

## **Young Pakistani Citizen's Vision for Tomorrow**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the hopes and fears of children, both boys and girls, aged 10-14 years, studying in government and private schools of Karachi, Pakistan. Data were collected using a questionnaire regarding the children's three main hopes and fears to their personal future, local future and the future of the world, their views on particular issues of social concerns and to inquire about children's involvement in any social organizations, their learning about these issues at school and their vision/images for the future in the year 2030. Subsequently, a focus group interview was also conducted in order to gain an in depth understanding of the responses of the students. The findings reveal that children from both gender groups were more optimistic for their personal future; however, the girls are less hopeful about the future of their local area. Children from both genders were found concerned about the increase in crime and violence, poverty, environmental degradation and social disparities prevailing within their local area and the world. It will also bring to light the level of children's involvement in social actions, the image they aspire in future for the contemporary world. Though the findings show that children are not involved formally in the activities of any social development organization even then they foresee a very positive and encouraging role to play in future for making this world a better place. Many of these children also reckoned teaching and learning regarding social and global issues in their schools highly important. It also provides some suggestions and implications for stakeholders who believe that developing knowledge, skills and attitude of forward-looking thinking is vital in order to promote the notion of responsible citizenship.

**Keywords:** hopes and fears of children, optimistic, pessimistic, crime, violence

### **Introduction**

According to Hicks (2001), "Children we teach in school today will become parents, voters, workers, business people and creative thinkers of tomorrow. From this generation will come leaders of the early and mid-21<sup>st</sup> century". Countries around the world including Pakistan are grappling with how best to educate children to meet the challenges and become leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This century has brought with it a number of revolutionary changes in the fields of science and technology, affecting the lives of people locally and globally. It has also given rise to global conflicts,

environmental concerns, crime and social injustices. Education is thought to be the most effective tool to address such issues as it provides children with adequate opportunities to understand these issues and guidance to prepare them to deal with the challenges that lie ahead of them reasonably and conscientiously. However, Holden (2005) cites that little is known about the children's understanding of such areas. In order to educate them, it is important to explore the images they have for their own personal future, the future of their local area as well as of the world.

As Hicks (2001) has rightly suggested that images of the future are a critical measure of a society's inner well-being, acting as a mirror of our times. The hopes and fears of the children for their future will influence what they are prepared to do in the present and what they are prepared to work towards (Hicks and Holden, 1995). If young children do not have access to images of a more just, ecological and peaceful future, personally, locally and globally, the range of possible futures that they can envision may be severely limited.

The first study in 1994 focused on the hopes and fears of over four hundred young people, aged 7, 11, 14 and 18 from South West of England. The study found that young citizens showed a growing awareness of social and environmental issues and were concerned that their local communities would be affected adversely by increased violence, unemployment and racism and a lack of facilities for young people. Similar concerns were expressed at a global level, with many children fearing increased war and conflict. This research study builds on one carried out in 1994 (Hicks and Holden, 1995). The study is being repeated and enlarged involving other countries including children of Karachi, Pakistan. This study explored children's images regarding their own, their locality and the future of the world and their vision for the future. This paper will discuss the findings- hopes and fears for the future of both boys and girls studying in grade 5 of the public and private schools in Karachi.

### **Research Method**

In order to obtain the perspectives of both boys and girls belonging to the different sectors, the study was conducted in two private and three public sector schools which included five single sex schools: 2 boys and 3 girls of Karachi, Pakistan. Within

these schools, students of grade five, a total of 178 children were selected, boys (n=94) and girls (n=84).

With the consent of the principal, children were recruited in the study and data was collected through a questionnaire and focused group interview. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. In the first part of the questionnaire, the children were asked to provide their views regarding three main hopes and fears related to their personal future; the future of their local area; and the future of the world. In the second section, they were asked to predict whether the future for themselves, their local area and the world would be better or worse. They were also asked to predict whether social problems such as violence, prejudice, environment, poverty, health, and unemployment would get much better, a bit better or stay about the same. In the third and last section, the children were asked about their involvement in any social organization, their learning about the issues at schools and their vision for their future. The questionnaire was administered to all 178 students. Data analysis of the quantitative data was entered into an excel sheet and the percentage of responses were calculated and compared between the gender variable. Qualitative data was coded for emerging themes and ideas, and then represented statistically in terms of frequency of the responses.

Following the analysis, focus group interviews of a 5-6 children from each school were conducted in order to seek clarification, explanation and elaboration of some ideas stated in qualitative part of the questionnaire and explanation of high number of similar responses to answers in quantitative data. The focus group interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions based on the analysis of the questionnaire. The discussions were tape recorded and key points were also noted down during the interviews. Data from the focus group interview was transcribed. Transcriptions were read and ideas categorized according to emerging themes.

### **Literature Review**

The future belongs to today's children but children's voices are generally absent from deliberations about and efforts to shape the future world. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 says that children have the right to express themselves freely. Children should be regarded as citizens of today rather than citizens in waiting. Children and young people in most parts

of the world have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes (Save the Children, Report 2006). Pakistan is no exception. The prevailing social norm sees children especially girls and disabled children as the property of their parents, teachers and elders who must do as adults tell them. In a Pakistani society, children are seen as to be under the direct control of their fathers who make all decisions for their children regarding their education, profession and marriages (Dean, 2007- HDP Symposium). It is also observed; in schools no opportunity is provided for students to express their views and opinions. Our teachers are so busy in completing the prescribed curriculum that they do not entertain student's questions and neither do they allow them to participate in the decisions concerning them considering them to be incompetent in knowing what is good for them. Children are not encouraged to raise their voices or to question these decisions. The conception of children as property, see parents but not children as rights holders. This marginalizes children's existence as independent considering them to be obedient and passive without raising questions.

People's hopes and fears for the future influence what they are prepared to do in the present and what they are prepared to work towards (Holden, 2007). Hicks (2002) and others have suggested that images of the future are a critical measure of a society's inner well-being, acting as a mirror of our times. Ascertaining the views of young people towards the future thus serves as an indicator of their current concerns, beliefs and actions and as well as indicating the role they see for themselves as future citizens. In studying children's hopes and fears for the future, we need to understand their personal hopes as well as what they feel about key issues affecting all our lives. These key issues – identified in this study as poverty, environment, conflict, racism and health - relate both to local and global communities. The belief that young people should understand such issues is central. The world would be a far better place if children's views were seriously and systematically taken into consideration, if children's participation as citizens and bearers of rights was encouraged and empowered (UNICEF Report, 2006).

Research conducted in 1994 (Hicks and Holden, 1995) explored the hopes and fears of UK pupils aged 7, 11, 14 and 18, making it possible to track the development of children's thinking. The study indicated that British children aged seven and eleven were less cynical and more optimistic than older pupils. Nonetheless, they showed an

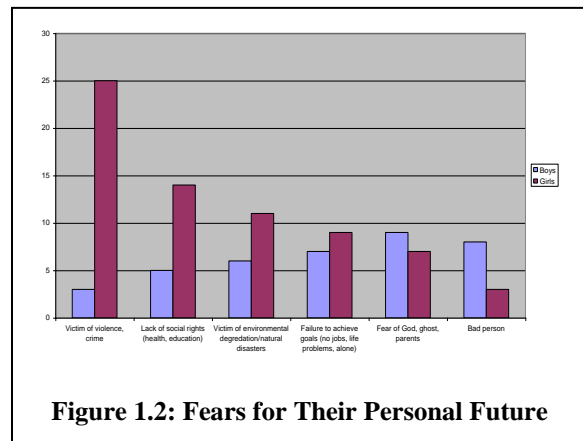
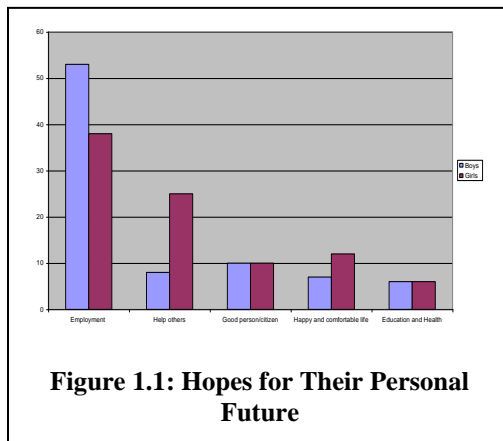
increasing awareness of social and environmental issues and were concerned that their local communities would be affected adversely by violence, unemployment and racism. Similar concerns were expressed at a global level, with children being particularly concerned about an increasing number of wars.

As young children grow into adulthood, new rights and responsibilities are acquired. Therefore, we as educators are responsible to provide children with opportunities to make decisions about their future. These empowered groups of young boys and girls may represent only a *drop in the ocean*. However, these significant drops can create ripples of change at the local, national and global levels. Thus, opportunities need to be provided for children to demonstrate their strengths, their unity, and their hope in order for adults to realize that boys and girls are touching the lives of adults surrounding them, and in the process of transforming relationships between adults and children (Save the Children, Report 2006).

## Findings

### *Hopes and Fears for Children's Personal Futures*

The figures 1.1 and 1.2 shows the responses of both boys and girls asking them to identify three hopes and fears for their personal future.



The graphs show that the children's hopes and fears for their personal future were rooted in the impending world of the adult.

**Employment.** About more than three quarters of the children envisaged the possibility of capturing jobs that are hierarchical, competitive and status proven. Both the boys and girls aspired becoming doctors. While a few of the boys also aspired to be pilots, engineers, army officers and lawyers while the girls aspired to become lawyers, models and teachers. While both boys and girls aspired to a high status profession some girls from the private schools also envisaged the possibilities of getting high status jobs but only one fourth of the girls from the government schools saw themselves becoming teachers. Their choice of teaching is rooted in the fact that in our culture women are expected to take care of the family and perform household chores. Teaching in the school, being a half day job enables the women to have a career and cater to the needs of her family.

**Democratic Values.** The next two personal hopes for the girls and boys were helping others and zeal towards becoming a good person and citizens by demonstrating it through service to humanity. The girls wanted to help others, beginning with their family and extending to those less fortunate than themselves. They mentioned, “*treat people for free*”, “*construct hospitals for the poor people*” and “*take my parents to perform hajj*”. While the boys hoped they would become “*kind and caring*”, “*honest and brave*”, “*serve their country and people*” and “*spread peace in the world*”. These hopes reflect the values that our children are instilled with from their inception at home. They are continuously reminded at home, at school and at religious centers that we are all brothers and sisters and that they have to become good and honest children who care for the human race. Therefore, it was not surprising that children come to see the importance of these values and hope to live their lives according to these values.

**Happy and Comfortable Life.** Both boys and girls also aspired to lead a happy and comfortable life. They aspired to *have their own homes, travel to other countries* like America, London and Malaysia and *wear good and fancy clothes and have a luxurious car and a house*. This for the girls was their third priority. They hoped to receive higher education by going to college and university, learning to read the Quran, acquiring good results and being active students was their goal. Evident from the data, the responses of the children emerges from their personal experiences. As the boys are constantly

interacting with the society, they want to achieve the luxuries of society while the girls who remain indoors prefer spending their time studying and reading the Quran.

When asked to express their fears, both boys and girls found it difficult to identify three personal fears. The boys found it more difficult than the girls, with nearly two out of three response left blank or irrelevant. The three fears expressed by the children for their personal future mirrored the situation prevailing around them. While the fears were expressed by both boys and girls, the emphasis differed.

***Victims of War and Violence.*** Most of the girls although only a few boys feared, being victims of violence and crime. These concerns are due to the increase in violence in their neighborhoods and violence leads to result in loss of life and property. Thus they expressed the fear that they might personally become victims of crime and violence. The girls in the focus group interview claimed that there was an increase in crime and violence in their own communities with increased robberies, snatching of mobile phones and purses, bomb blasts and the use of violence as a way of resolving conflicts. One of the students mentioned, “I fear for my life. Crime is increasing. They put a gun to your head and demand your mobile phone”. Another student mentioned, “of late there are a lot of bomb blasts taking place.... It is not safe for us to go out of our houses”. Their fears are a result of the exposure they receive via different communication technologies such as television, newspapers, radios and internet which makes them apprehensive and fearful about their personal future.

***Fear from God, Ghosts and Parents.*** The boys’ major fear was from God, ghosts and parents and enduring bad habits and doing bad things. They feared acquiring bad habits and receiving punishment from their parents and God for it. They feared becoming addicted to drugs, using abusive language or watching vulgar movies that would force them to move away from the teaching of Allah as mentioned in Quran.

***Lack of Social Rights and Failure to achieve goals.*** The second fear the children expressed was the fear of being denied their social rights such as the access to education and health facilities. The girls feared that they would “not be able to go for higher education” and complete their schooling as “I fear my school will close down and I will have nowhere to study”. While the boys felt that they would not be able to achieve their

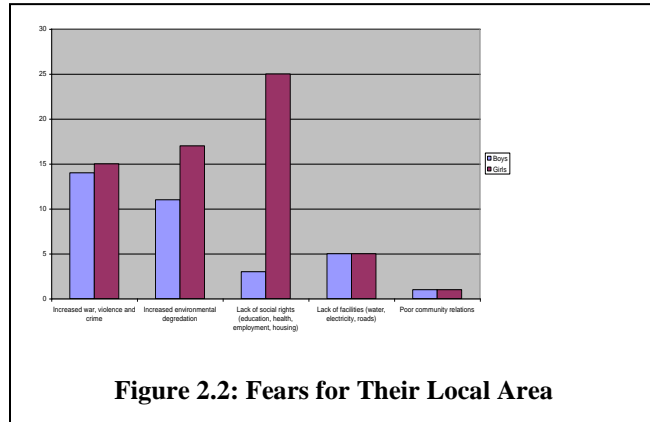
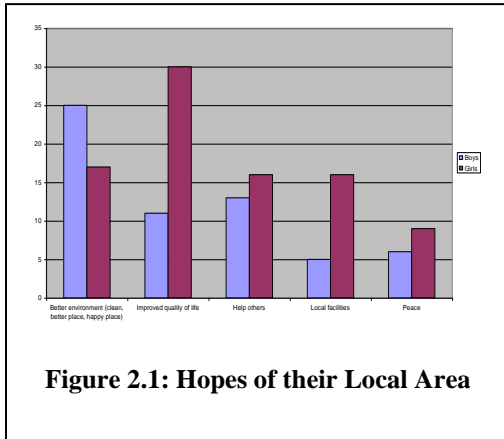
goals due to lack of employment they would remain poor, failure in their examination “I fear I will not be allowed to study more and I will be poor”, “I will be unemployed”. This is most probably due to the fact that boys in Pakistan are expected to be the sole bread winner in many families. Another reason could also be the present recession around the world where a number of skilled labourers are being laid-off due to the financial crises. Children also feared that increased environmental pollution will have negative effects on their health as clean drinking water would not be available and diseases were more like to increase due to the poor sewerage system and disposal of garbage.

***Environmental Degradation and Disasters.*** Both groups of children also feared being victims of environmental degradation and natural disasters which will have ill effect on their health and tsunami shared like the tsunami in 2004 and earthquake in Northern Pakistan in October 2005. It is worth mentioning that the girls were more concerned than the boys in expressing this fear. This is often the case as women and children are more vulnerable and are concerned about the environment in which they live. These concerns are probably due to the fact that Pakistan had recently experienced one of the most devastating earthquakes in its history in October 2005. This was soon followed by the catastrophic Tsunami that hit Indonesia and the adjacent areas of the Indian Ocean in December 2004. Since then natural disasters have occurred in many places in the world. Natural disasters like earthquake and tsunami are extensively covered by television which could lead children to become fearful of them. It is evident children were aware of major events in the news and were concerned about the implications of these for themselves and their communities.



**Hopes and Fears for their Local Future**

The tables 2.1 and 2.2 shows the responses of both boys’ and girls’ to the open ended questions on the three hopes and fears for their local future.



The children's hopes and fears for the future of their local area (Karachi in general and their neighbourhood in particular) were the opposite of each other. On the one hand they hoped for an improved quality of life for the people in their local area while on the other hand feared a life of poverty. They hoped for a better environment while fearing increased environmental degradation. They feared increased war, violence and crime, and hoped for peace. They wanted to help others to ensure improved community relations rather than allow them to worsen.

*Improved Quality of Life and Better Environment.* Both girls and boys expressed the same hopes for their local area but the importance they gave to them varied. The girls gave priority to o receive an improved quality of life with social rights to health; education and employment while this was the boys third priority. They hoped “everyone will have their own house and there will be more hospitals”. “I hope that the roads will be clean and there will be a good drainage system”, and “there will be clean drinking water”. This is likely because women aspire to lead a happy and comfortable life wherein they are able to nurture their children than men in Pakistan. The boys considered having a better environment as their first priority while the girls considered it their third priority, where there would have a clean environment and there would be more and more trees,

plants and vegetation.

*Helping Others.* The second hope for both the groups was of helping others. They saw themselves helping others to keep their local area clean and peaceful. They hoped that “people will be more kind and help each other”, “people of the community will help each other and be friends” and “People living happily”.

The fears of this group of children directly mirror their hopes. Both groups of children feared an increase in violence and crime for the future of their local area, there would be greater degradation of the environment and that provision of health and education and facilities such as clean water and electricity may decrease which would result in unemployment diseases and poverty concern than the boys with regard to increase in crime and violence.

*Lack of Social Rights.* More than half of the girls overwhelmingly predicted a lack of rights to education, health care and employment which they feared would result in environmental degradation with diseases and death for greater number of people in the neighbourhood. They expressed their fear, “there will be a shortage if hospital facilities and people will get sick and die”. “There will be hunger and unemployment”

*Environmental Degradation.* The boys’ main concern was the increase in environmental issues such as ‘pollution’ and ‘trees being cut down’. Spending more time outside the house than girls they have first-hand experience of dirty streets littered with garbage and overflowing gutters due to a poor sewerage system

*Violence and Crime.* Both groups of children feared increase in violence and crime. A girl aged 12 stated that ‘people in my area are continuously fighting with each other because there are many different political parties’. While another girl aged 14 claimed that “so many people are dying in different incidents such as bombing, terrorism, accidents and nobody is doing anything about it”. The girls seem more concerned as it is a general nature of women to be concerned about humanity.

Linked to crime and violence are concerns about poverty, health and education. They worry that because of the increase in violence local level schools will remain closed

and children will not be able to receive education and this will result in poverty and poor health conditions.

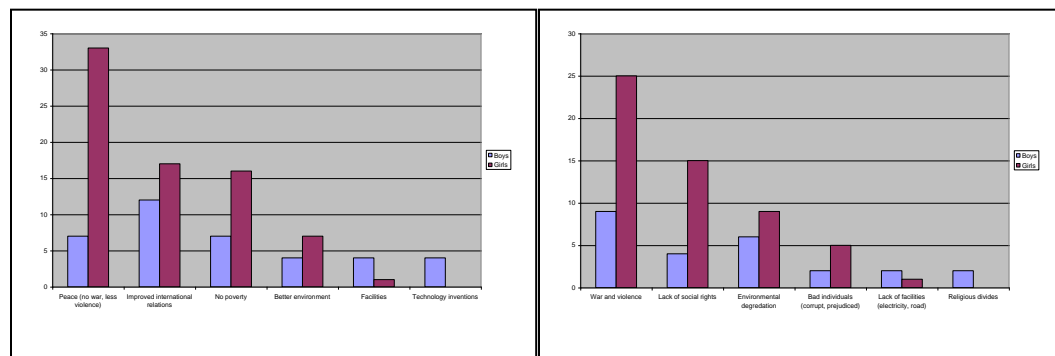
Issues in local area	Boys%				Girls%			
	Increase	Same	Decrease	No response	Increase	Same	Decrease	No response
<b>Violence</b>	28	29	41	2	28	23	48	1
<b>Unemployment</b>	45	23	31	1	25	24	50	1
<b>Prejudice/racism</b>	24	27	46	3	13	19	67	1
<b>Environmental problem</b>	18	20	61	1	26	8	63	3
<b>Poverty</b>	32	24	44	0	32	17	50	1
<b>Health</b>	75	13	12	0	65	23	12	0

Table 2.3: Concerns regarding the social issues to the future of their local area

When the children were asked about their concerns of the social issues with regard to the future of their local area, they seemed very optimistic to issues such as poverty, employment, health, and violence as evident in table 2.3. The responses are allied directly from their hopes for the local area where they aspired that every citizen be provided with the basic social rights. This according to them could lead them to live in a better environment with improved community relations. If people will be happy then the above mentioned social issues will not prevail in the local area. With regard to prejudice, I guess the children are optimistic because in Pakistan, we are not confronted with the racial issues as the majority population is Muslim who treat each other equally on the basis of nationality, religion and creed.

**Hopes and Fears for the Global Future**

Tables 3.1 show boys’ and girls’ responses to open ended questions asking them the three hopes and fears for their global future.



The children's hopes and fear for the future of the world were similar to their hopes and fear for their local area. The children are not only aware of what is happening in their local communities, they are also aware of what is happening around the world. More girls than boys responded to the questions regarding hopes and fears for the future of the world. This indicates more interest in the future of the world which could be because they were exposed to the world and issues facing the world by watching television and listening to discussions at home. As Gordon, Holland and Lahelma cited in Arnot and Dillabough (2000) asserts 'girls are more conscientious and knowing students'.

***Peace and International Relations.*** With regard to the world, interestingly, all the children responded. The girls and boys differed on their first and second hope. The girls overwhelming hoped for Peace, while the boys hoped for improved international relations while their greatest fear for the future was of more war, crime and violence. The girls hoped for *no war, less violence in the world* as means to improve international relations while the boys anticipated better relationship between countries and people as an important means to reduce crime and violence. To obtain peace they felt that the causative factors of war had to be addresses and improved relations with other countries and peoples (fourteen percent). They suggested the development of *better relations between different countries but especially between Muslim countries and America and wanted both to make to solve Kashmir Issue.* They suggested, "*They (Americans) should listen to us (Muslims) and we should listen to them, in this way we will create love within our hearts for each other and in this way we will stop fighting.*"

They also mentioned, "*To solve the Kashmir Issue the government of India and Pakistan must work together. When they work together some change will take place. The people of Kashmir will become free...it has been so many years but they are still being killed. I want the resolution of Kashmir issue; want to see the independence of Kashmir, so we can live a prosperous life.*"

***No Poverty.*** Eleven percent of the children desired a world in which there would be greater social justice, a world in which there is no poverty because there would be more jobs created and people would be ensured employment.

The rapid increase in war and terrorism around the world has led to children feeling insecure about the future and hope for more peace. One child mentioned, “war will increase, the fights are going on and no action is being taken’ and another stated, ‘cartoon controversy issue.... People are taking out processions and rallies, and the government is not doing anything... so these kinds of things are happening again and again... it will become worse and many countries will keep on fighting like this’. This shows that the children are well aware of what is happening in the world. Both boys and girls appear to share the same concerns regarding increase in war and violence and hope actions would be taken by governments to improve the situation as they themselves felt powerless about them.

Issues in the World	Boys%				Girls%			
	Increase	Same	Decrease	No response	Increase	Same	Decrease	No response
<b>Violence</b>	46	14	40	0	25	16	58	1
<b>Prejudice/Racism</b>	31	24	43	2	33	24	43	0
<b>Environmental problem</b>	34	20	45	1	29	6	64	1
<b>Poverty</b>	43	18	39	0	21	16	63	0
<b>Health</b>	62	25	11	2	62	23	15	0

When the children were asked about their concern about the social issues with regard to the future of their global area the responses of both boys and girls varied. The girls seemed very optimistic to issues such as global violence, prejudice, environmental problems and poverty and health as evident in table 3.3. Whereas the boys seemed quite pessimist about global violence and poverty and optimistic about the issues such as prejudice, health and environmental problems. The responses are mirrored directly from their hopes and fears for the global area where they fear a world with more violence, crime and religious conflicts.

**Action for Change**

Despite having a clear understanding of the kind of world they would like, these children did not envisage any roles to bring change in the prevailing society. In most Pakistani schools, the classroom teaching is focused on completing the textbook and learning on memorization so as to pass the exam. There are little or no opportunities for

students to participate in activities aimed at improving the school, the local community or the world in which they live. This did not come as a surprise that the majority of children did not have an experience of being involved with any organization that may be striving to bring change in the society. Of the 178 children, only 3 girls and 2 boys were members of Girl Guides and Boy Scouts.

Response	Personal		Local		Global	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Much better</b>	115	65	88	49	80	45
<b>A bit better</b>	22	12	57	32	47	26
<b>About the same</b>	29	16	18	10	16	9
<b>A bit worse</b>	9	5	9	5	14	8
<b>Much worse</b>	-		4	2	15	8
<b>No response</b>	3	2	2	1	6	3

	Boys		Girls		Total
<b>lot</b>	6	0%	7	4%	58%

	Boys		Girls		Total
<b>lot</b>	4	8%	3	5%	71%

Table 4.0 shows the responses of the children to the things they actually do to make their local community or the world ‘a better place’. Regarding work done at school both boys (4) and girls (75) mentioned their involvement in raising funds and collecting donations such as organizing a mela, collecting money for disaster victims and in campaigns to keep their school and area clean. Most of the children had got this opportunity because of the earthquake which left a number of people dead and homeless. There had never before such an overwhelming response to address the needs of fellow citizens. Occasionally schools also raise funds for other needs such as supporting in the infrastructure of a new wing in the school and establish an endowment fund. This

approach is very superficial and leads to an assumption that raising money and organizing a mela is the only way to solve the issues of poverty and hunger. Besides raising funds children mentioned helping others, as the funds they raised were given to *'help the poor and needy people'*. The children, especially the boys, felt not much was not being done at school to teach them how to minimize global and environmental issue nor do they facilitate in discussions about the future.

### **Vision for the Future**

Children were asked to draw or write about the kind of future they would like for the world to be in the year 2030. Both girls (84) and boys (94), are very optimistic about the future. The girls imagined a beautiful environment with better facility whereas the boys imagined more education, an advance in technology. Browns findings (1984) also supports the data that girls are more likely than boys to reject a technological future and that materialist values are *'endorsed by and large by males'* (p. 111). However, the images of a few children from both the groups indicated they were pessimistic about the future. They feared more fighting, more bomb blasts and increase in poverty. The fears for the future mentioned by the children reflect the fears that they have developed from the experiences of the present situation to materialize in the future.

### **Implications and Suggestions**

The hopes and fears of the children vary according to their gender; however, what is consistent is their concern about the future and their wish to study it at school. The data reveals seems that the local and the global area issues are important, however, no provision is provided to educate children with these issues in the school curriculum. Children are not blank slates, thinking feeling beings aware of their own desires and of the problems facing their local areas as well as the world. 70.2 percent of the boys and 44% of the girls felt that they could do a lot to make the world a better place. Children need to look at the underlying causes of such conditions and read some of the many articles exploring the issue (Hicks and Holden, 1995). Some of these issues are mentioned in the social studies curriculum but they just seek to inform students suggesting it is the duty of the government to address them. The data indicates students want to be active and engaged learners learning systematically to understand these issues

and more importantly they want opportunities to make a difference.

Therefore, it is required that teachers address these issues if they want to help children to be prepared for the challenges that wait ahead of them.

- Introducing occupations that portray non-stereotyping roles for men and women through lessons in English and Social Studies.
- Studies and issues about the local area could be brought in the classroom through the development of curriculum and textbooks. Time needs to be given to tackle these issues.
- Involving students in active work to improve the local area which will build on children's enthusiasm and helping them realize that they have an important part to play as citizens of their community (Hicks and Holden, 1995). It is seen that a few schools in Karachi engage in fund raising, giving donations and 'mela activities', but this approach is seen to be very superficial and leads to assumption that giving money and organizing a 'mela' is the way to solve the issues of poverty and hunger.
- The teaching of geography should include the study of issues and successes of local and global countries in brief at this level.
- The teaching of history is biased and focuses mainly on the wars and the achievements of the leaders and rulers of the subcontinent. It is important to give equal time to peace-keeping and peace-building, which will encourage children to envisage their own future so that they can maintain and build on their positive approach to life.
- The teacher's role is to have the courage to listen to children's concerns', engage them in debate and support their developing understanding of the issues. School Councils offer many opportunities to deal with 'real issues' for students and teachers.

Children must be taught how to be active citizens, aware of how the society changes and the part they can play. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to use a socially critical approach to learning, to challenge current values and examine the



possible future alternatives.

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