

Madrassa to (Job) Market in Pakistan: Amendment or Acknowledgement?

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Submitted to Faculty in the Asian University for Women
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Bachelor of Arts in Asian Studies

10th May, 2014

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Jana Fedtke and Professor Faheem Hussain for their continuous guidance, support and encouragement throughout the development of my thesis. I am really grateful to them for reading multiple drafts of my thesis and providing insightful comments and suggestions to help me organize my ideas and improve my writing. I would like to acknowledge Professor Cleonicki Saroca for assisting me in the conceptual framework of my thesis and providing me with the resources. Her Qualitative Research Methods class helped me a great deal to organize, conduct and complete my thesis research.

In addition, I am very thankful to Amna Noureen and Kamran Mirza for conducting interviews in Pakistan for me in Pakistan. Without their willingness and support, this research would not have been possible. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to Professor Tasneem Akhter and Humaira Noreen for helping me in translation of some research documents such as consent forms, information sheets, and interview questionnaire from English into Urdu.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the wonderful Writing Center tutors, especially Ms. Ayoola White, Ms. Devon Newhouse, and Emily Kastl, for providing assistance with the writing process to improve my writing skills. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Asian University for Women for providing the platform with financial support to conduct and complete this research.

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Abstract

Pakistani madrassas as educational institutions have come into the limelight after 9/11. They are highly criticized for their fundamentalist ideology and inability to prepare students for the current job market in Pakistan. It is commonly argued that because these madrassas have not seen much improvement in their curricula, there is a huge disconnection between their education and the current job market in Pakistan. Thus, madrassa graduates in today's world face immense difficulty to fit into the "mainstream" society to acquire higher education or well-paid jobs, except in the religious sector. This research explores the underlying causes of the difficulties madrassa graduates face in the job market from the perspectives of the madrassas as the active agents of change so that the roots of the problem can be addressed. Many madrassas have added the subjects from the duniawi education in their curriculum in order to meet the needs of contemporary society and claim to prepare their students for the current job market. However, they also agree that madrassa graduates face numerous difficulties to get well-paid jobs outside of the madrassa sector. These madrassas argue that while the problems with madrassa curricula exist, it is not the major reason behind the failure of madrassa graduates to secure a job in the current job market. Rather many structural problems such as high rate of unemployment, corruption, and negative perceptions of society about madrassas and madrassa graduates limit the madrassa graduates from the current job market in Pakistan. The research argues that madrassas at this moment need acceptance in the society and the job market rather than amendments.

Keywords: Madrassas education, madrassa reforms, curriculum, job market, acceptance.

I. Introduction

Education plays a major role in the development of a country by increasing its citizens' personal, social, and productive capacities. Many education systems have evolved from passive learning such as memorizing and transferring information, to more active learning such as understanding, analyzing, and applying the learning materials. These changes have taken and are taking place in different parts of the world at different speeds. Pakistan is among these changing

places. In Pakistan, there have been two different education systems, *deeni* and *dunyawi*, in place at the same time since the independence of the country in 1947.¹ It is important to explain the terms, *deeni* and *dunyawi*, before moving into the discussion about the two kinds of education systems. In Urdu, *Deen* means “religion” and *deeni* (religious) means anything related to religion and religious spirituality, while the word *dunya* means “this world” and anything related to this world and the material life is called *dunyawi*.

In Pakistan, religious education, commonly referred to as “deeni taleem,” is the old and “conservative” education system which has been in place in the subcontinent for centuries. Throughout the history of Islam, this education has been fulfilling the educational needs of Islamic society in the subcontinent and beyond.² The institutions where deeni education is imparted are called *madrassas* in Pakistan. About 1-7 percent of school children age 5-19 attend *madrassas* in Pakistan.³ On the other hand, there is “dunyawi taleem” which is based on the Western model of education and was established in the subcontinent during the British colonial period. Syed Ahmed Ali Khan’s Aligarh University is one of the first Muslim institutions which incorporated the Western model of education in Urdu and English during the British colonial rule.⁴ This tradition continued after the independence of Pakistan, becoming the “mainstream”⁵

1. Khalid Rahman and Syed Rashad Bukhari, “Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions,” *The Muslim World* 96, no. 2 (2006): 325.

2. Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, “Madrassa Education in Pakistan,” *Center for International and Strategic Analysis*, (2013): 4.

3. Tahir Andrabi, et al. “Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data,” *Comparative and International Education Society* 50, no. 3 (2006): 456. This article discusses the controversial number of enrollment in Pakistani *madrassas*, arguing that many news reports and articles published after 9/11 have exaggerated the number of *madrassas* and *madrassa* going children with the claim that these *madrassas* are breeding terrorism. Though this article does not discuss the link between *madrassas* and terrorism, it asserts that the number of *madrassas* and the enrolled students in these *madrassas* is not as “scary” as presented in media.

4. Jamal Malik, “Dynamic among Traditional Religious Schools and Their Institutions in Contemporary South Asia,” *The Muslim World* 87, no. 3-4 (1997): 200.

5. Though *dunyawi* education is usually considered as the mainstream education system and there has been a lot of discussion on mainstreaming Pakistan’s *madrassa* education system. However, I am personally troubled with

and dominant education system in Pakistan.⁶ In this education system, sciences, humanities, mathematics, and social studies and other contemporary subjects are taught in contemporary schools, colleges, and universities which are considered the institutions of dunyawī education.

The government of Pakistan has been working, not without struggles, to improve and adapt the needs of the contemporary society in the institutions of dunyawī education. However, deeni madrassas have not only been left out from these reformist struggles for a long time but are also highly criticized in the society. Madrassas are criticized for their fundamentalist ideology and inability in preparing students for the current job market in Pakistan. It is commonly argued that because these madrassas have not seen much improvement in their curricula, teaching process, and learning outcomes,⁷ there is a huge disconnection between what students study in a madrassa and what jobs are available in the job market.⁸ Thus, madrassa graduates in today's world face immense difficulty to fit into the "mainstream" society in terms of acquiring higher education or well-paid jobs, except in the religious sector.⁹ What are some underlying factors behind the difficulties madrassa graduates face in the job market? I undertook this research to explore and understand the underlying causes of the difficulties madrassa graduates face in the job market so that the roots of the problem can be addressed.

Thus, this paper examines these discrepancies between the madrassa education and the job market in Pakistan through the perspectives of madrassa students, teachers, and

the word "mainstream" because who decides what is mainstream and for whom? Therefore, in this paper, wherever I use this word, I will be using it in quotation marks as it does not represent my personal ideology.

6. International Crisis Group, "Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military," *Asia Report*, no. 36, July 29, 2002, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/036-pakistan-madrasas-extremism-and-the-military.aspx>.

7. Rahman and Bukhari, "Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions," 325.

8. Murtaza Haider, "Madrassa Graduates and Labour Market Mismatches," *Dawn News*, October 14, 2011, <http://www.dawn.com/news/666196/madrassa-graduates-and-labour-market-mismatches>.

9. Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Madrassa Education in the Pakistani Context: Challenges, Reforms, and Future Directions," *Peace Print: South Asian Journal of Peace-building* 2, no. 1 (2009): 7.

administrators about their motives behind providing and attaining madrassa education, their learning expectations and outcomes, and their level of satisfaction with the job opportunities available for them in the market. My research shows that many madrassas have added the subjects from the duniya education in their curriculum in order to meet the needs of contemporary society and claim to prepare their students for the needs of the contemporary world and the current job market. However, they also agree that madrassa graduates face numerous difficulties to get well-paid jobs outside of the madrassa sector, which seems to suggest that there is a disconnection between madrassa education and the job market in Pakistan. The situation is much more complex. The madrassas argue that while the problems with madrassa curricula exist, it is not the major reason behind the failure of madrassa graduates to secure a job in the current job market. There are many structural problems in the country such as high rate of unemployment, corruption, and negative perceptions of society about madrassas and madrassa graduates in Pakistan which fuel the situation even further and limit the madrassa graduates from the current job market in Pakistan. The study suggests that while madrassas are taking initiatives to improve their curricula, the need of the moment is the acceptance of these madrassas and their graduates in the society and the job market in Pakistan.

II. Historical Background and Literature Review

Definition of Madrassa

Madrassa is an Arabic word which means “center of learning.”¹⁰ Madrassas (or madaaris, a plural form of madrassa in Arabic) are Muslim educational institutions with a structured curriculum. They are one of the major sources of learning religious studies such as Islamic law

10. Ahmed, “Madrassa Education in the Pakistani Context,” 2.

and judiciary for many Islamic scholars in Pakistan.¹¹ Madrassas in Pakistan are considered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) because they provide free education, food, and boarding to poor students who might not have any other option to study in Pakistan because of their financial situations.¹²

Types of Religious Institutions in Pakistan

There are two types of religious institutions in Pakistan: maktabas and madrassas. Maktabas are informal places where children are taught to read and recite the Holy Quran and daily prayers. These maktabas can be in the local mosques or a courtyard of a home or under a tree. They are active as long as a teacher is available to teach the community children. Usually, the children studying in these maktabas also go to public or private primary schools to acquire the “mainstream” education.¹³ However, madrassas are more formal and regular institutions where students are officially enrolled, get rigorous religious education such as memorization of the Holy Quran, and learn Islamic sciences and arts, to become Islamic scholars and Islamic clergy.¹⁴

Classification of Madrassas in Pakistan

In Pakistan, people follow different traditions of Islam called sects. Most of these sects maintain their own educational institutions, madrassas. To monitor the curriculum and the examination system of these madrassas, there are five madrassa boards called *wifaq* or *tanzim* for

11. Ahmed, “Madrasa Education in the Pakistani Context,” 2.

12. Zaidi, “Madrasa Education in Pakistan,” 4.

13. Rahman and Bukhari, “Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions,” 325.

14. Rahman and Bukhari, “Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions,” 325.

each of these sects, *Deobandi*, *Brailvi*, *Ahl-e-Hadith*, *Jama'at-e-Islami*, *Shia*.¹⁵ As the majority of people in Pakistan follow one of the two *Sunni* traditions, Deobandi and Brailvi,¹⁶ about 90% of all madrassas in Pakistan are affiliated with these two boards.¹⁷ In addition, followers of the Shia tradition, being a minority in Pakistan, have the least number of madrassas registered with the Shia board.¹⁸

Syllabi/Curricula of Madrassas

Nazrah (reading and recitation of the Quran), *hifz* (memorization of the Quran), *tajweed* (recitation of the Quran with different Arabic pronunciation and accents), and *Dars-e-Nizami* (education of religious sciences and arts) are some of the common courses in many madrassas across the country. *Nazrah*, *hifz*, and *tajweed* are primary level subjects that are taken independently by students with the help of a teacher. The time period to complete these courses depends on a student's intellectual capability. While *Dars-e-Nizami* is a high level intensive course which includes the Arabic language, its grammar, literature, rhetoric, translation and

15. Zaidi, "Madrassa Education in Pakistan," 5. Also see, Ahmed, "Madrassa Education in the Pakistani Context," 2-3. And see Rahman and Bukhari, "Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions," 326.

16. Deoband and Bareili are towns in Uttar Pradesh, India, from where two rival Sunni movements arose in the late nineteenth century after the advent of the British. Though there are more followers of Brailvi tradition, the number of Deobandi madrassas is more than double than the number of *Sunni* madrassas.

17. International Crisis Group, "Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military," 6.

18. Zaidi, "Madrassa Education in Pakistan," 6-7. The names of madrassa boards and the number of madrassas affiliated with each board is listed here: *Wafaq-ul-Madaris al-Arabia* (16,800 Deobandi madrassas); *Tanzeem ul-Madaris* (8,000 Brailvi madrassa); *Wafaq-ul-Madaris al-Salafia* (1400 Ahl-e-Hadith madrassas); *Rabita ul-Madaris al-Islamia* (1,000 Jama'at e Islami madrassas); *Wafaq-ul-Madaris al-Shia* (413 Shia madrassas). Madrassas of each sect have different syllabi according to their particular ideology which may directly or indirectly oppose the others' belief system causing conflicts. Since the sectarianism has entrenched in the madrassa system, it is difficult for the government to establish one overarching board for all the madrassas and bring uniformity in their curricula in order to reduce the sectarian violence. The author argues, "Militancy in sectarian conflicts cannot be attributed solely to the teachings in the madrassas, though, of course, the propagation of divergent beliefs does create the potential for negative bias against people of other beliefs" (14). Some of madrassa authorities, understanding the drawbacks of sectarianism in Pakistan, are trying to bring all madrassa boards under the umbrella of "Ittehad Tanzeemat Madaris" (14-15).

exegesis of the Holy Quran, Hadith and its principles, *Fiqh* and *Sharia* (Islamic law and its implications) with old and new approaches to the study of theology and philosophy.¹⁹ There are some madrassas that have recently added the basic subjects from dunyawī education such as mathematics, general sciences, social studies, geography, and economics besides the rigorous curricula of Dars-e-Nizami,²⁰ but the number of these madrassas is very low.²¹ Typically, the length of the Dars-e-Nizami course is eight to ten years with a final exam each year or after every two years with the provision of a degree.²²

The final degree of Dars-e-Nizami called *Shahadatul Aalamiya* is considered to be a completion of 16 years of education in a madrassa and has been equivalent to an M.A. in Islamic Studies and Arabic in Pakistan since 1982.²³ However, the earlier degrees in Dars-e-Nizami course such as *Sanwiya Aama* (SSC) and *Sanwiya Khasa* (HSSC) have not yet been approved by the government as equal to the formal education system.²⁴ One reason for not approving the earlier degrees of Dars-e-Nizami, *S. Aama* and *S. Khasa*, equal to SSC or HSSC can be that they do not include any subjects of dunyawī education. For example, if a person wants to get admission to a college for HSC or university for undergraduate studies, he/she might not be able to cope with the range of subjects taught in the institutions of dunyawī education except Islamic Studies, Urdu, or maybe Pakistan Studies with the basis of these degrees only. On the other hand, the *S. Aalamiya* is accepted as equal to a master's degree and a person can proceed with doctorate education only in the field of Islamic Studies or Arabic. The reason is that in the doctorate level education in Pakistan, only specialization subjects are taught for specialization in

19. Rahman and Bukhari, "Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions," 327.

20. Rahman and Bukhari, "Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions," 326.

21. Ahmed, "Madrassa Education in the Pakistani Context," 7.

22. Rahman and Bukhari, "Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions," 326-27.

23. Zaidi, "Madrassa Education in Pakistan," 21. Also see Rahman and Bukhari, "Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions," 334.

24. Zaidi, "Madrassa Education in Pakistan," 21.

Islamic Studies or Arabic, and other courses such as mathematics, sciences, or English are not taught at all. Therefore, a student with a *S. Aalamiya* degree can be a more compatible student for a doctorate program of his/her field (which is only limited to Islamic Studies and Arabic) than a student with a *S. Aama* or *S. Khasa* degree for Higher Secondary or undergraduate level program where a more diverse range of subjects such as English, Urdu, social science, sciences, mathematics, economics, history, and geography is taught and English is a compulsory subject till the undergraduate studies.

Relationship between Madrassas and Pakistani Society

The relationship between madrassas and Pakistani Muslim society is very strong because madrassas have always been connected to the mosques, a place of worship as well as a social community center for Muslims. These madrassas provide *imams* for the mosques who lead five daily prayers, deliver Friday sermons, and participate in social activities such as birth, marriage, and death, providing their services to the community in these important events of people's lives.²⁵ The religious clergymen are an essential part of the Muslim society because they help people preserve Muslim tradition and play an important role in legal verdicts (*fatwas*) of people's everyday life events in the light of Islam. Most of the time, these religious institutions, mosques and madrassas, are funded and monitored by the community with a vision of shaping the state and society in line with Islamic teachings.²⁶ In addition, these madrassas also provide great assistance and education to the children of poor families, who, otherwise, could not be educated. The education in madrassas is provided with the aim to improve students' personal and societal quality of life by teaching them moral and ethical values according to the religion instead of

25. Zaidi, "Madrassa Education in Pakistan," 25.

26. MasoodaBano, "Contesting Ideologies and Struggle for Authority: State-Madrassa Engagement in Pakistan," *Religions and Development*, Working paper 14 (2007): 8.

focusing only on material values to improve their standard of life.²⁷ This is the reason that many times people from the upper middle class and rich families also send their children for education in madrassas besides the schooling in the institutions of dunyawī educational. As Masooda Bano states, “the most prevalent reason for a child being in a madrassa is the parents’ regard for religious values.”²⁸ This is the ideology that keeps these madrassas running and prospering in Pakistan because people, both rich and poor, want their children to have some level of religious education as they consider it to be important for them to become a “good Muslim.”

Relationship between Madrassas and the Job Market

Although madrassas are strongly related to society through mosques, fulfilling the society’s needs for leading daily prayers, providing guidance in funeral, marriage, and other religious matters in a person’s life, the job market is very limited for them. A madrassa graduate only has the option to work in religious spheres such as in a mosque or madrassa or as a religious teacher in an institution of dunyawī education. Although their degree of Dars-e-Nizami is recognized as a master’s degree, it does not increase their chances of getting a well-paid job in Pakistan.²⁹ They are considered “misfits” for the current job market because they are not thought to have the skills required for these jobs. Saba Imtiaz quotes Monis Rehman, the CEO of Naseeb Networks, “Graduates from madrassa are at a significant disadvantage when entering the job market compared to their peers from conventional schools. There is a prevalent perception that

27. Rahman and Bukhari, “Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions,” 329.

28. MasoodaBano, “Beyond Politics: The Reality of a Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 56. In addition, Andrabi, et al. “Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data,” also discuss that there is not much difference among the poor and the rich in choosing madrassa education for their children. However, in the settlements where other schooling options are limited, the number of poor families who send their children to madrassas increases a little in comparison to rich families (466). A possible reason can be that rich families can support their children’s education in cities in hostels, which is not possible for the poor families.

29. Haider, “Madrassa Graduates and Labour Market Mismatches,” 2011.

madrassa graduates lack fundamental mathematics, computer and comprehension skills.”³⁰ Madrassa graduates are usually considered incompetent for the current jobs with the claim that they are not taught the basic skills of mathematics, computer, English and general knowledge.

However, even if there are some madrassas who teach these basic skills, the graduates from these madrassas also face difficulties in finding jobs in the public or private job sector in Pakistan. Imtiaz states that employers do not want to employ the madrassa graduates because they think that the madrassa graduates “do not have social skills or will enforce their religious beliefs on others.”³¹ These biases and misperceptions towards madrassa students are another major factor which is hindering their way to acquire good and well-paid jobs in the Pakistani market. Therefore, most of these graduates either return to low-income jobs available in the religious sector such as teaching in madrassas or becoming an *imam* or going to the Arabic speaking Middle Eastern countries, to further their religious education or work as traders and businessmen.³² They mostly remain limited in the religious sector because this is the only available option for them after graduating from madrassas.

Madrassas and Militancy

Madrassas as educational institutions have come into the limelight after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. Some Western media have consistently claimed that madrassas breed extremism and are a threat to the international society. They have repeatedly suggested that there is a dire need of reformation of madrassas to integrate them into

30. Saba Imtiaz, “Fading job prospects for madrassa students,” *The Express Tribune*, March 27, 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/138236/fading-job-prospects-for-madrassa-students/>.

31. Imtiaz, “Fading job prospects for madrassa students,” 2011.

32. Imtiaz, “Fading job prospects for madrassa students,” 2011.

the “mainstream” education system.³³ Many studies have been conducted since then to explore the relationship between madrassa education and militancy in Pakistan. An analytical paper, titled “Pakistan’s Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education not Jihad,” published right after 9/11 in November 2001 by P.W. Singer, states that madrassas in Pakistan have built close ties with radical militant groups and play a critical role in sustaining the international terrorist network; therefore, Pakistan with the assistance of the US government should bring about some reforms to counter the negative effects of these militant madrassas.³⁴ Similarly, International Crisis Group published a report, “Pakistan: Madrassas, Extremism, and Militancy,” in 2002 which reported that because of poverty, a constrained worldview, and a lack of “modern civic education,” most madrassas are “susceptible to romantic notions of sectarian and international jihads, which promise instant salvation.”³⁵ In addition, Nicole Warren in “Madrassa Education in Pakistan: Assisting the Taliban’s Resurgence” argues that madrassas in Pakistan have clear associations with militancy and terrorism because they teach a radicalized curriculum combined with military training to Taliban.³⁶

However, the research done by many revisionists demonstrates that madrassas are not the main problem in breeding terrorism but that the institutions of dunyawi education are equally responsible for it. For example, a Brookings study, “Beyond Madrassas: Assessing the Links between Education and Militancy in Pakistan,” argues that with an exception of a few madrassas on the Afghan-Pakistan border, general madrassas in Pakistan are not the main reason in fueling militancy. Rather the problem lies at the failure of the Pakistani government to provide adequate

33. Bano, “Contesting Ideologies and Struggle for Authority,” 8.

34. Peter W. Singer, *Pakistan's Madrassahs: Insuring a System of Education Not Jihad*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001).

35. International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military,” (Executive summary on page i).

36. Nicole Warren, "Madrassa Education in Pakistan: Assisting the Taliban's Resurgence," *Pell Scholars and Senior Theses*, (2009).

public education and employment, which might make the young generation frustrated because of being unable to earn a proper living and make them more prone to turn towards violent means such as suicide bombing.³⁷ Another study, “Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: A New Look at the Militancy-Madrasah Connection,” argues that although madrasa education might justify jihad and madrassas and mosques might provide gathering places for the militant groups, an equally strong support for jihad is prevalent among the students who do not go to madrasa but to a public or private school.³⁸

Madrasa Reforms

The issue of madrasa reforms has become important since September 11, 2001 with a focus on counter-terrorism. Western countries, particularly the US government, have forced the Pakistani government to take immediate measures in this regard. Bano describes, “On the basis of claims that key Taliban leaders were educated in madrasas located mainly in the tribal belts of Pakistan, the US government has become very critical of madrasa system as a whole” and offered a package of \$225 million in 2003 to bring reform in the madrasa education system.³⁹ To reform madrassas and bring deeni education on par with duniawi education, the government has introduced some policies such as Model Deeni (religious) Madaris and the Madrasa Board Ordinance 2001, the Voluntarily Registration of Regulation Ordinance 2002, and the Government Madrasa Reforms Program 2004.⁴⁰ Through these reforms, the government tried to set up a few model madrassas where English, mathematics, social studies, and general sciences

37. Rebecca Winthrop and Corinne Graff, “Beyond Madrassas: Assessing the Links between Education and Militancy in Pakistan,” *Center for Universal Education at Brookings*, Working paper 2, (2010).

38. C. Christine Fair, “Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: A New Look at the Militancy-Madrasah Connection,” *Asia Policy*, 4:1 (2007).

39. Bano, “Beyond Politics,” 44.

40. Zaidi, “Madrasa Education in Pakistan,” 17-18.

were included in the madrassa curriculum besides religious subjects. It also made registration mandatory for all the madrassas in the country. However, these reforms have mostly met with strong resistance from madrassas and created a conflicting ideological situation between madrassa authorities and the Pakistani government because madrassa authorities view the current reforms as “a Western attempt to control Islam.”⁴¹ They perceive the government’s sudden attention and focus on them to reform their education system only because of the pressure by the Western agencies and not because their real or true concern for the inclusion of madrassas in Pakistan’s development. This particular perception is threatening their very existence.

The government has focused on madrassa reforms only from one angle, counter-militancy and counter-terrorism, because of which the reforms have faced so much resistance. Though the government claims to “mainstream” madrassas through these reforms, their way of approaching madrassas is marginalizing and demeaning. These madrassas argue that the purpose of these reforms is to secularize madrassas, not to enable madrassas to produce better scholars of Islam.⁴² Studies have shown that madrassas have the potential and willingness to embrace modernity according to the need of the time. As Zaidi points out, “Madrassas are not totally incognizant of modern changes in the society, and they want to include new subjects in their curricula according to the needs.”⁴³ My study shows that many madrassas have already added the subjects from the duniya education in their curriculum in order to meet the needs of contemporary society, especially in the job market. Through my research, I focus on their perspectives about the needs of today’s modern world, the challenges they have to face in the job market and their preparedness to face these challenges.

41. Bano, “Contesting Ideologies and Struggle for Authority,” 20.

42. Bano, “Contesting Ideologies and Struggle for Authority,” 20.

43. Zaidi, “Madrassa Education in Pakistan,” 24.

III. Methodology and Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

In order to explore the perspectives of madrassa students, teachers and administrators about their education and employment in Pakistan, this study adopts an ethnographic qualitative approach of in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview method is particularly useful in qualitative research because it helps us understand how people interpret their surroundings, and construct and understand their own behavior. In-depth interviews were conducted in Bahawalpur with 35 participants from eight madrassas, five girls' madrassas and three boys' madrassas, where a Dars-e-Nizami course is taught. The study focuses on Bahawalpur, a Saraiki speaking district in the southern part of Punjab, because it is one of the regions in Pakistan where there is a high rate of madrassa enrolment, second only to the enrolment in the Afghan-Pakistan border areas.⁴⁴ I initially intended to focus on madrassas from both urban and rural settings in Bahawalpur; however, during the research I realized that almost all of the madrassas which offer a Dars-e-Nizami course are located in the urban setting. Many students from the rural areas come to these madrassas in the city for further studies of Dars-e-Nizami after completing their *hifz*, memorization of the Holy Quran.

From each madrassa, four to six people were interviewed (two to four students, one teacher, and one person from the administration). Besides teachers and administrators, interviews were conducted only with those madrassa students (female and male) who have either graduated from madrassas after completing their Dars-e-Nizami degree or will be graduating within a year or two. The reason for focusing on this particular group of people is that they have already entered or are going to enter the job market soon with a Dars-e-Nizami degree, which is

44. Andrabi, et al. "Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan," 456.

equivalent to a master's degree in Pakistan. All of the participants in this research are above 18, the age at which a person takes on the rights and responsibilities of an adult in Pakistan.

This research was funded by the Asian Studies Department at the Asian University for Women but the funds were limited; thus, I could not travel back to Pakistan to conduct the interviews by myself. Therefore, the interviews were conducted and recorded by two research assistants in Pakistan and then sent to me for further analysis. It is important to mention that the research assistants are my younger siblings and did not have any prior experience in the field of research. Still, I decided to utilize their services for conducting the interviews in Pakistan because I could not find any other research assistant. They were not only available but were also talking to me regularly about my research proposal and providing me with some thoughtful insights about the current situation and context in Pakistan. Another major reason for selecting them as research assistants was that they both have studied in madrassas and have been exposed to the madrassa environment; thus it made the communication between the research assistants and the participants from madrassas easier and more comfortable. However, it also had its own consequences because of the sectarian problems in Pakistan.⁴⁵ As my siblings and I have studied at Brailvi madrassas in Pakistan, most of the Deobandi madrassas were reluctant to participate in my research because of the sectarian difference. Some of the madrassas refused to take part in this research, saying that they do not want anyone from the other sect to interfere in their madrassa. Another difficulty we faced in getting the participants was that madrassa people did not see any direct benefit of my research for them. They claimed that many people come to them

45. See the footnotes no. 18 above. In Pakistan, because of some ideological differences among different sects, there is a great internal (ideological and physical) clash between the Muslims of different sects, Brailvi and Deobandi, Sunni and Wahabi, and Sunni and Shia. These ideological clashes are no more limited only in the spheres of discussion and debates among scholars in the madrassas and mosques; it has extended to reach in people's everyday life in the face of physical violence. People from one sect mostly do not prefer to mingle with the people of other sects, especially in marital relationships.

for research purposes and take information from them, but then nothing happens. There is no positive change in their situation and no acknowledgement for them. On the other hand, some madrassas took it as an opportunity to convey their messages to the world.

As the research assistants did not have any background in conducting research, especially qualitative research, I provided them with some initial training on qualitative research methods via Skype. I helped them understand the process of conducting research and ethical issues related to the fieldwork such as providing informed and voluntary consent to all the participants, different written and oral methods of taking informed consent from the participants, maintaining their confidentiality, trying to be as unbiased toward the participants' information as possible in sociological research. To make sure that they understood the procedure, I provided them with some sample interviews conducted by me with some friends for this particular purpose. I communicated with them on a regular basis during the time the interviews were being conducted in Pakistan to provide them with all kinds of assistance they needed during the interviewing process. Overall, the interview process went smoothly; however, the interviewers faced some minor interruptions during the interviews. During the interviews of some of the female teachers and some administrators, the participants were interrupted a few times by students or other faculty members for different reasons. These interruptions usually disrupt the flow of discussion between the participant and the interviewer. The interviews with the participants were conducted during December 2013 and January 2014 mostly during the official working hours of these madrassas because it was very difficult to schedule an in interview outside of their working hours.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in the best ethical manner possible, abiding by the ethical guidelines of AUW Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research proposal, with the detailed plan for conducting this research and participant's information sheets and consent forms, was reviewed and approved by AUW IRB in order to conform to the standards and integrity of a qualitative research. After the AUW IRB approval on my research, I translated the research questions, research information sheet and participants' consent forms into Urdu, and a Pakistani professor⁴⁶ at the university revised them for the accuracy of language and information in Urdu. These translated documents were used to conduct the interviews in Urdu, which were recorded by the research assistants and sent to me. The translation of the interviews is used in this research report. This report uses pseudonyms for the participants' real names while the names of their institutions are not mentioned at all because it is very difficult to assign pseudonyms to all these madrassas. Therefore, madrassas (if needed) will be referred to in this paper with a number one to eight, as we have interviewed participants from eight madrassas.

The data is presented and analyzed according to the thematic patterns found in the participants' responses about their education and employment opportunities in Pakistan. To analyze the results thematically in this paper, I am using the theoretical and conceptual framework of the self model theory of subjectivity, symbolic interactionism, and the construction of discourse.

46. Dr. Tasneem Akhtar, Associate Professor of Economics at the department of Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) at the Asian University for Women.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

As this study adopts an ethnographic qualitative research approach to explore the perspectives of madrasa students, teachers, and administrators, I will utilize sociological and feminist theories such as epistemology, identity and subjectivity, symbolic interactionism, and construction of discourse to analyze and understand the results of this study. These theories, intertwined closely, are a useful tool in the humanities and social sciences to understand the meanings behind people's behaviors and choices and how these meanings keep changing through the fluid process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge through which we as individuals and societies justify our religious, moral, social, or ideological beliefs.⁴⁷ It is to understand how we know what we know, and that is called understanding of the source of knowledge which emerges through the justification of our beliefs. These beliefs can arise in people through both reliable (perception, introspection, memory, reason, and testimony) and unreliable psychological (desire, emotional needs, prejudice and biased values) factors. It is only the reliable origination of the beliefs, however, that is counted towards knowledge in the theory of epistemology.⁴⁸ This theory is a useful tool to understand the perspectives of the madrasa students, teachers, and administrators about their education and the job market in Pakistan. For example, if they learn and understand the purpose of their education to attain spirituality, the use of their education for acquiring a well-paid job seems irrelevant or external. This particular understanding has its grounds in religious studies which they are gaining with a purpose to strengthen their religious beliefs. This is their epistemological understanding of education. Therefore, while trying to understand their perspectives on their education and job, I need to understand my own

47. Matthias Steup, "Epistemology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (Winter 2013 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/epistemology/>.

48. Steup, "Epistemology," 2013.

epistemology about the relationship between education and job and how it may be different from the participants' epistemology. Though we live in the same world, our knowledge of it can be different on the basis of how we have acquired that knowledge.

The knowledge we have about the world around us shapes our identity and subjectivity, which then through social interactions are modified and re-modified as a constant construction of discourses.⁴⁹ Subjectivity refers to the process by which we become a subject or a person, our sense of ourselves, and this sense of ourselves is not static.⁵⁰ Our sense of ourselves changes with time and space because our knowledge and sources of our knowledge change. We construct ourselves by looking at ourselves through other people's eyes while interacting with them. This is outlined as symbolic interactionism in George Herbert Mead's Theory of Symbolic Interactionism.⁵¹ This theory analyzes society by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviors and how these meanings are interpreted when people come into contact with each other.⁵² They interpret each other's behavior either to create a social bond when their interpretations match or create "the Other" when these interpretations do not match. Thus, society is socially constructed through human interpretation.

Our construction of ourselves and our interpretations of our surroundings is our "reality" and "truth" of the world, people, practices, and events. In this process of construction, power plays a crucial role beside the knowledge we have acquired through different sources and belief systems. Michel Foucault calls it "power/knowledge" relationship in a discourse formation.⁵³

49. Lisa Blackman et al., "Editorial: Creating Subjectivities," *Subjectivity*, (2008), 3.

50. Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 2nd edition, (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 10-11.

51. Emory A. Griffin, "Symbolic Interactionism of George Herbert Mead," *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 8th edition, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2012), 55.

52. Griffin, "Symbolic Interactionism of George Herbert Mead," 59.

53. Nick Mansfield, "Foucault: The Subject and Power," in *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, (New York: NYU Press, 2000). 58.

Even if everyone has their own subjective knowledge to construct their reality, no one is completely free in this construction because, according to Foucault, they are monitored by the society's systems of knowledge. This is how the dominant discourses or the impartial truth(s) of the society are formed through the power and knowledge that constrain and enable what can be meaningfully spoken, thought, and written about people, objects and practices in a specific time and space.⁵⁴ Discourse is historically contingent and is produced through the plays of power/knowledge. It is sometimes held together by desire because, as Foucault states, "it is the discourses of truth and knowledge from which are derived our models of normal and abnormal behavior."⁵⁵ The one who has power can not only form a discourse but can also propagate their own knowledge and construction as "reality" or "truth" for the society as a whole.

These theories become relevant for my research when we try to understand what the dominant discourses about education and jobs are in Pakistan and how they have evolved. In contemporary Pakistani society, secular educational institutions are considered the norm. In this context, religious education, which used to dominate earlier, has come to signify something almost "abnormal." The "power" or "prestige" has shifted from religious education to a secular education system, but it is also important to consider an individual's subjective perception of religious education. As we construct our subjectivities through our epistemology, the madrassa students, teachers, and administrators construct their own realities and subjectivities of their behaviors of providing and attaining religious education. The way they have acquired knowledge about the religious education and its importance from the religious texts shapes their meaning of their education, which is an end in itself and a means to acquire spirituality. It is a discourse of education among the people from madrassas. However, the contemporary job-oriented society

54. Mansfield, "Foucault: The Subject and Power," 59.

55. Mansfield, "Foucault: The Subject and Power," 52.

epistemologically constructs the meaning of education in a different way, a means to an end where education is a means to obtain a well-paid job. This becomes the discourse of a job-oriented society. These two different meanings or discourses prescribed to the word “education” lead to different kinds of thoughts, which are then translated into action differently according to the theory of symbolic interactionism. The society that views education as a means to acquire a good job will value the benefit of education only if the jobseekers are successful in acquiring their intended job. If they fail to do so, their education will be considered as a waste of time. On the other hand, the other social group who sees education as an end in itself will value the benefit of education in terms of learning how much a person has learned and applied. Application may also include being able to earn money through working in the similar sector. Here, if a person fails to show the learning in a measurable way, this group would consider it a failure.

However, when both groups interact and their discourses about education do not match, a conflict arises. The more powerful group (this power can be physical, social, political, or ideological) tries to influence and change the discourse of the less powerful. The resistance may or may not occur during the course of reconstructing subjectivities and discourses. There are some madrassas in Pakistan that have moved beyond just teaching religious education and towards job-oriented education. It demonstrates that meaning, subjectivities, and discourses are fluid and subject to constant change. The discourse of madrassas about education is heavily influenced by the more dominant, economically and politically constructed, discourse of education, in which acquiring a well-paid job is the ultimate goal of education. When people like me who support the dominant discourse see madrassa students not being able to acquire a well-paid job in the contemporary job market, they automatically assume that there is a problem with the madrassa education. We do not even ask ourselves for the second time whether those

students even want these jobs or not. This is not to generalize that none of the madrassa students would want a well-paid job; however, there are students who do not want to work in any sector other than religion. While trying to make them confirm to the “mainstream,” we even forget that they also have human agency based on which they (at least some of them) chose to study in madrassas and work in the madrassa sector regardless of the little income they get from there.

I started this research to understand the gap between madrassa education and the job market assuming that there is a “gap.” I did not take into account the possibility that there might be some people who may not even see any gap between their education and the job market in Pakistan because the job market is not even their concern. My assumption that there is a gap is based on my observation that many madrassa graduates face difficulties in acquiring a well paid job in Pakistan. This research has questioned my own perspective about looking at madrassa education and the job market in Pakistan with an understanding that the situation is more nuanced than what I had thought before.

IV. Results and Discussion

This section highlights the key findings of my research from the in-depth interviews of madrassa students, teachers, and administrators about the madrassa education and the job market in Pakistan. The findings of my research can be categorized into two main sections: 1) the changes in the curriculum of madrassas and preparedness of madrassa students for the job market and 2) difficulties and/or (sometimes) failure of madrassa graduates in securing good jobs and its reasons. Below I will discuss and analyze these aspects of my findings in relation to my research question, “What are some underlying factors behind the difficulties madrassa graduates face in

the job market?” In the end, I will also discuss some of the solutions presented by the madrassas to incorporate madrassa students in the job market in Pakistan.

Curriculum Changes

Though it is commonly assumed that madrassas only focus on the religious education and do not teach any subjects of dunyawī education such as mathematics, sciences, social studies, and English, my research suggests that the situation is changing and madrassas are including these subjects in their curricula. These changes are happening on national level because of the government’s policy implementation in 2013⁵⁶ and the individual level because of the madrassas’ realization of the requirement of the current job market in Pakistan. The research shows that all the madrassas in Bahawalpur have added at least English, mathematics, general science, basic computer science, and social studies to their curriculum to equip their students with the needs of the current world. What the needs of the current “modern” world are and how one responds to these needs is also a contextual matter. For secularists, the requirements of the current world are to adopt and emulate modernity and survive in today’s highly competitive world. On the other hand, for the traditional religious societies, the requirement of today’s world might be to revisit the religion and either modernize it to survive in this world or stick to the fundamental traditional values and reject the changes happening in the current world. Madrassas are mostly known for the rejection of the modern society by sticking to the fundamental religious values. However, my research shows that madrassas in Bahawalpur are not rejecting the modernization rather they are revisiting the religion and remolding it to fit into the modern

56. Madrassas mentioned that since 2013 academic year, the government of Pakistan has made it mandatory for all the madrassas to include mathematics, general science, social studies, and English as mandatory subjects in the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum. The SSC level books of these subjects will be taught in the first 2 years of Dars-e-Nizami, and HSSC level books will be taught in the next two years to standardize the madrassa students’ learning with the ones attaining dunyawī education.

society. It is not to say that they are remolding the religion, but the methods of imparting the religion with a more inclusive approach of adding the subjects of secular (dunyawi) education in their curriculum.

While some of these madrassas are giving some basic knowledge of the dunyawi subjects in the first few years of Dars-e-Nizami course as required by the government's curriculum reform, the majority of these madrassas are not only providing the basic dunyawi education to their students but are also preparing them for the national level board exams of SSC, HSSC, and BA (2 years). Six out of eight participating madrassas claim that they are providing their students with full assistance to take the national level board exams so that the students not only have an exposure to the modern secular world but also know how to cope with it with their dunyawi education. In addition, these madrassas have started providing dunyawi education with the deeni education far before the government's curriculum reform package had arrived in their madrassas. Madrassa teachers and administrators, through these improvements in the curriculum, want their graduates to "acquire the relevant skills to participate actively in the development of Pakistan."⁵⁷ For example, one girls' madrassa has been preparing its students for the national level board exams of SSC, HSSC, and BA since 2005 not because the government required them to do so, but because they felt its need. Since then, four batches of 10-15 girls have graduated from this institution with an HSSC or BA degree besides the Dars-e-Nizami degree. Furthermore, two out of three boys' madrassas also claim to teach some level of dunyawi education with the religious education since their establishment in early 2000s in order to provide their students with some skills to move into the society outside of the madrassa. However, they have started the formal provision of dunyawi education and preparation for the board exams recently for the last three to four years.

57. Ahmed, "Madrassa Education in the Pakistani Context," 11.

When asked why madrassas have added these subjects in their curriculum, most of the participants asserted the critical need of the inclusion of the dunyawī education besides deeni education in order to cope with the current “modern” society in Pakistan, especially in the job market. They consider the necessity of having both kinds of education, deeni and dunyawī, in a person’s life, as deeni education teaches them the ways of life according to Islamic moral and ethical values while dunyawī education provides them a means of earning in the current job market. Imran, a Dars-e-Nizami final year student who wants to go to university after graduating from the madrassa and do his masters in Urdu Literature, explains the importance of deeni and dunyawī education by drawing an analogy of education to the human body. He says, “Deeni education is like soul and the dunyawī education is like bones in a human’s body.” He argues that the soul and the bones both are important for a person to survive in this world; however, the soul is the most essential part of a human being. The person’s soul is what makes the person alive and if it leaves, the person will be considered dead. Nevertheless, the bones are important for a person’s mobility. Similarly, deeni education, the soul, is what makes human beings who they are by teaching them the Islamic ways of life. On the other hand, dunyawī education, the bones, equips them to live in this world and move around successfully in the society by earning and fulfilling the necessities of their lives.

In addition, some participants emphasize the importance of learning the subjects of dunyawī education especially English for missionary purposes such as to spread the message of Islam to other people, Muslims and non-Muslims. Ms. Nazia, a female teacher and administrator of a girls’ madrassa, claims that the Prophet Muhammad encouraged his companions to learn different languages. She further states:

[The Prophet Muhammad’s] encouragement to learn different languages points out that we should try to interact and understand people from other countries and understand their

languages. When we will comprehend their languages, we will be able to understand their situations, their cultures, their civilizations and live with them in harmony in this world.

Ms. Nazia offers English in her madrassa and encourages her students to learn English because she believes in the utility of the language as a medium to understand people from different parts of the world. According to her, English as a medium can be used to convey the message of Islam across the different parts of the world. One of her students, Shagufta, says that learning English puts her at an advantage because it enables her to communicate with people in a language which they understand. The acceptance of English as a subject that is worthwhile learning in the curriculum of these madrassas in Bahawalpur shows that the perception of English “as un-Islamic and forbidden in Islam” is changing and “making their inroads to the madaris.”⁵⁸

Through the accounts of these madrassas where the curricular changes are happening, though at different speeds, it is apprehended that madrassas are cognizant of the demands of the changing society. All the madrassas in Pakistan cannot be generalized to have added the subjects of duniya education besides religious education on the basis of the findings of my research. Nonetheless, a conclusion can be derived that the improvements in the madrassa curriculum are taking place. Zaidi mentions a question persistently asked about madrassas: “Are the madaris adopting new concepts of the modern world?”⁵⁹ According to my research findings, the question is not so much about whether these madrassas are aware of the modern worlds’ needs and requirements and are adopting them or not. The question is why are some madrassas so reluctant to adopt the government’s curriculum reforms when they are aware of the necessity of these reforms? Zaidi illustrates the matter saying, “The government started madrassa reforms in the backdrop of 9/11, commonly perceived as being under pressure of western powers. Thus, any

58. Zaidi, “Madrassa Education in Pakistan,” 20.

59. Zaidi, “Madrassa Education in Pakistan,” 24.

efforts in this regard are perceived as part of a ‘foreign agenda.’”⁶⁰ When the government started these reforms after being pressurized by some western powers who also provided the Pakistani government with the large sums of funds to carry out these reforms.⁶¹ It threatened the existence of madrassas as religious entities. The assumptions which came with these reforms were that “Islam is under attack by the West”⁶² through which the west wants to secularize the Pakistani madrassas in Pakistan in order to control Islam. This assumption challenged the role of madrassas to shape the state and society according to the Islamic teachings and the authority of *ulema* (religious clergy) to impart the religious education independently as they interpret the teachings of Islam.⁶³ These religious clergy also claim that when the government does not provide any resources to madrassas regardless of how much social service they do, they should not decide what madrassas should teach to their students.

Without government’s involvement, some madrassas have decided to include the subjects of dunyawi education in their curriculum and/or prepare students for the national level exams of dunyawi education in madrassas. Their decisions have changed because of the need of earning a livelihood or preaching the religious teachings to a broader audience nationally and internationally. We cannot claim that the government’s efforts of bringing curriculum reform in madrassas have not influenced their decisions of including these subjects; two madrassas have added the subjects of dunyawi education into their curriculum because the governments requires them to do so. Yet, their decisions of encouraging and preparing their students for the national level exams are influenced by the requirement of the job market in Pakistan. Their interaction with the society in the job market and their experiences of difficulties in finding a well-paid job

60. Zaidi, “Madrassa Education in Pakistan,” 19.

61. Rahman and Bukhari, “Pakistan: Religious Education and Institutions,” 331.

62. Bano, “Contesting Ideologies and Struggle for Authority,” 20.

63. See Bano, “Contesting Ideologies and Struggle for Authority,” pages 8 and 19-12. Also see Malik, “Dynamic among Traditional Religious Schools and Their Institutions in Contemporary South Asia,” 208.

have made them realize the need of both deeni and dunyawi education. Therefore, the people who do not feel any need of working outside of the religious sector, madrassas and mosques, still do not see the importance of dunyawi education. Now as the madrassa have started teaching a broader curriculum which is not limited to religious education only, the question is whether this additional dunyawi education in these madrassas is actually preparing the students for the contemporary society and the job market in Pakistan or not.

Madrassa to Job Market: Preparation

When the participants (students, teachers and administrators) are asked whether their education in madrassa, deeni and/or dunyawi, is preparing these madrassa students for the current job market in Pakistan, the answers were mostly positive. Table 1 below shows the range of answers that I have received from the participants during the interviews. Though I have conducted in-depth interviews and the participants did not locate their answers in any of the categories bellow, I preferred organizing their responses in these five overlapping and fluid categories. In addition, I want to make it clear that the responses of the research participants cannot be put into boxes because they are much more complex than these polarized binaries of prepared and unprepared.

Table 1: Participants' Madrassas Preparing them for the Job Market

	Preparing	Somewhat preparing	Not preparing but realize its importance	Not preparing because it is not needed	Not sure
Students	13 (10 females and 3 males)	2 (1 female and 1 male)	1 (male)	1 (male)	2 (female)
Teachers	7 (3 females and 4 males)	1 (male)	0	1 (female)	0
Administrators	4 (1 female and 3 male)	2 (male)	0	1 (male)	0
Total # of participants (%)	24 (68.6%)	5 (14.3%)	1 (2.86%)	3 (8.57%)	2 (5.7%)

Source: The information in this table has been compiled by the author of this thesis.

The majority (68.6%) of participants consider themselves prepared for the needs of the current job market in Pakistan, while 14.3% participants consider themselves somewhat preparing. On the other hand, only 17.13% participants consider themselves, either not prepared or unsure about the requirements of the current job market to be prepared. The participants who considered themselves prepared for the current job market are mainly the ones from the six madrassas which are not only providing the dunyawi education in their institutions but are also preparing their students for the national level exams. The participants claim that in today's world, acquiring both kinds of education is essential as Ms. Nazia illustrates, "if we only obtain religious education, we'll be left out from this fast moving modern society, but if we only obtain dunyawi education, we'll lose our afterlife." As they are acquiring both deeni and dunyawi

education, they are preparing themselves for the current world to get a job in the religious sector as well as outside of the religious sector while securing their afterlife in heaven.

Interestingly, most of the male teachers, who participated in my research, are the job holders in the government sector besides teaching in these madrassas at the same time. Out of five male teachers, four of them have other jobs and sources of income either from a government job or personal businesses. Two of them are in teaching profession; one is a lecturer in Alama Iqbal Law College and the other is a teacher in a Danish School⁶⁴ in a village close to Bahawalpur. Among the other two madrassa teachers, one is a retired grade-2 bank officer and the other owns some farming land and runs a small business. The fifth male teacher is a recent Dars-e-Nizami graduate of the same madrassa where he is currently teaches. While completing his Dars-e-Naizami, he completed his BA and B.Ed as a private candidate. Then he completed his Master's in International Relations from Islamia University Bahawalpur and is looking for a permanent government job as a college lecturer. He has done some computer diplomas too and teaches computer in madrassa in addition to the religious subjects.

However, all four of the female teachers only teach in madrassa even though three of them have some level of dunyawi education besides the deeni education. For example, one female teacher, Ms. Nazia, mentions that in her family, her father, elder sister, and a brother are government jobs holders in the teaching sector. All of them (including her) have acquired deeni and dunyawi education from madrassas, passing national level exams of SSC, HSSC, BA and B.Ed. as private candidates. She says, "While my sister is a lecturer of Islamic Studies and Arabic in Yazman College, I prefer to run my own madrassa and teach here." She claims that her

64. Danish system of schools is introduced by the Punjab government in 2010. These schools are established with a vision to fight poverty by eradicating illiteracy in Pakistan. These schools provide free of cost education to underprivileged and under-resourced children in remote villages in Punjab. For further information, visit their website: <http://daanishschools.edu.pk/>.

students are prepared to face all kinds of challenges they may come across in the job market because of their broader education which includes dunyawī education besides religious education

These madrassa teachers themselves are qualified in both deeni and dunyawī education, and thus encourage their students to acquire both kinds of education. They consider the curriculum of their madrassas much broader and unique from the curriculum of typical Pakistani madrassas. One male teacher, Mr. Aslam, described the uniqueness of the curriculum in his madrassa and his vision for teaching this curriculum:

Our curriculum prepares students for the needs of today's world because it is very unique. It's different not only from other madrassas but also from the schools and colleges in Pakistan. From our institution, we envision to prepare the kind of citizens who will become the role models in the society and effective leaders. They will be able to play an important role in the government and society of Pakistan.

Besides teaching at a boys' madrassa, Mr. Aslam teaches law and religious studies at Alama Iqbal Law College. He is a gold medalist in LLB from Alama Iqbal Law College and has completed his LLM (M.Phil in Law) recently, and he was appointed as a religious teacher at the same collage. For further studies he plans to go to Canada for a PhD in criminal law and wants to pursue his career as a professor of Law and a researcher of Islamic law. As he himself holds well-paid and respectable jobs, he has similar prospects for his students. He believes that the curriculum in his madrassa consisting of religious studies (Dars-e-Nazami), English, mathematics, sciences,⁶⁵ computer science, political science and economics, is designed to prepare students for all kinds of skills required in the current job market in Pakistan. The students of his madrassa can get their desired jobs in any field.

In these madrassas, teachers' ideologies have a great influence on their students' perceptions of themselves as prepared or being prepared for the current job market. A female

⁶⁵. Among the eight participant madrassas, this madrassa is the only one where students are prepared to take national level matriculation exams with science subjects (physics, chemistry, and biology), while all other madrassas prepare their students to pass matriculation exam in arts with general science.

student, Aasia, mentioned, “As our teachers have got good jobs on the basis of madrassa education which teaches both deeni and dunyawi subjects, we will also get good jobs after our graduation.” She said that she is confident that her education is preparing her for the current job market in Pakistan, especially in the field of teaching which she wants to pursue. In addition, an exposure to the modern world through dunyawi education also gives the students confidence to face the modern world. “With this education, I am prepared to face the modern world and the requirements of the job market. I won’t back down, rather I will compete to get what I want,” Sana, another female student from the same madrassa, said. She, like many other students of participating madrassa, is confident in her abilities and her knowledge. This confidence has come with the understanding that she has gained knowledge not only in the field of religion but also in the other worldly matters. Sana wants to get an LLB degree after completing her studies at the madrassa; however, she does not want to work because she thinks that a woman’s best job is to raise her children and take care of her family in a proper manner. Her discourse about women influences her decision of what she wants to do with her education. For her, a woman’s best place is at her home. She should get education not to earn a livelihood unless it is absolutely necessary but to make a better nation through upbringing her children as better Muslims and better citizens.

Even though the majority of madrassas claim that they are preparing their students for the current job market by imparting both deeni and dunyawi education, there are madrassas which do not see themselves prepared or preparing for the current job market because they do not feel any need of it. For example, Ms. Shaheen, a female teacher from a madrassa which has recently added some subjects of dunyawi education in their curriculum, argues that there is no need of the dunyawi education besides religious education. Answering the question on whether she

encourages her students for further studies in college or university after graduating from madrassa or not, she asserted, “There are some students who want to go to university, but I do not support or encourage that. I would want them to teach in madrassa and spread the religion. ... The duniawi education they have received so far in madrassa is enough.” Ms. Shaheen does not see any importance of further duniawi education. She encourages her students to devote themselves to learning and teaching religious education only. She argues that in today’s modern world, people are going so far away from Islam and the Islamic way of life, so our responsibility in today’s world is to spread Islam and serve our religion. It shows that if the teachers can influence students’ opinions about the importance of duniawi education besides deeni education, the teacher may also influence them otherwise. The students of Ms. Shaheen’s madrassas show enthusiasm towards going to university for further education regardless of the disapproval and discouragement from their teacher. I found that it was mainly because some other teachers and administrators of the same madrassa encourage those students to study both deeni and duniawi education, though placing a stronger emphasis on the deeni education.

However, sometimes, the situation can be the opposite as found in the case of a male student, Kashif, from a boys’ madrassa. Though the majority of the students in his madrassa are acquiring both educations, he does not see any need of attaining duniawi education at all. His point of view is shaped by one of his teachers who does not support duniawi education at all. He shares his experience of being discouraged by his teachers when he tried to take the SSC national examination as a private candidate and sent his admission for the exams. One week before the board exam, he went to his teachers and asked for the teachers’ blessings for his exam. However, one of the teachers, instead of giving him the blessings, said, “I will pray that you fail the exam.”

The response he got from the teacher was heart breaking and discouraging for him. He further narrates his teacher's words,

Once a student passes SSC, then wants to complete HSSC, then BA, then MA, then MPhil, then PhD. While doing all this, he acquires this mentality that 'now I do not want to be an imam in a mosque, or a teacher in madrassa. I do not want to serve the religion now. I want to get a good government job.' And when their mentality is shaped in this way, they do not get any *sawab* (reward in afterlife) and his spiritual progress and connection with Allah stops.

It is understandable how the teachers have influence and power over this particular discourse of education. The teacher justifies his dislike about the student's attempt to sit in the SSC examination by explaining the process of how the majority of students who acquire dunyawi education leave the madrassa jobs behind, which stops their spiritual progress. This becomes the reason that Kashif did not acquire any more dunyawi education after that and does not even see the importance of dunyawi education if it becomes a reason for losing spirituality.

It is the prevalence of this particular discourse of education in many Pakistani madrassas, that the majority of the participants who consider themselves prepared and being prepared claimed that madrassa education system as a whole is ineffective in preparing madrassa graduates for the job market. They claim that because majority of Pakistani madrassas have not yet added dunyawi education in their curriculum, they are not preparing their students to cope with the requirements of the current job market. Table 2 below shows the range of responses of the participants about the preparedness of graduates of Pakistani madrassas for the job market.

Table 2: Pakistani Madrassas Preparing their Students for the Job Market

	Preparing	Somewhat preparing	Not preparing
Students	4 (3 female and 1 male)	5 (4 female and 1 male)	10 (6 female and 4 male)
Teachers	1 (female)	2 (female)	6 (5 male and 1 female)
Administrators	0	1 (female)	6 (male)
Total # of participants (%)	5 (14.3%)	8 (22.86%)	22 (62.86%)

Source: The information in the table has been compiled by the author of this thesis.

More than 60% participants believe that Pakistani madrassas are not preparing their students for the current job market. The reason participants give is that most of the Pakistani madrassas only teach religious education which does not help these graduates to find jobs in the current job market. For example, Mr. Aslam explained the situation of Pakistani madrassas saying:

The current madrassas in Pakistan are not preparing students as beneficial members of the society. Rather majority of them are just a burden in the society; they take from the society, eat and live on the society's expenditures but do not give back anything to the society.

These madrassa students are not beneficial members of the society because they are unable to earn their own living and fulfill the needs of their families, and the major reason for their inability is the lack of duniawi education and skills for the current job market. Some other participants are very hopeful and see a ray of light in the madrassa education system because they observe the changes happening in the madrassa curriculum in the last few years.

Madrassa to Job Market: Job Search

Whether madrassas are preparing their graduates for the current job market or not, the majority of participants agree that all the madrassa graduates face difficulties in finding jobs. They claim that it does not matter whether madrassas have opened up for the dunyawi education or not, the job market is limited for them. A few madrassa graduates who participated in my research shared their experiences of finding well-paid jobs. These graduates have obtained dunyawi education alongside the deeni education from their madrassas. One participant, Samreen, told us that she graduated from a madrassa with an S. Aalmiya degree in 2009. Her madrassa also provided dunyawi education and assisted her and her classmates to prepare and take national level SSC and HSSC examination under Bahawalpur board. She narrates her struggle of finding a job:

After my graduation, I got admission in Islamia University Bahawalpur in M.Phil in Islamic Studies on the basis of Dars-e-Nizami degree. I completed my M.Phil in 2011 and started searching for government job but as I did not have BA degree from dunyawi education, it was really hard to get a job... I applied for all the jobs openings for religious teacher, Urdu teacher, social studies teacher, but I had no luck. When I read the job description, I fulfill all of them, but when I apply, I get none. Sometimes it frustrated me. ... After struggling for over a year I started working in a private school with a salary of only 4000 rupees per month. I was in desperate need so I had to take this job. I performed well in this job and my employers were very happy with that; however, I did not stop searching for my dream job in the government sector and also completed my BA privately. ... Recently, I found a better job, though still in a private school, which pays me a little better. But comparative to a government teacher, it pays me far less, 2 times less than what a government employee earns for the same kind of job.

Her experience is not very different from the experiences of some other madrassa graduates who have been searching for jobs in Pakistan. Though these people consider themselves “more deserving candidates” for the positions of religious teachers in schools and colleges, it is extremely difficult for them to actually get these jobs.

Reasons behind the Difficulties of Madrassa Graduates in the Job Market

When asked what might be some underlying causes that madrassa graduates face many difficulties in the job market in Pakistan, the participants suggested two major reasons, limited madrassa curriculum and the structural problems in the Pakistani job market. Structural problems such as prevalence of negative perceptions about madrassas and madrassa graduates in the society, high rate of unemployment, and corruption structurally marginalize madrassa graduates from the job market. Table 3 shows the range of the responses from the participants about the causes of the difficulties and (sometimes) failure madrassa graduates face in the job market in Pakistan.

Table 3: The Reasons behind the Gap between Madrassa Education and the Job Market

	Curriculum and pedagogical methods	Structural problems	Both
Students	1 (male)	12 (10 female and 2 male)	7 (4 female and 3 male)
Teachers	0	5 (3 female and 2 male)	4 (1 female and 3 male)
Administrators	0	4 (1 female and 3 male)	5 (male)
Total # of participants (%)	1 (2.86%)	21 (60%)	13 (37.14%)

Source: The information in the table has been compiled by the author of this thesis.

The Table 3 shows that only one participant believes that the difficulties or failures madrassa graduates face in the job market is because of the incompetence of the madrassa curriculum only. On the other hand, 21 participants (60%) believe that the madrassa curriculum is not the main problem rather the problem lies in the structure of the job market which limits the entrance of

madrassa graduates in the market. Nevertheless, 13 participants (37%) consider both curriculum and structural problems as the major causes of madrassa graduates' difficulties and/or failure to get well-paid jobs.

Curriculum in Madrassas

The participants who believe that the madrassa curriculum is one of the main reasons for madrassa graduates' difficulties and/or inability to get good jobs in the current job market in Pakistan are from the madrassas which has adopted a more inclusive curriculum that consists of both deeni and dunyawī subjects. These madrassas have already adapted this inclusive curriculum because of the awareness that a curriculum consisting of religious studies only is not very helpful in today's world. Unfortunately, there are still many madrassas where this more inclusive curriculum is not taught. Not only their curriculum is limited, but the ideology behind that curriculum and the job market which requires dunyawī education is also limited. Mr. Aslam describes this situation in this way:

In many madrassas, students are not prepared for the job market because they do not teach any dunyawī education. Also their thinking is limited. [Madrassa students] are taught that they should rely on Allah to fulfill their needs while serving his cause. ... Except teaching and learning Quran, everything else is for *dunyawī* (material) purpose and they should not involve themselves in those kinds of job. When the students are prepared with this mentality, you can imagine where they will go. This education itself is limiting them; this philosophy, false philosophy, is marginalizing them in the society. ...

This limited thinking and education system of madrassas put their students in a disadvantage of being accepted in the job market. However, the majority of the participant madrassas do not align themselves with this kind of understanding of religious education and realize the needs of the current society and teach their children dunyawī education. Still their graduates face difficulties in the job market. Why? What is the main reason?

Structural Problems in the Job Market

Answering to the question that though madrassas have adopted a new inclusive curriculum, why the graduates face problems in the job market, many participants argue that the structural problems such as prevalence of misconception about madrassa in the society, high rate of unemployment, and corruption are the main problem.

Prejudice and Misconceptions about Madrassa Graduates

Madrassas claim that even after the problem of the curriculum is solved or being solved in their institutions, the misconceptions or prejudice about the madrassa education and madrassa graduates prevail. Madrassa graduates are thought to be incapable, incompetent, and unskilled and this presumption becomes one of the biggest decisive factors when madrassa graduates apply for jobs. Discussing this phenomenon, one teacher said that if there are a few vacancies, even for an Islamic Studies teacher in a government school, college or university, and among the candidates for the positions are both madrassa graduates and university graduates, the priority is usually given to the university graduates as it happened in the case of Samreen, who kept applying but was unable to secure a position in the government sector. Even if, he believes, a madrassa graduate is “more deserving candidate” for the position because she/he is more knowledgeable in the field and capable of teaching religious studies, she/he is not offered the position mainly because of the prejudice against madrassas in Pakistani society and this assumption that madrassa graduates are unskilled. Imtiaz quotes Naveed Khan, the head of the recruitment agency PeopleTM’s Executive Search Department:

While parents may be fine with sending their children to schools like Iqra, where they can become a hafiz and study other subjects too, what kind of academic or social skills do Iqra’s graduates have? I am not sure if the quality of education can be compared to schools such as Beaconhouse, City or Lyceum.⁶⁶

66. Imtiaz, “Fading Job Prospects for Madrassa Students,” 2011.

Iqra Public School is a chain of madrassa schools in many cities in Pakistan that, just like my participant madrassas, provide deeni and dunyawī education to their students at the same time. This statement of an employer portrays that the misconception and prejudice against madrassa education prevails, even about those who acquire both educations at the same time. Interestingly, he compares these madrassa graduates with the graduates of Beaconhouse, City, or Lyceum. These are some of the most expensive English medium private schools, but not all the schools in Pakistan are Beaconhouse, City, or Lyceum. However, it also shows that the job market is very competitive and the recruiters look for excellent candidates from the country's best schools. If madrassas want to compete in the job market, they still have a long way to go.

In addition to this particular misconception that madrassa graduates are unskilled, another presumption which may restrain the madrassa graduates from the job market is that madrassa graduates are considered not having any "social skills." Thus, they may not be able to adjust in the work place which contradicts their religious values. Imtiaz states that employers do not want to employ the madrassa graduates because they think that the madrassa graduates "do not have social skills or will enforce their religious beliefs on others."⁶⁷ According to Imtiaz, it seems that madrassa graduates have to face another difficulty in acquiring job because employers might not want them in the office because of their commitment to the religious values such as the attire and prayer timing. In addition, it might become hard for the graduates to adjust in the work place considering it their duty to preach religious values to others in the work place. However, none of the participants in my research mentioned this aspect of their difficulties. All of the male teachers who are working outside of madrassa sector claim that they have more respect in the work place mainly because they live according to the religious values. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that

67. Imtiaz, "Fading job prospects for madrassa students," 2011.

employers find it a problem for them to have madrassa graduates who may impose religious values on others in the work place, while madrassa graduates may find it an opportunity or challenge to convey the message of Islam to the people outside of madrassa/religious sector.

High Rate of Unemployment

In addition to the prejudice and misconception, the high rate of unemployment and corruption in Pakistan's job market adds to the difficulties of the madrassa graduates. Many participants argue that finding a job is not an easy task in Pakistan because there is so much unemployment and corruption. Mr. Irfan, a male madrassa teacher who also teaches in the Danish School, mentioned, "When a university graduate does not get job, everyone blames the government for unemployment. But when a madrassa graduate does not get job, we blame their education. Isn't it strange?" Unemployment is a common phenomenon in Pakistan and everyone faces difficulties in acquiring jobs because of the unstable political situation where the government is unable to provide enough opportunities for the current graduates, regardless of whether they are madrassa graduates or university graduates. According to a 2013 report by ILO (International Labor Organization), unemployment rate in Pakistan is reported 5.17% by the end of 2013 which is projected to increase to 5.25% in 2014.⁶⁸ This unemployment rate is recorded according to the number of people who are reported to search and apply for jobs.

Corruption

68. Ali Sidiki, "Unemployment in Pakistan Set to Increase in 2014: ILO Report," *The Express Tribune*, January 22, 2014. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/662013/ilo-report-pakistans-unemployment-rate-to-remain-same-till-2018/>

There is already a high rate of unemployment, and corruption worsens the situation because the few job-openings are mostly grabbed by a few powerful people who have money and can buy these jobs with their money and influence. For example, Safina, a female student, asserted, “In Pakistan, no one can easily find job. No matter whether you have graduated from a university or a madrassa, there is very little possibility that you get job until you have references of rich influential people.” Because of corruption in the job market, especially in the government sector, it becomes almost impossible for the madrassa graduates to get jobs as most of them are not from rich influential families, or it is against their religious values.

Future Prospects: Amendments with Acknowledgement

The question is what can be done to resolve and improve the situation where madrassa graduates also get their desired job and participate in the development of the country. Madrassas claim that they are trying their best to incorporate themselves with the current society and the job market. They require acceptance from the society and in the job market. As they have started to reform their own curricula and teaching methods with or without the help of government, now it is the turn of the society to accept them as a part of the society and acknowledge their efforts of not only providing for the poor but also adopting the new ways. It is not to say amendments or reforms are not needed any more, but these reforms must come with an acceptance and acknowledgement of the work of Pakistani madrassas and their social service as being the school for the poor. Imtiaz quotes Wakil Ahmed Khan, the Chair Person of the Pakistan Madrassa Education Board:

Society must accept the contribution of madrassas. They have become a dumping place for the poor who cannot afford to educate and clothe their children. The madrassa have

provided thousands with boarding and lodging and give them stipends. The public and private sectors need to work together for this.⁶⁹

Madrassas working as NGOs are providing education, lodging, and clothing to the poor children, once these poor children come out of these madrassas, it becomes the responsibility of the society to incorporate them into the society. One of the female teachers summarized it in this way, “As clapping cannot be done with one hand, these improvements cannot be brought just by one person. We need to work together, the madrassas, the government, and the society.” Only madrassas’ efforts by molding their curriculum according to the needs of the market will not work. The government needs to acknowledge their efforts and assist them with required resources, the society needs to accept the madrassa graduates as equal members of the society, and the employers need to consider them as eligible candidates and hire them.

My research participants call upon the government to communicate with them and design a much better and unified curriculum to provide madrassa students better skills for the current job market. They also request the government to create more job opportunities specifically for the madrassa graduates in the government sector according to their education and their skills. These madrassas have expressed the dire need of government’s involvement in madrassa affairs, not only to provide assistance with the curriculum reforms, but also to provide other resources such as proper buildings, qualified teachers specifically for teaching dunyawī subjects, their salaries, and stipend to the students who study in madrassas. They believe that if the government’s reform efforts come with these incentives, many other madrassas would be willing to accept them, because sometimes madrassas might want to provide the dunyawī education but they may not have enough resources to hire new teachers to teach these subjects.

69. Imtiaz, “Fading Job Prospects for Madrassa Students.”

V. Conclusion

The research highlights that madrassas in Bahawalpur are aware of the needs of the contemporary society in Pakistan and the requirements of the current job market. They are actively working to prepare their students according to these demands of the job market so that the graduates can acquire a better life in the society and do not remain limited to the religious sector only for the job. For this purpose, the majority of madrassas have included dunyawi education in their curriculum alongside the deeni education placing an importance on both kinds of education for a successful life. As they have upgraded their curriculum inclusive of deeni and dunyawi education, they consider themselves prepared for the current job market. However, they also realize that madrassa graduates have to face much more difficulties in the job market because of the structure of the job market where the misconceptions about madrassa education is prevalent with a high rate of unemployment and corruption. The research argues that madrassas at this moment need more acceptance rather than amendments. They want the government to communicate with them and work with them to bring more inclusive reforms not only in curriculum of madrassas but also in the societal behaviors and perspectives about madrassas in Pakistan. Once the government, civil society, and the madrassas start working together to improve the madrassa education system, the graduates from madrassas will also get a chance to take their part in progress of their country. As this research focuses only on the perspectives of madrassa students, teachers and administrations, further research can be done on exploring the perspectives of society and employers about madrassas' inclusion in the society with the current reforms and changes in their curriculum.

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