

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ISLAMIC STUDIES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

By

Adamu Abubakar Muhammad

Email: abubakaradamu1980@gmail.com; Tel: 09036206781

Bashir Ahmad

Email: bashiribnahmad@gmail.com; Tel: +234 803 664 9324

Department of Religious studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University of Kashere,

Gombe State, Nigeria

&

Abdullahi Uthman Imam

Email: abdallahazare@gmail.com; Tel: +234 806 067 9705

Department of Islamic Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Aminu Saleh College of Education Azare, Bauchi State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examines the critical analysis on the challenges of teaching Islamic studies in Nigerian universities through investigating the number of challenges facing its teaching, learning, and development that are always bring suffering or failure for the designed goals of the course. Various methods have been adopted but still suffering from multiple challenges. In response to these and with the adoption of descriptive and analytical methods were used for the study. The research findings revealed that the existing challenges in the process of teaching and learning of Islamic studies in Nigerian Universities have a direct link with methodological, language efficiency, and technological aspects of teaching and learning. It recommends that each teaching method such as lecture, tutorial and e-learning services are to be conducted with different teaching techniques. It also recommends that government should as a matter of necessity increase effort on modern training of Islamic studies teachers and equip them with modern teaching and learning materials to compete with global challenges in the educational sector.

Key Words: Challenges, Teaching, Islamic Studies, University, Nigeria.

Introduction

Education is an essential ingredient for human development, social justice, equity, and religious harmony; and in almost all aspects of life, Islam as a religion enjoins its adherents to seek useful knowledge from birth to grave. Islamic studies on the other hand train the sensibility of students in such a manner that their relationship with the creator, human relation, attitude to life, approach to all kinds of knowledge, and general decisions are all regulated by the value of Islam.

Ideally, Islamic studies as a course in Nigerian Universities should be able to respond to the challenges brought by modernity at the level of theory and application in teaching and learning processes if developed to serve as the relevant field to cope with the contemporary needs of the modern world in light of the principles as stated in the glorious Qur'an and Sunnah. Undeniably, Islam should be part of global modernity and its learning processes should be taught and delivered in line with modern technologies. If global and human history is traced accordingly, Islamic studies have total eligibility to retain all principles of Islam and to inspire all human beings on the ways to live in this modern world in peaceful co-existence. Unfortunately, the current situation of the Muslim

Ummah signals the failure of Islamic studies to address these challenges that leads the Muslim Ummah to backwardness and inaction (Muhammad, F.A et/al, 2011).

Qur'an and Sunnah collectively supported and even urged Muslims to be concerned about education and scholarship, this statement gains support from the first revelation of the Qur'an which centers mainly on education (Qur'an 96: 1 – 5). The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) repeatedly advised Muslims to search for knowledge from the cradle to the grave, even if it will take them to any far place as far as they can reach. Allah Almighty never ordered the noble Prophet to seek proliferation of anything besides knowledge as stated in Qur'an 20:14.

Whenever Islam is introduced to any place in history, it is always introduced alongside religious education, it always paid attention to the teachings and learning to both males and females.

(Ramadan, 2004; Rosnani, 2005) opined that scholars relate the failure of Islamic studies to the inability of Islamic education to nurture the critical thinking among students that led to Islamic education freeze and fails to cope with challenges of the contemporary world.

Actually, numerous calls to develop an appropriate method of teaching and learning in the field of Islamic studies more especially at the university level to solve the above-mentioned challenges have been voiced since the early past decade by some Muslim scholars such as Abduh (1905) and al-Afghani (1897).

Since the late 70s, the failure of teaching and learning in the field of Islamic studies remained as a seriously debating and discussing issue, and in 1977 a conference was held in Makkah to identify the main problems of teaching and learning processes in Muslim countries more especially the teaching of Islamic studies at university level and to proffer solutions and way-forward. However, only some resolutions of this conference have been implemented such as the formation of the International Islamic University of Malaysia and many more (Muhammad, F.A et/al, 2011).

Concept of Islamic Education

Islam as a universal religion appreciates and recommends knowledge acquisition for human development and recognition of Almighty Allah as the creator of the cosmos. This is why the very first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was specifically on seeking knowledge thus:

“Read in the name of your Lord who creates. He creates man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Read! Your Lord is most bountiful. He who teaches (the use of pen) He teaches man that which he knows not” (Qur'an 96:1-5)

The above verses command man to seek knowledge, not by reading alone but also by making use of pen for record purposes and other human development which get its early support with the inception of Islam where education has been given priority over all other things. This could be evidenced by the fact that the messenger of God (S.A.W) was a teacher as he was sent to the whole world to educate them on the essence of life. This is not only on verbal claiming but also manifested in his actions as he served as a great teacher that really laid much value on education.

The definition of Islamic education may vary according to who is writing about it and from which angle. Some emphasize the “tarbiyah,” or character development.

Others define it as religious education, with emphasis on the Qur'an and other basic Islamic teachings and values. For the purpose of this research, Islamic education refers to *tarbiyah* and any other topics specifically related to that development (Amr, A, etal 2006).

The meaning of Islamic education seems to vary according to who is writing about it and from which angle. For example, Muslim scholars interested in studying the content and substance of Islamic education emphasize the character development (*tarbiyah*) aspect of that education. Thus, in this way, Islamic education began. Pious and learned Muslims (*mu' allim* or *mudarris*), dedicated to making the teachings of the Qur'an more accessible to the Islamic community, taught the faithful in what came to be known as the *kuttāb* (plural, *katātīb*). The *kuttāb* could be located in a variety of venues: mosques, private homes, shops, tents, or even out in the open. Historians are uncertain as to when the *katātīb* was first established, but with the widespread desire of the faithful to study the Koran, *katātīb* could be found in virtually every part of the Islamic empire by the middle of the eighth century. The *kuttāb* served a vital social function as the only vehicle for formal public instruction for primary-age children and continued so until Western models of education were introduced in the modern period. Even at present, it has exhibited remarkable durability and continues to be an important means of religious instruction in many Muslim countries including the African countries including Nigerian state (Wikipedia,2021).

Most of their writings focus on how to ensure the proper Islamic development of Muslim students. Others focus on the historical models of religious education before and after Western colonization, with a clear preference for models that existed prior to colonization.

In addition, several institutions in the Muslim world offer education that relates to religion. The term "religious education" has been used in the media without clear parameters as to what is religious education and what is not. Religious education may refer to that type of education offered by Islamic education institutions from early stages to graduate education. Religious education may also refer to the religion class offered within the general education system in most Muslim countries. Finally, religious education is also offered by numerous private and community institutions with a focus on Qur'anic memorization and community education in basic Islamic teachings and values (Adam, 2021).

Infact, the philosophy of Islamic education is to inculcate moral values that constitute a wide range of virtues such as honesty, integrity, tolerance, truthfulness, self-discipline, humility, patience, industry, and others. Hence, morality should be the basis of every education given by a country to her citizen in order to record success, as in Islam as a religion, this is exactly what Islamic studies set out to achieve. Consequently, Islam makes the acquisition of knowledge obligatory on all Muslims irrespective of gender, age, tribe, or nation. However, Nigeria being a "secular" nation where freedom of religion is granted, demotes religious education in general and the course of Islamic studies in particular to the background where it considers Islamic studies as an elective subject at a lower educational level and provides no adequate teachers in secondary schools as well as an invaluable course in tertiary education level. (Azeez, A. O & Adeshina, S. T 2013).

Naturally, as a result of the massive changes that occurred in the Muslim world over the past 200 years, the shape and design of teaching Islamic studies as a course at the university level in Nigeria vary from one institution to another. However, after reviewing the Islamic education system in Nigeria, it becomes clear that a system of mixing Islamic and general education is practiced.

Methods of Teaching Islamic Studies in Nigerian Universities.

The teaching of Islamic studies as a course in Nigerian Universities starts its function dominantly in the traditional way with the absence of technological gadgets that help instructors to deliver the teaching and learning affairs successfully (Ashraf, et al 2014).

20th century poses number of critiques targeted at methodology-related factors to teaching and learning of Islamic studies more especially at the university level for effective response to the challenges brought by contemporary needs of applying technological methods in both teaching and learning processes.

As a religion embraced by one-fifth of the world population, there is a dire need for Islamic studies to re-vamp its methodology and approach in order to ensure its continued relevance and as a response to the demands exerted by globalization and presented by modernity. Since the late 1970s, Muslim scholars have seriously discussed this failure and have suggested multiple action plans to address the identified weakness (Muhammad F. A. et al 2011).

A leading scientist in Islam during 1332-1406 AD Ibn Khaldun, stated that the *Qur'an* is the basis of all religious education including reading and writing across the fields (Subh, 1993).

The methods improved by teachers of Islamic studies at the university level in Nigeria depends on their knowledge and preparation and the techniques are too varied because of the motivation of students and their willingness to teach the course (Ahmad, 1989).

Ahmad, M. (1989) suggests that teachers should help their students by focusing on the most important five elements of any discussion between teachers and their students in order to expand and develop their understanding.

1. Concentration on the main goal of the discussion was the first element.
2. Teachers should be aware of the quality of the pitch of the voice (low voice or high voice).
3. The time allocated to the subject can help in the achievement of the desired goal.
4. The quantity of the subject can influence the quality of the class's achievement.
5. The environment of the classroom impacts the targets of the classroom or the subject. So, focusing on these elements will help teachers to teach their students for better understanding.

There are several Islamic teaching methods that are used to teach tertiary level students of religion classes in many Muslim countries including Nigeria. These methods are designated by a 12th century education philosopher, Az-Zarnooji, in a booklet that G.E. von Gruenbaum (1947) translated as *Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (Self) Learning*, which substantially addresses the issues related to this era of teaching and learning. Some of these methods include preaching, advice and commandment, teaching by repetition, also known as *at-Tikrar*, the narrative method, the dialogue method, teaching by metaphors, teaching through practice and application, and teaching by dictation method (Al-Kahledy, 2010).

Globalization causes educational institutions more especially in Nigeria to encounter various challenges and demands, in which they need to play their roles in improving competitiveness and world-class quality education. For example, the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) is a university that integrates *Naqli* and *Aqli* knowledge has engaged the globalization challenge by requiring the adoption of English and Arabic language as a teaching and learning medium with the adaptability of knowledge discipline even though the majority of the lecturers and students are non-speakers of those languages.

For the field of Islamic Studies, the required medium in many Nigerian Universities is the English language since it is part of religious studies course, but almost all the basic sources of Islamic studies namely al-Quran, Hadis, and *Thurath* books are in the Arabic language, this can continues to serve as a factor in successful teaching and learning of Islamic studies as a course in Nigerian Universities (Adam 2021).

In the Nigerian system of education in general and particularly in the teaching Islamic studies as a course at the University level, the application of educational technology has been neglected and non-practiced. It was assumed that since Islamic knowledge is revealed as a sacred message, it should not be analyzed or taught through technology and modified methods.

As Asyafah (2014) stated that the teaching of Islam in the institutions of higher education is still limited to conceptualization and memorization.

As a matter of fact, using innovative teaching methods in the teaching and learning of Islamic studies has been looked at as necessary in our modern time. However, the existing Islamic studies/religious studies departments in Nigerian universities are still need to be improve and equip themselves or be supported on the method of different styles in their teaching and learning process. In some other institutions, even discussion and comprehension through various innovative methods of teaching is not encouraged by the lecturers (Bashir, 2021).

Analysis on the Challenges of Teaching Islamic Studies as a course in Nigerian Universities

The course of Islamic Studies is one of the religious studies course undertakings in Nigerian primary, post-primary schools and at the higher institutions level for decades. However, there are multitudes problems facing its development in both teachings and learning for up to date.

But, obviously, the teaching and learning of Islamic Studies in Nigerian Universities have been confronting unlimited number of problems that are identified and discussed by numerous researchers, writers, speakers and academia in different publications and conferences. The Subject of Islamic studies in Nigeria today is a mere elective subject in some high schools not as a compulsory discipline needed to enrich the faith and intellectual capability of Muslim pupils and students, and even in the Universities, the course is considered as a uncompetitive course (Busari J. M 2018).

The learning of Islamic Studies and its components is essential for every Muslim of any gender and nation because it is the gateway to be more acquaintance with Islam and its teachings. Through this, character building of a Muslim as an individual and a member of a particular society would be developed as asserted by Syed Ali Ashraf (1985) when he defines Islamic education *inter alia*:

....an education which trains the sensibility of students in a manner that builds their attitude to life, approach to all kinds of knowledge and ethical values of Islam.

However, despite these abundant values of Islamic Studies, there are numerous factors (problems and challenges) that are affecting the effectiveness of its teaching in Nigerian universities, these include:

1. **Interest-** Interest has been recognized by researchers in academia as a motivational factor that influences learning and performance. The deep interest of learners at university level in the subject of Islamic Studies goes side by side with the concept and values of Islam and moral teachings learnt in the class and its effectiveness in the heart of the learners and subsequently motivate such student to be of high moral standard from their teachers (Bashir, 2021).

There are two types of interest which enhance students to attain an excellent level of academic performance as advocated Hidi and Renninger (2006); these are: Situational and Individual Interest.

Situational interest involves psychological state of interest that can be generated by specific environmental stimuli while individual Interest connotes relatively enduring pre-disposition to attend to certain objects and events and to engage in certain activities.

Presently, many Nigerian University students lack genuine interest in studying Islamic Studies and they give little or no attention to it and always run or dream after other disciplines to become contemporary professionals but ignorantly forget to insert Islamic teachings into their struggles in order to be morally and ethically professionalized. Finally, as Islamic studies have not received much attention compared to general education, the system faces several challenges (Alokan *et al*, 2013).

2. **Parental Influence-** Parents are the first teachers for their children and their awareness and educational background go a long way to influence a child positively (Alokan *et al*, 2013). They prepare themselves to learn religious practices and principles, good morality and subsequently teach such at home in order to answer the children's questions and curiosity about religious and societal matters. While in other hands as posited by Alokan *et al* (2013) citing David, the illiteracy of the parents could have negative effects on the learner's academic and religious acts due to lack of supports, motivation and reinforcement. It is believed in some quarters that most of the problematic Muslim students and individuals are those neglected children at home in term of Islamic education. Islam emphasized in many areas on parent to teach their children. Allah (S.W.T) narrated the incident of the Luqmān - the wise – while admonishing/teaching his child in order to imitate him (Qur'an 31:12-19). Also the Prophet (S.A.W) commanded his nation to instruct their children upon observing prayer when they are seven years old. (Abu Dawood 495 and Ahmad 6689).

3. **Teacher's Influence** -Professionally, a teacher is someone who is trained, certified and certificated in both theory and practice of education. He is very important in the life cycle of a Student through his brilliance, influence, character, self-discipline and exemplary qualities because he is saddled with responsibility of imparting positive knowledge and information to the life of his students. According to Hippocrates as cited by Umar *et al* (2004), teacher affects eternity, he can never tell where his influence stops. Therefore, the influence of a well-

trained, dedicated, qualified and approachable teacher on moral and academic performance of students in Islamic Studies can never be under-estimated.

A good teacher of Islamic Studies has a responsibility of nurturing and developing his students spiritually, morally and ethically, re-shape their beliefs, characters, moral integrity and intensify their cognitive, affective and psychomotor tendencies to attain excellence. He must also be a counselor for his students to learn and be a role model because he has assumed the position of teacher, parent, discipline master and counselor at the same time. But, sadly today, some of Islamic Studies teachers in Nigerian Universities in particular are hostile, not approachable, not humanitarian, not capable of handling the subject matter of their responsibility, not portraying good personality, failed to be role models and reliable experts, and as such create many un-resolvable problems in the hearts of Muslim University students by scaring them away from class on unnecessary matters or based on their personal interest, exposing them to bad attitudes and beliefs (Zaiton and Hishamuddin, 2012)

4. Teacher-Student Relationship - Various researchers, current and previous ones have an opinion that if the subject instructors give their time to form a good rapport with their students, they can motivate them to acquire a relevant knowledge and be people of good characters and morals if trained well. According to Whitaker (2004), the key variable in the learning process is not the learners, but the instructors and their well plan. According to him, a competent teacher identifies the importance of building good connections with his school children by solving their identified problems and distancing fear in their hearts. Always the factor of teacher's irrelevance to students' affairs affects the learner's moral and behavioral as well as academic experiences.

5. Family and Environmental Variables - According to European Union Monitoring Report of (2013), the level of educational attainment of parents could reflect in the academic achievement of their wards, justifiably the students from educational family can perform better in their studies than those whose parents are either illiterate or possessed low level of education. Furthermore, hereditary factor could also serve as variable in students' behavioral and academic performances. Those children who usually inherit a very high gene from their learned parents perform creditably in good learning environment compared to those who inherit poor gene even if the environment is conducive for learning as asserted by the Community Development, Sound Education, Good Health and Social Life Initiative.

Muola (2010) also posited that the family background also constitutes a distinct variable in student's life because it influences the student physically, intellectually and emotionally. In the same vein, Fantuzzo and Childs (2000) believed that the impact of environment in which the students reside and live cannot be underestimated, this is considered to be consequential for child developmental outcomes such as cognitive ability, school readiness, and academic achievements, ethical and emotional adjustment.

The Prophet (S.A.W) has said:

It is his – born baby – parents who make him a Jew or a Christian
or a Magian quite as beats produce their young with their
limbs perfect. Do you see anything deficient in them?
(*Bukhari 1359 and Muslim 2658*).

If all these afore-mentioned variables are put into consideration, the students' performance and academic excellence in Islamic studies could be measured

within the realm of student's parental, family and environment variables. A well- educated, religious and morally grounded parents and family with sound Islamic education background is bound to produce in most cases, excellent and ethically- groomed children who will be excelling not in academics alone but also in the sphere of moral and religious angles; while, in the absence of these, the outcome might be catastrophic .

6. Textbooks and Language Barriers - The unavailability and inadequacy of up-to date and well explicit textbooks of Islamic Studies in some Nigerian tertiary institutions create a great deficiency in the students' academic and morality. Furthermore, the contents of some Islamic studies textbooks in Nigeria failed to cater for the academic, religious and moral aspirations of students who initially had no Islamic educational background. These students often face problems in understanding the topics and contents of textbooks written either in Arabic or English languages which are not explanatory enough to the Nigerian students and far from being easily understood to them since the official language of teaching in Nigerian universities is different from their native language (Adam, 2021).

7. Problems of Instructional Materials, Multimedia and ICT - Instructional Materials are the tools designed majorly for assisting the teachers in conveying the content of his subject or topic to the learners. The instructional materials are normally available in various forms that include textbooks, laboratories, films, recordings, charts design and other forms of Multimedia as noted by Oshinaike, Adekunmisi (2012) and (Nidhi, 2018).

It is not a hidden fact that the world has been digitalized through Information Communication Technology (ICT) and as such elevation, education globally ready to be digitalize, such teachers and students are now driven on the precepts of modern way of educational information dissemination. In accordance with this, the instructional materials, multimedia and ICT access needed for teaching and learning Islamic Studies in Nigerian tertiary institutions are believed to be either unavailable or inadequate or teachers are not digitally-inclined in Nigerian universities.

The Strategies for Improving Teaching of Islamic Studies in Nigerian Universities

Based on the information gathered in this research, the following strategies are attested for improving teaching and learning of Islamic studies as a course in Nigerian Universities.

- **To encourage Muslim stakeholders on ownership of Islamic education institutions.**

Educational system in Nigeria open a window for institutionalizing private universities regardless of its regional, religious perspective or political background of the owners. Islamic studies departments and relevant courses should be given more concern to train competent and qualified Islamic scholars are trained.

- **Promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence in the teaching and learning process.**

Negative perceptions about Islamic studies education from primary to university level are widespread among large segments of Western societies, the elites and middle class in Muslim countries including Nigeria. Correcting these misperceptions via dissemination of appropriate information will bring wider support to the reforms and modernization efforts proposed in this research (Sayyed, F.S, 2011). In Nigeria for example, Universities are considered as

major learning centres that are offering Islamic studies course which sometimes affected by national and international political, social, and cultural factors via the spread of radical Islamic doctrines as religious sources used by some teachers and students which may negatively influence the learning of the young generations in the Muslim world in general and Nigeria in particular. Therefore, efforts must be made to provide religiously credible and legitimate information about tolerance and peaceful coexistence in the media and multimedia links (Sayyed, F.S, 2011).

- **Supporting Islamic studies education in public schools through proper Monitoring and curriculum content.**

The Islamic aspects of identity in the Muslim world continue to influence those societies. Because of the strong presence of Islam as an identity element, people in the Muslim world will continue to seek knowledge about Islam, and will attract the minds of young learners to study and value the knowledge of Islamic studies as a sacred aspect of their existence and identity (Sayyed, F.S, 2011).

The involvement of governments in the Muslim world including Nigeria, with Islamic curricula to serve security objectives could lead to uncontrolled negative outcomes. The outcomes of such involvements have been devastating on a wide scale. While state supervision of Islamic curriculum is necessary to guard against the spread of radical and militant views.

- **Supporting and promoting new student-centered as well as action-oriented classroom instructions.**

The quality of teacher preparation, pedagogical approaches, and teacher-student relations in Islamic studies as a course has been of concern to all involved. The traditional approaches based on memorization are depriving students of creative thinking and addressing new challenges and contemporary issues. At the same time, administrators and teachers of Islamic studies at university level should welcome new learning approaches to this field of education, should double efforts to provide teacher training programs and exchange programs to introduce more participatory, less memorization-based rather than understanding-based as well as general modern approaches to teaching and learning of the subject.

- **Adopting of the current successful new models.**

The growing interest in studying Islamic studies education in the majority of Muslim world including Nigeria has led to the discovery of absorbing new models of teaching Islamic studies education in the university level. Several of these models strike an effective balance between providing Islamic education, modern education, and civic education. A compilation of “best practices” among Islamic studies education in the university level and the dissemination of its compilation in various formats (for example, in hard copies, CDs and on the internet) may expand these models into more institutions and more countries, especially if the implementation of these models is connected to some forms of motivation.

Conclusion

Despite numerous transformations that has occurred in the teaching and learning of Islamic Studies from primary level up to university level in Nigeria, there are factors and variables that are still militating against its potency. These include interest of the Student, teachers and parental factors, school curriculum

deficiency, Country's official language barrier and pedagogical problems. Various solutions to minimize these problems were discussed such as Society-related challenges, Government-related challenges and Institutions-related challenges which highlighted as; adequate motivations and reinforcements for the students, Promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence, Provide equitable education for girls, provision of needed materials in Islamic Studies, Provide careful supervision of Islamic studies in the curriculum, simplification of methods to learn official language of the country and language of the Glorious Qur'an, and continuous teaching of the subject by competent, friendly, dedicated, certified and God-fearing teachers were all advocated.

Recommendations

Considering the succinct overviews of the factors and variables that are affecting the potency and efficacy of teaching Islamic Studies in Nigerian universities, the following are recommended as solutions:

- As an Islamic Studies teacher, in order to achieve the great aim of recruiting and graduating well-behaved and educationally sound people, the teachers needs to focus on the students' individual differences in their various physical problems, interests, family background, intellectual abilities, learning capacities, motor abilities, social skills, aptitude and talents, language skill and experience. He must use of different teaching aids in a multimedia teaching and learning approaches for better address of his students challenges. The use of adequate, relevant and current modern facilities and instructional materials can improve students' academic performance of Islamic Studies students.
- Government, and the university administrators should make provision for adequate manpower and facilities needed for the better efficiency of the subject.
- The Students' interest should be aroused through various enlightenment programs, reinforcement, prizes and awards for the brilliant and well-behaved students of Islamic Studies from elementary to university level.
- In both public and private Universities, the subject should be handled only by qualified, certified, certificated, dedicated, friendly, competent and morally-inclined Islamic Studies teachers who will be worthy role models for the students in all areas.
- Islamic Studies students should be assigned specific roles in the institutions in order not to be perpetual passive learners and to develop their interest in the subject. This will give them clout of practicing what they learnt in their various communities.
- Islamic organizations and conscious Muslims should assist both the government, and University administrators in procuring the necessary materials needed in the teaching and learning of Islamic Studies in the relevant institutions.
- Adequate and functional instructional materials, comprehensive and easily accessible books, and other needed materials should be procured by the institution's authorities for effective and meaningful teaching and learning of Islamic Studies.
- The parents should be worthy models for their children academically and morally. They must create a conducive Islamic environment for their wards at home to practice Islamic teachings as being taught in the institutions.
- Adoption of multimedia and ICT facilities for the online perusal of Islamic Studies information for teaching and learning must be given priority by the government and institutions authorities. Also, Islamic Studies teachers should

acquaint themselves with the usages of these materials to enhance their teaching methodology.

- The Islamic Studies teachers need to be friendly, accommodating and employ suitable and effective pedagogical methods to be used in teaching, simplify the textbooks and device the simplest method of teaching and breaking official language barriers for their students and allow themselves to be seen by the students as counselors, confidants and above all reliable parents.

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