

From rote to relevance: The case for rethinking traditional Islamic curricula in Uganda

Abdul Swamad Gyagenda*¹, Siraje Abdallah Ssekamanya²

¹Islamic University in Uganda, Kumi Road, P.O.BOX 2555 Mbale
² Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

*Corresponding author: gyagendaabdul@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33102/uij.717>

Abstract

Traditional Islamic education in Uganda, particularly at the *Idaad* and *Thanawi* levels, plays a critical role in shaping morally grounded and spiritually conscious individuals. However, the current curriculum remains outdated, rigid with much emphasis on rote learning, and misaligned with both contemporary educational standards and Uganda's socio-cultural context. This study aimed to examine the challenges and prospects of Islamic education curriculum implementation in traditional Islamic institutes across Uganda. Adopting a qualitative design under an interpretivist paradigm, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected participants from three prominent Islamic institutes, along with documentary reviews and classroom observations. Thematic analysis revealed several issues: lack of a unified and nationally accredited curriculum, overreliance on foreign (mainly Saudi-based) content, exclusion of science subjects, outdated teaching methodologies, and minimal contextual relevance. These challenges hinder learners' critical thinking, innovation, and integration into broader society. The study concludes that the curriculum must be reimagined to integrate Islamic values with modern educational needs, including science, ICT, and national identity. Rethinking the curriculum to align with national development goals and global educational trends will enhance the relevance, recognition, and transformative potential of Islamic education in Uganda.

Keywords: *Islamic education in Uganda, , traditional Islamic Curricular, Traditional Islamic Education*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic madrasahs and institutes in Uganda, particularly at the *idadi* (intermediate) and *thanawi* (advanced) levels, serve a distinct purpose within the broader educational ecosystem. Unlike secular schools, their primary function is to equip students with the foundational knowledge and spiritual discipline necessary for pursuing specialised studies in Arabic and Islamic sciences. Many of these students eventually continue their education in universities across the Arab world, such as in Sudan, Egypt, or Saudi Arabia. This international academic trajectory underscores the importance of curriculum coherence, relevance, and adaptability within Uganda's Islamic educational institutions.

Recent literature provides valuable insights into how these madrasahs are evolving, what challenges they face, and how they compare to broader Islamic educational philosophies. A synthesis of key studies — including the works of Lujja et al. (2016), Gyagenda (2021, 2023), Kabali (2019), and Sseremba (2023) — reveals a dynamic discourse characterised by both convergence and divergence. This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of themes such as curriculum design, implementation, reform philosophy, instructional methods, and political influences.

A clear point of consensus among scholars is the urgent need for curriculum modernization. The existing *madrasah* curricula in Uganda are widely regarded as outdated and misaligned with both local and global educational needs. Lujja et al. (2016) call for integration between Islamic and secular knowledge through an

Manuscript Received Date: 08/5/2026

Manuscript Acceptance Date: 30/7/2026

Manuscript Published Date: 14/10/2026

©The Author(s) (2026). Published by USIM Press on behalf of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For commercial reuse, please contact penerbit@usim.edu.my

C O P E COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATION ETHICS



“Islamization of knowledge” framework, aiming to produce holistic learners capable of navigating modern challenges. Gyagenda (2021) echoes the call for reform but from a revivalist standpoint, invoking Al-Ghazali’s balanced educational philosophy that emphasises both intellectual inquiry and spiritual purification. Kabali (2019) offers a more pragmatic critique, noting that traditional Islamic curricula have not kept pace with globalization or the structural and delivery advantages seen in missionary schools. Despite their differing frameworks, all these voices agree on one critical point: the curriculum must evolve to prepare students for both modern life and advanced Islamic scholarship.

Arabic language proficiency and mastery of core Islamic sciences — including *fiqh* (jurisprudence), tafsir (Qur’anic exegesis), and hadith (Prophetic traditions) — are unanimously affirmed as the backbone of madrasah education. However, scholars differ in their pedagogical approaches. Kabali focuses on the subjects’ instrumental value for academic advancement, particularly in international contexts. Gyagenda warns against reducing these sciences to mere content delivery and argues for their role in cultivating ethical and spiritual integrity. Meanwhile, Lujja et al. advocate for contextualising these subjects within broader contemporary knowledge systems, fostering interdisciplinary learning. While there is no dispute over the content itself, the mode of delivery and its connection to learners’ lived experiences remain subjects of debate.

These pedagogical and philosophical differences are not merely academic. They reflect deeper tensions in how Islamic education is conceptualised in Uganda. For instance, Lujja et al. (2016) propose an integrative, forward-looking model that bridges Islamic and secular paradigms. In contrast, Gyagenda (2021) presents a revivalist model rooted in classical Islamic thought, prioritising moral rectitude over material achievement. Kabali (2019), taking a community-based approach, focuses on the operational and resource-based challenges of curriculum reform without engaging in abstract philosophy. These differing lenses — educational reform theory, Islamic philosophy, and grassroots development — shape not only how each author diagnoses the problem but also what solutions they propose.

Sseremba (2023) introduces a unique and politically charged dimension by highlighting the risks of foreign interference in Islamic education. He critiques how U.S.-led security agendas have co-opted curriculum reform efforts, undermining local autonomy and imposing surveillance-driven priorities. This stands in sharp contrast to the apolitical treatment of curriculum issues by other scholars, who focus primarily on pedagogy and content. Sseremba’s work reminds us that madrasahs are not just educational institutions but also socio-political entities vulnerable to external pressures.

One practical implication of this divergence is the question of international curriculum alignment. Kabali stresses the importance of harmonising Ugandan curricula with those in Arab universities to ensure student mobility and recognition abroad. In contrast, Lujja et al. and Gyagenda are more inward-looking, concerned with curriculum integrity and ideological coherence within Uganda. This again illustrates the multi-layered nature of curriculum reform — it must balance local relevance, spiritual authenticity, and global compatibility.

From a practical standpoint, curriculum implementation involves translating documented syllabi into strategic classroom practices. According to Davis (2021) and Campbell and Oblinger (2007), this includes teaching, designing instructional materials, establishing learning strategies, and evaluating both student performance and curriculum effectiveness. Yet, in Uganda’s madrasahs, the implementation process is fraught with challenges. These include teacher-centred approaches that suppress critical thinking, a lack of unified curriculum standards, and inadequate assessment mechanisms that fail to measure 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving (Gyagenda, 2023).

Moreover, the curriculum often fails to align with national development goals, such as Uganda’s education targets, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Reimers (2024) argues that Islamic education should contribute to lifelong learning, gender equality, and productivity — goals largely absent from Uganda’s current madrasah frameworks. Compounding this issue is the exclusion of science subjects, which severely limits career pathways for graduates and reinforces the perception of madrasah education as narrowly religious and professionally restrictive.

In conclusion, while there is broad agreement that Uganda’s *madrasah* curricula must evolve, scholars differ significantly in their proposed pathways. Some advocate integration, others revival; some highlight political threats, others educational methods. These divergences enrich the discourse and emphasize the need for a comprehensive, multi-dimensional reform strategy — one that honours theological roots while embracing pedagogical innovation, political autonomy, and global relevance. This article aims to explore these tensions and possibilities further, offering insights into how Uganda’s madrasah education can thrive in a rapidly changing world.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The curriculum of Islamic education in Uganda is expected to nurture holistic individuals—spiritually grounded, ethically conscious, intellectually competent, and socially responsible. In a pluralistic society such as Uganda, where Muslims live alongside diverse religious and cultural communities, Islamic education should cultivate values of peaceful coexistence, moral integrity, and national loyalty while firmly rooted in the Islamic worldview. The stated goals of the *Idaad* and *Thanawi* syllabi (2005) include producing ideal Muslims fit for both worldly and spiritual success, guiding teachers in effective instruction, and developing the youth educationally, socially, and culturally. However, the actual curriculum and its delivery mechanisms appear misaligned with these aspirations.

Recent studies (e.g., Lujja et al., 2016; Gyagenda, 2021; Kabali, 2019) consistently argue that the current Islamic education curriculum in Uganda is outdated, overly rigid, and dominated by teacher-centred pedagogies. It places excessive focus on rote memorisation and neglects essential 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Despite the importance of Arabic language mastery and foundational Islamic sciences like *fiqh*, *hadith*, and *tafsir*, their delivery often lacks contextual relevance and fails to connect with learners' social realities in a multi-religious and globalised society.

Furthermore, the curriculum tends to exclude science and technology subjects, limiting graduates' career prospects and reinforcing the perception that madrasah education is narrowly religious. As Gyagenda (2023) and Asfiati (2023) argue, Islamic education must not only preserve spiritual and moral values but also prepare learners to be critical thinkers, problem solvers, and contributors to national development. Without reforms that address implementation strategies, pedagogical approaches, and curriculum relevance, Uganda's madrasahs risk producing graduates who are spiritually aware but intellectually underprepared for contemporary challenges.

In addition, there is no unified national framework guiding Islamic education in Uganda, resulting in disparities across institutions and weakening its recognition within the national education system. This fragmentation is compounded by ideological divides within the Muslim community, as well as geopolitical influences that further complicate curriculum autonomy and coherence.

Given these challenges, there is an urgent need to reassess and reform the Islamic education curriculum in Uganda. This includes aligning its aims and content with national goals, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and modern educational expectations—while preserving its essential Islamic ethos. Only then can Islamic education fulfil its mission of producing morally upright, intellectually capable, and socially engaged citizens.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A curriculum must help address the challenges of the community. This means that curriculum developers need to consider the values and needs of a particular society. Curriculum-related issues are typically linked to the technical aspects involved in curriculum development and the leadership structure of institutions; in other words, these issues arise from the relationship between the intended curriculum, enacted curriculum, and attained curriculum (Pak et al., 2020). This suggests that the concerns relate to curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation.

Often, curriculum implementers such as administrators and teachers tend to misinterpret the curriculum due to a failure to understand the intended goals and objectives (Phaeton & Stears, 2017). Curriculum implementation is focused on fulfilling the aims, goals, and objectives for which it was designed. Therefore, the curriculum implementors at all levels must keep in mind the mission and vision of the curriculum in the implementation process. In Uganda, the Islamic education curriculum focuses much on content completion and also aims to pass students in examinations.

The goals, aims, objectives, vision, and mission of the curriculum are key components without which the curriculum is blind. Setting the right, timely, and relevant goals is fundamental to establishing a good curriculum. In Uganda, the Islamic education curriculum focuses much on the content completion and memorisation of the Qur'an and *hadith*, and also aims at passing students in examinations (Hassan, 2015). The goal of Islamic education has to be holistic, producing an all-round citizen with a comprehensive character to help live harmoniously here and in the hereafter (Syah, 2016).

Content uniformity is sometimes Biased because of denominations (*Sunni*, *Shia*, *Ahmadiyyah*, *salafi*, etc), which tend not to address the current needs of society, disunity, community cohesion, and development. some of the content is Obsolete and outdated (El-Mubarak & Hassan, 2021). Some of the content of the Islamic

education curriculum is too much compared to the allocated time, yet its relevance is also minimal (Nimulola, 2018).

The methods used in this day and age should be largely learner-centred. The instructional strategies should further evoke learners to think critically, arouse learners' interest to learn, and equip them with problem-solving abilities. The methodology of teaching Islamic education largely focuses on memory through rote learning, teacher-centeredness, and encourages traditional approaches such as issuing corporal punishments, and so on. For effective curriculum implementation, all the domains of learning have to be addressed, including the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Syah, 2016).

The assessment and evaluation of a curriculum create checks and balances. This is done to ensure that the goals and aims for which the curriculum was designed have been achieved (Goode, 2020). It is also administered to monitor learning progress and determine whether the curriculum is relevant. In addition, assessments and evaluations must be holistic, encompassing all major aspects of learning, such as cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains (Yusof et al., 2018). These aspects tend to be neglected in the implementation strategy of the Islamic education curriculum in Uganda.

The school environment provides infrastructure in terms of classrooms and teaching-learning materials such as audio-visual aids (Hashim, 2017). The teaching of Islamic education can go beyond the classroom environment, it goes outside the class where the learners have to put into practice certain Islamic principles and practices, such as dress code, prayer, and so on (Hassan, 2015). Sometimes, the schools where Islamic education is taught in Uganda are non-Muslim-founded schools whose environment may not be suitable for such practices (Campbell & Oblinger, 2007).

Parents participate in implementing the hidden curriculum as well as the official curriculum in various ways, collaborating with teachers, school authorities, and the community at large to ensure its smooth application (Apau, 2021). They provide scholastic materials and other requirements to learners (Yusof et al., 2018). Since Islamic education entails practice and morality, parents play a vital role in instilling these virtues and practices (Omar & Noh, 2015). The aims and goals of Islamic education cannot be effectively achieved if parents abandon their responsibilities and leave the task of inculcating values in learners solely to teachers (Syah, 2016).

The role of teachers cannot be underestimated in the process of curriculum implementation, as it is the pivot of implementation itself (Pandey, 2018). Teaching the students, the content matters, but the method of delivery is key. Islamic education teachers use traditional methods of teaching. Even in the twenty-first century, they still consider learners as empty tins to be filled, holding on so strongly to the concept of *tabula rasa*. Twenty-first-century challenges require contemporary solutions. Learners in this day and age are more exposed to information and knowledge compared to learners of ancient times. The trends in education globally have also shifted from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach (Aydin et al., 2017). Teachers cannot afford to remain rigid on outdated instructional approaches.

The role of multimedia-based instruction cannot be ignored. The Islamic education curriculum can be implemented using modern information and communication technologies. Modules can be designed using high-resolution graphics to enrich the learning process. The use of PowerPoint presentations and electronic-based learning. Using databases and online search engines to create content and update existing information.

The role of the school administration is basically to play a supervisory role (Phaeton & Stears, 2017). Ensuring standards and quality assurance (Davis, 2021). Providing all the requirements and equipment to foster learning (Kisirkoi & Mse, 2016). Monitoring and evaluation of students to see whether religious studies have impacted their behaviour and morality, as well as to maximize academic performance (Bruens, 2021). The administrators are in charge of creating a school environment suitable for Islamic education through the construction of Mosques and ablution places. Set a vision and mission that will allow learners to practice the Islamic values acquired in class (Davis, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which is particularly suited for exploratory research seeking to understand complex social and educational phenomena from the perspectives of those directly involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretivist approach was chosen to allow

for a nuanced, context-sensitive exploration of how stakeholders in Islamic education perceive and experience curriculum implementation and reform within Uganda's madrasah institutions.

Data collection involved multiple sources to ensure depth and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten key informants, including teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists from three selected Islamic institutes. These institutions were purposively sampled based on their long-standing engagement in *Idaad* and *Thanawi*-level instruction and their role in preparing students for advanced Islamic studies locally and abroad. In addition to interviews, relevant institutional documents—such as syllabi, teaching plans, and assessment tools—were reviewed to contextualize the reported practices and align them with stated curricular goals. An observation matrix was also employed to record classroom dynamics and instructional approaches, providing additional insight into curriculum implementation in practice.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-step framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary data were first coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data. Codes were then organised into clusters of related meanings, which formed the basis for broader themes related to curriculum design, pedagogical practices, reform perspectives, and institutional challenges (Creswell, 2007).

To enrich the findings and position them within a broader academic discourse, the study also incorporated a comprehensive review of relevant scholarly literature. This included empirical and theoretical works on Islamic education curricula, curriculum implementation frameworks, and reform debates from Uganda and comparable contexts. Theoretical insights were drawn from both classical Islamic educational philosophy and modern curriculum studies, facilitating a balanced analytical approach.

This multi-pronged methodology enabled the researcher to capture diverse stakeholder perspectives and critically examine the alignment—or lack thereof—between curriculum intentions, implementation strategies, and educational outcomes in Uganda's madrasah system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the documentary analysis made, the curricular documents from the institutes that participated in the study have differences as well as similarities. They have different authorship and ownership. The aims and contents are the same, with minimal differences in the details of the topics and references. Key issues were raised, analysed, and discussed. For instance, each institute follows a different curriculum, the content of which is rooted in the Saudi Arabian context, and science subjects are excluded from the teaching and learning of Islamic education.

Moreover, multiple curricular documents are in circulation and are followed by different institutes in Uganda. The lack of a unified curriculum has contributed to a lack of recognition from relevant government regulatory authorities.

The Islamic education curriculum was rooted in that of Saudi Arabia, while the teaching and learning of theology was being introduced back in the day. Since then, it has never been updated. Furthermore, the context of the Islamic education curriculum is deeply entrenched in the classical Arab culture, which is its origin. This makes it difficult for the learners to easily relate to the content, for instance, some of the examples used may not exist in the country, and socio-economic aspects of Uganda and national values are not reflected in the curriculum of Islamic education. Several attempts have been made by concerned stakeholders to update the Islamic education curriculum, however, key players who hold fundamentalist ideas have always perceived this as a path of contaminating the theology with alien systems. Akram had this to say:

Whenever the world changes, we have to adapt to what is changing. Because you see some materials, for instance, the history part of it was based on Saudi Arabia, learning about Saudi Arabia and other countries outside Uganda... Learning about the history of Uganda is more beneficial. It is beneficial for a learner to know how Islam came to Uganda and the Muslim dignitaries who have helped Islam to grow in the country, and the Muslim facilities we have in the country, other than knowing those outside of the country.

Ali revealed:

We do not have a definite curriculum to be followed. Like I told you, Islamic University In Uganda has a curriculum and has an exam, *majmu'at al-madāris al-Qur'āniyyah* has a curriculum, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council has a curriculum, and for them, they married one of the Katudde, which is the one they take as the national curriculum. Now of the three, which one is the curriculum of the country? And which one is registered by the Ministry of Education? Where are we registered? For us, our schools are known as Qur'an schools. Everybody knows that we teach only the Qur'an.

This, therefore, means that the curriculum of Islamic education has several versions in Uganda, whereby numerous organisations have different syllabi they follow. Each theological institute subscribes to a curriculum of its choice. Each organization sets examinations, and some institutes have their syllabi and set their organization. This lack of unification affects the students who graduate in so many ways, including a lack of recognition and having problems with equating the quality of learners from various institutes. The curriculum of Islamic education has to be unified, standardised, and accredited to meet both local and international demands (Beribe, 2023). A unified, accredited, and standardised curriculum is easier to monitor, assess, evaluate, review, and update. In another study conducted by Abdullah et al. (2024), they revealed that the Islamic education curriculum still faces a challenge of relevance in which it has to address the emerging global trends by providing sharia-compliant solutions while maintaining and promoting Islamic values.

Similarly, Ali says that the content of the Islamic education curriculum currently used in Uganda has its foundation and basis from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, he said:

For us, we are using the curriculum of Saudi Arabia; most of the things we teach children we teach things from Saudi Arabia. We teach *usuful*, then they will give you stories of Saudi Arabia, of Egypt, like there is a book of *Barzanji* which talks about Sahrami, it talks about Syria. So you will find that most of the things are not innovated from this side, but we only teach the curriculum of Saudi Arabia, yet we are in Uganda. So, for me, I feel that the Katudde group is trying to customise and as we speak now, they are now based on two modules, they are looking at the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council and Kibuli. So, most of the things are put in the curriculum when they expose Kibuli and the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council as our icons. So, I think one of the things that we can do is to customise the knowledge that we are teaching children. When we go Arabic language, we need to teach children vocabulary to understand and use the vocabulary of things that are available, tell them about Lake Nalubale, the river Nile, how it's called, and what is its significance in Uganda. But in my curriculum that I teach, there's nothing like Nile, there is nothing like Lake Victoria, there is nothing talking about the leaders in this country, you only learn about *al-wahabiyyiina* in Saudi Arabia, the four imams are the ones that we study. So I feel that that one is a weakness, and we don't have a think tank that can change these things.

This implies that the learners are disengaged from the content of the curriculum in such a way that they cannot easily relate with the context, and it makes it difficult to conceptualize and apply the same to the prevailing situations in a local context. Mutmainah et al. (2024) alluded that the Islamic education curriculum only tackles the cognitive domain and abandons the affective and psychomotor domains, which are relevant to contemporary educational trends. Moreover, Fuadi and Suyatno (2020) argue that the integration of the Islamic education curriculum with national values can be of much greater value because it helps transform the learners who are law-abiding citizens and God-fearing individuals. In addition, the Islamic education curriculum must rhyme with the emerging trends in education to remain relevant towards the advancement of humanity (Abdullah et al., 2024). Furthermore, the curriculum of Islamic education ought to prepare the learners as global citizens who are ready to serve in any corner of the world (Beribe, 2023).

From the observations made in all three participating Islamic institutes, the teaching and learning environment was not only characterised by teacher-centred techniques but also the content taught was in the Saudi context and not in the local Ugandan context.

Additionally, Musa states that the curriculum is tailored for an Arabic culture and environment, and not everything may be suitable for the local Ugandan context. He explains that unless the teacher can present the content in a way familiar to the learners, using local scenarios and examples, the learners may struggle to benefit from the foreign syllabus. He said:

The books we use while teaching Islamic education were designed in a foreign environment, not in our local atmosphere. They were written in Saudi Arabia and the Arabic language, while bringing examples and emphasising the context of Arabia. A teacher should have the capacity to use a context from such texts translating it to the local context which the learners are familiar with for instance where they use donkeys, the teacher may have to use cows because our learners interact more with cows than donkeys, despite the fact that we may have a few donkeys locally. The teacher should be using illustrations from the social-geographical context of the learners, highlighting examples that learners have seen and interacted with. Sometimes learning becomes difficult whenever learners are taught in a context of things they don't understand.

Likewise, Adam argues that the stories in Islamic literature transmitted to learners, including folklore, comics, drama, legends, and mythology, represent only the Arab culture and may not enable the learners to appreciate their culture and identity while preserving the values of Islam, which should be promoted by Islamic education. He said;

We are in Uganda, but the content of the curriculum is foreign. You teach learners things they have never seen, such as grapes, and you teach about camels, basically teaching an environment with which the learners have never interacted. In addition, some stories do not belong to us, we have our drama and literature. We have our artists, such as the late Hon. Kato Lubwama and others, who have contributed to our local literature content, however, we depend so much on Arabic literature, which does not benefit us. Even the geographical examples we give are from Arabia. I teach Arabic language, but the examples we use in Arabic grammar are foreign; it is very difficult to find an Arabic language teacher using examples such as mangoes. While teaching nouns, the classifications and types, instead of bringing unfamiliar examples, use the ones known to the learners, such as matooke, jackfruit, pineapple, and things that are easily known. Some of the learners have never eaten dates, they don't know barley. Some of the things erase our established known cultures. There was a teacher who was teaching and brought a very strange word 'كُمْتَرِي', which means pear. The learners began wondering what Pears look like. Instead of bringing pears as examples in class, talk about avocados, which the learners are more familiar with.

Isolating national heritage in the curriculum of Islamic education stifles the spirit of patriotism, undermines confidence and self-awareness among learners, and paves the way for an identity crisis in both teachers and students. It also fosters tendencies toward identity crises and disconnects local oral traditions and cultural literature, including folklore, comics, drama, and legends. The curriculum must align with the values of the nation and empower learners to develop a sense of identity and pride in their roots, ensuring that expressions such as proverbs, folklore, stories, and precedents stem from the local context (Gyagenda, 2024). Furthermore, to effectively apply Islamic principles, learners must be acquainted with the traditions, customs, and cultures of a specific group of people. Mayanja (2014) revealed that one of the major Islamic legal maxims is that customs are a basis for judgement (Al-'adah muḥakkamah). Now, if Islamic education in Uganda is preparing future jurists, how can they apply Islamic knowledge in their local context if it is taught within a foreign framework?

Moreover, according to Balad, some of the content taught at the *idaad* and *thanawi* levels is outdated. He says there has to be a revision of the content in the curriculum and significant updates made. He says;

The content of Islam being taught now, based on my own analysis, shows that there are some lacking elements. What was taught by the prophet at first and the behavior of the sahaba who stayed with the prophet, while it is true, we can't say it cannot be applied, we can apply them; but based on current affairs, we should revise the way we apply them so that they align with the current situation. What they teach the learners now cannot enable them to think critically; they are presenting the learners with what's already behind them.

They may imply that the content in the curriculum must align with the demands of the current generation. While the knowledge may be relevant, it needs to be contextualised to address the challenges of the 21st century and enable learners to think critically and analytically.

The exclusion of science subjects from the Islamic education curriculum, such as biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, geography, and others, may limit students' preparedness for broader career opportunities. There is a dichotomy in the teaching and learning of Islamic education, where the theological content is viewed

as spiritual and holy. At the same time, the other subjects are categorised as secular education. Moreover, Islam is a complete way of life in which all knowledge is perceived to originate from Allah and, therefore, is Godly. Furthermore, this classification of knowledge and subjects has hindered Islamic education learners from thinking critically, being creative, and being equipped to address societal issues.

Ali reveals that this dichotomy has hindered the development of innovation and the invention of new ideas in the Muslim world, largely due to the way Islamic education is presented, even though one cannot eliminate science from theology and Islamic education. He says;

We have science books in theology, we have the books of chemistry, we have the books of physics, and mathematics. But we never teach them, why? We have never been taught, but they exist. What I am saying is that there is a book of chemistry, it teaches chemistry, but in theology, but we can't teach it. One time when I was moving around in the library, I found those books in the library from Saudi Arabia, geography books, the geography of Saudi Arabia in Uganda. But nobody can teach geography in our curriculum because even when you check the scripts being produced, there is no subject called geography.

The Qur'an in chapter 6:38, inside the verse, Allah says, "مَّا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ" everything you see, the people who innovate get everything from the Qur'an. When we come here and we are in practical life, we tell children that we do not want them to study secular, meaning secular is not our knowledge. And yet the Qur'an emphasizes that whatever exists comes from the Qur'an. So, innovation and creativity are supposed to be embedded into theology.

He further argues that the teaching and learning of theology should be able to produce citizens with the ability to invent and innovate and come up with new ideas that can help improve and make this world a better place. He says;

There must be innovation. We must have theology children being able to invent. We should be able to read the Qur'an, interpret, and come up with something as a reflection. Like now, the verse which is in chapter 55, it talks about astronomy that people can go to heaven and they can even reach the moon. Why can't we have an innovation? How can we get there? Is it possible if Allah says it's possible? So, the theology education, we feel the ideal is that we need to teach theology like the Prophet ﷺ taught. How did he teach? The Prophet ﷺ used to teach the sahabah until they understood and implemented.

In a similar vein, Balad revealed that the Islamic education teachers are always against the curriculum that teaches science subjects such as chemistry and biology. He says that they use derogatory language to discourage Islamic education learners from ever engaging with what they call the secular curriculum. He says;

The sheikhs, when they come to teach us, they always emphasise the badness of the other curriculum. Whenever they enter the class, they say 'you are studying the things of St.Nagis' "you are from studying chemistry that one they make alcohol, things that are very dirty..." when they reach the class, what I know, they focus on emphasising the badness of other subjects giving the impression that the only acceptable curriculum before Allah is *Idaad* and *thanawi*... they do not share the benefits we can get from acquiring knowledge from science subjects.

This may imply that theology teachers are unaware of the importance of integrating knowledge and do not appreciate advancements in science and technology. Additionally, they may fear losing potential clients if students choose to pursue secular studies. Furthermore, they may genuinely believe that scientific disciplines are satanic and unrelated to Islamic theology, which they view as the ultimate source of salvation. Fakhurrrazi et al. (2024) suggest that blending Islamic values with contemporary sciences will create holistic learners who are morally upright, possess strong Islamic values, and also become critical thinkers, intellectuals, and problem solvers, thereby uplifting the standards of Muslim communities in all aspects of life. A contemporary Islamic education curriculum should be developed to integrate Islamic values with modern science. Despite this, some Islamic institutions teach both theology and a secular curriculum. The National Curriculum Development Centre opposes this due to concerns about overloading learners and issues with timetabling (Kisekka, 2022).

Moreover, Ali emphasizes that what people refer to as secular knowledge was invented by classical Muslim theologians and scholars who read the Qur'an, interpreted it, conducted research, and developed innovations and practical solutions to the problems and needs of their time. He says:

Most of the secular disciplines were initiated by Muslims. Learning the Qur'an, writing books, and interpreting them, that's why some of the verses are being understood later. Even currently, there are verses of the Qur'an that are being understood. Why is it that the names of the Muslims are the ones being changed? Because there is a concept that a Muslim or an Arab or someone who has studied theology cannot invent anything. But people like Ibn-Sīnā, Ibn-Sīnā is called Avicenna, now they confuse us, and you think that that is not an Islamic name, but Ibn-Sīnā was a Muslim and he studied the Qur'an. So we want to go back and check and ask Ibn-Sīnā what he did do? How was he teaching? How was he learning? How did he discover?

During the golden age of Islam, Islamic education was not only comprised of theological subjects but rather covered a wide range of subjects, including Alchemy (chemistry), Mathematics, Philosophy, astronomy, physics, and other human sciences (Gyagenda, 2024). Consequently, this era managed to produce many Muslim polymaths who were proficient in a variety of disciplines, for example, Al-Kindi, Al-Ghazālī, Ibn-Sīnā, and Al-Khawarizimi, among others.

In a study conducted by Eminoğlu et al. (2020), it was discovered that it is possible to fuse Islamic education with science and sociological subjects, and that Islamic education can be more meaningful and beneficial for both teachers and learners when blended with science subjects. This combination offers a better understanding and expands future opportunities while interacting with the environment. In another study, Ali (2020) noted that science in Indonesia is taught concurrently with Islamic education, using internalization, liberalization, and deductive methods. This approach produces scientists who possess a strong foundation in Islamic values and scientific skills, positioning them to serve humanity while maintaining spiritual well-being.

The various curricula of Islamic education in Uganda are designed by non-professionals in curriculum development. Sometimes the syllabi are developed by the clergy, some of whom may lack sufficient knowledge and skills in curriculum design and development. Adam revealed that:

The curriculum we have was not designed by qualified people. Because someone has to be a qualified specialist in curriculum development and design before participating in curriculum development. However, someone may be educated to the level of a sheikh and decides to set up an independent body to develop and design a curriculum without considering essential aspects of the curriculum, for instance, the nature of the content, what to include, or exclude. I have been teaching following the curriculum developed by the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, however, while teaching, we have been making several amendments because, in the process, we discovered that certain things were irrelevant and inappropriate. It's designed by just a click of people, for instance, the one for primary is attributed to Katudde. As a person, he has his views, but if it is a body, various people will combine heads. Trained personnel will be asking relevant questions. Is the content appropriate? Is the curriculum relevant? Will the curriculum benefit the learners in future? Will the curriculum shape the learner's behaviour?

Furthermore, the curriculum of Islamic education is outdated in a way that it is in line with the demands and needs of the contemporary generation. Ali says there is a need for the curriculum of Islamic education to be updated, he says;

It is outdated. So we are now giving advice that there is a need, if we have people who are writing about curriculum, our Islamic curriculum should at least be updated. It needs to be updated so that it moves with the trends of the 21st century. We are looking at digitalisation of the world; we are looking at the prayers that are performed; we have things that we teach our children, like joining of prayers, to combine *dhuḥur* and *aswir*, you should have moved a distance of about 4 miles or a distance where you get tired. Now that distance that we talk about, we don't specify, and we don't explain to children. You will discover that when a person travels for 120km in only 3 hours when he has reached, so the relevance of joining *swala* now becomes invalid. When it comes to fasting, we tell them that when you are a *musafir*, the Prophet *s.a.w* taught that one of the reasons that can make you not to fast is when you are a *musafir*. But to move about 200km a day, you cannot even finish the whole day, somebody will eat *daku*

in an area and then breaks the fast after reaching the destination. So the curriculum is outdated; we need to update it.

This indicates that the curriculum of Islam must align with the current trends of the 21st century. Additionally, changes in time and context may alter the interpretation of Islamic texts and thought, implying that the curriculum needs continuous updates to meet contemporary needs. Furthermore, the content of the curriculum should be organised by complexity and necessity, considering learners' levels of understanding and their ability to interpret and apply the acquired knowledge, competencies, and skills (Bruner, 1977). There is also a pressing need for regular reviews of the Islamic education curriculum. According to Adam, one of the participants in the study, the curriculum of Islamic education is seldom analysed or reviewed to determine whether it serves its intended purpose. Moreover, reviewing the Islamic education curriculum involves assessing the relevance of certain topics and subjects, phasing out some, merging others, introducing new ones, and suggesting innovative approaches to teaching and learning at specified intervals.

CONCLUSION

The Islamic education curriculum and syllabus in Uganda are outdated in such a way that the learners may not address the contemporary challenges within the Muslim community. In addition, several syllabi by different organizations are being followed in teaching and learning Islamic education in traditional Islamic institutes. Moreover, all are in the cultural-economic context of Saudi Arabia, making it difficult for the learners to relate and freely interact with the content. Furthermore, the curriculum of Islamic education at various *madrasas* is designed by people who are not qualified to develop or design curricula.

The philosophy of the Islamic education curriculum does not align with national goals or the frameworks of the Sustainable Development Goals and Millennium Development Goals.

Moreover, the curriculum of traditional Islamic education excludes modern sciences such as physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics, and others, which restricts graduates' future career and professional opportunities.

Assessment and evaluation tools and systems are not standardised. Every institute subscribes to a different examination body. Some institutes administer their own examinations without subscribing to any organization. The tests and examinations administered largely test memory and Arabic language proficiency. The examinations involve both written and oral examinations conducted weekly, monthly, and termly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to re-imagine and restate the philosophy of Islamic education in Uganda. This will enable it to align with contemporary national needs and values and be consistent with emerging global trends. A holistic philosophy will consider full transformation of individuals spiritually, but also equip them with adequate skills and attitude to solve societal problems through creativity and critical thinking. By so doing, the aims and goals of the Islamic education curriculum would have aligned with the SDGs and MDGs.

Modern science subjects such as biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics should be integrated into the curriculum of Islamic education to broaden and enhance both the career and academic opportunities available to theology graduates. Teaching and learning science subjects from the perspective of Islam can be rooted in the classical Islamic golden age and help merge the values and principles of Islam with our contemporary understanding of the world.

There is a need to customize the curriculum of Islamic education for traditional Islamic institutes so that it aligns with the learners' environment. Contextualising the syllabi can be accomplished by incorporating local examples and events, integrating leadership structures, folklore, stories, as well as geographical and historical backgrounds, so that learners are familiar with the content being delivered. In addition, all stakeholders—including professionals in education, religious leaders, and community leaders—should play a central role in designing the curriculum to ensure that its values align with communal and national values.

Providing materials to schools, such as infrastructure, textbooks (Islamic education), and other instructional materials, will enhance the teaching-learning environment. Teachers should be trained on how to implement the new curriculum through short courses (Nnabuike et al., 2016). The content should be integrated with contemporary developments in the world. Issues within the contemporary Muslim world should be addressed by the curriculum, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), terrorism/Boko Haram/al-Shabab/Islamic State in Syria (ISIS), the status of women in society, and the contribution of Muslims towards global development. Islam should be perceived as an independent worldview that encourages coexistence and globalization (Aydin et al., 2017). Embracing the practice of continuous evaluation of the entire curriculum will allow for improvements whenever necessary. It is important to remain flexible and pursue benchmarking. Setting achievable and realistic aims, goals, and objectives is essential. New methods of curriculum instruction should be adopted, including the use of information and communication technologies to aid teaching, research, and content creation (Kisirkoi & Mse, 2016). Moreover, integrating information and communication technologies may enhance the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum through simulated instruction, PowerPoint presentations, facilitating online instruction, and creating learning materials, among others (Gyagenda, 2021). Furthermore, learner-centeredness should be promoted by encouraging and promoting a learner-centred approach in the instruction of Islamic education (Kisirkoi & Mse, 2016). Parents should fulfil their role alongside teachers, and both must collaborate to ensure efficiency in curriculum implementation. More empirical research is still needed to ascertain the efficiency of teaching and learning in Islamic education and to guarantee effective curriculum implementation.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, A., Zaqiah, Q. Y., Ridwan, M., Hisniat, S. B., Mahmud, & Erihardiana, M. (2024). Reactualization Islamic theology in education: Designing curriculum, method learning, and technology integration for transformation educative. *Britain International of Linguistics, Arts and Education (BIOAE) Journal*, 6(1), 24-32.
- Ali, N. (2020). Integrating science and religion in the curriculum of Indonesian Islamic higher education: A case study of UIN Malang. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 13(9), 948-960.
- Apau, S. K. (2021). Teachers' concerns about the implementation of the standard-based curriculum in Ghana: A case study of Effutu Municipality. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 16(5), 202-211.
- Asfiati, Asfiati. "Merdeka curriculum: Encouraging creativity and innovation of Islamic religious education teachers in madrasah." *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (2023): 681-698.
- Aydin, H., Ozfidan, B., & Carothers, D. (2017). Meeting the challenges of curriculum and instruction in school settings in the United States. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, VIII(3), 76-92.
- Beribe, M. F. (2023). The impact of globalization on content and subjects in the curriculum in madrasah ibtidaiah: Challenges and opportunities. *At-Tasyrih Jurnal Pendidikan dan Hukum Islam*, 9(1), 54-68.
- Bruens, R. (2020, September 1). *At-a-glance: Educational administrators*. Retrieved November 10, 2021, from <https://resilienteducator.com/teaching-careers/educational-supervisor/>
- Bruner, J. S. (1977). *The process of education*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Campbell, J., & Oblinger, D. (2007, July 30). *Top-ten teaching and learning issues, 2007*. Retrieved November 2021, from <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2007/7/topten-teaching-and-learning-issues-2007>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches-Second Edition*. London: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th Edition ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Davis, B. (2021, May 2). *Mvorganizing.org*. Retrieved October 15, 2021, from <https://www.mvorganizing.org/what-are-the-elements-of-curriculum-implementation/>
- Davis, B. (2021, May 8). *The role of administrator in curriculum development*. Retrieved November 10, 2021, from <https://www.mvorganizing.org/what-is-the-role-of-administrator-in-curriculum-development/>
- Douglass, S. L., & Shaikh, M. A. (2004). Defining islamic education: Differentiation and applications. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 7(1), 5-18.

- El-Mubarak, A. M., & Hassan, I. (2021). Challenges of Islamic education in the era of globalization: A proposed holistic solution. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10(3), 337–349.
- Eminoğlu, S., Haşiloğlu, M. A., & Keskin, B. (2020). A Qualitative Study on the Use of the Concepts and Subjects of Life Sciences in Religion Courses. *Mimbar Sekolah Dasar*, 7(3), 327-347.
- Fakhrurrazi, Wasilah, N., & Jaya, H. (2024, January). Islam and knowledge: Harmony between sciences and faith. *Journal of Modern Islamic Studies and Civilization*, 2(1), 45-57.
- Fuadi, A., & Suyatno. (2020). Integration of nationalistic and religious values in Islamic education: Study in integrated Islamic school. *Randwick International of Social Science Journal*, 1(3), 555-570.
- Goode, K. (2020). *Curriculum Evaluation: Process & Models*. Retrieved 2021, from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/curriculum-evaluation-process-models.html>
- Gyagenda, A. (2021). Integration of modern ICTs as modes of instruction for Islamic education in higher institutions of learning. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, 4(2), 133-145. <https://doi.org/10.53449/ije.v4i2.62>
- Gyagenda, A. (2021). The relevance of Al-Ghazali's educational views to the contemporary system of Muslim education: Focus on Islamic education in Uganda. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, 4(1), 1-12.
- Gyagenda, A. (2023). Application of Bloom's taxonomy in the instruction of Islamic education. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, 6(1), 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.53449/ije.v6i1.222>
- Gyagenda, A. (2024). Culture and educational policy in Uganda. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, 7(1), 56-70. <https://doi.org/10.53449/ije.v7i1.371>
- Gyagenda, A. (2024). The contribution of Muslim scholars towards science, technology and knowledge: A historical perspective. *Journal of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language*, 3(2), 85-104
- Hassan, T. L. (2015). The exigency of integrating Quran education within secular curricular in non-Islamic states: A case of Uganda. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research*, 24(4), 235-252.
- Idaad and Thanawi curriculum. (2005)
- Kabali, S. (2019). Contribution of madrasah system to the development of human resource in Uganda and its neighbouring countries. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, 2(1), 89-100.
- Kisekka, C. (2022, September 27). *Madrasa education: NCDC, Muslims yet to agree on dual curriculum*. Retrieved July 2023, from <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/madrasa-education-ncdc-muslims-yet-to-agree-on-dual-curriculum>
- Kisirkoi, F. K., & Mse, G. (2016). Curriculum Implementation: Strategies for improved learning outcomes in primary schools in Kenya. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 5(1), 19-26.
- Lujja, S., Muhammed, M. O., & Hassan, R. (2016). Islamic Education in Uganda: Challenges and prospects of Islamization of knowledge. *TAWARIKH*, 7(2).
- Mayanja, S. J. (2014). *The Islamic legal maxims: A critical analysis*. Chukwani: The College of Education Press
- Mutmainah, S., Supriyanto, & Amrin. (2024). Problems of Islamic education: Analysis of philosophical perspectives. *Cendikia: Media Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 14(4), 448-457.
- Nimulola, M. A. (2018). Teachers' perceptions of the Ugandan secondary school Islamic religious education syllabi. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, 1(1), 10-25.
- Nnabuike, E., Aneke, M., & Otegbulu, R. (2016). Curriculum implementation and the teacher: Issues, challenges and the way forward. *International Journal in Commerce, IT & Social Sciences*, 3(6), 41-48.
- Omar, N., & Noh, M. A. (2015). Islamic education teaching practice based on the cultural diversity of students. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 4(1), 135-142.

- Pak, K., Polikoff, M. S., Desimone, L. M., & García, E. S. (2020). The adaptive challenges of curriculum implementation: Insights for educational leaders driving standards-based reform. *sagepub.com/journals-permissions*, 6(2), 1-15.
- Pandey, N. (2018, December). Barriers to effective curriculum implementation. *TechnoLEARN: An International Journal of Educational Technology*, 8(2), 65-69.
- Phaeton, M. J., & Stears, M. (2017). Exploring the alignment of the intended and implemented curriculum through teachers' interpretation: A case study of A-level biology practical work. *Journal of Mathematics Science and Technology Education*, 13(3), 723-740.
- Reimers, Fernando M. 2024. "The sustainable development goals and education, achievements and opportunities." *International Journal of Educational Development* 104:102965. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102965.
- Sheikh, A. S. (2013). *Islamic education in Kenya: A case study of islamic integrated schools in Garissa county*. Nairobi. [PhD Thesis, not published]
- Sseremba, Y. (2023). *America and the production of Islamic truth in Uganda*. Routledge.
- Syah, M. N. (2016). Challenges of Islamic education in Muslim world: Historical, political, and socio-cultural perspective. *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 4(1), 82-105.
- Yusof, R., Yin, K. Y., Norwani, N. M., & Jaafar, H. (2018). Conceptualizing curriculum evaluation in education degree programmes in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(6), 1020–1033.