Journal of Pedagogy and Education Science (JPES)
Vol. 2, No. 03, pp. 209-220
journal.iistr.org/index.php/JPES
DOI: 10.56741/jpes.v2i03.350

Curbing Hate Speech through Education: Modalities for Equipping Future Teachers

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received 28 May 2023
Revised 14 June 2023
Accepted 25 August 2023

Keywords
counter-speech
hate speech
prospective teachers
teacher education

ABSTRACT

A holistic education that embraces children's physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth within a framework of human values is essential for the sustainable development of humanity. Inappropriate use of language causes intolerance, violence and disharmony in society. Training for the effective use of peaceful language through education is a vital need of the present community. Hate speech, verbally and digitally, has become one of the most common methods for spreading disruptive and discriminatory messages and ideologies. Education has a significant role in curbing hate speech and equipping learners to combat hate speech and intolerance. Educational practices that promote respect for pluralism and diversity in all areas of life are to be framed at the teacher education level to equip prospective teachers to face the challenges of hate speech. This paper presents the definition, cause and consequences of hate speech in an educational context and proposes strategies to empower future teachers to address hate speech. Prospective teachers are to be trained to address the issues of hate speech through various methods, as suggested in the paper.

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Introduction

In February 2023, the Supreme Court of India observed that nowadays, there is a growing consensus around hate speech. There is no scope for hate crimes in the name of religion in a secular country like India. It has to be rooted out, and the state's primary duty is to protect its citizens from such crimes. It is undeniable that violence in all sectors of personal and social life is a common disharmony of the contemporary world. It is dangerous that educational institutions meant to be the nurseries of peace become fertile lands for violence. One of the four pillars of learning proposed by Jacques Delors in 'Learning: The Treasure Within' is living together in harmony. Current education is inadequate to promote the art of living together in harmony. Students are forcefully participating in unhealthy competitions and cannot demonstrate social skills. We need an education that seeks to nurture the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that comprise a culture of peace. Long-term proactive strategies are to be planned and implemented to boost peaceful persons who resolve conflicts non-violently. A holistic education that embraces children's physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth within a framework of human values is essential for the sustainable development of humanity.

We envision that the supreme aim of education is to transform individuals into ambassadors of peace. In recent years, extremism and hate speech has become a controversial topic and a problem that needs to be urgently addressed in democratic societies [1]-[5]. The language we use is the reflection of thoughts and cognitions. Hate ideas are subsumed in hate words, whether oral or written. All human beings share a universal faculty: that of communicating. It is a mental marvel used for meaning-making. This multifaceted linguistic ability includes speaking, listening, reading, writing, or using sign language. Language acquisition is undoubtedly the first significant event in human communicative history, being sustained first by interaction at home and then by education at school [6]. Inappropriate use of language causes intolerance, violence and disharmony in society. Training for the effective use of peaceful language through education is a vital need of the present community.

Freedom of speech is of paramount importance in a democracy. Article 19 (I) of the Indian constitution assures all citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression. When an individual expresses views supporting nationalism, patriotism and secularism, those expressions become a part of fundamental rights. However, there are certain reasonable restrictions on the freedom of speech for maintaining peace and harmony in society. Freedom of expression indicates that every human being has an opportunity to communicate caringly, compassionately and cordially towards social accord and unity. Education has a significant role in curbing hate speech and equipping learners to combat hate speech and intolerance. Educational practices promoting respect for pluralism and diversity in all areas of life should

be framed at the teacher education level to equip prospective teachers to face the challenges of hate speech. This paper presents the definition, cause and consequences of hate speech in an educational context and proposes strategies to empower future teachers to address hate speech. Review of literature, reflection of documents, inquiry into social issues and interaction with future teachers lead to the proposals of this paper.

What is hate speech?

Hate speech, verbally and digitally, has become one of the most common methods for spreading disruptive and discriminatory messages and ideologies. Hate speech originated beyond institutions, organised groups and youth; it is also built on informal dialogues, everyday experiences and particular opinions and reproduced—subtly or explicitly— [7]. The 267th Report of the Law Commission of India defines hate speech as an incitement to hatred primarily against a group of persons depicted in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief and the like. According to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), hate speech covers many expressions that advocate, incite, promote or justify hatred, violence and discrimination against a person or group of persons for various reasons. United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, launched by the Secretary-General in June 2019, is the first system-wide initiative to tackle hate speech. The United Nations Strategy defines hate speech as "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language concerning a person or a group based on whom they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or another identity factor". Ref. [3] states that hate speech includes all forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin. Ref. [8] describes hate speech as abusive discourses that attack the characteristics of specific social groups, such as ethnicity, religion and gender. According to Ref. [7], it is characterised by (1) demarcating an individual or group of individuals, the object of stigmatisation; (2) assigning this group a series of qualities considered undesirable; (3) generalising stereotypes for all the members of the social group; and (4) placing the hated group outside the space of everyday relationships, where their presence is deemed to be hostile and unacceptable. Therefore, hate speech is much more than words [9]; it can attack the human dignity of the hated group and the entire community. The narrow interpretations of hate speech, sometimes called 'dangerous speech' and 'fear speech', refer to the discourse that incites hatred against a specific person or a vulnerable social group that constitutes a crime. The broad interpretations could consider hatred any discriminatory

or offensive discourse against minorities or vulnerable individuals, which may not be a crime but may be morally condemned [10]. The Rapporteur of Minority Issues of the United Nations [11] differentiates three types of hate speech expression: (a) expression constituting an offence under international law that can be prosecuted criminally, (b) expression not criminally punishable but that may justify a restriction and a civil suit and (c) expression that does not give rise to criminal or civil sanctions but still raises concerns in terms of tolerance, civility and respect for others. No universally accepted definition seems to exist. Instead, hate speech is a broad umbrella term covering many hateful and harmful expressions, typically targeted at groups or classes of persons with specific characteristics [12]. Hate speech has also found its way into online gaming, with many gamers exchanging hate speech over their headsets as they fight each other on the virtual battlefield. The violent nature of the games themselves and the anonymity prevalent in online gaming sites encourage players to indulge freely in fantasy behaviours that would be unacceptable in real life. These behaviours can include using hate speech – such as racist, ethnic, antisemitic, misogynistic, and homophobic slurs – against opponents.

Online hate speech is defined as every form of expression, including text messages, images, music, videos, games, or other symbols and signs, disseminated by any possible form of digital media, including websites, forums, blogs, email, social media platforms, or other online communication channels; targeting an individual or a group of people based on protected characteristics, such as race or ethnic origin, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or disability; to incite, spread or to promote hatred or other forms of discrimination, or when the message can be reasonably understood as likely to produce that effect [13]. Any communication targeting someone based on protected characteristics with the intent or potential impact of inciting, spreading or promoting hatred or other forms of discrimination is hate speech.

Hate speech affects individuals in many ways. The victims lose trust in any person who is a part of the offender's group. They feel targeted, ashamed, and scared that they would be treated similarly from other sources. They feel vulnerable, unsafe, or preoccupied. The hate speech victims among college students face low self-esteem and self-endurance [14]. Victims of online hate speech may feel their human dignity is violated, no longer seeing themselves as reasonable and appropriate by socio-cultural norms. It may lead to normalising discrimination, intolerance and hateful attitudes and behaviours. Victims of online hate speech may show low self-esteem, sleeping disorders, increased anxiety and feelings of fear and insecurity; they may feel lonely or isolated. Victims of online hate speech may develop social anxiety and feel the need to isolate themselves. Online hate can create a broader climate of fear and polarisation, with social cohesion being threatened by hostility.

Social, political, religious or any bias is behind the context of all hate speech. Ideological doggedness without understanding the multiple perspectives of coexistence is a significant reason for hate speech. These people formulate negative stereotypes and perceive others as less worthy. According to Social Dominance Theory [15], people differ in the extent to which they desire and seek superior status and power over others. People who want greater social dominance tend to be more prejudiced towards other groups, believing that their 'ingroup' is superior to others. When people attempt to make sense of the world around them, they tend to create overgeneralisations about others; in some cases, these may develop subconsciously, so the person may not be aware of them [16]. Such a perspective has several drawbacks, including that it fails to adequately consider the influence of people's group memberships and intergroup relationships on their attitudes. The lack of a judicial system that ensures the prevention and punishment of the culprits is a crucial issue. Thus, socio-psychological and emotional factors push individuals and groups towards hate speech. Hate speech challenges social cohesion, erodes shared values and can lay the foundation for violence, undermining peace and stability and is a significant impediment to the fulfilment of human rights.

There are many programmes worldwide to address the social concern of hate speech and to eliminate violence and hate crimes. The No Hate Speech Movement is a youth campaign led by the Council of Europe Youth Department to mobilise young people to combat hate speech and promote human rights online. Launched in 2013, it was rolled out at the national and local levels through national campaigns in various countries. The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech aims to give the United Nations the room and resources to address hate speech, threatening United Nations principles, values and programmes. Many such movements worldwide support the new generation of digital citizens, empowered to recognise and reject hate speech and promote the importance of tolerance, non-discrimination, pluralism and freedom of expression. When it comes to the criminalisation of speech, there arises a question as to what types of speech should ideally be criminalised, whether only a specific sort of hate speech should be forbidden and whether all hate speech should be made punished by criminal law or should be dealt with under civil law. Sections 153A, 153B, 295A, 298, 505(1) and 505(2) of the Indian Penal Code declare that any word, spoken or written, or employing signs or any visual representation that 'promotes disharmony, enmity, hatred or ill-will' or 'offends' or 'insults' based on religion, ethnicity, culture, language, region, caste, community, race, or any other is a punishable offence [17] establishing and enforcing of laws should be strengthened for countering retaliatory hate speech and escalation of violence. However, education is a vital tool to address the challenges and reform the youth in maintaining an active climate of human rights in the face of the rapid changes our societies face today. Students are

stirred to think about the world when our knowledge of it is revealed to be ambiguous, equivocal, and mysterious. The education process focuses not on acquiring information but on understanding relationships within and among the subject matter under investigation [18].

Teacher Training Modalities Against Hate Speech

The aim of the training of teachers in the treatment of hate speech must be to identify it in the classroom and address its complexity, promoting the debate on responsibility, protagonists or arguments exposed. It is about dismantling hate speech based on the construction of counter lectures, adding "more speech to the conversation and trying to change the mindset of the hate speaker" [19]. The Report of the Secondary Education Commission,1952-53, observes that what every Indian shares in common is not religion but citizenship. Citizenship is the framework for national unity and identity. Responsible citizenship is also the matrix for collective peace. Schools have an enormous responsibility in the dissemination of human rights and peace. This responsibility is to be performed fruitfully by the teachers. Within educational solutions, one of the main tools is teacher training. We need teachers capable of exposing hate speech and extremist ideologies who utilise counter-address to transmit peace. The analytical and critical skills of prospective teachers need to be enhanced to transform them to identify social issues and respond appropriately. Better teacher training is required, explicitly tackling the problem of hate speech and extremism in society. We need to train teachers who dare to open spaces for political debate in their classes, where emotions and ideological positions are expressed. We need teachers who can promote inclusive education for social justice, coexistence and peace [20]. Thus, there is a need for well-trained teachers who do not try to impose political correction but who have developed the necessary skills to navigate the emotions and debates that arise in the classroom [21] to redirect the existentialist positions toward legitimate positions in democratic discussion [4]. Hence, future teachers should be trained to help young people develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to reflect the fundamental principles of human dignity and existence. Analysis of comprehensive articles and documents on hate speech focuses upon the following strategies at the teacher education level to help prospective teachers mitigate hate speech.

A. Developing the skill to spot hate speech

Applying the concept to the educational setting, Ref. [18] argues that the classroom is a community of inquiry, which should lead to questioning, reasoning, connecting, deliberating, challenging, and developing problem-solving techniques. The hate speech severity is to be identified for generating the appropriate responses to social issues. It helps to understand how the move from offline to online media has changed the nature of hate speech and how it is spread. It provides insight into how social media contributes to the stratification of hate. It helps to look at online hate from the perspectives of the creator, the distributor, and the

audiences receiving and responding to it. The amount of violence possibly resulting from inflammatory speech may depend on various factors, such as the capacity of the speaker to exercise influence, among others, the nature of the language used, the context in which it is uttered, the medium used, and the kind of the audience reached [22]. The content, tone of the expression, intention to cause harm and the nature of dissemination determine the intensity of hate speech. The criteria for assessing the severity of hate speech, derived from the Rabat Plan of Action: The Rabat threshold test should be a part of the curriculum at the teacher education level. It includes (a) Context: Context is important when assessing whether particular statements are likely to incite discrimination, hostility or violence against the target group, and it may have a direct bearing on both intent and causation. Analysis of the context should place the speech act within the social and political context prevalent at the time the speech was made and disseminated; (b) Speaker: The speaker's position or status in the society should be considered, precisely the individual's or organisation's standing in the context of the audience to whom the speech is directed; (c) Intent: The state of mind of the speaker is to be analysed. Negligence and recklessness are not sufficient for an act to be an offence. In this regard, it requires the activation of a triangular relationship between the object and subject of the speech act and the audience. (d) Content and form: Content analysis may include the degree to which the speech was provocative and direct, as well as the shape, style, and nature of arguments deployed in the address or the balance struck between arguments deployed (e) Extent of the speech act: Extent includes such elements as the reach of the speech act, its public nature, its magnitude and size of its audience. Other factors to consider include whether the speech is shared, what means of dissemination are used, the frequency, quantity and extent of the communications, whether the audience had the means to act on the incitement, whether the statement is circulated in a restricted environment or widely accessible to the general public.

Social issues can be presented before the prospective teachers. Cooperative discussions will be held to identify the role of hate speech in the case and spot the severity based on the above criteria. This would enable prospective teachers to observe human rights issues and comment with a critical consciousness. The awareness and skills acquired during the preservice phase must be transferred during school teaching.

B. SELMA Model training

SELMA (Social and Emotional Learning for Mutual Awareness) is a project co-funded by the European Commission in 2019 that aims to tackle the problem of online hate speech by promoting mutual awareness, tolerance, and respect. This is highly informative and beneficial for teachers to train adolescents to promote mutual awareness, patience, and respect. It helps

them to better understand the phenomenon of hate speech through social and emotional learning (SEL), media literacy (ML) and citizenship education (CE). Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management are the areas in SEL. The prospective teachers are trained to recognise one's emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behaviour. The ability to successfully regulate one's feelings, ideas, and behaviours in different situations helps manage stress, control impulses, and motivate oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals. He can take the perspective of and empathise with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Teachers are expected to understand social and ethical behaviour norms and recognise family, school, and community resources and supports, thereby establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. Training in social-emotional learning is essential at the teacher's education level to acquire the ability to communicate, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

Media literacy must be amalgamated with the foundational literacy for nurturing the generation Alpha towards peaceful uses of texts, images and gadgets. Media literacy is accessing, analysing, evaluating and creating messages across various contexts. It provides a set of perspectives from which we can expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter. It allows educators to start from pupils' existing understanding of the media. It uses a set of key media concepts – production, language, representation, and audience – which can be applied to contemporary mass media. It enables children and young people to think more consciously and deliberately, to understand and analyse their own experience as content online users and creators [23]. Media Analysis and media production are to be trained among the preservice teachers to develop critical analysis skills to understand context, drivers, cultural perspective, etc. Global citizenship education benefits informed and critically literate citizens of local, national and international systems and structures. Teachers who demonstrate ethically responsible behaviour promote the highest standards of professional practice. They respect cultural diversity and empower learners to foster their commitment to non-violence and peace. SELMA model training [13] can be adapted to the context of teacher education institutions for engaging ways to increase young people's participation to act effectively and responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

C. Training for pro-social communicative competence

Language is the tool for creating interpersonal relationships and fostering togetherness. Language functions in communication as a tool for information dissemination and building interpersonal relationships (LeBlanc, 2011). Most interpersonal conflicts are caused by

misinformation, inaccurate perceptions, and half-truths reflected in various communication modes. Through the meaningful usage of language, harmony and peace can be developed. Ref. [20] emphasises that 'peace consciousness' involves awareness, attention, intention, and effort towards expanding peace. There must be an atmosphere of change in the classroom and school environment wherein language becomes a tool for creating harmony, self-respect and respect for others instead of continually glorifying one's creed and belief at the cost of dehumanising others. Ref. [6] defines communication as an act of sharing capable of bringing about harmony or disharmony. The use of language can cause friction and perpetuate violence. He has propounded the notions of peace linguistics, which he projects as an advocacy for peaceful language use and communicative peace, which he sees as an offshoot of communicative competence. This is because language cannot be divorced from society, where it influences social structures and design. This sociolinguistic perspective holds validity in our time because, as the world is increasingly heating up, linguistic productions are becoming less compassionate and more violent. Aspects of language and peace can be woven into an applicable form in human communicative interaction [6]. Ref. [24] suggested that peace linguistics is essential to sustain human relationships and peacebuilding.

The prospective teachers need to be trained in prosocial communication, promoting collaboration and constructivism in the classroom. Verbal and nonverbal communication reflects teachers' immediacy behaviour, which is a dominant factor of teaching competency. Increased teacher immediacy increases student-teacher communication and interaction in classrooms [25]. The reinforcing language of the teacher stimulates the self-esteem and self-efficacy of learners. Teacher education courses should focus on developing pedagogical practices for connecting the self and community through speech. Teaching with communicative compassion is envisioned as a learning outcome at the teacher education level. Language that reflects self-respect and respects the dignity of others is to be embedded in all teaching competencies. During college-based practice teaching, the teacher educator and the peer teacher trainees can observe classes and provide feedback on constructive and peaceful communication regarding various speech acts and associated nonverbal behaviour patterns. This would help the prospective teachers to dignify their daily dialogue and refine their class management.

D. Curricular interventions

Possibilities for curricular and cross-curricular learning experiences must be explored and integrated to counteract aggression and cultivate compassion in daily educational practice. Social learning theory suggests environmental and cognitive factors influence human learning and behaviour. Children observe their surroundings, assimilate and imitate that behaviour.

Children who are heavy viewers of violence on television and aggressive video game players lose the ability to empathise and respond proactively. They gradually internalise violence as a way of solving problems. Positive models of social behaviour are to be presented in educational contexts. Teachers need training to give lessons from a humanistic and positive perspective. Teaching should awaken positive feelings and experiences, which help induce productive and positive thoughts among learners. Strategies like questions, stories, anecdotes, games, experiments, discussions, dialogues, value clarification, examples, analogies, metaphors, role-play, and simulation help promote peace through teaching-learning. On retention of concepts, memorisation of texts, or achieving individual goals and excellence but on learning to reflect, share, care, and collaborate [26]. Teachers can use all the above situations to highlight the consequences of hate speech with appropriate examples and issues. Learner-centred student-initiated strategies should be devised according to the contexts, and participatory learning experiences should be promoted to understand fundamental human virtues and values. Various programmes and plans will be implemented to increase awareness about diverse cultures. Spiritual matters should be discussed and encouraged instead of religious extremism and segregation. Activities to promote conflict resolution, protect human rights, and promote national integration and international understanding will be planned as integral curriculum components. Empathy-based counter-speech that mitigates the harmful effects of hate speech is to be developed.

Helping young people to deal with hate speech and practice counter speech is to be integrated with pedagogy. Counter-speech refers to direct responses to hate speech to refute or undermine it. According to Ref. [19], counter-speech is considered to be a promising solution as it can help control the hate speech problem and, at the same time, it supports free speech". Counterspeeches or alternative narratives combat hate speech by discrediting and deconstructing its content and basing its arguments on human rights [3]. Modelling of assertive communication behaviour is essential in curricular transactions.

Conclusion

Future teachers are expected to assume expanded roles as influential members of the larger community. Hence, constructive thinking and intervention of teachers are essential towards addressing diversity challenges. Everyone deserves safe and inclusive learning environments free of harassment and discrimination. Hate speech can potentially incite violence and cause psychological, emotional and physical damage. Educators and policymakers should develop appropriate pedagogical approaches to combat all forms of hate speech in schools by helping teachers solve these problems. The reframing of teacher education for strengthening teachers' educational responses to build learners' resilience to combat hate speech is to be reflected in all curricular reforms. Classroom activities should equip children

to protect the fundamental human right to freedom of expression and prevent the face of violence. Therefore, it is crucial to formulate education strategies that allow students to voice their opinions without being abusive towards others. New pedagogical strategies are required to prepare future teachers to strengthen skills in critical thinking, social and emotional learning, intercultural dialogue, and global citizenship to foster the necessary prosocial behavioural change to counter hate speech and promote inclusiveness and diversity. At a time when violent conflict regularly dominates the news, teachers are the key to helping young people obtain the knowledge, skills and perspectives they need to envision their role in creating a more peaceful world. Hence, teachers who excel in skills for enhancing peace, tolerance, coexistence and mutual respect are to be formed through innovative and ingenious teacher education programmes.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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