The Role of Islamic Integrated Education in Enhancing Access to Formal Education In Kenya

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Abstract: Muslim children in Kenya attend several educational institutions including Qur'anic schools, Madrasa and secular public schools. Those who attend all the three tracks usually begin their lessons in Qur'anic schools at about 4.00 AM and move on to the secular public schools between 7.OO AM and 4.00 PM. From the public secular schools, they again move on to Madrassa classes from 4.30 PM to about 6.00 PM. Many of these children have ended up dropping out of either Madrasa or public secular schools due to the distances between these institutions and the curriculum overload involved.This state of affairs has meant that children are missing out either on Islamic education or on the free secular public education. In the last two decades, Kenya has witnessed a new type of institution that combines Islamic religious subjects and the public secular education curriculum. Though these schools are purely private initiatives requiring some form of fee payment, Muslims in Kenya have fully embraced them. This paper argues that the Islamic integrated schools can be an alternative avenue of education for Muslim children since they combine the best of both the Islamic and secular public systems. It traces Islamic education in the different historical epochs, beginning with the arrival of Islam on the shores of the East African coast to the present, with the establishment of the first integrated school in the mid 1990's. The success of this type of schooling is attested to by the government's adoption of integration in its 2012 Education Act, as one of the strategies for increasing access to education for Muslims and other minority groups. The paper draws upon field research carried out between April and July 2012 in Garissa County. The study utilized interviews, observation and document reviews to gather data on the popularity of this type of schooling and the challenges they face in combining two different curricula under one roof.

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Introduction

The Kenyan government is a signatory to several international declarations, protocols and conventions, including the World Conference on Education held at Jomtien in Thailand in 1990. The Conference, whose major goal was attainment of Education For All (EFA) by 2015, resolved that the basic learning needs for diverse cultures must be met through a variety of delivery mechanisms. The Conference also emphasized the need to embrace formal and non-formal systems of education by recognizing the various religious and community groups (Gesau, n.d.).

In line with this commitment, the government in 2003 embarked on reforms geared towards attaining the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and EFA goals. The Sessional Paper that followed the recommendations of the 2003 National Conference on Education and Training led to major reforms in the education sector. Among the initiatives the Government undertook, is the provision of ECDE, which involves households, community and Government efforts in the integrated development of children from the time of conception (MoEST, 2005). It is from these recommendations that the relevance of Islamic Integrated Education becomes apparent. As much as Islamic Integrated schools are private initiatives geared towards provision of religious education while incorporating the secular national curriculum, such initiatives need to be evaluated within the scope of Education for All (EFA) goals.

As a result of these many initiatives, Kenya has seen a rise in national enrolment rate with an increase of more than 30% from 2003 to 2012 for primary education. However, the predominantly Muslim majority areas of Northern Kenya and the coastal regions, continue to register minimal growth in terms of access, retention, and completion rates. According to the MoEST (2012) statistics, the net enrolment rate for Wajir, Mandera and Garissa counties in Northern Kenya in 2010 was 22.8%, 19.2% and 24.8% respectively. However, contrary to these statistics, there is a strong desire and value for education in these regions

and within the Kenyan Muslim community, as attested to by enrolment figures in Madrasas and Qur'anic schools.

Despite many Muslim parents' desire to provide their children with an education that strengthens their identity and faith as Muslims while partaking of secular education provided by the government, the dichotomy in such a system, where a student has to move from one school to another, has had a toll on Muslim children in terms of access and achievement.

CONTEXT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN KENYA

Islamic Education in the pre-colonial context

Islamic traditional learning has existed along the East African coast since the end of the eighth century A.D. Based on archaeological excavations, Mark Horton (1996) has suggested the presence of a Muslim community who lived at Shanga, near Lamu from as early as 760 A.D. Later in the 14th century, Muslim traveller and historian Muhammad b. Abdalla Ibn Battutah (d.1377) visited Mogadishu, Mombasa and Kilwa and gave an account of Muslim settlements along the East African coast. In the period preceding the British colonial rule in Kenya, Islamic traditional education was conducted in mosques and scholars' residences. These historical accounts of the influence of Islam along the East African coast demonstrate the presence of Muslim settlements in the region and by extension the existence of Islamic traditional learning long before the coming of European powers to the Kenyan coast towards the end of the nineteenth century A.D.

In the period preceding the British colonial rule in Kenya, Islamic traditional education was conducted in mosques and scholars' residences which represented traditional centers of Islamic learning along the East African coast. Teaching was in the form of *darsa* (session) conducted in *halaqa* (study circle) either in the residence of the teacher or in the courtyards of the mosques.

Islamic Education in the colonial and Post- Colonial context

Madrasa's and Qur'anic schools have been a feature of Islamic education in Kenya long before the advent of the British colonial power in the region. When established a protectorate along the coastal strip in 1895,

making efforts to consolidate its power, it paid little attention to Islamic religious education.

Among the challenges Islamic education in Kenya faced during the British colonial era was that schools established by the colonial government did not cater for Islamic religious education due to the fact that, most of the schools were sponsored by Christian missionaries.The British colonial government gave support to formal schools established by Christian missionaries, which created a negative attitude to Muslims towards Western style education and forced some Muslim parents to abstain from sending their children to government schools (KNA, 1987). Muslims in Kenya therefore, perceived that the British colonial authorities, in partnership with different Christian churches, used the education system as a tool for evangelization, since government grants were channeled to schools established by churches (SUPKEM, n.d).

Marginalization of Islamic education was further enhanced by educational policies implemented by the British colonial administration, which focused on separating Islamic religious education from government schools. For instance, in 1909, the British colonial government in Kenya established the Fraser Education Commission, which recommended the separation of education systems based on racial and ethnic lines.

The first initiative to integrate the public secular curriculum in the madrasa and Qur'anic schools in Kenya was pioneered by Madrasat al-Ghazali al-Islamiyya, established by Shaykh Muhammad Abdalla Ghazali in 1933 in Mombasa. Shaykh Ghazali saw that Muslim children learning in Qur'anic schools were isolated from the mainstream education system provided in the government schools and therefore introduced subjects taught in schools into the curriculum of his *madrasa*. Subjects introduced in *Madrasat al- Ghazali* included history, geography and mathematics which were taught in Arabic language in addition to other Islamic religious subjects.

Before 1933, Islamic religious education was confined to the recitation and memorization of the Quran in addition to a few Islamic subjects and Arabic language. Other Madrasas also embarked on integrating modern subjects into the Madrasa curriculum, including Madrasat al-Falah al-Islamiyya established by Shaykh Abdalla Husny in Mombasa and Madrasat al-Najah in Lamu in 1938 and 1945

respectively. The Madrasa Resource Centre (MRC) is an example of an effort to introduce a pre-madrasa early childhood programme, which was implemented in Mombasa in 1986 and later expanded to Zanzibar and Uganda in 1990 and 1993 respectively. The MRC initiative was geared towards facilitating the development of quality and culturally appropriate and sustainable early childhood centers among the low-income communities. The curriculum of MRC integrates Islamic religious and secular education, which enables the children to learn both Islamic religious and secular education within the same premises (AKF, 2000).

Islamic Integrated Education

The emergence of Islamic integrated education is a response to the secularization of education through the marginalization of traditional Islamic sciences, which are rooted in Islamic sources such as the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). Subsequently, Muslim scholars have made serious endeavors to define the concept of Islamic education and then to develop a genuine Islamic education model based on `the basic tenets of the Islamic faith. This reformation of education envisions a new Muslim generation that is capable of fulfilling its role as *khalifatullah* (vicegerent of God). Islamic education, therefore, is seen to deal with the overall development of the individual in the spiritual, intellectual, physical and linguistic domains.

The existence of two systems of education, namely the national, modern secular system and the traditional, Islamic religious system in the Islamic world is a cause for concern. The Islamic religious sciences, as taught in the Madrasas, cannot be easily related to contemporary life. On the other hand, the acquired sciences, represented by the secular national system, lack of Islamic values. The graduates of the two systems view each other with suspicion and generally see the world through different lenses.

Both systems of education have considerably failed to produce an integrated Islamic personality. While the national secular education system seems to be designed to produce professionals deficient in religious values, Madrasa and Qur'anic school education produce religious specialists who are unable to participate actively in society, and are not critically and creatively responsive to deal with current issues of the growing Muslim community (Sheikh, 2013). The two

systems should be unified and integrated to produce individuals who are at home with the social, political and economic realities of the day as well as uphold the sacred teachings of the Quran. Hence, the integrated Islamic schools in Kenya seem to be adequately resolving the issue of dualism in Muslim education that was clearly articulated by Rosnani Hashim (1996).

The issue of dualism in Muslim education systems has been debated among Muslim scholars who have continuously attempted to revive the excellence of Islamic education. Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi (1982) asserted that the present state of education in the Muslim world is at its worst because of its bifurcating curriculum that comprises opposing components, one "Islamic" and one "modern". Lack of clear and specific vision leads to the insoluble problem of low standards in the Muslim educational institutions. Rosnani Hashim (1996) identified the problem of bifurcation or dualism as caused by the existence of dualistic education namely, modern secular education and traditional religious education that began during the British Colonialism. This phenomenon posed a serious dilemma for Muslims in Malaysia. Najum Mushtaq (2004) described this dualistic phenomenon in Pakistan as 'a vast gap' between the traditional and modern formal systems of education, which can be obviously seen in their graduates having different attitudes and points of views. He asserted that 'this phenomenon has led to a painful social strife and a fractious civil society'.

According to Freda Shamma (1996), Western or secular education and its underlying values, which have been integrated into Muslims life, have destroyed the 'Islamic social system'.This phenomena, was also studied by Tueybaha Sala-ud-Din (2005) who believes that Western education is transplanting its values through the education system. Through its value system, Muslim children gradually neglect Islamic values and identity in order to be integrated into the western system and therefore, make a compromise with Islamic doctrine and ideology. Undoubtedly, the ultimate aim of western or secular education is to produce secular individuals who will assimilate secular values; and in the future would be able to develop secular society.

Shahed Ali (1984) elucidated how the Western educational system affects Muslims life to become carbon copies of the West and consequently, makes them lose their own identities. According to him,

the system is actually also facing criticisms in the West, since it only produces individuals who suffer from a sense of loneliness, isolation and a lack of direction. His notion that the Western education system "creates a capital 'I' in the psychology of man to the exclusion of the world" is fair in the sense that it does not nourish the human souls with noble virtues and values and encourages self interest and individualism. He explained further about compartmentalization of knowledge in Western education and its effect in the development of individuals who have been totally cut off from the spiritual roots.

This brief review indicates that most Muslim educators, academicians and scholars are in agreement that there is a need to provide a truly Islamic system of education that can benefit all Muslims. This system should be able to create consciousness towards social solidarity among the Muslims by instilling the sense of brotherhood amongst them regardless of their race, countries, nations and origins.

Islamic Integrated Education: Kenyan Context

Despite numerous efforts by the Kenyan government to make access to education possible for all citizens, Muslims have continued to enroll their children in Qur'anic schools and Madrasas. To some parents, the Qur'anic schools and madrasa were adequate in the socialization of their children. To others, despite the challenges of moving from Qur'anic schools to secular public schools and then to Madrasa, it was the only opportunity for the children to gain proper grounding in Islamic knowledge and a certificate recognized by the government for higher education and employment. The third category merely send their children to the secular public schools during the day and provide Qur'anic instruction in their homes and in the neighborhood, where several families come together and recruit a Qur'anic teacher.

The scenario where Muslim children attend different schools, thereby missing out on either religious studies or the public national secular system has been a cause for concern to Muslim leaders and parents. They realized that Muslim children were not participating in sufficient numbers in the economic and political development of the country. To remedy this situation, some Islamic schools took the bold step of introducing secular subjects into their curriculum. Over the years, these efforts have led to the development of a robust sector of private Islamic schools in all corners of Kenya, which provides students

with religious and secular studies within the same institutions (Sheikh, 2013).

The integrated Islamic schools adopt the organizational format of Kenya's public school system, and provide both the national curriculum and Islamic curriculum as taught in Qur'anic schools and Madrasa. The fundamental difference between an Islamic Integrated school and the public school is the institutional orientation towards promoting a broad Islamic cultural orientation. School administrators actively foster Islamic identity and awareness among students and teachers. Since Islamic Integrated Schools offer both the national curriculum and Islamic education curriculum, there is no barrier to transitioning between the Islamic and the "regular" schools. According to Sheikh (2013), the popularity of this type of schools has meant that Muslims have continued to shun the free public education, with some regions currently having more integrated Islamic schools than public primary schools. For instance, in Garissa Town in 2012, there were over 40 Islamic Integrated schools compared to about 30 public primary schools. In Nairobi County, more than 80 per cent of Muslim children attend private Integrated Islamic schools. Currently there are over four hundred Integrated Islamic schools in Kenya, with Nairobi alone hosting over 70 such schools in the Eastleigh and South C suburbs.

Impact of Integrated Islamic Education

Though no extensive country-wide study is available, the Muslim Education Council (MEC), believes that there are about 150,000 Muslim children attending about 400 Integrated Islamic Schools. This constitutes a fairly significant source of access to education for a large number of Kenyan children, whose parents might not otherwise send them to secular public schools (Munawwar Khan, Executive Director, MEC, May 17, 2012). Considering this significant number of students in integrated Islamic schools, it is clear that these schools represent an avenue for increasing student enrolment, particularly in Northern Kenya, Nairobi, and the Coastal regions which are predominantly Muslim and lag behind the rest of the country in terms of access to education as attested to by statistics from the Ministry of Education. These schools have the capacity to contribute to Kenya's Vision 2030, and the global education goals of access to basic education, and gender equality in education. Moreover, the data on Islamic Integrated Schools indicate

that there is an opportunity to further increase the positive impact of Islamic schools on Muslim children's education through identification with the context and the content taught in the schools.

Conclusion

Islamic Integrated schools, an initiative of Muslim organizations and individual Muslim entrepreneurs, has become an alternative avenue of provision of education for Muslims in Kenya. The schools, many of which have humble origins, began as Qur'anic schools and later incorporated the national curriculum subjects. Some of them are private academies incorporating the Islamic education curricula as taught in the Madrasa and Qur'anic schools. Today, these schools host over 150,000 students and are still growing. In many areas, particularly in Muslim majority towns like Garissa, Wajir, Mombasa, Mandera and in the Nairobi suburbs majorly settled by Muslims, these schools are increasingly being seen by Muslims as an alternative to the public education offered by the government.

Although the Kenyan government has created all necessary laws to make education accessible to all its citizens, it has not provided clear frameworks and policies to enable minorities, or groups with special religious needs, to effectively participate in education. The government's single tract education, which emphasizes the secular national curriculum, does not adequately take care of the needs of the Muslim population, which demands provision of Islamic religious knowledge comprising the Quran, Hadith, *Fiqh,Tawheed, Aqiidah* and *Seerah* as a minimum.

To its credit, the Ministry of Education has recognized the place of Islamic education in the country's education system and passed the necessary legislation, including the education Act, 2012 which calls for integration of Qur'anic schools and Madrasa into the national education system. However, the Act has not been operationalized through provision of adequate resources and manpower. Integration as envisaged by section 95 of the Basic Education Act, has not been realized three years after the act was passed. In order to make this a reality, the Ministry of Education needs to collaborate with Muslim scholars, who have the technical know how, to design the integrated curriculum and help establish Integrated Islamic schools in Muslim majority regions. This will attract Muslim parents whose children are either studying

in Madrasa and Qur'anic schools simply because they cannot afford the fees demanded by the Islamic integrated schools or because they find the public national schools inadequate in the socialization of their children. This will greatly enhance access to education for Muslims, in line with the government's commitment to MDG and EFA goals.

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