



## **Analysing Interfaith Inclusivity in Pakistani Classrooms: A Mixed Method Study**

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### **Abstract**

Interfaith understanding and cooperation are crucial elements in promoting communities with a shared future for humankind, particularly in diverse and pluralistic societies like Pakistan. This research endeavours to assess the inclusivity of educational settings and its role in promoting interfaith literacy and collaboration within Pakistani classrooms. The research examines the inclusivity of Pakistani classrooms in accommodating religious diversity and the factors contributing to or hindering interfaith education. Sample has selected from universities across Karachi, Pakistan, while ensuring representation across different majority and minority religious traditions prevalent in the country. The study employs an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data has been collected by survey method from students of diverse religions, in qualitative phase the interviews were taken from teachers belonging to diverse faiths. The results indicate that inclusive educational practices enhance students' comfort, though institutional, curricular, and training-related challenges continue to constrain interfaith inclusivity, highlighting the need for trained educators, inclusive curricula, equitable policies, and interfaith initiatives to promote social harmony and mutual understanding in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Pakistani classrooms, religious inclusivity, interfaith education, interfaith dialogue.

### **Introduction**

In this age of globalization, when societies face issues like poverty, inequality, war, and environmental degradation, among other risks to sustainability, it is imperative for communities to work together, as peaceful coexistence is essential to overcome these challenges. Recent instances of conflicts and wars have intensified global polarization, making intercultural interaction more crucial than ever. Interfaith dialogue has become essential to address the ignorance that leads to intergroup conflicts (ICID, 2018). It pertains to the ability for interaction, collaboration, and respect among people of various religious affiliations. Sadiq (2021) also contends that in this era of religious intolerance and misinterpretation, interfaith dialogue is an effective tool for building cooperation and harmony. Such discourse facilitates interreligious understanding, improves interaction, and helps prevent conflicts.

Inclusivity is the bedrock of fruitful interfaith dialogue and education, where all



perspectives are valued regardless of religious affiliation, encouraging understanding and peace. Embracing inclusion is crucial in promoting collaboration and respect, strengthening bonds between faiths, and establishing connections across religious boundaries. Inclusive education ensures access to all (Rahim, 2016) and emphasizes diversity, equality, and fairness as key foundations of interfaith education (Singal, 2024).

In this context, interfaith education equips individuals with the understanding and capabilities to collaborate, overcome obstacles, and have a meaningful dialogue. In pluralistic societies like Pakistan, educational institutions play a crucial role in promoting inclusivity and cooperation. This study aims to assess the inclusivity of educational settings in Pakistan and their role in promoting interfaith understanding amid growing religious divides. Inclusive classrooms, which address diverse learning needs and cultural backgrounds, have gained increasing attention (UNESCO, 2017).

## **Objectives**

To assess the interfaith inclusivity in Pakistani educational institutions.

## **Research Questions**

How inclusive are classrooms in Pakistan in terms of accommodating students from diverse religious backgrounds?

What factors contribute to or hinder inclusivity in interfaith education within Pakistani classrooms?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is highly significant in addressing the on ground challenges for a religiously inclusive society. The insights of this study can help to identify gaps and suggest amendments in policy making of the state and its institutions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Social Identity Theory***

Van Dommelen (2014) conceptualizes identity as a significant predictor of behavior and attitudes, with individuals gaining self-concept from group affiliations (Tajfel, 1978). This paradigm clarifies how religious identification can both enhance social cohesion and uphold intergroup bias. Since it promotes personal well-being (Wellman & Tokuno, 2004), its salience may also aggravate conflict and group boundaries. Importantly, such conflict is not inherent to religious difference per se; rather, religion serves as a key determinant of collective identity (Ysseldyk et al., 2010), which can equally encourage social integration and alleviate alienation (Cnaan et al., 2004).

Given these complications, understanding religious identity and its implications for intergroup dynamics within educational contexts becomes crucial. Recognizing varied religious beliefs and practices can encourage interfaith tolerance, urging educators to develop environments that accept pluralism and encourage a sense of belonging and mutual respect.

### ***Inter group Contact Theory***

Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) presents a corresponding viewpoint, positing that meaningful and cooperative interaction between distinct groups lessens bias. Empirical research from Pettigrew and Tropp (2006, 2011) reveals



that such interaction consistently minimizes intergroup bias and promotes understanding. Extending this, Peacock (2023) suggests a “deategorization model” to better connect interfaith education with pluralistic situations. In educational environments, enabling structured and meaningful intergroup discussions can consequently contribute to tolerance, cooperation, and inclusive classroom atmospheres.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Interfaith Education and Inclusivity***

In the postmodern era, inclusivity and diversity in education play a significant role, making it essential to address diverse groups in the classroom. Diversity, as adduced by Tiwari and Masih (2016), is a natural phenomenon that needs to be acknowledged and incorporated into educational settings.

Interfaith inclusivity in classrooms refers to creating an environment where all students feel included and valued, promoting empathy, tolerance, and appreciation of diversity. By incorporating principles from various faiths, educators can create a secure learning environment and contribute to societal equity. By removing barriers and cultivating acceptance, inclusive education can generate meaningful change through engagement with universal principles in religious literature (Pradana et al., 2023).

### ***Significance of Interfaith Education and Inclusivity***

Considering the value of interfaith education and inclusivity, Sadiq (2021) argues that the Pakistani government should incorporate religious tolerance courses into the curriculum. He identifies educational initiatives as key to addressing religious intolerance, which stems from erroneous interpretations of religious texts and false beliefs about other religions. Inadequate knowledge about diverse faiths fosters ambiguity and leads learners to perceive followers of other religions as inferior, while religious hegemony and national narratives further exacerbate animosity. Therefore, prioritizing educational programs is essential for promoting an inclusive and harmonious society.

Ahmed (2018) underscores interfaith harmony through three steps: dialogue, understanding, and friendship. Dialogue enables open exchange and mutual understanding, which can lead to genuine and sustainable friendships. While dialogue alone may have limited impact, such friendships can produce more profound outcomes.

Interreligious education enables youth to recognize shared spiritual values and understand their faith within a broader context. By encouraging respect for diverse beliefs, it reduces conflict and promotes harmony, while also encouraging empathy, compassion, and a sense of responsibility towards others and the divine (Gill, 2022).

### ***Promoting Interfaith Understanding through Dialogue***

In an ever-evolving diverse society, intolerance, fear, conflict, and challenges may arise. Students need to learn how to communicate, cooperate, and interact with individuals who are different from them. The lessons students acquire locally can influence their global actions. Education in this century focuses not only on addressing social disparities but also on learning from people around the world. Educators must balance sameness and diversity by creating environments that promote peace, tolerance, and mutual respect .



In promoting interfaith understanding through dialogue, Tarantino and Kristen (2016) argue that institutions should meet students' religious or spiritual needs by building interfaith dialogue and inclusive learning environments. This helps students' value diverse religions and spiritual practices. Educational institutions can bridge understanding gaps between students of different faiths by providing equal opportunities for interaction in a judgment-free setting.

### ***Challenges to Interfaith Inclusivity in Education settings***

Inclusive educational settings are crucial to ensure all students have fair access to quality education and reach their full potential. However, classroom challenges such as prejudice, underrepresentation, and lack of cultural and religious sensitivity arise due to insufficient teacher training, limited resources, biased curricula, and language barriers (Hashmi et al., 2023). Similar challenges, including infrastructure and workload issues, were also identified by Amna and Parveen (2023).

Textbooks and curricula often ignore minority perspectives, which can reinforce prejudice rather than promote inclusion (Hussain et al., 2011). Additionally, minority students in Pakistan are rarely offered alternative subjects beyond the dominant Islamic studies curriculum (Burdi et al., 2018).

Thomas (2021) argues that an inclusive curriculum improves student outcomes and satisfaction by addressing diversity in content, teaching, and assessment, thereby enhancing engagement and belonging. A key contributing factor is the lack of teacher training in diversity, leaving educators underprepared for multicultural classrooms, which leads to student marginalization and disengagement. To address this, Parveen et al. (2022) recommend training and workshops to prepare teachers for inclusive education.

### ***Local Case Studies and Examples of Interfaith Education Programs***

Jan, Jamal, Shah, Uddin, & Shafi (2013) studied interfaith harmony between Muslims and Hindus in Swat, Pakistan's educational setting. They found strong support (97.6%) for joint education, believing it enhances interfaith cooperation (98.1%). However, Hindus (66.2%) prefer separate institutions due to differing perspectives on curriculum. Despite this, there's mutual respect and a peaceful atmosphere, suggesting education's role in promoting cohesion and interfaith literacy through media support.

### ***Policy Implications for Advancing Interfaith Inclusivity***

In support of a dialogue-oriented framework, teachers can create possibilities for the students by encouraging self-expression both in writing and spoken communication, without encouraging argumentation or debate (Shady & Larson, 2010). Educators must recognize that religious beliefs significantly influence class dynamics and student engagement. Therefore, faculty and staff should familiarize themselves with diverse religious cultures to develop course structures that prioritize inclusivity without bias. (Tarantino & Kristen, 2016).

### ***Methodology***

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore students' comfortability in expressing their religious beliefs and related interfaith interactions within educational settings. Phase 1, quantitative data and analysis, involves collecting



survey data from students of diverse religions to identify patterns and associations, followed by a phase 2, qualitative data and analysis, gain deeper insights and context from teachers' experiences and perspectives.

## Phase 1: Quantitative Data and Analysis

### **Sampling**

The data was collected through online surveys while using the convenient sampling. Given table shows the demographic characteristics of respondents of this study.

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	84	53.8
	Female	72	46.2
Religion	Christian	31	19.9
	Hindu	50	32.1
	Shia	11	7.1
	Muslim		
	Sunni	64	41
	Muslim		
Total		156	100.0

This distribution highlights the pluralistic nature of the sample, which is crucial for understanding the religious dynamics and interfaith interactions within the study population.

### **Data Collection**

Survey method was used to collect data of first phase of this study. An online questionnaire with close ended responses was shared with the students of various universities presiding in the city of Karachi. The questionnaire was develop using a 5-point Likert scale.

### **Data Analysis**

For descriptive and multivariate analyses, SPSS 16.0 was used. Cross tabulation is done to explain the associations between the dependent variable and independent variables. This supported in identifying patterns and trends within the data. Chi-square tests were conducted to determine statistical association between the variables, where P-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. To measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated. The value of Pearson's r ranges from -1 to 1, where values close to 1 indicate a strong positive correlation, values close to -1 indicate a strong negative correlation, and values around 0 indicate no correlation. The significance of the correlation was tested using the approximate t-test, with a p-value less than 0.05 indicating a statistically significant correlation.

### **Results and Findings**

Cross tabulation is done to explore and identify potential associations between the identified dependent and independent variables.

Hypothesis 1: Religious affiliation significantly influences levels of comfortability in expressing religious beliefs.



**Comfortability in Religious Affiliation Expressing Beliefs**

	<b>Sunni Muslim</b>	<b>Shia Muslim</b>	<b>Hindu</b>	<b>Christian</b>
Very Uncomfortable	15.60%	18.20%	6.00%	3.20%
Uncomfortable	4.70%	9.10%	8.00%	6.50%
Neutral	18.80%	27.30%	16.00%	51.60%
Comfortable	31.30%	45.50%	36.00%	25.80%
Very Comfortable	29.70%	0.00%	34.00%	12.90%

The comfortability in expressing religious beliefs varies significantly across different religious groups. Hindus and Sunni Muslims generally report higher levels of comfort, while Christians tend to be more neutral, and Shia Muslims show a more mixed distribution with no respondents feeling very comfortable. This distribution highlights potential differences in the cultural dynamics and experience within educational settings.

Hypothesis 2: Inclusive interfaith discussions significantly influence comfortability in expressing religious beliefs.

**Comfortable in Inclusiveness In Interfaith Discussions Expressing Beliefs**

	<b>Not at all inclusive</b>	<b>Slightly inclusive</b>	<b>Moderately inclusive</b>	<b>Extremely inclusive</b>
Very Uncomfortable	33.30%	33.30%	26.70%	6.70%
Uncomfortable	50.00%	40.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Neutral	48.70%	25.60%	25.60%	0.00%
Comfortable	38.30%	10.60%	51.10%	0.00%
Very Comfortable	23.10%	0.00%	69.20%	7.70%

The data indicates a clear trend where individuals' comfort levels in expressing their religious beliefs are positively correlated with their perceptions of inclusiveness in interfaith discussions. Those who feel very uncomfortable or uncomfortable tend to view interfaith discussions as less inclusive. Conversely, as comfort levels increase, individuals are more likely to perceive these discussions as moderately to extremely inclusive. This suggests that fostering a comfortable environment for expressing religious beliefs may enhance the perception of inclusiveness in interfaith dialogues.

Chi-Square

<b>Test</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>
Pearson Chi-Square	39.718	12	.000

The chi-square value is 39.718 with 12 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is less than 0.001. This indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables.

**Pearson's Correlation Coefficients**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Asymptotic Standard Error</b>	<b>Approximate T</b>	<b>Approximate Significance</b>
Pearson's R	0.255	0.085	3.206	0.002



The value of 0.255 indicates a weak to moderate positive correlation, meaning that as comfortability in expressing beliefs increases, perceptions of inclusiveness in interfaith discussions also tend to increase. This indicates that the correlation is statistically significant, and that the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 3: Administration’s announced policies significantly influence comfortability in expressing religious beliefs.

<b>Comfortable in Administration’s Policies on Interfaith Conflict Expressing Beliefs</b>					
	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
Very Uncomfortable	64.30%	14.30%	14.30%	7.10%	0.00%
Uncomfortable	60.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Neutral	10.80%	5.40%	45.90%	32.40%	5.40%
Comfortable	25.00%	2.10%	22.90%	27.10%	22.90%
Very Comfortable	7.70%	0.00%	51.30%	20.50%	20.50%

The findings suggest a clear trend, as individuals’ comfortability in expressing their beliefs increases, their perceptions of the administration’s policies on interfaith conflict become more positive. Those who are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable expressing their beliefs predominantly rate the policies as poor or inadequate. In contrast, respondents who are neutral, comfortable, or very comfortable show more positive evaluations, with higher ratings of the policies as adequate, effective, or excellent. This trend underscores the potential impact of individuals’ comfort levels on their perceptions of interfaith policies, highlighting the importance of fostering an environment where people feel comfortable expressing their beliefs to enhance their views of administrative policies.

**Chi-Square**

<b>Test</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>
Pearson Chi-Square	73.532	16	.000

The chi-square value is 73.532 with 16 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is less than 0.000. This indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables.

**Pearson’s Correlation Coefficients**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Asymptotic Standard Error</b>	<b>Approximate T</b>	<b>Approximate Significance</b>
Pearson’s R	0.420	0.066	5.599	.000

The value of 0.420 indicates a moderate positive linear relationship between the variables. These results further confirm that higher levels of comfortability in expressing beliefs are associated with more positive perceptions of the administration’s policies on interfaith conflict.

Hypothesis 4: Frequency of interfaith activities significantly influence comfortability in expressing religious beliefs.

**Comfortable in Interfaith Activities Expressing Beliefs**

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
Very Uncomfortable	93.80%	6.30%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Uncomfortable	80.00%	10.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%



Neutral	15.40%	41.00%	15.40%	17.90%	10.30%
Comfortable	12.20%	24.50%	30.60%	22.40%	10.20%
Very Comfortable	20.00%	22.50%	22.50%	17.50%	17.50%

Individuals who are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable were not provided much opportunities for interfaith activities. This figure is most extreme among the participants who feel very uncomfortable, with nearly all never attended any interfaith activity. Those who are neutral show a diverse range of participation frequencies. Comfortable and very comfortable individuals show a higher frequencies of participation in interfaith activities. This indicates the importance of exposure to diverse culture in increasing comfort level of the participants.

### Chi-Square

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	66.214 <sup>a</sup>	16	.000

The chi-square value is 66.214<sup>a</sup> with 16 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is less than 0.000. This indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables.

### Pearson's Correlation Coefficients

Measure	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error	Approximate T	Approximate Significance
Pearson's R	.424	.064	5.764	.000 <sup>c</sup>

The value of 0.424 indicates a moderate positive correlation, suggesting that as comfortability increases, the frequency of participation in interfaith activities also increases.

Hypothesis 5: Teachers' awareness on interfaith education significantly influence comfortability in expressing religious beliefs.

Comfortability	Teachers are Aware		
	No	Yes	Unsure
Very Uncomfortable	60.00%	26.70%	13.30%
Uncomfortable	50.00%	30.00%	20.00%
Neutral	38.50%	25.60%	35.90%
Comfortable	18.00%	60.00%	22.00%
Very Comfortable	23.70%	44.70%	31.60%

The data reveals a trend between students' comfort levels in expressing their beliefs and their awareness of interfaith policies. Those who are very uncomfortable expressing their beliefs largely feel that their teachers are not aware of their religion. Similarly, uncomfortable individuals also predominantly believe that teachers are unaware. Neutral respondents are more divided, with a notable portion being unsure about teachers' awareness. In contrast, those who are comfortable expressing their beliefs are much more likely to think that teachers are aware. Among those who are very comfortable, a significant number also believe that teachers are aware, though a notable portion still remains unsure. This trend suggests that increasing awareness among teachers about



interfaith could potentially enhance comfort levels among students in expressing their religious beliefs.

### Chi-Square

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.036 <sup>a</sup>	8	.010

The chi-square value is 20.036<sup>a</sup> with 8 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is less than 0.010. This indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables.

### Pearson's Correlation Coefficients

Measure	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error	Approximate T	Approximate Significance
Pearson's R	.203	.080	2.537	.012 <sup>c</sup>

The value of 0.203 indicates a weak positive correlation, suggesting that as comfortability increases, the frequency of participation in interfaith activities also increases.

The first quantitative phase provided causal justifications of inclusivity dynamics in Pakistani classrooms as per the students' perception and experiences; however, this qualitative phase aims to reveal rich insights and complex patterns related to teachers' experiences and perspectives on religious inclusivity in the classroom. It will allow for a deeper exploration of the underlying factors influencing comfortability, perceptions of inclusiveness, administrative policies, interfaith activities, and teachers' awareness.

## Phase 2: Qualitative Data and Analysis

### Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants of the study. Total four participants were selected keeping in mind the religious diversity found in quantitative phase.

Religion	Gender	Teaching Experience	Frequency
Christian	Male	10	1
Hindu	Female	12	1
Shia Muslim	Female	9	1
Sunni Muslim	Female	6	1
Total			4

This distribution highlights the pluralistic nature of the sample. The aim was to triangulate and cross analyse the responses with the perspective of teachers and students.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the findings from the quantitative phase of the study to ensure that the qualitative phase would provide deeper insights into those initial results. To facilitate the interviews, a transcriber was present to accurately record the responses. Each interview lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the



participants' experiences and perspectives. The proceedings were audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis in this study followed Creswell's (2013) structured approach to systematically identify and interpret patterns within the qualitative data to explain the initial quantitative results.

### **Results and Findings**

Structured table summarizing the theme development analysis based on the qualitative data provided for each participant regarding religious inclusivity in educational settings.

<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>THEME 1 CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS INCLUSIVITY</b>	<b>THEME 2 INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>THEME 3 ADVOCACY FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION</b>
PARTICIPANT 1 (HINDU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minority status Sensitivity to religious expression</li> <li>- Celebrating festivals privately</li> <li>- Difficulty in open expression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inclusive environment under Christian leadership</li> <li>- Clear and announced institutional policies</li> <li>- Positive treatment of all religions</li> <li>- Celebrate multi-religious festivals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participation in interfaith activities</li> <li>- Optional study of religious studies</li> </ul>
PARTICIPANT 2 (SHIA MUSLIM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personal experiences of religious bias</li> <li>- Positive change in perception due to job environment</li> <li>- Initial lack of awareness of inclusivity</li> <li>- Personal resistance to non-Islamic activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Admissions to various Muslim sects</li> <li>- Limited institutional policies on religious inclusivity</li> <li>- Focus on Islamic activities</li> <li>- Accommodation of leave requests for minority religions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not applicable in mathematics</li> <li>- No awareness of interfaith dialogues</li> </ul>
PARTICIPANT 3 (CHRISTIAN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No hardships faced due to religion</li> <li>- Never witnessed any religious biased events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptual awareness of inclusivity</li> <li>- Dependence on teacher for inclusivity</li> <li>- No clear policies on religious discrimination</li> <li>- Teachers are too busy for inclusion initiatives</li> <li>- Delegation of religious discussions to student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No personal interest in interfaith activities</li> <li>- Limited awareness of interfaith education</li> </ul>




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<p>PARTICIPANT 4 (SUNNI MUSLIM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptual awareness of inclusivity</li> <li>- Dependence on teacher for inclusivity</li> </ul>	<p>advisors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inclusive environment</li> <li>- No announced institutional policies</li> <li>- Positive treatment of all religions</li> <li>- Option for Non-Muslims to skip Islamic Studies</li> <li>- Closed group discussions with non-Muslim students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited involvement in interfaith activities</li> <li>- No personal interest in interfaith activities</li> <li>- Limited awareness of interfaith education</li> <li>- Only common elements should be taught</li> </ul>
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### ***Theme 1: Challenges of Religious Inclusivity***

This theme summarizes the challenges and experiences related to religious inclusivity faced by each participant. Hindu and Shia Muslims teachers highlighted significant challenges in expressing their beliefs openly in Pakistan. Hindu participant noted the necessity of celebrating religious festivals privately and the overall difficulty in openly practicing their faith. Similarly, Shia Muslims reported personal experiences of religious bias and initial unawareness of inclusivity issues. Sunni Muslim and Christian teachers, reported fewer or no hardships related to religious inclusivity. They did not face significant bias or obstacles in practicing their faith, suggesting a disparity in experiences based on religious affiliation.

### ***Theme 2: Institutional Environment***

This theme describes the institutional context in terms of inclusivity policies, leadership, and practices observed by each participant. Institutions led by religious minorities, such as the Christian-led institution mentioned by the Hindu participant, provide a notably inclusive environment. These institutions have clear and announced policies that foster positive treatment of all religions and celebrate multi-religious festivals. Such environments demonstrate the importance of leadership in promoting inclusivity. For Shia Muslim participants, the inclusivity within their institution includes admissions of various Muslim sects and accommodation of leave requests for minority religions. However, there is a predominant focus on Islamic activities and limited institutional policies on broader religious inclusivity. Christian and Sunni Muslim participants report a generally positive treatment of all religions but indicate a reliance on individual teachers rather than formal policies.

### ***Theme 3: Advocacy for Religious Education***

This theme highlights the participants' perspectives on interfaith activities, the relevance of religious studies, and their personal involvement in promoting religious inclusivity. The Hindu participant actively participates in interfaith activities and has the option to study religious topics, reflecting a supportive environment for religious education. This contrasts with other participants who



show limited engagement. For participants, particularly those in fields like mathematics, religious education is seen as irrelevant. A Shia Muslim participant noted no connection between their field and interfaith dialogue. Similarly, a Christian participant showed limited personal interest in interfaith activities and awareness of interfaith education due to their subject scope. Sunni Muslim participant reported limited involvement and interest in interfaith activities, with average awareness of interfaith education.

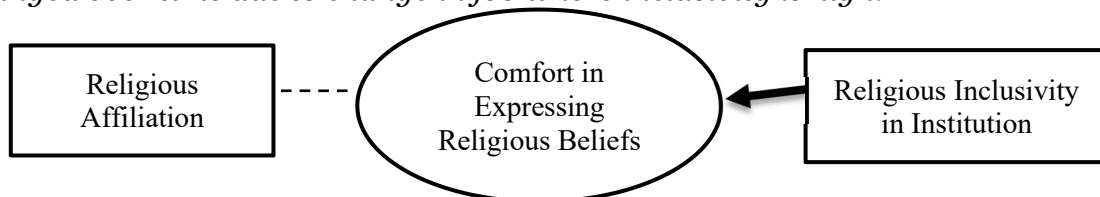
### **Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Phase**

The quantitative phase provided a broad understanding of trends, patterns, and associations related to the religious inclusivity, whereas, the qualitative phase provided deeper insights into the experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors that influence students' comfort levels with perspective of teachers. The integration of the study will be responded via results and findings of the quantitative phase.

### **Religious Affiliation**

In examining the relationship between religious affiliation and comfort levels in expressing religious beliefs, significant findings emerged. Despite being a minority group, Hindu students reported the highest levels of comfort (36%), followed closely by Sunni-Muslim (31.30%). This observation underscores that comfort levels in expressing beliefs are not solely tied to religious affiliation but are intricately linked to the inclusive practices within educational institutions. This connection was supported by qualitative insights, where a Hindu participant noted feeling suppressed in public settings regarding religious celebrations but experiencing a more inclusive environment within educational institutions. Similarly, a Shia-Muslim participant shared experiences of varying institutional inclusivity levels, suggesting a nuanced relationship between institutional practices and comfort in expressing religious beliefs.

*'I have personally encountered religious bias in the staffroom. Initially, I refrained from sharing 'majlis' food with Sunni friends, but my perspective changed over time due to change in job where inclusivity is high.'*



The figure above shows a chain of relationship among variables. This interplay highlights a complex network of relationships. In the context of the research, solid arrow represents strong relationships, while dotted lines indicate weaker connections, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of factors influencing comfort levels in expressing religious beliefs.

### ***Inclusive Interfaith Discussions and Teachers' Awareness on Interfaith Education***

The quantitative phase highlighted a clear correlation between increased interfaith discussions and greater comfort in expressing religious beliefs. Specifically, 50.00% of respondents who felt uneasy noted that classroom discussions lacked religious inclusivity. This finding was further reinforced in the



qualitative phase, where teachers less engaged in interfaith dialogue reported fewer instances of diverse students sharing their religious perspectives and celebrations. For instance, a Christian teacher mentioned the irrelevance of interfaith discussions in mathematics, noting no occurrences of students expressing religious ideas in their classes:

*‘ In my course (mathematics), it’s not feasible. Students are directed to discuss their religious ideas with student advisors. Teachers have tightly packed schedules, leaving little room for these exchanges. They are quite occupied.’* In contrast, an ethics teacher teaching Sunni Islam encountered several instances where students of different faiths shared their thoughts, highlighting how the nature of the subject can significantly influence and facilitate such discussions. This underscores the importance of integrating religious studies courses within educational institutions and trainings of the teachers on interfaith education.

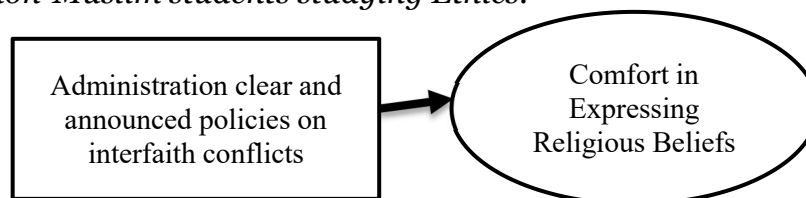


### **Administration's Clear Policies Regarding Interfaith Conflicts**

The quantitative data demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between institutions' clear and announced policies on interfaith conflicts and individuals' comfort levels in expressing their religious beliefs. Specifically, those who felt very uncomfortable expressing their beliefs predominantly rated the institutions' policies as poor or inadequate (64% compared to 14%). The qualitative phase of the study supported this pattern, with two notable cases. A Hindu teacher, representing a religious minority, reported an increase in religious expression due to the institution's clear and announced interfaith policies. In contrast, a Sunni-Muslim teacher reported fewer instances of interfaith open dialogues, with discussions occurring predominantly in closed groups.

This teacher noted,

*‘Discussions on interfaith dialogues are conducted, but only in ethics classes attended by non-Muslim students studying Ethics.’*



### **Discussion**

The results of the quantitative analysis, from students' perspectives and experiences, indicates that inclusive interfaith discussions in the classroom, administrative policies on interfaith conflict, the occurrence of interfaith activities in educational settings, and teachers' awareness of interfaith education significantly impact students' comfort levels in expressing their beliefs in educational settings. However, the analysis shows diverse results regarding religious affiliations, suggesting that comfort levels in expressing beliefs are not solely associated with religious affiliation but are more connected to the inclusive



educational environment. This can be assessed by evaluating the frequency of interfaith activities within educational settings.

This finding aligns with prior studies suggesting that integrating various faith principles allows teachers to create a secure and supportive learning environment. Inclusive education can dismantle obstacles and build acceptance among students, as identified by Pradana, Mahfud, & Priyanto (2023). Similarly, Chalermnirundom (2019) highlights that in order to establish learning settings that promote peace, tolerance, and respect for one another, educators must strike a balance between uniformity and diversity.

The quantitative results are corroborated by the thematic analysis of the experiences of the teachers. One minority group respondent, for instance, spoke of an incredibly welcoming learning environment. This observation emphasizes that the frequency of interfaith events can increase students' comfort levels in expressing their beliefs in educational settings. Examples of these events include interfaith discussions, religious literacy seminars, intercultural celebrations, community service programs, cross-cultural programs, and events focusing around diversity and building peace.

This result is in line with the intergroup interaction theory of Allport (1954), which provides discourses that support interfaith inclusion in educational settings and meaningful cooperative ties between divergent social groupings. Additionally, the findings substantiate earlier research that suggests institutions should support inclusive educational environments and policies, encourage interfaith discourse, and cater to the religious and spiritual needs of their students (Tarantino & Kristen, 2016).

The findings also highlight the impact of teachers' awareness as a deterrent to students feeling comfortably expressing their beliefs. This is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Hashmi, Bashir, Hashmi, and Awan in 2023, which highlighted issues in the classroom including bias, underrepresentation, and a lack of cultural and religious awareness. These problems are frequently caused by a lack of resources, biased curricula, inadequate training for educators, and language obstacles.

The integrated results of both the phases indicate the complexity of interfaith discussions and teacher understanding in building inclusive classrooms. Previous study (Hussain, Saleem, & Naveed, 2011) provides an additional support for this idea by emphasizing the importance of textbooks and curricula that integrate perspectives from minority groups. These perspectives are critical for establishing an inclusive atmosphere. It is important to highlight, nonetheless, that minority group students in Pakistan frequently do not have access to courses or disciplines other than Islamic ones (Burdi, Urooj, & Khan, 2018).

An inclusive curriculum and addressing and appreciating diversity and inclusivity in instruction and assessment can improve students' happiness and comfort level while expressing their religious beliefs (Thomas, 2021). Parveen, Batool, and Arif (2022) also suggest that teachers should be given educational workshops and training to ensure they thoroughly grasp the notion of inclusion.

## **Conclusion**

This study was carried out to evaluate how inclusive educational environments are in promoting interfaith education in Pakistani classrooms by studying about educators' and students' perspectives and experiences regarding interfaith



education. In addition, the study assesses the elements that support or obstruct inclusivity in interfaith education in Pakistani classrooms. The results of this study make it quite clear that promoting inclusivity is crucial to enhancing interfaith interaction and collaboration in Pakistani classrooms. The research underscores the significance of inclusive approaches in mitigating interfaith conflicts including interfaith discussions, accommodating administrative regulations, and a range of interfaith activities. These programs were closely associated with students feeling more at comfortable sharing their beliefs with others. Furthermore, the study showed that the inclusivity that educational institutions promote has a significant impact on these comfort levels and is not the only factor determining religious affiliation. The study additionally identified a number of obstacles and impediments, including as institutional policies on wider religious tolerance that are restricted, biased curriculum, insufficient training for teachers, and religious bias. It is imperative to tackle these obstacles by implementing comprehensive legislation, inclusive curriculum reforms, and teacher training efforts in order to create a supportive and welcoming learning environment in Pakistan.

## Implications and Recommendations

This study highlights key factors that contribute to and hinder inclusivity in interfaith education, with important implications for achieving societal harmony, mutual understanding, and peace in Pakistan's educational system. Well-trained educators, an unbiased curriculum, fair policies, and interfaith activities are vital for establishing inclusive environments, while their absence may restrict students' comfort in expressing beliefs. Prioritizing these factors helps enhance inclusive classrooms and promote acceptance and respect for diversity.

Future study should examine the long-term consequences of inclusive practices, analyze the effectiveness of teacher training in interfaith education, and explore regional variations in interfaith inclusivity across Pakistan.

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