

# **ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN KENYA FROM COLONIAL PERIOD TO DATE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Islamic education has existed side by side at times without dissonance but more often than not with conflicts and disagreements. Over the years, the failure of Muslim children to attain the same level of participation in education as well as academic success compared to members of other faiths has made actors in Islamic education to pursue an innovative alternative system of education that allows children to receive the two types of education at the same time and in the same venue. In Kenya, Islamic education has caused duality of education namely modern schooling offered in the formal schools and traditional Islamic religious education provided in the Qur'anic schools and Madrasas. This has been coupled by parent's fears 'for their children to lose their identity as Muslims due to the strong non-Islamic influence in the formal schools. In a bid to have the children benefit from formal education and still fulfil their religious obligation of getting the basic

religious knowledge, without having to attend several institutions, some Muslim organizations and individual entrepreneurs have established what are referred to as Islamic Integrated schools' in the predominantly Muslim regions of North Eastern, Coast province, Nairobi, Western province particularly around Mumias and Kakamega. The study noted that in the teaching and learning of IRE one can get a proper understanding of what is meant by a truly religious approach to life. Going by the spiral presentation of the themes, it is evident that the IRE curriculum has been developed based on the precepts and tenets of Islam which are further drawn from the first two sources of Sharia (Islamic Law) that is, Quran and Sunnah. The role played by the Nairobi Province IRE panel in organizing educational symposiums and rallies and the content of the rallies have been identified.

**Key Words:** *Islamic education, Kenya, colonial period*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education as a means of transmitting cultural knowledge and skills from one generation to another has existed in all societies throughout history long before formal educational systems existed and prior to schools and other institutions of learning. With the advent of Islam on the coast of East Africa in the 7th Century, education also arrived to the country and thus, education within the framework of Islam has existed for more than a millennium in Kenya (Bray, 2013). Islamic education has existed side by side at times without dissonance but more often than not with conflicts and disagreements. Over the years, the failure of Muslim children to attain the same level of participation in education as well as academic success compared to members of other faiths has made actors in Islamic education to pursue an innovative alternative system of education that allows children to receive the two types of education at the same time and in the same venue.

Islamic education is uniquely different from other types of educational theory and practice largely because of the all-encompassing influence of the Koran. The Koran serves as a comprehensive blueprint for both the individual and society and as the primary source of knowledge. The advent of the Koran in the seventh century was quite revolutionary for the predominantly illiterate Arabian society (Langgulung, 2010). Arab society had enjoyed a rich oral tradition, but the Koran was considered the word of God and needed to be organically interacted with by means of reading and reciting its words. Hence, reading and writing for the purpose of accessing the full blessings of the Koran was an aspiration for most Muslims. Thus, education in Islam unequivocally derived its origins from a symbiotic relationship with religious instruction.

Islamic education takes place in Mosques, Madrasas and Qur'anic schools.<sup>3</sup>Qur'anic schools have existed since the arrival of Islam with almost all Mosques having a Qur'anic school attached to them. Usually all children, both boys and girls of primary school age, attend Qur'anic schools and get basic Islamic education (Al-Ghazzali, 2011). Boys may continue for many years but girls tend to leave when they reach the age of ten or eleven. Islamic education, i.e the Qur'anic schooling and Madrasa are designed to address first and foremost the spiritual needs of the learners and to offer them avenues for growth in the faith. This type of education emerged in response to the divine mandate expressed in the Qur'an and is a means for disseminating and deepening the learner's knowledge of the Islamic faith.

In Kenya, Islamic education has caused duality of education namely modern schooling offered in the formal schools and traditional Islamic religious education provided in the Qur'anic schools and Madrasas (Al-Attas, 2009). This has been coupled by parent's fears 'for their children to lose their identity as Muslims due to the strong non-Islamic influence in the formal schools. In a bid to have the children benefit from formal education and still fulfil their religious obligation of getting the basic religious knowledge, without having to attend several institutions, some Muslim organizations and individual entrepreneurs have established what are referred to as 'Islamic Integrated schools' in the predominantly Muslim regions of North Eastern, Coast province, Nairobi, Western province particularly around Mumias and Kakamega. The children in these regions attend Qur'anic schools, traditional Madrasa institutions and secular public schools (Unicef, 2010).

### **Islamic Education**

Islam as a total way of life does not separate secular and religious life. Consequently, secular and religious educations are inseparable; they are integral parts of a whole. Islamic education is therefore supposed to support Islamic way of life. Arabic language has three terms for education, representing the various dimensions the educational process as perceived by Islam. The most widely used word for education in a formal sense is ta'llim, from the root 'alima, which is used to denote knowledge being sought or imparted instruction and teaching.

Observing the curriculum for the secondary schools, the Kenya Institute of Education has set up a list of national goals of education and two of the goals are closely related to religion and religious education. Goal number four which aims to “promote sound O l moral and religious values.” The purpose of this goal is to provide for development of attitudes, knowledge and skills that enhance achievements of moral values, helping the Kenyan children to grow up into good Kenyans with self-discipline, self-reliance and a feeling of integration in society.”<sup>84</sup> Goal number six which aims to “promote respect for and development of Kenya’s rich and varied cultures.”<sup>85</sup> The purpose of this goal is to develop positive attitudes among the pupils and build up an understanding of the past and the present cultures within the borders of Kenya, and their valid place in the contemporary society with religious tolerance.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

To establish the penetration of Islamic education in Kenya from colonial period to date.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theory applicable to the study is religious sociological theory of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim viewed religion with the context of the entire society and acknowledged its place in influencing the thinking and behaviour of the members of the society. According to Durkheim, religion is a social phenomenon that can be understood and be explained in sociological manner, a system of which the society is made conscious of itself, Further he sees religion as an institution which has various social functions. It is concerned with the ideals of the society, limits individuals and their selfish tendencies, curbs immoral acts and many of these functions are for the good of the society (Idrees, 2007).

Religion is a product of society which is associated with morality. Each person perceives morality in their own way, he further see that moral reality is divided into two; subjective and objective, where the objective is the common morality which applies to everyone collectively therefore social and subjective comprises of an infinite number of moralities, according to person’s own judgement. Dangor (2005), saw that, law and morality plays a major role in maintaining the equilibrium of society and adapting it to environment, which is also a role of religion. He held that religion, morality and law are the regulating forces in the society. Religion is viewed as an agent in the society which controls man’s moral; it elevates man and makes him human. IIEP schools are religious based and therefore are social entities which facilitate acquisition of religious knowledge and teaches Islamic morals collectively.

IIEP as a religious oriented system is used to impart ethical code, to enable the students to become responsible members of the society (Dangor, 2005). Durkheim argued that religion never concerns only belief, but also encompasses regular rituals and ceremonies. Rituals are necessary

to bind together the members of religious group and they allow people to escape from mundane aspects of daily life into higher realms of experience. Islam is a ritualistic religion; therefore children need to be brought up with religious practices in order for them to become practical Muslims at a later stage in life (Hussain, 2004). suggests an ethno methodological approach when carrying out a social science research this is because, it is because it is a procedure for studying people and their affairs, particularly in their behaviours and roots. The approach begins from individual UP or peoples actions, behaviour and day to day routines.

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### **Islamic Education during the Colonial Period**

In pre-colonial times, localized, relevant indigenous knowledge was very important in the organization and transmission of knowledge. But when formal education was introduced in Kenya during the British colonial era, ideological conflicts arose because this was a western-style education, provided mainly by the missionaries with the cooperation of the colonial government. The mission's educational objective was not only to expose Africans to a superior culture, but also to instruct pupils in the Word of God. Missionaries wanted Christian "truths" spread into the villages and countryside. The missionaries, dedicated to indoctrinating the African with a Christian moral code and knowledge that could be applied to the "betterment" of the tribal community, insisted it was necessary to coordinate education with religion. Missionaries saw in education a means by which to extend Christianity (Abreau, 2009). The missionary societies pressed the colonial administration to be allowed to take charge of African education with a view to building a Christian foundation. This view was supported by the various education commissions that were set up before Kenya's independence.

The policy that emerged on African education was to support Christian missionary educational effort through grants-in-aid, leaving them to select where to open up schools and who to accept or refuse admission. The doors of the mission schools were shut to those who did not accept baptism, attendance in the Church and Bible lessons. This policy discriminated against African Muslims who wanted secular education but at the same time retain their faith (Langgulung, 2004). Arising from complaints by the Muslims that the government was spending huge amounts of money to keep education in the hands of the missionaries, the Director of Education proposed to make provision for a few schools among 'tribes' where missionary effort had been withdrawn or had not been initiated.

Relying heavily on the evidence of missionaries, the Education Commission of 1919 rejected the idea.

In 1925, the Local Native Council's that gave grants-in-aid to Mission schools wanted to use part of their resources for building neutral schools without missionary cooperation. European District Officers who were ex-officio chairmen of Local Native Councils justified the existence of such schools. They argued that there was a large body of non-Christians, including Muslims who were demanding education. It was difficult for the Government to tell them that they could only have education plus Christian religion or no education at all. The missions viewed the Local Native Councils as secular agents in the education arena.

In Muslim dominated areas, improvement in school attendance was hard to come by, beginning from the first to the second decade of this century. An example can be used to explain the scenario. In Lamu, a night school was opened in 1929 to cater for the civil servants who wished to use their spare time to improve their knowledge of English and their prospects. Following the example of the night school, a day school was opened but it was closed down in 1931 due to poor attendance.

### **Role of Islamic Education**

Secular and religious education is inseparable in Islam, the major aim in education is to enhance a total way of life in mankind. Education also aims at equipping an individual to live in this world according to the Divine Command as revealed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the holy Prophet. Therefore, the aim is to teach Qur'an and Sunnah for cultural and literary value, produce faith and code of behaviour. Further, Islamic education provides or nurtures character and moral training with an objective of producing a good Muslim; a person whose spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical growth are well balanced. As Umaruddin puts it, 'in order to form beautiful character and the development of qualities which are conducive, wisdom, self-assertion and appetite ion are fundamental. They must work together and be in the correct proportion.

Islamic religious education also aim at nurturing learners in making rational judgement about facts through giving certain experience and enable them to see in the light of religion- This enables learners to interpret religion in their contemporary situation and enhance decision making in attaching value and meaning to religion. According to Bray (2013), jt educates learners to be informed and be able to discriminate about many manifestations of religion and other religions which they are likely to meet in a pluralistic society; religious tolerance. Finally to help learners have a religious view of life and to make up their own decisions regarding religious questions (free will). These help learners to become independent and responsible members of the society in future as they take their different roles

## **Improvement of Islamic Education in Kenya**

Some of the major challenges that the Kenya government faced at the dawn of independence in 1963 were abolition of racial segregation in schools and harmonization of curricula and expansion of educational opportunities. In 1963, there were only 6,058 primary schools with an enrolment of 891,553. By 1992 this had risen to 15,465 primary schools with 5.5 Million pupils. Unfortunately, this expansion was mainly limited to regions where the communities were predominantly Christian. In regions where communities were predominantly Muslim, the expansion has remained slow. This is particularly the case in the coastal region and in the North Eastern province. Parents in these regions preferred to take their children to Qur'anic schools and Madrassas where children are taught Islam and related studies. Enrolment in these regions, therefore, has remained far below the national average.

It was against this background that the programme for integrating traditional Islamic education for children in Madrasas and Dugsi's with formal pre-school and primary education started initially in Kwale district in 1985. Integrating Islamic education with secular education became necessary when it was realized that many Muslim children obtained religious education and not secular education. This was necessitated by the fears of parents that secular education was likely to undermine Islamic education and way of life. The integrated approach was regarded as one good strategy of ensuring that Muslim children did not miss out on secular education and at the same time maintain their way of life and religion.

In 1985, a District Centre for Early Childhood Education (DICECE) was established in Kwale District in the Southern Coastal part of Kenya. DICECE programme officers observed that some Muslim children, who attended secular nursery schools and centres in the morning hours, also attended Madrasas in the afternoon sessions. Some Muslims preferred to have their children attend Madrasas, even for those children who are old enough to attend primary schools. DICECE programme officers, Community leaders, Sheikhs, Imams, the Madrasa Maalims and the parents held consultations and jointly proposed the integration of activities in Madrasas with those of secular pre-schools. Some of the Madrasas integrated with formal pre-schools have since developed into fully fledged primary schools in Kwale District. The initial integrated Madrasas in Kwale gave a basis for wider integration of Dugsi's and Madrasas in other parts of the country

The government has accepted the system in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education. Most of the Muslim parents especially in areas of the country where majority is Muslim, would prefer their children to acquire basic skills in religion among which moral education is their priority. Such/integration could enhance the literacy skills among Muslim boys and girls in such areas. IIEP schools in Nairobi are privately owned by individuals or groups.



Due to the challenges of life in the current world, countries and people tend to compete with each other to attain a developed and progressive community. It is assumed that it is only through a modern system of education that people can intellectually and economically develop. As a result, the majority of traditional institutions in Muslim communities, such as Madrasa, continue to be institutions that only teach Islamic knowledge, whilst secular institutions are more popular, providing modern education with some religious elements or values. The separation between these two patterns of education, referred to as the “dualist system of education” is the main problem faced by Muslim society.

### **Challenges facing Islamic Education in Kenya**

Wainaina (2015), observe that some of the problems facing the teaching of Islamic education at primary school level are lack of textbooks and other learning resources. In addition, the subject is taught by teachers who may have inadequate experience and not all may have trained in religious education. The study has critically analyzed the relationship between the scholar’s findings on the challenges of Religious Education with that of IRE specifically. According to Bray (2013), Religious Education was introduced as compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum when the 8-4-4 system of education was incepted in 1985. However, the government did not consider the personnel available to handle the religious subjects. While there were enough teachers to teach CRE, it was not the same for IRE. This shortage has forced many Muslims in non-Muslim schools where IRE is not offered to take up CRE. The present study shows the impact of the shortage of IRE teachers on the teaching and learning process.

Mraja (2008), concur that some difficulties faced in Islamic Education teaching stem from lack of proper training and shortage of qualified Education teachers. Yahya (2004), contends that there is acute shortage of IRE teachers in Nairobi secondary schools. He has outlined a few factors contributing to the shortage such as low and negative attitude of both parents and students towards the subject. The present study observes that one of the factors that challenge the teaching of IRE in secondary schools in Nairobi is poverty. This is especially in schools within informal settlement areas such as Kibera. Most parents have financial constraints hence do not adequately cater for provision of learning resources.

Idrees (2007), outlines the general development of IRE in Kenya. He comes up with several challenges that teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of IRE. He contends that it is a sad state of affairs that proper Islamic education was not imparted to the Muslim youth during the colonial period. He attributes this to financial constraints. Poverty, he argues, has been the crux of Muslim problems. Muslim students may not attend school because they cannot afford to pay nominal amount such as school fees. This stems right from primary school to secondary school.

Muslim students cannot buy uniform for themselves and/or pay boarding fees. So they are either sent away or drop out of the course due to their failure to meet various expenses at later stages



(Muhammad, 2012). When few students remain in the schools, some classes are left without IRE students hence it is not taught. Students do not benefit from the moral training, hence fail to acquire the legal position of fardhain (knowledge of religious obligation). The probable effect of this inadequacy in Nairobi schools is low and negative attitude of students towards taking Islamic studies as a career subject both at college and university level.

Quraishy (2008), discussed the role played by private schools in the provision of quality secondary education. It also shows that poverty is an impediment to effective teaching of Religious Education. The present study has exhaustively discussed how poverty affects effective teaching and learning of IRE by learners in the slums and also identifies alternative measures, to be employed by parents to improve on the quality of education in private schools.

According to Mraja (2008) scarce reference books and journals on Islam especially in English has been a major constraint in offering many courses on Islam in tertiary institutions. He further explains that there is apparent lukewarm attitude of the Muslims towards IRE especially in Secondary schools and universities. Majority of the students go for other disciplines in humanities and social sciences. Perhaps the apparent lack in interest on Islamic studies is largely a reflection of the fact that premium in the labour market is given to those who specialized on sciences and business oriented subjects as opposed to arts.

According to Maina (2008), the acute shortage of IRE teachers could be illustrated by statistics. Data from National Union of Kenya Muslims (NUKEM) indicated that due to shortage of IRE teachers, only 52 out of 200 primary schools in Nairobi by 1995, could offer IRE. It was further noted that there was a shortfall of 300 IRE teachers in Nairobi. The inadequacy cuts across all levels of institutions of learning. The study notes that there has been a remarkable increment of IRE teachers because of sponsorship by various Islamic organizations.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The study noted that in the teaching and learning of IRE one can get a proper understanding of what is meant by a truly religious approach to life. Going by the spiral presentation of the themes, it is evident that the IRE curriculum has been developed based on the precepts and tenets of Islam which are further drawn from the first two sources of Sharia (Islamic Law) that is, Quran and Sunnah. The role played by the Nairobi Province IRE panel in organizing educational symposiums and rallies and the content of the rallies have been identified. These include muamalat (relationships), Akhlaq (morality), Devotional Acts among others. It is evident from the findings that IRE refines learner's morality and plays vital role in character building. We have also noted that secondary school IRE students have various opportunities in the labour market as already discussed. Hence, IRE has helped students in secondary schools in Nairobi to develop spiritually and academically.

The shortage of IRE teachers in Nairobi has compelled many schools not to offer the subject. Most of the secondary schools that offer IRE in Nairobi are private and since IRE has few lessons per week, administrators add more lessons to IRE teachers preferably their other teaching subjects. It becomes strenuous in terms of preparation since they are forced to cope with a heavy work load. Their counterparts specialize in teaching only one subject and are sort of relieved, composed and efficient. These are teachers who teach especially the core subjects such as English, Mathematics and Kiswahili among others. These subjects have been allocated many periods per week. Therefore, teachers handling these subjects are not added more subjects except where there are issues of under staffing (Mujahid, 2007). Studying IRE and practicing what it teaches helps students acquire life full of spiritual guidance. IRE therefore is an instrument for the application of the Divine law. It provides disciplinary practice, spiritual nourishment and true motivation when humankind worships Allah. Hence, IRE helps students to cultivate a sound personality, and to foster physical and moral development within the comprehensive scheme of Islamic way of life (Quraishy, 2007).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It is evident from the above discussion that though Islamic education proceeded Western education, the arrival of Christian missionaries at the beginning of the 19th Century not only curtailed the expansion of Islam into the interior of Kenya, it also slowed down the development of Islamic education. Since evangelism is the *raison d'être* of the missionaries, Muslims did not take up Western education seriously preferring to educate their children in their religious schools. This state of affairs was a problem for Muslims whose youth could not take up gainful positions with the civil service, a situation that persists to this day. In the areas where Muslims were majority, Qur'anic schools and Madrasa have continued to flourish even at times being the only institutions of learning in rural areas. The recent establishment of Islamic Integrated schools has opened further avenues for Muslims to not only receive Western education which promises its graduates a comfortable life but also Islamic education which promises its graduates a better life in the hereafter.

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