

Evolution of Islamic Education in Pakistan: Tradition, Modernization, Challenges, and Future Reforms

Zohaib Hassan Sain^{1*}, Sovia Mas Ayu², Junaidah³

¹ Superior University, Pakistan

^{2,3} Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, Indonesia

 zohaib3746@gmail.com*

Abstract

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Islam came to Pakistan in the seventh century, pioneering Islamic education systems in the region. Over the centuries, political, social, and economic developments influenced its evolution. This article explores Islamic education in Pakistan, focusing on course content, pedagogy, and infrastructure changes. The analysis begins with the earliest Islamic schools, particularly the madrasa system, which trained leaders and intellectuals in Islamic ethics, law, and theology. These institutions preserved and transmitted Islamic culture and knowledge across generations. Islamic education changed significantly during British colonial rule and industrialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries. Western principles were integrated into the madrasa curriculum, adding Mathematics, Science, and English, creating a shift from traditional methods. After independence, Pakistan expanded its Islamic education with universities and colleges. These institutions combined Islamic teachings with modern disciplines to provide a comprehensive curriculum. Today, Islamic education in Pakistan is vibrant and diverse, with institutions focusing on Islamic studies, Quranic studies, and Islamic law. While the government has implemented regulatory bodies to ensure quality, challenges like training instructors and incorporating technology persist. Collaborative efforts by religious scholars, educators, and policymakers are essential to modernising Islamic education and ensuring its relevance.

Keywords: *Islamic Education, Curriculum Modernization; Pakistan*

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has a rich tradition of Islamic education, dating back to the arrival of Islam in the 8th century. The early Islamic education system was marked by the establishment of madrasas that served as pivotal institutions for teaching Islamic Theology, Law, and Ethics. These institutions played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting religious and cultural values across generations.



Madrasas nurtured scholars who contributed significantly to Islamic thought and culture.¹ Islamic education in Pakistan underwent significant transformations due to socio-political influences, particularly during the British colonial period of the 19th and 20th centuries. The introduction of Western education brought about modernization, integrating subjects like Mathematics, Physics, and English into madrasa curricula.² This significantly shifted from traditional teaching methods to a more diverse educational approach.

After independence, Pakistan established Islamic colleges and universities to harmonize traditional Islamic studies with modern disciplines.³ Efforts to regulate and standardize Islamic education have included forming accreditation systems to ensure nationwide consistency in quality.⁴ Despite these advancements, challenges persist, such as outdated curricula, insufficient teacher training, and limited use of technology in teaching methodologies.⁵ As Pakistan modernizes, adapting its Islamic education system to meet society's evolving needs is imperative. This adaptation includes revising curricula, improving teacher training, and integrating modern technology into traditional teaching frameworks to ensure Islamic education remains relevant and effective.⁶ Analyzing the historical evolution, challenges, and achievements of Islamic

¹ Uzma Anzar, "Islamic Education: A Brief History of Madrassas with Comments on Curricula and Current Pedagogical Practices," *Paper for the University of Vermont, Environmental Programme* 55 (2003).

² Sarfaroze Niyozov and Nadeem Memon, "Islamic Education and Islamization: Evolution of Themes, Continuities and New Directions," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2011): 5–30.

³ Akrim Akrim et al., "Transformation of Islamic Education Curriculum Development Policy in the National Education System.," *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences* 17, no. 7 (2022): 2538–52.

⁴ Isra Mahmood et al., "Effects of Pesticides on Environment," *Plant, Soil and Microbes: Volume 1: Implications in Crop Science*, 2016, 253–69.

⁵ Moch Tolchah and Muhammad Arfan Mu'ammam, "Islamic Education in the Globalization Era," *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 7, no. 4 (2019): 1031–37.

⁶ Minhas Akbar et al., "Islamic Finance Education: Current State and Challenges for Pakistan," *Cogent Economics & Finance* 11, no. 1 (2023): 2164665, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2022.2164665>.

education in Pakistan provides valuable insights into its impact on the country's religious, cultural, and intellectual development.⁷

This article examines the complex history of Islamic education in Pakistan, from its origins to today. It focuses on how colonialism, independence, and modernity have shaped its development. The research seeks to identify ways to address persistent challenges and provide recommendations to improve Islamic education for a rapidly changing society. By investigating the contributions and limitations of Islamic schools, this study aims to guide policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in fostering collaboration and innovation to create a more inclusive and effective education system in Pakistan.

To direct this study, several essential inquiries have been devised to investigate the many aspects of Islamic education in Pakistan. These questions aim to examine the historical development, difficulties, and efforts to improve the educational system. The following are the research inquiries: What influence have historical, political, and social considerations had on the development of Islamic Education in Pakistan, and what are the potential far-reaching consequences for the future?; What is the comprehensive historical background and evolution of Islamic Educational Institutions such as Madrasas in Pakistan?; How did colonial influence and Western Education Paradigms impact Islamic Education in Pakistan?; and What initiatives were undertaken after independence to include Islamic Education into the National System, and what obstacles emerged?

Our research has identified several crucial gaps in the current literature regarding the evolution of Islamic education in Pakistan. These gaps highlight areas that require further investigation and are essential for comprehending the intricate landscape of Islamic education in Pakistan. Existing studies have explored the historical roots of Islamic education in Pakistan, but there is a need for more in-depth and nuanced research. This should include a detailed

⁷ Fazal Rabbi and Shahid Habib, "Discourse on Madrasa Education Reform in Pakistan: Challenges to State Narrative and Its Implications.," *Al Basirah* 8, no. 1 (2019).

examination of its development during the colonial and post-independence periods to reveal critical influences and transitions shaping the present educational framework. More needs to be explored of the complexities and challenges associated with integrating Islamic and Western education systems in Pakistan. Further research into these integration efforts could provide insights into the mutual influence of these educational paradigms and their impact on the broader educational landscape.

The existing literature needs to fully capture or analyze the current discussions, debates, and future visions regarding Islamic education in Pakistan, particularly those expressed by various stakeholders. It is crucial to include these contemporary perspectives for a holistic understanding of ongoing developments in Islamic education. More comparative studies are needed to examine the evolution of Islamic education in Pakistan and other Muslim-majority countries. Investigating transnational influences and connections could yield valuable insights into shared challenges and strategies across different contexts. Addressing these gaps in the existing literature will provide a more complete and nuanced understanding of the evolution of Islamic education in Pakistan, offering valuable insights for academic research and practical policy-making.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates Islamic education's historical development, current state, and prospects in Pakistan. It employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis. This methodological approach enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings. The historical evolution of Islamic education is explored by examining various sources, including archival records, historical documents, and scholarly research. Content analysis is utilized to identify significant patterns, changes, and factors influencing the development of Islamic education in Pakistan. The research spans from pre-independence to the present, providing a longitudinal perspective.

Data collection involves gathering insights from diverse participants, including educators and administrators from madrasas, Islamic schools and universities, policymakers, education specialists, students, and parents. This diverse participant base ensures a holistic understanding of Islamic education's multifaceted nature. Qualitative data will include interviews and focus group discussions, while quantitative data will be collected using surveys and structured questionnaires. Data analysis combines theme and content analysis for qualitative data alongside descriptive, inferential, and trend analysis for quantitative data. This integrated approach helps identify correlations, trends, and patterns that contribute to understanding Islamic education's past, present, and potential future. By employing these analytical techniques, the study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the curriculum, instructional methods, institutional frameworks, and policy developments within Islamic education in Pakistan. The primary objective is to offer an in-depth exploration of Islamic education's historical progression, its current dynamics, and its adaptability to future challenges. This methodological framework ensures the thoroughness and rigour of the research, instilling confidence in the validity of the findings.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Islamic education in Pakistan dates back to the 8th century when Islam was first introduced. Madrasas initially focused on Islamic theology, law, and ethics as foundational educational institutions, playing a crucial role in preserving and transmitting Islamic beliefs across generations.⁸ The colonial era of the 19th and 20th centuries brought significant transformations to this system. British administrators incorporated Western subjects such as Mathematics, Physics, and English into the madrasa curriculum, blending traditional Islamic education with modern teaching methods.⁹ This duality shaped the trajectory of

⁸ Salim Mansur Khalid and M Fayyaz Khan, "Pakistan: The State of Education.," *Muslim World* 96, no. 2 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2006.00130.x>.

⁹ Khalid Rahman, "Madrassas in Pakistan: Role and Emerging Trends," *Islam and Politics* 120 (2009): 57-70.

Islamic education in Pakistan, impacting its development.¹⁰ Islamic education in Pakistan exemplifies an intricate interplay of tradition and modernity shaped by historical, social, and political factors. The country's commitment to maintaining its religious and cultural legacy while addressing the needs of a rapidly changing society is reflected in its ongoing evolution. By embracing innovation and addressing persistent challenges, Islamic education in Pakistan has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the country's educational landscape.

Following Pakistan's independence in 1947, the government prioritised the development of Islamic institutions and colleges. These institutions sought to integrate traditional Islamic teachings with modern disciplines, ensuring a comprehensive educational approach. Regulatory agencies were established to maintain uniformity and quality across Islamic educational institutions.¹¹ However, persistent challenges remain, including outdated curricula, inadequate teacher training, and the limited incorporation of technology into teaching practices.

A critical issue linked to Islamic education in Pakistan is the association of some madrasas with extremism and militancy. This has prompted calls for educational reforms to address these concerns. Recent efforts have focused on modernising Islamic education through vocational training programs and promoting critical thinking and analytical skills. Such initiatives aim to enhance the employability of graduates while aligning Islamic education with the demands of modern society.¹²

The colonial era's influence created a dichotomy between traditional religious education and the Western-oriented curriculum, sparking ongoing debates about their coexistence. Efforts to integrate Islamic studies into

¹⁰ Muhammad Iqbal et al., "Barriers To Modern Education In Madrasas Of Pakistan: Student And Teacher's Perceptions," *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 2023, 31–40.

¹¹ Farid Panjwani, "Fazlur Rahman and the Search for Authentic Islamic Education: A Critical Appreciation," *Curriculum Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2012): 33–55, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2011.00574.x>.

¹² Rukhsana Zia, "Religion and Education in Pakistan: An Overview," *Prospects* 33, no. 2 (2003): 165–78.

mainstream educational institutions have further cemented the importance of Islamic education in Pakistan's national curriculum.¹³ Despite these efforts, unresolved challenges include the lack of a standardised curriculum, insufficient teacher preparation, and the limited use of innovative teaching techniques.

Recent reforms emphasise fostering critical thinking and addressing extremism within specific madrasas, reflecting a broader consensus on modernising Islamic education to meet societal needs.¹⁴ Incorporating technology, fostering vocational skills, and promoting analytical abilities are vital measures to ensure Islamic education's continued relevance and effectiveness in Pakistan. Although substantial progress has been made, the field still requires consistent adaptation and collaboration among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders.

Development of Islamic Education in Pakistan

The development of Islamic education in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the nation's cultural and religious legacy. Historically, madrasas were the primary institutions for transmitting Islamic knowledge, focusing on Quranic studies, Hadith, Fiqh, and Arabic. These institutions preserved Islamic traditions and fostered intellectual and spiritual development among students. Their role in shaping the religious and cultural identity of Pakistan remains significant. The evolution of Islamic education accelerated during the colonial era when Western education methods were introduced. Including modern subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages into madrasa curricula created a synthesis between traditional and contemporary education. Post-independence, this trend continued with establishing Islamic universities and schools that integrated religious teachings with modern academic disciplines. These developments

¹³ Naureen Durrani and Máiréad Dunne, "Curriculum and National Identity: Exploring the Links between Religion and Nation in Pakistan," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 42, no. 2 (2010): 215–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220270903312208>.

¹⁴ Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Education Reform in Pakistan—Challenges and Prospects," *Pakistan: Haunting Shadows of Human Security*, Edited by Jennifer Bennett 58 (2014).

highlight the adaptability of Islamic education in responding to changing societal needs.

Historical, political, and social factors have profoundly influenced this legacy. Early madrasas ensured the transmission of religious and ethical teachings.¹⁵ During the colonial period, a dual education system emerged, incorporating Western subjects like mathematics, science, and English into traditional Islamic curricula.¹⁶ Post-independence, Pakistan prioritized the establishment of Islamic institutions that combined religious teachings with modern disciplines to align with the nation's socio-political goals. These developments underscore the adaptability of Islamic education to changing societal needs.¹⁷

Despite its evolution, Islamic education in Pakistan faces significant challenges such as lack of uniform curriculum, links to extremism, and limited economic opportunities for graduates. Madrasas across the country follow diverse curricula, leading to inconsistencies in educational standards. This lack of standardization complicates efforts to create a cohesive national educational framework. Concerns regarding the association of some madrasas with extremist ideologies have drawn criticism and highlighted the need for continuous reform.¹⁸ Ensuring that these institutions promote peaceful interpretations of Islam remains a pressing priority. Madrasa graduates often face restricted career prospects outside religious or educational roles, limiting their economic integration into broader fields.

¹⁵ Muhammad Junaid Khawaja, Fareed Sharif Farooqi, and Toseef Azid, "Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Capital in a Developing Country: A Case Study of District Multan (Pakistan)," *Humanomics* 32, no. 2 (2016): 189–204, <https://doi.org/10.1108/H-11-2015-0075>.

¹⁶ Farkhanda Khursheed and Altaf Ullah, "Ideology of Pakistan and Pakistan Studies: A Study in Correlation and Its Impact on Curriculum Development," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 59, no. 1 (2022): 8.

¹⁷ Surriya Shahab, "History and Background of Madrassah Education in Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.52337/pjia.v4i4.333>.

¹⁸ USMAN AFAQ, "The Challenges and Opportunities of Islamic Education in Pakistan," *Harf-o-Sukhan* 7, no. 4 (2023): 346–55.

While challenges persist, they also present opportunities for innovation and progress to modernizing of curricula, enhancing teacher training, integrating technology, and collaboration with religious leaders. Providing teachers with updated pedagogical training ensures the delivery of high-quality education that aligns with modern standards.¹⁹ Technology can revolutionize traditional teaching methods, making education more accessible and effective while maintaining cultural and religious values. Engaging madrasa administrators and religious leaders in the reform process fosters trust and ensures reforms align with cultural and spiritual sensibilities.

Evolution of Islamic Educational Institutions

Historically, madrasas were central to Islamic education, focusing on Quranic studies, Hadith, Fiqh, and Arabic. These institutions played a vital role in preserving Islamic traditions and fostering intellectual and spiritual development. The evolution of Islamic education accelerated during the colonial era when Western education methods were introduced. Including modern subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages into madrasa curricula created a synthesis between traditional and contemporary education.²⁰ Post-independence, this trend continued with establishing Islamic universities and schools that integrated religious teachings with modern academic disciplines.²¹ These developments highlight the adaptability of Islamic education in responding to changing societal needs.

Colonial influence created a dichotomy between religious and secular education systems. Western education paradigms introduced subjects like mathematics, science, and English into traditional Islamic curricula resulting in a

¹⁹ Sajid Ali, "Modernizing Education in Pakistan: Networked Governance, the Role of Consultants and the Prevalence of Data," in *World Yearbook of Education 2014* (Routledge, 2014), 128–40.

²⁰ Kevin R McClure, "Madrasas and Pakistan's Education Agenda: Western Media Misrepresentation and Policy Recommendations," *International Journal of Educational Development* 29, no. 4 (2009): 334–41, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2009.01.003>.

²¹ Muhammad Usman and Asmak Ab Rahman, "Funding Higher Education through Waqf: A Lesson from Pakistan," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 14, no. 2 (2021): 409–24, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMEFM-05-2019-0200>.

blend of traditional and modern education. This shift fostered debates about the coexistence of Islamic and Western educational approaches, which persist in contemporary discussions.²² Post-independence reforms continued the integration of Western disciplines into Islamic education, but challenges such as resistance to change and lack of standardization impeded progress. These developments shaped today's dual educational system, highlighting the need for harmonization. After independence, Pakistan undertook significant initiatives to integrate Islamic education into the national system.²³ These efforts included the establishment of Islamic universities and schools combining religious teachings with modern disciplines. Regulatory frameworks were introduced to standardize curricula and ensure educational quality. However, obstacles emerged, including the lack of a uniform curriculum, inadequate teacher training and limited adoption of modern technology. These challenges hindered the effectiveness of reforms and created disparities in educational standards across institutions.

Recent modernization efforts include incorporating stem subjects, vocational training, and technology into madrasa education. Programs addressing extremism have emphasized critical thinking and analytical skills to counter radical ideologies.²⁴ While these measures have succeeded in some areas, such as improving employability and modernizing teaching methodologies, their effectiveness remains limited by institutional resistance, resource constraints, and scalability challenges. Strategic reforms are needed to ensure broader implementation and sustainability.

²² Abdul Qayyum, Atif Saleem, and Khurram Shezad, "Impact of Colonial Rule on Today's Educational System of Pakistan," *International Journal of Business, Economics and Management Works*, 2014.

²³ Muhammad Safdar and Gulzar Ahmad, "Post-Independence Education System of Pakistan: Continuation of British Colonial Slogan 'Divide and Rule,'" *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review* 4, no. 4 (2023): 30–40, [https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol4-iss4-2023\(30-40\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol4-iss4-2023(30-40)).

²⁴ Fareeda Ibad, "Modernization of Education in Pakistan: A Case Study," *International Journal of Experiential Learning & Case Studies* 4, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.22555/ijelcs.v4i2.2631>.

The future of Islamic education in Pakistan lies in its ability to balance tradition with innovation. Policymakers and educators must create a unified educational framework combining religious and contemporary education. Examples of madrasas successfully incorporating modern subjects while retaining their religious ethos can serve as models for broader reforms. Strategic reforms should aim to enhance the inclusivity and quality of education, ensuring that Islamic schools contribute actively to the country's socio-economic progress. Collaborative efforts between stakeholders, including policymakers, religious authorities, and educators, are essential to creating an educational system that reflects Pakistan's cultural and religious heritage while meeting the demands of a rapidly evolving global society.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the results underscore the complex and changing state of Islamic education in Pakistan, highlighting the need for ongoing discussion, cooperation, and creativity to uphold the significance and advancement of Islamic schools. Pakistan can enhance its educational system by addressing the current obstacles and taking advantage of the prospects in Islamic education, resulting in a more comprehensive, efficient, and enduring system. This method will uphold the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings and provide students with the necessary information and skills to thrive in the modern world. This study employs a proactive strategy to predict and examine probable future advancements in Islamic education in Pakistan. The findings obtained from this research will be crucial for politicians, educators, and other stakeholders in strategizing and getting ready for the future. By doing this, they may guarantee that Islamic education remains relevant and efficient in an ever-changing and rapidly growing global context. Moreover, these discoveries might contribute to developing strategic measures that harmonize Islamic education with the demands of contemporary society, thereby promoting an educational system rooted in culture and progressive in nature.

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