

Mainstream English Press and Poverty Alleviation: Critical Analysis of Letters to the Editor Section of Daily Dawn (Aug 2018-Dec 2019)

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the role of English press in providing a platform to readers to reflect their opinions regarding poverty alleviation. The study analyses the importance of English press in incorporating perspectives and voices of the readers. Universe of the study is Mainstream English Press of Pakistan, but the newspaper Daily Dawn (highest circulation across the country) provides an equal platform to readers to share their opinions and views regarding poverty and its alleviation all over the country. The narrative theory supports the study as the macro level narrative is building in society due to different readers' opinion according to their particular ways of thinking and circumstances. The study applies quantitative and qualitative content analysis to critically evaluate the content along with its frequency and focuses on interpreting and describing the actual sense or meaning behind the content. The study also applies purposive sampling to select the samples according to the purpose of selecting only those letters to editor where the poverty and poverty related issues and alleviation can be found. The research study finds out that the English press is practicing responsible journalism by providing platform to readers and reflecting opinions regarding poverty and its alleviation. It also highlights that mainstream English newspaper Dawn, is creating awareness regarding this social issue of poverty and also identifies the unequal distribution of opportunities due to poverty. It also ensures the quality journalism practicing by mainstream English newspapers, even in the era of digital media.

Keywords: Poverty Alleviation, Mainstream Press, Letters to Editor.

Introduction

Poverty has become a global issue that exists both in developed and developing nations. This issue has obtained an immense attention across all over the world. Poverty is seen as a state where an individual or a community does not have enough financial resources to meet the basic needs of living a life. It is also considered as a deprivation of enough financial assets to have standard necessities for an esteemed survival (Ahmad, 2016).

The world has become a global village where people are having a huge amount of knowledge source and material resources. A global village where everyone can get an easy access to knowledge and information, but all the people are not enjoying a same level of living standards. According to United Nation Development Program (1999), it has been estimated that many countries are suffering from persistent poverty. The estimated number of people is shown in the table in reference to their countries (Ahmad, 2016).

Table No 1: Estimated number of people in selected countries

College	New students
India	525
Pakistan	44
China	353
Bangladesh	36
Nigeria	32
Brazil	31
Indonesia	31

Computed from UNDP data in HRD 1999.

Poverty has always been seen as multi-dimensional concept in terms of low income, limited resources and high vulnerability to risks. An approach for poverty alleviation program always requires few essential components to reduce poverty that involves a stable economy and an improved governance to provide facilities and opportunities to poor. The poor people characterize the low income and high illiteracy rate along with limited employment opportunities. The poverty alleviation strategy plan has also been devised on the basis of strong government support in providing relief to the poor sector of society, decreasing inflation, creating employment opportunities, and improving health condition and providing better facilities (Plan).

Poverty Alleviation is the major concern of developing economics. A phenomenon that comprises of reducing poverty and increasing the potential growth in economy has been present since 1950s and 60s in order to reduce poverty and sustain the efforts for a rapid economic growth. The effort through import-substitution industrial development was an immense growth for the people in improving living standards especially in developing nations (Ahmad, 2016).

Poverty Reduction Strategy of Pakistan covers the status of reducing poverty by implementing the nine pillars of the strategy that includes safety of poor and vulnerable, value added resources, stable macroeconomics, enhanced economic competitiveness via quality investment in infrastructure, human capital, technological and industrial progress, efficient energy development programs, international industry linkages, human development and a fair governance system. The paper monitors the pro-poor budgetary and non-budgetary expenditures in terms of poverty and it has been proved a victorious strategy during the last eight years (PRSP, 2010).

China has become a successful country in the fight against poverty. It is always known as Middle Income Country, yet it has been proved itself a strong weapon against poverty by implementing particular mechanism for economic growth and sustained strategic policies that led to poverty alleviation. On other hand, poverty in Pakistan has always been fluctuated and presently, it has broken the records of last few decades. The comparison for poverty is not an easy task between both the countries due to their different methodologies being used for poverty reduction. Moreover, Chinese government has largely focused on rural poverty because one-third of the rural population was unable to meet their basic needs. China's success in poverty reduction was due to strong political determination and proper organizational stabilities. Likewise, Pakistan also been launched many methodologies and strategic policies but due to limited attention and poor implementation and governance, it had not made any change in poverty reduction (Farooq, 2012).

A research report on Estimation of Poverty and Vulnerability in Pakistan 2016 shows that Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) data estimated the poverty in Pakistan close to 38 percent below the poverty line in year 2015-16. The gravity of the rural poverty is comparatively more than the urban poverty. According to the research that close to 39 and 57 percent of population was vulnerable in 2016 and expectedly the vulnerability was higher in rural poverty as compared to urban poverty (Jamal, 2017).

Media has played a vital role to build an ideology. It has always seen as a watchdog in society in order to create awareness among public regarding any issue happening all around the world. Mass media directly manipulates the social events in the minds of audience the way they want to inform the public according to their choice (Bukhari, 2015).

In terms of media's role in poverty reduction, there is a strong contribution of media in highlighting the issues regarding poverty and to raise the voice in support of poverty reduction due to the government's measures of World Bank-approved and -supported Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP's) as it found a significant component in reducing poverty. Poverty reduction is becoming a new challenge in the eyes of public as portrayed by media. Media highlights the potential role in alleviating poverty by informing a wide range of audience about poverty issues. It also provides a platform to reflect several public opinions and also acts as a super power for an authentic decision-making regarding poverty reduction (Barnes, 2007).

The study analyzes mainstream English press as it is always considered as a strong mean of communication, where English newspapers play a larger role in communicating all the current and social issues happening across the world according to their own perspectives and built ideologies. Newspapers are always known as the mirrors of the world as they provide open forum to readers in order to reflect their opinion regarding any particular issue (Bukhari, 2015).

The study investigates specifically the role of newspapers in reducing poverty through its content. Among all the mainstream English newspapers, Daily Dawn has been selected on the basis of huge circulation across the country. The research examines the letters to editor section of Daily Dawn to analyze the readers' opinion and their thinking patterns regarding poverty and poverty reduction in country. The study highlights that the representation of news items and editorials may build the ideological phenomenon according to its own perspectives but the letters to editor section is an audience platform provided my press media to share their views and thoughts on particular issue across the globe.

Newspapers have provided a quality platform to readers in the light of freedom of speech so that readers express their opinions and views by writing to the newspaper and spreading the word globally. The research study analyzes the letters to editor section of Daily Dawn from Aug 2018 – December 2019 as the new governmental policies had been implemented in the year August 2018so the selected time period aims to observe the measures and steps taken against poverty alleviation in Pakistan.

Keeping in view the above-mentioned aspects of the study, Pakistan is among those countries where huge amount of population lives below poverty line due to which it is necessary to highlight the steps taken by government in order to eradicate poverty and to take measures for economic growth. Here, the research needs to focus on the readers' view point regarding poverty and its alleviation and the way they build media narratives according to their own experiences and thinking patterns. The specific objectives for the present study are as follows:

- To identify the role of mainstream English press media in practicing quality journalism by providing platform to readers
- To explore whether the media narratives are building in society through letters to editor section of Daily Dawn newspaper.

The research questions for the present study are as follows:

- RQ1. Does the mainstream English press provide the platform to readers to express their opinions?
- RQ2. What narratives are built regarding poverty alleviation in society through letters to editor section of Dawn newspaper?

Several studies have been conducted to analyze the involvement of media in the social issues relevant to poverty reduction and the representation of the content in the mainstream press. The study identifies Pakistan as the sixth populous country in the world where majority of the people live below the poverty line. According to the estimation of World Bank, the population of Pakistan is 22.6 billion who are spending their lives in poverty and without basic necessities. This is the reason the study explains that poverty in Pakistan is causing serious and heinous crimes due to the unavailability of fundamental sources. Hence, it is mandatory to empower people to bring developmental changes along with improved education system and sustained industrial development because the more investment in social capital the better would be the condition of poverty in country (Ansari, 2014).

On the basis of previous studies relevant to poverty reduction in Pakistan, the research explains that approach for poverty alleviation consists of human resource development and equal distribution of opportunities. Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund acts as a strong setup to reach the poor communities and the disadvantaged urban areas. Moreover, this enthusiastic organization not only supports the poor community but creates employment opportunities and improved education and health system for them (Khan, 2009).

World Bank has always given importance to poverty reduction in Pakistan by emphasizing on the provision of social services to the poor ones. The study mainly focuses on World Bank in the support of poverty reduction as it plans policy programs in order to reduce poverty in Pakistan. The Bank's policies aim to make a difference for the poor by reducing land taxation and improving natural resources which is the only survival for poor people (Nancy Birdsall, 2005).

According to a study based on Pakistan Poverty Reduction Strategy and the need for employment analyzes that Pakistan like other underdeveloped countries hardly provides quality jobs and high salaries. Labor market is an essential ingredient in producing a heavy investment and it stimulates growth and poverty alleviation. It aims to develop different strategic projects in order to increase the employment opportunities in country and to enhance the productivity and incomes of the existing labors in market. The study recognizes that quality jobs and incomes act as a strong contribution in reducing poverty (Amjad).

A stud relevant to rural poverty in Pakistan dictates that with the purpose to reduce poverty in Pakistan, the micro finance institutions provide resources for a quality income generation. Different organizations aim to reduce poverty in country by proving financial services to the poor and specifically to develop human capital through education and training to manage poverty reduction. The study concludes that human capital development is a fundamental and necessary component in reducing poverty in Pakistan. Effective planning and strategy is required for reducing and managing the poverty at large scale (Iqbal, 2014).

According to Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) the improved quality life of people can be possible by engaging people for their own betterment. In addition to the significance of a concerned governance of country, there are three pillars currently working in reducing poverty includes administrative, political and functionality of local government, but the missing pillar is socio-economic pillar which needs to be pro active in engaging poor and vulnerable people for planning, coordination and implementation but of course for that, skills are required to assess the economic status and developmental plans. Unfortunately, the system does not have any mechanism for institutions for social mobilization to help the people in identifying and organizing activities. The study further discloses that the proposal for socio-economic pillar for Poverty Reduction Program declares that it will bring out 8.7 million

households out of poverty. Doubtlessly, it has proved a strategic and a well-defined system for the provision of financial and human resources (PMPRP, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The study employs narrative theory to identify the way of thinking and human experiences and the way stories shape the readers' minds or the way readers shape the stories according to their own view point. The theory for narrative was first developed by David Epston and Michael White, which focuses on the way people interact narratives and reflect their opinions and views regarding any particular issue which somehow relates to their own observance and experiences (Madigan, 2011).

The central concept of narrative is to shape or organize the stories and frame it accordingly. It supports the study in understanding the content and analyzes that how text works along with the choices made by the readers in letters to editor. The theory shows how the narratives create effects and highlight the issues. (Shmoop, 2009)

As the four methods of narrative are given, the study focuses on persuasive type of narratives where the personal opinions are involved with the subject and the biasness of the readers regarding any particular issue. The study revolves around two metaphors i.e narrative and social construction of text and it explains the readers' views in respect of both the metaphors. The social construction of text is constructed by readers in letters to editor assumes the readers' understanding of the world and creates the meanings of the text in respect of their views and opinions.

Narratives help the readers to analyze individuals' writings and the context behind that finds the pattern as well. As the narratives can be seen in different forms i.e written, verbal and visual, it supports the text in the newspapers specifically in the letters to editor section with the built context by the readers. Narration is an independent variable but the other side also shows it a dependent one as it varies on mood of narration. The text is being narrated and constructed by an individual who acts as an engaged reader through a platform provided for quality journalism by Press media. The purpose behind the narration is to deliver the message through constructed texts regarding poverty alleviation in Pakistan and highlight the efforts or micro attempts by government according to readers' own opinions (Grunwald, 2005).

Understanding the narrative theory, the study examines the letters to editor section of Daily Dawn and shows that readers represent their opinions and viewpoints regarding poverty in Pakistan which builds media narratives as the text portrays the readers' thinking patterns and views according to their own choices. The theory plays a significant role in support of the study as it presents that media narratives are building in society through letters to editor section as it may shape the views of readers according to the constructed narratives on the basis of authors' own views and opinions.

Research Methodology

The study applies the method of quantitative and qualitative content analysis in order to examine the letters to editor section of Daily Dawn newspaper through its frequency and space occupied in the newspaper and to find the narration in the stories that are based on readers' opinion and viewpoints. The mainstream English Press of Pakistan considers being an independent variable of the study as it provides a platform to readers for sharing their viewpoints regarding any particular situation. On other, the platform for quality journalism i.e letters to editor section provided for readers to express their views so the readers' opinions are said to be dependent variable. Universe of the study for critically analyzing the letters to editor section includes all the English newspapers from which Daily Dawn newspaper of Pakistan has been analyzed due to its largest circulation in the country. Quantitative content analysis has been examined through the analytical categorization along with indicators regarding poverty and poverty alleviation. The letters to editor section have been analyzed by classifying the categories in respect of its frequency, space that shows

the length of letter, all the issues regarding poverty and highlight the narrative structure as well. The category of placement is not involved as the column is already specified. Qualitative research approach inducts narrative analysis which covers the social construction of texts and the meaning of the context in respect of readers ‘opinion regarding poverty and its alleviation.

The study implies a general approach of narrative that indicates the people with reference to their social values and environment that depicts the meaning of the message they construct in the text of letters to editor. Purposive Sampling is selected as the study specifically focuses on the letters to editor section of Daily Dawn newspaper and the purpose behind is to select the data that highlights the issue of poverty and poverty alleviation in any aspect.

The data has been analyzed from August 2018 to December 2019 and examined particularly letters to editor sections regarding the issue of poverty and poverty reduction. The time period that has been selected is due to the arrival of new government in August which has ensured new governmental policies and various poverty reduction programs that helps to slow down the poverty in Pakistan. The categories with indicators are mentioned below in the table:

Table No: 2

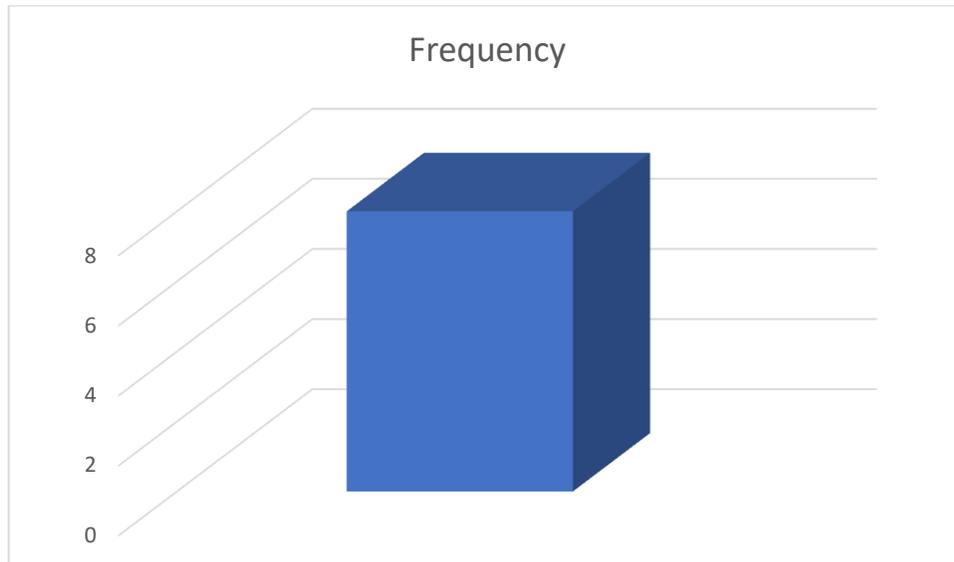
Categories	Indicators
Frequency	No. of letters to editor
Space (Length of the letter)	Short, medium and long
Issue	Poverty and Poverty alleviation related issues i.e Education, Health, Economic and Others
Narrative Structure	Macro Narratives or Micro Narratives
Context	Problem addressed, suggested solutions or just complaints

Findings and Analysis

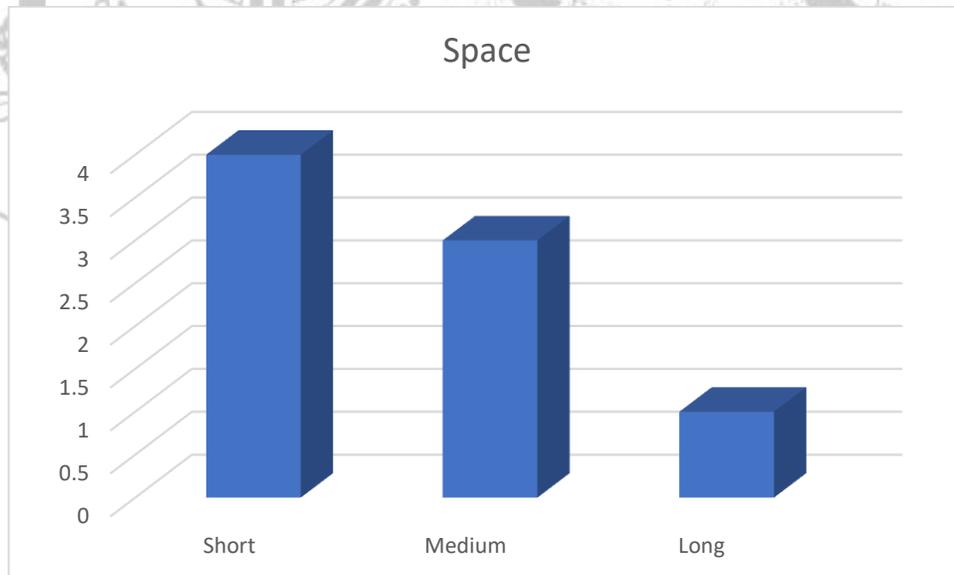
The study finds out that mainstream English press provides a platform for quality journalism to readers to reflect their opinions and thoughts. According to the present study, Daily Dawn has been analyzed for critical evaluation of letters to editor section and it shows that a specific column is assigned to this section so the readers share their viewpoints according to their own experiences and thoughts.

The study also presents that media narratives are building in society through letters to editor section as readers have a platform to discuss their views regarding poverty and poverty alleviation. The research analyzes every single letter to editor relevant to poverty and its reduction in society from August 2018 to December 2019.

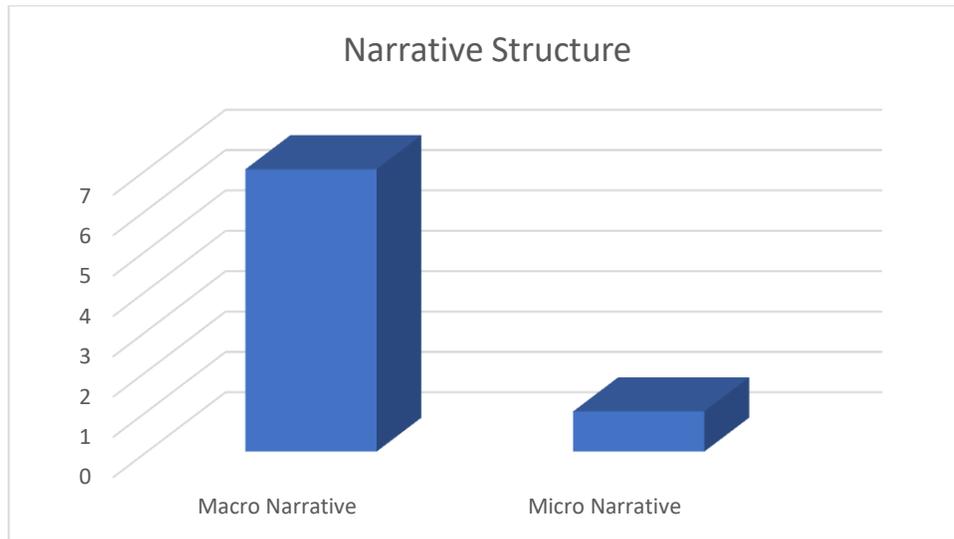
Moreover, the readers’ opinions portray the construction of narratives in society through letters to editor section of Daily Dawn. For evaluation, the frequency and space that shows the length of letters to editor section has been examined and the collected data has been analyzed from August 2018-December 2019.



The above table shows that letters to editor regarding poverty and poverty alleviation is relatively infrequent because throughout the whole year, only eight letters have been observed that discusses the issue of poverty and poverty alleviation. The readers reflect their opinions and construct the narratives according to their views regarding poverty and its alleviation which shows that media provides a specified section to public to share their views but the coverage of the particular issue is relatively infrequent.

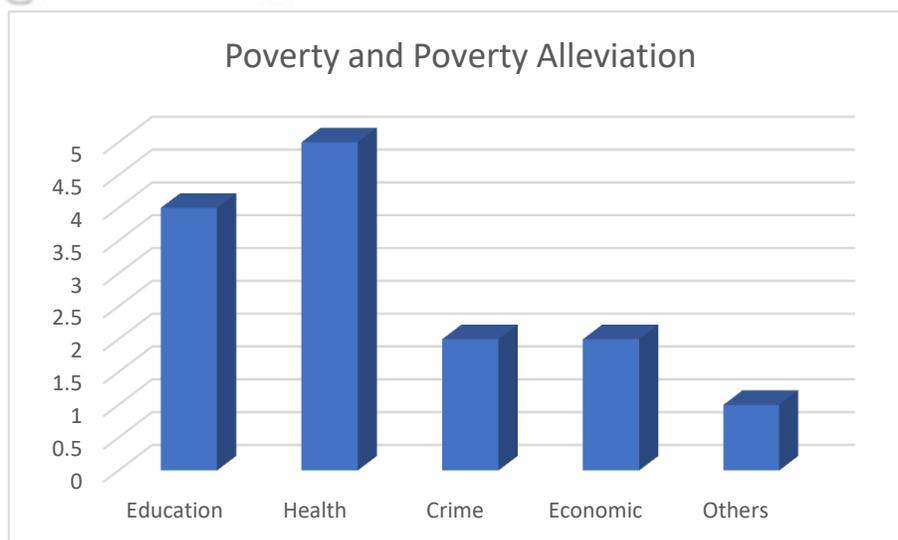


The above table shows that space occupied by letters to editor regarding poverty and poverty alleviation according to its length by analyzing the word count and majority of letters to editor are short in length and some of them have medium length that discusses poverty and the steps taken by government to reduce poverty. Only a single letter to editor have a long length relevant to poverty and its reduction. The study shows that majority of the letters to editor occupy short space according to its length.



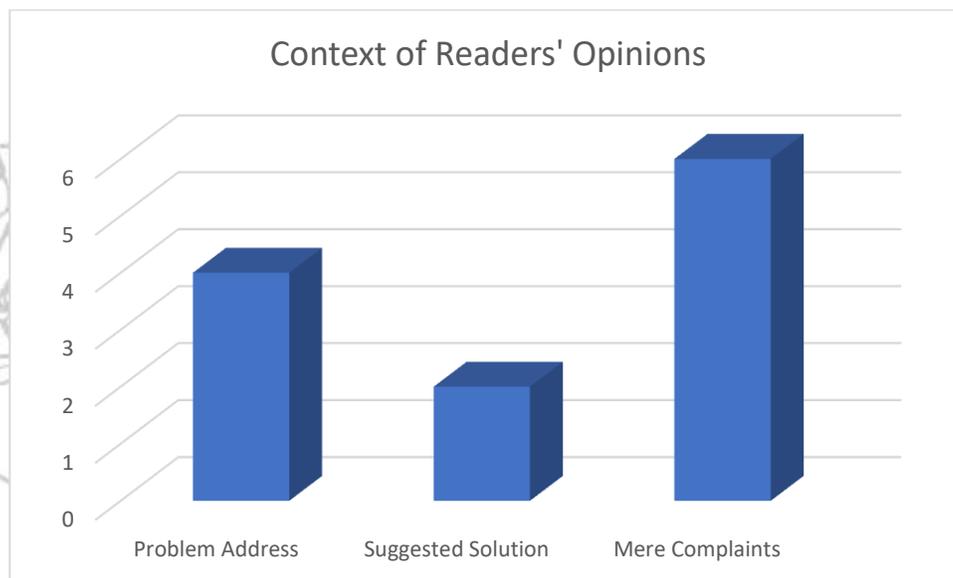
The above table shows the narrative structure in letters to editor of Daily Dawn and discloses that the study observes majority of the macro narratives as the stories are common across all the regions and cultures and have been discussed at macro level globally. On other hand, only few are micro narratives, those who are relevant to particular member of group or within subcultures. The study also analyzes the poverty of middle class and agony of their miseries has been discussed in few letters.

The study finds out that narrative structure has been explained qualitatively that how the contextual meaning is described according to readers' own experiences. The research presents the narrative analysis as macro-narrative and micro narrative structures in letters to editor of Daily Dawn. The qualitative narrative analysis views the macro-narratives as the narratives that are constructed by the readers and highlight the issue of poverty and poverty reduction as it has already been discussed worldwide and exists across all the cultures, regions and nations. Poverty has become a worldwide problem that has been viewed on all national and international platforms. Majority of letters to editor have shown the macro-narrative structures as they portray the opinions of readers in the constructed texts on the basis of their viewpoints and experiences.



The above table shows the issue of poverty and poverty alleviation through letters to editor section of Daily Dawn and highlights different aspects relevant to it. It shows that poverty hurts the health and education system more than the other factors. The reason is that poor people cannot afford to get their children education and to provide them better health facilities. The poverty also causes crime incidents because of low incomes and unemployment in the country. It also discloses that due to limited economic growth, poverty is increasing by each passing day.

The study analyzes the poverty and poverty alleviation in letters to editor section of Daily Dawn qualitatively as well. It views several issues that generates due to poverty in society as the poverty damages people's individuality because they are unable to have basic needs to live lives. There are so many factors exist which have been highlighted in letters to editor. Health and Education are two basic and mandatory needs of life that is essential to every human life. Poor people are unable to get their kids educated because they do not have enough income to pay dues for their children's education. Moreover, health of poor is also in danger because they do not have better health facilities. The crime rate is increasing due to unemployment in society as there are limited employment opportunities for poor ones. It is necessary to work on economic growth because it considers to be the only way to reduce poverty.



The above table shows the context of readers' opinions in order to reflect their opinion and views regarding poverty and poverty alleviation which describes that readers majorly make complaints in the letters to editor section and address the problems that are related to poverty and highlight several government poverty reduction plans and programs that are not considered to be enough to reduce poverty. The solutions have also been suggested in only few letters to editor in order to develop strategies and implement them to grow economically so the unemployment can be reduced and people can get basic necessities of life.

The study qualitatively analyzes the contextual meaning of readers' opinion as they address the problem of poverty in Pakistan and the way it is rapidly increasing. The narrative structures they construct in the text belong to the complaints they have made to the government for not taking any strong initiative for poverty reduction. The poverty reduction plans of different political parties temporarily facilitate people but cannot take them out from poverty. It is essential to make strategies that help the people to live their lives above the poverty line. Few letters to editor have suggested the solutions to government to focus on economic growth and make strategical models with a planned implementation so that it helps reduce poverty.

Discussion

The present research titled “Mainstream English Press and Poverty Alleviation: Critical Analysis of Letters to the Editor Section of Daily Dawn (Aug 2018-Dec 2019)” focused on poverty alleviation through main stream English press. Letter to editors in English press is the source of dissemination of information regarding poverty alleviation, its actually showed the policy of newspapers. These are the sources which provide quality journalism to readers to show their concerns and problems of the society through media.

Conclusion

Keeping in view above all the results and findings, the research study concludes that mainstream English press provides platform to readers for quality journalism to share their opinions and viewpoints regarding poverty and poverty alleviation as it provides a specified section for letters to editor. Furthermore, the contextual meanings of readers’ text construct the narratives in society regarding poverty according to their thoughts and opinions. The study has analyzed the collected data quantitatively and qualitatively where it explores that readers have highlighted the macro and micro narrative structures and the issues that are usually generated due to poverty in society. The readers have also made complaints to the government and addressed the problems related to poverty in society. They have also suggested the solutions to the government as well for the betterment of country by reducing poverty and growing economically.

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