
ADAPTING PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES IN MODEL ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: BALANCING CONTEMPORARY NEEDS WITH ISLAMIC VALUES

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Abstract

This paper examines the adaptation of pedagogical approaches in model Islamic educational institutions in The Gambia, focusing on the balance between contemporary educational needs and Islamic values. Through a comparative analysis of a selected institution in The Gambia, this study explores how the school incorporates innovative teaching strategies and contemporary curricula alongside traditional Islamic teachings using a single case study of the qualitative research approach. The findings were viewed through DuBow and Litzler's (2019) Theory of Change (ToC). A thorough synthesis of the data, collected through semi-structured interviews with the school leader and teachers, revealed that model Islamic schools in the Gambia could integrate modern teaching methods and maintain their students' Islamic values through preparation (planning), execution (implementation), risks, and outcomes (evaluative interventions). The findings from this paper highlight best practices and identify potential areas for improvement, offering insights into how a model Islamic educational institution can effectively navigate the demands of modern education without compromising its foundational Islamic values. The implications for policymakers, educators, and religious leaders underscore the importance of collaboration and flexibility in fostering educational environments that honor Islamic traditions and contemporary educational standards.

Keywords: pedagogical approaches; Islamic educational institutions; contemporary needs; Islamic values; Gambia

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji adaptasi pendekatan pedagogis di institusi pendidikan Islam model di Gambia, dengan fokus pada keseimbangan antara kebutuhan pendidikan kontemporer dan nilai-nilai Islam. Melalui analisis komparatif pada salah satu institusi di Gambia, studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana sekolah tersebut mengintegrasikan strategi pengajaran inovatif dan kurikulum kontemporer bersama dengan pengajaran Islam tradisional menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus tunggal dalam penelitian kualitatif. Temuan dianalisis menggunakan Theory of Change (ToC) dari DuBow dan Litzler (2019). Sintesis data yang diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan pemimpin sekolah dan guru mengungkapkan bahwa sekolah Islam model di Gambia dapat mengintegrasikan metode pengajaran modern sekaligus mempertahankan nilai-nilai Islam siswa melalui tahapan persiapan (perencanaan), pelaksanaan (implementasi), risiko, dan hasil (intervensi evaluatif). Temuan dari artikel ini menyoroti praktik terbaik dan mengidentifikasi potensi area yang dapat ditingkatkan, serta memberikan wawasan tentang bagaimana institusi pendidikan Islam model dapat secara efektif menavigasi tuntutan pendidikan modern tanpa mengorbankan nilai-nilai Islam yang mendasarinya. Implikasinya bagi pembuat kebijakan, pendidik, dan pemimpin agama menekankan pentingnya kolaborasi dan fleksibilitas dalam menciptakan lingkungan pendidikan yang menghormati tradisi Islam sekaligus memenuhi standar pendidikan kontemporer.

Kata kunci: pendekatan pedagogis; institusi pendidikan Islam; kebutuhan kontemporer; nilai-nilai Islam; Gambia

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Introduction

Islamic educational institutions are managed based on three keywords: management, education, and Islam. This means that Islamic educational institutions must be designed according to the characteristics of Islamic teaching. However, this cannot be pinpointed directly from the Quran; hence, it is written in “ayats” (signs). Nevertheless, there are some indications of how these institutions should be run while considering several factors (Bahri et al., 2022). Model Islamic educational institutions play a vital role in shaping the future leaders of the Islamic community. They are expected to generate students who are not only able to seek out jobs but also establish employment opportunities. With the advent of integrated Islamic educational institutions, these students stand out as trustworthy and responsible because they are religious, skilled in governance, and cultured. This gives them a chance over those who have only gone through secular education (Hakiem et al., 2023). In addition, Fadlan (2023) argued that model Islamic institutions have become an arena of meaningful educational values both for the future and the present, following societal advancement in science and technology. These institutions are engaged in academically developing Muslims in areas such as economics, investment, and academic planning. Therefore, improving such educational institutions is vital for managers to continuously enrich their scope and understanding of the task entrusted to them. With this, we expect economic growth and development for individuals and the nation. For this to succeed, it is expected that all stakeholders join hands in investing in such kind of education to encourage sustainable development, which also requires planning, organizing, and building solid educational institutions to produce competitive outputs (Guna et al., 2024).

Dating back to the medieval period of Islam, Islamic education has a rich culture and tradition. Education in Islam encompasses various directions, including Quranic studies, the history of Islam, Islamic jurisprudence, ethics, spirituality, and what is known today as either secular or Western education. All these are aimed at developing an individual with an understanding of Islamic teachings, principles, and the overall human, who could serve both as a servant of Allah through worship and devotion to Islam while serving the community through their knowledge. Zuhdi (2022) further reiterated that with the Islamic educational ideology, individuals can understand and interpret the Quran and Hadith, the primary sources of guidance for Muslims. Madrasas and Islamic schools have been key in maintaining and disseminating Islamic knowledge and values across generations, especially during the colonial era (Tan., 2017). At this time, foreign rulers had tried all means to inject their ideology into the teachings of Islam, yet those in charge remained stoic on their ground. Recently, there have been debates about integrating secular education into Islamic education. Some traditional scholars believe that learning science is a Western ideology. Therefore, integrating such an education system could lead to deviating and or polluting the minds of their young and emerging communities from following the actual values and traditions of Islam.

However, scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, whose philosophical underpinning is based on the school of essentialism, do not succumb to this ideology. He believes that integrating secular and Islamic education can significantly benefit the overall development of Muslims. This enables Muslims to be aware of the creation of the Creator from the real-world perspective while developing their critical thinking (Yarun et al., 2023). In this way, Muslims should be able to reclaim the mantle that had once belonged to them to add value to the current changes in the globalized world. In addition, Alam (2017) stated that

with the emergence of schools that integrate both secular and Islamic education, there has been a response from the Muslim communities to the dynamics of globalization.

Moreover, the implementation and development of the modern secular education system originated from classical Islamic scholars. Therefore, offering a system of education based on Al-Quran and Sunnah has not only offered educational services to the world but also generated children with morals, spiritual, sociological, psychological, physical, and virtuous noble characters (Rohman (2018). This development of modern education from traditional Islamic education has brought forth changes in the implementation of Islamic education in well-known Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and a host of other Asian countries where Muslims form the largest population. This development has impacted both their system of education and their curriculum. This development came into being considering views that traditional Islamic educational institutions could not fulfill the demands of society.

Also, parents from these Muslim communities started realizing that the existing system was not suitable for modern life anymore. For this reason, the idea of crafting an Islamic educational curriculum in the Madrasah arose, which was followed by the renovation of educational policies by most Muslim-majority countries, especially in Asia Rohman (2018).

However, this development has little or no effect on madrasa in sub-Saharan Africa, leaving them to follow the old and traditional teaching methods in their Islamic schools. Others who have adopted the modern approach are faced with criticism from their communities that they are engaged in a system of education that has been barred by previous Islamic scholars(Freire, 2022). In Pakistan, such schools are faced with a lack of funding by their government, thus leading to a lack of infrastructure and training for teachers, and socially unacceptable, making students faced with demotivation (Iqbal et al., 2023).

Based on the above-mentioned facts, this research aims to answer, how model Islamic educational institutions could address the challenges of adapting pedagogical approaches while maintaining the balance between contemporary educational demands and Islamic values. With that in mind, we want to achieve the following objectives: to explore how model Islamic educational institutions adapt their pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of contemporary society and to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with pedagogical adaptation in Islamic education. By exploring the strategies employed by these institutions, this study intends to provide insights into the dynamic nature of Islamic education in the modern context in the Gambia.

The significance of this study is that it should serve as a light for most other Muslim majority and minority countries to understand some of the challenges present in current model Islamic schools since it aims to answer such questions. Despite the availability of research in this area, especially in Asia, there have been insufficient pieces of literature written on this area in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, and no literature has been found on this topic in the context of the Gambia, thus showing the novelty of the study as well as the gap in the literature. This is evident in the study of (As'ad, 2021; Gyagenda, 2021), who advocate for integrating Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Islamic schools and conducted their study in the context of Indonesia and Uganda, respectively. Practically, the outcome of this research could go a long way in informing policymakers and all education stakeholders in the Gambia and beyond regarding this topic and thus probe solutions with ease.

How Islamic Schools are adapting the Pedagogical Needs of Society without losing Islamic Values

Amzat (2022) emphasized that modern teaching practices can offer students in Islamic schools holistic development, which could be through the integration of contemporary educational methods. This study included case studies and theoretical discussions from various Muslim countries while reflecting on the diverse nature of Islamic education in the wider world. Topics range from environmental education in Indonesia to the assimilation of Western teaching methods in Thailand while highlighting innovative and student-centered teaching strategies. Moreover, their study explored how teacher professionalism through lifelong learning and curriculum reform can pave the way for these changes. He further suggested how other teaching practices could enhance educational outcomes in Islamic settings.

Raihani (2020) stressed the need for social justice and critical thinking pedagogy, highlighting that increasing social injustices and sectarian frictions in Indonesian society are becoming one of the main factors dragging such an education behind. Also, the author emphasized reforming the teachers' skills and knowledge; hence, they have been entrusted to guide the children who are leaders of tomorrow. Reforming teacher education, teachers' philosophical capacity, and critical pedagogical practices are enhanced; however, readers should reconsider the model from an academic lens before putting it in context. To him, this will minimize social injustice and thus refine educational practices.

A study by Sahin (2013) highlighted that Islamic pedagogy refers to educational values, concepts, and perspectives deeply rooted in Islamic traditions, enabling young Muslims to be inspired, informed, and renew their thinking. Unlike other instructional methods, Islamic pedagogy is centered on holistic educational development, nurturing Muslims' minds, bodies, and souls. For him, education in Islam encompasses the concept of purifying the state of Muslim-born children, which is why Sahin (2013) holds parents and educators accountable for nurturing holiness, good character, and critical thinking interplay between knowledge and action as enhance children, especially young Muslims to build self-assessment and introspection.

It has been evident that the most popular pedagogy in traditional Islamic institutions is memorization. This idea developed based on the Muslims' way of preserving the Holy Quran. It is important to understand that one of the fundamental educational outcomes among Muslims is the preservation of the Quran by having it off the heart. However, many traditional Muslim educators failed to understand that the contents of both the Quran and the Hadith were well understood and utilized in their daily activities. This involves critical thinking and reflection (Boyle, 2006; Ogunnaike, 2020).

Although this was the trend during the medieval period, it was stopped by some prominent scholars such as Al-Ghazali. He feared that when philosophy was allowed into these texts, there would come a time when Muslims would blaspheme. This does not simply signify that he was totally against learning science, yet Imam al-Ghazali highlighted the importance of learning science and shaping the curriculum (Arifin, 2018). This idea has contributed to curriculum development, where children in Islamic schools are forced to memorize any learning content, thus leading to rote learning.

For this reason, Islamic schools in Western countries such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom are faced with the dilemma of whether to integrate both secular and traditional Islamic educational pedagogy. These Islamic institutions located in these Western countries have been pressured by their host countries to change. They fear that these Islamic educational institutions have become breeding grounds for Islamic extremists, who are engaged in suicide bombing and thus

becoming threats to societies in the West (Memon, 2021). With that, we now shift to the challenges Islamic institutions face in adopting contemporary teaching methods.

Challenges and Opportunities of Islamic Institutions in Implementing Contemporary Pedagogy

Several studies have explored the challenges and opportunities associated with adapting pedagogical approaches in Islamic education. El-Mubarak and Hassan (2021) believed that the Islamic curriculum is one of the key contemporary issues challenging Islamic pedagogy. Hence, it is the source of information guiding teaching and learning. Also, the diversities and critical alternative approaches required to enhance and transform Islamic education add to the menace of adopting modern pedagogies while considering national values and human resources availability in implementing contemporary pedagogy in Islamic institutions.

Realigning the Islamic education system is not just a mere modification or patchwork; it involves reconstructing, reconciling, and reorienting the Islamic culture to contribute to the take-off stage (Ilham, 2020). In addition, Ilham (2020) suggested six solutions to this long-standing menace. The first is to review Islamic schools while promoting the spirit of Islamic teaching, developing comprehensive quality human resources, and distributing roles among all stakeholders. Also, sensitizing them on their roles is key in addressing this ongoing phenomenon alongside the integration of science and technology as a basis for coping with the challenges of modern demands. This breeds unity not just for the Islamic faith but also for the rest of humanity. He further suggested that widening the horizon of understanding of the local people from the national to the global towards bridging cultural communication while holding onto the Islamic spirit could easily foster these changes.

A study by Elihami et al., (2024) argued that Islamic education has encountered many obstacles. The evolving dynamics prompting the increasing global interconnectedness also offer both prospects and hurdles. They further reiterated that the evolving social landscape, characterized by shifting demographics, attitudes, and values, has also significantly influenced the perception of Islamic education as societies grow diversely and pluralistically. This means that Islamic institutions should navigate into issues such as pluralism, gender equality, and cultural integration while maintaining Islamic values and principles.

Ulmadevi et al. (2023) study concluded that Indonesian pesantren cannot turn a blind eye to change. However, how they embrace these changes should be done with caution. Ulmadevi et al. (2023) further reiterated that today's digital era and the alpha-born generation cannot be separated from technology not even in Islamic boarding schools. This phenomenon has put the pesantren in the dilemma of adapting technology in today's digital environment. Through this manner, they can fulfill national education standards designed by the Indonesian government and meet local and global standards in educational attainment.

Moreover, a study conducted in Islamic schools of Mali, Gambia, and Guinea emphasizes the similarities and diversities across these three states. The study focused on how the Quranic schools and *majlis* in Mandingo-speaking communities based in Gambia, Mali, and Guinea share and vary in certain traits of their lesson delivery. It turns out that certain pupils in these institutions devoted their time to memorizing the Quran with the comprehension of numerous books written in Arabic. On the other hand, it took others decades to acquire such a smattering knowledge. Unlike many other Muslim-majority countries, these countries' Islamic institutions are mainly private and include tuition fees. Due to this

continuing menace, some students from poor backgrounds could not afford these fees. Therefore, they do not receive the needed pedagogy for their early completion and comprehension of Arabic texts and memorizing the Quran (Tamari, 2016).

A study in Malaysia aimed to find how Islamic schools could transform to meet the changes and challenges of globalization while ensuring the current needs of Islamic schools. The findings show that, for Islamic schools to reform to meet contemporary pedagogical needs, there should be changes in the curriculum, teaching style, Islamic school role, and, most importantly, equal gender participation (Hashim & Jemali. 2017).

Theoretical Framework

This paper intends to use DuBow and Litzler's Theory of Change (ToC); hence, it outlines how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a specific context. This theory is sound, particularly when we intend to understand the planning, implementing, and evaluating interventions in complex organizational settings DuBow and Litzler (2019). With the application of DuBow and Litzler's (2019) Theory of Change, we can understand how model Islamic educational institutions can balance contemporary educational demands while maintaining Islamic values.

When this theory is applied, we can identify the desired changes in these model Islamic educational institutions and map out the preconditions, interventions, assumptions, risks, outcomes, and impacts that school administrators, teachers, and students perceive. In other words, the ultimate objective of this research is to identify the effect of these teaching approaches on allowing Islamic educational institutions to adapt to current educational needs while retaining Islamic values (DuBow & Litzler. 2019). The change desired by this institution is to intertwine modern teaching methods with Islamic values, which would improve learners' educational performance. Moreover, through this theoretical framework, we will understand how teachers and school administrators deeply comprehend contemporary educational needs and Islamic values and the supportive policies and institutional frameworks that encourage combining the two.

With the use of (DuBow Litzler, 2019), ToC as a theoretical framework can enhance this paper to explore systematically how model Islamic educational institutions adapt modern pedagogical approaches while maintaining a balance between contemporary societal and educational demands and retaining their Islamic values. Through ToC, we are provided with a comprehensive and well-tailored approach to comprehending the challenges of integrating and developing these effective plans to achieve their intended goals.

Method

This study can gain in-depth insights into adopting pedagogical approaches in model Islamic educational institutions through a qualitative research approach. It is an approach that collects data through non-numerical means (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Since we target a single school, we intend to settle with a single case study design. With this qualitative research design, we can explore how the targeted Islamic educational institutions adapt their pedagogical approaches while maintaining Islamic values. Only one model Islamic educational institution is selected based on its reputation for excellence and diversity in approaches, Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection

We intend to collect our data with the help of semi-structured interviews. Through this qualitative data collection approach, we can garner the insights of school administrators, teachers, and students to understand their perspectives on adapting modern pedagogical approaches while retaining their Islamic values. A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to prompt follow-up questions when they feel they can hear more from the interviewee. Hence, it does not have to be rigid on the list of predetermined questions (Adamson, 2006; George, 2022). Another way we intend to collect data is by analyzing certain school documents such as school policies, curriculum documents, and school mission and vision statements. With all these data, we can understand and analyze some formal aspects of pedagogical adaptation.

The interview will be conducted via digital platforms, depending on the participants' availability and choice. Each interview session is anticipated to be 45 – 60 minutes, depending on the participant's response. As stressed in research ethics, the consent of the participants should be sought and confidential. It would also be necessary to tell participants that they have the right to withdraw from participating in the research and also seek their conscience to be recorded before the start of an interview session. Where necessary, notes will be taken during the interviews to capture non-verbal cues and other observations significant to the research.

Data Analysis

Upon recording the interview, we will transcribe the interview recordings word for word to know who says what. Following the transcriptions, an inductive approach will be used to deduce words into categories to patterns or themes for easy analysis of our findings. As we familiarize ourselves with the generated codes, which will be transposed to emerging themes. With the emergence of themes or patterns, a final report will be produced from the interview while using the ToC as a guide in the process, Sheppard (2020). Thematic analysis will be used as it is a flexible way of generating codes and emerging themes, ((Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Moreover, this approach allows the researcher to be at liberty to draw codes that could help in the emergence of themes relevant to their research. However, it has been criticized by many that it does not dwell on rigorous data analysis. This approach is also compatible with both the constructionist and essentialist paradigms.

Participant Selection Criteria

In the context of this research, a model Islamic school integrates a contemporary education syllabus along with the curriculum designed by AMANA. After a thorough inquiry, I learned that one school fits the design of a model Islamic school in the Gambia. Therefore, only one school has been selected. Meanwhile, interviewing the principal could provide relevant data to answer the above-stated research question since they are involved in policy formulation for the school and beyond. In addition, teachers would also serve as participants since the research aims to discover the challenges faced in integrating modern pedagogies while retaining the Islamic values of both the schools and students. This makes teachers very key since they are involved with the students directly in and outside the classroom; thus, their insights are valuable for the research to attain its aims.

Ethical Considerations

The study follows ethical guidelines set by relevant review boards. The confidentiality and privacy of participants be ensured by anonymizing data and securely storing research materials. This ensures that the research participants remain anonymous to the general public.

Validity and Reliability

The researchers employ member checking to ensure the data is valid and reliable. According to (Popping, 2019)), the former is how the researcher engages one or more participants regarding data accuracy. Moreover, the findings are compared to both previous studies and the theoretical framework to validate the findings or refine the ToC. We can propose a refined model or set recommendations for Islamic educational institutions with the insights gained from the findings. The recommendations drawn from these findings enable policymakers, teachers, and school administrators to design their policy based on ToC and develop training programs that would enhance teachers' profession and curtail curricular resources to align with the ToC framework.

Results and Discussion

Results

Tabel 1. Stages of Implementing Pedagogical Approaches in Model Islamic Educational Institutions (Dubow and Litzler (2019) Theory of Change (ToC))

Planning	Implementation	Evaluative Intervention	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance teaching and learning Student Engagement Teaching and Learning Methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuous Monitoring of lesson plans, scheme of work, crosschecking children's workbooks and notebooks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk Involved Financial constraints Parents fearing their children losing Islamic values Language Barrier Uncovered syllabus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes Positive feedback from Parents Children acquired skills while maintaining Islamic values
Preparation	Execution	Risk Involved	and Outcomes
Emerging themes			

After a thorough reiteration of the interview transcript and code, four themes emerged. These themes are drawn to help answer our research question as well as help us achieve our two objectives. The emerging themes include planning, implementation, outcome, and risks. With these themes, we report our findings as such.

However, it is important to note that the interview was conducted in one of the major local languages widely spoken in the Gambia, Mandinka. After translating the recording to the best of my ability, though it is not my mother tongue. I understand a lot since I was brought up in a Mandinka Community. Having said that, we will wallow in reporting our findings from the research question, how model Islamic educational institutions could address the challenges of adapting pedagogical approaches while maintaining the balance between contemporary educational demands and Islamic values.

Planning (Preparation)

Since they aim to ensure that students have a thorough glimpse of both secular and Islamic education without losing their Islamic values, they are exposed to both educational systems to lead a well-acceptable life with morals and high dignity. In addition, children who have only the experiences of the secular education system often are not able to have Islamic values and, therefore, may not live a very decent life as compared to those who have schooled in Islamic schools. Similarly, those who are schooled only through Islamic schools are unable to understand certain secular jobs like nursing, engineering, and so on. They are not trained to meet such high standards unless in special cases, which may not apply to everyone. Therefore, they become less productive and have little or no chance of employment in public offices; hence, such a skill has not been instilled in these individuals. This makes it pivotal for students from such institutions to be exposed to both, and once that is done, they become equally opportune as those in contemporary schools. Therefore, one of the ways they make sure that this does not happen is to sensitize both teachers and parents to the importance of meeting contemporary pedagogical needs because this gives students not only the theoretical knowledge but also the practical and content knowledge of what has been taught and one our respondent highlighted that one achieves this, one of our respondents stated thus:

“The materials we use for teaching are flashcards where you put writings on how to perform ablution, and other writings such as how to take out Zakat are also written on it. Alternatively, writing the names of things on paper or vanguards. Those are the pedagogic styles that we use in our everyday learning.” (Interview, 6th July, 2024)

From the above, we learn that teachers in Islamic schools place several strategic plans to support learners in adapting to the current contemporary pedagogical approaches. One is using flashcards, word cards, and drawing on vanguards to help children comprehend the topic or topics being delivered in the classroom and keep students engaged. Moreover, this can allow us to say that they use a learner-centered method; hence, teaching and learning are centered on the learners. The teacher can teach his students without deducing their Islamic values through this method. Given that they are taught how to give Zakat (alms), which is not only done through rote learning, it also exposes students to mathematical concepts since it involves what percentage of income they have to give out zakat and how much one gives out for what percentage.

Also, as part of every lesson, teachers need to assess and have feedback from the students on what contents have been digested by the students, which can only be known and done when the teacher follows and prepares a lesson plan. Through this means, the teacher does not only engage in giving and sharing the lesson with the students but also engages with them. This brings confidence and creates an open learning environment for students from Islamic schools because, in most traditional Islamic schools, such is not very encouraged, thus creating and encouraging rote learning and demotivating learners from building their critical thinking skills through inquiry. However, sometimes, letting things all bear in the name of living children with their rights all in the name of creating a democratic class might go in a manner not intended by the teacher. Given that Islamic schools are known for high moral standards and are careful not to fall victim to such, they plan mechanisms to integrate the two learning methods. As reported by our respondent:

“To ensure that what has been learned is understood, we engage in question and answer sessions. We also give those tests and sometimes homework as well as assignments. That is how we come to know whether or not they understand what has been taught or not.” (Interview 6th July, 2024).

Through this interview quote, we learn that part of the ways that Islamic school children can be engaged in critical thinking while maintaining their Islamic values is to engage them in not just questions and answer sessions but also by giving them homework and assigning them to make findings on uncovered topics. This way, they can understand from their perspectives and friends' perspectives while the teacher serves as a guide during teaching and learning. Moreover, this can also build children's zeal for learning; hence, learning is not only centered around read-aloud or memorization, which has been the core concentration pedagogy in most traditional Islamic schools. Through bought are acceptable contemporary pedagogies when used accurately. In the case of read-aloud in the madrassa, children can only read but cannot identify the contents of the learned material. Whereas memorization might also serve a similar function but is key in Islamic education, as emphasized by one of our respondents states that:

“I think one of the things that we emphasize is to ensure that children comprehend what has been taught. In certain subjects like the Quran and hadith, we emphasize the need for children to have a good memory in these two subjects; hence, they are the core of Islamic knowledge. But we implore their comprehension and knowledge on how several deeds are done for other areas.” (Interview 7th July, 2024).

This brings us to the understanding that memorization and read-aloud teaching methods are not destructive but depend on the subject and the learners. For instance, the Quran and the Hadith, which are core subjects in Islamic education, need to be memorized because they are considered the fundamental guide to a Muslim spiritual connective life with their Maker. In other words, the Quran is considered a manual for humans' day-to-day activity, and the hadith, on the other hand, serves as an explanatory tool for understanding the interpretation of the Quran. Therefore, having an in-depth understanding of both and having them off-heart is encouraged.

Implementation (Execution)

One of the key methods in determining the success and failure of any institution is not just through designing fanciful policies but how they implement those policies to achieve success. Also, when we speak of bringing changes anywhere, challenges are attached to it, yet how you manage those challenges as an institution determines how seriously the institution is ready to implement such plans. This means that when policies are written, they are not to be pasted to decorate the office or update the school files, as in the case of most school head teachers or school leaders. They are meant to be applied to bring positive changes. This can be affirmed by the statement of our respondent, who stated:

“As an administrator, when you design policies, you do not sit and fold your hands thinking that things are going to be done as expected. We evaluate these policy implementations by gauging teachers' lesson plans and schemes of work. Sometimes, we go into the classrooms while lessons are on to evaluate and monitor how teaching and learning are done. Sometimes we administer some evaluation forms to find out what is happening in the classroom. Also, we check the students' notebooks to find out the progress made so far.” (Interview 7th July, 2024)

From the statement above, it becomes a clear-cut manifest that one of the ways to implement policies to bring changes is to make a follow-up visit to those entrusted to implement the policies designed. Through these follow-ups, the policymakers can identify issues that circumnavigate the implementation of the policies and pave the way to make tangible solutions for them before it is too late. Going by the statement above, we realized that one of the ways through which this school is gaining success in implementing its policies is to make classroom visits. Through these visits, they can know whether or not what has been put to paper is being implemented. Moreover, scrutinizing children's books and asking them questions related to topics covered has also helped in the evaluation of the success of their policies.

Since implementation to bring in changes is a two-way process, given the fact that we do not just write policies and recommend their application without providing the necessary resources needed for its implementation. Moreover, the best ways this could be known is not only when the implementers have requested it but rather through making follow-ups in the classroom. This way we are not just affirming the second-hand information provided by the teachers but also serving as eye witness to what is ongoing for the best policy implementation. In this case, during the period of the classroom visits made by the school leader, they can know some key relevant tools that the teachers need to implement the policies they made, and this could be attested as thus:

“We provide them with all the teaching and learning materials they need to deliver their lessons. When they need my laptop to deliver certain learning content, I give it to them. Also, where they need an audio player, we provide it for them and others such as vanguards, markers to name a few, to help in the smooth delivery of their lessons”. (Interview 7th July, 2024)

From the above, it has become clear that bringing change, especially in such a delicate situation, does not just need putting pen on paper in the name of making policies but rather implementing them. In this case, we learn that the administration supports implementing their policies by not just playing the blame or, as he stated above, that they do not fall their hands to see policies implemented but rather give coaching and material support to the teachers. Through these means, they can register a lot of success in implementing modern pedagogy and better student performance.

Risk Involved

Like any new development agenda where change is involved, challenges are inevitable, so in this case. Most of the time, the thing that has been feared and anticipated could be hunting, which is similar to this finding. It has been revealed that the range at which the English language is widely spoken has also been associated by most parents that it is the language of “Kafir” (disbeliever). One of the risks involved in the changes of this model Islamic school is using the English language to the extent that students can only understand certain concepts and contents once they have been put in the English language. This adds to the ongoing concerns regarding the integration of Islamic and secular education types and much more to borrow certain ideas or ideologies from the secular education system. Given the fact that languages are attached to cultures and that adapting a foreign language leads to adapting their culture either consciously or unconsciously, the fear in the minds of parents of these students that they might lose their Islamic values has become an issue that the school has to face as indicated by a respondent that:

“From what I understand in my teachings, most times, for people to have an in-depth understanding of Arabic education is always very difficult. The reason for this challenge is the high

influence of the English language. The English language is acquired faster and understood more than the Islamic education. Also, many people speak English better than the Arabic language. The teacher teaching the Quran often speaks or uses some English vocabulary in his lessons. English learners also speak English in their daily conversation. Their parents also speak to them using some English vocabulary. The English language is used in the vehicles, among themselves, and in all other daily activities. With the use of all these words and vocabulary from English, we face the constraints of understanding the Arabic language.” (Interview 6th July, 2024).

Despite the issue not being directly linked to the integration of secular and Islamic education, people still relate to it. This becomes an issue, especially for those opposed to integrating the two, thus adding more issues to the ongoing menace without considering the other side. Moreover, the fact that there has been a long-standing rivalry between colonizers and the local inhabitants in the Gambia also adds to this menace for the fact that they were forcing Muslim students who wanted to proceed to a certain level to baptize has been an unforgettable experience for most Muslim Gambians at that time and till today.

Similarly, it could be understood that many Islamic schools in the Gambia are privately owned, and therefore, they gain little or no funding from the central government, thus making them vulnerable to financial crisis because running schools is a great financial burden. Most Islamic schools undergo a lot of financial constrain leading them to malfunction in several ways. For instance, a lack of finances would not only prevent them from hiring teachers with the best qualities to serve the needs of their students but also limit them from providing training and professional development for the teachers they have. Also, it contributes to their lack of infrastructure, which could be an attractive element for more students since they rely on it to fund their day-to-day activities. This could be attested in one of our respondents stating that:

“What we do is to sensitize each while highlighting the school's objectives. If you are here, we oblige you to act in certain manners. Sometimes due to our economic muscle, we would like certain training pieces. However, we have some internal training pieces to help boost teachers' professionalism. Through these trainings, we can show them how to behave. Also, we tell both Islamic and English teachers that they should not limit themselves to teaching their subject concepts but also inculcate some acceptable cultural norms and values that align with Islam into the learners.” (Interview 7th July, 2024)

Considering the statement above, it has become clear that the Islamic school is faced with financial constrain in training their teachers to improve their professional standards as they needed. Although they can train the teachers with the resources available, the ability to hire experts to train the teachers in certain areas of need and lack could not be possible due to the financial constraints they are faced with. At some point, the school may even lack the economic power to pay teachers' salaries because some students are from poor backgrounds and cannot afford to pay the yearly school fees. This leads the school administration in a dilemma of sending the student away for the payment or leaving them to stay before becoming a drop-out, which could bring dual issues. It is a clear manifest that they depend mainly on fees students pay to run the day-to-day administrative affairs.

Despite facing financial difficulties, this model Islamic institution could not escape the fear of parents losing confidence in the school because they did not follow the traditional madrassa style of teaching and curriculum. For this reason, many parents were skeptical if the school truly follows Islamic

education. For this reason, parents could not fully trust the school as they fear that if their children are exposed to such a style of teaching and learning the chances are high for their children to lose their Islamic moral values with ease. This added more problems to the understudied schools; hence, it encountered a drop in their enrolment. This could be attested thus:

“Some parents do not want their children to be exposed to these contemporary educations because they fear that their children might lose their Islamic values. Also, we have financial constraints as we would want to hire certain teachers who might bring great value if hired, but because of the financial constraints, we could not afford to pay their salary; hence, we are not subvented by the government.” (Interview 7th July, 2024).

It is not a surprise that some parents are so reluctant to the traditional teachings of Islam that they fear that anything coming from outsiders should be rejected even if it benefits them. This has become a constraint that brings risk to the existence of the understudied model Islamic school. It is also vital to note that due to their financial constraints, this Islamic institution cannot higher the services of certain teachers. This left them with no choice but to hire teachers whose standards are below standards since they lack the financial muscle to hire those with relevant quality. While this is ongoing, the credibility of the institution was put at stake since they could not afford to hire people of high teaching quality standards, thus leading to low student output, all of which are due to the financial crisis and lack of trust they are faced by the community they are serving.

Outcomes

Part of how this school gained success despite challenges was that it formulated its curriculum, adding to the one prescribed by the state-entrusted body responsible for designing Madrassa School’s curriculum in the Gambia, Amana. By liaising with experts who are friends and in support of the ideology being proposed by the school, the school principal was able to have deeper insights and input from lecturers who re-design their curriculum to meet national standards and thus become a model among other Islamic schools in the country. Given that students from such schools are not able to become experts in both areas becomes a challenge, yet they do not stand the chance of becoming knowledgeable and exposed to more learning areas compared to other students, thus attesting in the statement below by a respondent that:

“In my understanding, some students have challenges, but also some others have a great benefit on the issue a lot. Some can incorporate contemporary pedagogies while maintaining their Islamic values. Because we advocate for integrating both Islamic and secular education, we realized that some students fall for secular education; hence, it is the most widely studied area in the country and easily understood. That is what I have observed.” (Interview 6th July, 2024).

Despite the challenge faced by children in adapting to such a learning style and type of education, the experts entrusted with this task were able to curtail the curriculum such that children gain the benefits of having both knowledge. This prevents them from needing admission to lower grades of secular schools after completing 12 years of education. With their curriculum, the students who complete 12th grade are eligible for senior school admission since they are competent in secular and Islamic education.

As part of efforts to make sure the curriculum is completed, the teachers, through their exposure to several materials, were able to be inspired and adopt remedial classes, which not only support slow learners

but also aid in the completion of the syllabus. It is important to complete the designed syllabus since national and international exam bodies do not consider whether a particular school has completed its syllabus. Once the students complete the syllabus before moving to the next grade, the teacher and students find it easier to understand new concepts at their next level, given that the curriculum has been designed with simple to complex learning contents. Moreover, this adds to the knowledge students gain from the subjects whose syllabi are complete and, most significantly, can come out with flying colors after sitting national exams, thus sounding the school's name into higher heights. This could be confirmed with the statement from one of our respondents, who stated that:

“What I did was to arrange a two-week remedial class after the completion of the term, where these topics were covered. The idea was to help them understand the remaining topics, and I did not examine their understanding of that because I intended to cover the unfinished topics. The subject was fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and the topic was marital issues.” (Interview 6th July, 2024).

This is a wonderful initiative mainly practiced by teachers in contemporary schools. Though it is not very common even in public schools, one could say that this opportunity has been inspired primarily because this respondent was aware that not having completed a topic or topic impedes students' understanding in certain areas that are vital for their next grade and performance in both national and international exams.

By engaging with parents and other relevant stakeholders, the school administration convinced them to support them with their new initiative. This was also attained because they believe in themselves, and the concept they are coming up with could be of great benefit to the children. Moreover, engaging with the parents in parent-teacher meetings and other relevant platforms has created benefits for the school's reputation and building trust and confidence that some parents had once lost in the school. This made some parents not withdraw their students from the school, which improved the school's enrolment but added more value to their financial muscle since they rely heavily on student fees. Evidence of the above is stated by one of our respondents as thus:

“Through sensitization either during our PTA meetings or other avenues where such talks can be held.” (Interview 7th July 2024)

“Indeed, some parents do show positive reactions towards these even if they did not like it at first.” (Interview 7th July 2024)

Through sensitizations and with later results that parents realized their children got enrolled into public universities, they gave positive feedback to the school to upkeep what they are holding onto. Moreover, parents could also compare and among these schools through the output from students studying in other schools. By realizing their difference in output, they commended the school teachers and administrators for embarking on such a wonderful initiative, though not welcomed at first.

Discussion

It is a common saying that failure to plan is planning to fail; therefore, in any new developmental agenda, there must be some form of rules, policies, or precedence to follow so those goals, aims, or objectives are achieved. Part of the planning process in teaching is the drawing of lessons and scheme of work, but also, at the administrative level, they depend on policies as a form of guide, which is the case in this model Islamic school where our study is focused. It is through this planning of lesson plans that

teachers can engage their learners in the entire learning process. Through this process, the teacher can know what went wrong and right. Once the pros and the cons are identified, the pros are maintained while solutions are made for the cons. Making teaching aids, engaging in question and answer sessions, and giving homework, and assignments are all part of the planning process in ensuring that model Islamic school teachers can engage their students during learning. Teachers challenge learners' critical thinking skills through these planning methods while enhancing their holistic developmental skills. Meanwhile, previous studies have shown that teacher-centered methods and critical thinking pedagogy contribute to the holistic development of the young Muslim learner (Amzat, 2022); (Raihani, 2020); and (Sahin, 2013).

One of the critical elements hindering change in almost every institution that I know or heard of is the inability to lay down plans or fanciful policies and how to implement them. In some of his famous quotes, Albert Einstein stated that trial and failure are part of life. In another statement, he argued that only a fool reiterates the same task, expecting different results. From the two contrasting statements, I believe only a few individuals can decipher valuable insights from them to bring and make tangible change in their works. Part of the failure in implementing plans is the fear of being called names or not wanting to take responsibility. This was not the case in our study; hence, the institution stated that one way to ensure that what has been planned is put to work is by engaging in classroom visits and checking what progress and retrogress has been made so far. Through these strategies, better strategies are maintained while devising mechanisms to sort out the odd ones. Aside from classroom visits, they also sensitize teaching staff and parents on adapting contemporary pedagogical approaches. This means that parents do not fear their children losing their Islamic values. Both (Ilham, 2020) and (Elihami et al., 2024) believe that Islamic culture can contribute to the take-off stage of global connectedness. Despite following Amana's curriculum, they also develop and implement it to meet the demands of our pluralistic global communities while retaining their students' Islamic moral values (Arifin, 2018).

Indeed, every new developmental agenda must undertake some risk. How we address those risks depends on the situation but should be handled with care and caution to avoid great havoc, especially in this study context. Meanwhile, language is part of the risk involved in integrating contemporary pedagogical approaches in Islamic schools; hence, most of these are mainly written in English. It is understood that every language in the world has some cultures attached. Despite studying all their Islamic subjects in Arabic, children often tend to understand the knowledge contents more when some English vocabulary is used. This means that there is a fear of children adapting to the English culture, which is more secular-oriented than the Arabic culture. This may put the school into a dilemma of whether to continue with contemporary pedagogical approaches or strictly stick to traditional Islamic pedagogical approaches, as in the study of Memon (2021). Also, the bulkiness of the curriculum has been an issue; hence, teachers find it challenging to complete their syllabus with their students before transitioning to the next grade. Syllabuses are designed in the form of bricklaying, and therefore, failure to complete several topics in a particular grade is like leaving a big hole in the middle while constructing a mansion or skyscraper. A previous study has shown that how curriculums are designed for Islamic schools is an impediment, hence their nature of not being integrated to suit their purpose (El-Mubarak & Hassan, 2021).

A common phenomenon in many Muslim-majority countries, especially in Africa and some Asian countries that underwent colonialism, is that their Islamic schools are not counted as centers for developing productive citizens. As a result of these, even after gaining self-rule, Islamic schools in these

countries still suffer such form of marginalization, thus not being considered for government subvention. They mainly depend on tapping funds from school fees or other donors to run the daily affairs of their schools. For this reason, they cannot provide enough human and material resources to support modern-day teaching methods using technologies or hire the teachers they need for quality service delivery. A study reveals that one of the constraints these model Islamic institutions face is financial muscle, which could back them into delivering the best of services like secular schools (Tamari (2016).

There are ups and downs in any relationship, and so is this model Islamic school on which our study is based. Among the good things that developed is that after being exposed to contemporary teaching methods, teachers in this model Islamic schools started finding ways out of the bulky curriculum. One of the ways highlighted in our findings is that of remedial classes. They can cover all their syllabus in time through remedial classes, even when children are not formally examined on those topics. This aligns with the previous study by Hashim et al. (2017). They argued that for model Islamic schools to succeed, they should be willing to change their curriculum, teaching style, and school roles and advocate for gender equality. This could not be achieved in traditional Islamic schools; hence, they are reluctant to embrace these challenges. With an open forum discussion, this understudy model Islamic school has sanitized and sensitized parents' minds on accepting the new phenomenon of integrating contemporary pedagogical approaches into their Islamic school. This means children will stand the chance of building a high capacity to understand their studied area instead of using traditional Islamic pedagogy. As Elihami et al. (2024) argued, integrating both methods offers both prospects and hurdles for students.

Like any other research, this paper has a generalizability limitation; hence, the study is focused mainly on one model Islamic institution in the Gambia. We implore further research to compare learning outcomes and productivity between students from model Islamic and non-modeled Islamic educational institutions.

Conclusion

This study showed the feasibility and benefits of adapting pedagogical approaches while balancing contemporary educational needs and Islamic values. Through careful planning, Islamic school teachers and administrators could adapt teaching methodologies such as learner-centered, critical thinking, and so on without hindering their children's Islamic values. Through this effective planning, they could thoroughly comprehend contemporary educational needs, pedagogies, and Islamic values, thus maintaining a balance between the two. With these strategies, the school could accomplish its mission as indicated in its mission statement.

Properly implementing strategic plans is one of the most crucial tools, and it requires meticulous attention to detail. To ensure that students' Islamic values are not shaken, the school administration, teachers, and all relevant stakeholders have been sensitized on the need to implement and integrate these new methods effectively.

From this study, we understand that one of the risks that the understudied, modeled Islamic educational institution had to go through was rejection. Some Muslims are with believe that anything Western or secular should not be brought close to Islam. They fear that it can reduce the core values of Islam being instilled in their children. Another challenge faced by most Islamic schools is funding. Almost all Muslim-majority countries that underwent colonialism face this difficulty, and as a result of this, they

are not able to hire the services of certain teachers or conduct training to help improve the quality of the teachers in hand.

Integrating contemporary teaching methods in Islamic schools has yielded promising results, demonstrating enhancements in student involvement, analytical capabilities, and overall academic achievement. Furthermore, students are better equipped to navigate the intricacies of the modern landscape while maintaining a strong connection to their faith. The research indicates that with careful planning, effective execution, and proactive risk mitigation, modern pedagogical techniques can be successfully incorporated into Islamic educational institutions, enhancing the learning experience while preserving the schools' religious identity.

The implication of this study should go a long way in giving valuable insights for policymakers to consider some of the challenges that model Islamic schools go through when adopting modern pedagogies. Also, the benefits should be considered given the fact that it has created an avenue where students from such schools no longer have to spend six (6) more years in public schools, where they are expected to graduate with a grade 9 certificate to gain admission into senior school. Given this unfair treatment, I recommend that all stakeholders devise policies to ensure that students graduating from such schools are granted admission to state universities so that their productive lives are not all spent on schooling. Considering the limit of this research, further studies are required to provide nuances of comparing traditional madrassas and model Islamic schools. The findings from this research, I am certain, could provide detailed information on how to transform these schools as well as knowing the hurdles involved.

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