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Students' Perceptions of Religion and Spirituality in Pakistan

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Master in International Studies

Supervisor:

PhD. João Ferreira Dias, Integrated Researcher,
CEI-Iscte - Centre for International Studies

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SOCIOLOGIA
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Department of History

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Completing this dissertation marks the beginning of a new chapter, and I hope that someone will continue to build upon this research in the future.

Resumo

Esta dissertação examina os conceitos de religiosidade e espiritualidade no contexto do ensino superior no Paquistão, focando em seu impacto no desenvolvimento pessoal dos estudantes, no desempenho acadêmico e nas interações sociais. Com base nas definições de George et al. (2002), distingue entre religiosidade, caracterizada por práticas coletivas, e espiritualidade, definida como uma conexão pessoal com algo além da existência material. O estudo também contrasta as noções de salvação no Cristianismo e no Islã para destacar as diversas influências religiosas.

Os resultados de dez entrevistas revelam que, enquanto a religiosidade molda as atitudes e motivações dos estudantes, há um declínio perceptível no engajamento religioso à medida que eles fazem a transição para a universidade. Muitos participantes expressam que práticas espirituais aumentam sua disciplina e motivação, embora uma ligação clara entre religiosidade e desempenho acadêmico permaneça incerta. A pesquisa enfatiza o papel da comunidade e das práticas religiosas em promover interações sociais e comportamentos prosociais.

Além disso, o estudo aborda as dimensões históricas e políticas da religiosidade no Paquistão, observando as dinâmicas sectárias. Apesar das limitações relacionadas à amostra e ao formato das entrevistas online, esta pesquisa oferece uma exploração pioneira da espiritualidade e da religiosidade nas universidades paquistanesas. Ela defende a integração do desenvolvimento espiritual nos currículos educacionais e a promoção de ambientes inclusivos que respeitem crenças diversas. Em última análise, o estudo destaca a influência significativa da espiritualidade e da religiosidade nas experiências educacionais dos estudantes e sugere mais pesquisas em contextos mais amplos.

Palavras-chave: Religiosidade, Espiritualidade, Ensino Superior, Paquistão, Desempenho Acadêmico, Interações Sociais, Salvação, Sectarismo, Política Educacional, Desenvolvimento Estudantil.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the concepts of religiosity and spirituality in the context of higher education in Pakistan, focusing on their impact on students' personal development, academic performance, and social interactions. Drawing on definitions by George et al. (2002), it distinguishes between religiosity, characterized by collective practices, and spirituality, defined as a personal connection to something beyond material existence. The study also contrasts notions of salvation in Christianity and Islam to highlight diverse religious influences.

Findings from ten interviews reveal that while religiosity shapes students' attitudes and motivations, there is a noticeable decline in religious engagement as they transition to university. Many participants express that spiritual practices enhance their discipline and motivation, though a clear link between religiosity and academic performance remains uncertain. The research emphasizes the role of community and religious practices in fostering social interactions and prosocial behaviors.

Additionally, the study addresses the historical and political dimensions of religiosity in Pakistan, noting sectarian dynamics. Despite limitations related to the sample and online interview format, this research offers a pioneering exploration of spirituality and religiosity in Pakistani universities. It calls for integrating spiritual development into educational curricula and fostering inclusive environments that respect diverse beliefs. Ultimately, the study highlights the significant influence of spirituality and religiosity on students' educational experiences and suggests further research in broader contexts.

Keywords: Religiosity, Spirituality, Higher Education, Pakistan, Academic Performance, Social Interactions, Salvation, Sectarianism, Educational Policy, Student Development.

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1. Introduction

An Introduction to Religiosity and Spirituality

George et al. (2002) discusses how a variety of interconnected definitions of spirituality and religiosity are present in existing literature, which sometimes increases the challenge of making a distinction between them. The two terms center around ‘a pursuit for the sacred’. Religiosity can be closely linked to a collective sense of identity and reinforcement for the person by engaging in regular prayer, religious attendance, and visiting formal religious institutions (Koenig et al., 2012). Spirituality is essentially an inherent component of being human. Mytko & Knight (1999) explain that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. They can exist separately and overlap with each other.

Sherkat (2015) explains religiosity as a term that distinguishes and describes the individual, congregational and societal practices and attachments linked to religion. The concept of religiosity draws associations to a vast range of religious traditions. It also tends to segregate the diverse denominations and subgroups that exist beneath a religious umbrella. Religiosity better explains individual and collective commitments while nations and groups of religious followers pursue the chosen religion. Religiosity can be homogenous or diverse among and within nations, which can promote both conflict and solidarity among the people. The aspects of religious commitments on an individual level may include ethnic solidarity, social mobility and political commitments (Sherkat, 2015). Kishimoto (1961) argues that each cultural context generates its own definition of "religion". He defines religion as a cultural aspect that rests upon activities done by those who participate in them to exemplify the core meaning of life, and to relate to solutions for problems. Most religious systems across the globe are based on the concept of ‘holiness’ and ‘deity’ with respect to such activities.

Spirituality, on the other hand, resonates closely with a sense of connection and fullness beyond the material aspects of existence of a person (Myers & Williard, 2003). It refers to a connection and affiliation to someone or something beyond the world's boundaries, religion, and oneself (Van Niekerk, 2018). In the state of spirituality, an individual is said to form a bond with nature, divinity, and the universal processes that eventually allow him to find the purpose of his living and the true definitions of life. As such, there is no generic definition of the word ‘spirituality’. The concept entails a set of practices and lifestyles that reflect the spirit of human life. Spirituality offers an aspirational approach to the human code of conduct. The work of Pargament (1997) defines the term as the search for the sacred. The two keywords in this definition are ‘sacred’ and ‘search’. The idea of sacredness refers to the unparalleled powers of the Creator and His attributes including immanence,

boundlessness, and transcendence. The sacredness of the Lord is closely attributed to practically all parts of life for an individual such as his beliefs, relationships with each other, lived experiences, nature, and intrinsic motivations (Cohen, 2020). Furthermore, the keyword 'search' relates to a continuous, lifelong journey. The idea of 'search' is to discover a holy and sacred thing, forge profound relationships with the sacred, and follow a set of practices and pathways prescribed by the established institutions of religion (PBS, 2002).

The concepts of spirituality and religiosity are multifaceted, subjective, and intangible in nature (Tanyi, 2002; Warsah & Imran, 2005). These constitute an intrinsic component of being human and partakes a personal quest for meaning in life. Spirituality is often viewed as a factor that tends to shape humans' ethical perspectives, values, and ideologies (Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020). Evan Zuesse (1979), in his study of African religious thought, makes an essential distinction between "religions of structure" and "religions of salvation" and both of these terms have been discussed below.

The Concept of Salvation

Salvation is a core concept that sets the foundation of two major religions: Islam and Christianity. However, the understanding of 'salvation' has striking differences in the two religions. The idea of salvation in Christianity revolves around Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice and human depravity (Banda, 2023). The followers of Christ strongly perceive how all humans are born with sinning, deviant personalities and thus are distinct from God. The concept further leads to the idea of eternal damnation in Christianity. On the other hand, salvation is deemed as an outcome of God's grace and does not depend upon the individual's virtuous deeds or good efforts. In Christianity, righteous living is considered as God's grace and not a source of earning salvation (Khalil, 2017). On the other hand, salvation in Islam is a culmination of Allah's grace and human effort. Salvation is homocentric in nature, and depends largely around the actions of human beings, submission to the will of Allah, and deep faith in His might. At the center of Islamic salvation lies the firm belief in Tawhid¹ (Oneness of Allah). It is perceived that Allah has assigned a moral obligation to the human life, and human beings are held accountable for their moral conduct and behavior (Khalil, 2012). Here, the human beings are believed to be the primary drivers of the salvation journey. On the other hand, the role of Allah is pedagogical and functional as He created humankind with intellect and freewill. As a result, they are expected to distinguish between the right and the wrong and ultimately pave their destiny under divine guidance.

¹ The concept of Oneness of Allah, or Tawhid, is the central tenet of Islamic belief. It signifies that Allah is singular in His essence, attributes, and actions, with no partner or equal.

A Background of Religiosity and Spirituality in Pakistan

The existing literature on religiosity in Pakistan explains that students who are religiously and spiritually alive have a higher enthusiasm in their academic affairs. Johnstone (1975) and Yahya & Saad (2015) explain that being closer to religion exhibits positive and optimistic cultural element in civilized societies of the world. Religiosity tends to motivate people to fulfill their goals and achieve life satisfaction. The doctrines of various religions prepare the foundation of ethics and morals in their followers. Yahya and Saad (2015) further discuss how the Muslim faith in Allah and His Book (The Holy Quran)² offers the basis of knowledge, reasoning, and inquisitiveness for individuals.

In a country like Pakistan, the concept of spirituality plays an integral role in shaping the attitudes of people as the nation observes a very intricate social and cultural fabric with Islam as its central code of living. A profound examination of existing literature reveals how faith development and religious affiliation of learners and university students have paradoxically not been nurtured or developed on many university campuses. Villani et al. (2019)'s landmark synthesis of their period-long research found out a statistically significant decline of students' religious and spiritual values, behaviors, and attitudes as they entered university years. Prevailing studies elucidate how higher educational institutions such as colleges and universities have a rather liberalizing impact of learners' religious attitudes (Tay et al., 2014). It is becoming a research interest more lately as to how religious practices have mostly shifted from organizational to individual. Religious followers have become less dogmatic (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). However, the interesting facet of university impacts on religious and spiritual perceptions reveal how individuals have become more tolerant and resilient towards other students' religious beliefs and doctrines.

The foundations of Pakistan consist of a strong involvement of the religion, as the country was created in the name of Islam³. The religion has always played a pivotal role in the country's political evolution throughout the pre-partition and post-partition phases⁴. According to Charter et al. (2005), Islam was an effective tool of political mobilization before the partition of the sub-continent to urge the people to attain a separate Muslim country. However, after the creation of the new country and achieving the unanimous aim of nationhood, there was a noteworthy decrease in the role of religion in the

² The Holy Quran is Allah's final and eternal revelation, revealed to His Last Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is a divine guide for humanity, offering wisdom, laws, and spiritual teachings for all aspects of life.

³ The foundations of Pakistan's creation were rooted in the vision of a separate homeland where Muslims could live according to the principles of Islam, safeguarding their religious, cultural, and political rights.

⁴ During the pre-partition phase, the religion Islam was promoted as a unifying source for the people, a motivator for self-determination to strive for independence, and the foundation of Islamic political movements. In the post-partition phases, religion continued to be a tool for promoting national unity amidst diverse ethnic and linguistic groups within Pakistan. It also contributed significantly in defining the national identity with the incorporation of Islamic law in the country's legal framework.

country's affairs. Over time, there has been a conflict of ideology between the people, who long for a Muslim nation, and the political leadership that supports secularism.

Regardless of the students' religious backgrounds, the government of Pakistan looks forward to providing an objective and liberal system of education in the educational institutions of the country. According to Article 22(1) of the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), learners will never be forced to acquire religious education or participate in acts of religious worship and festivities, if these are linked to a different religion than what learners are practicing. However, recent research identifies a sheer lack of enforcement of this law in the country. According to a university professor in Lahore Pakistan, minorities are often coerced into studying Islam as a course in colleges and universities even though they do not practice that religion (Whitehouse James, 2022). There are also reports of how Hindu and Christians students within Pakistan do not dare to opt for elective subjects, considering that their requests might be taken as an insult to Islam (Hussain et al., 2011).

It is particularly interesting to note how young adults and university students may be more open and welcoming to ideas of religious diversity and spiritual searching. Jardine & Viljoen (2012) explain how young adults tend to seek meaning and value, as they embark on their journeys to identity recognition and development and may seek assistance from spiritual and religious sources to thoroughly formulate a system of meaning.

[A Background of Religious Sectarianism in Pakistan](#)

The South Asian history of Islam, as reported by Behuria (2004), depicts how the Shia and Sunni⁵ sects of Muslims co-existed peacefully and harmoniously in the subcontinent till the 1970s. At present, the Pakistani Shia community is the second largest population of Shias in the world after Iran. The Shia sect constitutes a crucial presence in the country's politics and Islamic history within the subcontinent. Prior to the arrival of Zia-ul-Haq as the Martial Law Administrator of the country in 1977, the country enjoyed cordial and amicable relations between the two sects. However, various factors contributed to the growing tensions and widening sectarian divide in Pakistan such as the Islamization policies of Zia-ul-Haq, the Islamic Revolution in Iran⁶ and the subsequent empowerment of the Shia community in 1979 across the world. Overall, the Shia community experienced that their freedom to practice religion was clearly being suppressed and their loyalty to the country was challenged on the large-scale. A series of political developments led to the growth of militant anti-

⁵ The Shia and Sunni sects in Islam represent two major branches, differing primarily in their beliefs about the rightful succession of leadership after Prophet Muhammad, with Sunnis recognizing elected caliphs and Shias believing leadership belongs to the Prophet's family, particularly Ali and his descendants.

⁶ The Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran was a mass uprising that led to the overthrow of the Western-backed monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the establishment of an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, transforming Iran into a theocratic state governed by Shia Islamic principles.

Shia organizations in Pakistan and deepening opposition and persecution towards the Shia community.

The Iranian Revolution and the subsequent rise of Shia influence in the region, coupled with the influx of Saudi Arabian funding to promote Sunni ideology, fueled sectarian tensions. This period saw the rise of militant groups aligned with both sects, transforming sectarian identity from a mere theological distinction into a political and social marker of division. In contemporary Pakistan, sectarian violence has become institutionalized, with deep-seated mistrust between communities manifesting in periodic violence, targeted killings, and discriminatory policies, all of which undermine national unity and social cohesion.

Research Background

Rooted in Islamic traditions, the culture of Pakistan gives a fundamental place to spiritual values that encourage essential Islamic practices such as Praying, Charity, and Fasting as the central facets of life (Ahmad, 2009; Omer et al., 2015). The religion 'Islam' has always been used to define the identity of Pakistan since its independence in 1947. There is a central position of Islam within the country's education system as a variety of Islamic ideologies have been used, time and again, by the country leaders to develop the education system (Ashraf, 2019). The First Education Conference⁷ led to religious education being a compulsory subject for schools. Islamic education is made compulsory up to the graduate level in all professional and general educational institutions across the country (Shakil & Akhtar, 2012). Following the independence of East Pakistan in 1971⁸, there was a stronger need to establish a religious ideology considering how the event was an outcome of ethno-lingual identity (Ashraf, 2019; Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Hence, religion has been utilized as a competent tool to curb lingual and ethno-regional movements in the country (Ashraf, 2019). The incorporation of religion in education allows the governmental institutions to stabilize the state and society, overall.

The role of educational institutions in Pakistan is central in this regard, as they tend to shape the narratives and perceptions of the students by integrating these Islamic values into the teaching methods and building the spiritual foundations that lead their lives ahead (Khalid et al., 2020). The existing research regarding the subject emphasizes the significance of the national curriculum and government-sponsored textbooks in asserting the dominant religious narrative in the country (Mahmood et al., 2016). These also construct an image of the 'self' and the 'other' on predominantly religious lines (Niaz, 2022). However, a research gap exists in terms of explaining the role of

⁷ The First Educational Conference in Pakistan, held in November 1947, was aimed at shaping the newly formed nation's education system. It emphasized the integration of Islamic values, promoting literacy, and developing a system that would foster national unity and socio-economic progress.

⁸ The separation of East Pakistan in 1971, following political, ethnic, and economic tensions, led to the creation of Bangladesh after a brutal civil war and Indian military intervention.

religiosity and spirituality in the routine atmosphere of learning institutions, in the classrooms, and on students' perceptions (Ashraf, 2019; Niaz, 2022). There is also limited research about how students' ideologies of religiosity and spirituality affect their academic performances.

This research aims to fill the gaps in existing literature by exploring how spiritual and religious beliefs affect the students mentally and emotionally regarding their social, academic, and religious lives (King & Roeser, 2009). One school of thought expounds on how early college and university students are more inclined to see the role of religiosity and spirituality as a means of mitigating stress within the unfamiliar collegiate atmosphere (Parker, 2010). On the other hand, the theoretical frameworks, and developmental constructs of Fowler (1981) suggests that most learners, during the era of late adolescence and young adulthood, are transitioning and moving back and forth between conventionally assumed religious beliefs. These beliefs are often shaped by cultural, environmental, and family influences, as noted by Fowler (1981), and then evolve into a more critically examined understanding of faith. This process encourages individuals to explore and interpret their identity and its meaning.

Research Question

Considering the research gaps identified previously, the research aims to respond to the following question.

"How does religious and spiritual teaching integrated into the Pakistani educational institutions influence the personal development, social interactions, and academic performance of learners?"

A student's educational journey comprises their academic progress and social and personal life development. Therefore, with religious values and spirituality kept as the fundamentals of teachings in Pakistani educational structures, this research will explore how these elements play a part in the student's overall educational journey and how the students internalize them.

Research Objectives

The study aims to explore the role of religion within a Pakistani higher education institution in shaping a student's faith, religious beliefs alongside his/her academic performance. Considering the primary research question and the area of highlight for this study, the main objectives are as follows.

R.O.1. Varying Religious Beliefs and Manifestations

- Investigate the variations in religious and spiritual values and practices within colleges and institutions to understand how they reflect in the routine life of the students.

R.O.2. Impact of the Campus Climate

- Explore how the campus climate defines and alters students' beliefs for religiosity and spirituality

R.O.3. Impact on Academic Performance

- Examine how religious motivations and spiritual values influence students' academic progress and discover the interconnection of these beliefs with their educational aspirations and choices.

The Rationale for Research

This study focuses on the impact of religiosity and spirituality within the context of Pakistani universities, a country where religion plays a significant role in shaping cultural and social values. Pakistan's existence as an Islamic republic has, over time, led to the mass incorporation of religion into the nation's culture and routine activities. Religiosity has also had a significant impact on the country's historical values, festivals and traditions. On an individual scale, religiosity offers a moral compass to individuals, guides them towards spiritual fulfilment and allows personality development in young adolescents. Despite the clear importance of religion in the national consciousness, there is a notable gap in academic literature regarding how religious and spiritual teachings influence students' personal development, social interactions, and academic performance.

This study is also significant because it addresses a growing interest in the role of spirituality in education globally. While much research has been conducted on spirituality and education in Western contexts, there is limited research focusing on Islamic countries like Pakistan. There is only a limited number of studies currently that explore the facets of religiosity and spirituality in Pakistani higher educational institutions, such as Khan et al. (2019), Khan, Z.H., Watson, P.J. & Chen, Z.(2016) and Abbas, S., Saeed, S., & Abbas, S. (2004). Examining how spiritual and religious frameworks influence students in Pakistani universities provides a unique opportunity to contribute to a more culturally diverse body of knowledge on education.

The most common sources of religious education in Pakistan include the frequent visits to the mosque and spending time with the youth and adults in the community, a rich understanding of the Quranic verses and chapters and their interpretation during congregational prayers and Friday sermons (Ashraf, 2019). In a country where the foundations of religious education and values are chiefly the responsibility of one's family, community and the mosque, it is important to understand how higher educational institutions enhance learners' ground-level understanding of the religion. By exploring this intersection of religiosity, spirituality, and education, this research seeks to illuminate how religious teachings influence not only academic outcomes but also students' social and emotional well-being.

The current state of affairs in the country's higher educational system depends largely on governmental reforms and policymakers. The system has evolved from having the aim of producing a steadfast Muslim to nurturing well-equipped global citizens who understand the virtues of their

religion but remain tolerant towards others as well. The findings could potentially guide future educational reforms, fostering an environment that encourages balanced personal, social, and academic development for students within Pakistan's unique cultural and religious framework. The study also aims to explore the extent to which the Pakistani educational system is a supporter of religious diversity and tolerance in its institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining the Concept of Religious Values and Spirituality

Spirituality and faith are viewed as fundamental concepts that significantly affect individuals' perceptions and cognitive abilities. It is, therefore, essential to dig deep into these elements' literal and contextual meanings.

2.1.1. Spirituality

Spirituality is a complex notion that has a lot of definitions that are hard to tell apart from one another. In contrast Vaughan (1991) sees spirituality as a "personal experience of the sacred", though scholars provide many other nuanced points of view. For instance, Bussing with others (2010) sees spirituality as a practical commitment to religious beliefs, but Barber (2019) perceives it as a quest for truth. Per Cook's (2004) detailed research, 13 conceptual dimensions of spirituality are revealed, with relatedness, transcendence, and immateriality emphasized as the main ones.

While there may be myriads of definitions, spirituality is a common human experience that contains a yearning for connectedness to oneself, others, nature and the spiritual (Ameri et al., 2017). Contrarily, there is an absence of a homogenized model for comprehending spirituality for the respective literature (Palmer, 2004). For this very reason, it is challenging to obtain a definitive in terms of research.

The corresponding research, as part of the discourse, attempts to bring the concept of spirituality into the limelight. It is done by combining various views and identifying the common themes (Hill & Pargament, 2008). The aim of this study is to fill this gap which will subsequently lead to develop clarity and way forward for the future research that will seek to understand the role of spirituality on individual thoughts and behaviors (Zinnbauer et al., 1999).

2.1.2. Religiosity

Religiosity is a broad and all-encompassing term which tends to expound upon practices that are associated with an individual's institutional and social illustrations of connectedness to 'purity', 'holiness', and 'sacredness'. Rather than exploring religion as a phenomenon, this study focuses on the student's religiosity, which captures the dynamic and individualized nature of religious engagement, beyond institutional or doctrinal boundaries. The terms could be explored and comprehended through the lens of myriad authors of classical to contemporary era (Stark, 1999). The fascinating point is that even the classical discourse on it is still as relevant today as it was back in the days. One of the trailblazers of sociology, Emile Durkheim scrutinized the stature of religion in society along with its functionary role in the preservation of social solidarity. In Durkheim's famous study "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1897)", he posited that religious rituals and

beliefs play an essential tool for the ascent of social solidarity and collective identity on a community level. On the other hand, Max Weber, an eminent sociologist, provided a sensitive outlook on the correlation between religion and social transformation.

In his work "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1905), Weber expatiated that the emphasis on ascetic values and worldly success to be a divine omen in Protestantism (mainly Calvinism) has been major definers of capitalism in the Western societies.

Undergoing a critical dissection of Durkheim and Weber's ideas, we can challenge the classical viewpoints with the newer ones, thus, enriching our awareness of religiosity and its ramifications in today's world. These fundamental works form the basis for studying religiosity and its multidimensional aspects, and they allow us to critically assess the validity of newer perspectives and emerging trends in religious studies (Durkheim, 1897; Weber, 1905).

The religion plays a formative role in structuring the socio-political landscape of Islamic countries and the respective topic has been a matter of extensive debate within scholarly inquiry (Asad, 1996). Scholars such as Chengappa (2021) posited that identity formation has its roots in religion, majorly in states like Pakistan. Religion is a foundational element for national conscience. Islam seeps into governance, legal, and social institutions which depicts its enduring significance in shaping social and collective identity (Brown, 2012). Additionally, the key role of Islamic principles in providing basis for State laws, majorly via sharia law has been highlighted by Saikia (2014). The legal structures are constructed on these principles (Lewis, 1991). Religion and politics are amalgamated to a point where it becomes challenging to balance old customs with contemporary ideas. Not to forget the hurdles of managing different cultural, political, and ideological perspectives (Gauvain, 2013).

Religion is an umbrella term which translates to formal, outward, and institutional. (D Villani, 2019). Religion refers to a set of values, rules, and traditions observed by a group of individuals to lead their lives (McNamara Barry et al., 2010). Paul Victor & Treschuk (2020) explain how the idea of religion is closely linked to traditional practices and values that are found in certain groups of people. Fowler (2017) states that religiosity is considerably influenced by culture and a religious follower exhibits faith towards holy scriptures, the God, ethics and values. According to Poulin et al. (2002), religiosity is the follower's active participation in social structures attributed to religious beliefs. There is significant divergence in the way researchers, scholars and spiritual and religious believers themselves interpret these terms. For example, Pargament et al. (1995) utilized a policy-capturing approach to discuss how college students and clergy interpret the term 'religiousness'. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) states that the idea of religiousness may imply the performance of religious rituals, engaging in altruistic acts, and attending religious places.

Based on qualitative research conducted by Ameri et al. (2017), there are three primary dimensions of religiosity, namely intrinsic, organizational, and non-organizational. The intrinsic facet of religion is the means through which individuals try to incorporate religion into their daily lives (Fosnacht & Broderick, 2020). Organizational religion relates to the frequency of a follower's presence and participation in religious services. Finally, the non-organizational practices of religion can be explained as the amount of time that a follower spends on personal religious offerings such as acts of worship and prayer (Frenkel & Hewitt, 1994).

According to Pirnazarov (2021), spirituality and religiousness are all-encompassing concepts that cover the primary ethical characteristics shaping the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. The article finds that spiritual and religious orientations serve as a tool to combat and end social crisis and ethical dilemmas by integrating these behavioral manifestations among individuals (Pirnazarov, 2021). The review of existing literature thus reveals a noteworthy diversity of opinion and consensus regarding the definitions of spirituality and religiosity. While this may enrich the overall comprehension of the concepts, this leads to an inconsistency in scientific research. Without an explicit definition of the terminology, it is challenging to draw conclusions about how researchers and respondents interpret these (Gall et al., 2011). An inconsistency also poses difficulties in communicating the findings of this study to other disciplines (Warsah & Imron, 2019).

2.2. Spirituality, Religiosity and Resilience in Young Adults

Within the context of religiosity and spirituality, resilience can be described as an individual's ability to cope adequately with challenging and stressful circumstances (Rutter, 2012). Hardy et al. (2004) defines resilience as the ability to adapt satisfactorily to situations that bring adversity, tragedy, or trauma. An individual's resilience can be linked to multiple factors such as his/her optimism, perceptions about spirituality, religious notions, and social support (Helmreich et al., 2017, Schwalm et al., 2022).

Multiple scholars have commented on how university students are most likely to experience periods of mental strains, adjustments, compromise, and stress as they transition into a new age of their lives (Durand-Bush et al., 2015; Hubbard et al., 2018; Kane & Jacobs, 2010). Crawford, Wright & Masten's (2006) study from more than a decade ago reveals how the students' personal and institutional religious commitments decline while they are at college or university. However, Tomalin's research (2007) contradicts that claim based on his quantitative study, whether learners' commitment towards religious duties did not decrease or increase during university years. Elicker et al. (2010) suggests that learners are re-evaluating and reconsidering their notions and assimilating philosophical dispositions at this age, instead of the presumed belief that they are abandoning their faith.

Researchers such as Krok (2008) and Yangarber-Hicks (2004) suggest how elements of spirituality and religiosity may serve as integral support systems during such stressful situations. Saleem et al. (2021)'s study based on Muslim Pakistani students reported how clarity of faith, prayer practices, engaging in religious affairs, and being mindful of religious preferences led to improved psychological well-being in university learners. Haider et al. (2022)'s research identified that religious coping was a significant determination of life satisfaction, mental well-being and resilience in Pakistani medical students.

Thomas & Savoy (2014) discuss the role of religious coping mechanisms for emotion regulation in young adults, whilst particularly focusing on cognitive reappraisal. Religious young adults from numerous religions naturally tend to absorb positive reappraisals (Vishkin et al., 2016). The study by Talik & Skowronski (2018) identifies the popularity of benevolent religious reappraisal as a coping strategy for young adults, where a worrying or traumatic episode is perceived as a prospect for spiritual growth. Stressful circumstances are also taken as valuable learning opportunities by religious youth. Paragament et al. (2000) identified how people believe that God puts them to test in order to strengthen them spiritually.

While research considers spirituality and religiosity as a widely perceived protective factor, a vast number of young adults across the globe still tend to question what exactly to believe in (Smith et al., 2015). In today's fast-paced era, stress has become exceedingly prevalent with disasters and fallouts being repeatedly unleashed in the mass media and social media platforms (Hubbard et al., 2018). Carbendale (2000) comments on how, during an era, where the society has become more vulnerable, susceptible and at risk than ever, college and university students try to seek solace from other forms of comfort, instead of depending upon the doctrines of religiosity and spirituality.

Japar's (2014) quantitative survey was conducted on 4,000 students enrolled at seventy-six different universities. It was revealed how a greater number of learners tried to strengthen and reinforce their religious faith during university years, instead of abandoning or weakening their faith. However, the study cannot be implied to be completely relevant or true to today's era since it was conducted a decade ago.

2.3. The Role of Religion in Identity and Value Formation

Adolescence is a crucial stage of human development, where an individual's behavioral and cognitive development takes place. The social-emotional development theory proposed by Erik Erikson states that during adolescence, a person tends to seek a role-model to understand who they are, and what their spiritual and moral aspects are (Karcher & Benne, 2009). Sokol (2009) explains that identity formation during adolescence constitutes an integral component of personality development.

According to Elkin (1970), young adults can understand and internalize the concepts, practices, and values that are linked with spirituality and religiosity. These beliefs and values may also alter their practices of participating in religious activities (Oppong, 2013). Jardine & Viljoen (2012) explain how young adults tend to seek meaning and value, as they embark on their journeys to identity recognition and development and may seek assistance from spiritual and religious sources to thoroughly formulate a system of meaning.

An individual's identity is cultivated and honed through a diversity of individual and collective skills, abilities and practices. It comprises a variety of religious, sociocultural, geopolitical, historical, racial and ethnic realities that a person witnesses till the time he reaches adulthood (Batoool & Ghayas, 2021; Furrow et al., 2004). The religion Islam involves geographically, ethnically, and culturally diverse populations, which allows its followers to regularly communicate with one another, and negotiate, persevere, and mature their identities. Not only does religiosity offer an ideologically rich context to its adolescent followers, but also provides a social perspective for identity development. King (2019) explains that abiding by religious practices and traditions highlights how these can be implemented into the lives of followers. Erikson's (1968) study focused on how religious ideologies and associated behavioral norms contribute towards identity development in teenagers. By gaining an understanding of religion and spirituality, adolescents obtain a transcendent worldview, interact better with other followers, and develop intergenerational relationships (Christie, 2010).

2.4. Islam and Nation-Building

Chengappa's (2021) study focused on the role of religion in the political evolution of Pakistan as a Muslim country. During the pre-partition phase, the religion 'Islam' served as an invaluable tool for political mobilization and the struggle to achieve a Muslim country. Islam played a crucial role in defining the identity of the new state called Pakistan and its citizens, even though it was inhabited by believers of different religions such as Hinduism, Christianity and Sikhism (Long et al., 2015). The partition in August 1947 led to a drastic change in the population's ideology, as well as the religious contours of the nascent state (Rahman, 2012). Hussain (2000) highlighted the importance of the Two Nation Theory⁹ in symbolizing Islam and providing a source of shared identity and cohesion in Muslims hailing from diverse socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographical divisions.

⁹ The Two Nation Theory of the subcontinent posited that Muslims and Hindus were two distinct nations with their own religions, cultures, and social values, and thus, Muslims required a separate homeland, which ultimately led to the creation of Pakistan.

Following the independence, the development of the Objectives Resolution¹⁰ in 1949 set the government's goals for Pakistan's imminent constitution. The legislation supported the viewpoint that 'sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Allah alone'. It was also decided how the governmental authorities would exercise power within the limit prescribed by the Holy scripture 'Quran'. Saikia (2014) pinpointed how the Islamic law lay at the heart of the country's law and order, and Islam was formally being used signal a defining aspect of national identity. The same principles crept into future editions of the Constitution until the 1973 Constitution, which is followed today. It has been repeatedly declared by official documentation that Islamic ideologies and principles are the bases for Pakistan's independence. On the other hand, the research presented by Ahmad (1971) argues that the fulfilment of the nationhood ideology after the independence in 1947, however, resulted in an evident decline on the role of religion in the country. Pakistan struggled with a conflict of ideology, where its population strived for a Muslim nation run on the doctrines of Islam, while the political leadership aimed for secularism (Amin et al., 2018).

2.5. Influence of Spirituality and Religion in the Educational Settings

The studies conducted by M. Ahmad (2004) and Rahman (2004) report the favorable aspects of religion in the educational settings of Pakistan, which is used to teach human values, ethics and morals, and religious principles to learners. Religious education also supports the idea of providing free education to students and increasing the literacy rate. Singer (2001), on the other hand, states that the inclusion of religion in Pakistan's educational settings tends to support the spread of violent and conservative religious ideologies. These ideologies are often criticized to pave the way for political indoctrination, where some educational institutions are deemed as incubators of terrorism (Panjwani & Chaudhary, 2022). The teaching material and textbooks used in governmental schools are also critiqued for their 'propagandist' information, which sometimes leads to negative perceptions and animosity towards religious minorities such as Hindus. A sense of aggressive nationalism may be infused among the Muslim citizens, where Islam may be used as the foundation to justify state policies (Haque, 1975). The Islamization¹¹ era of the Zia-ul-Haq regime raised concerns such as hateful material and intolerance towards other religions and content biases were identified in state-published textbooks, which implied that the inclusion of religion within the educational settings was problematic (Rahman, 2004).

¹⁰ The Objectives Resolution of 1949 in Pakistan was a foundational document that outlined the principles for the country's constitution, declaring that sovereignty belongs to Allah, and the state would govern according to Islamic values while ensuring fundamental rights and equality for all citizens.

¹¹ Zia ul Haq's Islamization (1977-1988) refers to a series of policies in Pakistan aimed at implementing Sharia law, including the introduction of Islamic banking, Hudood ordinances, and the promotion of religious education, intended to align the country's legal and social systems with Islamic principles.

The study by Polemikou and Silva (2022) provides a detailed account of the spiritual development of students in their educational climate and the influence of integrating religious perspectives during study. When spirituality is embedded into the education structure, it offers grounds for students to learn about traditions, norms, and values (Talat & Hafeez, 2024). The study has been segmented into aspects surrounding the role of religiousness and spirituality in educational systems. Firstly, it discusses how religious studies and demonstration of faithful practices are considered mandatory within the educational systems. It also explains the narrative of incorporating these values and how they develop spiritual spirits among young individuals. This qualitative study finds spiritual values to impact the students' social and personal development positively. It highlights the need to ensure spiritual studies as a part of the curriculum in schools (Polemikou & Da Silva, 2022).

Another exclusive study conducted by Khan et al. (2019) is based on the narrative that a lack of religious values and spiritual motives in the educational background has the most negative effect on students who pursue their careers in the business fields. Considering Pakistan's business landscape, the root cause of collapses and fraudulent scandals is the educational backgrounds of individuals lacking ethical demonstrations. The authors believe that students who are not taught about religious values and have no spiritual connections to explore the laws of nature are more inclined towards dishonesty and manipulative behaviors in business (Khan et al., 2021). The results of this cross-sectional study performed on students from different Pakistani educational institutes infer that religiousness is one of the primary limiting factors of cheating and deceptive behaviors evolving among students. Hence, the research presents the need to teach such concepts and academic courses to equip students with ethical values and educational eminence (Khan, Khalid, Anwer Hasnain, Ullah, & Ali, 2019).

Incorporating religious education into the curriculum promotes numerous opportunities for enhancing spiritual development in learners. By deepening the understanding of the religion, students can engage in discussions and reflect on core ideas of unveiling the truth and meaning of the life, the origin of humankind, the good and the evil, the notion of death and life after it, the belief in God, and moral values (Court, 2013; Philip Barnes, 2015; Tomalin, 2007).

2.6. Reflection of Religious and Spiritual Literacy in Social Behaviors and Characteristics of Students

Asani (2011) explains religious literacy as an individual's ability to apply religious knowledge and findings within the modern-day pluralistic setting, whilst communicating with others in a well-informed and diligent manner. To support peaceful coexistence, a religiously and spiritually literate person shall willingly respect, accept or tolerate dissimilar practices and opposing beliefs of others

(Ashraf, 2019). On the other hand, he or she will remain steadfast and resolute about their personal religious affiliations, or practices. The subject of incorporation of religious studies within formal academia has been a matter of debate in the research (Brown, 2017). There are some who are against the promotion of the respective integration while some question the expected outcome as to be uncertain of whether it will pave genuine understanding and tolerance or merely indoctrination (Vermeer, 2012). Additionally, the debate over the effects of imparting religious education on students' character development and critical thinking skills is also discussed in the research (Lee, 2018).

Tolchah and Mu'ammam (2019)'s descriptive analysis of the Indonesian educational setting explained the role of Islamic education towards academic excellence and social prosperity in learners. In the contemporary fast-paced era of globalization, retaining religious studies as a part of the educational system has become challenging. The detailed analysis produced by Khan (2014) infers that Islamic studies integrated into educational systems can have two main benefits. The first benefit is the character building of the students to polish their social behaviors, interactions, and decision-making capabilities (Khan et al., 2021). The second benefit is retaining the tradition of Islamic education and learning to increase the student's religious knowledge. Hence, religion and spirituality teach students not only help them become socially apt individuals but also help keep moral and social values related to religion in place (Tolchah & Mu'ammam, 2019). Furthermore, Gaol et al.'s (2023) study explains how religious literacy and formal education enhances learners' appreciation of the people and the world around them, and strengthen the faith in God. The qualitative interviews conducted by Gaol et al. (2023) revealed how most university students perceive formal religious education as an act of faith that provides them with the sense of spiritual cleansing, hope and optimism. The presence of professional educators on college and university campuses augments the effectiveness of delivering religious education.

A similar study by Susilawati et al. (2022) indicates the same effect of Islamic education as an essential tool to build students' character. However, the research adds to the information that this knowledge not only helps them in their social life and worldly affairs but also helps them achieve the purpose of their spiritual orientations in life hereafter. Islam, being a code of life for believers, makes them suitable and pious human beings while also strengthening their characters religiously to ease them in the afterlife (Susilawati, Aprilianti, & Asbari, 2022).

Zurqoni (2018) explains that the purpose of studying is to obtain a deep understanding of the meanings of life, acquire knowledge, behaviors, and attitude. Religious and spiritual literacy allows students to improve their understanding of how to incorporate religious behaviors and mannerism in their routine activities (Rusadi, 2023). Most college and university students demonstrate religiosity

through their active participation in religious movements and praying activities. The extent to which religion is studied in university education also influences the students' degree of practice of the traditional, moderate, and radical Islam (Chaudhry & McDonough, 1983; Nadeem et al., 2016).

Some research backs the proposition that professional educators boost the efficacy of religious education, while others object to the notion of neutrality and objectivity. They are suspicious of the potential biases in religious instruction (Susilawati et al., 2022). The debate continues to explore the objective of studying religion in formal academia.

Conclusion:

Keeping in mind the findings of the literature review and the gaps in existing studies, this research aims to reveal the diverse aspects of spirituality and religiosity in the Pakistani Education system (Ahmed, 2018). The university students' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors in Pakistan are to be studied in detail, following a thorough comparison with the literature review that covered diverse disciplines (Ali et al., 2020). Woven in rich perspectives, the literature review on spirituality and religiosity covers a wide range from traditional definitions to contemporary interpretations (Bari et al., 2017). The works of Vaughan (1991) and Victor & Treschuk (2019) brought into limelight the subjectivity and the notion of interconnectedness of spirituality, faith, and religious beliefs. Additionally, research by Villani et al. (2019) and Khan et al. (2021) stressed upon the influence of religious values rooted in educational systems on students' social, personal, and academic development.

The literature gathered led to a major theme where the evolutionary aspect of religious and spiritual elements in, dominantly among young adults (Brown, 2015). They are in a transition phase amid the diverse university environment (Chaudhry, 2018). Simultaneously, some research posited that lack of religious commitments from institutions has been observed (Crawford, Wright; Masten, 2006). While some quoted an ascent in spiritual seeking and identity formation among university students (Japar, 2014). The outturn has provided a way forward for further research to be done to fill this gap and explore more factors that shape religious and spiritual attitudes in higher education settings (Williams, 2016).

Another pertinent aspect which was reflected via the literature review is the relation amid religiosity, spirituality and resilience, academic stress, and society challenges in young adults (Durand-Bush et al. 2015, Hubbard et al. 2018). The study posits that religious and spiritual believes act as a major supporting and regulatory role in students' challenging academic life.

Additionally, the role of religious and spiritual literacy in academic settings was also highlighted. (Polemikou & Da Silva, 2022; Khan et al., 2019). From the review of studies, one can draw a clear observation that development and ethical values of students are embedded in the respective

integration (Smith & Johnson, 2018). However, there exists gaps on the how these values are depicted amid diverse cultural and educational contexts (Gupta & Sharma, 2019).

The outturn of the research paves way for the contemporary debates in the field. Additionally, the provides basis for addressing some of the gaps in the literature relating to the role of religiosity and spirituality in Pakistani higher education institutions. Through qualitative interviews of students, the research tends to dissect the religious and spiritual experiences layered with perceptions, and certain behaviors within the Pakistani academic system. Thematic analysis is what it targets. Major emphasis has been on identifying upcoming themes and patterns that could serve as a base for further research and educational approaches. The key objectives of this study are to provide input to policymaker, education experts and stake holders regarding synergistic relationship between religiousness, spirituality, and academic learning in the country of Pakistan, for the purpose of promoting spiritual and intellectual development of learners and their wellness.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Framework of Analysis

The purpose of this research was to recognize the perceptions of Pakistani students about religious values and the spiritual framework within their daily routines as well as undergraduate studies at the university level. The research utilized qualitative research methodology using semi-structured interviews for the target audience. Following the interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted for the insights gathered through the conversations with students (research subjects). The forthcoming chapters on the presentation of results, data analysis and conclusions results, discussion and analysis present the learners' responses as reflective, in-depth themes to unearth the different facets of their spiritual beliefs and religious perceptions.

3.1.1. Adoption of Methodological Strategy

Research Approach

According to Trochim (2006), the two broad horizons of reasoning in conducting research are deductive and inductive approaches. The latter focuses on the concept of transitioning from the specific detail to an overarching view, while deductive reasoning starts with generalized arguments and moves towards more specific ones. The work of Johnson-Laird (2010) explains the role of a deductive researcher as a 'top-down' approach, where the research cycle proceeds from studying theory towards formulating hypotheses, gathering data through primary approaches. Finally, the study outcomes are used to either add to existing theories or contradict them. The researcher opted for a deductive methodology for this research (Johnson-Laird, 1999). A deductive methodology was chosen to test pre-established literature and theories on religiosity and spirituality within the context of Pakistani university students. The process began with undergoing secondary research to identify a thought-provoking social theory about learners' perceptions on religion and spirituality. By reviewing the existing literature, the researcher identified gaps in existing scholarly work and aimed to develop focused interview questions to explore how these theoretical frameworks manifest in the personal and academic lives of students (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018).

The chosen approach of a deductive, positivist study allowed the researcher to reveal real-life contemporary bounded systems through the richness of the participants' voices (Yin, 2014). As stated in the literature review, religious beliefs and spiritual connectedness with the Creator offer support opportunities to the youth that further promotes pro-social behavior in structured environments (for example: college and university settings). As a result, it becomes crucial to study from a research point-of-view the extent to which support from peers and trusted mentors in the university can help shape and formulate beliefs in learners. It also provides a starting point for future research into the

educational institutions of the country, and how far they are delivering religious rejuvenation for their students. The use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews aided the researcher to present findings from diverse perspectives, identify emerging themes, patterns and similarities from the data, and enhance their validity.

Epistemology

The epistemological orientation of the research methodology is phenomenological. Casey (2000) explains how phenomenological research has always mainly overlapped with other significant qualitative approaches to research such as symbolic interactionism and ethnography. According to Husserl (1970), the main aim of pure phenomenological epistemology is to describe rather than explain. It aims to begin fresh research, and not base the findings of preconceptions or already existing hypotheses. The purpose of phenomenology is to concentrate on the subject's lived experiences and practices within the world around them. According to Neubauer (2019), descriptive phenomenology is highly useful in comprehending individuals' motivations and actions, as well as their subjective experiences. Creswell (2012) further highlighted its use in describing the meaning and context for multiple people in the light of a commonly shared phenomenon or lived experiences. Yin (2012) reported how phenomenological studies assist the research in gaining understanding of the subject by interviewing knowledgeable participants, which, in the case of this study, are students who are well-aware of their religious and spiritual inclinations during their college and university life.

The choice of a phenomenological research design is appropriate for the research because it provides a profound, deeper insight towards the beliefs of spirituality and religiosity through the eyes of a small sample of university learners. According to Vagle (2016), phenomenological research helps to gain awareness through the lived, first-hand experiences of the target. The chosen philosophy has allowed the researcher to explore the commonalities within a chosen sample of the target population as they experience various phenomena. It offers a distinctive snapshot of the human experience into the religiosity and spiritual formation paradigm by investigating the students' perceptions and personal experiences.

A phenomenological design was to obtain insights into the common experiences of Pakistani students across different universities in various contexts of religious and spiritual practices. The phenomenology approach was also chosen for this study to capture the personal perspectives and emotional responses of the respondents, obtaining rich insights about how these factors influence their academic and social lives, and align the study towards understanding subjective human experiences.

Research Design

Creswell (2005) describes a qualitative study as one where the focal research point remains at the heart of the perceptions and opinions of participants. The researcher's input is the initiation of generalized, broad questions that allow the subjects to provide valuable and rich information. As such, the researcher acts as the pivotal data collection instrument. Peterson (2019) explains how, in a qualitative study, the researcher tends to unveil mutual themes from the words and responses of the participants.

The research approach employed for this project was qualitative design because of the 'human aspect' of the desired research outcomes. Tenny et al. (2017) explain qualitative research as an approach that focuses on people's interpretation of their social reality and routine experiences. Zohrabi (2013) discusses how various data collection approaches such as open-ended or structured interviews, observations, and questionnaires can be utilized to analyze how and why do certain social phenomena function the way they do. Opting for the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to obtain deeper insights of how the target audience (Pakistani university and college students) comprehend and practice religion, and why their outwardly actions are the way they are.

3.1.2. Participants, Sampling Strategy and Methods for Data Collection

The data for the research project was gathered using a semi-structured interview. A predetermined set of open questions was provided to each respondent that resonated a preset thematic framework, keeping in mind the objectives of research. The following were the desired characteristics of the target sample:

- The respondent should be based in Pakistan or should have been living here for at least three years.
- The respondent must be enrolled in a college or university in Pakistan.
- The respondent must be between eighteen and twenty-five years of age.

A total of 10 Pakistani students were interviewed for the study. The chosen sample of research participants provided a cross-section of inner-city urban and rural perspectives from various cities and regions in Pakistan to bring a diverse perspective on the levels of pupil's spirituality and inclination to perform formal religious practices. The group of learners comprised an equal number of males and females, studying a variety of major disciplines such as science and technology, medicine, engineering, psychology, and business. The purpose behind opting for different academic disciplines was to explore whether each discipline contributed differently to the student's approach towards religiosity and spirituality.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the students to apply non-probability sampling for the desired outcomes in phenomenological research. Opting for non-probability sampling was significant in ensuring transferability rather than generalizability of the primary data collected. A key staff informant from major universities across the country was used to recruit interviewees specific to the criteria stated above. Even though the sample taken from the study can be perceived as small to provide adequate knowledge about the research matter, multiple researchers have commented on how qualitative interviews with small sample size can help attain saturation based on the strength and quality of information retrieved from the respondents (Malterud et al., 2016). It also facilitated the researcher's thorough association with the respondents, which helped him in unveiling meaningful and thorough findings to answer research questions. Finally, a small sample size was opted for with the intention of limiting the resource expenditure for this study.

The semi-structured interviews commenced with open-ended questions, which usually led towards follow-up questions for digging deeper into individual experiences and clarification. The questions aimed to cover various aspects of the respondents' spirituality and religious connectedness, including their family's inclination towards religious practices, the impact of college/university on a change in religious beliefs, impact on social life and academic success, and an overarching sense of security and safety while practicing religion. The choice of interviews, as compared to other methods such as questionnaires and surveys, will allow the researcher to explore the participants' stories in a relevant and real fashion. The following questions were asked:

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?
2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?
3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues since they started to attend/not attend religious services?
4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

3.1.3. Methods and Techniques for Data Analysis

The data for the research project was gathered using online interviews with Pakistani students to evaluate their perception of religion and spirituality. A total of 10 students studying in Pakistan were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Initially, the researcher aimed to audio-record and transcribe all interviews using MS Teams. However, most of the chosen respondents discussed their concerns with audio/video concerns for privacy matters. This is why the majority of the interviews

were conducted via email. The remaining interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using a suitable software package. After the recording and transcription, the data from the recorded interviews as well as the email-based responses were formally and systematically analyzed. The data was analyzed using reflective thematic analysis which is best suited for research analysis of perceptions. A three-stage coding process was utilized for the analysis: initial, focused and thematic coding. The purpose of coding these findings was to discover and describe emerging themes from students' stories about the impact of their religious and spirituality beliefs on identity development. Interview data was converted to the written scripts which was more convenient to analyze and familiarize using general readings. Trends in the responses among the students were then analyzed to identify the potential themes that can address the perception of students in Pakistan about the religion and spirituality. The thematic analysis was conducted using Clarke and Braun's Six Step Data Analysis Model shown in the image below:

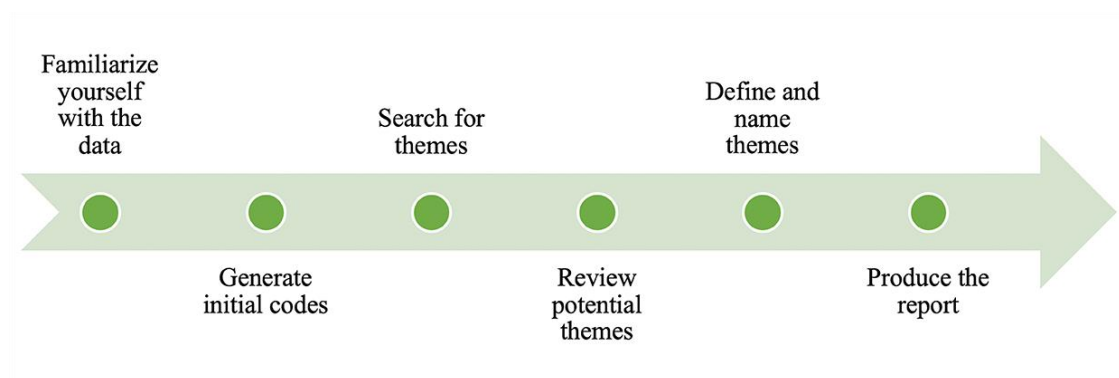


Figure 3.1: Clarke and Braun's Six Step Data Analysis Model (Applied Doctoral Center, 2023)

The first step in data analysis was reading the transcripts carefully to take note of first impressions from the data available and coming across evidence of key themes. It was also important to identify any bias at this stage and neutralize any preconceived notions in the beginning of the analysis. Next, annotating the transcripts allowed the researcher to organize the data systematically for dissemination. The qualitative data was then conceptualized with the help of categories and sub-categories that would be later used in the published content. Data segmentation was done with the help of spreadsheets to structure key variables in different columns and applying the coding. The segments were profoundly analyzed to craft the results and discussion chapters.

3.1.5. Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of using email as an interview approach was having a lack of representative samples, and the risk of interviewing participants outside the prescribed study population characteristics. Email interviews may also raise ethical concerns about the authenticity of the data collection process, eliminate non-verbal cues, and suggest impersonality. While conducting audio interviews, a key challenge faced was the lack of consent and permission for interview recording by participants. Participants were encouraged to take their time crafting thoughtful and detailed answers to reduce the limitations of the chosen methods of data collection, such as the lack of immediacy and spontaneity in responses. Follow-up emails were sent for clarification and elaboration where responses lacked depth, ensuring that rich, nuanced insights could still be gathered.

4. Results: Key Themes from Qualitative Interviews

This chapter presents the findings from the ten interviews conducted as part of this research. Each participant was asked the same four questions, allowing for a consistent comparison across responses. The data collected were rigorously analyzed through a process of coding, which facilitated the identification of key themes and sub-themes. These themes have been categorized under the four questions and allow to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Pakistani students' perspectives and experiences about religiosity and spirituality. The following sections detail these themes, supported by direct quotes from the interviews to illustrate the richness and diversity of the responses.

Interview Question 1

Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

The responses revealed two distinct kinds of variations in individuals' practice of attending religious gatherings: gender-based and sect-based. There were obvious differences in community religious rituals between males and females, where the former are expected to offer congregational prayers. On the other hand, there is no such compulsion for females in Islam. The respondents representing the Shia community had greater opportunities of meeting each other under the umbrella of religion as compared to Sunni Muslims.

Sub-Theme 1: Male Sunni Muslims

The most common activities for male Sunni Muslims including attending the weekly Friday prayer at the mosque, and the two Eid¹² prayers. According to the interviewees, these events are heartwarming and allow them to connect better with their friends and family once the prayers end. It was interesting to note how some places in Pakistan also organize Friday prayer, Eid prayers, and Taraweeh¹³ for females in congregation. However, most females were fond of offering their prayers and worship within the privacy of their houses. They attended regular Quranic interpretation classes

¹² The two Eid's in Islam are:

Eid al-Fitr: Celebrated at the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, it marks a day of gratitude, festivity, and charity after a month of spiritual reflection and fasting. Eid al-Adha: Known as the "Festival of Sacrifice," it commemorates Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to God.

Eid prayers for Muslims are special congregational prayers performed on the two major Islamic festivals, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. These prayers are offered in the morning, followed by a sermon (khutbah), and are a key component of the communal celebrations

¹³ Taraweeh is a special, optional prayer performed by Muslims during the nights of Ramadan. It involves reciting long portions of the Qur'an and is offered after the Isha (night) prayer, either individually or in congregation.

virtually to enhance their understanding of religious themes. In addition to this, some females mentioned the role of their colleges and universities in creating a sense of togetherness and community by hosting Eid Milan¹⁴ parties and Iftar celebrations.

Sub-Theme 2: Female Sunni Muslims

In general, the female respondents had less communal activities where the key practices were in-house Quran classes for recitation, translation and interpretation, Taraweeh prayers in mosques and community centers, milads¹⁵, knowledge sessions with Islamic scholars, and celebration of Shab-e-Mairaj¹⁶ and Shab-e-Barat¹⁷ in some Sunni sub-sects. These practices were adopted by some of the respondents, who believed that these occasions are valuable in terms of strengthening communal bonds, remembering Allah and His Prophet. Communal gathering was also known to enhance the attendees' knowledge about their religion. Regarding community events and milads, a female respondent stated:

‘Sometimes, there are milads and community events where we have Islamic scholars come over and talk about the religion, and then there are ‘Naats’ and ‘Hamds’¹⁸ for the praise of our Creator and his beloved Prophet.’

The most common approaches to religious events and gatherings included hosting family and friends, distributing sweets amongst neighbors, exchanging gifts and foods, and spending time with loved ones. When asked about the frequency of such gatherings, most respondents believed that religious communal events had lessened in number since their childhood. One of the key reasons identified was the respondents' and their family members' busy schedules due to college, university and work. On an individual basis, the respondents from religiously active families whether Shia or Sunni offered daily prayers and recited the Quran daily.

¹⁴ An Eid Milan party is a social gathering typically held after the Eid celebrations, where family, friends, and communities come together to share food, exchange greetings, and celebrate the joyous occasion of Eid

¹⁵ Milads: Gatherings celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), often including recitations of religious poetry, prayers, and sermons on his life and teachings.

¹⁶ The night commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) miraculous journey to the heavens (Isra and Mi 'raj), during which he ascended to the heavens and met with Allah.

¹⁷ Known as the "Night of Forgiveness," it is observed on the 15th night of the Islamic month of Sha'ban, where Muslims seek forgiveness from Allah and pray for blessings and prosperity.

¹⁸ Naats are poetic praises and hymns in honor of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), recited in devotion and admiration. Hamds are a form of Islamic poetry or song that praises Allah, expressing gratitude and reverence for His blessings and greatness.

Sub-Theme 3: The Shia Community

Shia Muslims were more socially active in terms of religious gatherings and enjoyed connecting with fellow Muslims at Imam Bargahs¹⁹ particularly during the Muharram majlis. For most respondents, the Muharram gatherings were social events that they sincerely looked forward to. The Shia male respondents were fond of organizing Majalis²⁰ at their households regularly and acquired numerous life skills and learning experiences throughout the process. The presence of Islamic scholars during such events made the socializing more informative and thought-provoking. One male respondent stated, ‘Every time I come back home from a majlis, there’s always something new added to my knowledge.’

Apart from the mourning, the Shia community also talked about the joyous moments, such as the Eid-e-Ghadeer²¹. All in all, the vast number of gatherings offered greater opportunities of understanding each other as a community and channeling individual emotional responses. In addition to this, the other regular gatherings for the Shia community included weekly Dua Kumayl recitations and Quran study circles.

Sub-Theme 4: Students from Religiously Inactive Families

The responses were different for students who didn’t witness religious socializing activities within their family, and only privately practiced the key rituals of Islam. One female respondent stated, ‘I think my brother hardly goes for the Friday prayer at the mosque and usually offers the rest of the prayers at home. I think it's partly because of how we grew up.’

Sub-Theme 5: Pakistani Muslims and Biddat

One female respondent provided an interesting observation of how Pakistani Muslims and families and transitioned from Biddat²² practices to insightful and knowledgeable events. The spirit of learning and understanding the Quran and Hadith was seemingly invigorated in most respondents where Quran class gatherings are held in community centers and event halls.

¹⁹ Imam Bargah is a religious congregation hall used by Shia Muslims for gatherings, especially during Muharram, to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain

²⁰ A majlis is a religious gathering, particularly among Shia Muslims, where sermons and recitations are performed to remember the tragedies of Karbala and other religious events.

²¹ Eid e Ghadeer is a Shia Islamic celebration to remember the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) declaration of Imam Ali (AS) as his successor at Ghadir Khumm

²² Biddat/Bid’ah is an innovation in religious practice, often considered a deviation from traditional Islamic teachings, and is generally discouraged in Islamic theology

Interview Question 2

Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

Sub-Theme 1: Islamic Studies as a Subject

The findings revealed that Pakistani universities and college do not actively influence learners' spiritual and religious beliefs. Religious teachings do not constitute the basis of education in most higher educational institutions across the country, as stated by the respondents. Most of the respondents mentioned the mandatory Islamic studies subject in the early years of university. However, studying the subject did not significantly have an impact on how they thought and practiced religion. Overall, most of the interviewees did not experience a major, life-changing impact of university life on religiosity and spirituality. The students also identified a 'lack of special classes and events under the name of religion' in their universities. The findings, however, were different for students that hailed from households that do not actively practice Islam. The college and university experiences were invaluable for them, as they enhanced their foundational religious teachings. Islamic studies and study circles proved to be 'enlightening' experiences for them. One respondent stated,

'Understanding the meaning behind that Arabic text of the Quran gives you so much insight.'

Sub-Theme 2: The Role of Teachers and Peers

The findings from interviews further highlighted the key role of teachers and mentors on campus indirectly influencing students' religious beliefs. This happens largely through class discussions. Another interviewee highlighted how her teachers have encouraged her to practice critical thinking and become proactive about seeking religious knowledge. The university and classroom environment also motivated some learners to explore Islamic history and take related courses. The professors in Pakistani universities tend to occasionally refer to Quranic and Hadith²³ teachings for students' motivation, which allowed them to spread the message to their friends and family. One student said,

'I would often go back home and research more about the given reference in class'.

²³ The Hadith is a collection of sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that serve as a primary source of Islamic teachings alongside the Qur'an

Additionally, some respondents commented on how their university and college peers have proven to be positive influences for them. It was interesting to see how university peers influenced each other to adopt religious practices. A female interviewee mentioned how she takes the Hijab²⁴ now because she learned that our appearances are crucial in showcasing our religious identities. She acquired this message from her non-Muslim peers who could be easily identified by how they dress. Another respondent stated,

‘Now for example thanks to some of my friends at the university, I’ve developed a habit of going to the mosque, previously I didn’t think it was too important.’

Another respondent explained the role of classmates, mentors, the overall campus environment, and particularly situations and first-hand experiences that allowed him to deepen his spirituality and religiousness.

Sub-Theme 3: Experiences of Students Living in Hostels

On the other hand, respondents who lived in hostels believed that university life has offered them new vistas of religious thinking and deepening their connection with their Creator. The perspectives originated from a medical student who experienced hopefulness and patience as she witnessed the heart-wrenching stories of her patients. There was also a newfound sense of exploring the power of Tahajjud²⁵ and miracle prayers. Again, the responses varied in terms of the subjects that the learners were studying. The students living away from home in university hostels also described the sense of community and support they experienced while living with fellow Muslims. One respondent commented, ‘Most of us live away from home, so I hope this will be a great initiative to help everyone perform a special form of Ibadat, listen to the recitation of Quran, and pray in congregation.’

The hostel life provided opportunities of extra prayers, such as Nawafil in Ramadan’s odd nights and breaking fasts together at the iftar time. Other non-obligatory forms of prayer such as the Salat-ul-Tasbeeh were also discovered by some learners for the first time during their university life.

Sub-Theme 4: Acceptance and Tolerance

The interviews also provided insights on the differing opinions of Shias and Sunnis. It was seen that learners acknowledged the core differences in each other’s religious practices and were willing to overcome them to collaborate and socialize with each other better. For example, one respondent stated how he had an equal proportion of Shia and Sunni friends in the university. Owing to the diversity of

²⁴ A modest covering worn by Muslim women, typically over the head and chest, as an expression of modesty and privacy in accordance with Islamic guidelines.

²⁵ A voluntary late-night prayer performed by Muslims, typically after Isha and before Fajr, seeking closeness to Allah through additional worship.

student body in colleges and universities, some students learned about a variety of Muslim sects including Ahl-e-Hadis, Wahabi and Barailvi²⁶ especially when they did not know that these existed. The Shia Muslims particularly found opportunities of appreciating and respecting differences among the Muslims and identifying common ground in the process. Some respondents also explained how a diverse student body urges them to become pivotal sources of information about Islam to non-Muslims. They served as ambassadors for Islam and were happy to answer other people's questions about the teachings of Quran and Hadith. Regarding this, one respondent commented, 'When you adopt a welcoming stance and answer other people's questions about Islam, I think you fulfill your role to spread the teachings of your Allah and His Prophet and you might as well bring about a positive impact on those around you.'

Sub-Theme 5: Westernization and Religiosity

Some respondents highlighted pressing concerns such as Westernization and deviation from faith due to negative influence on campus. Some students stated how practices and activities that go against Islam are becoming increasingly common across the country, including celebration of festivals such as Diwali²⁷ and Holi²⁸. One respondent also talked about the significance of such events in teaching religious tolerance and promoting interreligious acceptance. Religious diversity among the students was identified as a contributory factor towards the development of spirituality and religiosity.

Sub-Theme 6: Student-Led Religious Societies

The responses showed that there is a lack of student-led religious or Islamic societies in universities and colleges. However, one student mentioned that topics such as women rights in Islam and Islamic finance have been the center of discussion in some knowledge-sharing sessions held at the university.

Interview Question 3

Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

²⁶ various Sunni Muslim sub sects

²⁷ A Hindu festival known as the "Festival of Lights," celebrating the victory of light over darkness with rituals that include lighting lamps, fireworks, and family gatherings.

²⁸ A Hindu festival known for its vibrant color powder throwing and joyful gatherings.

The responses to this question were mixed and revealed a variety of themes about the role of higher educational institutions in impacting religious beliefs of learners.

Sub-Theme 1: The Role of University Life in Transforming Religious Perspectives

Some interviewees reported how going to university completely transformed their religious perspectives, when religious obligations become a source of peace for them rather than a burden. Generally, the challenges and hurdles of higher education allowed learners to connect better with their Creator in the form of supplications and prayers. The students' religious connections deepened particularly during periods of examination and allowed them to remain motivated while tackling any hurdles. The idea of hopefulness and optimism that stems from being religious was discussed by another student who said, ‘

I know that no matter how challenging a subject is, or even if I am on the verge of failing an exam, Allah will help me glide to the end.’

Some respondents also discussed how deepening religious beliefs led to them witnessing first-hand miracles in their academic and co-curricular ventures in colleges and universities.

Fulfilling Islamic obligations such as the daily five prayers help respondents in being calm and focused. Some students also highlighted the importance of knowledge in Islam, and how that helps them to fulfill their academic goals and become better students.

Most of the respondents mentioned the role of fellow students in studying and spending time together. One respondent explained,

‘Socially, I've found a great group of friends who share similar values. We study together sometimes, and we also make sure to celebrate Islamic holidays like Eid together.’

It was also revealed that there have not been major changes in students' perceptions of religion and spirituality while living together in hostels. Students tend to engage in healthy debates that allow them to understand a variety of interpretations of religious practices. A student of medicine explained the role of religion in her university life, as she tends to connect with learners who share identical values. Study groups offered spiritual support to most students, especially when they were living away from their family and friends. One respondent stated how her friend circle in the university engages in religious discourse and take prayer breaks together.

Sub-Theme 2: Religion, Discipline and Hopefulness

Additionally, links were drawn between religious practices and discipline. One student stated how she felt more disciplined and organized in her routine chores at university because she was habitual

of offering daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan. The concept of discipline had been deeply incorporated into the lifestyle of Shia students, especially how their beliefs prepare them for physical exertion during the month of Muharram and the walk of Arbaeen²⁹. Religious practices allowed learners to effectively manage time and structure their academic and social routines. Another student commented on how the rate of her prayers and supplications to Allah increased during periods of examination in the university. She stated,

‘There was one psychology exam that I took in the first semester which did not go too well in my opinion. I was not satisfied when I came back home but continued to tell my tale to Allah. I kept on praying to him sincerely and passionately. And eventually, I ended up getting a very decent score.’

However, the results varied according to the students’ existing inclination towards religion. Some students directly attributed all their academic success to their connection with Allah. One exception was seen in a respondent’s case whose family was not religiously active. As a result, she could not attribute major academic successes and social growth to religion and spirituality. However, she did notice how her peers’ conviction and faith in the Holy Quran was ‘heartwarming’, and that she was feeling that newfound influence in her life.

The second part of the question provided responses on how religion impacted students socially in college and university. Most students found solace and motivation among their peers at university and found ways of doing Ibadat together, enjoy Ramadan, offer Taraweeh prayers in congregation, and listen to the Quranic recitation.

Sub-Theme 3: The Perceptions of Imam Hussain’s (A.S.) Devotees

The findings produced emerging themes on the role of Imam Ali’s and Imam Hussain’s³⁰ devotees and how they are motivated to stay hopeful during challenging circumstances as well. While there were apprehensions on being treated harshly for being a Shia Muslim, some respondents appreciated their support groups and friends at the university who respected each other’s differing faiths. The respondents highlighted the significance of exercising patience, compromise and sacrifice when settling in new social settings, as taught by the religion. They also stressed upon the importance of ‘authenticity’ and how it is a deeply valued personality trait, and the fact that the religion taught them to stand firm by their principles. One student also pointed out that the tragedy of Imam Hussain (A.S.) formed the basis of his personal statement when applying to university and was one of the pivotal

²⁹ A Shia Muslim religious observance occurring 40 days after Ashura, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (AS) and the Battle of Karbala.

³⁰ Imam Ali (AS) was the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the first Imam in Shia Islam, and the fourth caliph in Sunni tradition. Imam Hussain (AS) was the son of Imam Ali (AS) and the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He is best known for his martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala. The followers of Imam Ali and Imam Hussain founded the Shia sect in Islam.

reasons for gaining admission to his desired school. The values and traits of his character, hardships, and unwavering determination indirectly impact most of the Shia learners' academic social life and academic success.

The findings of the interview also highlighted the 'progressive' and 'liberal' stance of higher educational institutions in Pakistan over the years. Previously, it was conceived that Islamic teachings and doctrines constitute the basis of university education, but one student commented, 'I hardly recall any activities that are solely dedicated to enhancing the learners' religious beliefs.'

Interview Question 4

Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

The responses to this question can be segregated mainly into two broad themes: the overall campus climate, and the respondents' individual thoughts about religious safety and tolerance in college or university.

Sub-Theme 1: Religious Diversity in Higher Educational Institutions

A few responses highlighted the lack of non-Muslims in their universities, where there were hardly three to four Christians and Hindus in their batch. As such, the campus climate does not have a large proportion of religious minorities. The responses varied according to the universities. For example, one interviewee discusses the widespread religious diversity in her medical school and how the campus climate offers student-led religious societies for all. In some universities of the country, students have the opportunity of attending interfaith events and knowledge sessions, which enhances awareness. Some campuses also have mosque, church, and gurdwara. Furthermore, some students mentioned having separate student communities for Muslims, Hindus and Christians in their university to host events that are open for all. One respondent commented, 'This creates a great opportunity for people to learn about and respect each other's beliefs.'

Sub-Theme 2: Religious Tolerance

The findings revealed a significant progression regarding the Pakistani mindset on religious tolerance. One of the respondents found it relieving because her university's campus climate was considerably

more welcoming and supporting than the ‘horror stories of religious discrimination’ that she heard before. One student reported how people have become more welcoming and accepting towards non-Muslims. According to her, ‘I remember one of the Hindu classmates giving Eid gifts to her friends in college.’ The Sunni male students, on the other hand, believed that more in-depth responses could be retrieved, had the questions been asked to religious minorities. Sunni Muslims, as such, enjoy a profound sense of religious security and safety.

Sub Theme 3: Flexibility of Schedules

One of the respondents credited the role of her professors in respecting religious obligations and offering flexibility to learners in terms of completing their assignments, providing extensions to them, and giving space to non-Muslim students during events like Diwali, Holi, Easter, and Christmas. Additionally, the primary research also unveiled instances where students are never criticized for covering their heads, wearing western clothing, or wearing the Christ cross. The university campus serves as an event venue for religious festivals and gatherings, such as iftar dinners, Muharram masjid, Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi, Diwali, Holi, Halloween, and Christmas. Another common aspect highlighted in most of the interviews was how universities make adjustments to class schedules for religious events. One respondent stated,

‘During Ramadan, the university often adjusts the schedule by reducing class timings and ending everything before sunset to make it convenient for Muslim students to observe fasting. On the other hand, the Christmas and New Year is also kept as a holiday for those celebrating.’ On an individual level, most of the respondents felt safe and secure in the campus climate and had multiple opportunities to fulfill their religious obligations. Almost all universities had prayer rooms available for students. Another respondent highlighted how universities tend to ensure the cleanliness and maintenance of these prayer rooms, and students from other religions are also welcomed.

Sub-Theme 4: The Shia and Sunni Community

Religious diversity, however, exists within the variety of Muslim sects such as Shias and the subsects of Sunnis. Again, the prevailing opinion implied that students are not ridiculed or sidelined for unique religious practices. One Shia respondent who enjoyed a sense of safety and security in her hostel life valued the fact that people will not play music or hold celebratory gatherings during the days of mourning in Muharram. However, the opinions differed among other respondents who explained how Pakistani students, in general, are unaccepting towards Ahmedis and Shia Muslims. As a result, students and faculty members who practice a different religion are yet to become comfortable in discussing their religious beliefs and activities openly. Generally, the Shia Muslims had a weaker sense of support, acceptance, safety and security of their religious beliefs in the campus. To win

people's support and acceptance, it was usually inevitable for them to justify their religious practices such as the mourning period, Arbaeen, and Ghadeer. For the apparent animosity between Shias and Muslims, one respondent cited the major reason to be 'the lack of understanding'. According to one of the respondents, 'Sometimes people might have stereotypes about Islam. But when that happens, I try to have open conversations and explain my beliefs.'

Sub Theme 5: A Hint of Discrimination on Campus

Some respondents said that they witnessed subtle discrimination and lack of religious acceptance when other students murmured about them, challenged their religious practices, and passed inappropriate comments. In addition to this, the interview findings highlighted that some students would even hide the fact that they are Shias or non-Muslims. Another interviewee said that she could not comment from the perspective of other students who follow a different religion than hers.

5. Discussion: Reflections on Findings from Qualitative Interviews

The gender-based distinction of religious gatherings in Islam, as highlighted by the interviews, reveals how Islamic practices in Pakistan do not prefer the mixing of women with men in religious gatherings and mosques. However, it should be noted that the religion itself does not prohibit members of the opposite gender from attracting gatherings together but supports sanctified and decent interaction between them.

Understanding Religiosity

The students' understanding of the term 'religiosity' related closely to the definitions provided by Fowler (2017) where they mentioned the significance of faith towards the Creator, His Holy scriptures, moral values and ethics. The findings supported Poulin et al.'s (2002) viewpoint on religion, which suggested that religiosity is the active participation of religious followers in social structures that reflect religious beliefs. It was seen how the respondents took great pride in attending religious gatherings which they believed made them closer to Allah. While the findings resonated with Zinnbauer et al.'s (1997) idea of attending religious gatherings and observing religious rituals, there was not enough conclusive evidence to indicate that students engaged in altruistic practices. These findings align with the research objective of exploring variations in religious practices within institutions and their reflections in learners' daily lives. The students' participation in religious gatherings highlights how faith influences their personal development and aligns with the research question's focus on the role of religiosity in shaping learners' behavior and social interactions.

Dimensions of Religiosity

The interview findings expounded upon Ameri et al.'s (2017) segregation of religiosity into intrinsic, organizational and non-organizational dimensions. It was seen how the respondents were making an active effort to achieve intrinsic religiosity by making religion an integral part of their routine lives, such as offering prayers, reciting Quran, and making private prayers to Allah. There were numerous examples of organizational religiosity highlighted in the current study, such as attending congregational prayers on a daily basis, on Friday, and during Eid, hosting gatherings for Quranic recitation and interpretation, Taraweeh, and celebrating the Ramadan fasting. There was also some evidence regarding the interviewees' personal religious offerings as they incorporated the non-organizational religiosity in their routines, particularly during exam seasons and the blessed nights of Ramadan.

The Role of Religiosity in Providing Support to Students

Furthermore, most of the respondents cited Islamic practices as a crucial support system for them during stressful circumstances, which is synchronous to the works of Krok (2008) and Yangarber-

Hicks (2004). It is thus implied that closeness to religion offers a source of personal growth, spiritual strength and academic support to adolescents, as consistent with previous literature. Individuals navigating through college and university life can rely on prayers to achieve a sense of peace and clarity during uncertain times. Not only this, but it can also be concluded that developing a deep connection with God serves as a reminder to achieve excellence in whatever is done including academic goals and aligns personal decisions with the will of Allah. Overall, there was enhanced confidence, focus and strength amongst learners who depicted strong aspects of religiosity and spirituality in their personality. Even though the results provided a variety of insight about learners' engagement in religious affairs and regularity in prayer and other obligations, there was little information revealed about improved psychological well-being as discussed by Saleem et al. (2021). The research findings resonate with the objective of examining the influence of students' religious motivations and spiritual beliefs on their academic progress. The role of Islamic practices in providing emotional support during stress highlights how spirituality contributes to personal growth and academic focus, aligning with the driving question of the study: the exploration of how religiosity shapes both personal development and educational outcomes.

Religiosity as a Coping Mechanism

The results, on the other hand, did not resonate with the works of Carbendale (2000) and Smith et al. (2015) who elucidated young adults' uncertainty towards their religious beliefs and how they aim to seek comfort through other ideas than spirituality and religiosity. Not a single respondent commented on their lack of faith in the power and will of their religion, nor did they mention their dependence on other modes of comfort. The coping mechanisms of students living in hostels or dormitories included joining students' religious association, participating in study circles, and hosting religious celebratory events for their peers. associations. The respondents' reliance on religious associations and practices for coping suggests that the institutional environment fosters spiritual engagement, reinforcing the importance of faith as a source of comfort and community. This supports the research question's focus on the influence of religiosity on students' personal and social development.

The Role of Religion in Pakistan's Higher Educational Institutions

While Pakistan was a nation formed predominantly on the doctrines of Islam, it was interesting to note how the results did not depict a direct impact of religion in the country's higher educational institutions. Drawing on the works on Amin et al. (2018), it can be implied that the political leadership's aim of achieving secularism is being implemented in colleges and universities across the country. None of the respondents mentioned a link between religious teachings in their institutions and nationhood or patriotism, which again connects with past literature that showcased a problematic inclusion of religion in Pakistan's educational system due to intolerance, extremism and content

biases. It appears as if the country's educational framework is paving its way towards restructuring. Educational institutions are progressing from deep-rooted religious ideologies towards an understanding of regional trends and global challenges whilst embracing globalization.

While the works of Polemikou & Da Silva (2022) stressed the significance of spiritual and religious studies as part of the curriculum, the focus on religious education is still insufficient in Pakistan. Even though Pakistan studies and Islamic studies are mandatory components of the undergraduate curriculum, the students reported no significant impact of this on their understanding and practice of the religion. Religious and spiritual education is crucial in terms of enhancing adolescents' understanding of religious beliefs and notions while respecting others. It also offers an effective means of developing well-being, ethical standards, and refraining from discrimination and religious extremism. In addition to this, learners who feel connected to their spirituality can find a sense of inner peace and fulfilment that can help them manage stress and burnout that comes through the hectic university life.

Retaining Religious Studies in a Globalized Education System

The present study also relates with Tolchah & Mu'ammam's (2019) study that acknowledged the challenge of retaining religious studies in today's increasingly globalized educational setting. This is the reason why most students commented on the lack of direct religious learning and enrichment opportunities on campus. However, Pakistani educational institutions are actively attempting to polish the character-building aspect of their students and enhancing their religious knowledge. This was primarily done with the help of religious societies, inviting renowned Islamic scholars on campus, and indirect references to the Holy Quran and Hadith during regular classes. However, Pakistani universities are addressing this gap by focusing on character development and enhancing students' religious understanding through indirect channels, such as religious societies, scholar visits, and integrating references to Islamic teachings in non-religious courses. These efforts align with Research Objective 1, which examines how varying religious practices and values manifest in students' daily routines. The use of indirect methods to convey spiritual teachings also reflects the impact of the campus climate (Research Objective 2) in shaping students' beliefs.

Religiosity, Spirituality and Students' Academic Success

Considering the sample and population characteristics specified for this study, the results did not provide any information about how religiosity and spirituality in individuals impacts their career and professional life. Hence, it does not provide further details to test Khan et al.'s (2019) research. Moreover, none of the responses explored the link between religiosity and avoiding malpractices or natural and moral evils. Also, there was a lack of insight on students' perceptions on cheating and

academic misconduct with respect to their religious beliefs and faiths, as explored in Khan et al.'s (2019) study. Regarding the role of religious education on the respondents' academic social life and success, a strong link can be drawn between the outcomes of Court (2013) and Tomalin's (2007) study with the present findings. The students who exhibited deeper understanding of the religion through support at the university valued the emotional and intellectual reactions that aroused from it. There was often a high sense of purpose and meaning in individuals who were active members of their household's and university's religious community, as they thoroughly enjoyed the healthy social life and belonging they obtained from the experience. The findings also connect closely with Philip Barnes' (2015) works that highlighted the role of religion in adolescent development by uncovering the truth of life and distinguishing between the right and wrong.

The Role of Islam in Personality Development

Although the students' responses drew connections with prior research on the impact of Islamic education on personality and character building, the current study did not cover the students' perceptions on how Islam is an all-encompassing code of life for the hereafter (Susilawati et al., 2022). The students also talked about the integration of religious behaviors and mannerism with their academic goals, such as the virtues of discipline and hopefulness, which supported Rusadi's (2023) study. The work of Nadeem et al. (2016) is also relevant in the light of the current study which gives examples on how students exhibit religiosity: through prayers and participation in religious movements.

The paradigm of communal religious practices is imperative because it allows the adolescents to reimagine religious practices that have, over time, between largely individualistic and lost communal ethos. However, the study did not draw upon other communal practices or ritualistic acts such as funeral services, building of mosques and community centers for the facilitation of public at large, or attending the annual pilgrimage once a year. Similarly, the interview responses did not produce sufficient input for a discussion regarding social welfare in Islam.

The Link between Religiosity and Academic Stress

The interviews also shed light upon the students' anxiety, stress, and mental strain during exam periods or while living away from home for college or university (Kane & Jacobs, 2010). The findings, however, deviated from Wright & Masten's (2006) claim that students' religious commitments decrease during periods of higher education. It was seen at multiple instances in the current study how learners became closer to their God due to being away of home, or while experiencing examination stress. Some students experienced a positive inclination towards religiosity

due to their peers' and professors' influence. As such, the findings of Tomalin's (2007) research were not found to be relevant for this study.

The discussion reflects the impact of the campus climate (Research Objective 2), where institutions promote both individual and communal religious engagement through prayer and participation in religious movements. However, the absence of responses on broader communal practices, such as social welfare initiatives or pilgrimage, indicates that students' religious engagement may be more focused on personal development than on collective religious obligations. This insight contributes to the study's aim of understanding how spiritual teachings shape not only academic performance but also social interactions and personal growth.

Sectarianism amongst Pakistani Students

The responses also revealed how Shia and Sunni Muslims agree on the foundational tenets of the religion such as believing in the Oneness and Unity of Allah and accepting Muhammad (PBUH) as His final Messenger. The Shias and Sunnis also agree on the pillars of Islam such as offering daily prayers or fasting during the month of Ramadan. However, their social practices and the observance of Muharram particularly vary. It was interesting to note how most of the interviewees had adequate religious literacy, in terms of informing and enlightening their peers about Islam, as well as accepting and tolerating religious practices that were different to theirs. The responses of Shia Muslims offer coherent examples on how their Sunni peers supported 'peaceful coexistence', and were eager to enhance their religious literacy about common misconceptions between the two sects. The findings, in this regard, are invaluable because these depict how the peaceful coexistence of two predominant Islamic sects is possible. Religious literature adolescents can help pave the way towards reducing misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudices that have been incorporated into society by extremists.

These findings align with Research Objective 1, which investigates the variation in religious practices within institutions and how they manifest in students' daily routines. The presence of diverse religious practices offers opportunities for students to engage in meaningful conversations, enhancing both their religious literacy and personal development. By interacting across sectarian lines, students develop empathy and tolerance, which strengthens their social interactions—an important aspect of the study's primary research question. Additionally, these inter-sect interactions reflect the impact of the campus climate on students' beliefs. The study suggests that exposure to diverse perspectives within Pakistani universities fosters greater understanding, challenging stereotypes and promoting mutual respect.

Answers to the Research Questions

The outcomes of the primary qualitative analysis can be used to formulate answers to the research questions and objectives posed in the beginning of this study.

How does religious and spiritual teaching integrated into the Pakistani educational institutions influence the personal development, social interactions, and academic performance of learners?

The primary data collection for this research concludes a significant impact of religious and spiritual beliefs on the personality development and social interactions of learners in the educational institutions of Pakistan. While there isn't enough conclusive evidence to form a direct association of religious and spiritual teaching with learners' academic performance, the research suggests that students are better motivated to study, have higher discipline and self-belief, place utmost faith in the power of prayer, and their Lord's Greatness to help them counter academic challenges. Shared religious and spiritual beliefs allow students to forge better social connections with their peers in colleges and universities because these offer common ground for knowledge-sharing, reflection, support, and celebration. The existence of study support groups and student-led religious societies are also useful opportunities for social interactions under the umbrella of religion. When religious and spiritual discussions are held in the classroom settings, learners are exposed to opportunities of engaging in healthy discourse with one another, clarify existing misconceptions about their religion, the subjects within it, and other religion. The research provides evidence that such activities integrated into colleges and universities allow learners to become resilient, tolerant, and accepting towards others.

The following responses have been culminated in the light of the research objectives set for this study.

- Investigate the variations in religious and spiritual values and practices within colleges and institutions to understand how they reflect in the routine life of the students.

Unlike the prevailing conception that Pakistani educational institutions are deeply rooted into religious teachings and education for adolescents, the findings revealed a rather insignificant focus of the institutions towards religious and spiritual practice. Key practices underscored in this study included mandatory Islamic studies lessons for undergraduate students, the presence of a society for religious affairs, and student-led departments for hosting religious celebratory events such as Ramadan iftar drives, Eid Milan parties, Christmas or Holi celebrations.

Students often integrate their spiritual practices, such as the five daily prayers and fasting, into their study habits and work routines, allowing these rituals to foster discipline and structure in their academic lives. This connection between spiritual practice and academic discipline reflects the students' efforts to harmonize their religious values with their educational responsibilities.

Religious and spiritual teachings also play a crucial role in building a sense of community among the student body. These teachings help bridge gaps between students, creating a supportive environment where individuals, particularly those away from home, can rely on each other for both academic assistance and personal support. This shared sense of religiosity nurtures a family-like atmosphere, where students feel connected and cared for by their peers.

Interestingly, while sectarian divides, such as those between Shia and Sunni students, are present, they seem to be less pronounced on an individual level within the campus setting. The prevailing sense of community fosters a deeper respect for each other's beliefs and practices, promoting mutual understanding across sectarian lines. This atmosphere of inclusivity reflects the ability of religious and spiritual values to unite students, allowing them to overcome differences and focus on shared goals in their academic and personal lives.

- Explore how the campus climate defines and alters students' beliefs for religiosity and spirituality

Despite the limited presence of religious minorities and a focus on Islamic teachings, which reflects the dominant religious landscape of the country, there are varying levels of openness and diversity across institutions. While the scope for discussing other religions remains limited, some universities have made progress by hosting interfaith events and encouraging broader religious dialogue. A key finding is the contrast between common misconceptions about religious intolerance and the actual experiences on campuses. Stories of discrimination and hatred are relatively rare, indicating a positive shift in the Pakistani university environment. This change highlights the efforts made by universities to foster a climate of religious tolerance and respect. Furthermore, there is an emerging sense of religious security and safety, particularly for minority students, who experience a greater respect for their religious practices and events. This progression suggests that the campus climate is gradually evolving to embrace religious diversity, contributing to students' broader understanding of spirituality and encouraging respect for different faiths. Universities, through their missions and visions, are now appearing to be committed to nurturing an environment that upholds the values of tolerance and inclusivity, challenging pre-existing stereotypes, and fostering mutual respect among students of all religious backgrounds.

- Examine how religious motivations and spiritual values influence students' academic progress and discover the interconnection of these beliefs with their educational aspirations and choices.

While religious education in Pakistan does not overwhelmingly influence students' lives by the time they reach higher education, it remains an informative and heartening part of their overall learning experience. Family upbringing and inclinations towards religious practice also shape how much influence religious teachings have on students' academic choices and aspirations. Religious discussions across the university campus, particularly those incorporating the Quran and Hadith, serve as important motivators for Pakistani students in fulfilling their educational aspirations. These conversations help students refine academic skills like reasoning, critical thinking, and logical argumentation, which contribute to their overall academic growth. Furthermore, religious teachings often inspire students to strive for excellence in their studies, by praying to Allah, being disciplined and steadfast in their study plans. Also, there was evidence of indirectly linking their academic success to a desire to become representatives of their faith within the university community. Additionally, religious values foster a sense of hopefulness and determination, helping students navigate academic challenges and pursue both curricular and co-curricular goals. This blend of religious motivation and spiritual belief not only influences their immediate academic progress but also contributes to their long-term educational and career aspirations, reflecting the interconnection between their spiritual values and academic journeys. However, it is beyond the scope of the present study to comment on the impact on students' career aspirations and long-term goals.

Filling the Gaps in Existing Literature

While much of the existing research primarily focuses on fundamental beliefs and practices, this study reveals how students engage with these concepts in their daily lives and their implications for personal and social development. The responses regarding Bid'ah indicate a sense of awareness amongst the students. They are thoroughly able to identify the fine line between innovation and adherence to traditional practices. Not only does this awareness allow them to critically engage with their religious beliefs, but it also helps them foster discussions about religious practices in contemporary contexts. The findings also underscore the significance of Nafl prayers in students' spiritual lives, emphasizing their role as a source of personal comfort and spiritual fulfillment. This aspect of religious practice is often overlooked in existing literature, which tends to focus on obligatory prayers. By highlighting the importance of Nafl prayers, this study broadens the understanding of students' religious experiences and the diverse ways in which they seek spiritual growth. By addressing these less-discussed aspects of religious practice, the findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how students integrate their religious beliefs into their everyday lives,

Emerging Themes from the Research Findings

The current study not only addresses gaps in the existing literature on spirituality and religiosity in Pakistan but also introduces new themes and sub-themes that could serve as valuable starting points for future research. One such theme highlighted in the responses was the growing focus on religious practices that align more closely with the core teachings of Islam. For instance, some respondents emphasized the trend of shifting away from certain traditional practices and rituals, and instead, prioritizing a more direct engagement with Islamic teachings and doctrines. This shift reflects broader social and theological dynamics within Pakistan, where individuals are re-examining their spiritual practices in light of contemporary understandings of Islam. Although these topics were not extensively covered in the existing literature, they represent emerging patterns that warrant further exploration in future studies on religious practices in the region.

Another religious aspect that has been repeatedly discussed in the results is the practice of Nafl (non-obligatory) religious practices, particularly Tahajjud prayer and the merits of the last ten days of Ramadan. The respondents stated numerous benefits of these forms of worship, especially when offered sincerely and wholeheartedly. Again, this was not a subject of discussion in the literature review but can contribute to future research on the psychic benefits of these forms of worship on students' emotional and psychological well-being. Both of these forms of voluntary worship are known to closely link with an individual's spirituality by providing greater opportunities for worship, devotion and reflection. The respondents who practiced Tahajjud and Nafl prayers found themselves drawing closer to their Lord and aimed to renew their commitment to leading a virtuous life. For adolescents, engaging in such practices can provide psychological and emotional benefits, including enhanced stress management, improved emotional regulation, and a greater sense of inner peace. The current study also serves as a starting point for future research regarding the adolescents' perceptions on the Shia-Sunni divide in Pakistan, and the role of social interactions and meaningful dialogues in bridging the gap. Even though the study sample was confined to only Pakistani students, there was a rich cultural variety amongst the participants. It is important to understand how Pakistani higher educational institutions are providing opportunities to interact with students from different religious or cultural backgrounds and inculcating a respect for diversity. By fostering resilience and a sense of purpose, these practices may help young individuals cope with academic pressures and social challenges. Future research could explore the specific impact of these non-obligatory practices on the mental health and personal development of adolescents, offering valuable insights into their role in holistic well-being within a faith-based context.

6. Conclusion

The primary aim of this present study was to evaluate how religious and spiritual teachings in Pakistani higher educational institutions impact the personality development, academic performance and overall social interactions of college and university students. The study's objectives included an assessment of how the students' differing religious beliefs and the campus climate impact their academic progress and performance. The findings of this study also relate closely to past literature. This study contributes favorably towards addressing existing gaps in theory, such as exploring the extent of religiosity and spirituality in Pakistani education system. It also sheds light upon the role of professional educators in higher educational institutions towards strengthening students' religious inclinations, which was conflictingly covered in past literature. Not even a single study in the past was centered on the idea of discussing religiosity and spirituality for Pakistan specifically, which means that the current study also closes the gap on those aspects.

The key question of the research entailed:

How does religious and spiritual teaching integrated into the Pakistani educational institutions influence the personal development, social interactions, and academic performance of learners?

The findings revealed that most of the respondents had several opportunities to enrich their spirituality and religiosity while being in colleges and universities, influencing their personality development, social interactions, and academic performance. However, most of these opportunities were indirect and did not pertain to the university's coursework or formal modes of teaching.

The students' personality development was seen in the sense of becoming more disciplined and steadfast in fulfilling their educational objectives while being closer to religious teachings. There was an added sense of hope and optimism in religiously and spiritually active students. Students hailing from Shia sects had stronger personalities and strict abidance to the truth and rightful doctrines of faith. Closeness to religion brings about an inclination to struggle for the right and disregard the wrong, even if it requires one to undergo sufferings, hardships or even martyrdom. Additionally, most of the students' personalities reflected an urge to raise a voice for truth and justice and reject falsehood and injustice.

The social concept in Islam, as believed by the participants of this study, was the idea of supporting prosperity and happiness for both individuals and the society. Religious observances allow teenagers

and adolescents in Pakistan to vibrantly express the spirit of community, foster brotherhood and sisterhood among each other, practice an attitude of tolerance, and positively exhibit good manners and morals when interacting with fellow Muslims. religious obligations provided socialization opportunities for both males and females, as well as the various sects (Sunnis and Shias).

The findings of this study did not provide conclusive evidence of a correlation between students' religiosity and academic performance but highlighted several instances where the respondents believed that stellar academic performances were closely linked to their prayers and styles of worship, especially voluntary acts of prayers. Teenagers' and adolescents' religious commitments allow them to fulfill their short-term and long-term academic goals with higher motivation, interests, self-esteem, and study habits. It was seen how religious practices and the creation of study support groups in universities served as facilitating agents and promoters of prosocial behaviors. In this way, students benefit from each other's presence by imparting academic and religious knowledge and easing the process of achieving academic outcomes.

The key objectives of this study focused on the following aspects: ***variety of religious beliefs and manifestations, campus climate, and academic performance.***

Pakistan, being a predominantly Muslim country, does not have a vast variety of students from other religions (Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism) in the universities. The diversity exists within the Muslim community, as students from numerous sects and sub-sects of Islam study together. However, the study did not provide conclusive evidence in this regard because none of the respondents in the study sample represented a minority religion in Pakistan, such as Hinduism or Christianity.

In most of the universities of Pakistan that were represented in the sample, the campus climate is welcoming and non-discriminating towards religious minorities. The learners did not experience a sense of disparity while practicing a religion different from Islam or while representing a minority sect of Islam. It was also seen how being closer to religious practices and having deep spiritual beliefs allowed learners to be more disciplined and motivated towards their academic goals. The students believed that stellar academic performances were closely linked to their prayers and styles of worship, especially voluntary acts of prayers.

The study was important because it was the first of its kind to explore the religiosity and spirituality of local Pakistani students in higher educational institutions. Even though past research has been conducted in this regard, the focus was largely on a comparative analysis between madrassas (religious schools) and contemporary schools. Most of the prior literature does not specifically focus

on Muslim students based in Pakistan, which is why this research has been beneficial in overcoming the gap in the existing literature.

Qualitative Emphasis

The voices captured through the interviews and qualitative analysis are central to the depth and significance of this study, offering detailed insights that address the challenges of a small sample size. Each participant's unique experience sheds light on the connections between religiosity, spirituality, and academic life, providing a range of perspectives that go beyond what quantitative data can capture. The strength of this research lies primarily in the richness of meaning of its distinct stories, revealing personal challenges, motivations, and ambitions shaped by religious and spiritual influences. These firsthand accounts have brought a considerable degree of authenticity to the research, helping to uncover subtle patterns and themes that enhance findings.

Limitations of the Study

Due to time constraints and privacy concerns, the study was based on a small sample size of 10 respondents only. Hence, the study is exposed to limitations such as the risk of random variability, constrained generalizability, and less exploration of heterogeneity in responses. A small sample size could not cover a wide range of colleges and universities in Pakistan from a variety of cities, which tends to undermine the internal and external validity of the research. Furthermore, the study does not provide a well-rounded view of spirituality and religiosity among students practicing religions other than Islam. The respondents were confined to only Sunni and Shia Muslims. This implies that the findings cannot be extended to students from other religions and their university experiences in Pakistan.

Another one of the inherent limitations of this study is how it was conducted through a digital interface, rather than in-person. This can potentially undermine the accuracy of the diagnostic assessment and may have led to under-reporting or responder biases. In future, it can be more advantageous to conduct in-person interviews with a greater number of students from universities across the country. Alternatively, a quantitative approach could be employed in the future to mitigate the margins of error and provide a better representation of the population.

Theoretical Implications

The outcomes of this study cannot directly be compared to other studies on religiosity and spirituality in Pakistan, considering how it is targeted towards a particular audience. By examining the interplay between religiosity, spirituality, and student development within Pakistani universities, however, this research highlights patterns that may also be present in other regions with comparable cultural or educational environments. These results invite further exploration to determine whether similar

trends, challenges, and influences exist across different institutions or societies. It also serves as a preliminary study to analyze the attributes of Muslim college/university students for future research. From a theoretical perspective, future research into this discipline and target audience should use this study as a starting point to explore emerging themes such as the link between nonobligatory prayer and adolescents' spiritual and religious well-being. Such comparative studies could broaden the understanding of how religious and spiritual values shape student experiences, enhancing the applicability and relevance of this work beyond the immediate context of Pakistan. The findings highlight how spiritual practices and beliefs influence academic progress and interpersonal relationships among students. This adds depth to existing models of social development, which often overlook the significance of spirituality in fostering social cohesion and emotional well-being within academic settings. Furthermore, it expands on previous research by providing empirical data on how religious and spiritual teachings influence academic performance in a developing country, specifically in the Pakistani context. This adds a unique perspective to global discussions of how values, beliefs, and religious motivations impact student success and engagement.

Practical Implications

From a practical viewpoint, policymakers for higher education in the country should acknowledge the religious and spiritual changes that youth undergo as they interact with a diverse set of individuals and tackle academic challenges. The insights of this study can be used by policymakers to develop more holistic education systems that incorporate opportunities for both intellectual and spiritual development for learners. Colleges and universities in Pakistan should develop targeted support systems and channels for religious/spiritual support on campus to improve their personal growth, social harmony, and academic outcomes. Alternatively, higher educational institutions in Pakistan other than the ones represented in this study should aim toward fostering a campus climate that supports religious tolerance, encourages healthy discussions on such themes, and offer safe platforms for spiritual reflection and development of youths.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the significant ways in which religiosity and spirituality influence the personal growth, social interactions, and academic paths of students in Pakistani universities. By amplifying the voices of these students, we have uncovered the complex relationships between belief systems and educational ambitions, offering valuable insights into student experiences within culturally grounded settings. This research extends the conversation on the connection between faith and education and opens avenues for future studies to explore similar patterns across other regions. As educational institutions continue to develop, recognizing the role of spiritual and religious values will be crucial in creating inclusive and well-rounded learning environments.

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Annexes

Interview Transcripts

Interview 1: Female 22, Sunni From Kinnaird College for Women on 22 June 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

In our country or religion, there aren't many religious gatherings specifically for females. While the men are expected to offer congregational prayers such as Friday and Eid, there is no such requirement for women. So, as such we have limited community-based activities in the name of religion. While this is not directed by Islam, sometimes we attend Quran classes or congregational Taraweeh (night prayers) during the month of Ramadan. Again, this is not compulsory, and it only happens in some parts of the country. Recently, I attended some of these Taraweeh prayers followed by a greater community event on the 27th night of Ramadan when the Quran is said to be revealed. That's where we have the recitation and interpretation of the Quran, prayers for the welfare of the community, and praise for Allah and His Prophet (PBUH). That is a very festive occasion in most places where the end of the religious gathering is usually done by the distribution of sweets. Sometimes, there are milads and community events where we have Islamic scholars come over and talk about the religion, and then there are 'Naats' and 'Hamds' for the praise of our Creator and his beloved Prophet. That is a great opportunity to interact with each other, and learning about the fundamentals of religion.

Some sects of Muslims also celebrate other events such as Eid-Milad un-Nabi which is the birth of our Prophet. Then, there are other blessed nights such as Shab-e-Mairaj and Shab-e-Barat which again allows people to host their family and friends and can be called as a religious gathering. Personally, our family does not host or attend religious gatherings of this nature to a great extent.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

I think colleges and universities in Pakistan do not provide enough focus towards religion and spirituality. We have adopted the Western cultures and concepts so deeply that we don't really pay attention towards the development of our religious teachings (Islam). I don't recall any particular activities or instances where Islamic teachings stay at the forefront of my college education. However, I do believe that people might get deviated from their faith. This happens primarily due to the group of people that you're spending most of your time on campus with, and some individuals may have the power of driving you away from the good. Basically, the immoral and 'bad' gets so normalized that we simply recognize it as normal. For example, there is a recent trend of hosting 'Holis' and 'Diwalis' in Pakistani colleges and universities. Now, while this promotes a sense of religious

tolerance towards minorities, but I seriously think that this is something prohibited by our religion Islam. Again, everyone is doing it because it is the trend in colleges and universities.

You're lucky though if you can get some teachers who instill religious and spiritual teachings in you, not formally. But you know during class discussions and I think that's important in rejuvenating and reviving our faith.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

During school life, I wasn't someone who would actively offer prayers or recite the Quran. It always seemed like a burden and a boring activity when our Quran tutor came over. However, growing up and moving to college, I have realized that there is so much peace that comes with practicing the religion. It seems as if your heart is at ease when you connect with your Creator, when you talk to Him about your problems, about the things that are troubling you. College or university is never an easy ride. You are not always passing your exams and tests with flying colors, and there are many hurdles. That's where it becomes very important to stick to your beliefs. Our religion teaches us that everything happens due to the will of Allah, and there is some good in all happenings of our life whether we are able to see it or not. I think this belief helps me stay motivated and overcome any hardships during my academic journey. I pray to Allah for heightened success, and for greater achievements during my higher education. There are times where I have seen miracles happen, for example there was one occasion where I was appointed as the Chief of Sports Society amidst tough competition. I think the primary driver of this success was my belief in Allah, and the fact that I kept on praying to him wholeheartedly.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

I think in Pakistan, we don't have too much diversity in the campus climate. Most of my classmates in college and university have been Muslims. I hardly recall two to three Christians, and Hindus in my university. As a result, there isn't enough attention paid towards the 'minorities'. For example, there are discussions about Islam and the teachings from Quran and Hadith in the classroom, but we don't really know what happens in other religions. Maybe the students from different faiths are too reluctant to share something like this due to the fear of 'rejection' or nobody really pays attention to it.

But on the other hand, I think we have evolved as a society over the years. While Pakistanis were previously not too accepting or welcoming towards different religions, there is a greater sense of

tolerance now. They accept our religion and beliefs, and we accept theirs. I also remember one of the Hindu classmates giving Eid gifts to her friends in college.

Even within Muslims, we have so many sects. But honestly, I don't any instances where a classmate is rejected or ridiculed to have different beliefs than the others. Shia Muslims practice mourning in the month of Muharram, which is a questionable practice for other sects, but I think we have all come to peace with the fact that they'll do this and everyone will have to accept it anyway.

Interview 2: Male 23, Sunni Forman Christian College on 24 June 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

For me, religious gatherings are mainly restricted to daily prayers at the mosque whenever I am at home, and not busy with university or work. Then, we offer Friday and Eid prayers at our town mosque. And I think that's all because I usually have a very busy schedule. My classes start early in the morning and end quite late. We also have classes during the weekend. I work part-time so that also adds to my jam-packed routine. It becomes difficult to plan time for extra community gatherings. Also, we don't have too much a concept of religious community gatherings where I live so apart from the Jummah (Friday) prayer and Eid, I don't think there's much.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

There isn't too much focus on religion in our coursework or university life, we only studied Islamic Studies in the second year of my Bachelor's, to be honest that didn't have a deep impact on my religious beliefs. Not much has changed in terms of what I think or practice about Islam before and during university. But again, I do believe that beliefs and thoughts change over time, especially depending on the people that you're spending time with. It also depends upon your classmates and teachers and the overall environment of your campus that may impact your beliefs, you may be put in situations which change your beliefs, some people might motivate you to become better humans and Muslims, while others might intentionally or unintentionally deviate you from the path of good. Alhamdulillah, I haven't had any such negative influences in my life yet. Now for example thanks to some of my friends at the university, I've developed a habit of going to the mosque, previously I didn't think it was too important.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

I wouldn't classify myself as one of the most religious people, other than offering the five daily prayers and fasting in the month of Ramadan there wasn't much that I had been doing previously.

However, I try to incorporate religious teaching and principles in our routine life and towards achieving academic goals and targets. I think I am more disciplined and more organized in completing my assignments and other work from university because I am so habitual of praying five times a day. I wake up early and go to bed on time, and a major reason for this is my commitment towards offering the early morning prayer (Fajr). Similarly, I think there's a strong belief that hard work will always be rewarded. For example, if I am studying for a test or completing an academic assignment, there's always hope that if I've done it with my best effort, it will be all good in the end.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

I might not be the right person to answer this question considering that I am a Sunni male, which is the dominant religious group of the country. I have never faced any difficulties in practicing religion. In fact, being a part of the primary group of religious followers gives me so much security and safety in my beliefs. But I don't think as a nation we are too supportive of other religions. Not even towards other religious sects. For example, Shia Muslims or Ahmedis. We also hear many stories of discrimination and violence in Pakistan due to difference of religious beliefs, which explains well how other religions are not safe. In the university campus, I have noticed that the students and even teachers from other religions such as Christianity or Hindus will choose not to talk about their religious practices and cultures because we haven't made them comfortable enough.

Interview 3: Male 23, Shia LUMS on 28 June 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

I am a Shia Muslim which opens up so many opportunities of religious gatherings throughout the year, which I really look forward to. My family and I love to host Majalis (community gatherings) at our place regularly, and the activity increases so much further during the month of Muharram which is also identified as the mourning period. There's so much to do during such gatherings and the process offers valuable learning experiences and life skills. During these Majalis, we have Islamic scholars and learned men and women who enlighten the audience about the various aspects of our religion. This is very thought-provoking and informative, and every time I come back home from a majlis, there's always something new added to my knowledge. Then, the most joyous moment of the year marks another important religious gathering, which is Eid e Ghadeer. These are times where we learn about our rich yet tragic religious and cultural history. I think these community religious

gatherings provide many opportunities for socialization, understanding each other, and channeling emotional responses to tragedy.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

Most of the staff and students in my college include Sunni Muslims, and we have significant differences in our beliefs and ways of religious practices that cannot be ignored. I am happy though that no matter what our differences are, I haven't come across people who force you to follow their religious sect. I have an equal share of Sunni and Shia friends, and I don't remember anyone actively or inactively trying to influence my thoughts and beliefs. So, for me I don't think university or college life has impacted what and how I think about my religion.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

So, when I applied for college and had to write my personal statement, I chose to write about the life of Imam Hussain (A.S.) and how his struggles, unwavering determination and ability to stand by the truth are principles that I deeply value. I resonate with his character so strongly that I wish to become a person like him. It was interesting to know that the admissions officer was deeply touched by that story. She is a Sunni Muslim but seems genuinely interested in learning about how our beliefs differ. So yes, I think that religiosity and spirituality is one of the reasons for securing admission in one of the top business schools of our country.

However, I have found Pakistan's higher education system to be very liberal and progressive, with only minimal focus on religion. I was always under the impression that religious principles will be given utmost preference in universities, but that has not been the case so far. I hardly recall any activities that are solely dedicated to enhancing the learners' religious beliefs.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

I would answer no to that one. Being a member of the 'less liked' religious community in Pakistan, I think there is a lot of explaining that we have to do to prove that our religious practices are justifiable. And that's not something that my Sunni friends would resonate with. We'll have to explain why the acts of Matam are performed, or questions about the overall mourning process, or even about Ghadeer and Arbreen. I think that comes only due to a sheer lack of understanding, and probably because a general hatred has always existed in our society for Shia Muslims. We face questioning eyes as we get excited and pumped up for our annual mourning period. It's obvious that people will murmur

about you, challenge your beliefs and practices, and pass comments on how you're practicing religion. While I may feel safe and secure within my college, I know a lot of students who would hide their religious affiliation just because they fear the lack of support and acceptance that I think everyone needs. And the funny thing is that we're not even outside the 'Islam' boundary yet. It's not that we are talking about another religion like Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity or so on. But I do feel we have a long way to go in accepting others around us, especially when their notions contradict ours.

Interview 4: Female 21, Sunni From Agha Khan University on 29 June 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

Compared to the importance and frequency of religious gatherings in my childhood, I feel like there isn't much happening around us under the name of community setting religious gatherings. Previously, our family friends and relatives would invite us for Milads and Niaz especially to celebrate key Islamic occasions such as Shab e Barat, Shab e Mairaj and 12th Rabi ul Awwal but things have evolved over time. I do not remember the last time that I went to such a gathering where there are talks about the Quran and Hadith.

But I've noticed how people have gradually moved from acts of Biddat to more useful and insightful religious gatherings such as Quran classes with Tafseer (interpretation). I personally support that idea and have attended multiple Quran classes with my friends and family whenever I've had the time. Now these are pretty big gatherings particularly in the month of Ramadan where event halls or community centers are booked, Islamic scholars and interpreters of the Quran are invited, and there is a deep discussion about a chosen verse or Surah from the Quran. This is very enlightening for me and I look forward to this religious gathering, probably more than what I looked forward to as a child.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

Since I started college, I have found myself to be closer to Allah in more ways that I can imagine. Now, I do not know whether all of this can be attributed to being in college or there is some credit given to the Quran classes as well. Being a student of medicine, we hardly get time to incorporate Islamic studies into our routines, but learning about various patient cases and miracle stories about their survival gives me a newfound sense of hope and faith in Allah. I have seen people struggling with the worst of diseases yet having a big smile on their face because they trust Allah so much. They believe all things happen for a reason. When I compare their problems to mine, I find my own challenges to be rather insignificant and I instead thank Allah for His countless bounties. So I think in that sense the university life has given me new perspectives to think about the religion. I believe more in the concept of predestination and Allah's decree. And spending most of my time in patient

wards, I have witnessed the power of ‘prayers’ and ‘dua’ firsthand. Thanks to a few people that I’ve met, I have been offering Tahajjud prayer since the last four months and there is indeed a noticeable difference (positive) in my life.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

I think all successes have to be directly attributable to Allah. Because without His will and permission, nothing good or bad can happen to you. There are countless occasions where I think I wouldn’t have crossed the line if it weren’t for Allah. And this belief helps me keep going. I know that no matter how challenging a subject is, or even if I am on the verge of failing an exam, Allah will help me glide to the end. In terms of my social life in university as a medical student, my religious beliefs and routines allow me to connect with fellow students who share similar values. Since the exam season is always around the corner, we form study groups. Not only do these groups help each other academically, but are also great sources for spiritual support. I live away from my home and family in the hostel, alongside my other friends, so it is absolutely essential to have something to connect with. We also often get together during the exam season and otherwise to study together and then take prayer breaks.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

Till now, I would say that my overall experience on the college and university campus has been very positive when it comes to religious and spiritual diversity. My university is one of the largest medical schools in Pakistan and Asia, so it is very common to have students from different religious beliefs studying here. Our university also has several student-led organizations and societies that keep track of different religious festivals and occasions. I’ve also been a part of some events and discussions for other faiths, and these have been open to everyone. I think it’s pretty useful because it raises so much awareness and clarifies misconceptions that we might hold for other religions. Indirectly, it also teaches us a sense of community and mutual respect, which are essential components for future doctors like us. On a personal level, I think the campus climate is pretty secure in practicing my own beliefs. We have plenty of prayer rooms. There is a mosque (masjid), a small church, and a gurdwara (worship place for Sikhs) in the campus. The administration is also quite supportive in helping us accommodate our religious observances. It is also very thoughtful of the admin to keep in mind the religious festivals of various student groups. For example, during Ramadan, the university often adjusts the schedule by reducing class timings and ending everything before sunset to make it

convenient for Muslim students to observe fasting. On the other hand, the Christmas and New Year is also kept as a holiday for those celebrating.

Interview 5: Male 23, Shia From University of Central Punjab on 29 June 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

Yes, I do attend religious gatherings regularly with my family, and it's a mix of both community and individual settings. As a practicing Shia Muslim, these gatherings are really important to me because for all these years I have witnessed my family going to these events, and I've always enjoyed meeting so many members of our community like that. I am a very social person, so I don't think there's a better way of connecting with people for support who share similar beliefs with you not just for spiritual growth but also for maintaining a sense of community and support. For community settings, I frequently attend our local Imam-Bargah, especially for significant events like the days of Muharram, and other important religious observances. During Muharram, for instance, attending majlis (gatherings) is a deeply moving experience. It is an emotional rollercoaster, and the experience is so surreal as you feel exactly what happened with our Prophet's dearest Imam Hussain and his family. This is the time when I am highly looking forward to these religious gatherings.

Apart from these major events, we also have smaller, more regular gatherings such as weekly Dua Kumayl recitations and Quran study circles. Sometimes, I am unable to attend because of university commitments, but whenever I have the chance I will make sure to go and attend. I have a designated space in my room where I perform my daily prayers and read the Quran. This personal time is very important to me as it allows me to connect with my faith on a deeper level, free from distractions.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

I come from a rural hometown and back home, most of my religious practices were held primarily within the Shia Muslim community. However, moving to a different city like Lahore for university allows me to interact with a broader range of Muslim from different sects. I hadn't even heard about some of these sects before such as Barailvi, Wahabi, Ahl-e-Hadis, and so on. I think this exposure helps me to appreciate the different traditions and practices of my own religion, help find similarities and differences, and understand that there is so much common ground to share rather than being in conflict always. Thanks to my teachers and university mates that I've found here. I've also become more proactive about seeking knowledge and understanding my faith. The academic environment has encouraged me to ask questions and explore my beliefs more critically. I've taken courses on Islamic history and theology, which have provided a deeper insight into the rich intellectual traditions of Islam.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

From a young age, I think my religion has taught us discipline through a variety of religious practices such as the daily prayers, fasting, and even the walk of Arbaeen which is a tradition for the Shia community. This discipline is something that has been embedded into my life and I've taken this with me to the university as well. I manage my time well, focus on studies, am ready for physical exertion, and can better structure my day.

I think being a dear and passionate follower of Imam Ali and Imam Hussain is what helps me move forward during difficult times in university. I've changed cities to continue my further education and there have been many times where I've had to compromise, sacrifice, or remain patient. I always thought that coming from a member of a staunch Shia family will make settling in difficult for me. I thought that my university peers would not accept me. There were moments when I thought that standing by my principles might isolate me or make it harder to navigate new social environments. However, I have learned with time that authenticity is the most valued. One should know what is right and stick to it. Over time, I've found some cherished friends and peers who come from different backgrounds but have mutual respect for each other's beliefs.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

When I first arrived at university, I was a bit worried about how I would fit in with my religious practices, but I quickly found that our campus is very welcoming and gives you a friendly environment to study at. There are groups for Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and more, and they all host events that are open to everyone. This creates a great opportunity for people to learn about and respect each other's beliefs. I've attended events organized by both Sunni and Shia Muslim groups, and it's been amazing to see how everyone comes together to celebrate and learn. On a personal level, I feel very safe and secure practicing my own beliefs. The university has prayer rooms available, which makes it easy for me to keep up with my daily prayers.

Talking about my university professors, I am grateful for their support and help throughout. They understand the importance of religious observances specific to different groups and will make observances when needed. For example, I remember not being able to complete an assignment that was due in the first ten days of Muharram and my professor was kind enough in giving me an extension without deduction of marks. They're also very flexible with other religions and their festivities such as Holi and Diwali for our Hindu peers.

Overall, I do feel that the campus is a place where I can practice my religion freely and feel safe and secure. The acceptance and support I've experienced here have made a big difference in my university life, allowing me to focus on my studies and enjoy my time here.

Interview 6: Female 21, Sunni From University of Lahore on 29 June 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

Not quite, I don't think I have seen my parents going for such religious gatherings all through my life so we haven't really acquired any of that, at best I would offer my daily prayers and fast in the month of Ramadan. I think my brother hardly goes for the Friday prayer at the mosque and usually offers the rest of the prayers at home. I think it's partly because of how we grew up. My family has always been more private about our religious practices. We pray and observe important rituals, but mostly within the comfort of our home.

Even during the month of Ramadan, most of us don't have the time to sit together and enjoy iftar meals with the family. That's because we are all occupied with our study and work routines. Sometimes, we invite close friends and relatives over for iftar or for special occasions like Eid. These gatherings are intimate and meaningful, allowing us to share our faith in a more personal way.

Maybe in the future, I'll try to step out of my comfort zone a bit and attend some of these gatherings to see if I can benefit from that communal spirit.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

like I mentioned earlier, I don't come from a religiously active family so seeing people around in my university that follow Islam so ardently has definitely had an impact. I would say that the impact is mostly positive because the things and ideas which I should have essentially learned from home are now being introduced to me in this late part of my life.

Oh, one of the positives I think that have come from university life is attending some Islamic study circles with my friends on campus. It is an enlightening experience, to be honest. Understanding the meaning behind that Arabic text of the Quran gives you so much insight.

Another thing that has influenced my religious beliefs from the university include an additional sense of support and community that comes with practicing Islam together. During the odd nights of Ramadan, this year I was able to pray Nawafil prayers with my friends which was a memorable experience. Then, I enjoyed breaking fast together with a group of students and that makes me realize that as a family, we haven't truly enjoyed the community spirit that Ramadan and our religion offer to us.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

Again, I would say that I have not had the opportunity of experiencing the true essence of religion, or communicating with Allah on a deeper level and telling Him about my worries and aspirations with full conviction. So, my case is probably different than my peers'. I have seen them pray and recite so many verses of the Quran, and Quranic duas before important exams, and then I've also seen the joy on their faces when they come out of the examination hall with a successful exam attempt. It's heartwarming to see such a high degree of belief and I am trying to incorporate that in my daily routine.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

I think yes, it's my third year at university and I don't think I have any such event of students or staff members facing discrimination on religious grounds. Women who wish to have their head covered will never be restricted. Similarly, female students who prefer wearing western clothing have not been questioned by anyone at all. But I don't think this is like that in many other universities of my country. There are Christians and Hindus too. There are also a few Sikh students who are treated with a similar level of warmth and welcoming attitude as the rest of us. So, I really believe that the campus climate is suitably supportive and accepting, and I am very happy about that. For example, during our religious festivals, the university often allows us to use spaces for celebrations and gatherings. This includes everything from setting up prayer rooms during Ramadan to organizing iftar dinners where everyone, regardless of their faith, is welcome to join. During Muharram, we set up water stalls for everyone and then the models of the Masjid-e-Nabwi are prepared and displayed during Eid Milad-un-Nabi. Similarly, there are festivals for Diwali and Holi, and Halloween and Christmas for students.

Interview 7: Female 24, Sunni Kinnaird College on 29 June 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

To be honest, the women in our family do not go to many communal religious gatherings. We like to stay at home, offer our prayers, and do our Ibaadat (worship). Now that could be in the form of daily namaz or Quran recitation or even Nafl prayers during the more blessed nights or important days. This usually happens when Ramadan is going on, and that's pretty much about it. I do attend some Quranic interpretation classes online especially when it is being hosted by a renowned Islamic scholar

that I deeply admire. Other than that, I think we do attend Eid Milan parties that are hosted in our community hall. My school, college and university now have these gatherings which are enjoyable to attend, and give a sense of community and togetherness.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

One of the biggest changes that I've seen in myself after joining college is how I have started taking the Hijab (covering my head). Again, no one forced me or compelled me into doing something like this. But growing up, I have realized that we can easily tell Hindus and Christians apart just by the way they dress. Their appearances play an important role in representing their religious identity. So, when studying in an environment where students from different religious beliefs and different nationalities are welcome, I really thought it was important to adopt the teachings of our religion. The hijab gives us a sense of identity that connects us better to Islam. Other than that, I think I have started talking more about my religion to non-Muslims around me. I think that being Muslims, it is our duty to act as primary sources of information about the religion that we're practicing. When you adopt a welcoming stance and answer other people's questions about Islam, I think you fulfill your role to spread the teachings of your Allah and His Prophet and you might as well bring about a positive impact on those around you.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

I am glad to have connected with many students on campus who are 'religiously alive and invigorated'. It gives me so much satisfaction that I can talk to my peers on religious topics and engage in informative and healthy discussion because there is so much to share. Most of them are well-aware of Islam, and this helps me to enhance my existing knowledge. For example, my friends know of so many 'Wazeefahs' and are well-aware of the blessings that we can seek from Allah by reciting particular ayahs or surahs. I have started applying their beliefs with the hope of my academic success and the outcomes have been so positive so far. I find myself connecting with Allah better. I know My Lord offers a door to knock on where no prayers are left unanswered. We should just know how to call upon Him with utmost belief and faith that we will be supported by the will of Allah.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

Yes, I do find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity. For example, we have a prayer room on campus where students from different religions can go to pray or meditate. This space is always clean and quiet, and everyone respects each other's time there.

Nobody will question you of being in there even if you are not praying, or you belong to another religion. This is great to be honest, because all through our lives we have heard and witnessed horror stories of religious discrimination in Pakistani institutions. I would like to thank Allah to let me grow and thrive in an educational setting where no one questions my Hijab or what I practice as part of my religion. There are several classmates who have adopted contemporary fashion and Western dressing trends, but no one makes me feel like I am the odd one out. In fact, I only get more respect. So yes, the environment is safe and secure and supportive of different religious practices. I cannot obviously talk from the perspective of other students who follow a different religion than ours.

Interview 8: Female 19, Sunni Lahore Garrison University on 3 July 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

Yes, Alhamdulillah. I am proud to have been born in an Islamic household where we take these religious gatherings very passionately and seriously. Attending regular gatherings with friends and family, and neighbors is a favorite thing to do. It's also a moment where we get to know each other better, exchange food and gifts on auspicious occasions, and just stand by each other's sides during times of need.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

I don't think much to be honest. Because there is not much happening directly in the university that tends to impact how you think about religion or practice it. There are no such special classes or events held under the name of religion. The university promotes a contemporary and Western mode of education and within that, I don't think there's a lot of scope for doing religion or spirituality. But yes, you may get indirectly inspired from your peers or staff members. Sometimes, teachers give you references from Hadith or the Quran to motivate you generally. And I think it is very enlightening. I would often go back home and research more about the given reference in class, and that also motivates me further to communicate the teachings to my family, friends, and younger siblings. Similarly, I have learned from my friends. For example, one of my friends regularly offers Salat-ul-Tasbeeh, a special prayer. I didn't know about this properly until I met her in university. So, I have also incorporated that into my daily routine Alhamdulillah.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

Like I said in the beginning, my family and I have always been very close to religion. Especially when it comes to asking Allah for anything. I will literally ask My Lord for all small and all major

things in my life, with a strong hope that every prayer will eventually be fulfilled. That also applies to academic success. The rate of my prayers and probably my connection with Allah deepens so much during the exam season. I find myself offering more Nawafil (extra prayers) than usual, and then the efforts and prayers are reflected in my results as well. For example, there was one psychology exam that I took in the first semester which did not go too well in my opinion. I was not satisfied when I came back home, but continued to tell my tale to Allah. I kept on praying to him so sincerely and passionately. And eventually, I ended up getting a very decent score. So I think most of my academic successes can be attributed to the faith in religion and spirituality that I hold in my heart.

When talking about my academic social life, like I mentioned in the beginning I have connected with friends on our mutual religious interests. Some of my friends would motivate me to pray in certain ways, and I would do the same to others. This Ramadan, my group of friends and I are looking forward to conduct Taraweeh prayers for female students in our university community mosque. Most of us live away from home, so I hope this will be a great initiative to help everyone perform a special form of Ibadat, listen to the recitation of Quran, and pray in congregation.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

I cannot comment on part where my campus is supportive of spiritual and religious diversity because a large majority of students here are Muslims. Some might be Christians, but that's all I guess. Till date, everyone seems supportive and okay towards religious practices and forms of worship in the university environment. Like some girls in my class would cover their head and no one bats an eye. Some male students have a beard and others don't. Nobody bothers each other for practicing any part of the religion. Even in the hostel environment, people will maintain a sense of mourning during the month of Muharram to respect the faith of Shia Muslims. No one would play music or hold celebratory events in the hostel during the first 10-12 days of Muharram.

Talking about me, I think yes I feel safe and secure. Nobody has questioned me anything about my ways of practicing Islam so far. So Alhamdulillah, so far so good. No concerns have been raised till now, which is interesting because all through this time, media has always told us how bad and difficult life is under the name of religion in Pakistani educational institutions. But then again, I belong to the religious majority. Things might be different when we are talking to religious minorities.

Interview 9: Female 24, Sunni From Lahore School of Economics on 21 Jul 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

My faith and being a Muslim is important to me, so attending religious gatherings is a regular part of my life. Like you said about two ways, so I try my best to practice in both manners the individual basis and community settings.

Community Setting: Every Friday, I attend Jummah prayers at the mosque near my house with other women in the neighborhood. It's a social event too, a chance to catch up with friends and family after the prayers. This gets even better in Ramadan and then the Eid prayers of course. It is such a heartwarming feeling to meet and greet so many people,

During the week, I try to pray five times a day at home. It's a way to connect with Allah throughout the day and find some peace in the middle of my busy schedule. Sometimes, I'll visit the local madrasa (Islamic school) for a short Quran recitation class with other young women. There are two to three scholars who visit often, and I have attended a few sessions where the interpretation of Surahs such as Surah Yasin, Surah Nur, and Surah Baqarah have been done. These have been great experiences for me so far.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

College has exposed me to different perspectives on Islam and other religions, thanks to the professors and tutors I have interacted with. And the best part is that our university includes students from other religions as well. During the first year of my university, we took an Islamic studies close for example, we learn about different interpretations of Quranic verses and historical events. It's challenged me to think critically about my own faith and appreciate the richness of Islamic scholarship. You know, understanding about the less discussed parts of history amongst Sunni Muslims such as what happened at Karbala, or the history of prophets other than Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

There's also a vibrant Islamic society on campus. They organize lectures by visiting scholars on various topics like Islamic finance or women's rights in Islam. These events have definitely broadened my understanding of my religion.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

My faith plays an important role in my life, both academically and socially. Studying during exam periods can be stressful, so prayer helps me stay calm and focused. It also motivates me to be a good student – Islam emphasizes the importance of knowledge. Socially, I have found a great group of

friends who share similar values. We study together sometimes, and we also make sure to celebrate Islamic holidays like Eid together. It's nice to have that sense of community. As for colleagues, I haven't noticed any major changes in their views on religion. Most of them respect my beliefs, and I respect theirs. Occasionally, there might be friendly debates about different interpretations of religious practices, but it's always done in a respectful way.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

The campus climate is generally accepting of religious diversity. There are student societies for Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and even a small interfaith group. The university organizes events celebrating different religious festivals throughout the year.

Of course, there can be occasional misunderstandings. Sometimes people might have stereotypes about Islam. But when that happens, I try to have open conversations and explain my beliefs. Overall, I feel safe and secure expressing my faith on campus.

There are designated prayer rooms on campus for both men and women, which is really helpful for fulfilling my prayer obligations. Knowing that my faith is respected allows me to focus on my studies and build friendships without feeling judged.

Interview 10: Male 24, Sunni From COMSATS, Islamabad on 8 August 2024

1. Do you attend religious gatherings regularly, in a community setting, or on an individual basis?

I make it a point to attend the weekly Friday sermons, which serve as a spiritual recharge for me. While I don't regularly attend other community gatherings, I find solace in individual reflection and personal practice. For instance, when a task turns out to be more challenging than initially anticipated, I try to take a few minutes to clear my head and connect with my inner self. This personal time helps me stay grounded and focused.

2. Has college/university influenced your religious/spiritual beliefs until now?

My university experience has reinforced and strengthened the spiritual and religious beliefs instilled in me from a young age. However, the university exposed me to diverse perspectives and ideas, which helped me solidify my convictions. For example, engaging in discussions with peers from different

backgrounds and experiences broadened my understanding of various spiritual concepts and encouraged me to explore my own beliefs more deeply.

3. Has religion or spirituality played an important role in your academic social life and academic success? Have you noticed any changes in your colleagues?

Religion has played a vital role in my academic social life, as I've formed strong bonds with like-minded individuals who share similar beliefs. We often study together, support each other during challenging times, and celebrate each other's successes. I attribute my academic success to my spiritual beliefs, which have helped me navigate obstacles and stay motivated. For instance, during exam periods, I often reflect on my spiritual values to stay focused and calm under pressure. I believe that the failures I faced during my academic journey were an essential part of my growth, and I'm grateful for the lessons learned.

4. Do you find the campus climate to be accepting and supportive of religious and spiritual diversity? Do you find yourself in an environment where you can feel safe and secure when you have your own beliefs?

Although the campus climate may not have been extremely religiously diverse, I felt comfortable and accepted as part of the religious majority. I believe everyone is on their unique spiritual journey, and the campus environment allowed me to express my beliefs safely and securely. I observed that the university respected and accommodated different religious practices, such as having the facility of masjid inside the campus and supporting student organizations in arranging religious gatherings. This atmosphere of acceptance and understanding enabled me to practice my beliefs freely without fear of judgment or discrimination.