

Building Bridges between the Education Systems of the Muslim World and the West: The Case of Somalia

Adanweli Abdullahi Ahmed¹ 

¹Master in Educational Leadership and Management at Somali National University, Somalia.

Correspondence: aadanwali000@gmail.com¹

ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This study explored Building Bridges between the Education Systems of the Muslim World and the West: The Case of Somalia.

Methodology: Employing a qualitative methodology, it analyzes historical documents, academic literature, and case studies to identify patterns and implications of educational dualism.

Findings: The findings reveal that while Islamic education emphasizes spiritual and moral values, Western education prioritizes secular and empirical knowledge, often leading to fragmented educational philosophies in Somalia. It was highlighted the marginalization of Islamic principles in favor of Western pedagogical methods, particularly in urban areas. This dualism creates disconnection between intellectual and spiritual development, challenging Somalia's ability to balance modern demands with cultural and religious identities.

Conclusion: The study concludes that integrating Islamic principles into all educational sectors is essential for fostering a unified, morally grounded, and intellectually competent society. The researcher suggested the following Recommendations include curriculum reform that combines Islamic and modern subjects, teacher training to incorporate ethical teachings, policy support for Islamic education, and the modernization of Quranic schools to ensure their relevance in the contemporary educational landscape.

Keywords: Education System, Muslim World, West, Somalia.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Indeed, in Islam, the **Quran** and the **Sunnah** are considered the ultimate sources of knowledge and guidance for all aspects of life. The Quran itself affirms that it contains the guidance for everything. One of the verses that emphasize this is: *"We have sent down to you the Book (the Quran) as clarification for everything, and as a guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims."* **Surah An-Nahl (16:89)**. This verse explicitly mentions that the Quran provides clarification for everything, offering guidance, mercy, and glad tidings for those who believe. Additionally, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) serves as a practical embodiment of the Quranic teachings. The Prophet's words and actions (recorded in the Hadith) further explain and exemplify the Quran's teachings, making the Quran and Sunnah inseparable sources of knowledge for Muslims. So, every piece of knowledge, whether it concerns belief, ethics, law, or daily life, is ultimately grounded in the guidance of the Quran and the

Article History

Received:
October 19, 2024

Revised:
December 13, 2024

Accepted:
December 22, 2024

Published:
December 30, 2024

Sunnah. Thus, Islamic education, often referred to as *tarbiyyah al-Islamiyyah*, embodies a holistic approach that integrates spiritual and ethical values with intellectual development. Rooted in the principles of *ta'alim* (instruction), *tahdhib* (nurture), and other concepts like *hikmah* (wisdom) and *amanah* (trust), this educational model seeks to foster a harmonious balance between human intellect and spiritual consciousness, derived from the Quran and Sunnah (Nor, 2012). Islamic education views the acquisition of knowledge as an act of worship (*ibadah*), a lifelong process that aims to develop individuals who are both morally upright and intellectually capable, capable of serving as Allah's vicegerents (*khalifatullah*) on Earth (Yasin et al., 2013). In contrast, the Western educational model emerged from a secular worldview that prioritizes rational inquiry and technological advancement over spiritual or ethical development. Propagated widely during the colonial era, Western education often emphasizes materialistic and individualistic goals, focusing on economic and scientific achievements. This secular approach values human reasoning and empirical methods, often sidelining revealed knowledge and spirituality as non-essential or even irrelevant (Rosnani, 2004). The absence of a spiritual component in this framework creates disconnect between intellectual growth and moral or spiritual accountability, resulting in a materialistic approach to life (Familugba & Rotimi, 2024; Fayokemi & Olorunda, 2020; Parveen et al., 2022).

Consequently, The integration of these two distinct educational paradigms Islamic and Western has created what scholars refer to as "educational dualism," where secular education systems and traditional Islamic education coexist yet often conflict in their objectives and methods. This dualism generates significant challenges for Islamic societies as they attempt to balance these systems. As Abusulayman (1989) argues, education in the Muslim world often lacks a clear vision, leading to confusion between Islamic values and Western norms (Abusulayman, 1989). Aftermath, This dualistic structure not only fragments educational philosophy but also leads to broader social issues, as individuals are left without a coherent moral or cultural framework. Islamic scholars and educators propose that genuine reform in Muslim educational systems must focus on curriculum integration that respects both religious principles and the intellectual rigor necessary for today's world. Such reforms are seen as essential to producing individuals who are knowledgeable in their fields and rooted in Islamic values, embodying moral character and intellectual skill. This goal aligns with the recommendations of the First World Conference on Muslim Education, which emphasized the importance of a balanced approach that fosters spiritual, intellectual, and physical growth to achieve moral and societal harmony, First World Conference on Muslim Education, (1977).

Most of the today's knowledge underpin the contributions of Muslim scholars to various fields have been vast and profound. From the early centuries of Islam through the Golden Age, Muslim scholars synthesized and expanded upon the knowledge of ancient civilizations, contributing to advancements in fields such as theology, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, geography, and literature. Their work not only shaped Islamic civilization but also laid the groundwork for the Renaissance and the development of modern science in the West.

1.1 Problem Statement

The education systems of the Muslim world and the West reflect fundamentally divergent paradigms, with the former rooted in the spiritual and ethical dimensions of Islamic teachings and the latter characterized by secular and materialistic approaches. This divergence has created a global challenge of educational dualism, particularly in post-colonial Muslim societies, where both systems coexist but often fail to harmonize. The global push for modernization through Western education systems has frequently sidelined Islamic educational traditions, undermining their spiritual and moral contributions. At the same time, many Muslim societies struggle to adapt to the demands of modernity without compromising their religious and cultural identity. In the context of Islamic societies, this dualism results in fragmented educational systems that fail to provide a unified vision for intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. Countries in the Muslim world, including Somalia, face challenges in balancing the need for technological and scientific progress with the preservation of Islamic values. The disconnection between

Western-influenced curricula and Islamic pedagogical principles has led to confusion, disorientation, and the erosion of cultural and religious identities. Thus, this review paper examines Building Bridges between the Educations Systems of the Muslim World and the West: The Case of Somalia.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine the historical evolution of the Somali education system its dualistic nature combining Islamic and Western influences
2. To analyze challenges posed by the integration of Western education systems with Islamic principles in Somalia

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extend the historical evolution of the Somali education system?
2. What are the challenges posed by the integration of Western education systems with Islamic principles in Somalia?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Contributions of Muslim Scholars in Various Fields

Muslim scholars have made significant contributions to various fields of knowledge, spanning from theology and philosophy to science, medicine, mathematics, and the arts. Their work has not only shaped Islamic civilization but also greatly influenced Western thought and the development of global knowledge. Here, we explore the contributions of Muslim scholars in different fields with citations and references to acknowledge their profound impact.

2.2 Contributions to Theology and Philosophy

Islamic theology (Aqidah) and philosophy (Falsafah) have rich traditions, with scholars playing a crucial role in shaping intellectual discourse. Notable figures include:

Al-Ghazali (1058–1111): Known as one of the most influential Muslim theologians and philosophers, Al-Ghazali's work bridged the gap between philosophy and Islamic theology. His book *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-Falasifah)* critiqued the Aristotelian philosophy of the time and defended Islamic teachings, particularly against rationalist approaches. His work contributed to the development of Islamic mysticism (Sufism) and theology (al-Ash'ari school) Gutas, (2001).

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126–1198): A philosopher and polymath, Ibn Rushd is renowned for his works in Aristotelian philosophy. His commentaries on Aristotle's works played a pivotal role in introducing Greek philosophy to the Islamic world and later to Europe. He argued for the compatibility of reason and faith and emphasized the importance of logic and philosophy in understanding the divine (Kraemer, 2001).

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980–1037): A leading philosopher and physician, Ibn Sina's contributions to metaphysics, ethics, and logic remain foundational. His book *The Canon of Medicine (Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb)* was used in European medical schools for centuries, while his philosophical work *The Book of Healing* remains a significant text in Islamic philosophy, influencing both Eastern and Western thinkers (Nasr, 2006).

2.3 Contributions to Science and Mathematics

Muslim scholars made monumental advancements in various scientific fields, particularly during the Golden Age of Islam (8th to 14th centuries). Their work laid the foundation for many modern scientific principles.

Al-Khwarizmi (780–850): Often regarded as the father of algebra, Al-Khwarizmi's seminal work *Al-Kitab al-Mukhtasar fi Hisab al-Jabr wal-Muqabala* introduced systematic methods of solving linear and quadratic equations, which later evolved into the field of algebra. His name is the origin of the term *algorithm*, reflecting his contributions to mathematics and computing (Rashed, 2002).

Al-Razi (865–925): A pioneering physician, chemist, and philosopher, Al-Razi (Rhazes) made significant advances in medicine, particularly in the fields of surgery and ophthalmology. He is credited with the first use of alcohol in medicine and was the first to describe the difference between measles and smallpox. His medical encyclopedia *Al-Hawi* influenced European medicine for centuries (Dhanani, 2005).

Ibn al-Haytham (965–1040): Known as the "father of optics," Ibn al-Haytham made groundbreaking contributions to the understanding of light and vision. His book *Kitab al-Manazir* (Book of Optics) described how light travels and how it interacts with objects, forming the basis for the modern science of optics. His work influenced later scientists such as Kepler and Newton (Sabra, 1989).

Al-Battani (858–929): An astronomer and mathematician, Al-Battani's work in trigonometry and astronomy was groundbreaking. He improved the accuracy of earlier astronomical tables and was the first to accurately calculate the length of the solar year, a contribution that greatly influenced later European astronomers like Copernicus (Lorch, 2005).

2.4 Contributions to Medicine

Islamic scholars made substantial contributions to medicine, combining knowledge from Greek, Persian, and Indian traditions with their own innovations. Key figures include:

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980–1037): As mentioned earlier, Ibn Sina's *The Canon of Medicine* became a cornerstone of both Islamic and Western medical education. It provided comprehensive knowledge on anatomy, physiology, and disease classification and remained a standard medical text in Europe until the 17th century (Nasr, 2006).

Al-Zahrawi (936–1013): Known as the father of surgery in the Islamic world, Al-Zahrawi (Abulcasis) wrote *Al-Tasrif*, an influential medical encyclopedia that covered a wide range of surgical techniques. He introduced new surgical instruments and methods for cauterization, suturing, and dental surgery. His work greatly influenced Western surgery (Green, 2001).

Ibn al-Nafis (1213–1288): A pioneering figure in cardiovascular physiology, Ibn al-Nafis is credited with discovering the pulmonary circulation of blood. His work challenged Galen's teachings and laid the groundwork for modern cardiology (Dhanani, 2005).

2.5 Contributions to Geography and Exploration

Muslim scholars also excelled in geography, contributing to the mapping of the world and exploration.

Al-Idrisi (1100–1165): A geographer and cartographer, Al-Idrisi created one of the most advanced world maps of his time. His work *Tabula Rogeriana* is regarded as one of the most accurate maps of the world in the 12th century, reflecting a deep understanding of geography and the world's physical features (Berggren & Jones, 2000).

Ibn Battuta (1304–1369): A famous traveler and scholar, Ibn Battuta's extensive travels across Africa, Asia, and Europe are recorded in his work *Rihla* (The Journey). His accounts provide invaluable insights into the geography, cultures, and societies of the 14th century, making him one of the most significant explorers in history (Ibn Battuta, 1958).

2.6 Contributions to Literature and Poetry

The Muslim world has also produced many renowned poets and authors whose works have influenced both Eastern and Western literary traditions.

Rumi (1207–1273): One of the greatest poets in history, Rumi's works, particularly his *Masnawi*, have had a lasting influence on both Persian literature and world poetry. His themes of love, spirituality, and the nature of existence resonate with readers globally, and his mystical Sufi poetry has inspired many in the West as well (Chittick, 2004).

Omar Khayyam (1048–1131): A polymath, Khayyam is best known for his *Rubaiyat* (quatrains), a collection of poems that explore themes of life, fate, and the meaning of existence. His work has been translated into numerous languages and remains influential in world literature (Sardar, 2007).

2.7 History of the Educational System in Somalia

The history of education in Somalia has evolved through various phases, deeply influenced by Islamic teachings, colonial rule, and the subsequent adoption of Western educational models. The Somali education system has faced numerous challenges, ranging from inadequate infrastructure to political instability, but it has maintained a strong link to Islamic principles. However, the penetration of Western educational systems has led to tensions, particularly concerning the respect for Islamic values and the treatment of teachers of the Holy Quran.

2.7.1 Pre-Colonial Education System

Before the advent of colonial rule, the Somali education system was largely shaped by Islam. Religious education was the primary form of learning, with the Quran as the central text. Education was provided in Quranic schools, where students learned to read and memorize the Quran, study Islamic law (Sharia), and engage in basic arithmetic. These schools were typically formal, with teachers, known as *Alims*, holding great respect within the community. The primary focus was religious education, and schools operated under the guidance of local religious leaders. The Quranic school system was pivotal in the transmission of Islamic knowledge and was highly respected by society. Teachers of the Quran (*Hafids*) were viewed as spiritual leaders, and their role was critical in maintaining religious traditions in Somali society (Abdirahman, 2011). The curriculum was centered on memorization, recitation, and interpretation of the Quran, which served as the foundation for all teaching (Farah, 2014).

2.7.2 Colonial Influence (Late 19th Century – 1960)

The arrival of European colonial powers in the late 19th century introduced a formal educational system in Somalia, which was heavily influenced by Western models. The British in the north and the Italians in the south established schools aimed at serving the colonial administration's interests. These schools introduced European languages, secular subjects, and Western-style curricula that were disconnected from Islamic teachings (Lewis, 2002).

The introduction of Western education often ignored the deeply ingrained Islamic principles in Somali society. This shift led to the marginalization of religious education, especially Quranic studies. Colonial educational policies focused on preparing a small educated elite to serve colonial needs rather than creating an education system that could benefit the broader Somali population (Menkhaus, 2003). The impact of Western education was evident in the increasing disrespect for teachers of the Holy Quran. With the colonial education system emphasizing secular subjects, religious educators were often marginalized, and their status within the community declined. The respect that teachers of the Quran once commanded was undermined as Western-style education gained prominence (Bashir, 1999).

2.7.3 Post-Independence Era (1960-1991)

After Somalia gained independence in 1960, the country sought to modernize its education system by integrating both Western and Islamic educational frameworks. The new government aimed to create a unified national education system that balanced traditional Islamic teachings with modern academic subjects. However, tensions arose as the influence of Western education grew, especially in urban centers. The government's educational policies included the promotion of the Somali language, secular subjects, and Western pedagogical methods, but this came at the expense of Islamic education.

During this period, Quranic schools continued to function alongside formal schools, but their role was increasingly seen as secondary to the state-run education system. Teachers of the Quran were still revered in rural areas, but in urban areas, the growing dominance of secular education led to the undermining of their authority and respect. The government's promotion of Western-style education often disregarded Islamic principles, further alienating religious educators and their role in Somali society (Samatar, 1992).

2.7.4 Civil War and its Aftermath (1991 – Present)

The civil war that erupted in 1991 devastated Somalia's education system, leading to the collapse of formal institutions. With the government's collapse, educational institutions in Somalia became fragmented. Quranic schools, however, continued to operate in many parts of the country, doing a vital role in providing education in a time of crisis. In the post-civil war era, the influence of Western education has only deepened, particularly in urban areas. International organizations and foreign governments have played an important role in rebuilding the education system, but their focus on Western models of education has led to further erosion of Islamic educational principles. Many schools in Somalia now teach secular subjects in English and Somali, with little emphasis on **Quranic education** (Laitin, 2003). The increasing respect for Western educational models has resulted in a decrease in the respect for **Quranic teachers**. Many young people in urban areas now view religious education as secondary to modern subjects that offer better job prospects. As Western education continues to penetrate Somalia, the traditional respect for teachers of the Quran has diminished, and religious educators are often viewed as less important compared to their secular counterparts (Ahmed, 2007).

2.8 The Influence of Western Education Systems on Somalia's Education System

Today, the Somali education system is marked by a blend of Islamic and Western educational influences. While Quranic schools still exist, especially in rural areas, the dominant educational model in Somalia is Western-oriented, with a curriculum focused on English, mathematics, science, and other secular subjects. The role of Islamic education has been reduced, and there is increasing concern over the lack of respect for Quranic teachers.

The challenge remains in how to integrate Islamic education with Western models without diminishing the value of either system. Some argue that Somali education needs a hybrid approach that respects Islamic teachings while adopting modern educational practices that cater to the global economy (Bashir, 2010). However, the persistent influence of Western education systems in Somalia, supported by international aid and organizations, continues to shape the educational landscape, leaving little room for the integration of Islamic principles in modern education. The Somali education system's history reflects the tension between Islamic education and the influence of Western educational models. While the pre-colonial system was firmly rooted in Islamic teachings, colonial and post-colonial influences gradually marginalized Quranic education, leading to a decline in the respect for teachers of the Holy Quran. The contemporary education system in Somalia is dominated by Western-style curricula, which has further reduced the status of religious educators. Moving forward, the challenge lies in finding a balance that respects both Islamic values and the need for modern education to meet the demands of a globalized world.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative approach. The qualitative nature of the study ensures an in-depth exploration of the subject, relying on descriptive and interpretative methods to present findings. The research focused on analyzing historical documents, academic literature, and case studies related to educational frameworks in Islamic and Western traditions. Secondary data was drawn from prior studies on Islamic education, Western influences, and their coexistence in Somalia. Through comparative analysis, the study examined how Islamic values and Western pedagogical principles intersect, conflict, and potentially harmonize within the Somali education system. An inductive approach is used to derive

themes and patterns from the data, focusing on challenges, opportunities, and implications of integrating these systems.

4. ANALYSIS

The Somali education system reflects a dualistic approach, with a blend of Islamic and Western influences. Historically, education in Somalia was deeply rooted in Islamic principles, focusing on Quranic teachings and the development of spiritual and moral character. However, colonial and post-colonial influences introduced Western-style education, emphasizing secular subjects, scientific inquiry, and technological advancements. This shift has contributed to the marginalization of Islamic education in many areas, particularly urban centers. The Western education system has introduced modern methodologies, diverse curricula, and access to global knowledge with low vision and mission. However, its secular nature often conflicts with the Islamic worldview, leading to challenges in integrating spiritual values with intellectual development. As a result, the Somali education system struggles with educational dualism, where Islamic and Western paradigms coexist but often fail to align in objectives and implementation.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 *Comparison with Existing Literature*

The integration of Western education systems in Somalia has often sidelined Islamic principles, as noted in Abdirahman (2011) and Farah (2014). Western education focuses on material and empirical knowledge, neglecting spiritual and moral dimensions. This contrast is also highlighted by Rosnani (2004), who emphasized that Western models prioritize economic and scientific achievements over spiritual growth. Somalia's education system is a prime example of what Abusulayman (1989) described as "educational dualism," which causes confusion and undermines cohesive moral frameworks. This issue persists in contemporary Somalia, where, as Bashir (2010) observed, the dominance of Western curricula diminishes the respect for Quranic teachers and Islamic values.

5.2 *The Role of Islamic Education*

Islamic education provides a holistic framework that integrates moral, spiritual, and intellectual development. Nor (2012) and Yasin et al. (2013) argue that Islamic education promotes purposeful learning by aligning worldly knowledge with ethical and spiritual objectives. For Somalia, emphasizing Islamic principles across all subjects could produce students who are not only intellectually competent but also morally responsible and spiritually conscious. Countries like Malaysia, as Rosnani (2004) discussed, have successfully integrated Islamic values into modern education. These examples demonstrate that a balanced approach is achievable, offering Somalia a potential model for curriculum reform.

6. CONCLUSION

The dual influence of Islamic and Western education systems in Somalia presents both opportunities and challenges. Western education models have largely borrowed foundational subjects and teaching techniques from Islamic scholars, making only modifications to these contributions. However, their secular focus often undermines the integration of Islamic values. To create a more cohesive and purposeful education system, Somalia must prioritize integrating Islamic principles into all areas of learning. This integration would ensure that education not only imparts knowledge but also nurtures ethical and spiritual character.

6.1 *Recommendations*

Curriculum Reform: Develop an integrated curriculum that combines Islamic values with modern academic subjects. For instance, science and history can incorporate Islamic perspectives, highlighting contributions from Muslim scholars.

Policy Support: Establish national policies that emphasize the importance of Islamic education within the broader educational framework.

Community Engagement Involve local religious leaders, educators, and policymakers in designing education reforms to ensure cultural relevance and community acceptance.

Revitalize Quranic Schools: Support Quranic schools with resources and training to modernize their approach while preserving their spiritual mission.

Acknowledgments

None.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding Source

The author received NO funding to conduct this study.

ORCID's

Adanweli Abdullahi Ahmed ¹ <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8819-8815>

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