7

Transmission of Values in Muslim Countries: Religious Education and Moral Development in School Curricula

Rukhsana Zia

Introduction

Recent international events have intensified interest among politicians, religious leaders, scholars and educational professionals about the way religion is taught in schools and its consequent manifestation as learned social behavior. Students' understanding of other faiths alongside their own personal faith is being scrutinized and there are persistent calls for a reassessment of the emphasis placed on this in education. Indeed, the linkages of spiritual and moral development with religious education and civic education (with its focus on human rights and the duties and responsibilities of citizens in local, national and international contexts) are lively and contentious issues. Of particular interest are contrasts between curriculum-based approaches to religion adopted in secular societies (where state and religious institutions are separated as in many western nations) and religious societies (as in most Muslim nations).

This chapter focuses on the development of formal approaches to spiritual and moral education in Muslim countries over time. Apart from discussing the relevant concepts, it outlines contemporary patterns of schooling in Muslim countries and notes the impact of key historical and political events. Curricular emphases on spiritual and moral education and religious education are also placed in comparative perspective, specifically in relation to school time devoted to each component in subgroups of Muslim countries (members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, OIC[1]) and, to a limited extent, with secular countries (basically western nations). Overall, the chapter seeks to provide a broader framework for understanding the inclusion of religious and moral education in the school curricula of Muslim countries, and the role of such subjects in the development of moral and social behavior among pupils.

Spiritual, moral and religious education

International agreements regarding the search for individual identity are clearly reflected in specific resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN 1976), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989). In the latter Convention, countries are required, among other things, to accord children the right to nationality and identity, to ensure their survival and development, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and to ensure freedom of expression and association. Article 12 asserts that States "shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (UN 1989).

Dearing (1995) amplified the concepts of spiritual, moral and religious education in the following manner. Spiritual development in an educational context means awareness and reflection upon one's experiences; questioning and exploring the meaning of experience; understanding and evaluating the possible responses and interpretations; developing personal views and insights; and applying these insights to one's own life. Moral development, like spiritual development, is a multi-faceted concept and includes such aspects as the knowledge of, and willingness to live by, codes and conventions of conduct delineated by God, as well as the ones agreed by society (non-statutory and those prescribed by law); and the ability to make judgements on moral issues in the light of criteria based on responsible judgements. Personal morality is the composite of beliefs and values of individuals, of the particular social, cultural and religious groups to which they belong, and of the laws and customs of the wider society. Children need to be introduced to concepts of 'right' and 'wrong' from an early age so as to cultivate moral behavior as a set of instinctive habits. Schooling plays a major role in establishing the foundations of a viable value system. School activities and interventions assume that, with time, children realize that life situations will constantly arise where 'rights' and 'wrongs' are not universal truths, that they will need to make considered and morally consistent decisions in different situations and, more importantly, learn to take responsibility for their decisions.

Most forms of school-based religious education vary according to the approach to religion that is adopted—that is, teaching *about* religion, *for* religion and/or *through* religion. Even in secular schools, teaching for and through religion offers manifold opportunities to teach values, morality, ethics and civics with a focus on rights, responsibilities and respect for differences. And while religious education has the potential to promote values of truth, justice and respect for all, it also has the potential to teach the opposite of these. There are grey areas between evangelizing, indoctrination, brainwashing and mere neutral knowledge transfer. Public schooling, as the dominant provider of education in most countries, is responsible for moulding students' ethical concepts regarding personal and collective living. Whether it remains religiously neutral is another matter and not under consideration here.

Muslim countries: A historical perspective[2]

This section traces the evolving political contexts of Muslim countries, highlighting influences on the 'Islamic resurgence' and a consolidated Islamic world-view.

Today's Muslim countries are largely the outcome of diverse political and geographical factors. Within a few centuries after the prophet's death in 632 CE, Islam spread with electrifying speed to some three continents. During this era of 'Muslim explosion' (Ahmed 1999), Islam spread to South and South-East Asia, southern Spain and Eastern Europe, North Africa and, by the eighteenth century, to the Americas. Colonization challenged the Islamic world in the nineteenth century. Out of the fifty-seven OIC States, all but three were colonized. Some Muslim states (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey) gained independence in the aftermath of the First World War; most others were decolonized after the Second World War. The world's Muslim population is presently estimated at 1.6-1.9 billion, or approximately 22-27 percent of the world's population. Regional figures for 2003 indicate that Africa hosts nearly 54 percent of all Muslims, while Asia and Europe are home to roughly 31 and 7 percent, respectively, of the total Muslim population. Most Muslim countries fall in the low- to middle-income bracket. The high fertility rate in most Muslim countries, coupled with a high concentration of young adults, increases their vulnerability to civil conflict (Cincotta, Engelman and Anastasion 2003). Human development indicators tend to be low in most Muslim countries, making a case for a low quality of life known by the citizens of these countries. Some contend that, politically, Muslim countries have a poor record of showing solidarity to safeguard their identity, honour and interests (Syed 2005).

Colonization and imperialism became the harbingers of many fundamental changes in the Muslim world (Al-e-Ahmed 1980), and initiated an era of introspection. Western colonization affected all sectors of the economy and society, including education. From the eighteenth century onward, Muslim reformers appeared in different parts of the Muslim world and, in the late twentieth century, various organizations mushroomed to guard Muslim identity against 'westernization' and to promote Islamic culture (e.g., *Ikhwan al-muslimin* in Egypt or the *Jamaat-e-Islami* in Pakistan). Such organizations promoted an alternative, Islamic worldview for a whole spectrum of political, economic, governmental and social issues. These reformist movements shaped attitudes towards the west and the essence of Muslim identity and, depending upon the reformist ideology, ranged between two extremes in terms of spirit, form and action (Shepard 1987). Academic and educational institutions resulting from these movements varied as well, some acting as instruments of change and others as guardians of tradition (Zaman 2002).

The Middle-East War of 1967 proved to be a watershed and, coupled with other events such as the Iranian revolution, impacted a whole range of Islamic concepts relating to political, economic, cultural and educational orientations. The strengthening of nationalism brought together reformist forces, irrespective of religious leanings, to work alongside each other for political independence. Calls for a Muslim *Ummah* [community or people] intensified with the establishment of Muslim nation-states. The

formation of the OIC was one such response. In recent years, Islamic revivalism from an extremist perspective—what is often labelled as 'fundamentalism'—has in some cases manifested itself in acts of violence, such as the New York and Washington D.C. attacks of September 2001, the 2004 Madrid bombings and the 2005 London bombings. This fundamentalist extremism must be separated from the humane and gentle core of the religious creed that is Islam. In the wake of 9/11, a lot of anger in the Muslim world has been projected outwards, especially towards western countries, and yet at the same time considerable angst has been directed inwards. The rhetoric repeatedly emanating from the Muslim world maintains the historical emphasis on Islamization and Muslim identity, but it is increasingly intermingled with the need to "play a significant role in projecting a moderate image of the Muslim *Ummah*" (Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, quoted in *Dawn* 2005: 4). The OIC has initiated reforms to make itself more dynamic, proactive and a true representative of the *Ummah*. It is hoped that with more introspection by Muslim countries, the threat from extremists will diminish accordingly.

Religious revival is visible in much of the world (Ahmed 1999). Consider, for example, evangelical Christianity in the USA and Hinduism in India. In the Muslim world, too, initiatives to define the relevance (or irrelevance) of the message of Islam for today's modernized and globalized world are growing. There are ongoing debates over the *Qur'an* and its interpretations; the *hadith* and their authenticity; the differentiation of *Meccan* and *Medinan surahs*; the nature of Islamic law and *shari'a*; the difference between *shari'a* and *fiqh*; the distinction between *ibadat* (God's worship) and *muamalat* (social obligations); and the role of *ulema* (Islamic scholars) and the rulers/government. The debates over possible legal reforms in the case of women's rights and the rights of minorities are especially pronounced. Questions are also raised over the legality of *ulema* as guardians/custodians of faith and the myriad of interpretations. The most common contention is that, since Islam does not have an ordained clergy, experts of all specialties are required to resolve contemporary issues (*ijtehad*) that are usually beyond the scope of religious scholars, thus ascribing to a more inclusive notion of the religious scholar.

Although Islamic traditionalists aspire for the *shari'a* to be the rule of the land, the problem of implementation, within the accepted framework of modernity, poses considerable challenges. Since the *shari'a* has not been codified according to the canons of modern law, there tend to be differences in legal decisions, even among Islamic jurists of the same school (Nagata 1994). This raises differences of position on various social, educational and cultural issues within a country, which influence *inter alia* the establishment of a fundamental identity for its citizens. At another level, such existing differences among Islamic States produce variations in legal rulings and thus grouping Islamic countries on the basis of their religion alone is extremely problematic.

Islamic education and education in Muslim countries

This section discusses how the Islamic world-view influenced Islamic education from being an all-inclusive phenomenon to a situation today where it has been reduced to the mere transmission of religious education. This discussion helps explain why the lines of division between education in Muslim countries and Islamic (religious) education, which many use synonymously, tend to be blurred.

Knowledge *(Ilm)* plays a central role in the Muslim's attitude towards life, work and being (Hilgendorf 2003). God and knowledge are inseparable: without knowledge, one cannot know God and without God, there is no true knowledge. The organization of the traditional curriculum under Islam has been, and continues to be, based upon the recognition that the *Qur'an* is the core, pivot and gateway of learning (Al-Saud 1979) and is considered the basis for the teaching of all disciplines (Husain and Ashraf 1979).

Education in Islam dates back to the prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him), who explained and interpreted his revelations in the mosque. Mosques became the centres of instruction and such explanatory circles became the norm. While mosques and mosque schools (*kuttubs,* also known as *Qur'anic* schools) continued to offer religious learning and basic education, *madrasahs* were established to formalize the need for higher education. With the break-up of the Muslim Empire, *madrasahs*, which were supported by the ruling class, lost patronage and social support; and subsequently they had to resort to more rigorous religious education. Different *madrasahs* used different curricular models and offered a different quality of education. For example, the *Dars-I-nizami* (a popular curricular model)*, Deo-bandi madrasahs, Farangi-Mahal* (pre-1850)*, Nadwat al-Ulema* (post 1870s) and some others were intended to produce scholars and intellectuals. Their syllabi focused on language, metaphysics, rhetoric and logic. Other schools focused more narrowly on religion (Peters 1996). Emphasis on religious education was further consolidated by infighting among different religious sects, who sought to use education as a vehicle for enhancing their denominational doctrine to the detriment of creative thought and experimentation (Hilgendorf 2003). Many propounded that the 'gate of *ijtihad*' (knowledge based upon reasoning) was closed for future independent or rational inquiry (Mehmet 1990), giving way to *taqlid* (acceptance of past knowledge without question) as the order of the day (Gil'adi 1992). *Qur'anic* schools faced a similar fate. Over the years *Qur'anic* schools, for various reasons, did not expand their curriculum and were therefore not deemed competent to provide an education suited to contemporary societal needs.

At present, religious schools (both *Qur'anic* schools and *madrasahs*) tend to attract poorer children who cannot afford the fees of western-style schools. This not only creates disparities in access to quality education, but also in further learning and employment opportunities for children belonging to different social strata (Mernissi 1992). Not only is this instrumental in creating animosity between classes, it also translates into a rejection of the west, mostly by the have-nots, who are mainly students of the *madrasahs* or the public school system. It is further buttressed by anger towards governing elites who are seen as puppets of the West. These conditions may engender

the widespread indignation towards the west and western lifestyles, rather than religious teaching, but this contention warrants greater in-depth study.

At present, the educational indicators of most OIC members are rather dismal. The average primary school enrolment ratio for all OIC countries is about 81 percent, while for some ten countries it is less than 50 percent. The average secondary school enrolment ratio for all OIC countries is 45 percent, with some thirty countries falling below 30 percent. The average university enrolment ratio for all OIC countries is about 11 percent. It is regrettable that nearly twenty-three OIC nations have an adult literacy rate of 50 percent or below. Only twenty nations have literacy rates greater than 80 percent. Muslim nations have obviously emphasized education, especially science and technology, in order to keep pace with the modern world. However, school quality and the impact of education are another matter. Indeed, a large segment of the population in these countries does not have access to any kind of schooling. Nevertheless, though the modern reformers in Muslim countries faced the stereotype of westernized or Europeanized Islam, they did manage to bring to the fore the issue of redefining Muslim intellect. Educational reforms successfully transformed curricula and raised questions about the blind following of tradition. Despite efforts by most Muslim states to modernize, some thinkers blame the countries themselves for depriving their populace of their heritage (i.e., allowing most students to vegetate in a state of semi-science while the elite few benefit from western education) due to the level of teaching in its institutions (Mernissi 1992).

Following independence, many countries tried to revive traditional values by indigenizing the curricula of their colonial rulers and, in the case of Muslim countries, the school curriculum was 'Islamized'. The issue of whether this 'Islamization' was truly Islamic deserves further scrutiny. In any case, the main outcome was the establishment of parallel systems of educational institutions comprising a mix of the traditional and the secular. (This pattern was also visible in other social institutions.) Modern, allegedly western education and 'technical' (Habermas 1974) knowledge—with universal applicability though created and defined in advanced industrial states—were imported with ease and with relatively little modification by developing nations and most Muslim states. (Lately however, alternatives to western science are being encouraged in some fields like medicine.) This dependence was stronger in higher education than in primary schooling, which was expected to reflect national and local cultures. Areas of 'private' (Berger and Luckman 1967) or 'practical' (Habermas 1974) knowledge—which are found in informal and intimate human relationships and often taught as spiritual and moral education in subjects like religious education, history, social studies, arts, music and literature)—more closely followed national or local heritages. It was precisely these curricular subjects that were indigenized (Islamized in the case of Muslim countries) after political independence (Lewin 1985).

Types of educational institutions in Muslim countries

Historical and political processes in Muslim countries, as shown above, have narrowed the concepts of schooling and Islamic education to mere education *for* and *through* religion. The following paragraphs further amplify this point by tracing the evolution of *madrasahs*, which were a major educational institution in Muslim countries.

Traditionally speaking, mosques have been the essential context for learning in the Muslim world. From early times, the *kuttub* provided the first educational experiences for Muslim believers. Everybody, regardless of class or status, attended the same school. The curricular content of the *kuttub* focused on basic education. It taught young boys and girls how to read and write, and provided them a basic foundation in essential subjects like Arabic grammar, mathematics, and *Qur'anic* recitation and memorization. The importance of *kuttubs* cannot be underestimated. They were central to civil life and were the main avenue for the provision of public basic education. As is the case today, there was no segregation between boys and girls in *kuttubs*. Segregation only began at the higher *madrasah* level. There, theology, philosophy, science, Arabic grammar and law were taught to advanced students. From the tenth century, *madrasahs* developed into full-fledged colleges and universities and played a fundamental role in the foundation of European institutions of higher education (Nasr 1987; Al-Attas 1979). *Madrasahs* were located in major mosques in important urban centres and secured their reputation from the particular sheikhs and imams who taught there. Well-known imams attracted students from all over the Islamic world.

Madrasah, an Arabic word, literally means a 'place of instruction'. The term *madrasah* is typically used as a generic title for all schools teaching Islamic subjects including, but not limited to, the *Qur'an*, *hadith* [prophetic traditions] and *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence]). The contents and teaching methods of such schools are considered fundamentally similar. Nevertheless, different *madrasahs* offer a varying quality of education, have different sectarian affiliations and even offer different levels of instruction. Some, like the *Deo-bandi madrasahs* of South Asia, aim to develop cadres of scholars and intellectuals and thus place greater emphasis on language, metaphysics, rhetoric and logic. Others are more narrowly focused on religion.

Traditional Islamic education in *madrasahs* comprises two broad fields: the *manqulat* (the 'transmitted' subjects) and the *ma'qulat* (the 'rational' or 'secular' subjects). *Manqulat* includes: *Qur'anic* exegesis (*tafsir*); prophetic traditions (*hadith*); Arabic grammar (*sarf*), syntax (*nahw*) and language/literature (*adab*); jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and principles of jurisprudence (*usul ul-fiqh*); and rhetoric (*balaghat*). The *ma'qulat* includes logic *(mantiq)*; philosophy (*falsafa or hikmat*); theology (*kalam*); mathematics/astronomy (*riyaziyyat*); and medicine (*tibb*). *Madrasahs* varied in their jurisprudential exclusiveness/inclusiveness (some being attached to a particular *madhab* [school of jurisprudence], while others accommodated teachers from different schools of jurisprudence). The *madrasahs* also differed in their emphasis between the *manqulat* and *ma'qulat* and in other respects (e.g., some gave more attention to *hadith*, while others focused on *sarf/nahw*). *Madrasahs* in Spain, where Muslims reigned for

nearly 800 years, are a classic example of the harmonious interweaving of Islamic/spiritual with secular/earthly knowledge. This coincided with a period in which Muslim scholars contributed to advances in the fields of science, technology and philosophy, among others (Malik 2005).

As Muslim societies were colonized, secular educational institutions were promoted by colonizers and came to supersede *madrasahs* and other Islamic institutions. This was the beginning of disconnect between the two. Modern education in these secular institutions catered to, and helped define, emergent elites, leaving religious education offered in *madrasahs* for the poor. The idea of a separation between the state and religion, emphasized by Western administrations, was viewed by most Muslims as heresy. *Madrasahs* in the Muslim world responded by abandoning the pursuit of modern sciences and secular subjects, thus denying students exposure to secular areas of knowledge. The most radical shift in the contents of *madrasahs* occurred in the sub-continent and, to some extent, in Indonesia. In South Asia, especially Pakistan, politics and political gains were the main justification for the revival of religious education (i.e., Islamist ideology) in these religious institutions. Ironically, it was the financial support of the USA and European countries, which was instrumental in propagating the strict mode of Islamic practice (International Crisis Group 2002, quoted in Zia 2003a; Anzar 2003). At present, *madrasahs* in some countries (e.g., Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) ascribe to *Wahabi* doctrines of practice, while other countries like Indonesia have religious schools that teach, by and large, a moderate form of Islam encompassing Sufism. Indeed, many schools in the South-East Asia region maintain a balance between the religious and the secular. Religious institutions like *madrasahs* can be state-funded and/or privately funded. Contrary to popular understanding, *madrasahs* cater to a small percentage of the population, while remaining a part of the overall educational infrastructure in Muslim countries. Very few *madrasahs* teach an extremist perspective of religion, but as religious institutions in Muslim countries are under increasing international scrutiny, many governments are seeking to regulate the *madrasahs* and their curriculum.

The next section charts the development of modern schooling and how it evolved as a distinct stream as compared to the indigenous (*madrasah*) schools.

The development of 'modern schools'

The expansion of 'modern' schooling, an international phenomenon since the mid-nineteenth century, changed the organization and transmission of knowledge in both Muslim and non-Muslim regions of the world. In Muslim countries, European colonizers introduced and expanded modern forms of schooling. Modern education in Muslim countries incorporated allegedly secular subjects for mass education, predominantly geared to opening up economic opportunities. Following independence, modern schools were typically consolidated by national governments into public school systems—a development viewed by many as an import from the west and/or established by western-educated policy-makers. Overall, national systems of education

in colonized countries were closely linked, especially at the upper levels, to institutions in the United Kingdom or France, as these were the primary colonisers of Muslim states. As a result of their being 'imported' from the west, modern schools became the subject of considerable distrust, which partly explains the neglect of science and technology in these countries. It is clear that, for various reasons, education did not undergo stages of adaptation, appropriation and ownership in Muslim countries. Modern schools, with their centralized planning, administration, delivery of teaching, modes of assessment, knowledge codified in textbooks, and spatial organization (by age groupings and subjects) were totally different from the traditional *madrasahs.* Nevertheless, these and other indigenous schools have tended to survive, often as a discrete and parallel stream of schooling. Many researchers though (Somel 2001; Ringer 2001; Fortna 2002) make it a point to disengage concepts of 'modernization' from 'westernization', especially 'cultural modernization'.

In today's globalized world, education is increasingly seen as a passport for military and economic success—and scientific achievement. Indeed, OIC nations, being aware of the significance of an educated and skilled populace, have placed it high on their policy agenda. The widespread criticism of the 'modern' (public) schools in Muslim countries is partly based on the perceived threat to Islamic morals and culture, especially those related to women (Ringer 2001). The debate over the influence of modern education on morals has also been an issue in other countries, such as the Russian Federation, Japan and the USA (Fortna 2002). Many societies with differing religious and cultural backgrounds have struggled with similar issues. Notwithstanding the effectiveness of education and efficient education systems, the role of western education in Muslim nations has been discussed for its seemingly negative impact. Starrett (1998) describes the case of Egypt, where mass education is cited as a force, which fostered a social, cultural, intellectual and political climate for formidable Islamist movements to emerge. This characterization could be applied to other parts of the Muslim world. The backfiring of government policies consolidated the position of the Islamists (Starrett 1998). In the discussion over state-organized mass education, the 'effects of civil society' are overlooked (Mazawi 1999) or there is a tendency to rely on data from official sources, which creates an incomplete or even distorted picture of educational processes and realities (Fortna 2002). Reliable data and credible analyses are crucial for further clarity in discourses like these. Other distortions in comparisons arise as a result of differences in teaching environments and teaching methodologies, but these will not be discussed here.

In short, public schooling in Muslim countries has evolved as the predominant way of education. The traditional mode of education, the *madrasah*, has narrowed its curriculum to mere transmission of religious education, while public schooling has evolved as a more inclusive phenomenon.

Basic values in Islam

The section briefly delineates the basic philosophy of Islam and its values relating to human rights, tolerance and citizenship. In doing so, it seeks to place in context the Islamic teachings that are implicit in religious education in Muslim countries, be it as a component of the curriculum in public schooling or in religious schools (*madrasahs*).

Islam urges a balance between *deen* (religion) and *duniya* (worldly affairs) and a good Muslim has to participate fully in both. This balance and order was modelled on the life of the Holy Prophet and for all Muslims it is deemed the ideal to follow. Even so, it is not the achievement of the ideal alone that begets the reward; it is also each person's effort and motivation, according to his or her capacity and context towards the ideal, which is deemed equally worthy of reward. When Arabs came in contact with Greek science and philosophy in the ninth century, there emerged a new breed of Muslims dedicated to an ideal known as *falsafah*. Their aim was to live rationally in accordance with the laws that governed the universe. According to Islam, Allah created the world and everything within it is amongst the actions of Allah. Scientific activity in Islam emerged as a search for an understanding of Allah's world; the outcomes of this activity subsequently inspired important developments in a range of disciplines.

Islam preaches moderation and has directed its focus basically at the purification of motives (Abu Rida 1998), the ultimate test being action and behavior, not for any worldly reason, but to fulfil Allah's dictates. Thus, good deeds are judged in accordance with their value and the intention of the doer. Muslims derive guidance from the *hadith* (sayings of the prophet) and *sunnah* (life of the prophet). Islam is the law of the individual as well as of the society. The emphasis is on unity and rejection of everything that leads to divisiveness.

Rights and responsibilities in Islam are characterized by equity (all people are regarded as equal in terms of their rights and responsibilities for their own actions) and balance (regarded as moderation). Muslim law warns against the abuse of rights (Negra 1998). Most scholars divide rights in Islam into two parts: the rights of God and the rights of human beings. The former comprises rights that no one shares with Him, such as acts of devotion; the latter are divided into four groups: natural, personal, civil and political. Especially noteworthy are the rights of non-Muslims in Islamic countries. Governed by humanist principles, once a person fulfils the obligations for citizenship (paying tax) nothing distinguishes a non-Muslim from a Muslim. According to Islam, rights are entirely owned by God and human beings (as vice-regents of God) can enjoy them in their relationship with God. Islam clearly emphasizes human duties and moral obligations and, as such, human rights are a function of human obligation and not their antecedent (Nasr 1980). For Muslims, *shari'a* (Islamic jurisprudence) is the source of human rights, which defines the parameters of human activities.

There are strong allegations of mistreatment of women in Islam. Throughout the world, and in Muslim countries, measures of gender equality show a bias in favour of the male (*Human Development Report*, UNDP 1995). The Gender-related development index (GDI) of Muslim countries is considerably lower in comparison to that of

western countries. In addition, issues concerning women become more pronounced with the transformation of traditional social structures since women often bear the brunt of such crises, due to poverty, urbanization and greater illiteracy. Again, these issues can be seen in most developing countries as well as in Muslim countries. *Hijab* (the religious word for modesty, but commonly understood as veiling) is another misunderstood concept, especially in the west. It is further complicated by manifold attitudes toward it within the Muslim world. Greater study is needed to establish if the restrictions placed on women are due to Islamic teachings or because of the exigencies of a male-dominated society over the centuries. Women occupy a special place in Islam and women are perceived, partly because of the ways in which religion is embedded in local social and cultural values (Delaney 1991; Zia 2003a), as most vulnerable to radical change and influence. These influences, though, can vary according to class, region and status. Suffice it here to say that, historically, women's role in Muslim societies has largely been restricted. The teachings of Islam clearly place both sexes as 'equivalent' rather than 'equal', whereby social functions and expectations differ across sexes but are complementary, both within and outside the family (Hijab 1995).

The fact that teaching *through* and *for* religion is the *modus operandi* in the schools of Muslim countries, should not be a cause for concern. Some scholars, as noted above, propound that the values espoused in Islam and Islamic teachings endorse 'living together'. As in most contemporary societies, Islam insists on the adherence to the same rights, obligations and duties to oneself and others. The basic difference lies in the superimposition of the spiritual dimension as the primary motive (Zia 2003b). Understanding evolving value systems in Muslim countries necessitates consideration of the nature and impact of curricular contents, together with other contextual factors that directly or indirectly impact upon the spiritual and moral development of the child.

Religious and moral education in Muslim countries' curricula

Cross-national analyses of official curricular data for recent decades indicate that the intended amounts of annual instructional time, as well as the overall composition of public school curricula, are quite similar in the Arab States to those found in other regions of the world (Benavot and Amadio 2004). Differences are mainly one of degree than of kind. This section probes the religious and moral education component of the school curriculum in two ways: first, by extending the analyses to all countries with a significant Muslim population (i.e., members of OIC[3]); and second, by examining in greater detail the emphasis given to religious education, on the one hand, and moral and spiritual education, on the other, in sub-groups of Muslim countries. To be sure, there are other factors in Muslim countries, both within and outside the school system, which affect student learning in these areas, but official curricular policies leave an indelible mark on pupil orientations and attitudes.

The analyses presented below draw upon the IBE database on curricular time allocations (IBE-UNESCO 2005a), and follow the methodology used by Benavot and Amadio (2004). Table 7.1 presents the proportion of OIC countries teaching religious

education and moral education in 1985 and 2000 and, of these countries, the mean percentage of total curricular time devoted to these two subjects. Table 7.2 then compares the emphasis placed on religious education and moral education between Arab States and non-Arab countries, which are members of the OIC.

Table 7.1: Religious and moral education in the school curricula of Muslim countries belonging to the OIC, 1985 and 2000

Religious and moral education	1985 Grades		
	1-3	4-6	7-8
Number of OIC countries with official curricular information	25	25	29
Proportion of countries that teach:			
Religious education	64	76	72
Moral education	28	32	17
Of countries that teach the subject, mean percentage of total curricular time devoted to:			
Religious education	13	11	8
Range	2-33	2-32	3-24
Moral education	5	4	4
Range	2-8	1-10	1-8

Religious and moral education	2000 Grades		
	1-3	4-6	7-8
Number of OIC countries with official curricular information	43	43	38
Proportion of countries that teach:			
Religious education	58	60	66
Moral education	23	23	13
Of countries that teach the subject, mean percentage of total curricular time devoted to:			
Religious education	11	10	7
Range	3-27	3-16	3-14
Moral education	3	2	3
Range	1-6	1-6	2-5

Based on: IBE-UNESCO (2005a).

Table 7.1 reports that during the 1980s approximately two-thirds of Muslim countries (64-72 percent) included religious education in their official school curriculum and allocated about 10 percent of total instructional time to this subject area. Moral education, on the other hand, was incorporated in far fewer national school curricula (17-32 percent) and was allocated only 5 percent of total instructional time. In comparisons across grade levels, religious education was taught with greater frequency towards the end of primary education and beginning of secondary education, while relative time allotments for this subject declined, on average, in the lower secondary grades. Moral and spiritual education was less prevalent and allocated less instructional time in lower secondary education.

In the most recent period (circa 2000), the prevalence and relative emphasis on religious and moral education in Muslim countries have declined. Smaller proportions of Muslim countries explicitly include these two subject areas in the school curriculum (58-66 percent include religious education and 13-23 percent include moral education) and time allocations, on average, tend to be lower. Since these over-time trends are based on different sets of Muslim countries, they are not strictly comparable. Nevertheless, constant case analyses verify the basic trend—namely, while religious education and, to a much lesser extent, moral and spiritual education are important components of the intended school curriculum of Muslim countries, the overall prominence of these subjects areas has declined during the 1985-2000 period.

These findings are placed in sharper focus in Table 7.2, which compares patterns in Arab States[4] and in non-Arab Muslim countries. The findings reported in Table 7.2 clearly indicate that religious education has been, and continues to be, an extremely important subject area in the primary and secondary school curriculum of Arab States. Since the 1980s, religious education has been taught in over 85 percent of all Arab countries throughout grades 1-8. In non-Arab Muslim countries, by contrast, religious education was taught less frequently in the 1980s and its prevalence has declined over the past two decades. Differences in relative time allocations to religious education, while smaller, favour Arab countries over non-Arab Muslim countries.

With respect to moral and spiritual education, a different pattern emerges. It is mainly in non-Arab Muslim states where this subject is given greater prominence, not so much in terms of official time allocations, but due to the fact of its being explicitly included in the official curriculum. The greater prevalence of moral education in non-Arab Muslim countries is found in both time periods.

In short, a basic pattern emerges from these analyses. Whereas schools in Arab countries foster the spiritual and moral development of young children almost exclusively through religiously framed subjects, schools in most non-Arab Muslim countries tend to transmit value-laden contents via two subject areas: moral education as well as religious education. The importance of moral education as an explicit component of official curricular policy in the latter group overlaps with the emphasis given this subject in most Asian (non-Muslim) countries. Finally, there is evidence that, at least in some Muslim countries, the relative place of religious and moral education in the official school curriculum has become less salient over time.

Table 7.2: Religious and moral education in the school curricula of Arab States and non-Arab States belonging to the OIC, 1985 and 2000

Religious and moral education	1985 Grades 1-3		Grades 4-6		Grades 7-8	
	Arab States	Non-Arab States	Arab States	Non-Arab States	Arab States	Non-Arab States
Number of OIC countries with official curricular information	14	11	14	11	14	15
Proportion of countries that teach:						
Religious education	86	45	93	55	86	60
Moral education	14	45	14	55	14	33
Of countries that teach the subject, mean percentage of total curricular time devoted to:						
Religious education	14	8	12	8	10	5
Range	5-33	2-15	2-32	4-13	3-24	3-9
Moral education	6	5	4	4	n/a	4
Range	5-7	2-8	3-6	1-10		1-8
Religious and moral education	2000 Grades 1-3		Grades 4-6		Grades 7-8	
	Arab States	Non-Arab States	Arab States	Non-Arab States	Arab States	Non-Arab States
Number of OIC countries with official curricular information	19	24	19	24	18	20
Proportion of countries that teach:						
Religious education	89	33	89	38	94	40
Moral education	11	33	11	38	11	15
Of countries that teach the subject, mean percentage of total curricular time devoted to:						
Religious education	13	8	10	8	7	7
Range	6-27	3-17	4-16	3-15	3-14	3-11
Moral education	2	2	1	2	2	4
Range	1-3	1-6	1-2	1-6	2-3	3-5

Based on: IBE-UNESCO (2005a).

How different are Muslim and western countries with respect to the official religious component of school curriculum? In terms of the combined time devoted to religious and moral education, the answer is not much. In both periods, circa 1985 and 2000, countries in the OIC group and those in North America and Western Europe (NAWE)[5] allocated very similar amounts of time to these subject areas, with the former allocating, on average, 1 percent more time than the latter (IBE-UNESCO 2005a).

Since 1985 countries in both groups *decreased*, on average, allotted time to religious and moral education—0.6 percent for OIC and 0.8 percent for NAWE. The 'extreme' cases also became more similar: in 1985, the country with the greatest amount of allotted time to religious and moral education in the OIC group was Saudi Arabia (30 percent); in NAWE, it was Luxembourg (18 percent). In 2000, Afghanistan was the OIC country with the largest time allocation to religious and moral education (20 percent) and Israel was the largest in the NAWE group (18 percent). However, to reiterate, official time given to religious and moral education indicates little of the content, much less the quality, of classroom teaching and subsequent student learning.

Conclusion

Schools can consolidate what children learn outside school, but the significance of parenting, the mass media and influential religious, cultural and social organizations should not be underestimated. The whole school, by and large, is geared to nurture the child's spiritual and moral development, with the school curriculum given the overt challenge. Although this aspect of a children's development is largely attributed to religious education, it surely does not have a monopoly.

Schools also play significant roles in the development of responsible and efficacious global citizens. The challenges for religious and moral education are many, especially in a pluralistic, inclusive world. In Muslim and non-Muslim societies alike, it is exceedingly difficult to assess the impacts of religious and moral education on normative or non-normative behavior, even more so on the basis of intended time allocated to religious and moral education in school curricula.

With this in mind, a few things are clear: like most developing countries, Muslim countries face difficult economic and human development challenges; most OIC countries show dismal literacy rates and low school enrolments; Islamic education *per se* and religious education taught in schools for Muslims are not the same; the nature of religion and religious education are interpreted differently by different sects in Islam; most values explicit (or implicit) in Islamic teachings are similar to the values prized in the modern world, but their interpretation, in terms of content and teaching methods, deserve further study; contemporary *madrasahs* cater to the educational needs of the poor and, as such, offer a quality of schooling that has much in common to other public schools catering to poorer social strata; during and after colonization most sectors of Muslim societies underwent 'Islamization'; in some cases Islamization was used as a tool to cling to political power (Zia 2003b); finally, modernity is prized by Muslim

countries, but Muslims tend to be sceptical about western modernity, and consequently secularism as a main characteristic of modernity (Kassim 2005).

Official curricular data shows considerable similarities in the relative emphasis given religious and moral education in both Muslim and western countries. In addition, this emphasis is declining in both groups of countries. In Muslim countries religious (Islamic) education is taught rather than spiritual or moral education—in other words, schools teach *through* and *for* religion, rather than *about* religion. Among Arab States, both Muslim and non-Muslim, where the subject of religious education is widely offered, but little understood, there is an acute need to identify contextual conditions beyond differences of religion. Given the impact of past colonization, it is not unreasonable to expect that religious fervour may move beyond the confines of various religious groups to mass nationalistic movements. Domination, whether forceful or subtle, accentuates issues of religious or cultural identity.

Suffice it here to add that even though religion might be taught differently in schools in Muslim countries, perhaps the impact of religious schooling in Muslim countries is 'overstated' (generally poor enrolment in formal schooling, while a large populace remains out of formal schools; *madrasah* education even if considered dubious is very small; religious education is not an unusually overwhelming part of the curriculum; and, time allocation for the same has been on decline since the past two decades). More attention needs to be given to other in-school factors like the content of religious education and teaching methods.

Undoubtedly, the transmission of values in a culturally and religiously diverse world is a formidable challenge for schools. Producing global citizens when outside contextual realities often offset the abstract (or concrete) school-based moral and spiritual learning is a real dilemma. It clearly deserves further scrutiny since it concerns both educational stakeholders and wider communities. Future discussions should draw upon insights from attitudinal surveys of children in and out of school, as well as the relative impacts of different time allocations to religious education or moral education.

_____

Notes

1.   For more information on the OIC see: www.oic-oci.org
2.   The first sections of this chapter draw upon another work of the author: Globalization, Modernization and Education in Muslim Countries (Zia 2006).
3.   The 57 members of the OIC include: [Arab States] Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen; [Non-Arab States] Afghanistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei-Darussalam, Burkina-Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrghyz Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Suriname, Tajikistan, Togo, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Uzbekistan.
4.   Grouping of Arab States was based on EFA regions; see UNESCO GMR 2005.
5.   The NAWE Countries are: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and USA.