

Roadmap for Development of a National Islamic Education Curriculum

Introduction:

A team of selected stakeholders from UMSC, the Office of the Supreme Mufti (OSM) - Kibuli, UMEA, UMTA, NCDC, and other Muslim Education Institutions, in a 4-day retreat, undertook a curriculum review and harmonization of the current Islamic Education Curricula which are used at primary level—i.e. Primary One or P.1 to Primary Seven or P.7. In the process of reviewing the different curricula, local ones (i.e. the UMSC-Link, Uganda Quranic Schools Association) and international ones (i.e. from Turkey and Al-Fatih Academy curriculum based in the US) were reviewed. The process mostly focused on understanding the educational gaps which were of local interest to educating the children, and these were as follows:

Gaps Identified & Recommendations:

The curricula review has identified the following gaps that exist in current Ugandan madrasa curricula with respect to attitudes, knowledge, and skills currently being taught and the current needs of students, along with related recommendations:

1. Existence of multiple curricula:

Description:

There are several different curricula in use and some are written while others are unwritten. Those which are written are adopted differently by the children, hence compromising standardization and acceptability by government and the Muslim leadership in general to offer its support to either the teachers financially or to the children with harmonized education materials. For the unwritten, there is little support in order to do follow up to support the children, and the volunteers who offer their time to teach these children receive no educational materials from the Muslim institutions or government, hence relying on memorization from those teaching them.

Recommendations:

- i. There is a need for the curriculum review and harmonization process to come up with one unified curriculum accepted by all stakeholders.
- ii. There is need to fully establish a Commission to oversee the teaching of theology, examination, and certification processes. The Commission should explore possibilities for creating a hybrid curriculum with key subjects from the national (government) curriculum and the harmonized theology curriculum to replace the various current dual curricula. The Commission shall be fully constituted by representatives of all key stakeholders from the participating groups, including about 21 people, which shall be in charge of overseeing the Islamic theological/madrasa education in Uganda. It shall work with the experts in Islamic studies and Arabic language and the NCDC to complete the harmonization, review, design, pilot, and implementation of the new curriculum.
- iii. The stakeholders anticipate NCDC's support and guidance on the entire process.
- iv. The government should provide recognition of the harmonized curriculum and additional support for its implementation.
- v. There is need for a systematic campaign to encourage all communities/schools to embrace the new unified dual curriculum and to engage government to embrace the same.

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Key Finding 2: *“Madrasas vary widely in structure, curriculum, level of formalization, capacities, and affiliation with Islamic or governmental bodies.”*

- Recommendation 1: *“The NCDC should work with key stakeholders possessing technical expertise in areas such as Islam and Arabic for the development/revision and adoption of the IRE Madrasa curriculum. A unified dual curriculum should be offered to all Islamic schools, along with a uniform examination system, and a process for ensuring regular updates to the curriculum.”*

2. Teaching and learning instructional materials inappropriate to age and context:

Description:

Some materials were of a too-advanced age; for example, at the lower primary level the materials were for the upper age. Some books gave examples that don’t suit our (Ugandan) context—for example, having to teach primary level 4 learners about marriage. Instead, this can be done progressively and introduced at a later age, and the curriculum can concentrate on topics about family for this particular age.

Recommendations:

- Produce age-appropriate teaching/learning materials. New educational materials shall be developed and updated/enriched with new content; these materials shall include Teachers’ Guide(s), Learners’ Guide(s), Textbooks, etc.
- These materials shall integrate content on Tolerance, Critical Thinking, Student Leadership, Social Cohesion, as well as other topics in areas where it may be lacking or inadequate.

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Recommendation 3: *“Develop additional teaching materials to enhance education in areas where gaps have been identified.”*
- Recommendation 4: *“Provide additional support to Madrasas for improving tolerance and social cohesion—building on their existing strengths in these areas.”*
- Recommendation 5: *“Enhance Madrasas’ capacity to promote critical thinking skills among their students.”*
- Recommendation 2: *“Facilitate a system of regular and standardized teacher training, including a Madrasa Teacher Training School with affiliation to recognized universities, for Madrasa Teachers.”*

3. Content overload

Description:

There was too much content given irrespective of time, age, and ability—for example, under *sira*. We must give due regard to both breadth and depth and determine this according to the age of the learners.

Recommendations:

- Transfer/distribute content based on available time of contact in class.
- Create content with illustrations that are relevant and in context to the Ugandan environment for deeper appreciation and acceptability to our local communities.
- Conduct teacher training on material development and use in class.

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Recommendation 3: *“Develop additional teaching materials to enhance education in areas where gaps have been identified.”*
- Recommendation 2: *“Facilitate a system of regular and standardized teacher training, including a Madrasa Teacher Training School with affiliation to recognized universities, for Madrasa Teachers.”*

4. Teachers' lack of knowledge/capacity to interpret and implement the curriculum:

Description:

When we went into schools during the research survey, we discovered that there was inadequate knowledge among teachers; for example, some teachers could not express themselves efficiently in Arabic, yet Arabic is a central tenet in Islamic education which needs to be emphasized.

During the curriculum review we realized that some teachers would over-emphasize what they know rather than what is recommended to be taught about the topic in relation to age-appropriateness. For example, on *wudhu*, a P.1 learner is taught the same content as a P.7 child.

Recommendations:

- i. Conduct in-service training for untrained Madrasa teachers.
- ii. Refresher courses/ retraining are needed to equip teacher with skills to interpret and implement the curriculum appropriately.
- iii. Produce teachers' guides and learners' books.
- iv. Produce materials which are age-appropriate

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Recommendation 2: *“Facilitate a system of regular and standardized teacher training, including a Madrasa Teacher Training School with affiliation to recognized universities, for Madrasa Teachers.”*

5. Integration of community needs and expectations into the curriculum:

Description:

With most of the curricula that are currently being used, the content was mostly extracted from external foreign curricula such as from Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Nigeria that is not tailored to the local needs and expectations. Also, during the previous curricular design processes, teachers and parents were not fully involved. This process compromised ownership of the key stakeholders which in return isolated the implementation to those considered to be the owners. There was generally a lack of community engagement in ensuring that ownership of the curriculum is owned by all the stakeholders since Islam starts from the home, community, and the nation in general.

Recommendations:

- i. Emphasize value-based teaching / learning which will help to build the character of the learner, including family, community, and national values which conform to the Islamic principles. For example, short stories supported by Hadith and verses of the Quran.
- ii. Relate knowledge content to the current (daily living) situation plus the spiritual/ moral domain in areas such as: Economy/ world of work, Social life and social cohesion, and Leadership skills— i.e. charts, stories, guides to field work, audio/visual clips, etc. showing community life activities, home life, etc.
- iii. Facilitate teacher involvement in curriculum development and implementation to give more ownership for teachers in the new curriculum. For example, involve teachers in material development, Training of Trainers (ToTs) and others for ownership.
- iv. Disseminate the approved curriculum to concerned parents and community members, especially during the evaluation phase which entails production of IEC materials relating to the new curriculum, which will address expectations and fears; introduce the Education Commission; etc.

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Recommendation 4: “Provide additional support to Madrasas for improving tolerance and social cohesion—building on their existing strengths in these areas.”
- Recommendation 7: “Engage Madrasa students in community activities through which they can develop leadership skills and contribute to community development.”

6. The curricula under review was content-oriented and emphasized volume (syllabus coverage), and used a teacher centered approach.

Description:

The emphasis was on covering the allotted work and trying to complete the content with less participation and little room for critical thinking by the learners. This makes the children to cram whatever is shared by the teachers as opposed to fully understanding and appreciating concepts as well as having a chance to think through and ask questions to themselves or their teachers where they need support.

Recommendations:

- i. We are going to have a combination of content- and learner-centered approaches.
- ii. We propose a shift to competence coupled with development and learner-centered approaches with emphasis on critical thinking, which entails producing new Teaching and Learners’ Materials and includes training teachers, producing textbooks, piloting, and others.
- iii. Develop appropriate learners’ textbooks.
- iv. Develop teachers’ guides.
- v. Develop appropriate teaching aids.
- vi. Retool (retrain) teachers.

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Recommendation 2: “Facilitate a system of regular and standardized teacher training, including a Madrasa Teacher Training School with affiliation to recognized universities, for Madrasa Teachers.”
- Recommendation 4: “Provide additional support to Madrasas for improving tolerance and social cohesion—building on their existing strengths in these areas.”
- Recommendation 5: “Enhance Madrasas’ capacity to promote critical thinking skills among their students.”

7. Inadequate mastery of Arabic language by many of the teachers of theology and Arabic language:

Description:

Whereas Muslims in Uganda don’t speak Arabic, their preference is to teach their children Islam in the Arabic language because Arabic is important in the learning and practice of Islam. However, many of the teachers do not master the language, e.g application of supplication in singular and plural form, recitation of the Quran, reading and writing of Arabic, Arabic grammar, etc.

Recommendations:

- i. Re-train Madrasa teachers in the Arabic language.
- ii. Strengthen teaching of Arabic language at all levels to improve learner competence and fluency in Arabic.
- iii. Teacher Training colleges should produce more competent Arabic language teachers.
- iv. Provide refresher courses.
- v. Provide and strengthen Arabic language supporting facilities and activities like audio-visual aids, charts, debating clubs, speech training and competitions, etc.

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Recommendation 6: *“Support Madrasas in enhancing students’ Arabic capacity.”*

8. Incorrect sequencing of content:

Description:

A coherent curriculum has concepts building upon/into each other. However, the curricula under review have a lot of incoherencies; for example, in some curricula there were instances where after teaching the 5 daily prayers, a different topic was introduced before teaching the other sunna prayers like Eid prayers.

Recommendations:

- i. Re-design the curriculum to address the incoherencies.
- ii. Develop new/appropriate materials.
- iii. Facilitate community engagement to appreciate this systematic sequencing, including engaging the Muslim community leaders to fully appreciate it as well. This also helps with ensuring that the informal madrasas headed by mostly imams are engaged in understanding what is going on.

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Recommendation 3: *“Develop additional teaching materials to enhance education in areas where gaps have been identified.”*
- Recommendation 2: *“Facilitate a system of regular and standardized teacher training including a Madrasa Teacher Training School with affiliation to recognized universities, for Madrasa Teachers.”*

9. Congestion in classrooms and inadequate furnishing in classrooms:

Description:

There is congestion in most schools; hence there is a need to ensure there is decongestion. The education and proper understanding of a child also depends on how he or she gets the necessary support from a teacher within the class. The teacher/student ratio is worrisome, but also the infrastructure to support this is in a challenging state which compromises the quality of the children in these schools. The limited infrastructure also forces the teachers and children to use the same facilities irrespective of gender. This further limits the girls especially to acquire their education to the fullest, hence making a major reeducation of their numbers in the Islamic education sector.

Recommendations:

- i. The majority of schools need construction of more school infrastructure, i.e. classrooms.
- ii. Adequate furnishing of classrooms, i.e. furniture, carpets, etc., is needed.
- iii. The schools need close supervision by the relevant bodies/authorities to control students’ intake and performance.

Basis/Evidence for these Recommendations in the National Madrasa Survey Report:

- Recommendation 9: *“Provide critical infrastructure to Madrasas most in need (particularly washroom facilities for female students and fire safety equipment).”*

Next Steps:

The next steps are categorized into two phases: Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Phase One:

1. The Technical Committee which led this Curriculum Review will produce a Report on the process of harmonizing and reviewing the curriculum.
2. Key stakeholders will form an official joint Commission for Islamic theological studies responsible for overseeing Islamic Theological Schools, curriculum management, examination and certification. (This is a currently ongoing process which has already begun and which will include subsequent formal constitution and activation of this Commission.)

Phase Two:

1. Curriculum design and development
 - a. Development of objectives, mission, vision
 - b. Content development (including matching content to the objectives, which is part of the curriculum alignment process, with support from NCDC)
2. Sample Instructional Materials development
 - a. Identification of available materials (levels and nature)
 - b. Teachers' Guides development
 - c. Learners' Guides/ Student textbook development
 - d. Development of teaching aids.
3. Evaluation of the developed curriculum & production of the 1st draft
4. Piloting of the curriculum (6 months)
 - a. Training of teachers (ToTs)
 - b. Training of the pilot cohort schools (Directors, School Administrators and Teachers)
5. Receiving pilot feedback and compilation of the final curriculum
6. Roll out and implementation
 - a. Production and dissemination Curriculum Guides, Teachers' Guides, Learners' Resource Books, Assessment Guides
 - b. Printing of development materials
 - c. Mass training of Directors, School Administrators, and Teachers
 - d. Mass production of teaching/learning materials