

COLONIAL LEGACY AND THE EMERGENCE OF EDUCATIONAL DUALISM: A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL–MADRASSA DICHOTOMY IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the colonial legacy and the emergence of educational dualism between school and madrasa systems in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, through a qualitative interpretivist framework. Grounded in social constructionism and informed by postcolonial theory, the research explores how epistemological and pedagogical divergences are constructed, sustained, and reproduced within two parallel education systems. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 46 participants, including madrasa scholars and school, college, and university teachers, along with document analysis of curricula. The data were analyzed using thematic, content, and discourse analysis techniques to identify patterns of meaning, ideology, and institutional practice. Findings reveal a deep epistemological divide between revelation-based and secular-empirical knowledge systems, reinforced by distinct pedagogical practices and historically rooted in colonial restructuring of education. The study further highlights how institutional separation and dominant discourses of legitimacy sustain this dualism, contributing to cognitive, social, and educational fragmentation. The research concludes that the school–madrasa divide is not merely structural but fundamentally epistemic and postcolonial in nature, requiring integrative and context-sensitive reform approaches.

Keywords: Educational dualism; Madrasa education; School system; Epistemology; Pedagogy; Postcolonial theory; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Discourse analysis; Curriculum studies; Pakistan education system.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education in postcolonial societies is often shaped by historically embedded epistemological tensions that continue to influence institutional structures, curriculum design, and pedagogical practices. In Pakistan, one of the most significant manifestations of this tension is the enduring **school–madrasa dichotomy**, which reflects a broader **educational dualism between secular-modern and religious-traditional knowledge systems**. This divide is not merely administrative or curricular; rather, it represents a deeper epistemological contest over the definition, legitimacy, and authority of knowledge itself (Riaz, 2008; Ali, 2009).

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), this duality is particularly pronounced due to the region's socio-cultural composition, historical exposure to geopolitical conflicts, and the sustained role of religious seminaries (madrassas) alongside formal schooling systems. Schools and madrassas operate as parallel institutions with distinct philosophical foundations, pedagogical logics, and socio-economic functions. While formal schooling emphasizes scientific reasoning, standardized assessment, and labor market orientation, madrassas prioritize memorization, religious interpretation, and moral-spiritual formation (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Hefner & Zaman, 2007).

From a postcolonial perspective, this bifurcation is not accidental but historically produced. Colonial educational policies in British India institutionalized a separation between religious and secular knowledge systems, privileging Western epistemologies while marginalizing indigenous Islamic intellectual traditions (Hoodbhoy, 1998; Rahman, 2004). This structural separation has persisted in post-independence Pakistan, contributing to what scholars describe as **epistemic fragmentation** within the education system (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Alatas, 2006).

Recent scholarship suggests that madrassas are often misrepresented in global discourse as monolithic institutions of extremism, whereas empirical studies highlight their diversity in curricula, governance, and socio-economic roles (Riaz, 2008; Hefner & Zaman, 2007). Similarly, school systems are increasingly critiqued for reproducing inequality, weak critical thinking capacities, and limited contextual integration of local epistemologies (Abbasi, 2014; Shah et al., 2022). This indicates that the dichotomy is not simply religious versus secular education but involves broader questions of **knowledge production, power, and identity**

formation.

In contemporary educational debates, epistemological beliefs of teachers and institutional actors have gained significant attention, particularly in relation to how they shape classroom practices and learning outcomes (Shah et al., 2022; Khalid et al., 2023). In Pakistan, these beliefs are deeply embedded within socio-religious worldviews that influence both pedagogical approaches and perceptions of educational legitimacy (Itbar et al., 2017). As a result, the school–madrassa divide continues to reproduce distinct learning cultures that rarely intersect, limiting possibilities for educational integration or mutual epistemic recognition.

Given this context, this study investigates the **epistemological and pedagogical divergence between school and madrassa education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan**. It adopts a qualitative interpretivist approach grounded in postcolonial theory to explore how teachers and religious scholars construct, negotiate, and reproduce this educational dichotomy. By examining lived experiences and institutional discourses, the study aims to contribute to a deeper

understanding of how historical legacies and contemporary socio-political conditions shape educational knowledge systems in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

Education in Pakistan reflects a persistent structural and epistemological dualism between formal schooling and madrassa systems, particularly evident in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). This divide is not merely institutional but deeply rooted in competing knowledge systems, pedagogical philosophies, and historical trajectories shaped by colonial and postcolonial transformations. Schools largely follow a secular, state-regulated curriculum influenced by Western epistemologies, whereas madrassas are grounded in classical Islamic knowledge traditions emphasizing religious instruction and moral formation.

Despite numerous policy reforms and modernization efforts, the epistemological gap between these two systems remains largely unresolved. This fragmentation continues to generate disparities in teaching approaches, learning outcomes, and student worldviews, potentially affecting critical thinking, employability, and social cohesion. Existing research has primarily focused on policy, security implications, or curriculum reform, while limited attention has been given to the lived epistemological and pedagogical constructions of educators themselves within both systems.

Moreover, there is a lack of qualitative, context-rich inquiry that explores how school and madrassa teachers in KP interpret, reproduce, or challenge this educational dichotomy. This gap limits a deeper understanding of how knowledge, power, and pedagogy interact in shaping educational realities. Therefore, this study problematizes the enduring epistemological and pedagogical divergence between school and madrassa education as a socially constructed phenomenon that requires critical interpretive investigation.

Research Questions

1. How do school and madrassa educators in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa construct and interpret epistemological and pedagogical differences between the two systems?
2. How do historical and postcolonial factors shape the persistence and perceived impacts of the school–madrassa educational dualism?

Research Objectives

1. To examine how educators construct and practice knowledge in schools and madrassas.
2. To explore historical, postcolonial, and socio-educational factors sustaining the school-madrassa divide and its perceived impacts.

Literature Review

Introduction to Educational Dualism in Pakistan
The education system in Pakistan is widely characterized by a persistent dual structure consisting of formal secular schools and religious madrassas. This division is not only institutional but also epistemological, reflecting two distinct traditions of knowledge production and transmission. Scholars argue that this dualism has historical roots in colonial governance, which institutionalized Western-style education alongside indigenous religious schooling systems, leading to parallel and often disconnected educational trajectories (Rahman, 2004; Hoodbhoy, 1998).

Colonial Legacy and Epistemological Fragmentation

Postcolonial scholars emphasize that the current educational divide is deeply influenced by colonial epistemologies that privileged Western rational-scientific knowledge over indigenous and religious forms of knowing. Said's concept of Orientalism highlights how Western knowledge systems historically constructed non-Western traditions as inferior or "other" (Said, 1978; Crossley & Tikly, 2004). In South Asia, this resulted in the institutional separation of secular and religious education, where schools became associated with modernity and madrassas with tradition (Alatas, 2006; Durrani & Dunne, 2010).

Madrassa Education: Structure, Curriculum, and Role

Madrassas in Pakistan represent a long-standing Islamic educational tradition focusing on Qur'anic studies, Hadith, fiqh, and Arabic language. Historically, they served as centers of higher learning in Muslim societies, producing scholars, jurists, and intellectuals (Makdisi, 1981; Berkey, 2014). In the contemporary context, madrassas in Pakistan provide free education, boarding, and social support, especially for low-income populations (Riaz, 2008). However, critics argue that many madrassas rely on traditional rote-learning pedagogies and have limited engagement

with modern scientific or critical knowledge systems (Ali, 2009; Anzar, 2003).

School Education System and Epistemological Orientation

The formal school system in Pakistan is largely influenced by colonial-era administrative structures and post-independence reforms. It emphasizes standardized curricula, examinations, and secular subjects aligned with global education models. However, scholars highlight that this system often suffers from poor quality teaching, rote learning practices, and weak critical thinking development (Hoodbhoy, 1998; Rahman, 2004). Furthermore, curriculum content has been criticized for ideological and national identity construction, often reinforcing state-centric narratives (Durrani & Dunne, 2010).

Pedagogical Divergence Between Schools and Madrassas

Research indicates significant differences in pedagogical approaches between the two systems. Madrassas typically emphasize memorization, teacher authority, and religious interpretation, whereas schools adopt structured curricula with examination-oriented learning (Halstead, 1995; Shah et al., 2022). However, both systems are often criticized for limited emphasis on inquiry-based learning and critical pedagogy. Recent studies suggest that epistemological beliefs of teachers significantly shape classroom practices and student learning outcomes in both contexts (Khalid et al., 2023; Shah et al., 2025).

Postcolonial and Theoretical Interpretations

Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens to understand educational dualism as a product of knowledge-power relations. Foucault's concept of power/knowledge explains how institutional control over knowledge production shapes educational legitimacy (Foucault, 1980). Similarly, postcolonial scholars argue that education in formerly colonized societies reflects hybrid epistemologies shaped by both indigenous traditions and Western frameworks (Gandhi, 2019; Young, 2016). In Pakistan, this hybridity manifests as tension between religious authenticity and modern educational demands.

Madrassa Reform and Integration Debates

Policy discourse in Pakistan has frequently focused on madrassa reform, modernization, and integration into mainstream education. However, scholars argue that reform initiatives often fail due to lack of trust, ideological resistance, and structural inequalities (Bano, 2007; Zaman, 1999). Some studies propose integrating constructivist pedagogies with Islamic epistemologies to bridge the gap between the two systems (Rahman & El-Muhammady, 2025).

Existing literature extensively discusses madrassa reforms, curriculum issues, and political dimensions of education in Pakistan. However, there is limited qualitative research that explores how educators themselves construct epistemological and pedagogical meanings within both systems, particularly in the socio-cultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study addresses this gap by adopting a postcolonial interpretivist lens to examine lived educational discourses and practices.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in the social constructionist (interpretivist) paradigm to examine the colonial legacy and emergence of educational dualism between school and madrassa systems in Pakistan, with a particular focus on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The approach is appropriate for exploring complex socio-historical and epistemological realities, where meanings are constructed through lived experiences, institutional discourses, and historical narratives. The study emphasizes depth over breadth, aiming to generate rich, contextualized insights into how educators understand and reproduce the school-madrassa dichotomy.

Research Design and Approach

The study employs a qualitative interpretivist research design, which is suitable for examining socially constructed meanings and educational ideologies. Unlike positivist approaches that focus on measurement and statistical generalization, interpretivism seeks to understand how individuals interpret their social world.

The inductive nature of qualitative research enables the development of meaning from data rather than testing predefined hypotheses. In this study, data were collected from educators and scholars to understand how epistemological and pedagogical differences between school and

madrassa systems are constructed and experienced in context.

A social constructionist perspective underpins the study, emphasizing that knowledge, educational practices, and institutional divisions are shaped through historical, cultural, and ideological processes.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by postcolonial theory, which critically examines how colonial histories continue to influence contemporary knowledge systems and institutional structures (Young, 2003). Edward Said's concept of Orientalism provides a key analytical lens for understanding how Western epistemologies constructed and positioned indigenous knowledge systems as "other" (Said, 1978).

Within this framework, the school-madrassa dichotomy is interpreted as a postcolonial outcome shaped by competing epistemologies:

- Western-modern secular knowledge introduced through colonial education systems
- Indigenous Islamic knowledge rooted in classical religious traditions

This theoretical lens allows for a critical analysis of how power, knowledge, and institutional authority interact in shaping Pakistan's educational landscape.

Study Area: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a culturally diverse and historically significant province of Pakistan, with a population exceeding 30 million (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The province consists of 27 districts and reflects marked socio-economic and educational disparities.

The education system in KP is characterized by a dual structure: formal schools and madrassas. Schools follow a state-regulated curriculum offering secular education from primary to tertiary levels, while madrassas provide religious education grounded in Islamic scholarship.

Madrassas play an important socio-educational role, particularly in rural and low-income communities, offering free education, boarding, and accommodation. Their role became more prominent during and after the Soviet-Afghan war, which significantly influenced the socio-political landscape of the region.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive and snowball sampling technique was used in this study. Purposive sampling enabled the selection of information-rich participants with relevant academic and religious expertise, while snowball sampling helped identify additional participants through referrals.

Participants included:

Sample Size

A total of 46 participants were selected:

| Category | Number |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Madrassa Scholars/Teachers | 23 |
| School/College/University Teachers | 23 |
| Total | 46 |

This balanced sample allowed for a comparative and dialogical analysis of perspectives from both educational systems.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using two primary sources:

- Semi-structured in-depth interviews** with school and madrassa educators
- Document analysis** of school and madrassa curricula

Interviews focused on participants' perceptions of the origin, evolution, and dynamics of the educational dichotomy, while curriculum analysis provided institutional and epistemological context.

Content Analysis of Curriculum

Content analysis was employed as both a data collection and analytical method. Curriculum documents were systematically examined to identify:

- Epistemological orientations
- Knowledge hierarchies
- Pedagogical structures
- Ideological and institutional assumptions

This method facilitated triangulation with interview data and strengthened the interpretive depth of the study.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was used to examine how language constructs meaning, ideology, and power relations within educational narratives. Following

- Qualified Ulama with formal religious education and scholarly training

- School, college, and university teachers with advanced academic qualifications (including PhD scholars)

This strategy ensured the inclusion of both epistemic traditions for comparative analysis.

Gee (2005), discourse is understood as both language-in-use and a social practice embedded in power structures.

In this study, discourse analysis helped interpret how educators articulate and negotiate:

- Knowledge legitimacy
- Institutional authority
- Historical narratives of education
- Colonial and postcolonial influences

Interview Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a guided interview protocol. Participants were asked about:

- The historical origin of the school-madrassa divide
- Its evolution over time
- Socio-cultural and institutional dynamics shaping the dichotomy

Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Rapport-building techniques were used to ensure openness and authenticity of responses.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed. Participants were informed about:

- The purpose of the research
- Voluntary participation
- Confidentiality and anonymity
- Academic use of data only

Informed consent was obtained prior to recording interviews. In cases where recording was not permitted, detailed field notes were maintained.

Data Transcription and Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed for accuracy. Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach supported by discourse and content analysis.

The analytical process involved:

- Identification of recurring patterns and themes
- Categorization of themes into meaningful clusters
- Interpretation through a postcolonial theoretical lens

The integration of thematic and discourse analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of both explicit meanings and underlying ideological structures.

Trustworthiness, Validity, and Reliability

To ensure trustworthiness:

- Methodological triangulation was applied (interviews + curriculum analysis)
- Data were systematically coded and repeatedly verified
- Prolonged engagement with participants enhanced credibility

Validity was ensured through contextual interpretation of findings, while reliability was strengthened through consistent analytical procedures.

Generalization

This study does not aim for statistical generalization. Instead, it focuses on analytical and

Table 1: Major Themes Identified from Interview Data

| No. | Theme | Description |
|-----|---|---|
| 1 | Epistemological Divide | Contrasting definitions of knowledge (religious vs secular) |
| 2 | Pedagogical Divergence | Differences in teaching methods and classroom practices |
| 3 | Colonial Legacy and Historical Construction | Role of colonial education system in shaping dualism |
| 4 | Institutional Separation | Structural and policy-based division of education systems |
| 5 | Socio-Cognitive Impact | Perceived effects on students' thinking and integration |

theoretical generalization. Findings are interpreted within broader postcolonial and educational frameworks, allowing transferability to similar socio-educational contexts where dual educational systems exist.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis in this study follows a **qualitative inductive approach**, integrating **thematic analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis**. Data were derived from semi-structured interviews with **46 participants (23 madrassa educators and 23 school/college/university teachers)** along with curriculum documents from both systems. The analysis is framed within a **postcolonial theoretical lens**, enabling interpretation of how colonial legacies continue to shape epistemological and pedagogical divisions in Pakistan's education system, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The analysis process involved repeated reading of transcripts, coding of meaningful segments, categorization into themes, and interpretation through theoretical abstraction. The findings are presented under major thematic categories emerging from the data.

Emergent Themes from Interview Data

The thematic analysis generated five major themes reflecting epistemological, pedagogical, historical, and institutional dimensions of the school-madrassa dichotomy.

Epistemological Divide: Competing Knowledge Systems

A dominant theme across interviews was the **fundamental difference in knowledge construction** between school and madrassa

systems. Madrassa educators emphasized **revelation-based knowledge (wahy)**, while school educators prioritized **empirical and scientific knowledge**.

Table 2: Epistemological Orientations of Both Systems

| Dimension | Madrassa Perspective | School Education Perspective |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Source of Knowledge | Qur'an, Hadith, classical fiqh | Science, reason, empirical inquiry |
| Nature of Knowledge | Sacred and absolute | Dynamic and evolving |
| Purpose of Education | Moral and spiritual development | Economic and intellectual development |
| Authority of Knowledge | Religious scholars (Ulama) | Academic experts and institutions |

The findings indicate a **clear epistemological polarization** between the two systems. Madrassa educators view knowledge as divinely ordained and fixed, whereas school educators treat knowledge as humanly constructed and subject to revision. This divergence reflects a deeper **postcolonial epistemic rupture**, where colonial modernity institutionalized secular knowledge systems while marginalizing indigenous Islamic epistemologies.

The result is not merely curricular difference but a **structural epistemic divide** embedded in educational consciousness.

Pedagogical Divergence: Teaching and Learning Practices

Another key theme was the **contrast in pedagogical approaches** between the two systems.

Table 4.3: Pedagogical Practices in School and Madrassa Systems

| Aspect | Madrassa System | School System |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Teaching Method | Memorization (Hifz), rote learning | Interactive, lecture-discussion |
| Teacher Role | Authority-based, directive | Facilitator and guide |
| Student Role | Passive receiver | Active participant |
| Assessment | Oral repetition and memorization | Written exams, analytical testing |

Madrassa pedagogy is largely **text-centric and memorization-oriented**, emphasizing preservation of religious knowledge. In contrast, school pedagogy promotes **critical thinking, analysis, and examination-based evaluation**. However, several school teachers criticized the overemphasis on rote learning even within formal education, suggesting that pedagogical rigidity exists in both systems, though in different forms.

educational models replaced indigenous learning traditions while religious institutions maintained traditional methods in resistance.

Colonial Legacy and Historical Construction of Dualism

Participants widely acknowledged that the **origins of the school-madrassa divide are historically rooted in colonial intervention**.

This divergence reflects what postcolonial scholars describe as a **dual pedagogy system**, where colonial

Table 4.4: Historical Factors Contributing to Educational Dualism

| Historical Phase | Key Influence |
|-------------------|---|
| Pre-colonial era | Integrated religious and secular knowledge |
| Colonial period | Institutional separation of knowledge systems |
| Post-independence | Continuation of dual education structures |
| Post-1979 context | Expansion and politicization of madrassas |

The data strongly suggest that the current educational dualism is not natural but **historically produced through colonial governance structures**. British colonial education policies

institutionalized Western curricula in formal schools while confining religious education to madrassas.

This supports Said's (1978) argument that colonial knowledge systems reorganize indigenous epistemologies into subordinate categories. Educators in both systems acknowledged that the divide is **historically inherited rather than**

organically developed, reinforcing the relevance of postcolonial theory in explaining educational fragmentation.

Institutional Separation and Policy Fragmentation Respondents highlighted the **lack of integration between school and madrasa systems** as a structural issue.

Table 5: Institutional Features of School and Madrasa Systems

| Feature | Madrasa System | School System |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Governance | Religious boards | Government/private authorities |
| Curriculum Control | Independent boards (Wafaqs) | Ministry of Education |
| Funding | Donations, endowments | State funding/private fees |
| Certification | Religious degrees | Academic degrees |

The institutional separation reflects a **parallel education governance structure**, where both systems operate independently with minimal interaction. This fragmentation reinforces social and epistemological boundaries.

Participants argued that this separation reduces opportunities for **curriculum integration, teacher**

mobility, and intellectual exchange, thereby sustaining the dichotomy across generations.

Socio-Cognitive and Developmental Impact Respondents expressed concerns regarding the **implications of educational dualism on students' cognitive and social development.**

Table 6: Perceived Impacts of School–Madrasa Divide

| Impact Area | Observed Effect |
|-----------------------|---|
| Cognitive Development | Limited critical thinking in madrasa students |
| Employability | Skill mismatch in madrasa graduates |
| Social Integration | Ideological and cultural polarization |
| Identity Formation | Dual and conflicting worldviews |

The findings indicate that the educational divide contributes to **fragmented cognitive and social identities**. Madrasa students are perceived as strong in religious knowledge but limited in modern skills, while school students are seen as lacking grounding in religious ethics.

This reinforces a broader postcolonial concern: the creation of **binary knowledge identities** that

hinder holistic human development and social cohesion.

Discourse Patterns: Construction of Knowledge and Power

Discourse analysis revealed recurring linguistic patterns emphasizing **authority, legitimacy, and identity construction.**

Table 4.7: Dominant Discourse Patterns

| Discourse Type | Example Pattern | Meaning |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Religious authority discourse | “True knowledge comes from Quran” | Epistemic legitimacy |
| Modernist discourse | “Science defines progress” | Rational authority |
| Defensive discourse | “Our system is misunderstood” | Institutional protection |
| Reform discourse | “Integration is necessary” | Educational transformation |

The discourse analysis shows that both groups actively construct **legitimacy narratives** to defend their epistemological positions. Madrassa educators emphasize divine authority, while school educators emphasize rational-scientific legitimacy. This discursive competition reflects what Foucault (1980) describes as the relationship between **knowledge and power**, where each system legitimizes itself while delegitimizing the other.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the school-madrassa dichotomy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is not merely an administrative or curricular difference but a deeply embedded **epistemological and postcolonial construct**. The qualitative evidence reveals that both systems operate on fundamentally different assumptions about the nature, purpose, and authority of knowledge. Madrassa education is grounded in a **revelation-based epistemology**, where knowledge is considered divine, fixed, and morally oriented. In contrast, school education is shaped by a **modern secular epistemology**, emphasizing empiricism, rational inquiry, and socio-economic utility.

This epistemological divergence is further reinforced through distinct pedagogical practices. Madrassas continue to rely heavily on memorization and textual transmission, whereas formal schools adopt more structured, examination-oriented, and partially interactive teaching approaches. However, the study also highlights that both systems are not entirely static; each reflects internal tensions between tradition and reform.

From a postcolonial perspective, the persistence of this dualism can be understood as a continuation of colonial knowledge restructuring. The British colonial education system institutionalized Western epistemologies within formal schooling while relegating Islamic knowledge to separate religious institutions. This structural separation created a **parallel system of knowledge production**, which continues to shape educational identities in Pakistan today.

The discourse analysis further reveals that educators from both systems actively construct legitimacy narratives to defend their epistemological positions. This reinforces Foucault's notion of the relationship between **knowledge and power**, where competing systems

of knowledge also represent competing power structures. Consequently, the dichotomy is sustained not only institutionally but also discursively through everyday educational language and practices.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the school-madrassa divide in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a historically produced and socially sustained form of **educational dualism rooted in colonial epistemic restructuring**. It is not an accidental or purely ideological divide but a structural outcome of competing knowledge systems introduced and reinforced through colonial governance and postcolonial institutional continuity.

The findings confirm that both education systems serve distinct but incomplete functions: madrassas emphasize moral and spiritual formation, while schools prioritize cognitive and economic development. However, this separation limits the possibility of a **holistic education system** that integrates ethical, intellectual, and practical dimensions of learning.

Overall, the study demonstrates that educational dualism in Pakistan is sustained through intertwined processes of **history, ideology, institutional design, and discourse**, making it a deeply embedded structural condition rather than a surface-level policy issue.

IMPLICATIONS

The study has several important theoretical, policy, and pedagogical implications.

Theoretically, it contributes to postcolonial educational discourse by illustrating how colonial epistemologies continue to shape contemporary education systems in South Asia. It extends the argument that knowledge systems are not neutral but are embedded in **power relations and historical continuities**.

At the policy level, the findings suggest that fragmented governance of education in Pakistan perpetuates intellectual and social divisions. The coexistence of two parallel systems without meaningful integration limits national educational cohesion and reinforces socio-cultural polarization. Pedagogically, the study highlights the need to reconsider teaching approaches in both systems. Madrassas may benefit from incorporating critical thinking and analytical skills, while formal schools

may strengthen moral and ethical dimensions of education.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should focus on comparative studies across different provinces of Pakistan to determine whether similar epistemological patterns exist beyond Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Quantitative or mixed-method studies could also be used to measure the cognitive, social, and employment outcomes of students from both systems.

Further research is also needed to explore **models of curriculum integration** that can bridge epistemological divides without undermining the religious or academic integrity of either system. Longitudinal studies examining reform initiatives in madrassas and public schools would also provide valuable insights into evolving educational transformations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, there is a need for **curriculum dialogue and partial integration** between madrasa and formal education systems to reduce epistemological fragmentation while respecting institutional autonomy.

Second, teacher training programs in both systems should incorporate **critical pedagogy and reflective teaching practices** to enhance cognitive engagement and analytical learning.

Third, policy frameworks should encourage the inclusion of **modern subjects in madrassas and ethical/religious studies in schools**, promoting balanced education.

Fourth, collaborative platforms should be established between madrasa boards and educational ministries to facilitate **academic recognition, mobility, and institutional cooperation**.

Finally, educational reforms should be designed with sensitivity to local cultural and religious contexts to ensure **acceptance and sustainability**.

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited by its qualitative nature, which restricts statistical generalization. The findings are based on perceptions and interpretations of 46 participants and therefore reflect **contextual and subjective realities** rather than universal claims.

The study is geographically limited to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; therefore, findings may not fully represent other provinces or national-level dynamics. Additionally, access limitations and respondent sensitivity regarding religious and institutional discussions may have influenced the depth of certain responses.

Despite these limitations, methodological triangulation through interviews and curriculum analysis enhances the **credibility and trustworthiness** of the findings.

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