

Islamic Beliefs in Compulsory Islamic Studies (Islamiyat) and Cognitive Development: An investigation

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Abstract: *Islamic Studies or Islamiyat is offered as compulsory subject following the recommendation of Objective Resolution 1949, and Constitution of 1973 of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Therefore, all successive governments of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan took measures to introduce Islamic learning programs and courses in academics. Apart from other measures of introducing Islam both as a religion and as a way of life in academia, the teaching of Islamiyat was made compulsory at all three tiers of education aligned with the Educational Policies 1959, 1972, 1978, 1992, 1998, and 2009. The current study is focused on analyzing the topics of Islamic beliefs introduced at all the three tiers of education under the compulsory core course of Islamiyat or Islamic Studies. The underlying objective is to analyze the applicability of Piaget's cognitive developmental theory in the topics selection of compulsory Islamic studies at all three tiers of education since the continuity of contents at successive levels is a principle of curriculum construction and organization. The paper explores whether the topics are helical in application and cater to the cognitive developmental needs of learners as per the aspects of age and stage. The results of the study reveal that the repetition of the contents at different cognitive stages does not match the cognitive level of the learners at relevant stages.*

Keywords: Islamic studies, cognitive development, topical framework, Piaget's stage theory, Islamic beliefs

Introduction

Religion remains a force that shapes and instills identity and behavior in an individual. It is a strong source of collective motivation in human life. Therefore religion is an influential component of politics, foreign policy, economics, social mores, counseling psychology, and domestic interactions. Religious education plays a vital role in fostering social cohesion, developing human respect and inculcating an understanding of religion (Barnes, 2008). "Education without religion is incomplete and religion without education is dangerous" (Schluss, 2009). Besides, when religious lessons are appreciated by pupils, they have a strong influence on them (Bertram-Troost, de Roos, & Miedema, 2009). Religious scholars signify the relevance of religious programs for each level of education aligned with the needs and demands of each stage of human cognitive and moral development (Hashim, 2007). From the philosophical perspective, cognition means an action or a faculty of knowing, perceiving and conceiving, against emotion and volition (Haq, 1990). Piaget believed that the cognitive development was an artifact of the mind achieved through

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observation and experimentation (Krause, Bochner, Duchesne, et al., 2006; Hashim, 2007; Sultan, 1992).

Research studies embedded in local contexts are considered significant as they address an immediate problem. This study targets the issues related to the Islamic Education as a part of a course of studies in academies in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Also, in the context of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, religious education and education itself have been determined as two ends of the same thread. Therefore, all successive governments of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan formally approved the relationship between religion and education in the respective Constitution. At the same time, the consecutive educational policies aimed at bringing about the constructive changes in the education system of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan gave extensive recommendations for religious education by considering religion as the root of all scientific knowledge, i.e. The National Commission 1959, Educational Policy 1972, the National Education Policy 1978, the successive National Education Policy 1992-2002, The National Education Policy 1998, and the existing National Educational policy 2009. Hence, the teaching of Islamic studies becomes more effective, worth learning, and meaningful when the contents of the curriculum are relevant to learners' lives, particularly when "students are led to discover the larger connections between the knowledge and skills they learn, rather than memorizing isolated bits of information" (Hashim, 2007).

The archival records, as in the e.g. Education Policy (2009) document, National Curriculum (2006) for compulsory Islamiyat (Islamic Studies), and the textbooks issued by the Sindh Text Book Board, Jamshoroo, and approved by the Curriculum Wing within the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, reveal that the content of compulsory Islamic Studies revolves around "six times" at Primary (Grade III-IV) and Elementary levels (Grade V-VIII) i.e. Al-Quran (which is further sub-divided into recitation, memorization, translation), and articles of faith (belief), and worship, and biography of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and famous Muslim personalities, and ethics /moral values and Manners. However, except for the biography of the prophet (peace be upon him) which is included in compulsory Islamic studies at higher secondary education (XI), the list of topics at secondary (X), and higher secondary (XI) and at under-graduate (XIV) level is comprised of the study of al-Quran (translation and explanation), and study of Hadith (translation and explanation), worship, and ethics and manners. At undergraduate level, a few more topics under the titles "science and Quran, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic civilization, the social and economic system of Islam" are found as approved contents by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) since it is authorized for the revision of curriculum in all subjects for grade XII upward.

Investigative discussions on each topic domain of compulsory Islamiyat are far-reaching and out of the scope of this research paper, therefore, topics under the category of "Islamic beliefs" are taken for analysis. Besides, "beliefs" is a core and fundamental part of Islamic knowledge. A clear understanding of Islamic beliefs is essential and pre-requisite for positive behavioral outcomes and is linked with the learning about the proceeding aspects of the religion, Islam. On the other side, from a psychological perspective, each stage of a learner's cognitive development demands a special level of understanding. Babbie (2013) stated that "a normal act of the human mind is a first fact in human knowledge".

Therefore, research on cognitive development supports curriculum planning. When a curriculum is planned considering the developmental level of the learners, the expected failure of teacher and students can be reduced significantly (Pratt, 1994; Lattuca & Stark, 2011). Underlying this objective, the research paper tends to explore the alignment and relevance of the Islamic beliefs within the compulsory Islamiyat with the notion of ages and stages proposed by Piaget. The paper intends to discover whether during nine years of schooling (Grades III- VIII, and X, XII, and XIV) the provided knowledge about "Islamic beliefs" is balanced and worthwhile or the repetition of the contents is with or without enhanced exposure.

Literature Review

Cognition is the ability to think, to reason, and to understand and remember the world around us. "It involves mental processes that are associated with talking, organizing and making sense of information processes that includes perceiving, attending to, understanding and recalling information." These mental functions are part of what is referred to as "cognition" (Krause et al., 2006). According to the cognitive perspective, an associated explanation of learning is constructivism which focuses on cognition as a collaborative process involving social processes, interaction with the environment and self-reflection. It is an approach to learning that owes much to the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (Krause et al., 2006). As the field of psychology continues to evolve, researchers tend towards the development of cognitive sciences (Weegar & Pacis, 2012).

Jean Piaget's work on children's cognitive development, specifically with quantitative concepts, has grabbed much attention within the field of education (Ojose, 2008). Piaget and Vygotsky, both viewed learning as a search for meaning. Piaget considered cognitive development as a product of the mind while Vygotsky observed it as a social process and also associated it with interactions with the environment and self-reflection. Piaget's theory comprised two major elements, 'ages' and 'stages', which further help to predict what children can and cannot understand at different ages. These constructivist theories also helped build the foundation for curriculum design (Weegar & Pacis, 2012). One major contribution of Piagetian theory concerns the developmental stages of children's cognition (Ojose, 2008) which pointed out four primary stages of development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational. Ojose (2008) also emphasized that Piaget theorized that children develop steadily and gradually through varying stages and that the experiences in one stage form the foundations to proceed to the next stage. On the other hand, constructivism emphasized that educators should provide experiences that help students build on their current knowledge of the world (Krause et al., 2006). In fact, Piaget's stage theory helps a teacher to understand the cognitive development of the child as the teacher plans stage-appropriate activities to keep students active and the curriculum developers design courses relevant to the needs of knowledge at each stage of cognitive development (Ojose, 2008).

According to Piagetian theory, the sensorimotor stage (0-2 years) develops from birth till the appearance of language. The main characteristic of this age is the acquisition of object permanence. However, the Pre-operational Stage (2-7 years) is characterized by the

increase in language skills, symbolic thoughts and an egocentric perspective. Rational and logical thoughts make little appearances at this age. Students can be involved with the problem solving tasks matching their age and available material. Conversely, at the Concrete Operations Stage (7-11 years) a child reaches a remarkable cognitive growth. Two logical operations, seriation and classification, develop during this age. Seriation is the ability to order objects and classification involves the grouping of objects. Reasoning skills, dealing with logical arguments also develop. While in the Formal Operations stage (11+ years) young persons at this stage of cognitive development are endowed with abstract thinking and propositional and hypothetical reasoning (Krause et al., 2006). Webb (1980) described how ‘each stage incorporates and restructures the previous one and refines the individual’s ability to perceive and understand.’

Figure 1
Piaget’s stages of cognitive development

		<i>Concrete operations stage</i>	<i>Formal Operations stage</i>
<i>Sensorimotor stage</i>	<i>Preoperational stage</i>	<i>Concrete operations stage</i>	<i>Formal Operations stage</i>
Main achievements: Object permanence Goal-directed action Deferred imitation Dominated by motor and sensory activities: hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and	Main achievements: language acquisition & symbolic thoughts. Thinking still limited; appearance dominates perceptions and understanding	Main achievements: Ability to represent events mentally Ability to operate logically on surroundings Classifying objects mentally Reversing actions Compensating for changes Seeing from another’s viewpoint	Main achievements: Abstract thought Some achieve hypothetical reasoning in secondary school
Birth to 2 years	2 to 6 or 7 years	7 to 11 or 12 years	From around 12 years

Source: Krause et al. 2003, p. 41

Piaget’s work raises a question about the implications of the stage theory from a cognitive perspective not only in the curriculum but to the whole teaching-learning process. Not only Piagetian guidelines, as advocated by numerous educational psychologists, but the work of many religious scholars can also serve as valuable standards for the development of religious curriculum. Some of them are; James Fowler’s six stages of Faith Consciousness; Elkind’s denominational conception of religious identity or cognitive de-

velopment in religious understanding; Fritz Oser's five developmental stages and a sixth universal stage or the development of religious judgment; Ronald Goldman's work regarding children's ability to understand religious ideas; and Kohlberg adapted the cognitive stage theory to moral development (Brodie, 2012). The development of cognitive psychology presented a theoretical framework which was not only adopted but also applied to the field of religious experience and the development of religious thinking. Religious educators and academicians, in both places of worships and school settings, may obtain information useful in formulating the psychological basis of curriculum design for religious instructions (Korniejczuk & San Martin, 1993; Grimmitt, 2000; Day, 2001).

Research Methodology

The study analyzed the archival records using content analysis "a study of recorded human communications" (Babbie, 2013, pp. 327-328) as a research approach (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). The archival records included: chapter four "Islam Education" of Educational Policy (2009) document (Ministry of Education, 2009); National Curriculum (2006) of Compulsory Islamiyat (Islamic Studies) for grade III to grade XII, issued by Curriculum Wing, Department of Education, Government of Pakistan; and the textbooks issued by Sindh Text Book Board, Jamshoroo, Pakistan and approved by Curriculum Wing within the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, under the domain 'Islam Beliefs' as a unit of enquiry. Locally, textbooks are taken as an essential curriculum document which is implemented in the classrooms and assessed accordingly at the end of each academic year in a respective grade.

The data (details of topics about Islamic Beliefs) are taken from each of the five levels of the Pakistani education system-Primary level (From Grade III to Grade V); Elementary level (Grade VI to Grade VIII); Secondary level (up to Grade X); Higher Secondary level (up to Grade XII); and Undergraduate level. In early childhood education up to grade III, an integrated nature of the curriculum is adopted.

Findings and Discussion

A content analysis of the topics and the text under the domain 'Islamic Beliefs' revealed the following results at the respective academic levels.

Table 1
Topics of Islamic Belief in Compulsory Islamiyat at Primary Level (Grade III-V)

Islamic Beliefs	Allah (One God)	Angels	Revealed Books	Messengers/ Prophets	Hereafter	Destiny/ Fate
Grade III	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grade IV	Articles of faith Allah, angels, revealed books, messengers, hereafter (a brief input)					-
Grade V	-	-	-	Obedience of Prophet (SAWW), Importance of Sunnah of Prophet (SAWW),	Concept about this World	-

Table 1 presents an overview of the Islamic beliefs included at primary level (from Grade III to Grade V). According to Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development, the pre-operational stage is around 2-7 years (Ojose, 2008; Krause et al., 2006; Webb, 1980). Operations refer to the rules and thinking that are performed logically (Webb, 1980; Krause et al., 2006). Usually children are around ages seven to eight when they enter grade III, that is, at the end of the pre-operational stage. The pre-operational stage is characterized by an increase in language skills, symbolic (representational) thoughts, most evident in children's play, and an egocentric perspective characterized by a child's tendency and belief to see the world from his/her own perspective (Ojose, 2008; Krause et al., 2006; Webb, 1980). Topics related to Muslim's belief are not found in compulsory Islamiyat at the pre-operational stage (Grade III); however, symbolic thoughts are developed at this stage. Therefore, another topic 'prayer and its timings' is introduced at grade III but the topic does not make any effective connection in a child's mind and life about the objective of the performance of these prayers at their stated time nor the good morals in Islam introduced at the same level. A close observation of the content under the heading 'prayer and its timings' reveals that the text is further sub-divided into an understanding of the objective of prayers, the benefits of the prayers and the stated time slots for performing the five prayers. However, Piaget holds that a child is unable to operate on more than one conspicuous aspect of a situation (Webb, 1980; Krause et al., 2006; Openshaw & Stendler, 1965). This stage is characterized by symbolic thoughts that make the learners able to pretend and because of this ability, plays (role-taking and role-playing) are very important in demonstrating a learner's understanding of symbols and expanding his/her concepts (Ojose, 2008; Krause et al., 2006). Sultan (1992) suggested using the children's own suggestions for playing different roles as they can be very creative in such as activities as 'let's build a mosque', 'who teaches squirrels to gather food', 'who gives us the rain?'. It is observed that the beliefs make a difference. Generally, each topic introduced in the syllabus of compulsory Islamiyat at grade III does not remind a child about a Muslim's beliefs. More interestingly, the topics of Islamiyat at grade III are mainly about the pros and cons of recitation with no understanding of the objectives of recitation. Egocentrism naturally becomes a feature of the child's personality at this stage, hence topics related to Islamic belief, particularly a healthy understanding about the Oneness of Allah (Tauheed) may shield them from the adverse effects of egoism. Under discussion about good morals, there are statements such as 'these good attributes will please God and Messenger' but the reminder about 'Islamic beliefs' is missing. Moreover, 'prophethood' is an Islamic belief of which the children are not reminded but it is presented as a piece of information about the condition of society at the time of Prophet's birth, his birth and appearance and his upbringing. However, the learner may not have any representative or symbolic thought at this stage, which can make him/her understand the meaning of 'worshipping false gods or idols', 'long drawn blood feuds', and 'gambling'. The pre-operational stage requires that learners be given opportunities to explore their physical world during play and problem solving activities, respectively to their age and the topic of Islam being taught (Krause et al., 2006; Webb, 1980; Ojose, 2008). This can be achieved through drawing, coloring, stories, playing a role in stories, setting up bulletin boards, field trips and so on (Sultan, 1992).

Generally, learners proceed to Grades IV and V when they are between the ages of eight and ten years. According to the cognitive developmental theories of these stages, learners reach the concrete operational stage (7-11) years. This is known as the remarkable cognitive growth and reasoning skills stage as learners may be able to deal with logical arguments. Simultaneously, the ability to make connections between thoughts develops during this age. However, Muslim beliefs introduced to Muslim learners at grades IV and V are in a very brief and unexciting manner. The information, style and tone in which information is imparted do not make children able to appreciate the universe, the creation of Allah and their own selves. The sensitivity of Muslim beliefs is not communicated to them appropriately. The way the text or material is presented to the learners in the textbooks for 'Islamic Belief' is uninteresting and monotonous. For instance, at grade IV a part of the text is presented as the Oneness of Allah (Tauheed) which means to believe that Allah is One and He is without any association, and only He has the right of being worshiped. Everything is created by Him. He is Kind and Merciful. Moreover, referring to the hereafter, the piece of text is: 'After the end of this world a day of accountability by Allah will appear and those who do good deeds will enter into paradise and the wrongdoers will be thrown in the hellfire. This is the concept of hereafter.' Similarly, at grade V the piece of text about the hereafter is presented as: 'The physical world around you will not be forever. A day will come when this physical world will come to an end, then human beings will be resurrected and will be in front of Allah. This is called hereafter.' The worst reality is attached to the teaching and learning strategies that are used during class. Learners are supposed to read the material and write down the answers to the questions given at the end of each topic e.g. Will the world last forever? Shall human beings be resurrected after death? What does Faith mean? What does belief in Allah mean? This is the same method of the assessment of learners' learning used at the end of each academic year. Assessment practices tend to encourage students to memorize and recall and write isolated bits of information of Islamic belief in the examination. [Krause et al. \(2006\)](#) found that in line with the stage theory, learners at this stage are able to mentally manipulate and think logically about the objects and experiences that are presented to them ([Ojose, 2008](#); [Openshaw & Stendler, 1965](#)). One of the 'main needs is for teaching to be carried out in contexts that provide plenty of concrete experience', and to provide students the opportunities through which they can 'experiment with the material' or the world around them, 'to test their ideas', and 'to begin to think logically' which further leads learners to extend and expand their existing knowledge on the basis of later learning ([Webb, 1980](#); [Ojose, 2008](#)).

Table 2 shows the topics of Islamic beliefs included in grades VI and VII, the end of concrete operational stage and in grade VIII, at the start of the formal operational stage (11+ years of age). This is characterized by abstract thinking and propositional and hypothetical reasoning ([Webb, 1980](#); [Ojose, 2008](#); [Openshaw & Stendler, 1965](#)). In fact, the pattern, style and tone of learning the material on Islamic beliefs included even in this concrete and formal operational stage reflect the previous stage.

Table 2
Topics about Islamic Belief in Compulsory Islamiyat at Elementry Level

Islamic Beliefs	Allah (One God)	Angels	Revealed Books	Messengers/ Prophets	Hereafter	Destiny/ Fate
Grade VI	Oneness of Allah,	-	-	-	-	-
Grade VII	-	-	-	Prophet hood (reality and need)-Finality of Prophet hood	-	-
Grade VIII	-	-	-	-	Concept & Remembrance of Hereafter and its Role in Personality Development	-

For instance, at grade VI a part of the text about oneness of Allah is presented as:

“To believe that Allah was when nothing did and He will remain when nothing will. He is alone. He is without any association or partner. He is Alone in claiming the right of being worshiped”. And, “This belief in Allah is The foundation of Faith. In Islam, the belief in Allah is of prime importance. Former prophets also taught about this belief.”

Interestingly, text quotations are followed by such questions as: What does oneness of Allah mean? It is up to the teachers to elaborate and present experiences to the learners of how belief is being translated into meaning and into actions and to explore what worship actually means, which kind of association is against the Islamic belief and how the possibilities of any association with God can be avoided. The existing teaching methods may not comply with the pros and cons of learning religious faith. The emphasis is only memorization and copying the same text in the examinations rather than involving students in discussions, role-playing demonstrations, problem-solving and project-based learning (Sultan, 1992).

At grade VII level, part of the text gives information to the learners about prophet-hood:

“The greatest human knowledge is the knowledge of the right path. What is good and what is bad? And what benefits are attached to the right and good? A human being himself is unable to find the reality of life? What is the true and real goal of his life? From where did he come (what is his origin?) Into this world and where did he go after death (his real destiny after death)? And, human beings cannot find the answers to these and other similar questions. The open way to get the truth is the only Being (Allah) who created human beings and the universe. To fulfill this task Allah appointed messenger and prophets into this world.”

During the concrete operational stage learners are more dependent on what they see, hear and experience. Learners cannot think in abstraction and do not achieve concrete operations on all the tasks at the same time (Krause et al., 2006). This particular age requires

teaching to be carried out in the context that provides plenty of real life experience. This can be taught through real life matters where guidance comes from the words and actions of the Holy messenger of Islam (SAWW). For instance, these real life matters can be of performing prayers, making ablutions, food habits, sleeping and salutation, the ethics of meeting, dealing with neighbors and so on. The list of the contextual experiences is long and through these students' current ways of thinking can be challenged (Krause et al., 2006; Webb, 1980; Openshaw & Stendler, 1965).

Around 11 years of age the learner is ready to deal with formal operations: to think in abstraction and logically; to form hypothesis and solve problem systematically; to use rules and general principles to find out general principles of specific problems; and to induce general principles from specific examples (Openshaw & Stendler, 1965; Webb, 1980; Krause et al., 2006). Teachers at this level can stimulate a more advanced pattern of thinking in their students by capturing their interest and creating enthusiasm for the curriculum component related to their working. At grade VIII part of a text about the hereafter under a subtopic 'logical reasoning for hereafter' is presented as:

“Every individual interested to know that where we go after death? Which kind of dealing we would experience? But we do not have a right source of this knowledge. This is also out of our observation and experience. Neither a person is able to let us aware about hereafter after his death. Truthful Holy messenger (SAWW) has the knowledge of these questions by the authority of Allah, and this is the satisfactory answer.”

It is necessary that a text should be easily understood by the learner and it should be supported by known premises. However, there are plenty of real life experiences which can be logically connected with the concept of the hereafter. Haq (1990) described how 'knowledge is just synonymous with consciousness, awareness, and familiarity, and it is based upon experience or actual observation of the facts' (p. 23). Similarly, knowledge based upon passion cannot be true knowledge. 'Passions are imaginary concepts or transitory beliefs without any element of performance or constancy; neither have any firm ground of a sound reason or argument to stand upon' (p. 27). How beautifully the Holy Qur'an presents reality with reason and the analogy of the maturity of fruits (Qur'an, 6:99)! When the fruit reaches the last stage of its perfection its connection with the parent tree is immediately cut off. Nature knows that the fully evolved fruit now fits to regenerate itself in a new atmosphere and is worth a high price in the market, so its break off its connections with its previous worlds. This means that to live independently and thriving in the hereafter all fruits must die in their former world. In human beings also the rule is the same (Haq, 1990).

Indeed, a link between Islamic beliefs and actions or deeds is missing. Only one out of three Islamic fundamental beliefs (Oneness of Allah, Prophet Hood, and Hereafter) is included in the syllabus of compulsory Islamiyat at each stage of the elementary level. Are not all three Islamic beliefs important at each stage of learning to enhance their exposure and their interlinkages with human practices? Do not the maturity of the mind and cognitive development vary at each stage of elementary level? Learning is an active process of change. The world changes every moment not only socially, but biologically

and psychologically as well. For the survival of learning the educator and the learner both have to make adaptations accordingly (Haq, 1990). The learner at the concrete operational age is able to mentally group objects in terms of similar characteristics (Krause et al., 2006; Openshaw & Stendler, 1965). More interestingly the learning material provided in the textbooks for each relevant grade comprises only the theoretical knowledge about the domains of information. The implication and learning from these Islamic beliefs is absolutely a neglected truth. Above all, religion is not only an idea or theory, but it is a practical code with theoretical foundations. Moreover, the teaching and learning strategies for compulsory Islamiyat at each academic level, whether elementary, secondary or higher levels are concerned, are solely based on reading and memorizing the learning material provided in the textbooks. Success in the examination is in proportion to the best in memorization. Usually, the higher order thinking skills are not addressed in subject specific exams and projects, problem-solving activities and lived experiences are not introduced to learners to involve them in learning about religion and learning from religion. Learners are passive agents throughout the teaching and learning process about the beliefs and values of Islam.

Table 3
Topics about Islamic Belief in Compulsory Islamiyat at Secondary Level

Islamic Beliefs	Allah (One God)	Angels	Revealed Books	Messengers/ Prophets	Hereafter	Destiny/ Fate
Grade IX-X	Love and obedience of Allah and his messenger (SAWW)					

Table 3 presents topics of Islamic belief included for grade X. After a gap of one year, (at grade IX) students again study compulsory Islamiyat at secondary level. At this academic stage, the nature and mode of the syllabus of compulsory Islamiyat are shifted towards translation and explanation of three selected chapters from the Quran and selected precepts of the prophet of Islam (SAWW). Apart from three chapters of the Holy Qur'an and few selected Hadith, only one topic 'love and obedience of Allah and His messenger (SAWW)' is found relating to Islamic belief. An observation of the learning material presented in textbooks as a part of Islamic Belief does not bring any change in the style of presenting knowledge about religious beliefs. The learning material is around three standard lengths of a page and the topic is further sub-divided into four subheadings: love with Allah, love with the messenger of Allah, obedience, and finality of prophethood. The general nature of the learning material is endorsed by the references of the Qur'an and Hadith which further make the understanding complex since each and every verse of the holy Qur'an is full of wisdom and meaning. Unwisely connecting and mentioning the Holy text makes it a burden for learners regarding adding to the existing knowledge. For instance, the part of material under a sub-heading 'love with the Messenger of Allah' is presented as: 'love with the messenger of Allah is a pre-requisite of faith.' The Holy Qur'an describes how: 'the Prophet is closer to the believers than their selves' (Qur'an, 33:6). Therefore, when believers would be asked to select between themselves and love with the Messenger of Allah they must scarify themselves and select love with the messenger. Again, the Holy Qur'an says: "O you who believe! Be not forward in the presence

of Allah and His Messenger, and keep your duty to Allah” (Qur’an, 49:1). Further, it is written that the right of piety (Taqwa) will be paid to the beauty in communication, coordination in action and obedience in attitude. However, at this stage of human development, cognition is remarkably changed as compared to the earlier stages. The learner is able to deduce and induce principles and to find the logical pattern. Therefore, the main focus should be to encourage and provide opportunities for students to begin to think abstractly about possibilities. The complexity of the material does not match with the maturity of the learners’ minds which may ultimately create boredom and passivity on the part of the learners. The learning material is followed by Questions such as: What does the love of Allah mean? and Why is the obedient of Prophet (SAWW) essential? And Explain the meaning of ‘finality of prophethood’ in the light of any verse of the holy Qur’an? Undoubtedly, the learner would not be able to perceive the correct notion of Love and Obedience of the Almighty and His Messenger (SAW) and the possible ways of expression of these concepts into actions and deeds. Sultan (1996) describes how learners at this age are able to differentiate well the multiple variations of polytheism, hypocrisy (Nifaq), and disobedience and denial or atheism (Kufr). Learners’ can be involved in discussion topics, resource persons’ input, simulated dialogues, open Fiqh forums relevant to the information applicable at this age, demonstrations and practicum, audio and video tapes and documentaries (Sultan, 1992).

Table 4
Topics about Islamic Belief in Compulsory Islamiyat at Higher Secondary Level

Islamic Beliefs	Allah (One God)	Angels	Revealed Books	Messengers/ Prophets	Hereafter	Destiny/ Fate
Grade XI-XII	Oneness of Allah,	Belief in Angels	Belief on Revealed	Prophet-hood (need and importance), Attributes of Prophets, Finality of Prophet-hood (SAWW),	Belief in Hereafter	Belief in Des-tiny /Fate

Interestingly, at a higher secondary level the trend of the syllabus of compulsory Islamiyat is shifted back from translation and explanation of selected chapters of the Holy Qur’an to the nature of the syllabus of primary and elementary levels (see above). Therefore, topics of Islamic belief included in this successive stage adds no increment in the level of intricacy and understanding and it is simply repetition of what students have already taken at the previous stages from grade III to grade X. To determine the validity of the analysis, an observation of the last ten years’ examination papers divulges that students are asked to write about one of the Islamic beliefs and its advantages and disadvantages in human and personal lives e.g. What does creed mean? What does belief in the Oneness of Allah mean? Describe its impact on human life. What does polytheism mean and describe its different kinds? Explain the belief of prophet hood and describe attributes of messengers? In turn, the students’ practice is to memorize the learning material and write the same against a question. Yet, Islamic beliefs are the pivotal point around which

each action during the course of a human's life revolves and learners are better able to use human cognitive faculties. Learning activities can include open forums on problems and issues, media reviews, resource persons, films, posters and displays developed and created by learners, involvement in projects, slides and presentation with commentaries, debates, social services, field reports, writing paper and articles for journals, dramas and simulations based on true Muslim stories, review and reading of supplementary monographs and periodicals (Sultan, 1992).

A system of fundamental beliefs serves as a pivotal point to revolve around the life of its adherents, regulates the everyday life of Muslims and the followers of Islam across the world are deeply committed to their faith (Bell & Lugo, 2013). The religion 'Islam' requires both beliefs and its understanding for intrinsic human integrity and goodness (Abdel-Khalek, 2010; Ayers, 2010).

Table 5
Topics of Compulsory Islamiyat at Undergraduate Level (professional program)

Islamic Beliefs	Allah (One God)	Angels	Revealed Books	Messengers/ Prophets	Hereafter	Destiny/ Fate
Undergraduate level (HEC's recommendations for Engineering Program)	Verses of Surah Al-Baqra related to Faith (Verse No-284-286)	-	-	Verses of Surah Al-Hujrat Related to Adab Al-Nabi (Verse No-1-18)	-	-
Undergraduate level Engineering Program (Public and Private stream)	The Basic Islamic Belief-Oneness of Allah, Prophethood, The Day of Judgment with reference to the verses other than recommended by HEC					- -

At undergraduate (professional) level, again the trend of compulsory Islamiyat is reverted to the translation and explanation of selected verses from the Holy Qur'an related to fundamental Islamic beliefs (Oneness of Allah, Prophet hood, and Hereafter). The HEC is empowered to revise the curriculum in all subjects for grade XII upwards. Therefore, the revised contents about Islamic beliefs available at the HEC's official website included guidelines for universities on suggested topics of Islamic Beliefs within compulsory Islamiyat or Islamic Studies. The prevailing list of contents about 'Islamic beliefs' in universities, differs with the HEC's recommended list of Islamic beliefs. Explanation of selected verses of the Holy Qur'an requires an enormity of discussion about Islamic beliefs which is usually lacking in the teaching of compulsory Islamic studies at this level. Yet Islamic creeds must be discussed with zeal and zest and religious fervor as learners are at this stage of cognitive development able to thoroughly analyze the implications of the concept of Tauheed (Oneness of Allah), Al Akhira (hereafter), and Al Risalah (prophet-hood) for the moral, spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual and physical growth and development of the individual and society (Sultan, 1992). The decoding of Islamic beliefs into action is ultimately an ignored trend. 'Islamic beliefs' are fundamental components at each level of cognitive maturity. Textbooks are not generally recommended at the undergraduate level so it is at the discretion of the teachers how they impart knowledge included in the

syllabus. An interesting fact is that usually the subject teachers at tertiary level do not take professional development courses before taking up teaching as a profession; neither is it a recognized practice of teaching at university level. Only content knowledge and degrees in the relevant discipline are considered sufficient criterion for getting employed to teach at the university level. The complexity for the content area 'Islamic Beliefs' is replicated and aligned with the previous stages of knowledge about Islamic Belief. However, at undergraduate level students meet higher levels of cognitive development and this further creates dullness and passivity on learners' part. [Balota and Black \(1997\)](#) stated that 'words become less meaningful when repeated excessively' ([Balota & Black, 1997](#); [Kounios, Kotz, & Holcomb, 2000](#)), and 'massed repetition could actually reverse the benefits of brief repetition' ([Kuhl & Anderson, 2011](#)). [Sultan \(1992\)](#) described how repetition tends to make students bored with the course and unnecessarily wastes their time (p. 58). Yet, higher Islamic education demands the growth of intellect, a unique gift of Allah ([Hashim, 2007](#)). [Pintrich, Marx, and Boyle \(1993\)](#); [Pintrich \(2000a, 2000b, 2002\)](#); [Sinatra \(2005\)](#) discussed how challenge at the tertiary level teaching-learning process is to understand students' starting point and at the same time work toward a more constructivist view of learning. The World Conference on Muslim Education (1977) also emphasized that the objective of education should be the balanced growth of the total personality and the infusion of faith in the personality of learners. The status of a Muslim requires the reflection of faith in daily practice and conduct. [Fowler \(2004\)](#) emphasized how 'our ways of imagining and committing in faith correlate significantly with our ways of knowing and valuing more generally.'

Conclusion and Recommendations

The development of curriculum is an ongoing process which is not only a venture to promote learning, but also to address the sustainability of the teaching-learning process. Therefore, it comprehensively takes decisions about objectives, learner profile, contents, teaching strategies, assessment and learning material and resources ([Seel, 2004](#)). Teaching religion along with academics is to equip the students with the basis of knowledge they need for the rest of their lives ([Niyozov & Memon, 2011](#)). This remains the problem with Muslim educators who have been teaching the 'facts about Islam' but never addressed the challenge of 'being Muslim', against the goal of Islamic education which is to teach children about being Muslim ([Tauhidi, 1995](#)).

It is recommended that the syllabus of compulsory Islamic Studies should be revised to align it with the cognitive ability of the students at each of the six levels of education ([Mababaya & Mababaya, 2005](#)). It is also emphasized to impart knowledge among subject specific teachers about updating teaching methodologies to teach Islamic Studies. Most of the Islamic Studies teachers are unskilled and are unaware of the psychology of learners, developing and assessing students learning outcomes, the infusion of diversified teaching techniques and methodologies, curriculum updates and smart use of audiovisual aids. Moreover, teachers are not used to setting instructional objectives for instructional delivery. The results of any advancement towards curriculum may be fruitless unless teachers

are trained and their skills are polished. Teachers usually do not take courses related to the teaching profession during their academic development nor undertake any customized professional teachers' training courses. Therefore after assessing their needs at each level, they should be offered the in-service in relation to Islamic Studies at tertiary level and this should be compulsory for all teachers who aim to join the profession in the future.

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