

## **Microaggressions in Multicultural Primary Classrooms: Educators' Perspectives in a Pakistani Metropolis**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand microaggression practices in multicultural primary education classrooms within the context of the Pakistani socio-cultural context. The study aimed to 1) identify the manifestation of microaggressions by teachers and 2) examine the perspectives of both primary teachers and school leaders regarding the diverse student population. A qualitative phenomenological research methodology was adopted, and data were collected from ten purposively selected government schools in Islamabad through latent classroom observations (Grades 4 and 5) using semi-structured interviews with school heads and focus group discussions with teachers. Thematic analysis using NVivo software revealed that educators do indulge in microaggressions frequently, even though they are unaware of the formal concepts, especially microinsults and microinvalidations. These behaviors largely stemmed from implicit biases, which has its roots in norms practiced in Pakistani society. Regional differences, language barriers, and the caste system also play a role as catalysts to this phenomenon. The findings highlight the critical need to adapt microaggression frameworks for the Pakistani context and recommend targeted cultural inclusion training for educators to promote equitable learning environments.

**Keywords:** Microaggressions, primary education, multiculturalism, critical race theory, implicit biases

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## Introduction

Microaggressions are defined as brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group (Sue et al., 2007). They can be delivered by anyone from any group, whether individually or in a group capacity. The impact of microaggressions is most painful, damaging, and harmful when they are acted upon by those who hold power or those who are disempowered (Sue et al., 2008). Various psychologists and early childhood education experts have contributed to the understanding of microaggressions at the primary level. For example, Michael Genhart's book "Ouch! Moments: When Words Are Used in hurtful ways," illustrated by Viviana Garofoli, explicitly addresses microaggressions (Genhart, 2015). Other examples of literature related to children and microaggressions include Sharee Miller's "Don't Touch My Hair" (Miller, 2018), Marcus Ewert's "10000 Dresses" (Ewert, 2008), and Yang Sookchoi's "The Name Jar" (Choi, 2003). These books provide clarifications that can help young children confront the reality of microaggressions and their potential impact on marginalized groups. It is crucial to address microaggressions at a young age because children can understand the difference between love and hatred and can separate empathetic and loving behavior from hurtful actions and words. Incidents of microaggressions at such a young and vulnerable age can have long-lasting effects on a child's mental health and psychological development (Carone et al., 2022).

Microaggressions have been studied extensively in terms of their impact on both psychological and physical health. Research has shown that microaggressions can result in stress, which can have negative effects on an individual's overall well-being (Harrison & Tanner, 2018). Discrimination and social anxiety disorders have also been linked to microaggressions, with everyday discrimination being a significant predictor of social anxiety. It is important to note that microaggressions are often not noticed by the person delivering them due to their subtle nature. Despite the challenges, efforts must be made to address implicit bias and microaggressions to create a supportive environment that promotes respect and eliminates all forms of discrimination in educational settings (Barber et al., 2019).

Microaggressions have significant implications in education. They can have a detrimental impact on the mental health of victims, create a hostile environment in educational institutions, contribute to the creation of a stereotyped climate, and even lead to physical health problems. Microaggressions in the classroom often trigger unfavorable dialogues and can lead to the avoidance of blame by the perpetrators. Unfortunately, teachers and mentors in educational settings are often ill-prepared to recognize and address microaggressions when they occur (Morrison et al., 2023). Educational settings have

become hotspots for controversies surrounding microaggressions and other forms of harsh dialogue, with debates over topics such as safe spaces, trigger warnings, and speaker invitations. There are advocates for changing or limiting certain forms of language usage in educational settings, while others argue that such restrictions would result in censorship of speech and thoughts (Gayle et al., 2013).

In educational institutions, particularly at the primary level, there is a presence of biases and stereotypes toward a specific cultural community. Teachers and school leaders display prejudiced and stereotypical attitudes, which can negatively impact how children from this community perceive themselves. Additionally, the data indicate that adults in educational institutions lack knowledge and sensitivity regarding microaggressions, as they often make implicit microaggressive comments about students from minority cultural groups. This lack of awareness is due to societal desensitization to biases and prejudices. It is important to note that numerous practices in society are based on biases and prejudices towards minority communities, both unintentional and intentional. For example, teachers may ask questions about students' birthplaces, native languages, and traditional norms, which can be considered microaggressions. Furthermore, teachers may make statements that deny the individuality of minority cultures within the dominant culture (Lehmann-Grube et al., 2023).

Studies have shown that microaggressions can affect the composition of student bodies, retention rates, and academic performance. Understandably, marginalized groups are at higher risk of microaggressions because of their vulnerability to stereotyping, underperformance, and lack of opportunities. Furthermore, the educational inequalities with respect to gender-based roles, such as the underrepresentation of females in vocational subjects, can also lead to microaggressions. There have been extensive studies on microaggressions at the college level, which have shown a direct relationship between depression and perceived discrimination among college students (Steketee et al., 2021). It has been observed in higher educational settings that microaggressions can lead to severe behavioral, cognitive, and emotional reactions, where students can react aggressively toward racial and ethnic groups. In such cases, the educators must be well equipped and support the healthy dialogue to minimize the negative effects of microaggressions (Sue, 2007).

Although there have been extensive research studies on microaggressions, the literature is still focused on deepening the racial framework of Western societies. In the Pakistani educational context, there are different socio-cultural aspects that are needed to be considered while addressing microaggressions. Pakistan's educational context has diversity in the form of languages, ethnicities, belief systems, and socio-economic statuses. The caste system is one of the key catalysts in this area as well. In metropolis hubs like

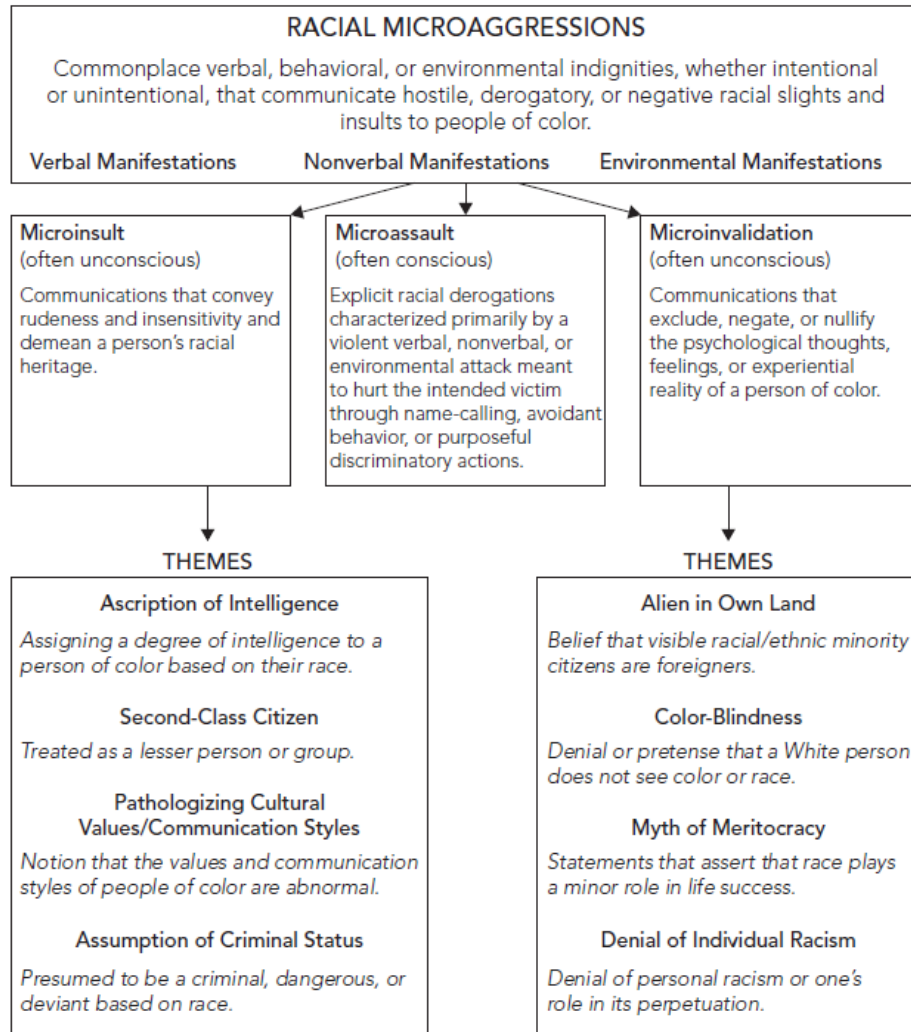
Islamabad, primary classrooms are highly multicultural, where students from various backgrounds are hosted in a single class. The need to establish significance for this study is of high importance, as the application of a microaggressions framework to a Pakistani context broadens the concept beyond conventional black-and-white racial binaries for addressing the complex, intersectional cultural prejudices. It is important to understand these dynamics for the development of inclusive learning environments in underrepresented educational settings.

### ***Types of Microaggressions***

While describing the term “microaggressions,” Sue (2007) described three forms of microaggressions, i.e., microassault (hurting someone through verbal or non-verbal acts), microinsults (looking at someone unintentionally with subtle looks that are usually dismissive), and microinvalidation. A micro assault is an outward statement or behavior meant to hurt a person based on the minority group to which they belong. Microassaults are the most closely related to outward hate and discrimination. Examples of microassaults are displaying a Confederate flag, discouraging interracial interaction, or telling a gay person that being gay is an abomination to their god (Sue et al., 2007).

The term "microinsults" refers to statements that are insensitive to a person's identity and heritage. Microinsults are not understood to be hurtful by the aggressor. However, such a statement or act displays an underlying negative message regarding a person's race. An example of a microassault is asking a Black person, "How did you get your job?" Although seemingly harmless, this statement could have an underlying meaning that the person is not qualified for the job because of their background (Sue et al., 2007).

The term "microinvalidation" refers to the statements that discount or deny the experience of another person. An example would be a student rolling their eyes or becoming distracted when a Latina student speaks about the lack of Latin history classes offered in the school (Strayhorn, 2008). Although the literature mainly focuses on the themes of racial microaggressions, many of these themes can be applied to other minority populations (Sue, 2007).

**Figure 1***Categories of and Relationships Among Racial Microaggressions (Sue, 2010)*

While Sue's (2010) taxonomy provides the foundational framework, there is ongoing debate among scholars about the definition, measurement, and direct cultural transferability of these categories outside the Western context. In societies like Pakistan, microaggressions rarely manifest purely along racial lines. They are deeply embedded in language marginalization, regional stereotyping, and caste-based discrimination. Applying Sue's framework in this scenario is a critical adaptation for capturing how implicit biases operate within this distinct socio-cultural environment. Mitigation of these subtle

exclusions necessitates a shift toward culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies. Currently, the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy within Pakistani primary education is severely underdeveloped and leaves educators ill-equipped for navigating complex multicultural classroom dynamics and maintaining equitable teaching practices.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives were achieved through this research study from an exploratory perspective:

1. To explore the existence of microaggressions practiced by primary teachers in their multicultural classrooms.
2. To unpack the views of primary teachers and leaders about the microaggressions while dealing with the multicultural population of students in a classroom.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were answered in this research study:

1. Were the microaggressions practiced by the teachers and leaders at the primary level?
2. What types of microaggressions by teachers were prevalent in multicultural classrooms at the primary level in the context of Pakistan, specifically Islamabad?
3. What were the views of primary teachers and leaders about the microaggressions during their teaching practices?
4. What implicit biases by the teachers and school leaders were causing the microaggressions in Pakistan, specifically Islamabad?

### **Research Methodology**

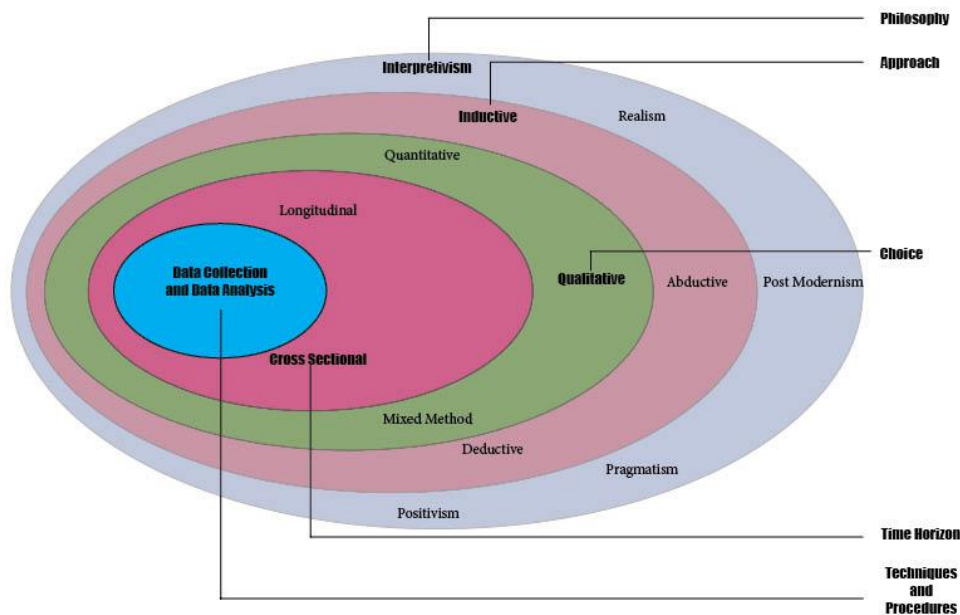
The research method followed in the study is qualitative research. This approach allows for an inductive analysis without predisposed dimensions. It aims to describe, understand, and interpret the meanings of experiences of human life, making it well-suited for the study's objectives. The researcher adopted the phenomenological methodology, which emphasizes empathy, openness, and understanding of the central underlying meaning of experiences. Additionally, the study justified the axiological stance of value-laden, highlighting the importance of personal interaction between the researcher and the participants through interviews. These methodological choices were informed by the Saunders onion model, which provides a comprehensive and systematic approach to conducting research, taking into account various aspects of the research process.

### *Participants of the study*

The sample size of this study was calculated using the item-to-response ratio with criteria of 1:30. So, the sample size was 600 employees. To avoid social desirability bias, workers' anonymity was ensured, which dramatically decreases it (Serenko & Choo, 2020). Respondents were also informed that there is no right or wrong answer and that their responses would be kept confidential.

**Figure 2**

*Saunders Onion Model, Source: Saunders et al. (2009)*



### *Participants*

The participants of the study consisted of the government primary schools run by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) in the Capital Territory of Islamabad. The total number of primary government schools with early childhood education in Islamabad was ten (10) when the study was conducted.

The sample for the current study was drawn from government primary schools in Islamabad using a purposive sampling technique to ensure alignment with the phenomenological aim of exploring the lived experiences of educators in multicultural

settings. From the twelve schools listed in the regional administration cluster table, ten (10) schools authorized by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) were purposively selected based on the high levels of cultural diversity.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school heads who were willing to participate in the study. Additionally, primary teachers of the 4th and 5th levels of education were purposively selected for focus group discussions (FGDs) (7 FGDs, 1 in each school). The class settings of 4th grade were observed during the data collection process for a period of 1 week each.

### ***Instrumentation***

The instruments used for data collection in the study included observations, semi-structured interview protocols, and focus group discussions. Observations were conducted using the Reality Check Approach to observe the actual practices of primary teachers in the classroom setting without informing the teachers about the purpose of the observations. Semi-structured interview protocols were used to gather the views and opinions of primary institute leaders about the understanding of microaggressions in an academic setting, specifically at the primary level. Focus group discussions were also conducted with primary teachers to gather their perspectives on microaggressions in multicultural classrooms.

The observation checklist, adapted from Sue (2010), was used to gather notes and broad themes from English and Urdu classes of 4th grade in selected schools. The qualitative data collected through the semi-structured interviews, observations, and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically with the support of NVivo software by QSR International.

The observation notes, transcribed documents of interviews, and focus group discussions were used to make the coding so that the themes could be identified in alignment with the research questions of the study. The observation findings were qualitatively analyzed with the help of notes, which provided themes for the next steps of focus group discussions and interviews. The communication content of verbal interviews was converted into textual documents through transcription, and content analysis was used for qualitative analysis. These instruments were chosen to gather a comprehensive understanding of microaggressions in the context of primary education in Pakistan and to address the research questions of the study.

### ***Data Collection***

The researcher collected data from Islamabad District, which comprises urban areas and four (4) rural areas. The selected sample schools were visited, and a research tool (semi-

structured interview) was administered to heads of the schools, who gave their views and opinions in the form of responses to questions of the tool. Data collected by semi-structured interviews were organized, classified, and analyzed through the qualitative thematic content analysis technique to get the interpretations and findings for the study. Results and findings were drawn according to the analysis and interpretation. Based on the findings of the research, recommendations were formulated to be adopted in the future for further research.

### ***Data Analysis***

In the current qualitative study, data were collected through the technique of observations, semi-structured interview protocols, and focus group discussions. Observation was used in the first step through a "Reality Check Approach" (RCA) to observe the actual real-life practices of primary teachers in a classroom regarding microaggressions, their understanding, and their extent. It is to be noted that only the classroom settings of the 4th and 5th grades were observed by the researcher through RCA to identify any types of microaggression practices. Teachers of the primary level institutes were not aware of the details of observations and what was being observed in their behavior, classroom, teaching practices, or overall educational environment of the class to get the real picture. Only the school leaders were briefed about the research purpose and objectives. After written permission from the school leaders, the classroom practices and dealings of only 4th and 5th grade primary teachers (who were part of the focus group discussion in the next step also) were observed by the researcher for a minimum duration of 01 week for the existence of any incidents (verbal, behavioral, or environmental) leading to microaggressions. The observation checklist included the basic elements and specifications identified within the literature, specifically from Sue. The research questions of the study were addressed through observation to identify the existence of any microaggression practices and types of microaggressions prevailing in multicultural primary classrooms.

For maintaining the integrity of the phenomenological approach, the initial coding phase strictly centered on the participants' lived experiences with the extraction of NVivo codes directly from the transcripts and observation notes. Only after these primary experiences were mapped did the researchers apply Sue's (2010) framework as a secondary theoretical lens for categorization of the phenomenon into thematic microaggressions. Methodological rigor and credibility were established through the triangulation of data sources, i.e., observations, interviews, and focus group discussions, and a peer debriefing was done to resolve any coding discrepancies.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Strict ethical protocols were maintained throughout the study, and institutional ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review committee. Formal access permission was granted by the FDE and the respective school heads. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before interviews and FGDs, along with ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw without penalty. The use of the reality check approach (RCA) for latent classroom observation was ethically justified and approved by the committee for the prevention of reactivity. Disclosure of the exact nature of observations to the teachers beforehand would have likely altered their natural classroom behaviors. To mitigate this, observational data were strictly anonymized, and no sensitive judgments were recorded on permanent personnel files, and the overall goal of the study was prioritized.

### **Results of the Study**

The analytical findings of the thematic analysis revealed four prominent themes extracted from the data collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. These themes were identified using the qualitative thematic analysis technique with the support of NVivo software.

The analytical findings revealed four prominent themes. Table 1 outlines the alignment between the research questions, data sources, extracted codes, and the final themes.

**Table 1**

*Thematic analysis mapping*

| Research Question | Data Source                                 | Sample Codes (In Vivo & Observational)                           | Final Theme                               |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| RQ 1, 2, 4        | Teacher Observations, FGDs, Head Interviews | Gender roles, cultural expectations, career assumptions          | Theme 01: Role Prejudice and Stereotyping |
| RQ 1, 2, 4        | Teacher Observations, FGDs                  | Rural vs. urban intelligence assumptions, language barriers      | Theme 02: Myth of Meritocracy             |
| RQ 1, 2, 3        | Teacher Observations, Head Interviews       | Dominant culture preference, language policing, caste favoritism | Theme 03: Pathologizing Culture           |

|         |                       |                                                                  |                                                  |
|---------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| RQ 3, 4 | FGDs, Head Interviews | Dismissal of harm, normalization of slights, lack of terminology | Theme 04: Insensitivity Towards Microaggressions |
|---------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|

### ***Theme 1: Role Prejudice and Stereotyping***

The observations and perspectives of the participants revealed that individuals from a specific cultural community were being unfairly labeled and assigned gender-based roles. This type of prejudice and stereotyping occurs when traditional expectations and stereotypes are imposed on individuals from a particular cultural background. At the primary education level, teachers and school leaders may hold certain beliefs and perceptions that indicate biased attitudes based on cultural affiliations. The observation notes highlighted specific questions that perpetuated these biases, such as asking if there were qualified female professionals in the student's family or assuming that an elder sister would discontinue education after eighth grade. These questions conveyed the message that women from a certain culture were not expected to pursue professional qualifications or work after marriage.

The interviews and focus group discussions further emphasized the biases and prejudices that can influence the teaching and learning process through stereotyping. For example, one participant mentioned that favoritism or perceived preferences between students and teachers can lead to biased actions. It is important to note that these assumptions and perceptions reflect biases and prejudices that can exist among teachers, leaders, and parents, potentially affecting the educational experience of students. However, the participants were not fully aware of the concept of microaggressions and did not have an extensive understanding of how biases and stereotypes based on culture, race, or gender can negatively impact individuals. Stereotyping and prejudice can result in creating an unacceptable image of a child, leading to distortions in their self-concept.

### ***Theme 2: Myth of Meritocracy***

It has been revealed in the study findings that intelligence has been associated with different factors, including color, gender, race, and culture, based on preconceived biases and prejudices. These assumptions adversely affect the principles of merit and equality on the basis of intelligence. Neutral statements are made and ascertained that race, culture, or gender are not the determining factors in success or opportunities, but the observations noted some instances where the students or parents were skeptically and unnecessarily questioned about their qualifications, and success parameters are defined based on resources or exposure to valuable opportunities. An example of such a question was, "Do you have a stable and good internet connection?" or "How often do you visit your village?"

This implies that individuals from rural areas or less privileged backgrounds tend to be less intelligent than individuals from city areas because of their lifestyle and constraints of resources. It was also assumed that unfair advantage of opportunities and resources is a “right” of individuals belonging to the dominant culture of that specific area. Moreover, individuals can also face prejudice and bias based on their physical appearance and social status because opportunities and resources for learning are available easily for individuals with a privileged background.

Microaggressions based on physical appearance are sometimes more harmful at the personal level. One such incident was shared by a participant in which a healthy boy was given the role of an “obese” individual in a stage play, which led to embarrassment and ridicule by classmates. Such incidents at the personal level can be extremely harmful to the mental health of a student. Some other factors affecting the differential treatment due to a diverse cultural background may include traditional values and norms of the minority group, as well as their language being seen as an “alien” language. These differential behaviors and prejudices indicate that meritocracy is a myth, and students may encounter numerous biases during their learning journey, particularly in multicultural classrooms in cities like Islamabad, where there is a dominant culture from Punjab. In one instance shared during a focus group discussion, a student who had recently moved from the province of KPK struggled with Urdu language proficiency, resulting in poor performance in tests and exams. The teacher initially considered the student to be intellectually weak but later realized that the language barrier was hindering the student's understanding. It was also discovered that the student's family predominantly spoke Pashto at home.

### ***Theme 3: Pathologizing Culture***

There have been several incidents reported where students from a minority culture were questioned repeatedly and unnecessarily about their language, communication style, and cultural norms by students from the dominant culture community. This unnecessary questioning is an indicator that the communication styles of minority cultures are pathologized to ascertain that the dominant culture is the best and ideal one. A few examples from observational notes are “Why are you noisy and loud?” or “Why do you use ummm (filler words) this much while talking?” There were several pros and cons mentioned by the participants of having a multi-cultural classroom at the primary level. Some of the most important pros mentioned by the participants are diversified learning experiences, exposure to new ideas, and cultural uniqueness. On the other hand, some of the cons were linguistic restrictions, preconceived prejudice, diversified lifestyles, unfamiliarity with cultural norms, and limited educational resources. Grouping within the classroom can also be influenced by a student's parents' interference with their interaction and acceptance.

Pakistani society also prefers the caste system, which can also affect the overall assumptions and behavior of teachers as well as students in a multi-caste classroom. Participants of the FGD highlighted the discriminatory behavior where teachers may show favoritism towards the same caste students. Furthermore, strong personal bonding between students and teachers can lead to privileges and differential behavior. It has also been emphasized in the FGD that teachers from the Pashtun culture are also representing the minority cultural group within the teachers of Islamabad, but they show less or no discrimination towards the Pashtun students because of the familiarization with the cultural traditions and language. This indicates that the teacher belonging to a dominant culture may hold bias towards the students from a minority culture consciously or unconsciously, while the teacher from a minority culture can also have bias towards the students of the majority culture consciously or unconsciously. These biases and prejudices are based on the uniqueness of each individual, who has a different mindset, perceptions, and assumptions regarding life.

#### ***Theme 4: Insensitivity Towards Microaggressions***

The data revealed a significant lack of knowledge and insensitivity among adults in educational institutions regarding microaggressions. Numerous implicit microaggressive comments were made by teachers and leaders about students from minority cultural groups, which can have detrimental effects on their learning and mental well-being, even at the primary education level. All participants expressed that they had little to no knowledge about the concept and implications of microaggressions in the multicultural learning environment of Islamabad. This concept was unfamiliar to them because society as a whole has become desensitized to verbal and behavioral biases and prejudices. As one participant mentioned, it is common in our society to label every Pashtoon as "Khan" and every short person as "chotu." The participants only became aware of the term "microaggressions" and its implications after receiving detailed explanations and information from the researcher. Before this, teachers and leaders were neither knowledgeable nor trained to handle or address incidents involving microaggressions. All participants believed that numerous practices in society were based on differential biases and prejudices towards minority communities. These practices were sometimes unintentional, while in other cases, intentional derogatory remarks or comments were made toward individuals based on their race, color, gender, or culture.

The observation notes highlighted instances where teachers repeatedly asked questions about students' birthplace, native language, and traditional norms. Some examples of questions asked of Pashtoon students were, "How can you speak such good Urdu?" or "A non-Pashtoon person asking a native Pashto speaker to teach them words in their native language." Furthermore, teachers and school leaders made statements that

indicated a disregard for minority cultures, denying their individuality within the dominant culture. Teachers often made stereotypical statements about the multicultural nature of Islamabad, emphasizing that the city accepts all cultures or has diverse friendships due to its multiculturalism. However, constantly reminding individuals from minority cultures about these aspects can be seen as an implied microaggression and is a common occurrence in Islamabad.

## **Discussion**

According to the study, several significant findings shed light on the experiences of students from minority cultures in multicultural classroom settings about microaggressions. These findings were based on a theory-driven approach by Sue (2010). The study revealed that microaggressions were present in three forms, namely microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations, aimed at minority culture students. It has been noted that the concept of microaggression was somewhat unfamiliar to the teachers and leaders at primary institutions. This unfamiliarity can be one of the reasons for the biases and prejudices towards the minority groups because teachers may have preconceived assumptions. Furthermore, acknowledgement of a phenomenon is making things difficult for the teachers to accept the diversity and have inclusivity in their classrooms as per the international standards and standard operational procedures. Proper training and awareness among the teachers and leaders are essential to using diversity as a tool in academic success. These findings and recommendations are in alignment with the theoretical framework provided by Sue (2010), Fortunato and colleagues (2018), and Watanabe and Song (2015).

### ***Research Question 1: Were the microaggressions practiced by the teachers and leaders at the primary level?***

The definition of racial microaggressions provided by Sue et al. (2007) included verbal, behavioral, or environmental acts (intentionally and unintentionally) that are disrespectful towards individuals of minority color. It has been found in this study that such microaggressive behaviors were shown by the teachers and leaders at the primary level. It has also been found in the study that teachers and leaders at the primary level had little or no knowledge about the concept of microaggressions. Hence, the number of their actions, gestures, behaviors, or statements can be categorized as unintentional microaggressions. The conventional mindset of individuals belonging to the majority culture in Islamabad, Pakistan, may have preconceived biases and prejudices towards the minority culture, which is one of the reasons for the lack of awareness about microaggressions. Many research studies have also indicated that microaggressions in the classroom can have adverse effects on culturally minority students, affecting their motivation level and social support system,

limiting their social interactions, and ultimately leading to their social exclusion. Teachers and leaders at the primary level must be well-equipped and culturally competent to address any such derogatory instances and discriminatory behaviors by fellow teachers or students to provide equal rights to education to all students and have positive behavioral development for academic success.

***Research Question 2: What types of microaggressions by teachers were prevalent in multicultural classrooms of the primary level in the context of Pakistan?***

According to Sue (2010), racial microaggressions are common verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that communicate negative slights to people of color, whether intentional or unintentional. These microaggressions can take the form of verbal, non-verbal, or environmental manifestations. Sue categorizes microaggressions into three types: microinsult, microassault, and microinvalidation. The current study focuses on microinsult and microinvalidation within primary educational institutions and the participants (teachers/leaders). The observed microaggressions were found to be unintentional and unconscious acts by the teachers and leaders. Microinsults are rude and insensitive communications that demean a person's racial or cultural heritage, while microinvalidations exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of people of color. Teachers at the primary level often display insensitivity towards children of minority cultural heritage through their verbal, non-verbal, and environmental behaviors. Additionally, teachers' lack of knowledge about microaggressions can lead to the exclusion or invalidation of the psychological experiences of children from minority cultures. While these manifestations are typically unintentional, intentional insults or invalidations can occur during instances of anger or stress. It is important to note that intentional assaults characterized by violent attacks are almost non-existent in authorized primary institutions, as the focus is on providing a safe and nurturing environment for children.

***Research Question 3: What were the views of primary teachers and leaders about the microaggressions during their teaching practices?***

The study found that teachers and leaders of the primary level were unaware and unknowledgeable about the concepts of microaggressions. The word "microaggressions" is foreign or alien to teachers in the sample primary institutions. However, all the teachers and leaders were highly qualified and recruited on a merit basis in the sample institutions. However, the educational system lacks the understanding and knowledge of microaggressions, along with their implications and effects in a diverse cultural society. The educational system lacks microinclusiveness, where teachers and leaders recruited for teaching are neither trained nor well informed about international practices and laws. The

theory of microaggressions is based on CRT, which is widely accepted and practiced at international institutions. The CRT tends to show a constant trend of unequal treatment of minority races or cultures within the educational setting. It has been highlighted in the CRT that students related to a minority race or cultural heritage have been given a disadvantage for opportunities due to the lack of resources, which negates the rule of equality in education (Gunawan, 2017). The findings concluded that after the provision of a detailed briefing about the concepts of microaggressions and their implications, teachers and leaders of primary institutions were in a better position to understand and relate to the instances that were considered casual and conventional in their minds but were microaggression practices in theory. As the microaggressions were not considered an educational issue, no interventions or precautionary measures have been introduced or implemented in educational institutions.

The Islamabad Capital Territory is a city of diversified cultures in which individuals belonging to neighboring cities reside for their livelihood, better education, health facilities, or any other personal reasons. ICT is dominantly under the influence of the culture from Punjab province because of its twin city status with Rawalpindi. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the nearest province that shares boundaries with Punjab and ICT. After the Afghan war, Islamabad also hosted thousands of Afghan refugees whose native language was not Urdu. This resulted in multicultural classroom settings, as many Afghan children got their education from the public schools of ICT. It can be concluded that without the proper knowledge and understanding of an issue or concept, it is almost impossible for even an educated individual to handle the unwanted situation efficiently and based on merit. If the teacher or leader is unaware of the implications and consequences of any verbal, non-verbal, or environmental manifestation falling under the umbrella of microaggressions, then it is impossible to maintain the rule of equality in the teaching-learning process for students belonging to a minority culture.

***Research Question 4: What implicit biases of the teachers and school leaders were causing the microaggressions in Pakistan?***

The qualitative study found that there were several implicit biases within the teachers and school leaders, which were causing intentional or unintentional microaggressions in primary institutions. Some of these implicit biases were the caste system, regional discrimination, religious affiliations, conventional mindset, and accepted societal norms. These biases can lead to prejudices and differential behavior towards the less acceptable community in the form of intentional or unintentional microaggressions. It is to be noted that such biases were not considered invalid or dishonored by society as a whole because individuals feel proud based on such biases to some extent. It can be explained that the preference of the caste system is considered honorable and a moment of pride for

individuals belonging to the same caste. Similarly, some religious affiliations are stronger and more acceptable than others. Pakistan is a society that is rigid and fundamental at its core. Hence, it is difficult to change the conventional mindset of the population, especially for centuries-old traditions and cultural norms. The implicit biases within an individual mold the mindset and thought process according to the ease of general acceptability. Teachers and leaders of primary institutions are also part of this society and hence have a certain mindset for several ideas.

Sometimes it is difficult for an individual who has biased views about caste or culture to accommodate the inclusion of any other caste or culture. Some common microaggression practices were not even considered harmful and wrong by the individuals who were facing them for a long period. It is suggested that proper sensitization of society through literature and practices is needed to bring a change in the biased mindset of the population. Furthermore, international rules and regulations need to be followed, especially by the educational system of Pakistan, to have cultural diversity with inclusion and acceptability to ensure equality.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The current study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample of the study was small and geographically concentrated within Islamabad's government schools and was selected purposively. The findings of the study cannot be generalized to the broad context of all Pakistani educational institutions. The study focused exclusively on the perspectives and behaviors of educators, and the absence of data from the children and parents limits a comprehensive understanding of the lived impact of these microaggressions. Despite utilizing a latent observation approach, the presence of the researcher may have introduced observational reactivity, and the categorizations of specific behaviors inherently rely on researcher interpretations and cultural translations of the microaggression constructs.

### **Conclusion**

The research study concludes that there are microaggressions present in multicultural classroom settings of primary schools in ICT. These microaggressions are generally unintentional and unconscious due to a lack of awareness and knowledge about the concept and implications of microaggressions. The study specifically observes three types of microaggressions, namely microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. It is noted that teachers and leaders in primary schools hold implicit biases and prejudices against individuals from minority races, cultures, religions, or ethnicities. These biases are based on preconceived notions influenced by conventional mindsets, societal norms, power

imbalances, and caste systems. Despite being well-qualified, these teachers unintentionally and intentionally perpetuate microaggressions within educational institutions. Once individuals become aware of the concepts and theoretical implications of microaggressions, they can identify daily life practices, words, actions, and gestures that can be related to microaggressions. It is crucial to address microaggressions to create a safe learning environment and provide equal opportunities for all individuals. Students, faculty, and parents should collaborate to better understand how words or actions can deeply hurt others. This study serves as a starting point to identify a problem that can be further explored through quantitative and qualitative research methods to find solutions for improved and equitable learning.

### **Recommendations**

Addressing the issues of microaggressions in today's society, especially in educational institutions, is crucial for promoting equality and inclusivity. To ensure equal access to educational resources and a safe learning environment for individuals of all genders, races, religions, and cultures, several recommendations can be implemented:

1. Create a safe and approachable learning environment for cultural minorities at all levels of educational institutions.
2. Invest in mandatory diversity and inclusion training for faculty, staff, and administration.
3. Introduce a refresher training course on international educational concepts and the management of multicultural student communities.
4. Increase faculty awareness of microaggressions by educating them on international guidelines and concepts to ensure compliance with international standards.
5. Promote awareness and sensitization through literature, workshops, seminars, training courses, webinars, and social networking.
6. Establish proper protocols and procedures for cultural inclusion, which should be monitored and evaluated by governing authorities.
7. Provide faculty with incentives such as certifications, accreditations, and awards for professional development in cultural diversity and inclusion.
8. Encourage personal development of faculty, staff, or administration in multicultural knowledge to better understand students' backgrounds and avoid relying on stereotypes.
9. Create opportunities for cross-cultural interactions among faculty members and administrators, including organizing cultural festivals to promote and showcase cultural norms.

There is a dire need to raise awareness about microaggressions, diversity, and inclusivity to get the most benefit from diverse cultures in education. Awareness and sensitivity can be created by conducting workshops and seminars and advertising the information on conventional and digital media platforms. The curriculum also needs to be upgraded to inculcate diversity and inclusion. In order to meet the international standards and protocols in the field of education, updated teacher training courses, diplomas, certificates, and accreditations should be encouraged for the professional development of teachers. Furthermore, compliance with the international standards for diversity and inclusion in educational institutions can be monitored by the educational department through supervision and monitoring teams.

Educational institutions should have counseling departments so that the students and teachers can get support and help from professionally trained psychiatrists as per their needs. If any case of microaggression or discriminatory behavior is reported, it should be handled as per the international rules and laws to ensure the safety and security of the students of all races, genders, religions, or cultures for the provision of equal rights to education to every child.

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