Teachers' Perceptions of the Ugandan Secondary School Islamic Religious Education Syllabi

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Abstract

This study explored teachers' perceptions of the appropriateness of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) secondary school syllabi and the challenges therein. A combination of stratified and cluster sampling techniques were used to select 234 IRE teachers from 124 secondary schools in Uganda. A cross-sectional survey design was used and data was collected using closed- and open-ended questionnaire. Data was analysed by descriptive statistics and interpreted using Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. Findings indicate that: teachers enjoyed teaching low level and practical topics and found difficulties teaching abstract, philosophical and computational-based ones; the affective components of the IRE syllabi were not being appropriately addressed; teachers' limited competency in Arabic Language was an obstacle in handling of technical topics; and that the IRE syllabi were quite broad compared to the time allocated to their implementation. The implications to teacher educators is that more skills in Arabic Language and practice in handling particular topics should be given to pre- and in-service teachers. The IRE syllabi should be revised to accommodate contemporary issues.

Keywords: Islamic religious education, Islamic curriculum, Bloom's taxonomy

Islamic Education – including Islamic Studies – has been a subject of concern to Muslim intellectuals for many decades, particularly since 1977 when the First World Conference on Muslim Education was held in Makkah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. At this conference, it was observed that Islamic education was heavily permeated with secularism and that it had failed to promote Islamic vision among Muslims. It was resolved among others that education should cater for the balanced growth of Man's total personality, including the spiritual aspect (Saqeb, 2000), creating in him an emotional attachment to Islam and enabling him to follow the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (Husain & Ashraf, 1979). Since then, subsequent world conferences on Muslim education have been held in: Islamabad

– Pakistan (1980), Dhaka – Bangladesh (1981), Jakarta – Indonesia (1982), Cairo – Egypt (1987), Cape Town – South Africa (1996), Shah Alam – Malaysia (2009), and Bandr Seri Begawan – Brunei Darussalam (2012) (Saqeb, 2000, Wan Bakar, n.d.).

A number of terms are used in describing the teaching of Islam including: Islamic Education, Islamic Religious Education, Islamic Studies, and Islamic Sciences. Although sometimes used interchangeably, Islamic Education is broader than the other terms and it means a system or paradigm of education in the Islamic spirit which has no segregation between "religious" and "secular" knowledge. It aims at developing the entire human aspects physically, intellectually and spiritually as well as educating a person to be aware about his nature as a man and his roles as the servant of God and His vicegerent on this earth (Yaacob & Embong, 2008). It comes from the Arabic root word *tarbiyya* which may be translated as character building (Shah et al, 2015) or causing something to gradually grow (Tauhidi, 2003). Its origin has also been linked to ta'dib (Al-Attas, 1991), meaning proper placement and ordering of things (Al-Khaledy, 2001) or high quality of soul, good upbringing, urbanity and courtesy (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004).

On the other hand, Islamic Studies, Islamic Sciences and Islamic Religious Education mean the teaching of the heritage of Islamic theology through the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This study adopts the Islamic Religious Education nomenclature as formally used in the Ugandan education system (NCDC, 2001). The curriculum content of IRE generally includes: Quran recitation (*Qiraa*), memorisation (*Hifdh*) and interpretation (*Tafsiir*); Prophet's Sayings and Practices (Hadith), Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), Islamic basic beliefs (*Aquiidah*), Arabic Language, grammar, prose, rhetoric, literature, Islamic Rituals, Islamic History, Islamic Manners and Values (Shah et al., 2015; Abdulla et al., 2006; Al-Khaledy, 2004).

During the Prophet's time, the message aimed at spreading Islam and unifying Arabs under the unity of Allah (*Tawhiid*) and justifying social transformation of their tribal culture, therefore the focus was on Qur'an recitation, *Tafsiir*, Hadith, *Shariah* and *Fiqh* (Ashaari et. al., 2011; Hashimi, 2005). During Caliph Umar's reign, more disciplines like swimming, horsemanship, famous Arab proverbs and poetry were introduced in the curriculum (Hashimi, 2005). After conquering North Africa, part of India and those parts along the Mediterranean Sea, the Muslim nation expanded to include non-Arabs of different cultures, traditions and languages hence the teaching of Arabic language and grammar (*nahw*) became emphasised (Hashimi, 2005). By the 13th century, more specialisations had been added to the curriculum to include mathematics, astronomy, medicine, music and philosophy which were all taught in an integrated manner (Abdulla et. al. 2006; Mohamed, 2015).

With the rise and advancement in Science and Technology in the Western World in the 15th and 16th centuries and their subsequent conquest and colonisation of many states of the Muslim World in the 19th century, the Western

system of education came to be introduced (Shah et al, 2015). As Western education flourished in most states of the Muslim world, Islamic education eventually lost popularity and became more and more limited in what it could offer its graduates in terms of access to status and power.

Initially, most of the Muslim states had been reluctant to embrace Western education for fear of losing the Muslim identity but eventually gave in due to the increased knowledge and influence of the Western powers (Hashimi, 2011; Shah, Ghazi, Miraj-ud-Din, Shahzad & Ullah, 2015). Some Muslim intellectuals attributed this "backwardness" to educational and cultural failure while others regarded it as a punishment of Allah due to the un-Islamic way of life. The former suggested a system of education where some Islamic religious teachings were added to the secular education curriculum as a subject or part of it, while the latter advocated for a system where Islam was regarded as the overarching epistemological framework with secular teachings added to its curriculum (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). This led to Islamic religious teachings being taught separately from the natural and rational ones, thus dual curriculum. The degree to which this was done differed from country to country where some states like Turkey and Senegal completely adopted the Western system and marginalised Islamic education, while the reverse was true of others like Pakistan (Abdulla et al., 2006).

Since independence time, attempts have been made towards eliminating dualism between secular and religious education, leading to the Islamization of Knowledge movement which aims at uniting and integrating the two systems with Islam as the motivating and guiding power (AbuSulayman, 1989) and placing the aims and objectives, content, methods of teaching and method of evaluation within the Islamic worldview (Langgulung, 2004). However, the current situation of the Muslim Ummah indicates a failure of IRE to cope with challenges of the contemporary world leading to Muslims to either being linked to backwardness and stagnation (Ashaari et al., 2011), or easily falling into traps of Western culture (Hashimi, 2011). Lemu (n.d.) also observed that learning Islamic Studies in Qur'anic schools has not helped children to understand anything because of the extremely narrow curriculum.

In Uganda, the teaching of Islam was introduced by Arab merchants who arrived in 1844 during King Suna's reign and the first lessons were conducted in his royal Palace (Mayanja, 2015). The merchants taught Qur'an and religious rituals like ablution, prayers and fasting (Lujja, Mustafa & Rusni 2016). The first formal Qur'an School was initiated in Kibuli in 1914 and subjects taught included Arabic language, Prayer, Qur'an, Sharia, and Islamic History and Civilisation (Kasozi, 2007 as cited by Mayanja, 2015). The secular system of education was introduced in 1922 with Kibuli Primary school, which later on in 1945 became elevated to secondary status. The integration of secular in Islamic education began in the 1940s with a couple of schools including Kibuli in Kampala, Kabasanda in Butambala, Bombo in Luwero, Bukoyo in Busoga and Nyamitanga in Ankole (Mayanja, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

The current IRE mainstream and integrated syllabi for secondary schools in Uganda were developed in 2001 (NCDC, 2001) and 2005 (IUIU-SUC, 2005) respectively but since then, a number of events concerning Muslims have occurred which have implications on what and how Islam should be taught in schools. Likewise, higher education institutions – teacher education inclusive – are expected to review their curricula at least every five years (NCHE, 2014) and it is recommended that in the process, various stakeholders be involved (IUCEA, 2010). One category of key stakeholders in implementation of the IRE curriculum are the teachers, hence the need for exploring their perceptions.

A number of studies have been conducted on IRE in Uganda (Lujja, et al 2016; Mayanja, 2015; Tugume, 2015). Lujja et al. (2016) assessed the performance of the prevailing Islamic education in Uganda and how Islamization of human acquired knowledge (IoK) could figure into improvement of the performance of this education to foster modernity. They used a qualitative approach to collect secondary data through library search and analysed the roles that Muslim educational institutions like UMEA and UMTA have indirectly played in promoting IoK in Muslim schools in Uganda. They concluded that integrating and reconciling Islamic education with modern social sciences through Islamization of Knowledge will improve the current Muslim education system in the country. Their main focus was on how the curricula in Muslim schools could benefit from Islamization of Knowledge.

Tugume (2015) analysed the integration of Qur'an with secular education in Butambala district in Uganda and used historical and interview methods for data collection. He interviewed teachers, headteachers, parents, an education officer and inspectors of schools. The study concluded that while Muslims had picked interest in integrating secular education in Qur'an schools, there was still eagerness to rejuvenate Qur'an education. His focus was on primary schools.

Mayanja (2015) examined challenges in the teaching of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language in Ugandan primary and secondary schools, and the attempted linkage of madrasat with terrorism. He was specifically interested in the: relevance of the syllabi; categorisation and enrolments of students in Muslim founded schools; numbers of IRE teachers on Government pay role in all UPE and USE schools; administration of, and student participation in IRE examinations; coping mechanisms of the double curriculum in Islamic primary and secondary schools; and whether Madrasat radicalizes Muslims and prepares them for terrorism. He analysed the NCDC and UNEB secular secondary school syllabi for IRE and Arabic language, the *I-edaadi* and *Thanawi* curricula and the percentages of Muslim children offering official examinations at the various levels. He found that in English-based secondary schools at O' level, only 50% and 4% of Muslim children enrolled for IRE and Arabic language respectively. His focus was on managerial challenges in the teaching of IRE and the method used was largely documentary analysis.

The current study focuses on those aspects related to the syllabi of IRE as perceived by the teachers, and its methodology is survey and document analysis.

Study Purpose

The purpose of the study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the Uganda secondary school Islamic Religious Education syllabi.

Objectives

1. To find out teachers' perceptions of the appropriateness of the content within the IRE syllabi.
2. To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the IRE syllabi.

Research Questions

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of the appropriateness of content within the IRE syllabi?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of the IRE syllabi?

Scope of Study

The study was carried out in Uganda which is surrounded by South Sudan to the North, Kenya to the East, Tanzania and Rwanda to the South, and Democratic Republic of Congo to the West. Uganda's surface area is 241,550.7 square kilometres (UBoS, 2014). The country is divided into 112 districts with a population of 34.9 million people and a Muslim composition of 13.7 percent, the most dominant religion being Christianity constituting 82.4 percent (UBoS).

The study was confined to teachers as stakeholders and key implementers of the curriculum, and the secondary school level was chosen because students at the adolescence stage are characterised by a search for identity and desire for experimentation with various aspects of life. The mainstream NCDC-based and integrated IUIU-based curricula were considered for the study.

The study covered a period of IRE teaching between 2001 and 2016, 2001 and 2005 being the years in which the NCDC and IUIU syllabi were approved respectively (NCDC, 2001; IUIU-SUC, 2005).

Anticipated Contribution of the Study

The study is expected to point out areas of strengths and weaknesses within the IRE content for consolidation and improvement respectively, and thus serve as a guide to curriculum evaluation and review by curriculum developers and teacher educators.

Bloom's Taxonomy and the IRE Curriculum

Benjamin Bloom and his associates (Bloom, et al., 1956; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964 cited in Seifert, 2009) identified three domains of learning – cognitive, psychomotor and affective, each of which having behaviours organised hierarchically from lower to higher levels. The cognitive domain emphasises thinking and is classified under: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating – as revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The psychomotor emphasizes muscle and motor skills under the levels of: imitation, manipulation, precision, articulation and naturalisation. The affective domain emphasizes feelings and emotions under: receiving, responding, valuing, organisation and characterisation by a value complex. Since teaching IRE aims at cultivating a deep understanding of Islam, inculcating Islamic values and developing practical knowledge of Islamic rituals, this model was found relevant.

Overview of the Secondary School IRE Syllabi for O' and A' Levels in Uganda

The secondary school syllabi for IRE are of two categories. The mainstream one developed by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC, 2001) and the unified one – integrating Islamic and secular subjects – developed by Islamic University in Uganda Syllabus Unification Committee (IUIU-SUC, 2005).

The Uganda secondary school IRE mainstream syllabus for Ordinary level consists of two papers:

1) *History of Islam* (P225/1) with three sections: The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Early Muslim Community; The Caliphate of the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs; and Islam in Uganda.

2) *Beliefs and Practices of Islam* (P225/2) with three sections: The Five Pillars of Islam and Muslim Ceremonies (Islam and its Rituals); *Imaan* (Faith and its Articles); and *Ihsaan* (Islamic Morality).

The advanced level papers are four:

1) *Introduction to the Study of the Qur'an* (P235/1) sub divided into three: Revelation of the Holy Qur'an; Spiritual, Social, Economic and Political Teachings of the Holy Qur'an; and Selected Surahs and their Translation.

2) *Introduction to Hadith and Fiqh* (P235/2). The Hadith section consists of: Collection, Compilation, Evaluation, Classification and Types of Hadith; and the Fiqh section consists of: Development of Islamic Law, Sources of Islamic Law, Legal Classification of Acts, Islamic Schools of Law, Fundamentals of Teaching Sharia, and Challenges to the application of and Reasons for non-application of Sharia.

3) *History of Islam* (P235/3) consisting of Early Islamic History, the Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids, and the Crusades and Muslim Empires.

4) *Islam in Africa* (P235/4) consists of Islam in East Africa and Islam in West Africa.

The unified syllabi consist of four similar IRE subjects for both Ordinary (*I-edaadi*) and Advanced (*Thanawi*) levels (SUC, 2015). At the *I-edaadi* level, the following subjects with their respective papers are taken:

1) *Qur'an and its Sciences*: Recitation and its Arts (P1); Memorisation, Translation and Interpretation (P2); Principles of dictation and Calligraphy (P4).
2) *Teachings of the Prophet*: Hadith (P1).
3) *Beliefs and Islamic Civilisation*: Tawhiid (P.1); Biography of the Prophet (P3); and Islamic History (P4).
4) *Fiqh*: Jurisprudence rituals (P1); Islamic law of contracts (P2).
   The *Thanawi* subjects and papers are as follows:
1) *Qur'an and its Science*: Memorisation, Translation and Interpretation (P.2); and Sources of Tafsiir (P.3).
2) *Teachings of the Prophet*: Hadith (P.1); and Sources of Hadith (P.2).
3) *Beliefs and Islamic Civilisation*: Tawhiid (P.1); Comparative Religions and Muslim sects (P.2); and Islamic History (P.4).
4) *Fiqh*: Personal Law (P.3); and Sources of Fiqh (P.4).

Models of Islamic Education

The Islamic Education curriculum can be been categorised under a number of models depending on the proportion of IRE content included in relation to general education (Shah et al, 2015; Abdulla et al., 2006; Al-Alawani, 1989 cited in Nooraini & Khairul Azmi, 2011). It can also be categorised according to the extent to which Islam is practiced and integrated across children's lives (Moes, nd).

The first model (Abdulla et al., 2006; Shah et al., 2015) is continuum-based beginning with an exclusively Islamic education [i], followed by one with a strong Islamic education combined with minimal general education [ii], followed by a model that combines strong Islamic education with high quality general education [iii], followed by an equally mixed Islamic and general education [iv], then by one that combines a stronger general education with minimal Islamic education [v], and lastly one that consists mainly of general education subjects with superficial Islamic education [vi] (see Fig. 1).

i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi
Exclusively Islamic education	Strong Islamic with minimal general education	Strong Islamic and high quality general education	Mixed Islamic and general education	Strong general education with minimal Islamic education	Strong general with superficial Islamic education

Figure 1. Continuum of Islamic Religious Education. Adapted from Abdulla et al (2006) and Shah et al (2015)

The second (Al-Alawani's) model is similar to the above but with fewer categories, i.e. traditionalist, modernist and eclectic. The curriculum in the traditionalist approach is subject-centred and the method of study is primarily memorization with a goal of producing virtuous Muslims who would obey the religious commandments (Hashimi, 2005). In the modernist approach, the curriculum and teaching methodologies are essentially secular and Islam is taught as a subject without deep analysis, while the eclectic approach integrates 'sound' aspects of the modernist curriculum with the traditional one, maintaining Islam at the core.

The third is Moes' Islamic performance design model emphasising the need of integrating Islamic ethos across curricular and extra-curricular domains of Islamic education in a holistic approach. He argues that learning takes place through various human faculties (such as mind, heart, and soul) and knowledge domains are interconnected and united, serving human and divine purposes (Al-Zeera, 2001). Moes based his model on Tauhidi's (2001; 2003) Tarbiyah project which advocates education to aim at teaching what it means to really be Muslim, focusing on personality and character development, critical thinking and problem solving rather than filling children's minds with facts about Islam (Ashaari, 2012).

The current study categorised schools according to foundation and funding bodies as follows:

- Government Muslim (GM): Founded by Muslims and aided by government,
- Government non-Muslim (GN): Founded by non-Muslims and aided by government,
- Private non-Muslim (PN): Founded and funded by non-Muslims,
- Private Muslim (PM): Founded and funded by Muslims, and
- Private Islamic (PI): Founded and funded by Muslims and following integrated curriculum.

The non-Muslim schools (both government-aided and private) belong to category 'vi' of the continuum in Fig. 1 describing superficial Islamic education because much as they follow the same syllabi with the Muslim schools, the practice of Islam among students in these schools is not enforced, coupled with the limited time and facilities allocated to the subject. The Muslim schools (both government-aided and private) fall under category 'v' describing minimal Islamic education because although the practice of Islam is enforced, the time given to its teaching is also limited. All the above four categories of schools belong to what Mayanja (2015, p.27) described as "English-based secular curriculum incorporating limited Islamic knowledge". The private Islamic schools fall under category 'iv' in the model described by mixed Islamic and general education because they follow a dual curriculum, tend to give more time to Islamic Religious Education compared to general education and emphasise the use of Arabic language in the IRE syllabus, what (Mayanja, 2015, p.27) termed "Arabic-based Islamic curriculum integrated with secular education".

Methodology

The study aimed at soliciting teachers' beliefs and opinions about the IRE syllabi, which could best be done through a survey (Creswell, 2012). A cross-sectional survey design was deemed appropriate for the study because it enabled the researcher to reach a large number of teachers across several districts and schools in Uganda. The population included all IRE secondary school teachers in Uganda. Out of the 112 districts, only 57 of them had schools with students who had registered with UNEB to sit for IRE. A sampling frame of 577 schools teaching IRE was compiled basing on data obtained from UNEB (2016) supplemented with that of Uganda Muslim Brothers and Sisters (UMBS) (2012).

Sampling incorporated a combination of stratified (proportional) and cluster sampling. Cluster sampling was chosen because there was no readily available list of IRE teachers in Ugandan secondary schools (see also Creswell, 2011). But the researcher first had to stratify the schools according to regions because their distribution is not uniform. Fifty six of the 57 targeted districts were stratified according to the four regions of Uganda: Northern (6), Eastern (12), Central (29), and Western (9). Sixteen districts were randomly selected from the four regions as follows: Northern 2 of 6, Eastern 3 of 12, Central 7 of 29, and Western 4 of 9. Kampala district due to its relatively high number of schools was treated as a separate region and its 5 divisions formed the clusters. The number of schools identified was 124.

The number of teachers in each school varied from 1 – 10 depending on the type and location of school, with the non-Muslim and rural-based schools having relatively fewer teachers than the Muslim and urban-based ones. The total number of identified teachers was 360 although it was observed that some of them taught in 2 – 4 schools thereby making this total seem relatively low compared to the number of schools. Of the 360 teachers issued questionnaires, 234 of them returned them. Seventy three (31.2%) of the teachers were from 39 schools in Eastern Uganda, 51(21.8%) of them from 29 schools in Central Uganda, 48(20.5%) from 19 schools in Kampala, 47(20.1%) from 27 schools in the North and 15(6.4%) were from 10 schools in Western Uganda. As regards teacher distribution in the different types of schools, more than a third 85(36.3%) of them were from Government Muslim schools, 61(26.1%) from Private Muslim, 45(19.2%) from Private Non-Muslim, 23(9.8%) from Government Non-Muslim, and only 18(7.7%) taught in Private Islamic schools. Two teachers did not indicate the type of schools.

An open- and closed ended questionnaire was used. Its Content Validity Index and Cronbach's alpha were .79 and .75 respectively. Documentary analysis of the syllabi was also conducted.

Findings

This section begins with background data on teachers' competences in Arabic Language followed by presentation of data on their perceptions of the

levels of difficulty in IRE topics and their reasons for such. Challenges faced by teachers in implementing the syllabi are also presented.

Teachers' Competencies in Arabic Language

Slightly more than one third, 85(37.1%) of the teachers regarded themselves as being poor in spoken Arabic Language, almost one third (77, 33.6%) rated themselves as being good at it, 51(22.3%) had no experience in it and only 16(7.0%) were excellent in it. As for written Arabic language, slightly more than one third 88(38.4%) of the teachers indicated that they were good at it, almost one third of them 77(33.6%) were poor, 42(18.3%) had no experience in it and only 22(9.6%) indicated that they were excellent in it. In as far as memorization of the Holy Qur'an is concerned, about one third, 72 (31.9%) of the teachers claimed to have memorized up to nine short *surahs* (chapters of the Qur'an), an equal number 72 (31.9%) had memorized 10-19*surahs*, 42 (18.5%) had memorized 20-29*surahs* and only 40 (17.7%) had memorized more than 30 *surahs*.

Teachers' Perceptions of Appropriateness of IRE Syllabi

Teachers were asked to list 3 topics that they found easy to teach and 3 that they found difficult to teach, beginning with the most to the least. The most popular of the teachers' ratings of the easiest topics was that of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Early Muslims 42(17.9%), followed by Swalat 25(10.7%), Jahiliyya 20(8.5%) and Revelation 19(8.1%) as illustrated in the darkest shades of Figure 2. When all the frequencies for each topic were computed, that of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Early Muslims still had the highest 99(42.3%), followed by Imaan 65(27.8%), Social teachings of the Qur'an 61(26.1%), Swalat 17(26.1%), Caliphate 57(24.4%) and Revelation 40(17.1%).
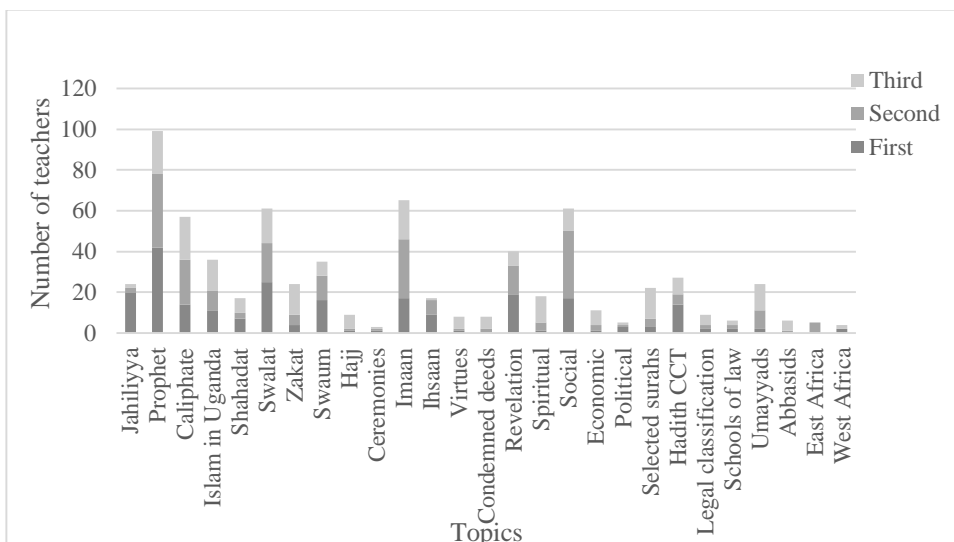

Figure 2. Rankings of topics perceived as being easy to teach

The major reasons advanced for topics being easy were that some of them (e.g. Swalat) are practical and simple to understand. Other reasons included teachers' and students' background knowledge in Islam, while the reason given for that of Prophet Muhammad and Early Muslims, was that it was exciting.

The topic ranked hardest to teach was Qadha and Qadar 24(10.3%), followed by Translation of the Qur'an 22(9.4%), Classification of legal acts 21(9.0%), sources of Islamic law 19(8.1%) and Crusades and Muslim empires 18(7.7%). When all the frequencies for each topic were computed, the topic cited most was Translation of the Qur'an 59(25.2%), followed by Classification of legal acts 56(24%), Crusades and Muslim Empires 53(22.7%), Qadha and Qadar 50(21.4%), Islam in Uganda 47(20.0%) and Ihsaan 46(19.6%) (See Fig. 3).
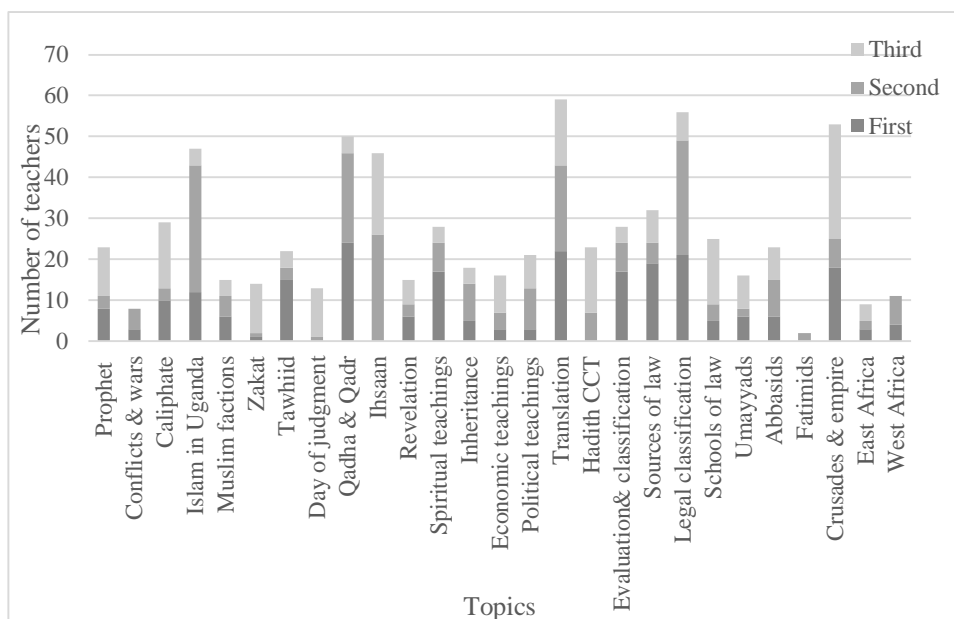

Figure 3. Rankings of topics perceived as being difficult to teach

The main reasons advanced for topics being difficult to teach included their being abstract, hard to conceptualize and requirement of deep analyses. Other reasons included usage of Arabic terms in some topics and the wide content of some papers with very many subsections.

Teachers also argued that memorization of Qur'anic injunctions / verses was difficult to develop among students. Other reasons included students being biased as they saw no relevance of the content, computations needed in some topics, papers being very historical, and biographies of personalities.

Much as the topic of Social teachings was among the easy ones in the overall ratings (see Fig.2), one of its subtopics, that is, Inheritance was particularly singled out as being hard 18(7.6%).

Challenges in Implementing the IRE Secondary School Syllabi

A number of challenges in implementing the syllabi were cited by the teachers (see Fig. 4), with the most common being the broad width of the syllabi. They cited some topics such as dynasties being wide and some papers, especially P235/2, P235/3, and P225/1 having many topics. They also mentioned topics taught in O' level being repeated at A' level for example Pre-Islamic History.
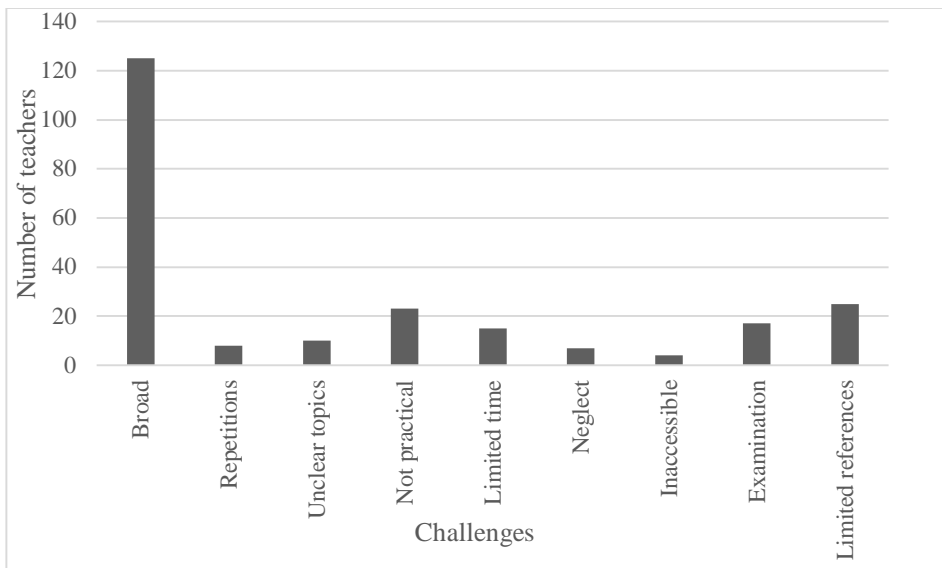

Figure 4. Challenges in implementing the IRE syllabi

Other challenges included some of the topics lacking clarity, being outdated and irrelevant. Despite the fact that slightly more than one third (10 of 28) of the aims and objectives of teaching IRE stated in the syllabi (NCDC, 2001) focus on appreciation of Islamic teachings, teachers lamented that this had not translated into strengthening faith among Muslim students taking IRE. Administrative and political challenges were also cited such as inaccessibility of the syllabi, limited time allocated for the subject and neglect by government and school administration.

Teachers pointed out that some topics in the syllabi were not harmonised citing P235/3 as an example. They also cited lack of harmony between the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) and NCDC where some of the questions set were not in the syllabi while others were limited compared to the many topics in the syllabi, to the extent that some topics were taught but had never been examined.

Regarding references, although 66 books and articles are included in the list of references section of the 2001 IRE syllabi, 25(22.2%) teachers indicated not having had access to them. Almost 90% of the recommended literature is now (2018) outdated, the most recent having been published in 1989. While this is acceptable for classical work like Translation of the Holy Qur'an and that of

outstanding Muslim scholars, it may not be proper for themes like "Islam and the Modern World". Of course teachers are not limited to these references and they can always find other options.

In order to overcome some of the above challenges, teachers suggested that the syllabi should be reduced by removing some topics and or sections, or merging them and also making copies of the syllabi readily available. To avoid duplication, they suggested that History of Islam should remain at one level (either Ordinary or Advanced). That the hard aspects of the syllabi should be simplified in the texts. They also suggested increasing on the variety of questions set by UNEB, beginning teaching P225/2 in S.1 or S.2 classes, focusing on topics on modernity, increasing on the time allocated to IRE and creating extra lessons. Others were of the view that a teachers' guide be produced.

Discussion

This section presents a discussion of the findings within the perspective of Bloom's taxonomy. Having background knowledge – entry behaviour – on a given topic IRE was found to facilitate teaching-learning because it is this low level knowledge that forms a foundation for subsequent higher levels of learning. On the other hand, difficult to teach topics required higher-order thinking at the levels of analysing, evaluating and creating. A topic like inheritance requires mastery of computational skills before being applied. It also involves breaking down material into its constituent parts and determining how they relate to one another. Husin, Che Noh and Tamuri (2014) in their case study of one of the excellent teachers in Malaysia reported her to have also found the topic of tithe of wealth (inheritance) to be quite challenging, which surprisingly made her enjoy teaching it.

Teachers in this study found teaching of similar topics at the Ordinary and Advanced levels quite challenging. This however should not pause a problem if the levels of knowledge at which the topics are taught and examined are clearly made distinct in the teaching syllabi and schemes of work, such that more higher-order objectives are used at the advanced than ordinary level.

Lack of competence in Arabic language by almost one half of the teachers in this study was regarded as an obstacle to implementing the IRE syllabus. Arabic language has been found to be very instrumental in the teaching and learning of Islam as it facilitates communication between Muslims and the Qur'an (Hashimi, 2005). Fluency in the language is a requirement for the Islamic education system in order to clearly understand Islamic sources (Al-Attas, 1991). A similar trend of limited numbers in Arabic language practice was found among IRE students in Ugandan secondary schools. Although those students taking IRE with Arabic language stood high chances of gaining a strong foundation in Islamic religion, only 1,314 of 16650(7.9%) and 434 of 5824(7.5%) of them opted to take Arabic language at O' and A' Levels respectively (Mayanja, 2012). Mayanja argues that students who went through secular elementary schools were not adequately exposed to Arabic language and therefore lacked the competence

to take it at Secondary level. This is a vicious cycle because it is some of these students who are future teachers of IRE.

The topic of Swalat was perceived as being easy to teach because it is practical, and this falls under the psychomotor domain. Students from Muslim practising families are already exposed to this act of worship which begins with imitating, and gradually progresses through following of instructions, developing accuracy, being articulate until it becomes automatic. But that is in as far as the physical activities are concerned. Practical acts of worship also require cognitive and affective skills too where one has to master relevant surahs and supplications while at the same time being mindful of Allah (SWT).

Some topics under Imaan (like Qadha and Qadar) were found hard and challenging to teach because they involve emotions where learners are expected to hypothesise abstract and seemingly conflicting concepts. The failure of IRE in strengthening Muslim students' faith was also one of the major concerns of the teachers. Similarly, Hashimi (2005) and Lubis (2012) argued that Islamic studies today failed to touch the hearts while developing the minds of students. Therefore, besides students being guided to listening attentively and participating in class for examinations purposes, they should be motivated to willingly engage in affectionate activities like Qur'an recitation.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is evident that teachers enjoyed teaching straight forward practical topics and found difficulties teaching abstract and mathematical topics. The affective components of the IRE syllabi were not being appropriately addressed. Teachers' limited competency in Arabic Language also proved to be an obstacle in handling technical topics. It was also evident that the IRE syllabi are quite broad compared to the time allocated to its teaching.

The implications for teacher educators is that more skills and practice in handling particular topics should be given to pre- and in-service teacher trainees. The IRE syllabi should be revised to accommodate contemporary issues.

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