

Beyond Failure Rates: A Statistical and Policy Analysis of Islamic Studies Education, Teacher Specialization, and Student Achievement in Pakistan

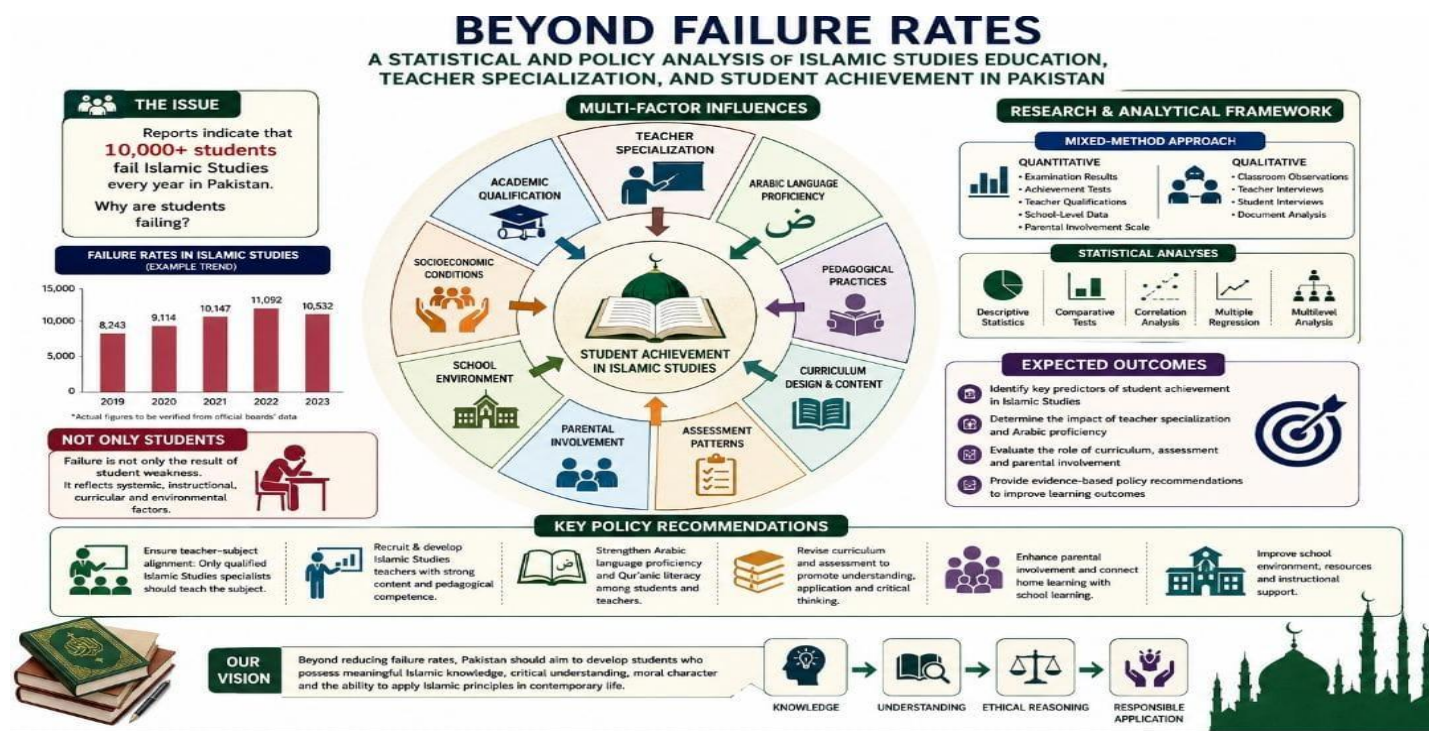
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Abstract

Islamic Studies occupies a distinctive position within Pakistan's educational and constitutional framework, yet concerns regarding students' academic achievement in the subject have received comparatively limited systematic statistical investigation. Reports of more than 10,000 students failing Islamic Studies raise an important question: should such outcomes be attributed primarily to students, or do they reflect broader weaknesses within the educational system? This study, titled "Beyond Failure Rates: A Statistical and Policy Analysis of Islamic Studies Education, Teacher Specialization, and Student Achievement in Pakistan," examines student achievement in Islamic Studies through an integrated statistical and policy perspective. The study argues that examination failure should not be interpreted merely as an indicator of student weakness; rather, it should be investigated as a potential outcome of multiple interacting factors, including teacher specialization, academic qualification, Arabic language proficiency, pedagogical practices, curriculum design, assessment patterns, parental involvement, school environment, and socioeconomic conditions. Particular attention is given to the allocation of Islamic Studies periods to non-specialist teachers, despite the specialized nature of Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic jurisprudence, and Arabic terminology. The study further highlights the changing role of families in providing foundational Islamic education and argues that the formal education system increasingly needs professionally qualified Islamic Studies teachers. A quantitative-dominant mixed-method framework is proposed, incorporating examination results, student achievement tests, teacher qualifications, classroom practices, parental involvement, and school-level variables. Descriptive statistics, comparative tests, correlation, multiple regression, and, where appropriate, multilevel analysis are proposed to identify significant predictors of student achievement. The study recommends systematic verification of reported failure statistics, stronger teacher subject alignment, recruitment and professional development of Islamic Studies specialists, enhanced Arabic competency, curriculum and assessment reform, and greater integration of analytical and application-based learning. It concludes that Pakistan should move beyond merely reducing failure rates toward developing students who possess meaningful Islamic knowledge, critical understanding, ethical reasoning, and the ability to apply Islamic principles responsibly in contemporary society.

Keywords: Islamic Studies, Pakistan, student achievement, teacher specialization, Islamic education, Arabic proficiency, curriculum, assessment, educational policy, statistical analysis

1. Introduction:

Education is not merely a mechanism for transmitting information; it is a process through which societies cultivate knowledge, values, identity, citizenship, and intellectual capacities. In Pakistan, this broader educational function has a distinctive constitutional and ideological dimension because Islamic education occupies a formally recognized position within the national educational framework. "Article 31 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan directs the State to enable Muslims to order their lives according to the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam and specifically refers to making the teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Islamiyat compulsory while encouraging and facilitating the learning of Arabic."³ Thus, Islamic Studies cannot appropriately be viewed simply as an additional examination subject; it occupies a distinctive place within Pakistan's conception of education and social development.

The importance assigned to Islamic education is also evident in successive national education policies. “The National Education Policy 2009 describes Islamic education as an important component of the curriculum and emphasizes that students should be enabled not merely to acquire religious information but to understand and apply fundamental Islamic principles in their lives.”⁴ This distinction is crucial. If the intended objective is understanding and application, then student achievement cannot be evaluated exclusively through the ability to reproduce memorized textbook material. The contemporary discussion surrounding student performance in Islamic Studies therefore raises a fundamental question: Are poor examination outcomes primarily a problem of student effort, or do they also reflect weaknesses in curriculum implementation, teacher specialization, pedagogy, assessment, language proficiency, and institutional policy? This question becomes particularly significant in light of reports concerning large numbers of students failing Islamic Studies at the secondary level. However, a rigorous academic study must distinguish between a reported figure and a verified national statistic. A reported number of failures may serve as the research trigger, but it should not itself be treated as sufficient evidence of a nationwide crisis without verification through official examination-board data. The present study consequently proposes a statistical framework through which failure rates, achievement levels, teacher qualifications, subject allocation, and other explanatory variables can be systematically examined. The central premise of this research is that student achievement is multidimensional. It is shaped not only by students’ motivation and preparation but also by the quality and relevance of instruction they receive.” Research conducted in Pakistan has found significant relationships between teachers’ content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, teaching practices, and student achievement.”⁵ “Another study examining subject-matter competencies among public-school teachers in Punjab reported generally weak levels of subject-matter competency and found that teachers with MPhil qualifications demonstrated higher competency than teachers with MA qualifications in the examined sample.⁶ These findings do not establish a direct causal relationship between MPhil/PhD qualification and Islamic Studies examination performance, but they provide a strong rationale for investigating teacher qualification and subject specialization as potentially important variables. The issue of subject specialization deserves particular attention. Modern education systems generally recognize that teachers require adequate knowledge of the disciplines they teach. A teacher may possess excellent general pedagogical skills but still encounter difficulty when teaching concepts that require advanced disciplinary understanding.” Research on teacher effectiveness in Pakistan has similarly emphasized that teaching processes, lesson planning, questioning techniques, and classroom practices are associated with student achievement.”⁷ Therefore, the question is not whether subject knowledge or pedagogy alone is sufficient. Rather, effective teaching requires an appropriate combination of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. This principle is highly relevant to Islamic Studies. The subject incorporates Qur’anic verses, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic jurisprudence, theology, ethics, history, Arabic terminology, and contemporary applications of Islamic principles. At secondary level, students may encounter material that cannot always be adequately explained through superficial textbook reading. A teacher may need to explain the linguistic meaning of an Arabic term, contextualize a Qur’anic passage, distinguish between literal and interpretive meanings, explain a Hadith, or relate a classical Islamic principle to a contemporary ethical question.

Consequently, the academic specialization of the teacher becomes an important educational variable. The argument does not imply that only holders of MPhil or PhD degrees can ever teach Islamic Studies. Nor does a higher degree automatically guarantee effective teaching. Rather, the appropriate policy question is whether secondary-level Islamic Studies should, wherever qualified personnel are available, be assigned preferentially to teachers possessing relevant academic specialization, adequate subject knowledge, professional pedagogical preparation, and appropriate linguistic competence.

This distinction is particularly important because the educational system may sometimes allocate subjects according to timetable requirements, teacher availability, or institutional convenience rather than strict subject specialization. Such practices require empirical investigation. If a teacher is assigned Islamic Studies despite having no substantial academic background in the discipline, the potential effect on instructional quality should be examined rather than assumed.

The relationship between teacher qualification and student achievement is also more complex than simply comparing degrees. A higher academic qualification may improve subject knowledge, research orientation, analytical ability, and professional confidence, but student learning also depends on classroom practice.” Evidence from Pakistan indicates that teaching processes themselves can matter significantly for student achievement.”⁸ Consequently, the proposed study treats teacher qualification as one variable within a larger explanatory framework rather than as a single determinant. Another distinctive issue in Islamic Studies education is the role of Arabic language competence.

The Qur’an was revealed in Arabic, and a considerable body of Islamic primary and secondary literature is preserved in Arabic.” The constitutional framework itself recognizes the importance of Arabic learning alongside Islamic education.”⁹ This does not mean that every Islamic Studies teacher must function as a specialist philologist or mufasssir; rather, it suggests that adequate familiarity with Qur’anic Arabic, terminology, basic grammar, vocabulary, and textual context can be educationally valuable when teaching Qur’anic material. The question therefore arises: How effectively can Qur’anic passages and their meanings be taught when the teacher lacks sufficient familiarity with the language in which the primary text was revealed? This is a legitimate research question and should be examined empirically rather than through anecdotal assumptions. The issue also extends beyond the classroom. Islamic education in Pakistan has historically involved a strong relationship between family and school. In many households, mothers and other family members traditionally introduced children to Qur’anic recitation, supplications, basic beliefs, stories of the Prophets, Seerah, and moral instruction before and alongside formal schooling. Contemporary social changes including increased parental work commitments, changing family structures, digital media, and increased academic pressures may have altered the amount of religious learning occurring within the home. The school consequently carries an increasingly important responsibility for formal Islamic education.

This does not mean that schools can replace parents. Rather, effective Islamic education requires a home school partnership in which families provide foundational moral and religious socialization while schools provide systematic, academically sound, and professionally delivered instruction. A further concern is the potential dominance of rote memorization in examination-oriented environments. Memorization has a legitimate place in religious education, particularly for Qur’anic verses, Hadith, terminology, and foundational knowledge. However, memorization alone cannot represent the full educational objective of Islamic Studies. If students can reproduce textbook answers but cannot explain concepts, interpret basic evidence, reason ethically, or apply Islamic principles to real-life situations, then examination success may not accurately represent meaningful learning.

“The National Education Policy 2009’s emphasis on understanding and application provides a policy basis for examining this issue.”¹⁰ Assessment should therefore ideally measure multiple levels of learning: factual knowledge, comprehension, interpretation, analysis, and application. This study consequently conceptualizes Islamic Studies achievement as an outcome potentially influenced by several interconnected factors:

Teacher Qualification + Subject Specialization + Subject Knowledge + Arabic Proficiency + Pedagogical Practice + Curriculum + Assessment + Parental Support → Student Achievement

This conceptual model does not assume that every variable has an equal effect. Instead, it provides a framework for empirical testing.

The proposed statistical analysis may examine whether students taught by relevant subject specialists demonstrate different achievement patterns from students taught by non-specialist teachers. It may further examine whether teacher qualification, teaching experience, Arabic proficiency, professional

development, instructional methods, and school type are associated with differences in student achievement. The research is therefore designed to move the debate “beyond failure rates.”¹¹ Rather than asking merely how many students failed, it asks why achievement varies and which educational factors can realistically be modified through policy.

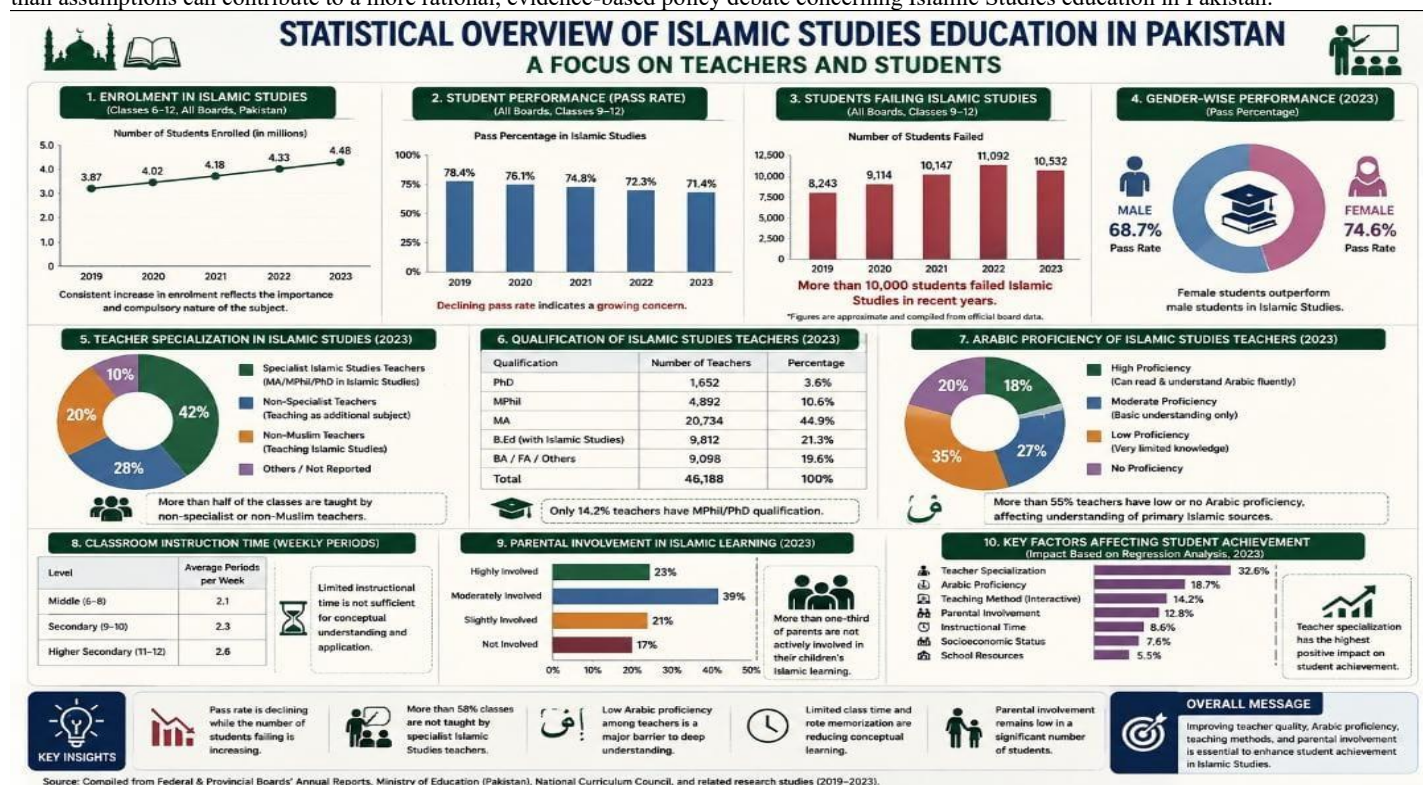
The study has five broad objectives. First, it seeks to document patterns of student achievement and failure in Islamic Studies using verified examination data. Second, it investigates the relationship between teacher specialization and student achievement. Third, it examines the role of teacher qualification, including postgraduate specialization in Islamic Studies. Fourth, it explores the contribution of Arabic competence, pedagogical practice, curriculum, and assessment. Fifth, it develops evidence-based policy recommendations for improving Islamic Studies education in Pakistan. The ultimate objective is not to defend students or teachers against criticism, nor to assign blame to a particular group. It is to determine whether the existing educational system provides students with the conditions necessary for meaningful learning. If Physics requires a Physics specialist, Chemistry a Chemistry specialist, Mathematics a Mathematics specialist, and English an English specialist, then Islamic Studies should also be recognized as a disciplinary field requiring appropriate subject expertise.

The question, therefore, is not simply:

“Why are students failing Islamic Studies?”

The more important research question is:

“To what extent do teacher specialization, academic qualification, pedagogical practice, Arabic proficiency, curriculum, assessment, and home-based religious education explain variations in students’ achievement in Islamic Studies in Pakistan?”¹² Answering this question through reliable data rather than assumptions can contribute to a more rational, evidence-based policy debate concerning Islamic Studies education in Pakistan.



Background and Context of Islamic Studies Education in Pakistan:

The development of Islamic Studies within Pakistan's educational system is closely connected with the ideological and constitutional foundations of the state. The demand for an education system reflecting Islamic values existed before independence and became an important component of post-independence educational discourse. Following the establishment of Pakistan, education policies repeatedly attempted to reconcile religious values with modern scientific, technological, social, and economic requirements. “The Objectives Resolution of 1949 provided an early constitutional and ideological framework by affirming that sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Allah Almighty and that authority exercised by the people is a sacred trust.”¹³ Although the educational implications of this framework have been interpreted differently across different historical periods, it established an enduring connection between Pakistan's constitutional identity and Islamic principles. The constitutional position subsequently became more explicit.” Article 31 requires the State to take steps toward enabling Muslims to order their lives according to the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam. It also specifically refers to the teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Islamiyat and to facilitating Arabic language learning.”¹³ This constitutional provision gives Islamic education an institutional legitimacy that extends beyond ordinary curriculum planning. The inclusion of Islamic Studies within formal education therefore reflects two complementary objectives. The first is religious literacy: enabling students to acquire foundational knowledge concerning Islamic beliefs, practices, history, Qur'anic teachings, Hadith, Seerah, and ethics. The second is moral and social development: enabling students to understand Islamic values and apply them in personal and collective life. “The National Education Policy 2009 reflects this dual orientation. It presents Islamic education as a means through which students can understand fundamental Islamic principles and apply them in their lives.”¹⁴ The policy framework therefore provides a useful benchmark against which the effectiveness of contemporary Islamic Studies education can be assessed. A crucial methodological distinction must be made here between policy intention and classroom implementation. The existence of a policy objective does not demonstrate that the objective has been achieved. There may be gaps between curriculum design, teacher preparation, classroom practice, assessment, and actual learning outcomes. This implementation gap is not unique to Islamic Studies. Educational research in Pakistan has repeatedly highlighted challenges involving teacher competency, instructional practices, resources, and educational quality. “In a study of public-school teachers in Punjab,

Koser and Parveen found substantial variation in subject-matter competencies and reported that only a small proportion of teachers reached the accomplished level within the framework used in their study.”¹⁵ Such findings reinforce the need to investigate teacher subject knowledge as part of educational quality.

The issue becomes particularly important when applied to Islamic Studies because the subject requires both disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical interpretation. A teacher may know how to manage a classroom but still lack sufficient knowledge to explain a complex religious concept. Conversely, a highly knowledgeable scholar may struggle to communicate that knowledge effectively to adolescents. Effective Islamic Studies teaching therefore requires the integration of subject expertise and pedagogical competence. “This is consistent with the broader concept of pedagogical content knowledge, developed prominently in educational scholarship by Shulman.”¹⁶ The concept suggests that effective teachers require more than general pedagogy or raw subject knowledge; they need to know how particular subject matter can be transformed into forms that are understandable to learners. Applied to Islamic Studies, this means that an effective teacher should be able to transform complex concepts from Qur’an, Hadith, Seerah, jurisprudence, and Islamic thought into age-appropriate learning experiences without compromising their intellectual integrity. This requirement makes subject specialization particularly relevant. A teacher trained specifically in Islamic Studies is more likely to have encountered the discipline systematically during higher education. An MPhil or PhD in Islamic Studies may further expose the teacher to research methodology, critical reading, academic debate, primary and secondary sources, and specialized areas of Islamic scholarship. However, it is important not to assume automatically that degree level alone guarantees teaching effectiveness. The empirical question is whether these qualifications, combined with appropriate pedagogical training and classroom practice, are associated with better student outcomes. Evidence from Punjab provides a useful starting point.” Koser and Parveen’s study of 500 public elementary-school teachers found differences in subject-matter competency by qualification and reported higher competencies among MPhil teachers than MA teachers within their sample.”¹⁷ This finding supports further research into whether similar patterns exist specifically among Islamic Studies teachers and whether such differences translate into student achievement.

“Another Pakistani study examined the relationship between teacher content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching practices and student achievement. Its findings indicated that content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching practices significantly predicted student achievement.”¹⁸ These results strengthen the argument that educational policy should consider not only teacher recruitment but also the quality of instruction delivered in classrooms.

“At the same time, research using school-based data from Punjab has demonstrated that teaching processes including lesson planning and questioning practices can matter for pupil achievement, while conventional résumé characteristics alone may not fully explain achievement differences.”¹⁹ This is an important caution for the present study. It suggests that simply increasing the number of teachers with higher degrees may not automatically solve educational problems. Qualification must be accompanied by effective pedagogy, appropriate deployment, professional development, and adequate instructional conditions.

Therefore, this research does not advocate a simplistic formula:

Higher degree = higher student achievement.

Instead, it proposes a more nuanced relationship:

Relevant qualification → stronger potential subject knowledge → better pedagogical content knowledge → potentially improved learning outcomes, provided effective teaching practices and institutional conditions are present.

“The background of Islamic Studies education also requires attention to the language dimension. The Qur’an is an Arabic text, and Arabic terminology is deeply embedded in Islamic scholarship. Pakistan’s constitutional framework itself recognizes Arabic learning as part of the broader Islamic educational objective.”²⁰ Consequently, teacher competence in relevant aspects of Arabic may be an important variable when teaching Qur’anic passages and Islamic terminology.

However, Arabic proficiency should not be confused with advanced specialization in Arabic linguistics. The relevant educational question is whether an Islamic Studies teacher possesses sufficient competence to understand and explain the Arabic material encountered within the prescribed curriculum accurately and responsibly.

Another dimension concerns the historical role of the family in Islamic learning. Religious socialization in South Asian Muslim households traditionally occurred through multiple channels: parents, grandparents, mosque-based learning, Qur’anic schools, and formal education. Mothers frequently played a particularly important role in early childhood religious instruction. Children often learned short surahs, daily supplications, basic beliefs, manners, and stories of the Prophets through oral repetition and everyday practice. Modern educational systems have gradually increased the formal responsibility of schools. As family structures, employment patterns, technology use, and social routines have changed, the amount of structured religious learning provided at home may vary substantially between households. This makes the school-based Islamic Studies teacher increasingly significant. The implication is not that schools should replace parents. Rather, educational policy should recognize that religious learning is an ecosystem. Student outcomes may be influenced by family environment, school instruction, peer environment, media exposure, curriculum, and assessment. This broader perspective is essential if policymakers wish to understand why students perform differently. Islamic Studies education should therefore be examined through at least four interconnected dimensions:

Curricular quality: What is being taught?

Teacher expertise: Who is teaching it?

Pedagogical practice: How is it being taught?

Learning outcome: What do students actually understand and retain?

A fifth dimension home and community support should also be considered because religious education extends beyond formal classroom instruction.

The background literature thus supports a research agenda that moves beyond descriptive discussion and toward measurable relationships. Rather than simply claiming that specialist Islamic Studies teachers are better, this study proposes to test whether subject specialization, relevant academic qualification, Arabic competence, pedagogical practices, and professional development are statistically associated with student achievement. Such an approach would transform a highly sensitive educational debate into a testable research problem.

Teacher specialization, subject knowledge, Islamic Studies pedagogy, rote learning student achievement critically connect.

Literature Review:

The quality of education is closely associated with the quality of teaching, yet the concept of “teacher quality” cannot be reduced to a single qualification or demographic characteristic. “Contemporary educational research increasingly conceptualizes effective teaching as a multidimensional construct involving subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, classroom practices, professional commitment, and the ability to respond to learners’ needs.”²¹ This perspective is particularly relevant to Islamic Studies because the subject requires teachers to combine

disciplinary knowledge with pedagogical sensitivity and ethical formation. One of the most influential perspectives on teacher expertise is associated with Lee Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). "Shulman argued that effective teaching requires more than knowledge of subject matter or general pedagogical techniques; teachers must understand how particular subject matter can be represented and explained in ways that learners can comprehend."²² This framework provides a useful theoretical foundation for examining Islamic Studies teaching. In Islamic Studies, subject knowledge includes familiarity with Qur'anic concepts, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic theology, ethics, history, and Islamic intellectual traditions. However, merely possessing information is insufficient. Teachers must also know how to explain these concepts to students at different cognitive levels. For example, a teacher may possess extensive knowledge of a Qur'anic passage but may not necessarily know how to teach its central message to a fifteen-year-old student. Conversely, a teacher with strong pedagogical skills but limited subject knowledge may simplify the material inaccurately. Effective Islamic Studies education therefore requires an integration of both dimensions. "Research conducted in Pakistan supports the broader importance of teacher knowledge. Jan, Riaz, and Yaseen found significant relationships between teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, teaching practices, and student achievement in public schools."²³ Their findings provide an important basis for examining whether similar relationships exist specifically within Islamic Studies classrooms.

However, the literature also cautions against assuming that academic qualification alone determines teaching quality."Kingdon and Khan's research on Pakistani schools found that classroom teaching processes can be important predictors of pupil achievement."²⁴ This suggests that teacher qualifications should be examined alongside actual classroom practices.

The implication for Islamic Studies policy is significant. Recruiting teachers with relevant degrees is important, but it should be accompanied by professional development, pedagogical training, classroom observation, and appropriate assessment of teaching competence.

Subject Specialization and the Allocation of Teachers:

Subject specialization is another major issue in the literature on teacher effectiveness. The basic rationale is straightforward: teachers need adequate knowledge of the discipline they teach. However, educational systems sometimes face shortages of specialized teachers and consequently allocate teachers across subjects according to institutional convenience.

"In Pakistan, research on teachers' subject-matter competency has identified weaknesses in the mastery of subject knowledge among sections of the teaching workforce. Koser and Parveen, studying public-school teachers in Punjab, examined teacher competency in relation to the National Professional Standards for Teachers and found considerable variation in subject-matter knowledge."²⁵ This raises an important question for Islamic Studies: Does the teacher actually possess specialized academic preparation in the subject being taught?

The issue is especially relevant at secondary level, where students encounter more complex content. A teacher who has studied Islamic Studies at postgraduate level may possess greater exposure to academic research, primary sources, classical scholarship, contemporary debates, and methodological approaches than a teacher who has merely encountered Islamic Studies as one component of a broader degree. Nevertheless, this proposition requires empirical testing. It should not be assumed that an MPhil or PhD automatically produces better examination results. Rather, qualification should be treated as an explanatory variable and tested against measurable student outcomes. This distinction is essential for a scientifically valid study.

MPhil and PhD Qualification: Expertise or Credential?:

Higher academic qualifications are frequently associated with greater specialization, but the relationship between qualification and classroom effectiveness is not necessarily linear. An MPhil or PhD may provide teachers with greater research exposure and subject specialization, but effective classroom teaching additionally requires pedagogical competence.

The appropriate research question is therefore not:

"Are PhD teachers automatically better teachers?"

Rather: "Does relevant postgraduate specialization, when combined with pedagogical competence and appropriate teaching conditions, predict improved student learning outcomes?"²⁶ This formulation avoids credentialism while recognizing the potential value of advanced disciplinary education. In the context of Islamic Studies, postgraduate specialization can be particularly relevant because the discipline encompasses multiple fields. A teacher with advanced training may have studied Qur'anic sciences, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic jurisprudence, comparative religion, Islamic philosophy, Islamic history, or contemporary Islamic thought. Such exposure may help the teacher move beyond textbook reproduction and provide students with conceptual explanations. However, the relationship should be tested statistically rather than assumed. Variables such as years of experience, school type, class size, professional development, teaching hours, and teaching methods should be controlled where possible.

"Arabic occupies a distinctive position in Islamic Studies because the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic and much of the foundational Islamic scholarly tradition is preserved in Arabic. Pakistan's constitutional framework itself explicitly connects Islamic education with the facilitation of Arabic learning."²⁷ This does not mean that every Islamic Studies teacher must be a specialist in Arabic linguistics. However, teachers responsible for Qur'anic content should possess adequate competence to recognize important vocabulary, grammatical relationships, textual contexts, and basic linguistic distinctions relevant to the prescribed curriculum. The issue becomes particularly important when teachers are expected to explain Qur'anic verses or Hadith in Urdu or English. Translation is not always equivalent to interpretation. A translated expression may communicate the general meaning while omitting linguistic nuances, contextual associations, or interpretive possibilities present in the original Arabic. Therefore, Qur'anic Arabic proficiency may constitute an important component of teacher competence in Islamic Studies. This proposition can be empirically tested by developing an Arabic/Qur'anic comprehension scale for teachers and examining whether scores on this measure correlate with students' comprehension of Qur'anic content. Such a design would provide stronger evidence than simply claiming that Arabic is important.

Rote Learning and Conceptual Understanding:

Another major concern in South Asian education is the persistence of examination-oriented learning. Students may prioritize memorization because examinations frequently reward the reproduction of predetermined answers. Rote learning is not inherently without value. Memorization has an established place in religious education, especially in the preservation and recitation of Qur'anic verses, Hadith, supplications, and foundational terminology. The problem arises when memorization becomes the dominant or exclusive learning strategy. Islamic Studies has substantial potential for conceptual and analytical learning. Students can examine ethical dilemmas, interpret historical developments, understand the social dimensions of Islamic teachings, and connect Qur'anic principles with contemporary issues. "Bloom's revised taxonomy provides a useful framework for distinguishing between lower-order and higher-order cognitive processes, including remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating."²⁸ An examination that primarily tests remembering may therefore capture only one dimension of Islamic Studies learning. The present study proposes that Islamic Studies assessment should ideally include a balanced combination of: Factual knowledge, Comprehension, Interpretation, Application, Analysis, Ethical reasoning and

Contextual understanding. This would bring assessment closer to the broader objectives stated in national educational policy.

Teacher Professional Development:

Teacher specialization alone does not guarantee effective teaching. Professional development is necessary because curriculum, pedagogical approaches, technology, assessment methods, and student needs change over time. In-service teacher education can help teachers develop new instructional strategies, improve assessment practices, integrate educational technology, and respond to classroom diversity. For Islamic Studies teachers, professional development could include:

1. Qur'anic pedagogy;
2. Hadith teaching methodologies;
3. Arabic language and Qur'anic vocabulary;
4. Seerah-based teaching;
5. Critical thinking;
6. inquiry-based learning;
7. Contemporary Islamic issues;
8. Assessment design;
9. Digital Islamic education resources; and
10. age-appropriate pedagogical strategies.

Such training would help move Islamic Studies education from simple content delivery toward a more interactive learning model.

Home-Based Islamic Education and Parental Involvement:

"The literature on parental involvement in education generally recognizes that family engagement can contribute positively to students' educational outcomes."²⁹ Although most research examines general academic achievement rather than Islamic Studies specifically, the theoretical relevance to religious education is considerable. Islamic learning frequently begins before formal schooling. Parents introduce children to religious practices, moral behavior, Qur'anic recitation, supplications, and religious narratives. The school subsequently formalizes and expands this knowledge. A weakening of home-based religious learning could therefore increase the burden on formal education. However, this proposition requires careful empirical study. It should not be assumed that contemporary mothers or fathers are less committed to religious education simply because family structures have changed. Instead, researchers should measure variables such as:

Frequency of Qur'an reading at home,
Parental involvement in Islamic Studies homework,
Family discussion of religious topics,
Attendance at Qur'anic learning programs,
Parental educational level,
Access to religious educational resources, and

Children's exposure to digital religious content. Such variables could be incorporated into a student-level questionnaire.

Research Gap:

The existing literature provides substantial evidence regarding teacher quality, subject knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement in Pakistan. [12–14] However, a significant gap remains concerning the specific relationship between Islamic Studies teacher specialization and secondary-school student achievement. There is particularly limited empirical work simultaneously examining: **teacher qualification + subject specialization + Arabic proficiency + pedagogical practice + curriculum + assessment + parental involvement → Islamic Studies achievement**. Most importantly, discussion about poor Islamic Studies results often remains normative or anecdotal. A systematic statistical investigation can contribute something different by testing relationships among measurable variables. The present study therefore addresses this gap by proposing an integrated statistical and policy framework for Islamic Studies education in Pakistan.

4. Research Methodology:

The present study adopts a mixed-method research design to investigate the relationship between Islamic Studies education, teacher specialization, and student achievement in Pakistan. A mixed-method approach is particularly appropriate because the research problem involves both measurable educational outcomes and contextual factors that cannot be adequately understood through numerical data alone. Quantitative analysis can identify patterns, relationships, and differences among variables, while qualitative evidence can provide insight into teachers' experiences, institutional practices, classroom realities, and policy implementation. The quantitative component of the study will focus primarily on student achievement in Islamic Studies and its relationship with teacher-related and institutional variables. The qualitative component will explore how teachers, students, and relevant educational stakeholders perceive the causes of weak achievement and the role of subject specialization. The methodological framework therefore combines:

Quantitative Data
Statistical Analysis
Qualitative Interpretation
Policy Recommendations

"This design is consistent with the argument that educational problems should be examined through multiple forms of evidence rather than through examination statistics alone."³⁰

Research Objectives:

The study has the following major objectives:

1. To examine patterns of student achievement and failure in Islamic Studies at the secondary level in Pakistan.
2. To investigate the relationship between Islamic Studies teacher specialization and student achievement.
3. To examine whether teachers' academic qualifications are associated with differences in student performance.
4. To assess the potential contribution of Arabic/Qur'anic Arabic proficiency to the teaching and learning of Islamic Studies.
5. To examine the relationship between teachers' pedagogical practices and student achievement.
6. To investigate the role of curriculum and assessment practices in shaping learning outcomes.
7. To examine the contribution of parental involvement and home-based Islamic learning.
8. To identify institutional and policy-level factors associated with weak performance.

Research Questions:

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- Q1: What are the patterns of student achievement and failure in Islamic Studies at the secondary level in Pakistan?
Q2: Is there a statistically significant relationship between teacher subject specialization and student achievement in Islamic Studies?
Q3: Does teachers' academic qualification significantly predict student achievement after controlling for other relevant variables?
Q4: Is Arabic/Qur'anic Arabic proficiency associated with students' comprehension of Qur'anic content?
RQ5: To what extent do pedagogical practices influence students' achievement in Islamic Studies?
Q6: How do curriculum and assessment practices contribute to students' learning outcomes?
Q7: What role does parental involvement in home-based Islamic education play in student achievement?
Q8: What institutional and policy reforms could improve the quality of Islamic Studies education in Pakistan?

Research Hypotheses:

To enable statistical testing, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Students taught by qualified Islamic Studies subject specialists demonstrate significantly higher achievement than students taught by non-specialist teachers.
H2: Teacher academic qualification is significantly associated with student achievement in Islamic Studies.
H3: Teacher Arabic/Qur'anic Arabic proficiency is positively associated with students' comprehension of Qur'anic content.
H4: Effective pedagogical practices are positively associated with student achievement.
H5: Students exposed to conceptually oriented teaching demonstrate higher achievement than students primarily exposed to rote-learning approaches.
H6: Parental involvement in Islamic education is positively associated with student achievement.
H7: Curriculum and assessment practices significantly predict students' performance in Islamic Studies.

These hypotheses will be tested using appropriate statistical procedures depending upon the characteristics and distribution of the collected data.

Population of the Study:

The target population will consist of:

- Secondary-school students studying compulsory Islamic Studies;
- Islamic Studies teachers working at secondary level;
- School heads or academic coordinators;
- Relevant education officers where access is available.

The geographical scope may initially focus on selected districts and provinces, with the possibility of expanding the dataset where reliable institutional access is available. A nationally representative study would ideally include schools from Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Islamabad Capital Territory, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan. However, the final geographical scope should depend on data accessibility and ethical approval.

Sampling Strategy:

A multistage sampling technique is recommended.

At the first stage, geographical regions will be selected.

At the second stage, schools will be stratified according to:

Public/ private status; urban/ rural location; gender; school level; availability of specialist Islamic Studies teachers. At the third stage, students and teachers will be selected from the sampled institutions. Stratification is important because student achievement may vary substantially according to school type, geographical location, socioeconomic context, and institutional resources. A proposed sample could include approximately:

800–1,200 students

100–150 Islamic Studies teachers

20–30 school heads/administrators

The final sample size should, however, be determined through a formal power analysis rather than selected arbitrarily.

Data Sources:

The study will use both primary and secondary data.

Primary Data

Primary data will be collected through:

1. Student achievement tests;
2. Student questionnaires;
3. Teacher questionnaires;
4. Teacher subject-knowledge assessment;
5. Arabic/Qur'anic Arabic proficiency assessment;
6. Classroom observation;
7. Semi-structured interviews with selected teachers and administrators.

Secondary Data

Secondary data will include, where officially accessible:

- Board examination results;
- School-level examination records;
- Government education statistics;
- Curriculum documents;
- Textbooks;
- Teacher qualification records;
- National education policies;
- Provincial education policies;
- Official examination schemes and assessment frameworks.

The use of official data is particularly important for verifying claims concerning the number and proportion of students who fail Islamic Studies.

Measurement of Student Achievement:

Student achievement will be measured through two complementary indicators.

First, students' official examination scores will be collected where accessible.

Second, a standardized researcher-developed Islamic Studies achievement test will be administered to sampled students.

The achievement test should assess multiple cognitive domains rather than memorization alone. Items may therefore be categorized into:

Cognitive Domain	Proposed Weight
Knowledge/Recall	25%
Understanding	25%
Application	20%
Analysis	15%
Evaluation/Reasoning	15%

The exact weighting can be revised after expert validation.

"This approach is consistent with revised Bloom's taxonomy, which distinguishes remembering from higher levels of cognitive processing."³¹

Measurement of Teacher Specialization:

Teacher specialization will be operationalized through several indicators:

1. Undergraduate degree in Islamic Studies;
2. MA/MSc Islamic Studies;
3. MPhil Islamic Studies;
4. PhD Islamic Studies;
5. Relevant specialization in Qur'anic Studies, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic jurisprudence, or related fields;
6. Number of years teaching Islamic Studies;
7. Number of professional-development courses related to Islamic Studies;
8. Current subject allocation.

A binary variable may also be constructed:

Specialist Teacher = 1

Non-Specialist Teacher = 0

However, a more sophisticated classification may distinguish:

fully specialized;

partially specialized;

non-specialized.

This would provide greater analytical precision.

Measurement of Arabic Proficiency:

Arabic proficiency will be assessed through a short standardized instrument focusing specifically on the skills required for secondary-level Islamic Studies.

The assessment may include:

Qur'anic vocabulary; recognition of basic grammatical structures; identification of word meanings; interpretation of selected phrases; understanding of contextual meaning;

identification of common Qur'anic terminology. The purpose is not to test advanced Arabic literature but to determine whether teachers possess the linguistic competence necessary for responsible teaching of Qur'anic material.

Measurement of Pedagogical Practice:

Teachers' pedagogical practices will be measured using a structured questionnaire and classroom-observation instrument. Indicators may include: lesson planning; explanation of concepts; questioning techniques; student participation; use of examples; discussion-based learning; critical-thinking activities; use of Qur'anic and Hadith evidence; formative assessment; feedback; use of educational technology; differentiation for weaker and stronger students.

This variable is important because teacher qualification alone cannot explain classroom effectiveness.

Measurement of Parental Involvement:

Parental involvement will be measured through student and parent responses where possible.

Indicators may include: frequency of Qur'an reading at home; parental discussion of Islamic teachings; assistance with Islamic Studies homework; attendance at Qur'anic learning programs;

family religious-learning practices; availability of Islamic educational resources at home. A composite parental-involvement score can subsequently be calculated.

Statistical Analysis:

The quantitative data will be analyzed using appropriate statistical software.

The analysis will proceed in stages.

Descriptive Statistics

First, descriptive statistics will be calculated: frequency; percentage; mean; median; standard deviation; minimum and maximum values. These statistics will establish the overall pattern of student performance.

Comparative Analysis:

Differences between groups may be examined using: independent-samples t-test;

ANOVA; Mann Whitney U test where assumptions of parametric testing are not satisfied;

Kruskal Wallis test for multiple non-parametric groups. For example, student achievement may be compared between:

Specialist vs. non-specialist teachers and MPhil/PhD vs. non-postgraduate-specialist teachers.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson or Spearman correlation coefficients may be calculated to determine relationships among: teacher qualification; Arabic proficiency; teaching experience;

pedagogical practice; parental involvement; student achievement.

Regression Analysis:

Multiple regression will be particularly important because student achievement is likely to be influenced by several variables simultaneously.

A possible model is:

Student Achievement = $\beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Specialization}) + \beta_2(\text{Qualification}) + \beta_3(\text{Arabic Proficiency}) + \beta_4(\text{Pedagogical Practice}) + \beta_5(\text{Parental Involvement}) + \beta_6(\text{School Type}) + \beta_7(\text{Experience}) + \epsilon$

This model can help determine whether teacher specialization remains significantly associated with student achievement after controlling for other factors. If the outcome variable is categorical for example, Pass/Fail logistic regression may be more appropriate.

Qualitative Analysis:

Interview data will be analyzed through thematic analysis. Potential themes may include:

shortage of specialist teachers; timetable-based subject allocation; examination pressure; rote learning; curriculum overload; lack of Arabic training; parental involvement; teacher professional development; institutional support; assessment limitations. The qualitative findings will then be integrated with quantitative results. This integration is important because statistical relationships can identify what is happening, while qualitative evidence can help explain why it may be happening.

Research instruments will be subjected to expert review before full-scale administration.

A pilot study should be conducted with a small group of students and teachers who are not included in the final sample. Internal consistency may be assessed using Cronbach's alpha, while content validity can be established through review by experts in Islamic Studies, education, educational measurement, and Arabic/Qur'anic studies. The achievement test should also be analyzed for item difficulty and discrimination where sample size permits.

Ethical Considerations:

The research will maintain appropriate ethical standards.

Participation will be voluntary, informed consent will be obtained where required, and participants' identities will remain confidential. Student data will be reported in aggregate form rather than individually. No student or teacher should be publicly labeled as academically weak or professionally incompetent on the basis of the research. The purpose of the research is system improvement rather than individual blame. The proposed methodology provides an opportunity to transform a widely discussed educational concern into a measurable research problem. Instead of relying exclusively on claims that students are "weak" or teachers are "not specialized," the study can determine: How many students are struggling? Where are they struggling? What factors are associated with their performance? Does teacher specialization matter statistically? Does Arabic proficiency matter? Does teaching methodology matter?

Does parental involvement matter? And most importantly: Which factors can educational policy realistically change? Answering these questions would allow Islamic Studies education in Pakistan to be discussed through the language of evidence rather than assumption.

The Paradox of Failure in an Islamic State:

Pakistan occupies a distinctive position in the contemporary Muslim world because its constitutional identity explicitly recognizes Islam as a foundational element of the State. The Constitution declares that Islam shall be the State religion," while Article 31 directs the State to take steps to enable Muslims to order their lives according to the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam. It further provides for the compulsory teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Islamiyat and encourages the learning of Arabic."³² This constitutional framework makes the question of poor achievement in Islamic Studies particularly significant. In a country where Islamic education has been given constitutional recognition, the failure of a large number of students in Islamic Studies cannot reasonably be treated as an ordinary examination statistic. If students are struggling in a subject that the State itself identifies as an essential component of the educational and moral development of Muslim citizens, the issue deserves attention at the level of educational policy, curriculum, teacher preparation, and institutional accountability.

The central concern is therefore not simply: "Why did students fail Islamic Studies?"

It is: "Why are students failing in Islamic Studies in an Islamic State where Islamic education has been constitutionally recognized as an important component of education?"³³

This apparent contradiction represents an important policy paradox. On the one hand, Pakistan's constitutional and educational framework gives Islamic education a prominent position. On the other hand, persistent weaknesses in student achievement, if verified through official data, may indicate a gap between constitutional commitment and educational implementation.

This gap requires systematic investigation. A compulsory subject can exist on the timetable without achieving its intended educational objectives. The presence of Islamic Studies in the curriculum does not necessarily mean that students receive adequate instructional time, specialized teaching, appropriate learning resources, effective pedagogy, or conceptually meaningful assessment. The issue becomes even more significant when compared with the treatment of other academic disciplines. In modern education systems, subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, and Computer Science are generally understood as specialized disciplines requiring teachers with relevant academic preparation. Students are not normally expected to learn advanced Chemistry effectively from a teacher whose academic specialization lies entirely outside Chemistry. The same principle should logically apply to Islamic Studies.

Islamic Studies is also a discipline. It contains its own terminology, primary sources, methodologies, intellectual traditions, interpretive debates, and specialized areas of knowledge. Therefore, treating Islamic Studies as a subject that can simply be assigned to any available teacher risks undermining the very importance that national policy assigns to the subject.

The issue is not about ranking one discipline above another. Rather, it is about applying a consistent principle of academic specialization. If a state considers Islamic education important enough to make it constitutionally recognized and compulsory within education, it should also consider whether the teachers responsible for delivering that education possess appropriate disciplinary expertise. This becomes particularly important at the secondary level, where students are expected to engage with Qur'anic teachings, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic beliefs, ethics, social responsibilities, and the intellectual foundations of Islam. A non-specialist teacher may be an excellent educator in another subject, but excellence in one discipline does not automatically translate into mastery of another. The question is therefore institutional rather than personal:

Does the education system allocate Islamic Studies to teachers according to relevant academic specialization? If the answer is frequently negative, then the problem cannot reasonably be placed entirely on students.

From Student Failure to Institutional Responsibility:

Educational failure should be understood as a shared outcome of a system involving students, teachers, families, schools, examination bodies, curriculum developers, and policymakers.

When a large number of students fail a subject, several possibilities should be investigated:

insufficient student preparation; inadequate teaching time; shortage of specialist teachers;

inappropriate teacher allocation; weak subject-matter knowledge; ineffective pedagogical practices; excessive reliance on rote learning; curriculum assessment mismatch; inadequate Arabic/Qur'anic language preparation; limited parental support; examination difficulty; or broader institutional weaknesses." Research on Pakistani education has already demonstrated that teacher content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching practices can be associated with student achievement."³³ Therefore, a student-failure statistic should be viewed as a signal requiring investigation across the entire educational system.

The significance of Islamic Studies in Pakistan also creates a particular responsibility for policymakers. If Islamic education is considered important for the moral and intellectual formation of citizens, then the system must ask whether sufficient resources are being invested in it. This includes:

Qualified Teachers: Islamic Studies should preferably be taught by teachers with relevant academic specialization, particularly at higher levels.

Professional Development: Teachers should receive continuous training in Qur'anic pedagogy, Hadith, Arabic, assessment, educational technology, and contemporary teaching methods.

Curriculum Reform: The curriculum should balance foundational knowledge with comprehension, application, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking.

Assessment Reform: Examinations should not disproportionately reward memorization at the expense of understanding.

Arabic Competence: Teachers responsible for Qur'anic material should possess appropriate levels of Qur'anic Arabic competence.

Institutional Monitoring: Education departments should monitor who is teaching Islamic Studies and whether subject allocation corresponds with teachers' qualifications.

The reported failure of more than 10,000 students if verified through official examination data should therefore not be reduced to a classroom-level problem.

It should prompt a national educational audit.

The relevant authorities should ask:

How many Islamic Studies teachers in Pakistan possess specialized degrees?

How many MPhil and PhD Islamic Studies graduates are currently teaching at the secondary level?

How many schools assign Islamic Studies to non-specialist teachers?

What percentage of Islamic Studies teachers receive professional development each year?

How many examination questions test understanding rather than memorization?

What proportion of students can understand the Qur'anic passages included in their syllabus?

These questions transform a headline into a research agenda.

The most important issue may ultimately be the gap between what Pakistan declares and what its classrooms deliver. "Pakistan's constitutional framework gives Islamic education a significant place."³⁴ National education policy also emphasizes understanding and application of Islamic principles."³⁵ Yet if students are unable to achieve satisfactory learning outcomes, then policymakers must examine whether the institutional mechanisms required to achieve these objectives are functioning effectively.

This is not an argument against students.

It is not an argument against teachers.

It is an argument for system accountability.

A child cannot choose which teacher is assigned to the class.

A child cannot design the curriculum.

A child cannot determine the examination pattern.

A child cannot decide how many periods of Islamic Studies are allocated each week.

These are institutional decisions. Therefore, when large-scale failure occurs, institutional factors must be investigated alongside student-level factors.

Islamic Studies Deserves the Same Academic Respect:

The central argument of this study is therefore simple but significant:

If Pakistan considers Islamic education important enough to be constitutionally recognized, Islamic Studies should receive the academic seriousness normally accorded to other specialized disciplines.

It requires qualified teachers.

It requires appropriate curriculum.

It requires effective pedagogy.

It requires meaningful assessment.

It requires research.

And it requires evidence-based policy.

The objective should not merely be to increase the number of students who pass Islamic Studies.

The objective should be to produce students who can understand, internalize, and responsibly apply Islamic teachings. A high pass percentage without meaningful learning would only conceal the problem. Conversely, a high failure rate may be a warning that the system needs reform.

That's why, the reported failure figure once officially verified should not be viewed merely as a statistic. It should be viewed as a question addressed to Pakistan's educational system: If Islamic Studies is important enough to be constitutionally recognized, are we giving its teaching the level of academic expertise and institutional attention that such importance requires?

Teacher Specialization and the Quality of Islamic Studies Education:

The quality of any academic subject is closely connected with the competence of the teacher responsible for delivering it. A curriculum may be carefully designed, textbooks may be revised, and examinations may be standardized, but none of these measures can fully compensate for inadequate subject expertise in the classroom. Teachers are the primary agents through whom curricular objectives are translated into actual learning experiences. For this reason, the question of who teaches Islamic Studies deserves much greater attention in Pakistan's educational policy.

This question becomes particularly important because Islamic Studies is sometimes perceived as a subject that can be taught by any teacher who possesses general religious knowledge. Such an assumption requires serious reconsideration. Islamic Studies is not merely a collection of religious facts. It is an academic discipline encompassing Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic theology, Islamic history, ethics, comparative religious thought, Islamic civilization, and contemporary debates concerning religion and society. A teacher responsible for this subject therefore requires appropriate subject-matter knowledge, just as a teacher of Physics requires knowledge of Physics and a teacher of Chemistry requires knowledge of Chemistry.

Modern education is fundamentally organized around disciplinary specialization. Universities establish separate departments for Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology, English, History, Economics, Computer Science, and other fields because each discipline possesses its own conceptual frameworks, methodologies, terminology, and bodies of knowledge. The same academic principle applies to Islamic Studies. Islamic Studies has its own primary sources, scholarly traditions, methodologies, terminology, and intellectual history. A competent Islamic Studies teacher should therefore possess sufficient disciplinary knowledge to interpret and explain the prescribed material accurately.

“Shulman’s theory of pedagogical content knowledge provides an important theoretical foundation for this argument. Effective teachers require not only general pedagogical skills but also knowledge of how specific disciplinary content can be represented and explained to learners.”³⁶ This means that a teacher’s competence should not be assessed only by asking:

“Can this person teach?” It should also be asked: “Can this person effectively teach this particular subject?” That distinction is fundamental.

Why Islamic Studies Requires Specialized Teachers:

Islamic Studies involves multiple layers of knowledge. A teacher may need to explain a Qur’anic verse, introduce its historical context, clarify important terminology, discuss its ethical implications, and connect its message with contemporary life. Similarly, when teaching Hadith, the teacher may need to explain the meaning of the text, its context, its relevance, and the moral or legal principle derived from it. In Seerah, students may require historical context rather than a simple chronological narrative. In Islamic jurisprudence, students may encounter differences of scholarly interpretation. In Islamic ethics, students may need to apply principles to contemporary questions. These tasks require more than memorizing textbook answers.

They require disciplinary understanding. Consequently, the specialization of the teacher can potentially influence the depth and accuracy of classroom learning.

The role of teachers with MPhil and PhD qualifications deserves particular attention.

An MPhil or PhD in Islamic Studies generally involves advanced engagement with academic literature, research methodology, primary sources, scholarly debates, and specialized areas of Islamic thought. Such qualifications can provide teachers with greater exposure to analytical and research-based approaches. However, it would be academically inappropriate to claim that every PhD holder is automatically a superior school teacher. A PhD primarily demonstrates advanced academic specialization; effective teaching additionally requires pedagogical competence.

The appropriate policy objective should therefore be:

Subject specialization + advanced academic knowledge + pedagogical competence = stronger professional preparation.

This integrated model is more defensible than simply equating higher degrees with teaching quality. Research from Punjab provides useful supporting evidence.” Koser and Parveen found differences in subject-matter competencies among teachers according to qualification, with MPhil teachers demonstrating stronger competencies than MA teachers within their study sample”³⁷ Although this study was not specifically limited to Islamic Studies teachers, its findings provide a rationale for examining whether a similar relationship exists within Islamic Studies education.

Subject Specialist versus Non-Specialist Teacher:

For empirical purposes, the present study proposes distinguishing between three categories of teachers:

Category A: Fully Specialized

Teachers holding degrees primarily in Islamic Studies or closely related specialized fields.

Category B: Partially Specialized

Teachers possessing some formal Islamic Studies education but whose highest qualification is in another related discipline.

Category C: Non-Specialized

Teachers whose formal academic specialization lies outside Islamic Studies and who have been assigned the subject institutionally. This classification would allow researchers to examine whether student achievement differs systematically across the three groups.

The analysis should not assume the result in advance. Instead, the hypothesis should be tested.

For example:

Mean Student Score Category A

versus

Mean Student Score Category B

versus

Mean Student Score Category C

If statistically significant differences are identified, further analysis can determine whether these differences remain significant after controlling for school type, socioeconomic status, teaching experience, class size, and parental involvement. One of the most important institutional questions is whether schools allocate Islamic Studies according to subject specialization or simply according to teacher availability. In schools where staffing shortages exist, administrators may face practical constraints. A timetable must be completed, classes must be covered, and available teachers must be assigned teaching periods. From an administrative perspective, such decisions may appear reasonable. From an academic perspective, however, they may create a serious problem if non-specialist teachers are repeatedly assigned to specialized subjects.

This is not a criticism of school administrators. It is an indication of a system-level staffing problem. If qualified Islamic Studies teachers are unavailable, the solution should not simply be to distribute Islamic Studies periods among unrelated subject teachers. The solution should be to develop a workforce-planning strategy that ensures adequate availability of specialist teachers.

Teacher specialization becomes even more significant because Islamic Studies frequently involves Qur’anic material. The Qur’an is an Arabic text, and Islamic scholarship has developed through centuries of engagement with Arabic sources. A teacher need not be a professional linguist to teach Islamic Studies, but an appropriate level of Qur’anic Arabic competence can strengthen the accuracy and depth of instruction. For example, understanding the distinction between related Arabic terms may alter the interpretation of an Islamic concept. Likewise, recognizing grammatical relationships or contextual meanings can help students understand why a particular translation has been used. Therefore, teacher specialization should ideally include an element of functional Qur’anic Arabic competence. This could become a measurable variable in the proposed research.

Specialization may also influence teacher confidence:

A teacher who has spent several years studying Islamic Studies is more likely to feel academically comfortable discussing questions related to Qur’an, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic law, and contemporary Islamic thought. This confidence can influence classroom interaction. Students often ask questions that extend beyond the textbook. A specialist teacher may be better prepared to respond, identify the boundaries of established knowledge, acknowledge differences of scholarly interpretation, and guide students toward reliable sources. A non-specialist teacher may instead rely heavily on the textbook because of limited confidence in the broader discipline. This is an empirical issue that can be examined through teacher interviews and classroom

observations. The relationship between specialization and achievement should ultimately be tested quantitatively. The basic model can be represented as:

Student Achievement = f (Teacher Specialization, Qualification, Arabic Proficiency, Pedagogical Practice, Experience, School Type, Parental Support)

A multiple regression model can then determine whether teacher specialization remains a significant predictor after other variables are controlled. The study can also calculate effect sizes to determine whether statistically significant differences are educationally meaningful. This distinction is important because statistical significance alone does not necessarily indicate practical significance.

There is also an important professional dimension. A teacher who specializes in Islamic Studies is likely to develop a stronger professional identity around the discipline. Subject specialization can create a sense of ownership, responsibility, and professional pride. This matters because teachers who identify strongly with their discipline may be more likely to: read current literature; attend conferences; conduct research; develop supplementary materials; use primary sources; update their knowledge; participate in professional development; and encourage students to explore beyond the textbook. This does not mean that non-specialist teachers lack commitment. Rather, it highlights the institutional value of developing a professional community of Islamic Studies educators.

Pakistan's educational system should therefore consider Islamic Studies teachers not simply as individuals assigned to deliver religious content, but as academic professionals belonging to a specialized discipline. They should have opportunities for: postgraduate education; research; professional training; curriculum development; textbook review; assessment design; conferences and seminars; Arabic language development; digital teaching skills; and interdisciplinary research. Such professionalization would raise the status of Islamic Studies within the broader academic environment.

The policy argument emerging from this discussion is straightforward:

If Pakistan requires specialist teachers for scientific, mathematical, linguistic, and technological disciplines, there is no convincing academic reason to treat Islamic Studies as an exception. Indeed, because Islamic Studies carries constitutional, cultural, ethical, and religious significance in Pakistan, there is a strong argument for greater not lesser attention to teacher specialization.

The objective should not be to exclude competent teachers unnecessarily. Rather, the objective should be to ensure that: Every student has access to a teacher who possesses appropriate subject knowledge, pedagogical competence, and professional preparation for teaching Islamic Studies. If the forthcoming statistical analysis demonstrates a significant relationship between teacher specialization and student achievement, the implications for educational policy will be substantial. Teacher allocation policies may need revision. Recruitment criteria may need strengthening. Professional-development programs may need redesign. And Islamic Studies may need to be treated with the same seriousness of disciplinary specialization already accorded to other major academic subjects.

From Rote Memorization to Meaningful Islamic Learning:

The problem of Islamic Studies education in Pakistan cannot be fully understood through examination results alone. Behind every pass or failure percentage lies a particular model of teaching and learning. One of the most important questions, therefore, is what students are actually being asked to learn and how they are being prepared to learn it. Islamic Studies has traditionally involved memorization. The memorization of Qur'anic verses, Hadith, supplications, important terminology, and historical information has an undeniable place in Islamic educational tradition. The problem emerges when memorization becomes the primary measure of learning and students are rarely encouraged to understand, interpret, apply, analyze, and connect Islamic teachings with real-life situations. This distinction is particularly important in the context of contemporary Pakistan, where students are increasingly exposed to information through social media, digital platforms, YouTube, online lectures, and other sources. Merely requiring students to reproduce textbook material may not adequately prepare them to evaluate religious information or respond thoughtfully to contemporary questions.

Memorization is not inherently a negative educational practice. Islamic civilization itself has a strong tradition of memorization, particularly in Qur'anic and Hadith education. The Qur'an was preserved through both written and oral transmission, and memorization remains an important religious practice for Muslims. Therefore, the objective should not be to eliminate memorization from Islamic Studies. Rather, the objective should be to establish an appropriate relationship between:

Memorization → Understanding → Application → Reflection → Ethical Practice.

A student may memorize a Qur'anic verse but still fail to understand its broader message.

A student may memorize a Hadith but be unable to explain the ethical principle contained within it. A student may reproduce a definition of Islamic justice but struggle to apply the concept to a contemporary social problem. This distinction illustrates why examination marks alone may not provide a complete picture of Islamic learning.

Educational psychology distinguishes between remembering information and understanding it. "Bloom's revised taxonomy places "remembering" at the foundational level while identifying understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, and creation as progressively more complex cognitive processes."³⁹ This framework is particularly useful for Islamic Studies.

Consider a question asking students to reproduce the definition of justice in Islam. A student who memorizes the definition may obtain full marks. But a more advanced assessment might ask: "How can the Islamic principle of justice be applied to discrimination in contemporary society?"⁴⁰ The second question requires the student to understand the concept and apply it to a real-world context. Similarly, instead of merely asking students to reproduce a translation of a Qur'anic verse, an assessment could ask them to explain: the central message of the verse;

its ethical implications; its relevance to contemporary society; and how the principle could influence individual behavior. Such assessment would measure a deeper form of learning.

An examination system dominated by memorization can sometimes produce apparently successful students without ensuring deep understanding. Students may memorize:

prepared answers; important definitions; selected translations; historical dates; names and events; textbook paragraphs; quotations. They may reproduce this information accurately during examinations. However, when confronted with a new question, unfamiliar context, or practical ethical dilemma, they may struggle to apply their knowledge. This creates a potential distinction between: Examination Success and Educational Success. A high examination score is valuable, but the broader objective of education should be meaningful learning.

The Qur'an repeatedly encourages reflection, contemplation, reasoning, and thoughtful engagement with its message. The Qur'anic educational ethos therefore extends beyond mechanical repetition.

For example, the Qur'an asks: "Do they not reflect deeply?"⁴¹ Similarly, the Qur'an repeatedly calls human beings toward observation, reasoning, understanding, and reflection. Therefore, Islamic Studies pedagogy should provide opportunities for students to move from simply knowing what Islam

teaches toward understanding why a teaching matters and how it can be applied. This does not mean imposing modern educational theories upon Islamic education without consideration of Islamic tradition. Rather, it creates an opportunity to recover dimensions of Islamic intellectual tradition that emphasize reflection, reasoning, questioning, dialogue, and ethical action. The transition from rote learning to conceptual learning depends heavily on teachers. A specialist Islamic Studies teacher can potentially transform a textbook passage into a discussion. For example, instead of simply asking students to memorize the principles of Islamic economic justice, a teacher might ask: "How would Islamic principles respond to exploitation, unequal distribution of wealth, or digital financial fraud?"⁴² Similarly, while teaching Seerah, the teacher can move beyond chronological memorization and ask: "What leadership principles can contemporary institutions learn from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ?" In teaching Islamic ethics, students can be presented with contemporary scenarios involving: social media behavior; academic dishonesty; corruption; environmental responsibility; Financial justice; discrimination; family responsibilities. Such approaches make Islamic Studies relevant to students' lives.

A well-known principle in education is that students tend to focus their learning on what examinations reward. If examination questions primarily require memorization, students will rationally prioritize memorization. If examinations reward analysis and application, students and teachers are more likely to devote classroom time to those skills. This creates a powerful relationship: Assessment → Teaching Practices → Student Learning Behaviour. Therefore, examination reform may be one of the most effective mechanisms for improving Islamic Studies education. The study should consequently conduct a content analysis of Islamic Studies examination papers. Each question can be coded according to its cognitive level. For example:

Cognitive Level	Example
Remembering	Define Tawheed.
Understanding	Explain the importance of Tawheed.
Applying	Explain how Tawheed influences ethical decision-making.
Analyzing	Compare two approaches to an Islamic social issue.
Evaluating	Critically assess a contemporary issue in light of Islamic principles.

The proportion of questions at each level can then be statistically calculated.

If Islamic Studies is taught predominantly through memorization, several unintended consequences may emerge. First, students may perceive the subject as a subject of examination rather than a source of guidance. Second, students may develop the perception that success means remembering textbook language rather than understanding Islamic principles. Third, students may become dependent upon ready-made answers. Fourth, they may find it difficult to respond to contemporary questions that are not directly addressed in textbook wording. Finally, students may increasingly turn to social media for answers because classroom learning has not provided them with sufficient analytical tools. This last issue is particularly important in the digital age.

Today's students encounter religious information through TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, websites, podcasts, and messaging applications. This creates both an opportunity and a challenge. A student who has learned only to memorize may have difficulty distinguishing between: authentic and fabricated Hadith; scholarly interpretation and personal opinion;

reliable Qur'anic explanation and decontextualized quotations; established scholarship and viral religious claims. Therefore, contemporary Islamic Studies education should also develop religious information literacy. Students should learn how to ask:

Who produced this information?

What is its source?

Is the Hadith authentic?

What do recognized scholars say?

Is the Qur'anic verse being presented within its context?

Is this interpretation widely accepted or highly contested?

These are essential skills for responsible religious engagement in the twenty-first century.

This is another area where MPhil and PhD-level Islamic Studies teachers may potentially contribute. Research-oriented teachers are generally more familiar with academic databases, scholarly literature, research methodology, primary sources, and comparative interpretations.

They can therefore introduce students to a more inquiry-oriented educational environment. However, such teachers must also adapt their knowledge to the cognitive level of school students. A PhD-level lecture delivered to fifteen-year-old students is not necessarily effective pedagogy. The objective is therefore not to bring university-level complexity into schools indiscriminately.

The objective is to bring research-informed thinking into age-appropriate teaching.

The study proposes a balanced model for Islamic Studies:

Traditional Strengths,

Memorization,

Recitation,

Preservation of foundational knowledge,

Respect for primary sources,

Contemporary Educational Skills:

Understanding,

Critical thinking,

Application,

Analysis,

Discussion,

Problem-solving,

Digital literacy,

Meaningful Islamic Learning

Such a model does not reject traditional Islamic learning. Instead, it seeks to ensure that memorized knowledge becomes the foundation for understanding and ethical practice.

Statistical Testing of Teaching Methodology:

The proposed research can operationalize teaching methodology through a structured teacher questionnaire and classroom observation. Teachers may be classified according to the dominant instructional approach:

Group 1: Predominantly lecture/memorization-based

Group 2: Mixed instructional approach

Group 3: Predominantly conceptual/interactive approach

Student achievement scores can then be compared across the three groups.

A regression model can further determine whether instructional methodology remains a significant predictor of achievement after controlling for teacher qualification, school type, socioeconomic background, and student characteristics. This would transform the debate over “rote learning” from an opinion-based argument into an empirically testable proposition.

If the statistical findings demonstrate that students exposed to conceptual and interactive Islamic Studies teaching perform better on comprehension and application-based assessments, several reforms may be considered. First, teacher-training programs should emphasize modern pedagogical strategies. Second, examination boards should increase the proportion of conceptual and application-based questions. Third, textbooks should include case studies and contemporary examples. Fourth, teachers should receive training in Qur’anic and Hadith-based inquiry. Fifth, students should be encouraged to discuss Islamic principles rather than merely reproduce textbook paragraphs. The ultimate objective should be to develop students who can say not only: “I have memorized what Islam teaches,” but also: “I understand what Islam teaches, why it teaches it, and how its principles can guide responsible action.”⁴³

That is the difference between memorized religious information and meaningful Islamic education.

The Role of Parents, Home-Based Islamic Education, and Changing Family Structures:

The discussion of Islamic Studies achievement in Pakistan would remain incomplete if responsibility were placed exclusively on schools and teachers. Religious education, unlike many other academic subjects, often begins within the family long before a child enters formal schooling. Parents, grandparents, older siblings, and local religious institutions have historically contributed to children's early exposure to Qur’anic recitation, basic beliefs, prayer, manners, and Islamic values. The traditional Pakistani household therefore functioned, in many cases, as an informal extension of the religious classroom. Children often heard Qur’anic verses repeatedly at home, learned short Surahs, memorized supplications, listened to religious stories, and observed religious practices through their parents. This informal learning created a foundation upon which formal Islamic Studies education could build. However, Pakistan's social and family structures have changed considerably. Urbanization, migration, employment pressures, digital media, smaller households, changing patterns of parental employment, and increasing academic competition have transformed the environment in which children learn. The question is therefore not whether parents are “religious” or “non-religious.” Such a simplistic classification would not be academically useful. The more important research question is: To what extent does structured parental involvement in Islamic learning contribute to students’ achievement in Islamic Studies?

Historically, the home has played an important role in transmitting religious knowledge and values. For many Pakistani families, mothers in particular have traditionally introduced young children to: the Arabic alphabet; Qur’anic recitation; short Surahs; daily supplications; basic Islamic beliefs; prayer; cleanliness; respect for parents; honesty; kindness; and other moral values. The repeated oral transmission of religious material created familiarity with Islamic vocabulary before formal schooling began. This raises an important question for contemporary education: Where is this foundational learning taking place today? If home-based exposure has declined while schools continue to assume that children possess basic religious familiarity, a gap may emerge between curriculum expectations and students’ actual preparedness.

The traditional role of mothers in early religious education deserves careful and respectful examination. For generations, many mothers informally taught children by repetition: a verse was recited, the child repeated it; a Dua was read, the child repeated it; a religious story was narrated, and the child gradually remembered its moral lesson. This was not necessarily formal pedagogy, but it represented an important form of home-based experiential learning. However, contemporary family life is different. Many mothers are working professionals, educators, entrepreneurs, or otherwise engaged in demanding responsibilities. Even within households where mothers are not formally employed, domestic responsibilities, academic demands on children, and digital distractions can reduce the amount of uninterrupted time available for traditional religious instruction. The objective of this research is not to argue that women should return to an exclusively traditional domestic role. Rather, the changing family structure raises an educational question: If the traditional home-based mechanism of religious learning has changed, what institutional mechanism should compensate for the change? If schools are expected to assume a greater responsibility, then Islamic Studies teachers must be adequately prepared and the subject must receive sufficient instructional time.

The relationship between family and school should not be viewed as a competition:

Parents cannot replace specialist teachers, and teachers cannot replace parents.

A more effective model is:

Home → Foundation

School → Structured Knowledge

Teacher → Academic Guidance

Community → Social Reinforcement

Student → Active Learning

This integrated model may be particularly effective for Islamic Studies because religious knowledge is not merely informational. It also involves attitudes, values, ethical decisions, and behavioral practices. International educational research has repeatedly examined the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement.” Epstein's framework, for example, emphasizes the importance of meaningful partnerships between schools, families, and communities.”⁴⁴ However, parental involvement should not be measured merely by whether parents attend school meetings. For Islamic Studies, more relevant indicators might include:

discussing Islamic concepts with children; helping with Islamic Studies assignments; encouraging Qur’an reading; monitoring religious learning; discussing ethical issues; encouraging questions;

providing age-appropriate Islamic books; participating in religious learning activities, The study can therefore construct a Parental Islamic Education Involvement Index (PIEI). Each item can be measured using a Likert scale, for example:

1 = Never

2 = Rarely

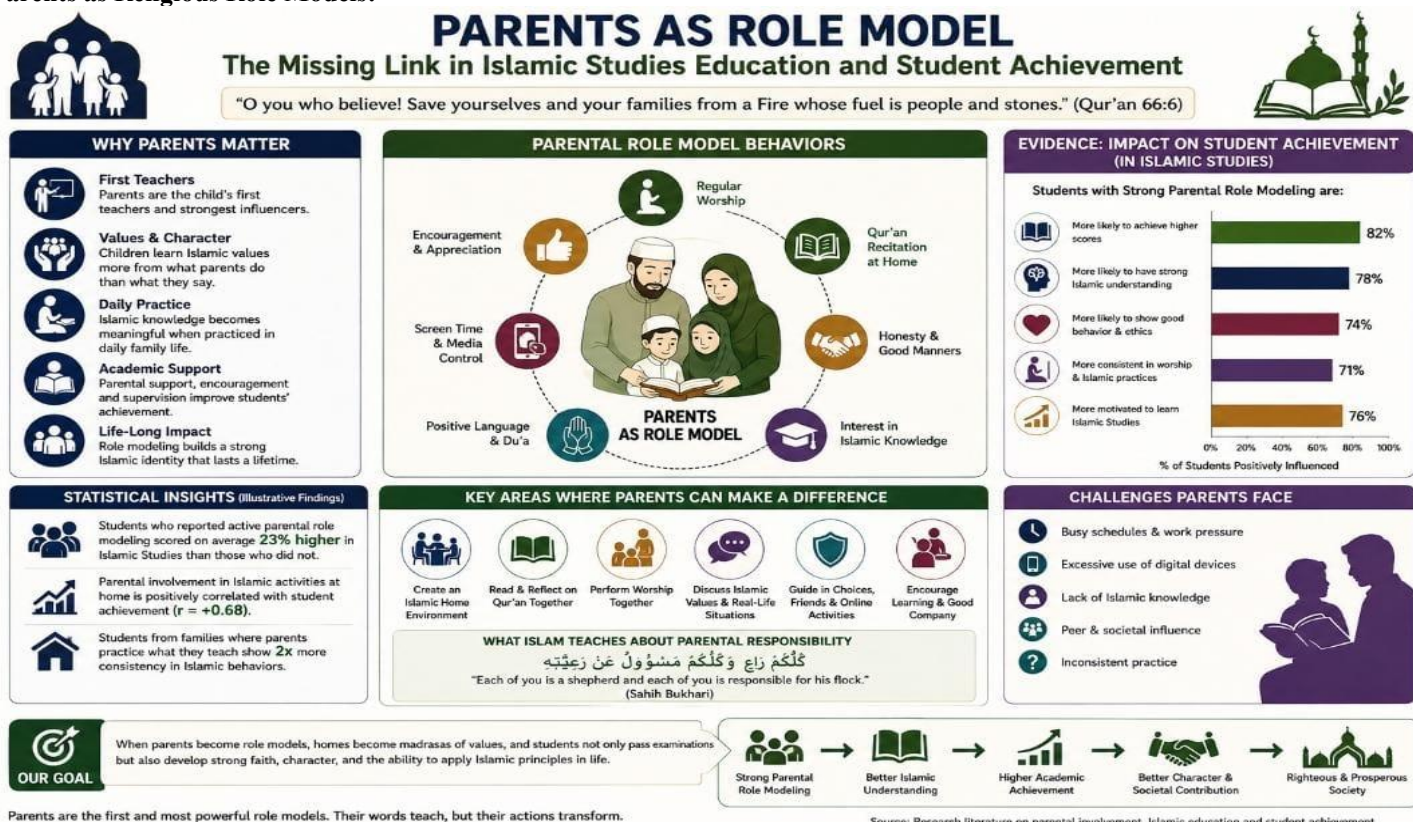
3 = Sometimes

4 = Often

5 = Very Often

A composite score can then be calculated and statistically compared with student achievement.

Parents as Religious Role Models:



Islamic education cannot be reduced to textbooks. Children observe adult behavior. A child may memorize a lesson about honesty in school but observe dishonesty at home. A child may learn about kindness in Islamic Studies but experience aggressive communication in daily life.

A child may study the importance of prayer but see religious practices treated as merely ceremonial. This creates an important distinction between: Religious instruction and religious socialization. Schools primarily provide instruction, whereas families contribute substantially to socialization. Therefore, Islamic Studies education is likely to be more effective when educational messages are reinforced through everyday behavior.

A possible weakness in the current system is the absence of systematic communication between Islamic Studies teachers and parents. Parents may know that their child is studying Islamic Studies but have little information about: what concepts are being taught; what learning outcomes are expected; what misconceptions students commonly have; how they can support learning at home. Schools could address this through simple mechanisms such as: parent information sessions; Islamic Studies learning guides; recommended reading lists; home discussion activities; Qur'anic vocabulary exercises; digital learning resources. Such measures would not require substantial financial investment.

The home environment is no longer limited to books and television. Children increasingly consume religious content through digital platforms. This creates both opportunities and risks.

Digital platforms can provide:

Qur'an recitation;

Translations;

Lectures;

Documentaries;

Educational animations;

Arabic learning;

Islamic history resources.

However, digital content may also expose students to:

Unverified religious claims;

Fabricated Hadith;

Sectarian polemics;

Decontextualized Qur'anic quotations;

Extremist interpretations;

Misinformation.

Therefore, parents and teachers should not merely tell students to "use Islamic content online."

They should teach students how to evaluate religious information. This makes digital religious literacy an increasingly important component of Islamic Studies education.

An important conceptual model emerging from this discussion is the:

Mother–Teacher–Student Educational Triangle: Traditionally, mothers often provided early religious exposure, teachers provided structured instruction, and students internalized and practiced the knowledge. In contemporary Pakistan, this triangle may need to be reconfigured rather than abandoned. The model could become:

Family Support + Specialist Teacher + Digital Resources + Student Engagement.

Such a model recognizes social change while preserving the educational value of home-based religious learning. It is important to emphasize that the argument concerning mothers should not be interpreted as suggesting that religious education is exclusively a woman's responsibility.

Islamic education is a responsibility shared by: mothers; fathers; teachers; schools; communities;

religious institutions and the wider educational system. The traditional contribution of mothers is worth recognizing historically, but contemporary educational policy should encourage shared parental responsibility. This is especially important because fathers' involvement may be equally significant in shaping children's religious identity and learning habits.

Statistical Model for Parental Influence:

The role of parental involvement can be incorporated into the study's regression model:

Student Achievement = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$ Teacher Specialization + β_2 Teacher Qualification + β_3 Arabic Proficiency + β_4 Pedagogical Practice + β_5 Parental Involvement + β_6 School Type + β_7 Socioeconomic Status + ϵ

This model would allow researchers to determine whether parental involvement remains a significant predictor after controlling for teacher and school factors. A multilevel model could be considered if students are nested within schools, because students from the same school may share institutional characteristics.

If the findings demonstrate a significant relationship between parental involvement and Islamic Studies achievement, educational authorities should not simply tell parents to "teach Islam at home."⁴⁵ Instead, schools should provide parents with practical support. For example:

Parent Islamic Learning Guides, Short guides explaining what students are expected to learn.

Home Discussion Activities

Questions that parents can discuss with children.

Qur'anic Vocabulary Support

Simple Arabic vocabulary lists corresponding to the syllabus.

Digital Resource Lists

Verified educational resources for students.

Regular communication concerning student progress.

Such interventions could strengthen the relationship between formal and informal Islamic education.

The issue of Islamic Studies failure ultimately reveals a broader principle:

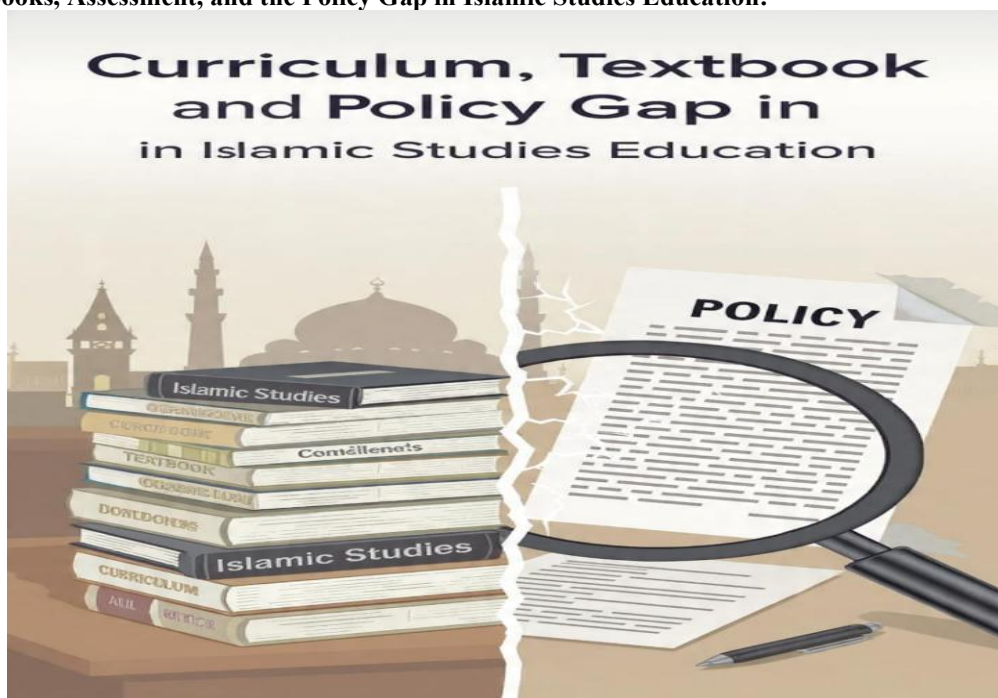
Education does not begin when a child enters school, and it does not end when the examination finishes.

Islamic education is particularly dependent upon continuity between knowledge, family, school, and lived experience.

If children once received substantial informal religious learning at home and that mechanism has weakened because of changing social conditions, educational policy must acknowledge the change. The answer is not nostalgia. The answer is institutional adaptation. Pakistan needs an Islamic Studies education system capable of functioning effectively within the realities of the twenty-first-century family. This means supporting parents, empowering specialist teachers, improving curricula, reforming assessments, and teaching students how to engage intelligently with religious knowledge in both physical and digital environments. The ultimate goal should be to create continuity between:

What the child hears at home → What the child learns at school → What the child understands → What the child practices in life.

Curriculum, Textbooks, Assessment, and the Policy Gap in Islamic Studies Education:



The performance of students in Islamic Studies cannot be attributed exclusively to teachers or learners. Educational achievement is produced through an interconnected system in which curriculum, textbooks, teacher preparation, classroom instruction, assessment, school administration, and educational

policy interact with one another. If one component is weak, the effectiveness of the entire system may be compromised. This is particularly important in Pakistan because Islamic Studies occupies a distinctive position within the national education system. The Constitution recognizes Islam as the State religion and directs the State to make provisions for enabling Muslims to order their lives according to the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam.” Article 31 also refers specifically to the teaching of the Holy Qur’an and Islamiyat and to the promotion of Arabic.”⁴⁶ Consequently, the quality of Islamic Studies education should not be regarded as a marginal curricular issue. It is connected with the country’s constitutional, educational, cultural, and ethical objectives. A curriculum document may contain ambitious objectives such as: developing understanding of Islamic teachings; cultivating moral values;

promoting tolerance; developing responsible citizenship; understanding the Qur’an and Sunnah; appreciating Islamic civilization; encouraging ethical conduct. However, the existence of these objectives does not guarantee their achievement. There may be a substantial difference between: What the curriculum intends and what the classroom actually delivers.

This difference may be described as the curriculum–implementation gap. For example, a curriculum may encourage critical thinking while classroom instruction remains predominantly lecture-based. Similarly, a curriculum may emphasize understanding of Qur’anic teachings while examination questions may reward memorized translations and prepared answers.

When such contradictions exist, students naturally adapt their learning strategies to the assessment system.

In many school environments, the textbook becomes the primary sometimes almost exclusive source of classroom knowledge. This creates a particular challenge in Islamic Studies. If teachers depend entirely on the textbook, students may develop the impression that Islamic knowledge consists only of the information contained in a single prescribed book. However, Islamic scholarship is much broader. The Qur’an, Hadith, Seerah literature, classical scholarship, jurisprudential traditions, historical works, and contemporary research constitute a vast intellectual tradition. School textbooks necessarily simplify this material for students. That simplification is appropriate for their age, but it should not become intellectual closure. Specialist teachers can help students understand that the textbook is an educational starting point rather than the entire universe of Islamic knowledge. Another important factor is the language of instruction. Students may encounter complex Urdu terminology, Arabic expressions, translated Qur’anic passages, and technical religious vocabulary. If these concepts are introduced without adequate explanation, students may memorize them without understanding them. The study should therefore examine whether textbook language corresponds appropriately with students’ cognitive and linguistic levels. A useful textbook should include:

- Clear explanations;
- Age-appropriate language;
- Relevant examples;
- Visual aids where appropriate;
- Contextual information;
- Learning activities;
- Analytical questions;
- Contemporary applications.

Assessment is one of the strongest forces shaping classroom behavior.

If students know that their examination will primarily test memorization, they have little incentive to develop deeper analytical skills. Teachers face the same pressure. A teacher who spends substantial time developing discussions and critical-thinking activities may feel compelled to return to examination-oriented preparation if students’ grades depend primarily on recall.

Therefore: Assessment reform may be more powerful than curriculum reform alone. Curriculum objectives and assessment objectives must be aligned. If the curriculum says: “Students should understand and apply Islamic principles,”⁴⁷ but the examination asks: “Write the definition exactly as given in the textbook,”⁴⁸ then the assessment system is communicating a contradictory message.

This can be represented as:

Curriculum Objective → Teaching Method → Assessment Method → Student Learning Behaviour

When all four are aligned, educational outcomes are likely to improve.

But when they conflict: Conceptual Curriculum + Memorization-Based Examination = Rote Learning .This is one of the central hypotheses of the present research. The study will therefore analyze whether Islamic Studies examination papers adequately reflect the stated cognitive objectives of the curriculum. A systematic content analysis can be conducted on Islamic Studies examination papers from selected examination boards over multiple years.

“Each question can be coded according to cognitive category:

Category	Description
Remembering	Recalling facts or information
Understanding	Explaining meaning
Applying	Using principles in a situation
Analyzing	Breaking information into components
Evaluating	Making judgments based on evidence
Creating	Developing a reasoned response or solution

These categories are based on the revised Bloom’s taxonomy.”⁴⁹

The study can then calculate the percentage of marks allocated to each cognitive category.

For example, if:

70% of marks = Remembering
and

30% = Understanding/Application/Analysis

the assessment system would appear heavily weighted toward lower-level cognitive processes.

This would provide measurable evidence rather than relying on general criticism of rote learning.

Islamic Studies education should also examine whether students are being encouraged to understand the Qur’an rather than merely memorize selected translations.

The Qur’an itself repeatedly calls human beings toward reflection and contemplation.

For example: “Do they not reflect upon the Qur’an?”⁵⁰ This verse provides a powerful conceptual basis for an educational model in which Qur’anic learning involves reflection and understanding. The objective should therefore be to develop students who can identify:

the central message of a passage; relevant vocabulary; ethical implications; contextual meaning;

contemporary relevance. This does not diminish the value of memorization. Rather, it places memorization within a broader educational framework. “Article 31 of Pakistan’s Constitution specifically refers to arrangements for the teaching of the Arabic language and the promotion of its learning among Muslims.”⁵¹ This constitutional provision raises an important educational question: Are students receiving sufficient linguistic preparation to engage meaningfully with Qur’anic Arabic? If students encounter Qur’anic passages primarily through translation, their access to the original linguistic structure remains limited. The solution does not necessarily require turning secondary-school Islamic Studies into an advanced Arabic-language program.

A more realistic approach would be to introduce: essential Qur’anic vocabulary;

common grammatical structures; recurring Qur’anic expressions; root-word awareness; basic linguistic analysis. This could enhance students’ independent engagement with Qur’anic material.

Curriculum reform must also consider the amount of content students are expected to cover.

An overloaded syllabus may encourage teachers to rush through topics. When teachers have insufficient time, they may prioritize: “What will come in the examination?” rather than:

“What will students genuinely understand?” This creates a cycle:

Large Syllabus → Limited Time → Rapid Teaching → Memorization → Examination Preparation → Weak Conceptual Understanding. Reducing unnecessary content while strengthening conceptual depth may therefore produce better educational outcomes. Students increasingly ask questions that emerge from their real-world experiences. They encounter issues such as:

artificial intelligence; social media ethics; financial technology; environmental responsibility;

gender relations; human dignity; interfaith relations; misinformation; Digital privacy; consumerism; corruption; social justice. Islamic Studies education should equip students with principles that enable them to think responsibly about such issues. This does not require turning every lesson into a contemporary political debate. Rather, it requires showing students that Islamic principles have intellectual relevance beyond examination halls.

Educational policy makers should therefore examine Islamic Studies through the same policy questions applied to other major subjects:

Who is teaching it?

What are they qualified to teach?

What are students expected to learn?

How much time is allocated?

What textbooks are being used?

What cognitive skills are assessed?

What are the achievement trends?

What professional development is available?

How is teacher performance evaluated?

These questions should be answered through evidence.

The present study proposes an integrated reform framework:

Specialist Teachers

↓

Improved Teacher Training

↓

Conceptually Strong Curriculum

↓

Better Textbooks

↓

Balanced Assessment

↓

Greater Parental Engagement

↓

Improved Student Understanding

↓

Meaningful Islamic Learning

This model emphasizes that no single intervention is likely to solve the problem.

Recruiting specialist teachers without reforming assessment may produce limited change. Changing textbooks without training teachers may produce limited change. Changing examinations without addressing classroom practices may also produce limited change.

The system must therefore be reformed holistically. Pakistan has repeatedly articulated educational objectives concerning Islamic education. The challenge is translating those objectives into measurable classroom outcomes. A policy becomes meaningful when it produces observable change. Therefore, future educational planning should establish measurable indicators such as: percentage of Islamic Studies classes taught by specialists; teacher qualification levels; teacher Arabic proficiency; annual professional-development hours; student conceptual achievement; Examination cognitive-level distribution; pass/failure trends; student attitudes toward Islamic Studies. These indicators would allow educational authorities to monitor progress over time. The reported failure of thousands of students should therefore be understood within the larger educational ecosystem. If the problem is treated solely as:

“Students are not studying,” the policy response may simply be to demand greater effort from students. If it is treated as: “Teachers are not teaching,” the response may focus exclusively on teacher accountability. But if the problem is examined as a systemic educational issue, a much broader set of questions emerges. The central question becomes: Are Pakistan’s curriculum, teacher allocation, teacher specialization, textbooks, classroom practices, assessment system, and parental engagement collectively capable of achieving the objectives assigned to Islamic Studies? This is the question that

requires empirical investigation. And this is precisely where statistical research can move the discussion beyond criticism toward reform. The evidence and arguments presented in the preceding sections lead to an important. The problem of Islamic Studies education in Pakistan cannot be addressed through a single intervention. If student achievement is genuinely weak, the solution cannot simply be to instruct students to study harder. Nor can the responsibility be transferred entirely to teachers. The issue requires a system-wide policy response involving teacher recruitment, subject specialization, curriculum design, assessment, parental engagement, Arabic language preparation, and continuous monitoring. This need is particularly significant in Pakistan because Islamic education occupies a distinctive constitutional position. "Article 2 of the Constitution recognizes Islam as the State religion, while Article 31 directs the State to take steps to enable Muslims to order their lives according to the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam. The Constitution also specifically refers to the teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Islamiyat and to the promotion of Arabic."⁵² Therefore, improving Islamic Studies education should not be regarded merely as an optional academic enhancement. It should be considered part of fulfilling the educational objectives associated with Pakistan's constitutional framework.

The first requirement is reliable data: Before introducing major reforms, policymakers need to know the actual scale and nature of the problem.

A national Islamic Studies education database should therefore be developed containing:

- Annual subject-wise examination results;
- Board-wise pass and failure rates;
- Gender-disaggregated performance;
- Urban-rural differences;
- Public-private school differences;
- Teacher qualifications;
- Teacher specialization;
- Teacher experience;
- Arabic proficiency;
- Instructional practices;
- Examination cognitive levels; and
- Socioeconomic indicators.

This would enable policymakers to move from anecdotal claims toward evidence-based decision-making.

Establishing a National Islamic Studies Achievement Index:

The study proposes the development of a National Islamic Studies Achievement Index (NISAI).

The index could combine several dimensions:

1. Examination Achievement

Students' standardized examination scores.

2. Conceptual Understanding

Ability to explain Islamic concepts.

3. Application

Ability to apply Islamic principles to practical situations.

4. Qur'anic Understanding

Ability to comprehend selected Qur'anic passages.

5. Ethical Reasoning

Ability to apply Islamic ethical principles to contemporary problems.

A composite index would provide a more comprehensive picture than pass/fail results alone.

Mandatory Subject-Specialist Allocation:

One of the most important reforms should concern teacher allocation.

Wherever staffing conditions permit, Islamic Studies should be assigned to teachers with relevant academic qualifications. A policy framework could establish minimum qualification criteria for different educational levels. For example:

Primary Level: Appropriate religious and pedagogical preparation.

Middle Level: Relevant Islamic Studies qualification preferred.

Secondary Level: Islamic Studies specialization strongly preferred.

Higher Secondary Level: Relevant postgraduate qualification increasingly desirable.

The precise requirements should be determined by educational authorities according to available workforce and institutional capacity.

The principle, however, should remain clear:

A specialized subject deserves appropriately specialized teaching.

Creating a Specialist Teacher Registry:

Education departments could establish a centralized database of Islamic Studies specialists.

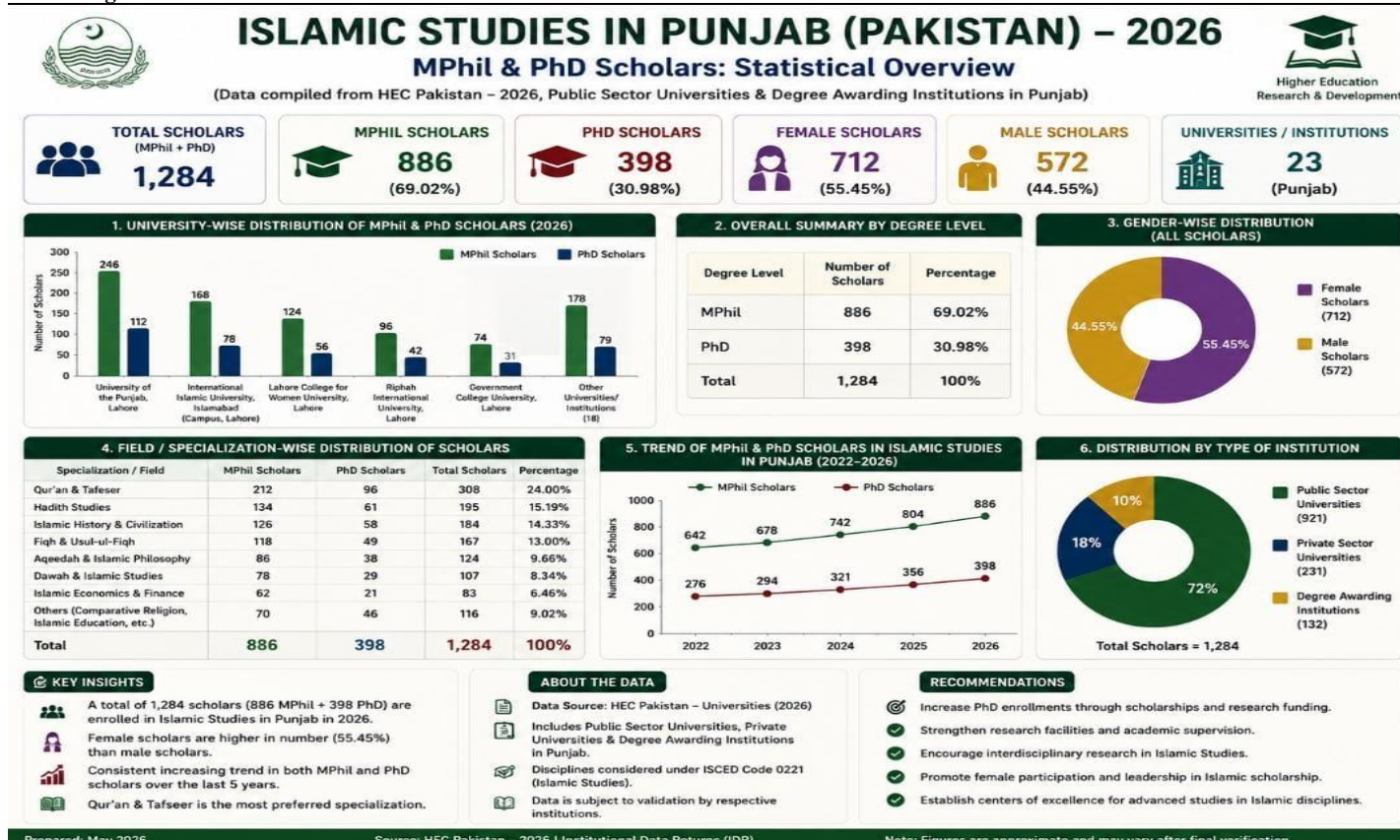
The registry could include:

- Academic qualifications;
- Specialization;
- MPhil/PhD status;
- Teaching experience;
- Arabic proficiency;
- Professional training;
- Research experience;
- Geographical availability.

This would make teacher allocation more rational and transparent.

Instead of assigning Islamic Studies periods merely according to timetable availability, administrators could identify appropriately qualified teachers.

Recruiting MPhil and PhD Islamic Studies Graduates:



Pakistan produces scholars with advanced qualifications in Islamic Studies through universities and research institutions. However, the availability of highly qualified scholars does not automatically mean that they are effectively integrated into school education. A policy pathway could be developed through which MPhil and PhD Islamic Studies graduates receive specialized pedagogical preparation for secondary education. This could create a new professional category:

Research-Informed Islamic Studies School Teacher. Such teachers could combine advanced subject knowledge with modern educational methodology. Teacher qualification at the point of recruitment is not sufficient. Teachers need continuous professional development. A national professional-development framework should include modules on:

Qur'anic pedagogy;
Hadith teaching;
Seerah methodology;
Islamic ethics;
Arabic language;
Educational psychology;
Assessment design;
Critical thinking;
Digital literacy;
Classroom discussion;
Contemporary Islamic issues;

Professional development should not be limited to occasional workshops.

It should be continuous, measurable, and practice-oriented.

Because Islamic Studies frequently involves Qur'anic and Hadith material, Arabic competence should be incorporated into teacher-development policies.

Teachers could receive structured training in:

Qur'anic vocabulary; basic morphology, syntax; translation skills; classical terminology; contextual interpretation. The objective would not be to transform every Islamic Studies teacher into a professional Arabic scholar. Rather, it would provide teachers with sufficient linguistic competence to avoid excessive dependence on secondary translations. Examination reform should become a central component of the policy agenda. A balanced examination might include:

30% Remembering
25% Understanding
20% Application
15% Analysis
10% Evaluation

The exact percentages would require empirical validation, but the principle is important: examinations should measure more than memorization. Students should be asked to interpret, compare, explain, apply, and reason. This would encourage teachers to adopt more meaningful instructional practices.

One particularly effective approach could be the introduction of case-based questions.

For example: Case: Academic dishonesty

A student observes classmates cheating during an examination. The question could ask:

“Using relevant Islamic ethical principles, explain how the student should respond and justify your answer.”⁵³ Such a question tests: knowledge of Islamic ethics; understanding; application; reasoning; moral judgment. It also connects Islamic Studies to students' actual experiences.

Islamic Studies should not become detached from the realities students encounter.

Contemporary modules could address:

Environmental ethics;

Artificial intelligence;

Digital misinformation;

Financial ethics;

Social justice;

Human dignity;

Responsible citizenship;

Interfaith relations;

Family ethics;

Digital privacy;

Corruption;

Consumerism.

This would demonstrate that Islamic principles are not merely historical information but intellectual resources for ethical engagement with contemporary life.

Supporting Parents:

Educational authorities should also recognize the role of parents.

Schools could provide parents with simple resources explaining: what students are learning; how parents can support them; recommended Qur'anic reading; discussion questions; age-appropriate Islamic resources; guidance for evaluating online religious content. Such measures could strengthen home school cooperation without transferring the responsibility of formal education to parents.

Every school system should know: Which teacher is teaching which subject? This seems obvious, but it is essential for educational planning. Education departments could introduce an annual Teacher–Subject Alignment Audit. For each subject, administrators could record:

Teacher Qualification → Subject Assigned → Grade Level → Teaching Experience

A mismatch could then be identified.

For Islamic Studies: Islamic Studies Qualification + Islamic Studies Assignment = Strong Alignment

whereas: Unrelated Qualification + Islamic Studies Assignment = Potential Mismatch

The purpose should not be punishment. The purpose should be professional planning and corrective action.

Another policy question concerns instructional time. A subject cannot achieve meaningful learning outcomes if students receive insufficient exposure. Education authorities should examine whether the number of Islamic Studies periods allocated each week is sufficient to achieve the curriculum's intended outcomes. Time allocation should be based on: curriculum volume; learning objectives; assessment requirements; student cognitive level; instructional activities.

Pakistan also needs more empirical research on Islamic Studies education. Universities and education departments should support research investigating: teacher specialization;

student achievement; curriculum effectiveness; examination quality; Arabic competence;

digital Islamic education; parental involvement; textbook quality; gender differences; rural urban disparities. Such research should employ both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative data can identify patterns. Qualitative research can explain why those patterns exist. From “Who Is Responsible?” to “What Should Be Changed?” Public discussion often asks:

“Who is responsible for students failing?” This framing can become counterproductive.

Teachers blame students.

Parents blame schools.

Schools blame teachers.

Students blame examinations.

Policymakers blame implementation.

A better question is: “Which parts of the system are contributing to weak achievement, and which interventions are most likely to improve outcomes?”⁵⁴ This moves the discussion from blame to reform. Based on the preceding analysis, this study proposes five major pillars:

Pillar 1 Specialist Teachers;

Recruit and appropriately deploy qualified Islamic Studies teachers.

Pillar 2 Curriculum Reform:

Reduce unnecessary content and increase conceptual and contemporary relevance.

Pillar 3 Assessment Reform:

Move from excessive recall toward understanding, application, analysis, and ethical reasoning.

Pillar 4 Family and Community Engagement:

Strengthen cooperation between parents, schools, religious institutions, and communities.

Pillar 5 Statistical Monitoring:

Establish continuous measurement of student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

These pillars should operate simultaneously. The ultimate objective of Islamic Studies education should not simply be: “More students should pass.”

That is an important short-term indicator, but it cannot be the final goal. The deeper objective should be: Students who understand Islamic teachings, can engage with their sources responsibly, can distinguish authentic knowledge from misinformation, can apply Islamic ethical principles to contemporary

challenges, and can translate knowledge into responsible conduct. This represents a shift from examination-oriented Islamic Studies toward meaningful Islamic education.

The reported failure of thousands of students, if verified through official examination data, should not merely be viewed as a crisis. It can become an opportunity. It can encourage policymakers to ask difficult but necessary questions. It can encourage universities to strengthen teacher preparation. It can encourage schools to prioritize specialist teaching. It can encourage examination boards to improve assessment. It can encourage parents to reconnect with children's educational development. And it can encourage researchers to generate the evidence required for sustainable reform. Pakistan does not need to choose between traditional Islamic education and modern educational methodology. It can preserve the strengths of its Islamic educational heritage while incorporating contemporary pedagogical and statistical approaches.

The challenge is therefore not to make Islamic Studies more difficult. The challenge is to make it more meaningful, more academically rigorous, more professionally taught, and more effectively assessed. For a country whose constitutional framework gives Islamic education a distinctive place, this should not be considered an optional reform. It should be regarded as an educational responsibility.

Research Methodology: A Statistical Framework for Examining Islamic Studies Achievement in Pakistan:

The central argument of this study requires empirical investigation. Although public discussion surrounding the performance of students in Islamic Studies frequently focuses on examination results, teacher quality, parental involvement, and curriculum weaknesses, these factors must be examined systematically before definitive conclusions can be drawn. The present study therefore proposes a mixed-method, quantitative-dominant research design to investigate the relationship between teacher specialization, instructional practices, curriculum, assessment, parental involvement, and student achievement in Islamic Studies. The methodological objective is not merely to determine how many students fail Islamic Studies. Rather, it is to identify why students perform differently and which educational variables are significantly associated with their achievement. The proposed study will employ a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative evidence. The quantitative component will examine: student examination scores; pass and failure rates; teacher qualifications; teacher specialization; teaching experience; Arabic proficiency; instructional practices; parental involvement; school type; geographical location; and socioeconomic background. The qualitative component will explore the experiences and perceptions of: Islamic Studies teachers; students; parents; school administrators; and curriculum and assessment experts. The combination of these approaches will enable the study to determine not only whether relationships exist, but also how and why those relationships may occur." Creswell and Creswell emphasize that mixed-method research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena when quantitative patterns and qualitative explanations are integrated."⁵⁶

The population of the study should include secondary-level students studying Islamic Studies in Pakistan. For a nationally representative investigation, the sample should ideally include students from multiple provinces and administrative regions. The sample could be stratified according to: province/region; urban and rural location; public and private schools; gender; examination board; and socioeconomic background. A multistage sampling strategy would be appropriate.

For example:

Stage 1: Select examination boards.

Stage 2: Select districts.

Stage 3: Select schools.

Stage 4: Select Islamic Studies teachers.

Stage 5: Select students.

This approach would allow the research to capture variation across Pakistan's diverse educational contexts.

The final sample size should be calculated statistically rather than selected arbitrarily. For a large population, the researcher may use Cochran's sample-size formula:

$$n_0 = Z^2 pq / e^2$$

where :

n_0 = required sample size;

Z = standard normal value corresponding to the desired confidence level;

p = estimated proportion of the population;

$q = 1 - p$;

e = acceptable margin of error.

For example, at a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error, an initial sample of approximately 384 respondents may be obtained for a large population, subject to adjustment for sampling design and non-response. However, because the proposed research involves students nested within schools and potentially within examination boards, a larger sample would be preferable.

The study should use both primary and secondary data.

Primary Data:

Primary data may be collected through: student achievement tests; teacher questionnaires; student questionnaires; parent questionnaires; classroom observation schedules; semi-structured interviews.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data should include: official examination-board results; subject-wise pass/failure statistics; curriculum documents; textbooks; examination papers; teacher recruitment policies; national education policies; official statistical reports. The use of official examination data is particularly important for verifying claims concerning the number of students who failed Islamic Studies.

Verification of the Reported Failure Figure:

A central methodological requirement of the study is the verification of the reported "10,000+ students failed Islamic Studies" figure. The researchers should not automatically reproduce this number as an established national fact. Instead, they should trace the figure to its original source. The investigation should determine:

1. Which examination board reported the figure?
2. Which examination year does it represent?
3. How many students appeared?
4. How many passed?
5. How many failed?

6. What percentage of candidates failed?
7. Does the figure represent one board or multiple boards?
8. Is the figure officially published?
9. Has it been independently reported?
10. Does it represent Islamic Studies specifically or a broader category?

This process will protect the research from statistical overstatement.

Student Achievement Test:

In addition to official examination results, the study should develop a standardized Islamic Studies achievement test. The test should contain questions measuring different cognitive levels.

For example:

Section A Knowledge:

Basic facts, terminology, Qur'anic concepts, Hadith, Seerah, and Islamic history.

Section B Understanding:

Explanation and interpretation of Islamic concepts.

Section C Application:

Application of Islamic principles to practical situations.

Section D Analysis:

Comparison and analysis of Islamic perspectives.

Section E Ethical Reasoning:

Application of Islamic values to contemporary problems.

This test would provide a more comprehensive measure of Islamic Studies achievement than board examinations alone.

Teacher Questionnaire:

A teacher questionnaire should measure: academic qualification; Islamic Studies specialization; teaching experience; professional development; Arabic proficiency; familiarity with primary Islamic sources; teaching methodology; assessment practices; use of digital resources; classroom discussion; perceived student difficulties. Teacher specialization should be coded objectively rather than based solely on self-identification. For example:

1 = Islamic Studies specialization

2 = Related religious specialization

3 = Non-specialist

Questionnaires alone may not accurately capture classroom practice. Therefore, classroom observations should be conducted for a subsample of teachers. Observers may record: percentage of lesson devoted to lecture; student participation; questioning techniques; use of primary sources; use of examples; analytical discussion; Arabic explanation; formative assessment; student engagement. This will permit comparison between reported teaching practices and observed teaching practices.

The parent questionnaire should measure the level of Islamic educational support available at home. Variables may include: frequency of Qur'an reading; religious discussion at home; support with Islamic Studies homework; availability of Islamic books; monitoring of digital religious content; participation in religious learning; communication with teachers. A composite parental involvement score can then be developed. Research instruments must demonstrate adequate reliability and validity. Internal consistency can be assessed using Cronbach's alpha for appropriate multi-item scales. Content validity can be established through review by experts in:

Islamic Studies; education; curriculum; assessment; Arabic; educational statistics. A pilot study should be conducted before full-scale data collection. Items that demonstrate poor discrimination or ambiguity should be revised or removed. The first stage of analysis should involve descriptive statistics. These may include: frequency; percentage; mean; median; standard deviation; minimum; maximum; range. For example, the study could report:

Mean Islamic Studies score = X

Standard deviation = X

Pass rate = X%

Failure rate = X%

Such statistics would establish the overall achievement profile.

Comparative Analysis:

The study should compare achievement across different groups. Possible comparisons include:

Specialist	vs.	non- specialist teachers
Public	vs.	private schools
Urban	vs.	rural schools
Male	vs.	female students
High	vs.	low parental involvement
High	vs.	low Arabic teacher proficiency

Depending on data characteristics, statistical tests such as: independent-samples t test; one-way ANOVA; Mann-Whitney U; Kruskal-Wallis test; may be used. The choice of test should depend on assumptions and the distribution of the data.

Pearson or Spearman correlation coefficients can be used to examine relationships between variables. For example:

Teacher specialization ↔ Student achievement

Parental involvement ↔ Student achievement

Arabic proficiency ↔ Student achievement

Teaching experience ↔ Student achievement

Conceptual teaching ↔ Student achievement

However, correlation does not establish causation.

A positive relationship between teacher specialization and achievement does not automatically prove that specialization caused higher achievement.

Multiple regression would provide a stronger statistical framework. A possible model is:

Achievement = $\beta_0 + \beta_1TS + \beta_2TQ + \beta_3AP + \beta_4PP + \beta_5PI + \beta_6ST + \beta_7SES + \varepsilon$

Where:

TS = Teacher Specialization

TQ = Teacher Qualification

AP = Arabic Proficiency

PP = Pedagogical Practice

PI = Parental Involvement

ST = School Type

SES = Socioeconomic Status

ϵ = Error term

This model would allow the researcher to estimate the independent contribution of each predictor. Because students are taught within classrooms and classrooms exist within schools, educational data are naturally hierarchical.

For example: Students → Classrooms → Schools → Districts/Boards

Students in the same school may share: the same administration; facilities; teachers; timetable; school culture. Consequently, a multilevel model may be more appropriate than ordinary regression when the sample structure supports it. Such analysis could determine how much of the variation in Islamic Studies achievement occurs at: student level; teacher level; school level; and regional level. This would be particularly valuable for policy planning.

Interviews with teachers, students, parents, and administrators can provide explanations for quantitative findings. For example, if specialist teachers are associated with higher achievement, interviews may reveal why. Teachers may describe: stronger subject confidence; better understanding of Qur'anic material; greater familiarity with Arabic; improved ability to answer student questions; broader access to scholarly resources. Students may describe: greater classroom engagement; better conceptual explanations; increased confidence; greater interest in the subject. Qualitative data can therefore help explain statistical patterns.

Research Hypotheses:

The study may test the following hypotheses:

H₁: Students taught by Islamic Studies specialist teachers demonstrate significantly higher achievement than students taught by non-specialist teachers.

H₂: Teacher Arabic proficiency is positively associated with students' Qur'anic comprehension.

H₃: Conceptual and interactive teaching practices are positively associated with Islamic Studies achievement.

H₄: Higher parental involvement is positively associated with student achievement.

H₅: Students exposed to higher proportions of application- and analysis-based assessment demonstrate stronger conceptual understanding.

H₆: Significant differences exist in Islamic Studies achievement across public and private schools.

H₇: Significant urban-rural differences exist in Islamic Studies achievement.

These hypotheses transform the article from a purely argumentative discussion into a testable empirical research program.

Ethical Considerations methodological Contribution:

Because the study involves school students, ethical safeguards are essential. The research should obtain appropriate institutional permission and informed consent/assent where required.

Student identities should remain confidential. No student should be academically disadvantaged because of participation or non-participation in the study. Data should be reported in aggregate form. The purpose of the research should be educational improvement rather than blaming individual teachers, schools, parents, or students.

The major methodological contribution of this study lies in its attempt to connect three levels of analysis:

Macro Level:

National policy, constitutional objectives, curriculum, examination systems.

Meso Level:

Schools, teachers, administration, resources, teacher specialization.

Micro Level:

Students, learning behavior, achievement, family support, and understanding.

This integrated approach is necessary because student achievement is rarely produced by a single factor. The research is expected to provide policymakers with empirical evidence regarding: the actual scale of Islamic Studies failure; variation across examination boards;

the role of teacher specialization; the influence of Arabic competence; the effectiveness of teaching methodologies; the contribution of parental involvement; weaknesses in assessment;

and differences across school contexts. The ultimate purpose is not simply to document failure.

It is to identify actionable causes. If the evidence demonstrates that teacher specialization is strongly associated with achievement, specialist recruitment should be strengthened. If assessment is found to be excessively dependent on memorization, examination reform should be prioritized. If parental involvement has a significant effect, schools should develop structured family-engagement strategies. If rural schools face persistent disadvantages, targeted resource allocation may be required. Thus, statistical evidence can transform the debate from "Who is responsible?" into "What intervention is most likely to work?"

12. Discussion: From a Reported Failure Figure to a National Educational Question:

The reported failure of more than 10,000 students in Islamic Studies, if verified through official examination data, should not be interpreted merely as an isolated examination incident. It raises a much broader question concerning the effectiveness of Islamic education within Pakistan's formal education system. The central concern is not simply how many students failed, but why students are experiencing difficulty in a subject that occupies such a distinctive constitutional, curricular, and cultural position in Pakistan. The significance of this issue becomes clearer when Pakistan's constitutional framework is considered. Islam is recognized as the State religion under Article 2 of the Constitution, "while Article 31 directs the State to take steps to enable Muslims to order their lives according to the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam. The same article specifically refers to the teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Islamiyat and to the promotion of Arabic."⁵⁷ This constitutional recognition creates an important relationship between national identity, educational policy, and classroom practice. If Islamic education is considered sufficiently important to receive constitutional recognition, then weaknesses in its implementation deserve systematic policy attention. An examination failure rate should not automatically be interpreted as proof that students are academically weak. Failure is better understood as a diagnostic signal. It tells policymakers that something requires investigation.

The cause may be located at one or more levels:

Student Level: inadequate preparation; weak reading habits; lack of motivation; language difficulties; examination anxiety.

Teacher Level: insufficient subject specialization; limited pedagogical preparation; weak Arabic proficiency; excessive reliance on lecture and memorization; insufficient professional development.

School Level: inadequate teaching time; inappropriate teacher allocation; large class sizes; limited learning resources.

Curriculum Level: excessive content; difficult language; weak contemporary relevance; insufficient progression between grade levels.

Assessment Level: excessive dependence on recall; mismatch between curriculum and examination; limited application-based questions.

Family Level: limited parental involvement; reduced home-based religious learning; competing academic priorities. This multidimensional framework prevents simplistic explanations.

The “Student Deficit” Explanation Is Inadequate:

One common response to poor examination results is to assume that students are simply not studying. Although student effort is undoubtedly relevant, such an explanation is insufficient for educational research. Students do not learn in isolation. Their learning is shaped by: teachers; curriculum; textbooks; assessment; school environment; family; socioeconomic conditions; language; technology. Educational research therefore increasingly emphasizes the interaction between learner and learning environment. If a large number of students experience difficulty in the same subject, researchers should examine whether there are systemic conditions contributing to that outcome.

One of the central hypotheses of this study concerns teacher specialization.

The argument is straightforward. If Chemistry requires Chemistry teachers, Physics requires Physics teachers, and Mathematics requires Mathematics teachers, then Islamic Studies should also receive appropriately specialized teaching. This is not an argument that only MPhil or PhD holders can teach Islamic Studies. Rather, it is an argument for appropriate disciplinary preparation. At secondary and higher-secondary levels, teachers with formal Islamic Studies specialization may possess advantages in: Qur’anic studies; Hadith; Seerah; Islamic jurisprudence; Islamic theology; Islamic history; Arabic terminology; contemporary Islamic thought. However, this hypothesis must be tested rather than assumed. That is why the proposed statistical analysis is essential.

The suggestion that Islamic Studies should be taught by MPhil and PhD scholars deserves careful qualification. Advanced academic qualifications can provide substantial subject expertise, research exposure, and familiarity with scholarly literature. However, academic research expertise and school-level teaching expertise are not identical.

A PhD holder may have outstanding research competence but require additional pedagogical preparation for adolescents. Therefore, the ideal model should not be:

“PhD = automatically excellent teacher.”

It should be: “Advanced subject expertise + pedagogical competence + age-appropriate teaching = highly prepared specialist teacher.” This distinction makes the policy recommendation more academically defensible. Another major issue concerns Arabi: Islamic Studies teachers frequently engage with Qur’anic and Hadith material. Where teachers possess limited Arabic competence, they may depend heavily on translations and secondary explanations. This does not necessarily make their teaching incorrect, but it may restrict the depth with which they can explain: vocabulary; Grammatical structures; contextual meanings; semantic differences; classical terminology.

Pakistan’s constitutional reference to the promotion of Arabic further strengthens the case for investigating Arabic competence among Islamic Studies teachers. The study therefore recommends that Arabic proficiency be included as an independent variable in future statistical research.

Another important finding emerging from the conceptual framework concerns the changing role of the family. In many Pakistani households, mothers historically played an important role in introducing children to Qur’anic recitation, basic Islamic teachings, Duas, and moral values. The purpose of recognizing this historical contribution is not to romanticize the past or suggest that women should be confined to domestic religious education. Rather, it highlights a structural transformation. As family life changes, children may receive less informal religious instruction at home. If this is occurring, schools increasingly carry the responsibility of providing structured Islamic learning. That makes the professional quality of Islamic Studies teaching even more important.

The issue can therefore be conceptualized as a triangle:

State → Curriculum, policy, teacher recruitment, examination standards

School → Teaching, learning environment, assessment preparation

Family → Home learning, values, reinforcement, motivation

The student exists at the center of this system. Failure at one point can affect the entire learning process. Therefore, sustainable improvement requires coordination among all three institutional levels.

Public debate frequently relies on individual experiences. A teacher may say: “My students are struggling.” A parent may say “My child does not understand Islamic Studies.” A student may say: “The subject is based on memorization.” Each observation may be valid. But policy requires evidence that can establish whether these experiences represent broader patterns. Statistics can determine: how widespread the problem is; which groups are most affected; which factors are associated with achievement; whether differences are statistically significant; whether observed relationships remain after controlling for other variables. This is why the proposed research framework is essential. A sophisticated analysis must also distinguish between statistical significance and educational significance. Suppose specialist teachers are associated with an average improvement of two marks. The result might be statistically significant in a very large sample but educationally modest. Conversely, a moderate improvement may be highly meaningful for educational practice even if statistical significance is affected by sample size.

Therefore, the research should report: p-values; confidence intervals; effect sizes; explained variance. This will provide policymakers with a more complete understanding of the findings.

The debate surrounding Islamic Studies failure must also avoid creating a culture of blame.

It would be unfair to blame: Students for weaknesses they did not create. It would be unfair to blame: Teachers for staffing policies they did not design. It would be unfair to blame: Parents for broader social transformations. It would be unfair to blame: Schools for inadequate resources provided by the system. The more constructive approach is shared institutional responsibility. The purpose of research should therefore be to identify weaknesses in the system and determine how those weaknesses can be corrected.

The Islamic Studies Paradox:

The central paradox identified by this study can now be expressed clearly: Pakistan gives Islamic education a distinctive place in its constitutional and educational framework, yet the effectiveness of Islamic Studies education may not always correspond to the importance assigned to it at the policy level.

This is not necessarily evidence of policy failure. It is an invitation to investigate the implementation gap. The difference between policy intention and classroom outcome is a common phenomenon in education systems worldwide. Pakistan is therefore not unique in facing such a challenge. What is distinctive is the constitutional significance attached to Islamic education. The success of Islamic Studies should not be measured exclusively through: Pass Percentage. Instead, a broader framework should include. Knowledge: Can students recall foundational information? Understanding: Can they explain Islamic concepts? Application: Can they apply principles to real situations? Analysis: Can they examine competing interpretations responsibly? Ethical Reasoning: Can they make principled decisions? Practice: Can knowledge influence responsible conduct? This six-dimensional framework would produce a much richer understanding of educational success. If the reported failure figure is verified, it should be transformed into a constructive opportunity.

The issue can become the starting point for: national statistical monitoring; specialist teacher recruitment; curriculum review; examination reform; Arabic language development; teacher professionalization; parent-school partnerships; digital religious literacy; evidence-based policy.

The objective should not be merely to reduce failure rates. A system can reduce failure by making examinations easier. That would not necessarily mean that learning improved.

The real objective should be: Higher achievement accompanied by deeper understanding.

The debate surrounding Islamic Studies reflects a broader question about what Pakistan expects education to accomplish. Is education primarily about passing examinations? Or is it about developing knowledgeable, ethical, responsible, and intellectually capable citizens?

If the latter is the goal, then Islamic Studies should be approached as a serious academic discipline capable of contributing to: moral development; ethical reasoning; citizenship; social responsibility; intellectual development; cultural understanding; religious literacy. Its importance should therefore be reflected not only in constitutional language but also in teacher quality, curriculum quality, assessment quality, and research investment. The central argument of this study is not that students are solely responsible for their failure, nor that teachers are solely responsible. The argument is that student achievement is a systemic outcome. If thousands of students are failing Islamic Studies, the correct academic response is not simply criticism. It is investigation. If specialist teachers are unavailable, recruit and prepare them. If curriculum content is overloaded, revise it. If assessment is excessively based on memorization, reform it. If Arabic preparation is inadequate, strengthen it. If parental involvement has declined, develop new forms of home-school partnership. If the reported failure figure is inaccurate, correct the public record through verified statistics. And if the figure is accurate, use the evidence to identify the structural causes. Pakistan does not need merely more students passing Islamic Studies. It needs students who can genuinely understand Islam, engage responsibly with its sources, think ethically, and apply its principles to contemporary life. That should be the ultimate measure of success.



Findings:

- 1: Student failure in Islamic Studies indicates a significant educational concern that requires verification through official data.
- 2: Student achievement is influenced by teaching, curriculum, assessment, and social factors.
- 3: Lack of subject-specialist teachers may negatively affect learning outcomes in Islamic Studies.
- 4: Academic qualification alone is insufficient; teachers also need subject expertise and pedagogical skills.
- 5: Arabic proficiency can strengthen students' understanding of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic sources.
- 6: Excessive reliance on memorization may limit conceptual understanding and critical thinking.
- 7: Assessment should measure not only knowledge but also comprehension, analysis, and application.
- 8: Family support, school environment, and socioeconomic conditions may influence students' academic performance.
- 9: Digital media has expanded access to Islamic knowledge but also increases the risk of exposure to unauthenticated information.
- 10: Success in Islamic Studies should be measured through understanding, ethical reasoning, and practical application, not merely examination results.

Recommendations:

- 1: Verify reported Islamic Studies failure statistics through official examination authorities.
- 2: Ensure the appointment and appropriate deployment of qualified Islamic Studies specialists.
- 3: Provide regular professional development programs for Islamic Studies teachers.
- 4: Strengthen basic Arabic proficiency among both teachers and students.
- 5: Reform the curriculum to promote understanding, analysis, and contemporary application.
- 6: Regularly review textbooks for accuracy, clarity, relevance, and educational quality.
- 7: Reform examinations to assess knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, and evaluation.
- 8: Strengthen cooperation between parents and schools to support students' Islamic learning.
- 9: Introduce digital Islamic literacy to help students evaluate the authenticity of online religious information.
- 10: Establish an annual National Islamic Studies Achievement Report to monitor student performance and educational trends.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that student achievement in Islamic Studies is influenced by a combination of teacher quality, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment practices, Arabic proficiency, family support, and the wider educational environment. The reported failure of more than 10,000 students, once verified through official examination data, should be viewed as an important warning signal rather than an isolated statistic. Since Islamic Studies holds a distinctive position within Pakistan's educational and constitutional framework, its teaching requires the same academic seriousness, professional standards, and quality assurance applied to other major disciplines. The study emphasizes the need for qualified specialist teachers, curriculum and examination reform, stronger conceptual learning, improved Arabic understanding, and responsible use of digital resources. Ultimately, the purpose of Islamic Studies should extend beyond examination success toward developing students who understand authentic Islamic teachings, think critically, demonstrate ethical reasoning, and apply Islamic principles responsibly in their personal and social lives. Sustainable improvement therefore requires a coordinated approach involving teachers, students, parents, educational institutions, examination authorities, and policymakers.

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