

The Relevance of the Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum to the Development of Modern Islamic Religious Education in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Traditional education in Pakistan has deep and varied roots, primarily due to the cultural and ethnic diversity that exists in the country. The unstoppable flow of globalization threatens to shift cultural heritage including traditional education in Pakistan. Thus, efforts are needed so that traditional education is not abandoned and remains relevant to current developments. The aim of this research is to determine the relevance of the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum for the development of modern Islamic religious education in Pakistan. This research is field research combined with literature study. The data collection instrument used was semi-structured interviews. This research was conducted in 15 school institutions, both formal and informal, in 5 big cities in Pakistan. The results of this research found that the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum has several limitations in terms of relevance to modern needs. Islamic educational institutions retain Dars-e-Nizami for the reason that they see it as a way to preserve and inherit the classical Islamic intellectual tradition as well as to maintain a strong understanding of the Islamic religion among students. Education based on the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum still has an important place in the highly conservative and traditional Muslim community. The implications of this research are that schools in Pakistan do not abandon traditional education or curriculum, but continue to preserve it by making adjustments that are relevant to current developments

Keywords: Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum, Modern Islamic Religious Education, Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

The country of Pakistan has a large Muslim population, and the majority of them adhere to the Hanafi school of thought. Therefore, Islamic education in this country is given great attention. The government, private institutions, and NGOs are involved in providing public and religious education in Pakistan, and education is mandatory up to high school level ¹.

The education system in Pakistan is generally divided into five levels: primary/primary (grades one to five), intermediate/middle (grades six to eight), higher/secondary (nine and ten, leading to Secondary School, Certificate or SSC), secondary /higher (grades eleven and twelfth, leading to the Higher Secondary (School) Certificate or HSC), leading undergraduate and graduate degree programs and universities. The curriculum usually includes a combination of eight courses including electives (such as Biology, Chemistry, and Computational Physics) as well as compulsory courses (such as Mathematics, English, Urdu, Islamiyat and Pakistan Studies)²³

Islamic religious education in Pakistan is divided into three categories, namely Quranic School, Mosque Primary School and Madrasah. The first is a school where children learn to read the Koran. The place is usually in mosques or village prayer rooms. Study time is not clearly organized. There are morning, afternoon and evening. The chaplains who teach usually come from the village. The two mosque elementary schools, namely mosques, are used as learning places for children aged 7 years and over. This initiative was officially carried out by the Zia-ul-Haq government in the 80s to overcome the lack of places to study in rural areas in some places in Pakistan ⁴⁵⁶.

Pakistan is known to be rich in traditional types of education. This traditional education has existed for centuries and remains an integral part of Pakistani society, especially for religious education. Although formal education has also developed in Pakistan, traditional education is still very relevant and embraced by the majority of Pakistani society, especially in the context of religious and moral education⁷⁸.

Traditional education in Pakistan has deep and varied roots, primarily due to the cultural and ethnic diversity that exists in the country. Some traditional forms of education in Pakistan involve informal systems, while others have a stronger formal basis. Some examples of traditional education in Pakistan are Madrasas. Madrasas are traditional Islamic schools in Pakistan that teach religious knowledge, Arabic and other Islamic subjects. They have an important role in religious and cultural education in Pakistan. Apart from that, there are also Islamic boarding schools, namely Islamic educational institutions that represent

¹ Habibullah Khan and Muhammad Ajmal, 'Religious Education in Pakistan Status of Non-Formal Education in Teaching and Learning Process of Madaris', *The Dialogue*, 17.1 (2022), 14–25.

² DR MUHAMMAD FAISAL, MR ALI RAZA, and DR QUDSIA ISHAQ, 'TACKLING THE LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN ISLAMIC STUDIES-AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE PREVAILING CURRICULUM FOR DINI MADARIS IN PAKISTAN', *Hamdard Islamicus*, 45.1 (2022) <<https://hamdardislamicus.com.pk/index.php/hi/article/view/359>> [accessed 11 October 2023].

³ Syed Hammad ur Rahman, 'Madressah Education in Pakistan'.

⁴ Qaisar Javed Mian, 'Religious Education in Pakistan', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education* (Routledge, 2013), pp. 251–55

<<https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/chapters/edit/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9780203106075-34&type=chapterpdf>> [accessed 11 October 2023].

⁵ Syed Jaffar Ahmed, 'Schools, Syllabuses, and Human Rights: An Evaluation of Pakistan's Education System', *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, 4.1 (2001), 69–76.

⁶ Mumtaz Ahmad, 'Madrasa Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh', 2004

<https://www.academia.edu/download/6334579/mumtaz_madrassah.pdf> [accessed 26 October 2023].

⁷ Muhammad Iqbal and others, 'Barriers To Modern Education In Madrasas Of Pakistan: Student And Teacher's Perceptions', *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 2023, 31–40.

⁸ Hameedullah Bhutto and Ibrahim Narongraksakhet, 'ENGLISH-A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SANAVIYAH AMAH CURRICULUM OF MADRASAH IN PAKISTAN', *The Scholar Islamic Academic Research Journal*, 3.1 (2017), 1–19.

traditional forms of education in Pakistan. They usually focus on religious education and Quran interpretation. Islamic boarding schools have a big role in maintaining Islamic values in Pakistani society⁹¹⁰. Then there are Halaqas, which are Islamic study groups which are often led by an Islamic cleric or scholar. They usually take place in mosques and are a traditional way of learning about the Islamic religion.

The curriculum in Pakistan includes a combination of eight courses including electives, such as Biology, Chemistry, and Computational Physics. as well as compulsory subjects such as Mathematics, English, Urdu, Islamiyat and Pakistan Studies. Due to strong pressure and pressure from religious leaders, the Pakistani government finally agreed to re-insert chapters discussing Islamic history, the Koran and Sunnah in the education curriculum in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). This decision was welcomed by religious leaders in the region of Pakistan which directly borders Afghanistan¹¹¹².

The rapid flow of globalization makes it easy to get information from foreign countries, resulting in many foreign cultures entering Pakistan. This foreign culture influences all fields including education. Thus, the country of Pakistan, which is rich in traditional education, will be threatened with being displaced by modern education that comes from outside Pakistan. The changes that occur can influence various educational elements such as teaching styles, learning models, learning media and even the curriculum. In Pakistan there is a well-known traditional curriculum, namely the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum. The existence of this curriculum is closely guarded by the Pakistani people because it is part of their cultural heritage

Dars-e-Nizami is a traditional curriculum used in madrasas and Islamic boarding schools in Pakistan. It covers a wide range of subjects, including tafsir, hadith, fiqh (Islamic law), and Arabic sciences¹³¹⁴. Dars-e-Nizami is a traditional Islamic course taught in many Islamic institutions and Dar Ul Uloom in Pakistan and other parts of the world. It is a curriculum or system of study that originated in the Indian subcontinent in the 18th century. The curriculum covers various fields of study such as Arabic, Koranic studies, and Hadith science. The Dars-i Nizami system was developed by Nizamuddin Sihalivi from the Firangi Mahal Ulama group. The curriculum is named after him as Darse Nizami¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷.

⁹ Abdul Hai Madni, Naseem Akhter, and Muhammad Asif Nadeem, 'ENGLISH-CURRICULUM OF ISLAMIC INSTITUTES IN SUB CONTINENT (A CRITICAL ANALYSIS)', *The Scholar Islamic Academic Research Journal*, 6.1 (2020), 135–62.

¹⁰ Irfan Ullah Sabir, 'رائج نصاب درس نظامی کا عصری تقاضوں اور مفکرین ہند کی آراء کی روشنی میں تنقیدی جائزہ', *The Critical Review of Current Curriculum of Dars-Nizami in the Light of Modern Age Needs and Educational Theories of the Sub-Continental Thinkers*, *Al-Wifaq*, 3.2 (2020), 45–67.

¹¹ بختیار بانو, 'A CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE ARABIC CURRICULUM OF RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS: دینی مدارس کے عربی نصاب کا تحقیقی و تنقیدی جائزہ', *Journal of Arabic, University of Karachi*, 1.2 (2023), 27–42.

¹² Akbar Ali, 'An Exploration of Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on the Effective Teaching of the Critical Interpretation of the Quran in Multilingual Classrooms' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Staffordshire University, 2021) <<https://eprints.staffs.ac.uk/id/eprint/7370>> [accessed 11 October 2023].

¹³ Yaqoob Khan Marwat, 'Mawlāna Abul Kalām 'Azād and His Efforts in Reforming and Developing the Curriculum of Dars-i-Nizām', *Al-Idah*, 38.2 (2020), 82–95.

¹⁴ Muhammad Asghar Shahzad and others, 'Islamic Finance Education and Curricula of Deeni Madaris (Religious Seminaries): An Exploratory Study', *Islamic Banking and Finance Review (IBFR)*, 6 (2019) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3416852> [accessed 11 October 2023].

¹⁵ SABRINA AL-FAARSIYYAH, 'THE NIZAMI CURRICULUM' <<https://darul-ilm.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-Nizami-Curriculum.pdf>> [accessed 11 October 2023].

¹⁶ Zubair Zafar Khan, 'How Far Dars-e-Nizami Is Attuned to the Modern Era: Some Observation Zubair Zafar Khan' <<https://muslimsocieties.org/Vol4/How%20far%20Dars-e-Nizami%20is%20Attuned%20to%20the%20Modern%20Era-Some%20Observation.pdf>> [accessed 11 October 2023].

¹⁷ Mohammad Islam, 'A Research Review of Present Curriculum of Pakistan's Religious Madrasas and Some Possible Aspects of Its Improvement: پاکستان کے دینی مدارس کا موجودہ نصاب اور بہتری کے بعض ممکنہ پہلوؤں کا جائزہ', *Bannu University Research Journal in Islamic Studies*, 9.1 (2022) <<http://burjis.com/index.php/burjis/article/view/239>> [accessed 11 October 2023].

Studies on Dars-e-Nizami have recently been researched by several local researchers such as those carried out by Al-Faarsiyyah and also Khan. The two previous researchers conducted research that focused on studying from a historical perspective that since the past there have been efforts to maintain the relevance of this curriculum so that it continues to run along with developments over time because nowadays many new problems have emerged. Life has become more complicated than before. The actions taken are by making changes and modifications such as removing and adding material according to the needs of the times.

However, previous research has not explained in detail what changes and modifications were made, therefore this research aims to determine the relevance of the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum to the development of modern Islamic religious education in Pakistan in detail.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research is qualitative research using a semi-structured interview research design¹⁸. In-depth interviews are a method of qualitative data collection that involves direct one-to-one engagement with individual participants, which can occur face-to-face or in some situations via telecommunications means^{19 20}

In-depth interviews are beneficial for making participants comfortable to produce thoughtful and insightful answers by establishing a rapport with the interviewee by providing opportunities to probe questions for more detailed information and return to specific questions to produce in-depth understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and experiences.²¹

The subjects in this research were 15 school institutions, both formal and informal, that use the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum. The institutions that are the subject of this research are in the cities of Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi. The following is a detailed description.

Table 1. Research Subject Data

No.	City	Institutions	Respondent
1	Islamabad	4	8
2	Karachi	4	9
3	Lahore	3	4
4	Multan	2	3
5	Rawalpindi	2	2

The reason for conducting research in these five cities is because these five cities are the five largest cities in Pakistan and are a classical picture of the face of Islamic education in Pakistan, especially traditional education

¹⁸ Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews* (Sage, 2018), II
<[https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=df1QDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=interview+research+design+\(Brinkmann+%26+Kvale,+2018\)&ots=u3VWKBPF2&sig=CmyJ-YeFNZBgVXaJbHC4S5NIQfc](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=df1QDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=interview+research+design+(Brinkmann+%26+Kvale,+2018)&ots=u3VWKBPF2&sig=CmyJ-YeFNZBgVXaJbHC4S5NIQfc)> [accessed 1 November 2023].

¹⁹ Brinkmann and Kvale, II.

²⁰ Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (sage, 2021)
<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=RwcVEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=interview+Salda%C3%BA+2021.&ots=echNhOUf0b&sig=Y2_7ldtYcVTlds2kgj_aRUQDLbU> [accessed 1 November 2023].

²¹ Kathryn Roulston and Myungweon Choi, 'Qualitative Interviews', *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, 2018, 233–49.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum

Dars-e-Nizami is a traditional curriculum in Islamic education used in various madrassas and Islamic boarding schools in Pakistan and much of the Muslim world. This curriculum has existed for centuries and has been inherited from Islamic educational traditions²². Dars-e-Nizami covers a wide range of subjects designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the Islamic religion. This course is designed to train students to become ordained Islamic scholars. The full duration of the course is eight years, and covers various levels such as Sanwiala Aama, Sanwiala khasa, Al-Shahadat-ul-Aaliyah, and Al-Shahadat-ul-Alamiyah. This course covers a variety of subjects such as Arabic grammar, Islamic theology, classical philosophy, and classical logic. The curriculum also includes worldly sciences. Dars-e-Nizami courses are taught by qualified teachers and instructors.



Figure 1. Educational Atmosphere in the City of Karachi

Following are some of the main subjects usually taught in the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum

1. Tafsir, namely the study of the interpretation of the Al-Quran, which includes understanding the meaning of the verses of the Al-Quran and their historical context.
2. Hadith, namely this subject includes hadiths, namely quotes and histories about the words, actions and agreements of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Students study authentic hadiths and the principles of their interpretation.
3. Fiqh (Islamic Law), is the study of Islamic law, which includes legal rules, worship, ethics and procedures in Islam. This includes legal comparisons between various schools of fiqh.
4. Usul al-Fiqh, namely subjects related to the principles of Islamic law, which include how to determine laws based on sources of Islamic law.
5. Nahw (Arabic Grammar), namely the study of Arabic grammar, which is important in understanding and interpreting original Islamic texts.
6. Sarf (Arabic Morphology), which is a subject related to the structure and changes of words in Arabic.
7. Mantik (Logic), which includes the study of logic and understanding arguments in the context of Islamic thought.
8. Balagha (Rhetoric) is the study of the art of speaking and writing beautifully in Arabic.
9. Akhlaq (Islamic Ethics) is a subject that teaches ethics and moral behavior in Islam.
10. Aqidah (Faith) is the study of Islamic beliefs and doctrines²³.

The Dars-e-Nizami curriculum may vary slightly between different madrassas and Islamic boarding

²² AL-FAARSIYYAH.

²³ AL-FAARSIYYAH.

schools, depending on their respective emphases and policies. However, the essence of this curriculum is to provide an in-depth understanding of the Islamic religion, interpretation of the Koran, and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as well as preparation for students to become scholars and leaders of the Muslim community.

Dars-e Nizami is a curriculum developed by Mulla Nizamuddin in the 18th century and implemented at Darul Uloom Deoband, a madrasa which is considered an educational institution equivalent to al-Azhar in Cairo in Asia. This curriculum is used in South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The curriculum has undergone modifications from its original arrangement at Madrasah Faraghi Mahall in the 18th century, with the main modification being an emphasis on the study of two areas, namely hadith and fiqh.

There is no specific law governing the Dars-e Nizami curriculum. However, this curriculum is designed to produce ulama, or Islamic scholars, who are well-versed in Islamic teachings and practices.

However, if we look at developments, the Government of Pakistan has made efforts by taking various steps to reform the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum in recent years. Pakistani government tried to recommend introduction of new subjects like Urdu, arithmetic, and general science at primary level, English, general mathematics, and Pakistan Studies at secondary level, and political science, political economy, and English as elective subjects at the baccalaureate and master's levels then the Government has emphasized the need for madrasas to provide modern education in addition to the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum. In 2019, the Federal Ministry of Education of the Government of Pakistan announced plans for the development of a Single National Curriculum (SNC), which will be implemented in all provinces and territories as well as in public and private schools. SNC aims to provide a uniform education system that includes modern subjects such as science, mathematics, and social sciences, as well as Islamic studies.

Relevance of the Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum

Based on the results of interviews with several sources, it can be concluded that traditional Islamic education in Pakistan is still prevalent and practiced in various religious educational institutions. The Deobandi movement and other Islamic educational movements seek to preserve the traditional Islamic heritage in Pakistan. This course is offered by various institutions like Hidayah Academy, Jamia-tul-madina USA, and AIOU^{24,25}.

This curriculum has several advantages, namely teaching Islamic values. The Dars-e-Nizami curriculum broadly teaches Islamic teachings, ethics, and moral values, which remain relevant in everyday life and can help develop good character. Then another advantage is Understanding the Islamic Scientific Heritage. Dars-e-Nizami supports a deep understanding of Islamic intellectual heritage, such as religious sciences, literature, history, and Islamic law, which still have value in academic research and cultural understanding.

Challenges in maintaining the relevance of Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum in the modern era

1. Lack of Diverse Curriculum Content

Dars-e-Nizami may lack coverage of modern topics such as science, mathematics, technology and social sciences. Lack of understanding of these aspects can limit graduates' ability to compete in the modern world.

2. Lack of Focus on Practical Skills

²⁴ Hamid Mahmood, 'The Dars-e-Nizami and the Transnational Traditionalist Madaris in Britain' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Master's dissertation, Queen Mary, University of London, 2012).

²⁵ Hamid Mahmood, 'The Dars-e Nizami and the Transnational, Traditionalist Madaris' (unpublished PhD Thesis, MA thesis, University of London, 2012).

This curriculum may place less emphasis on the development of practical skills needed in the modern era, such as communication skills, time management, and information technology.

3. Conservatism

Some elements in this curriculum may have a conservative or traditional view of social, cultural or religious issues, which may not be in accordance with the views and values that develop in modern society.

4. Limitations in Job Opportunities

Graduates from institutions following the Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum may have limited employment opportunities outside the religious sector, and this could be an economic challenge ²⁶²⁷.

Efforts to maintain the relevance of Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum in the modern era

According to the dissertation written by Al-Faarsiyyah, the efforts made to maintain the relevance of this curriculum are by making changes and modifications. Changes and modifications continued after the Partition of India in 1947 C.E. Commenting on the name of the Nizami curriculum, Mawlānā Muhammadullah Khalili Qasmi writes: "The curriculum of Darul Uloom Deoband is given the name Dars-e-Nizāmī, which is valid to some extent. However, this has caused some people to misunderstand the curriculum to be the same exact curriculum that existed in the 12th century. Although the foundation of this curriculum is certainly that of the 12th century, which existed in India at the inception of the Darul Uloom Deoband, this curriculum has experienced many changes due to the demands of the time. If we were to compare the Dars-e-Nizāmī of Mullā Nizām al-Dīn to the Dars-e-Nizāmī of present day, then one would hesitate (to call it Dars-e-Nizāmī). There have been foundational changes made to the curriculum. Many books have been removed, many have been added, and many subjects have been replaced. The act of changing, removing, and adding books in accordance with the need of time still continues in the Nizami learning system today."²⁸

There is no doubt that Dars-e-Nizami when it was introduced was in keeping with the needs of the day and met adequately the demands of that period. However, there was, at that time, no distinction between spiritual and secular education. Administrators, businessmen, poets and writers were all suitably equipped for their respective fields through this system of education. Today, the political and social structure, economic and monetary conditions, trade and industry, national and international situation as everything else has undergone a revolutionary change. Innumerable new problems have arisen. The life has become more complicated than it was in the past. It is therefore necessary that this syllabus should also be reoriented. Thus, with a view to improve the efficiency of Madaris ²⁹.

Based on the two research results above, it shows that the initial creation of this curriculum was sufficient for the needs of society at that time, but as time progressed, changes and modifications were needed, this has been done long ago since the separation of India and Pakistan. Efforts made include eliminating, adding or replacing subjects according to developments over time.

To maintain the relevance of the Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum in the modern era, a number of steps can be taken, namely the first step, namely aligning the curriculum with modern topics such as science, mathematics, technology and social sciences. The second emphasizes the development of practical skills such as digital literacy, communication skills, and management skills. Third, facilitate discussion and debate in the curriculum to promote a more inclusive understanding of social and cultural issues. Fourth,

²⁶ Marwat.

²⁷ Muhammad Farooq, 'Political Change and Madrasa Curriculum: A Historical Analysis of Dars-i-Nizami', *Journal of Research (Faculty of Languages & Islamic Studies)*, 12 (2007), 59–81.

²⁸ AL-FAARSIYYAH.

²⁹ Khan.

encourage collaboration with non-religious educational institutions to open up more career opportunities for graduates.

The relevance of the Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum in the modern era depends on the extent to which the institutions that follow it are willing and able to adapt to changes in society and the economy.

Some institutions and individuals may also try to incorporate elements of modern education into this curriculum, such as science subjects, mathematics, or communication skills, so that their graduates have a more holistic understanding and are prepared to face challenges outside the world of religion.

CONCLUSION

Although this curriculum may have some limitations in terms of relevance to modern needs, many Islamic educational institutions retain Dars-e-Nizami because they see it as a way to preserve and inherit the classical Islamic intellectual tradition as well as to maintain a strong understanding of the Islamic religion among students. Education based on Dars-e-Nizami still has an important place in the very conservative and traditional Muslim community. Challenges in maintaining the relevance of the Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum in the modern era are the lack of Diversity in Curriculum Content, lack of Focus on Practical Skills, conservatism and limited Job Opportunities. To maintain relevance, some institutions may need to add modern subjects to the curriculum

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