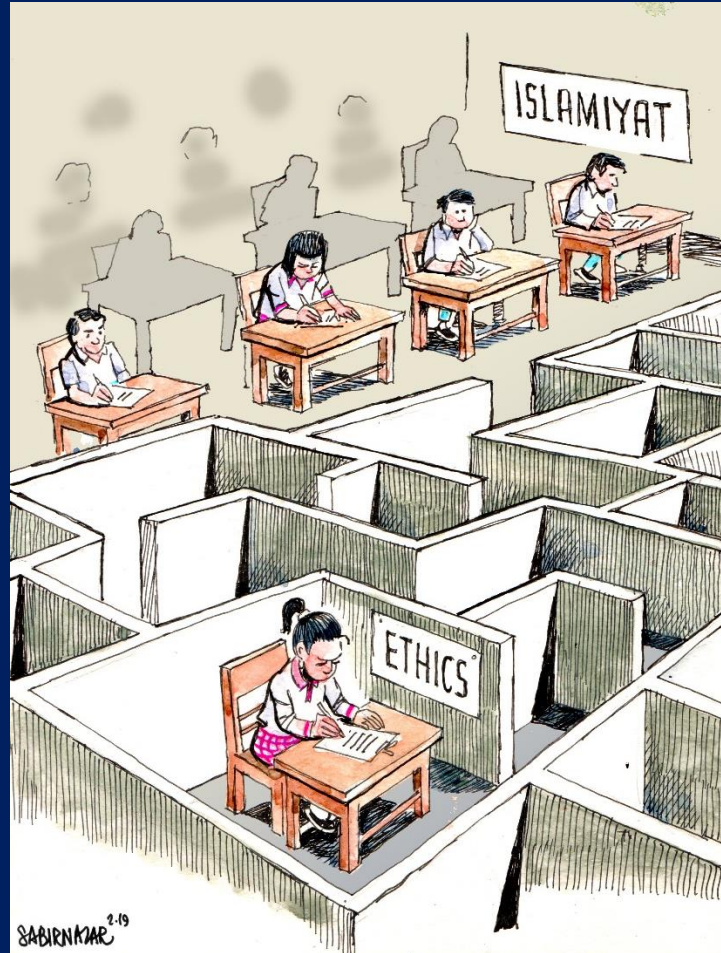


Working Paper

Ethics in Question

Viability of Ethics, as a subject for students belonging to religious minorities in the education system of Pakistan



www.csjpak.org



www.pcmr.pk

Peter Jacob – Suneel Malik

1. Introduction

From 1960s onwards, the scope of mandatory Islamic studies in formal education system has been gradually enhanced through the education policies introduced in 1972, 1979, 1992, 1998 and 2009, apparently without any objective analysis and evaluation. Since 1973, teaching of the Holy Quran and Islamiyat is a constitutional requirement.¹ On the other hand, the constitution also guarantees religious freedom² and freedom from coercion.³

At present, public education system is invested in teaching the religion of the majority population. The Islamic Education is a compulsory subject for Muslim students, from primary to university levels at all public and private institutions. The learning of Nazarah (Quranic text) is also compulsory from class Five to Eight. Religious lessons in Languages, History and Social studies comprise 25-40 percent^{4 5} of the textbooks which the students, including those who are Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Baha'i, Parsi, Buddhist and other religious minorities, have to study and pass.

The minority students are allowed to study Ethics instead of Islamiyat⁶ though there is no alternative given for the subject of Nazrah. Religious minorities and policy expert have been recommending a review of this arrangement in order to avoid risks of exclusion and religious discrimination.⁷ In this vein, CSJ has carried out an assessment looking at utilization of the option of Ethics as a subject by the minority students using the empirical data. CSJ hopes that this working paper will inform the view of the decision makers and public at large.

2. Methodology and data quality

CSJ acquired data from the eight Board(s) of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) in Punjab, the Punjab Examination Commission (for Grade 5 and 8) and Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (Islamabad, hereafter Federal Board), for year 2018-2019, by exercising the Right to Information. The available data represents 88.88% picture in Punjab, for Matric and Intermediate, whereas 100% picture for Grades 5 and 8. (BISE Lahore failed to respond despite repeated requests).

Some Boards did not provide segregated data about the total students enrolled with them though all provided complete data on minority students and students opting for Ethics, etc. Apparently, some of the Education Boards assumed that only those students that opt to take exams in Ethics, were minority.⁸ CSJ kept this in view while tabulating and interpreting the data⁹ to ensure result accuracy.

¹ Article 31, (2)(a), Constitution of Pakistan "Government to make teaching of the Holy Quran and Islamiyat compulsory, to encourage and facilitate the learning of Arabic language..."

² Article 18, Constitution of Pakistan "Every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion..."

³ Article 22, (1), Constitution of Pakistan "No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction ... other than his own."

⁴ Saleem, Ahmed, Nayyar, A. H., The Subtle Subversion, SDPI, 2003, p. vi.

⁵ Bhatti, Nabila Feroz, Jacob, Peter, Education Vs Fanatic Literacy, NCJP, 2013

<http://archive.paxchristi.net/MISC/2014-0251-en-ap-GE.pdf>

⁶ National Education Policy 2009, Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, p. 33.

⁷ <https://nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2018/-education-policy-fails-to-curb-religious-discrimination>

⁸ Faisalabad, Sahiwal, Rawalpindi, Multan, DG Khan and Gujranwala.

⁹ Data from Sargodha, Bahawalpur and Federal Boards was used to analyse the trend in literacy.

While it is recommended that the government entities should refine and segregate the religion-wise data, it is unlikely that the trends may be different than those reflected here. It is also imaginable that the trends reflected in this assessment are prevalent in the entire country due to same policy and similar socio-political conditions for minorities.

3. Key findings

The data provided by Education Boards and Examination Commission in Punjab showed that in 2018:

a) Ethics was a least preferred option for the minority students as:

- i. Only **0.07%** students opted to be examined in Ethics at **Grade 5** level, while **0.06%** students at **Grade 8** studied Ethics.
- ii. Out of total **15917 minority students** at **Matriculation** level, **80%** studied Islamiyat, while **20%** studied **Ethics**.
- iii. Out of **7405** Minority students at Intermediate level, 90% studied Islamiyat, while only 1.7% studied Ethics and 8.8% studied civics.

b) The data reflects particularly low literacy among minorities compared to average literacy rate in the province/country (p.7). The minority students were 1.01% and 0.59% in Sargodha and Bahawalpur divisions respectively while only 1.53% were enrolled with Federal Board, while there was a sizeable minority population in those divisions, Islamabad particularly had 4% minority population in 1998 census.

The elements of the education policy, such as impractical option of Ethics, might have had an exclusionary effect on the students belonging to religious minorities.

4. Data Analysis

The data at hand shows that less than 1% of total students opted for Ethics i.e. 982 students at Grade 5, and 664 students at Grade 8. The maximum number of minority students that opted for the subject of Ethics, among all categories, was 20%, in Matric exams, while at the Intermediate level, only 1.7% studied Ethics, 8.8% Civics, however, the remaining 80% minority students at Matric level and 90% at intermediate level in public and private schools and colleges studied Islamiyat.

Hence, an overwhelming majority of the minority students opted to take exams in Islamiyat instead. The foreseeable reasons are;

- a) The option is redundant because students are concerned about the low marks yielded in Ethics as compared to lenient marking in Islamiyat.
- b) The students' choice has to do with avoidance of social-religious discrimination,
- c) A low interest in the subject, entails logistical issues, such as availability of books which makes the choice hardly practical.

i) Primary examination:

According to data provided by Punjab Examination Commission for Grade 5, out of 1480366 registered students, 1479383 (99.93%) were studying Islamiyat, while only 982 (0.07%) opted for Ethics.

Ethics as a subject was taken by 447, 132 and 148 students in Lahore, Gujranwala and Sargodha divisions respectively. The number of students that selected Ethics was in two digits in other six divisions in Punjab. In Dera Ghazi Khan division, Ethics was opted by only 11 students of Grade 5.

Table 1. Students opted for Islamiyat / Ethics at Grade 5 (Punjab)

Division	Lahore	Faisalabad	Sahiwal	Rawalpindi	Multan	D.G. Khan	Bahawalpur	Gujranwala	Sargodha	Total
Students	209489	222091	109205	110890	172736	155590	140489	224197	135679	1480366
Ethics	447	39	28	68	44	11	65	132	148	982
Islamiyat	209042	222052	109177	110822	172692	155579	140424	224065	135531	1479384

ii) Middle examination:

For Grade 8, out of 1069314 registered students, 1068650 (99.94%) studied Islamiyat, while only 664 (0.06%) studied Ethics. Lahore is the only division in Punjab where 261 students took Ethics, while in other divisions, less than 100 students enrolled for Ethics. In Dera Ghazi Khan, only three students of Grade 8 opted for Ethics attributable to low literacy, small number of minorities and the discrimination.

Table 2. Students opted for Islamiyat / Ethics at Grade 8 (Punjab)

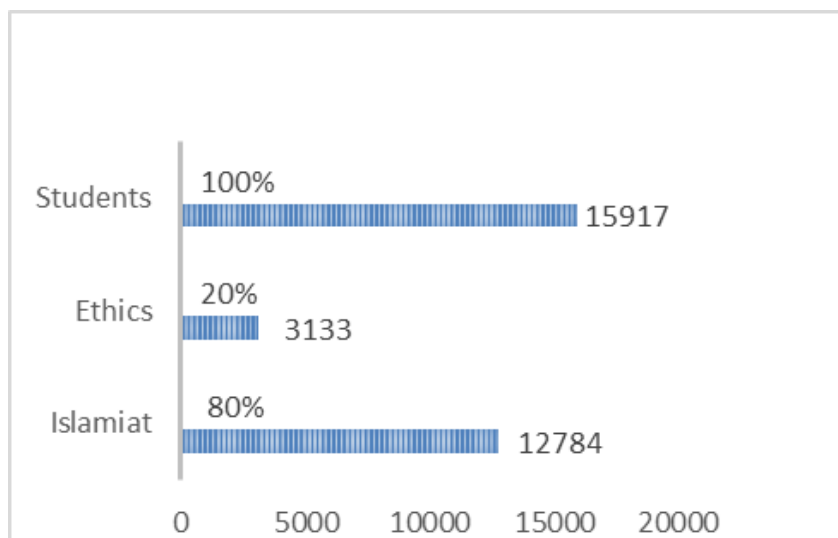
Division	Lahore	Faisalabad	Sahiwal	Rawalpindi	Multan	DG Khan	Bahawalpur	Gujranwala	Sargodha	Total
Islamiyat	162576	161075	72092	95218	111854	95164	95766	177397	97508	1068650
Ethics	261	43	25	72	32	3	40	94	94	664
students	162837	161118	72117	95290	111886	95167	95806	177491	97602	1069314

Note: The Punjab Examination Commission does not register religion of students in examination forms hence religion-wise data for Grade 5 and Grade 8 does not explain the total number of minority students and specific religious identity of the students.

iii) Matric examination:

According to the data collected from eight Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), out of 15917 Minority students at Matriculation level, 12784 (80%) studied Islamiyat, while only 3133 (20%) studied Ethics .

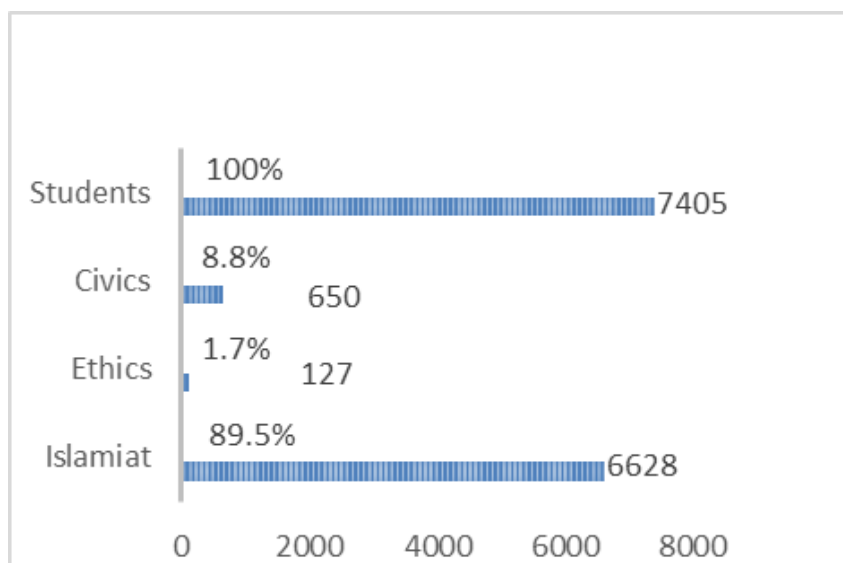
Chart 1. Minority Students - Matriculation



iv) Intermediate examination:

Out of 7405 Minority students at Intermediate level, 6628 (90%) studied Islamiat, while only 127 (1.7%) studied Ethics and 650 (8.8%) studied civics. BISE Dera Ghazi Khan had only one minority student.

Chart 2. Minority Students - Intermediate



5. Analysis of the Selected Data

CSJ selected data from three Boards (Federal, Bahawalpur and Sargodha) which provided the number of minority students. Moreover, these administrative divisions had at least 200,000 (2%-4% minority population according to the 1998 census that helped to draw plausible results/ conclusions about prevalence / motivation for literacy.

For Matric, BISE Sargodha had 1837 (1.01% of total) minority students enrolled, out of these 429 (23%) studied Ethics, while 1408 (77%) studied Islamiat. At BISE Bahawalpur, the minority students 460 (0.59% of total), only 141 (31%) of these enrolled themselves for Ethics, and 319 (69%) opted for Islamiat.

Table 3. Matric Exceptional results

BISE	Total students	Muslim students	Minority students	Ethics	Islamiat
Bahawalpur Board	77487	77027	460	141	319
		99.41%	0.59%	31%	69%
Sargodha Board	182249	180412	1837	429	1408
		98.99%	1.01%	23%	77%
Federal Board	89886	88509	1377	1086	291
		98.47%	1.53%	79%	21%

Table 4. Opposite trend in the same Boards in Intermediate

BISE	Total students	Muslim students	Minority students	Civics	Ethics	Islamiat
Bahawalpur Board	53480	53313	167	-	8	159
		99.69%	0.31%	-	5%	95%
Sargodha Board	99625	98768	857	11	60	786
		99.14%	0.86%	1.28%	7%	91.72%
Federal Board	34112	33419	693	201	-	492
		97.97%	2.03%	29%	-	71%

Interestingly, results showed reverse trends for Intermediate exam in the three selected districts. In Federal Board, 1086 (79%) minority students enrolled at Matric level in Ethics, whereas 71% (492) of minority students studied Islamiat at Inter level, and 201 (29%) studied Civics while none was enrolled in Ethics.

The minority students enrolled with BISE Bahawalpur were only of the total 167 only 5% (8) opted for Ethics. Out of 857 minority students enrolled with BISE Sargodha only 7% (60) students studied Ethics while 1.28% (11) students opted to study Civics. In this stratum, only 8.28% (71) minority students took Civics or Ethics in lieu of Islamiat in Sargodha division.

6. Conclusions and Observations

i) Narrow choice eliminates freedom

The evidence at hand proves that the subject of Ethics prescribed in the 2009 National Education Policy is an impractical option. This discriminatory arrangement on the face of it, requires minority students to segregate themselves from the rest of the class on the basis of religious identity.

Analysis of the Selected Data

The minority students are forced to study Islamiyat under this arrangement which is a gross violation of the constitution of Pakistan which states that “No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction ... other than his own.”¹⁰ Moreover, there is an element and high degree of coercion by narrowing of the choice, in an utter disregard to the intention of the constitution that also guarantees religious freedom equally to all citizens.¹¹

The small number of students choosing to study Ethics may not be without repercussion which is a matter open to investigation, however an overwhelming number of students preferring to choose what is not given to them impresses upon the need to revise this policy, with a particular regard to the aspiration about improving literacy rate in the country and needs for a proactive inclusion of religious minorities.

ii) Literacy, choice of alternative subject

This assessment was constrained by the fact that government has withheld the announcement of demographic data of 2017 census related to minorities that could be used to draw area-wise conclusions about trends in literacy.

Nevertheless, the 1998 census showed that minorities lagged up to 20% behind the average literacy rates.¹² A recent survey on the Economic and Social Well-being of Women by Punjab Commission on the Status of Women shows that minority women lagged 12.2 % behind in literacy than average (48.4%) in the province.¹³ The low literacy rates cannot be detached from the exclusionary choices imposed in the curriculum and religious discrimination in education policies.

The choice of Ethics as subject, assigns minority students to learn about different religions as compared to Muslim counterpart who study one religion. Taking the subject of Ethics impacts grades of minority students negatively and students face discrimination in the schools and they isolate themselves from rest of students. Therefore, this policy besides being a failure in its own scheme of thought is a systemic and systematic violation of the rights of the religious minorities.

¹⁰ Article 22, (1), Constitution of Pakistan.

¹¹ Article 25, Constitution of Pakistan, also interpreted by CJ Tassuq Hussain Jilani, PLD 2014 SC 699. [SMC No. 1/2014 etc](#)

¹² Jivan & Jacob, Life on The Margins, National Commission for Justice and Peace, 2012, p. 40
http://csjpak.org/publications_with_other_organizations/Life_on_the_Margins_english.pdf

¹³ <https://interactive.pcsw-punjab.pk/esw/minorities.html>

Recommendations

Centre for Social Justice would like to call the attention of the Federal and Provincial Ministries of Education and respective Committees set up for the curriculum and policy reviews on the findings and analysis of this assessment. We, on behalf of civil society stakeholders urge the governments to consider following recommendations. It is suggested that the government should take instant steps to:

1. Make Ethics and moral education a learning outcome of the formal education hence integrated into the school curriculum for all students.
2. Introduce syllabus for students belonging to minorities so that they may be able to study their own religion as alternative to Islamiyat.
3. Keep the compulsory religious education in the educational institutions to the Higher Secondary levels for all students, in order to eliminate the risk of religion being used as source of conflict or radicalization by the vested interest.
4. Ensure that religion should be taught in the religious courses only, in order to observe propriety and respect for all religious groups.
5. Introduce an alternative to Nazrah for students belonging to religious minority communities.