



Religious orientations as a predictor of rational thinking among secondary school students



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 October 2013

Received in revised form 26 October 2014

Accepted 10 November 2014

Available online 30 December 2014

Keywords:

Adolescents

Cognition

Reasoning

Religiosity

Mental process

ABSTRACT

Cognitive experiential self-theory (CEST) postulates that past experiences develop implicit beliefs in human cognitive system. These beliefs modify and generate schemas attaching meanings to self, others and relations between self and others. Allport's religious orientations are explanations of people religious beliefs focusing the reasons of their religiousness. We, in the current study investigated the contribution of secondary school students' religious affiliations (fellowship with Hinduism, Christianity or Islam) as well as religious orientations (intrinsic, extrinsic personal and extrinsic social) in developing their cognitive experiential thinking systems. The Hindu ($N = 1050$), Christian ($N = 1073$), and Muslim ($N = 1394$) secondary school students participated in the study. Age universal I–E (intrinsic–extrinsic religiosity) scale and rational experiential inventory for adolescents (REI-A) were adapted to collect the required information. We conclude that the students' religious affiliations and orientations have significant impacts on their cognitive systems, specifically on rational thinking rather than on experiential thinking. The religious orientations moderately explain the variances in rational thinking of Hindu and Muslim students, while their impact on the rational choices of the Christian students is very small. In general, both an intrinsic orientation to religion and an external personal orientation are positively associated with rational thinking, while an external social orientation is negatively associated. Religious affiliations and orientations have very little effect on experiential thinking.

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1. Introduction

The division of mental processes into two distinctive forms is deeply rooted in the literature of neuroscience and cognitive psychology. For instance, the right and left hemispheres of the Sperry's two chamber brain theory largely corresponds to two distinctive thinking modes of dual-process theories of reasoning and cognition (Sperry, 1982). Cognitive psychologists attached varied labels to the two systems of thinking and decision making (Evans, 2008). Kahneman (2013) and Evans (2008) used the terms system 1 and system 2 for these divisions (Evans and Stanovich (2013) replaced these labels with the type 1 and type 2) whereas Epstein (1994) in cognitive experiential self-theory (CEST) denoted them with experiential and rational thinking. The system 1 in Kehnman's division is fast, automatic and unconscious. It is self-evidently valid and heavily influenced by the context and past experiences of the thinkers. The system 2, in contrast, is slow, controlled and effortful. It is

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logic based and requires evidence for justifications. Although the features of system 1 and 2 are also available in experiential and rational thinking yet the distinction between the two modes in CEST is highly process based rather than speed or quickness. The major difference between the experiential and rational thinking in CEST is due to their distinctive nature of information processing (Epstein, 1994; Epstein, Pacini, Denes-Raj, & Heier, 1996; Pacini & Epstein, 1999). The experiential thinking style is holistic, associationistic and outcome oriented whereas the rational thinking approach is analytical, cause and effect focused and process oriented. Dual process theory of human intelligence postulates that no system or thinking pattern has absolute importance on other. The intelligence according to this theory is individuals' ability to flexibly and independently switch between the different modes of thoughts depending on the task requirements (Kaufmann, 2011).

Literature explores different factors that affect thinking processes and individuals' abilities to switch between these processes (Stanovich, 1999; Stanovich & West, 2000). People's prior beliefs (also terms as belief biases), past experiences as well as culture related issues are among major factors that influence thinkers' reasoning and decision making patterns (Evans, Barston, & Pollard, 1983; Evans & Feeny, 2004; Juliusson, Karlsson, & Gärling, 2005; Manalo, Kusumi, Koyasu, Michita, & Tanaka, 2013). We in this research expanded the concept of prior beliefs and concentrated on peoples religious beliefs examining their impacts on individuals' thinking choices.

Whitley and Kite (2010) explain that initially in this area of inquiry researchers focused to investigate the impacts of simple indicators of religiosity (such as persons' participations in different religious obligations) on different forms of prejudices they showed in their lives and decision making. But studying religiosity in terms of people's attendance of worship places could not get wide acceptance by religious leaders and concerned communities (Whitley & Kite, 2010). Later on, the researchers start to concentrate on quality of religious involvement rather than quantity. Allport (1960, 1961, 1963) proposed the study of religiousness in terms of people's objectives of following religion; which in their point of view were better predictors of religiousness. He postulated that the people who followed religion to gain inner satisfaction were intrinsically religious oriented whereas non-religious and social objectives impelled persons toward extrinsic religious orientations – that were further divided in extrinsic personal and extrinsic religious orientations (Gorsuch & Venable, 1983; Maltby, 1999). Under extrinsic personal religious orientation people follow religion to gain personal acceptance in the environment as well as social adaptability and grace in the society. The persons with extrinsic social religious orientation on the other hand seek social protection, security and other non-religious benefits from the external world.

2. The current study

We established theoretical bases of the current study on cognitive-experiential self-theory (CEST) presented by Epstein (1994) and the division of religious orientations postulated by Allport (1960) and revised by Gorsuch and Venable (1983) and Maltby (1999). Flere and Lavrič (2008) conclude that followers of different religions to some or large extent demonstrate three religious orientations depending on social, cultural and political characteristics of the society in which they inhabit. We postulate that the differently religious oriented people not only live in a social and political environment but they also make routine decisions in that particular environment. We in this study intended to investigate the contribution of people's religious orientations in their thinking and decision making process. To meet this challenge and broaden the scope of the research, we examined the three groups of Hindu, Christian and Muslim secondary school students studying in religiously heterogeneous institutions.

3. Research questions

Major purpose of the current study was to investigate the role of three religious orientations (intrinsic, extrinsic personal and extrinsic social) in developing people's rational and experiential thinking patterns concentrating on Hindu, Christian and Muslim secondary school students. Following research questions were formulated to achieve the research objectives.

To what extent do the secondary school students in the sample demonstrate intrinsic, extrinsic personal and extrinsic social religious orientations and does the profile differ for Hindu, Christian and Muslim students?

To what extent do the secondary school students in the sample show preferences for rational or experiential style of thinking in their decision-making process and do these preferences differ for Hindu, Christian and Muslim students?

Do the religious orientations of the Hindu, Christian and Muslim secondary school students predict their rational and experiential thinking choices?

4. Research methodology

Research objectives supported a research design for this study that was combination of descriptive, inferential and correlational research approaches (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). The Hindu and Christian communities approximately share 1.9% and 1.6% of the total population of the Pakistan respectively (Hackett & Grim, 2012). Though their population is scattered across the country yet the presence of Hindu community is comparatively higher in rural Sindh (second large populated province of Pakistan). The presence of Christian community is comparatively higher in central Punjab (largest populated province of Pakistan) as well as urban centers of the country. Pakistani Christian and Hindu people generally follow local cultures, languages and customs in their daily life with little modification according to their religious norms (Mcclintock, 1992). The definite numbers of Hindu and Christian students enrolled at different educational levels are unavailable. Viewing

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