



## Original Article

# Need for Integrated Islamic Schools in a Muslim State-Perspective of the Heads of Islamic School Systems of Karachi

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## ABSTRACT

The Single National Curriculum proposed by the Government of Pakistan in 2020 emphasized on the Integration of Islamic education across all boards for nation-building, whereas, the constitution and educational policies of Pakistan had always indicated the importance of a contextualized education system in compliance with the ideology of Pakistan and for preservation of Islamic morals through generations. Yet there was a rising inclination of parents towards integrated Islamic education schools in Pakistan. Research-based evidence on the uniqueness of their practices needed to be excavated. Therefore, this study sought to find out the purpose of having Islamic schools in a Muslim state and the requirements of an integrated Islamic education system from the perspective of Islamic school leaders. To achieve this objective, 4 heads of private integrated Islamic schools of Karachi were interviewed to study their perspectives on the need for integrated Islamic education systems in Karachi and their practices that make them stand out from other regular private schools of Karachi. The four themes that emerged from a qualitative analysis of their interviews were a divine sense of purpose, Islamic integration in the curriculum, Tarbiyah, and Fear of Allah, which can serve as guidance for the improvement of the unified national educational policy for nation-building.

**Keywords:** *Divine purpose, Fear of Allah, Integrated Islamic education, Islamic integration in curriculum, Islamic schools, Tarbiyah*

## INTRODUCTION

The sociological perspective of education states that the education has to be contextualized to benefit the children optimally and to develop their individual personalities as needed by their society or nation. Research proves that providing opportunities for students to develop a better understanding of their culture of origin and raising awareness about racism and discrimination is related to students' ethnic-racial identity development. Culturally relevant teaching remains an important method for promoting achievement and positive identities for students of all races (Byrd, 2016). Aristotle and Confucius, two of the greatest and ancient philosophers pondered upon the nature and purpose of education, where they raised questions such as what kind of people should our children grow into, and how can we direct them towards that kind of growth (Lee, 2001). Their questions also reflected the importance of development of a child's personality through education and the importance of contextualization of education (Lee, 2001). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979 as cited in Rosa & Tudge, 2013), a child develops and learns when they interact with their environment and the society, and the teaching and learning has to be linked with the social context to be meaningful and more effective in a child's development (Hall & Kidman, 2004).

Globally, the concept of Integrated Islamic Schools took an accelerated growth after the escalated migrations took place due to global economic challenges in most of the Muslim countries and better opportunities for the Muslim families in the developed western countries, which also lead to a rise in islamophobia, influencing the quality of education the Muslims were receiving in the West and a regular conflict between the parents and the schools about maintaining their religious identities and preserving their children's faith (Arar et al., 2023). Globally, the demand and supply of Islamic

schools is rising with each year, including the United States of America, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Holland, Australia and other Western countries (Yaacob & Embong, 2008). Only in America, back in 1987, as per a report given by the International Institute of Islamic Thought (as cited in Yaacob & Embong, 2008), the number of Islamic schools was 50, and by 2004, it had increased to around 220 Islamic schools. According to the Islamic School registry database of the Islamic Schools League of America for the year 2021 (as cited in Khan & Imam 2022), the numbers had risen to around 300 Islamic schools functioning across the country.

Eventually, the idea penetrated into the developing countries with Muslim majority such as Nigeria (Puspitasari, et al., 2020), Malaysia (Yaacob & Embong, 2008), Indonesia (Hasan, 2009), Turkey (Aşlamacı & Kaymakcan, 2017) & Pakistan (Sheikh & Hussain, 2022), where the private schools and school systems had already adopted western pedagogies, curriculum and school management strategies, meanwhile the traditional Islamic educational institutions (also known as Madrassas) were ill-reputed due to their lack of worldly education, mistreatment of the children by their teachers and administration, and their extremism, there was now a lack of religious education among the youth and the entire focus was being put into the academics and the skills of 21<sup>st</sup> century global citizenship (Sheikh & Hussain, 2022; Yaacob & Embong, 2008). According to recent research that studied the Islamic schools of Karachi, Dar-e-Arqam, an integrated Islamic education school has 592 branches all over Pakistan, Usman Public School System has 50 campuses operating, and the Inspiration Model school has 17 campuses running in Karachi (Hussain & Khan, 2020).

### Significance

It was felt that the local schools in general were not imparting Islamic knowledge, morals and values as

directed by the National ideology, National Education Policies and the national curriculum framework, which lead to the foundation and thrivingness of Islamic schools in the private sector for providing Islamic education to the students in a modern way (Faizi et al., 2018). They design their environment, policies and code of conduct in light of the Islamic teachings (Yaacob & Embong, 2008) whereas the objectives of learning, the structure of the integrated Islamic schooling model such as the hierarchical structure, the framework for delivery of education, the understanding of a child's psychology, the curriculum, the medium of instructions, the language, the pedagogies and methods of assessments are largely influenced and mostly adopted from the West (Sheikh & Hussain, 2022).

## Research Questions

The study tends to answer the following research questions:

- According to Islamic school leaders, what is the purpose of having Islamic Schools in a Muslim state?
- According to Islamic school leaders, what are the requirements of an integrated Islamic education system?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of education has always aimed at developing the young in proficiency of languages, knowledge acquisition, building social confidence and in bringing awareness of morality so that they become individually and collectively successful. In Islam, as outlined by the First World Conference on Muslim Education the aim of education is the development of a holistically balanced personality through stimulation of spiritual development, intellectual development, physical development and linguistic development to serve as an obliged and humble vicegerent of Allah at all levels (Saqeb, 2000). Recent surveys supported the idea that personality development is related to the religiousness and spirituality of that individual by highlighting a significant relationship between spirituality, religiosity and the personality characteristics of an individual (Henningsgaard & Arnau, 2008). Research suggests that inclusion of religiosity and spirituality in the school curriculum can help to reduce social injustice in the longer run (Elbih, 2012).

Iqbal had stated that the children of Muslim countries must learn such values and develop such personality characteristics that distinguish them as Muslims (Ali, 2011; Nauman, 2018). The national constitution, in Article 31 had also postulated that

to encourage and promote the ideology of Pakistan and to inspire agreement and amenability of the nation towards the moral standards laid down by Islam, Pakistan must include Islamic education in the curriculum (Rust & Arribas, 2018). Keeping in view the above recommendations, the National Curriculum Framework of Pakistan (2017) stressed upon the inclusion of religiously and culturally relevant content and teaching practices in schools to develop the personalities of students as envisioned by Iqbal and Jinnah. Hence, it was projected for all the schooling system in Pakistan to have and Islamic integrated education.

In a country founded upon Iqbal's vision for uplifting the Muslim population, and the Islamic ideology, there was a dire need to contextualize the education to suit the developmental and preservation needs of the Muslim population (Nauman, 2018; Sheikh & Ali, 2019) because education is a vital means of preserving and transmitting cultural values to the next generation (Bourdieu et al., 1977). Since the independence, the majority and influential names in the private schooling industry were those that were following the western education systems. Therefore, an educational system borrowed from western countries or contexts not only brings in the non-applicable techniques and content knowledge but it tarnishes the existing culture of a society by bringing with it the value system and norms of that country, society or culture (Nauman, 2018), which are inevitably infused into the young minds.

In the last decade, the educational institutions of Pakistan have shifted their orientation from western education to Islamic education, leading to an amalgamation of western teaching strategies, western content and western values with the Islamic ones in private schools of Pakistan. Such schools claim to provide Islamic education through integrating Islamic values and philosophy with the western teaching methods and syllabus, and to develop holistic Islamic personalities in children. According to Ashraf (2018) and Hussain (2004), various governments of Pakistan have made attempts at Islamizing and contextualizing the school curriculum at national level to align it with the ideology of Pakistan, however, these attempts have been ineffective. They gave several reasons for the failed attempts, one of which is that there are numerous educational systems being operated in Pakistan which makes it difficult to Islamize the educational system. Ashraf(2018)also pointed out that the political influence in the education policy making and implementation of those policies have hindered effectiveness of actions taken to contextualize the educational system of Pakistan. Third, he continued to suggest that the lack

of contextualized teacher education and teacher training has caused a huge problem in deliverance of the local curriculum in the most effective manner. Fourth reason is that the Islamic education that was aimed at cultivating Islamic values among children has instead brought differences and conflicts among the Muslims rather than uniting them under similar values and objectives. Fifth reason stated in the paper is that the students' interests lie in western education, rather than religious or Islamic education. Thus, due to these and other possible issues, the attempts at devising an Islamic educational system lacks in development of an Islamic personality among the Muslims (Ashraf, 2018). All private schools in Pakistan seem to have their own educational system and the extent to which they integrate Islamic education across their curriculum differs from school to school as well.

According to the study of Khattak (2014), recently there has been a wave of Islamic schools that emerged to offer the prospect of learning Arabic and memorization of the Holy Quran, along with the Islamic education while attaining the 21<sup>st</sup> century education required to compete and survive in a rapidly advancing and globalized world. Meanwhile, some Islamic schools go a step further in their quest to provide Islamic education to their students beyond classrooms and books by providing them with a school environment that reflects a true Muslim society (Jackson, 2013). Their purpose is to induce the values and morals of Islam into their students' lives, and to deliver them a schooling experience that is enveloped in religiosity. Such schools have deviated from the idea of a traditional Islamic education system (the madrassa system in Pakistan), which commonly consisted of the memorization of the Holy Quran and its tafseer (meaning of verses and their interpretations). When the Islamic schools started to operate and capture larger shares of the local population, they were critiqued by educationists and were deemed unnecessary specially because Pakistan is already an Islamic state, its policies already highlight the inclusion of Islamic studies in the school's curriculum, every school teaches Islamiyat, and that no school would be drawing the students away from their religion (Rust & Arribas, 2018). However, the integrated Islamic school reflected that private schools do not give due importance to the subject of Islamiyat as other the subjects (Durrani, 2013). Today, the Islamic schools have their chains and several campuses running and the parents demand for Islamic schools is ever increasing.

Islamic schools provide academic and extracurricular activities to its students and they accentuate upon the Islamic code of conduct and

morals for the students as well as for their families (Faizi et. al., 2018). However, the planned objectives and basic educational structure of Islamic schools such as institution structure, education delivery framework, child learning psychology, curriculum, language focus and assessment methodology are adopted from the western world (Sheikh & Hussain, 2022). Therefore, there is a dire need to chalk out the effective and unique practices that are being carried out by integrated Islamic schools that make them stand out from the regular private schools of Pakistan.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This research was conducted using qualitative means of collecting and analyzing the data. Studying a phenomenon with a qualitative approach gives the researcher an in-depth analysis of the question that they are seeking to answer (Byrne & Humble, 2007; Creswell, 1999). Semi-structured phenomenological interviews were conducted with the heads of 4 Islamic Schools to understand their perspective on Islamic education and its need in the local context. The Islamic Schools were selected through purposive sampling. For selection of Islamic schools, the criteria was as follows:

- The schools should be registered.
- The schools proclaim themselves to be Islamic schools.
- The schools are integrating Islamic education throughout their curriculum.
- The schools should have classes from pre-primary to grade 8.
- The schools should be running since at least a decade.

The data obtained from the interviews and were analyzed using the thematic method of data analysis prescribed by (Saldana, 2021).

## RESULTS & FINDINGS

The interviews from the heads of integrated Islamic education systems of Karachi were transcribed and analyzed thematically to address the research questions about the need of Islamic Education system other than the regular schools in a Muslim state and the requirements of integrated Islamic schools. The results highlighted and stressed upon the importance of integration of Islamic knowledge, values and morals in the curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and the development of lifelong characteristics of a good Muslim. Through the thematic analysis of interviews, the following themes emerged

which are explained with reference to the responses of the participants.

### **A Divine Sense of Purpose**

The heads of Islamic schools unanimously believed that their students have a slightly different sense of purpose in life than the students of other schools. They all were of the opinion that when children from other regular schools grow up with a career-oriented goal of life, the students from the Islamic schools grow up with an ulterior motive; other than to build their career, to serve humanity and to spread the teachings of Islam, because they are taught what Allah wants from his beings and what the purpose of their life is according to Allah, and, being Muslims, what change do they need to bring into their own lives and into the society around them. One of the Islamic school heads stated,

*"The child also eventually understands that yes, modern education is important, let's suppose I want to be a scientist. And yet I want to be a good Muslim also whose life is not purposeless, money is not the only purpose, getting famous is not the only objective of life. The basic purpose is to also know who my Allah is and what my Allah expects from me."*

Another school head explained the functioning of their school for the development of strong individuals with a sense of purpose in life by stating,

*"Our teachers model positive attitudes and encourage students to develop a growth mindset. We also integrate Islamic teachings and values into our curriculum to develop strong values and a sense of purpose among our students..."*

They further elaborated that,

*"Islamic Integration helps in Islamic personality development by providing students with a comprehensive understanding of their faith and its teachings. It helps students develop a sense of purpose, identity, and values that guide their behavior and decision-making"*

According to the heads of integrated Islamic schools of Karachi, these schools develop a divine sense of purpose among the students that drives them to lead a life according to Allah's will and serve the purpose for which they have been created by Allah. They do this by imparting not only the knowledge but also the understanding of the teachings of Islam.

### **Islamic Integration in Curriculum**

The heads of all four integrated Islamic schools were unified in their responses that integration of Islamic education has to be throughout the curriculum, which includes relating the Islamic teaching and knowledge

with all subjects being taught in school. A school head of one of the participating Integrated Islamic school systems reported that according to them,

*"Islamic integration is required in every subject."*

They further elaborated on the idea of integrating Islamic education into all subjects, by saying,

*"For example, if you are teaching science, we also tell our children's that the things that Allah has made for us, the importance of those things. Why are those things made for the use of human beings? So, everything, the course of nature, the discipline that is the system of day and night, the discipline that is seen in the growth of different things, this all can be explained to the children through Islamic integration. So basically, it is like, the Islamic perspective that the child gets of the things around him and the child tends to know Allah (SWT) in a better way, and the understanding, that the child can acknowledge in a proper way and also can convey to the coming generations."*

They also said,

*"...degrees are important, but a proper dose of your religion and the modern education, this is required. So that basic proportion, that a child gets the modern means, scientific knowledge, all that has to be there, but with a proper dose of Islam as well."*

Emphasizing on the importance of Islamic education as integrated in entire curriculum and not as a separate subject, a school head said,

*"Integrating Islam in subjects it is very necessary because in our students brain they don't have any shelves out there. They don't own a different shelf for Islamiyat. Also, a separate period of Islamic teachings is not enough and it that window cannot be closed after that period."*

Another head reported,

*"We believe that Islamic education should be an integral part of our curriculum, as it helps students develop a strong connection with their faith and culture. Islamic integrated schools provide a unique opportunity to combine secular education with Islamic teachings and values, enabling students to develop a strong moral compass and a sense of identity."*

The Islamic school heads believed that the knowledge of Islam and the knowledge provided in Islamic revelations should be integrated in all subjects, and that, it was the specialty of integrated Islamic schools of Karachi and this made them distinctive from other regular schools.

## Tarbiyah

The responses of all Islamic school heads were consistent in their idea that as an Islamic school, they teach the children distinction between what's forbidden and why its forbidden, the consequences of their right and wrong actions considering the teachings of Islam, and to mindfully follow the teachings of Islam. According to them, the Tarbiyah they provide to their students is other than the taleem (education) that these students receive in any local school. A head of one of the participating Islamic schools reported,

*"Teaching of Islam right from the beginning, telling the students what is right and why it is right. What is wrong and why is it wrong? This leads to the better understanding of our own religion... So that is why I believe that Islamic schools should be there."*

While explaining how an individual should be groomed and nurtured as a person, as a member of the society, the other Islamic school's head said,

*"He should be shariah compliant in his personality. They pray, they fast, and fulfill the duties and responsibilities towards Allah, but they must also fulfill the duties and responsibilities towards the people of Allah."*

Whereas, elaborating on what Tarbiyah is and what it encompasses from an Islamic perspective, the head of the third Islamic school shared,

*"Islamic teachings also promote qualities such as kindness, empathy, and compassion, which are essential for personality development... We focus on developing students' self-confidence, communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and emotional intelligence. We also help them develop a sense of responsibility, empathy, respect, and appreciation for diversity."*

They further elaborated that

*"Our goal is to instill in them the values and skills they need to become well-rounded individuals who can lead successful and fulfilling lives."*

Therefore, Tarbiyah is the strength of integrated Islamic education schools of Karachi according to the heads of the participating schools. This is an umbrella term for the moral, social, ethical and spiritual development of the students, in accordance with the development of their 21st century skills, considering the teachings of Islam, leading to the formation of a successful individual and a successful Ummah.

## Fear of Allah

The participants of this study reported that they seek to instill the fear of Allah in their students so that

they would lead in their own spheres of life with a God-fearing approach. A respondent voiced that

*"The goal of our school is that we want to be an exemplary institution that provides balanced education to the child so that he becomes a God-fearing leader."*

They also elaborated,

*"To nurture individuals into God-fearing leaders, we are providing balanced education, and when we say balanced education, then we are focusing on three things. One is the spiritual growth, one is the mental growth, and the other is the physical growth."*

Another participant reported,

*"What we (generally in schools) do is simply give basic knowledge, which I think that everybody in Pakistan knows about it and that's just what we are doing. we do not make our students understand and realize what our Creator wants from us. This gap is bridged basically by Islamic schools."*

The integrated Islamic school heads believe that by strengthening their students' connection with Allah and by helping them understand what Allah wants from them and why they should comply, they develop the students' spirituality, which transforms them into God-fearing leaders.

## Discussion

The research tried to understand the reason behind integrated Islamic schools' demand and their thriving presence in Karachi, given that all the public and private schools of Karachi were already bound to follow the National Curriculum Framework, the national policies and the national ideology which revolves around our identity as Muslims and the teachings of Islam. It was highlighted by the heads of integrated Islamic schools that the need for the Islamic school system arises from its core objective of delivering an understanding and awareness of the divine purpose of the existence of its students as Muslims, for which, the curriculum is integrated with the knowledge sent by Allah in His revelations, the Islamic teachings, morals and Islamic values, and the students are schooled with the love and fear of Allah. The school heads were of the view that the divine sense of purpose needs to be inculcated in the Muslim Ummah through school education. The same thought was expressed by Mabud (2018) that the most basic objective of Islamic education is to impart a sense of purpose for which Allah has created us. The purpose goes beyond the worldly gains is at the helm of all affairs.

Muslims are obliged to focus on the nature of

knowledge and its values that should be transplanted or integrated in their children's minds, souls and attitudes. Here, the significance of the concept of "integration" is obvious in the educational system and its curriculum. Muhammad Ayyub Khan at the National Education Commission (1959 as cited in Faizi et al., 2018) stressed upon the notion that the education system of Pakistan must incorporate the cultural, moral, and spiritual values in the curriculum so that the youth may receive the worldly education as well as the Islamic education, then only they can prosper as a nation. The integrated Islamic schools of Karachi seemed to be aligned with Ayyub Khan's (Faizi et al., 2018) and Iqbal's idea (Sheikh & Hussain, 2022) that Muslims have a distinct aim of life, because of which they envision their students to be growing as an Ummah and outshining the rest of the world with the Tarbiyah they receive at the school and at homes, while they lead with the fear of Allah and the Islamic morals and values at the bottom of their hearts.

The integrated Islamic schools of Karachi give importance to producing God-fearing leaders among the Muslim Ummah by honing their spirituality and connecting them with their Creator to understand what is required of them in a leadership role. Research suggests that religiosity and spirituality if included in the education system can help reduce social injustice (Elbih, 2012). According to another research, The First World Conference on Muslim Education suggested that the aim of education is to develop of a balanced individual through stimulation of spiritual development, intellectual development, physical development and linguistic development to serve as an obliged and humble vicegerent of Allah at all levels (Saqeb, 2000).

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to understand why integrated Islamic schools exist in a society that was already founded upon the Islamic ideology, had policies for imparting Islamic morals and values, and had schools as well as madrassas. It also sought to find out the basic requirements of schools of Karachi to be integrated Islamic schools from the perspectives of their principals or heads. The results suggest that the heads of integrated Islamic schools believe that their schools instill a divine sense of purpose among their students through integration of Islamic knowledge in every subject and through Tarbiyah around morals, values, code of conduct and the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, resulting in God-fearing leaders for the nation and the globalized world.

## Recommendations

These results can be helpful in devising a policy for integration of Islamic education in all public and private schools of Pakistan to improve the unified national educational policy, and to add some specific details to it for the purpose of nation-building. More extensive study of the practices of Islamic schools and the difference of impact of the practices of integrated Islamic schools and regular schools is needed to gauge more information on the effectiveness of these schools.

## Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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