

KSI MADARIS AROUND THE WORLD - ANALYSING EXISTING CURRICULA

By Curriculum Development (CD) Team

Introduction

The Curriculum Development (CD) team of the Madrasah Centre of Excellence (MCE) has carried out a comprehensive study of existing curricula at Khoja Shi'a Ithna-asheri (KSI) madaris around the world. This paper highlights the key findings of this study, including the various curriculum models currently in use in our madaris globally, and a gap analysis of existing syllabi.

Methodology

One of the key initial objectives of the CD team was to tabulate the subjects, themes and topics currently being taught at major KSI madaris around the world. The purpose of this tabulation was to provide a database of all subjects and topics taught at madrasah, highlight current strengths and weaknesses of existing syllabi, perform a gap analysis between the various syllabi and highlight areas that need attention. The tabulation would also show where we stand today in terms of delivery of madaris content, and could potentially form a basis for shaping future curricula and syllabi.

The following syllabi were included as part of this tabulation and analysis:

1. Islamic Religious Education, Nairobi (1988)
2. Islamic Religious Education, Nairobi (1991)
3. Shia Ithna-Asheri Madressa (SIM), Stanmore
4. Husayni Madrasah Girls Section, Dar-es-Salaam
5. Husayni Madrasah Boys Section, Dar-es-Salaam
6. QFatima, Hujjat Saturday Workshop, Stanmore
7. Al Madrasah Al Muhammadiyyah, Dubai
8. East End Madressa, Scarborough
9. Centre Madressa, Bathurst
10. ISSC West Madrasah, Brampton
11. Ahlulbait Islamic Mission School (AIMS), Karachi
12. AQA GCSE, AS and A2 Islamic Studies

The conception of a common syllabus in the eighties

The Islamic Religious Education Committee of Nairobi pioneered one of the first common syllabi for use within KSI madaris. This common syllabus was drawn up in the mid eighties from syllabi compiled by the World Federation and its member federations.

The production of the first set of notes for madaris began in 1986, based on this common syllabus, and came to a completion towards the end of 1987. The complete set of notes was first published in 1988 and although these notes are no longer in use today, many teachers and madaris still have these in their libraries and they serve as reference books.

The 1988 syllabus was monitored and reviewed over a couple of years and a second edition was published in 1991. This version served as a pre-cursor for most syllabi in use today, including ISSC, SIM and Husayni Madrasah, Dar-es-Salaam. Over the years, various large madaris around the world

have developed this 1991 syllabus significantly, although the core structure and subjects remained unchanged.

Current approaches to delivering madrasah education

Two main approaches have been identified in the syllabi in use today: The ‘conventional’ model and the ‘thematic’ model. Following on from the Nairobi 1988 model, most madaris use the conventional model, which imparts madrasah education via four main subject areas:

1. Dinyaat – includes Aqaid and Fiqh
2. Akhlaq
3. Tarikh
4. Qur’an

The conventional approach is still very popular amongst a majority of our madaris. During the course of our tabulation work, several madaris either revamped or are in the process of working towards a major overhaul of their existing syllabus and course notes. However, they have all decided to retain the conventional approach where topics are taught within the four main subjects.

The ‘thematic’ approach is relatively new and has been used most notably by QFatima and AIMS, Karachi. This is a cross-curricular approach where content across the four traditional subject areas relating to a particular theme is interlinked to convey a well-rounded and holistic understanding of the topic or theme.

Examples of themes within the AIMS curriculum include:

- Qur’anic Stories – includes tarikh and akhlaq lessons from Qur’anic stories
- Personality Building – includes akhlaq lessons from the lives of the 14 Ma’sumeen
- Islamic Lifestyle – incorporates fiqh and akhlaq
- Social responsibility – incorporates fiqh, akhlaq and current affairs
- Nahj al-Balagha – lessons across all subject areas from Nahj al-Balagha
- Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah – lessons across all subject areas from Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah

Some themes within the QFatima curriculum demonstrating a cross-curricular ‘thematic’ approach include:

- Q-Concepts – includes lessons in fiqh and akhlaq
- Q-Life – includes lessons in akhlaq
- Q-Calendar – discusses calendar events, incorporating tarikh, aqaid and fiqh
- Q-Prayer – incorporates lessons in fiqh, aqaid and Qur’an

Gender Variation

The most notable variation in syllabi across the two genders occurs within fiqh, where girls are taught all the important masail relating to taharah, salah, sawm, khums and taqlid before they become baligh at the age of 9, whereas boys are introduced to these topics much later on. Girls also have to learn the fiqh relating to ‘bleeding in women’, which most madaris teach around the age of 9. There are no variations across other subject areas, with the exception of teaching the story of Nabi Yusuf to boys only (for tarikh and Qur’an, within the Nairobi IRE 1991 syllabus).

Age Variation

Most madaris' intake is from the age of 4/5 year olds to 14/15 year olds. Madaris also have some courses for students post age 15 but these are not well structured in terms of curriculum and content.

There is a marked difference between the ages at which various content is taught across continents. AIMS in Karachi introduces many topics very early on, and their syllabus is very tightly packed, with almost double the content taught in Western madaris. Madaris in Africa initially taught a lot of content very early on (as demonstrated within the IRE 1988 and 1991 syllabi), but a gradual shift can be observed over the years, making their syllabi more aligned to their Western counterparts.

The following table gives a snapshot of age variation across madaris:

TARIKH	NBO 88	NBO 91	SIM	DXB	DSM	K'CHI	B'TON
The event of Mubahala	11	13	7, 11	8,12	14	6	13
Masjid al-Dhirar		13					13
A plot to kill the Prophet (S)			11	12			
The farewell pilgrimage	14	13	11	12	14	6	14
The event of Ghadeer	11	13	7, 11	8,12	14	11	14
Imam Ali is appointed successor to the Prophet at Ghadeer	14	13	11	12	14	11	14
The extent of geographical spread of Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet	14	13					
Usama's expedition	14	13	11	12	14	6	
The Prophet asks for pen and paper		13	11	12	14	6	
The illness preceding his death	14	13	11	12	14	6	14
The date of his wafat and place of burial	6	6	11	12	14	6	14
An account of the Prophet's wafat	14	13	11	12	14	6	14
An account of his burial	14	13	11	12	14	6	14

Content Depth

A careful study of the actual notes used at madaris across the globe shows a significant difference in the depth of content taught. The initial Nairobi syllabi of 1991 is very 'content-heavy', and a progressive watering down of the content can be observed over the years, with SIM content being considerably watered down compared to the syllabi of African madaris. The reasoning behind this watering down of content is to focus on the core areas and ensure that the most basic tenets of faith

and Islamic practice are understood, as teaching time is limited and does not allow delving deeper into 'non-essential' areas. Although this proved quite popular with many madaris around the world that use the SIM syllabus and notes, recent reviews indicate that some content that has been dropped over the years needs to re-instated. This can be observed in the new Siraat manuals produced by ISSC, Brampton, which are now in use in all the three major madaris in Toronto.

The down-side to watering down content is yearly repetition of the same content, which is quite marked in the SIM fiqh and aqaid syllabus.

Benchmarking topics

Having tabulated all madrasah subjects and topics, the following bench-marking criteria was developed:

Relevance to Age	Regional Variation
<p>Is content appropriate for the specified age?</p> <p>Is the depth appropriately challenging?</p> <p>Does it stimulate learning?</p> <p>Is knowledge of this topic necessary at this age?</p>	<p>Is content relevant to our contemporary changing environment?</p> <p>Does this topic vary depending on region?</p> <p>If yes, has regional variation been appropriately described?</p>
Content	Resources
<p>Is the scope well defined?</p> <p>Is the depth of learning well defined?</p> <p>Is it relevant to the subject?</p> <p>Is it relevant to the life of the madrasah student?</p> <p>Does it overlap significantly with topics in other subjects?</p>	<p>Adequate teaching guidelines available for this topic</p> <p>Age-specific student notes available</p> <p>Contemporary teaching resources available</p> <p>Up to date rulings and guidance available</p>

Gap Analysis

The tabulation of madrasah topics helps us identify gaps within existing curricula by comparing them against each other. The following table is a small sample from the database that gives an idea of how this can be achieved:

AKHLAQ	NBO 88	NBO 91	SIM	DXB	DSM	AIMS	ISSC
Relationship with the self							
Definition of nafs			14	15	14		
What is the 'self'?					14		
Why should we develop the self?					14		
How to recognise the self					14		
Potential states of man		16	14	15	14		
The three types of nafs		16	11	12			
Powers of the soul: Intellect, Anger, Passion & Imagination		16					16
Pleasures and pains affecting the powers of the soul		16					
Vices of the powers of the soul		16					

Conclusion

The full results of this analysis will be shared at the panel of experts meeting. The CD team looks forward to guidance from the panel of experts meeting to be held in UK in November in answering the following questions :

- 1-What is the best approach and methodology/model to adopt for our global madaris curriculum?
- 2-What are the key take-aways from this study and how do we optimise the findings in developing a framework, curriculum and syllabus?
- 3-What challenges do we need to overcome to achieve 1 and 2 above and how do we get to our ultimate objectives?