

Islamic Religious Education Learning Experiences and Muslim Students' Beliefs and Practices in Secondary Schools in Eastern Uganda

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ABSTRACT

We now live in an era where, believing in and doing certain things are regarded by some sections of society, including students and graduates of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Eastern Uganda, to be out of fashion and backward. Teachers of IRE are concerned about the inability of the subject to strengthen students' faith and practice. But are their concerns justified, and if so, to what extent and under which contexts? This study sought to determine the influence of IRE learning experiences on Muslim students' beliefs and practices. The population consisted of Senior Four and Six students from Eastern Uganda from which a sample of 890 was selected using multi-stage sampling. A questionnaire was used to collect data, which was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation and ANOVA. The relationship between students' learning experiences and their beliefs was found not to be statistically significant; while that between learning experiences and their practices was statistically significant and moderate. A statistically significant difference in students' practices among school types was also found, where students from Government Non-Muslim schools had the lowest while those from Private Islamic schools had the highest. It therefore is recommended that Islamic extra-curricular activities be organized for students to boost their knowledge and skills.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Keywords:

Islamic religious education, learning experiences, Muslim students' beliefs, Muslim students' practices.

1. Introduction

Youths are the backbone of a society given the energy and vigor with which they approach and conduct issues if properly guided, as was demonstrated

by the people of the Cave referred to in the Qur'an, having been youths who believed in Allah and their guidance increased (Al-Kahf, 18:13). Likewise, Muslim youths - especially those who have studied Islamic Religious Education

(IRE) should be enthusiastic in their religious deeds. In Uganda, some secondary school students are reluctant to identify as Muslims and are instead apologetic for being so, which may have consequences on their practice of the religion (Lukyamuzi, 2010). This is coupled with the perceptions of IRE teachers in the country, who noted that the subject did not seem to translate into strengthening the faith of its students and graduates (Nimulola, 2018). Also, contrary to the teachings of Islam, Muslim students in one city in Eastern Uganda were found to be involved in a number of unbecoming behaviors like snatching bags, phones, and other valuable properties of citizens as well as bullying, and displaying violent behavior in schools (Kirinya, 2019).

Uganda is divided into four regions; Northern, Eastern, Central and Western, and these are subdivided into 135 districts, 32 of which fall in the Eastern Region (MoLG, 2020). This region has a relatively high representation of Muslims (17.0%), being second to the Central one (18.4%), the national one being at 13.7% (UBoS, 2014). This is where the Islamic University in Uganda's Main Campus is located - a major player in the training of Islamic Religious Education teachers.

The structure of secondary education in Uganda consists of four years of Ordinary Level (Lower Secondary) and two years of Advanced Level (Upper Secondary). These schools may be categorized according to ownership, students' residential status, and school religious inclination. In terms

of foundation and ownership, schools can be government, i.e., founded and funded by government, government aided, i.e., jointly managed and funded by the founding body and government; and private, i.e., founded and funded by individuals and organizations (Education Act, 2008). In terms of students' residence, they can be day, boarding, or both. For purposes of this study, schools were categorized according to inclination to Islam as: Government Muslim (GM), i.e., founded by Muslims and funded by government; Private Muslim (PM), i.e., founded and funded by Muslims; Private Islamic (PI), i.e., founded and funded by Muslims but also offer a duo curriculum of theology and secular; Government Non-Muslim (GNM), i.e., founded by non-Muslims and funded by government; and Private Non-Muslim (PNM). i.e., founded and funded by non-Muslims.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Early Transmission of Islam in Arabia and Uganda

Islam is as old as Mankind because all prophets e.g., Ibrahim (AS) preached about the submission to the will of Allah ([SWT] Qur'an, 3:67), and its final re-expression was revealed to Prophet Mahammad (SAW) beginning 610 AD and perfected in 632 AD (Qur'an, 5:3). The basic tenets of Islam include belief in the six articles of faith (imaan), practicing the five pillars of Islam, and perfection (ihsaan) in the worship of Allah (Qur'an, 2:177, 4: 136, 54:49; Sahih Bukhari, 1:2:8). Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was the best

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model in imaan, Islam, and ihsaan, followed by his companions and those who came after them. For instance, during Caliph Abubakar's reign (632-634), some members of the community indicated a desire to relax some forms of worship, by seeking to be exempted from paying zakat (annual alms tax) and this was outrightly rejected. The teachings of Islam continued to be transmitted through homes, mosques, kataatiib (elementary schools, singular: kuttaab), madrasas and eventually formal schools. Islam was highly practiced since it was the dominant culture. After the 13th century, which marked the end of the Golden Age ([8th - 13th] centuries characterized by advancement in biology, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy etc), the influence of Islam began to decline. This was aggravated by colonization (early 19th century) of countries in the Muslim world (Tan, 2017). Western influence affected Islamic education and practice by separating religion from the secular and promoting the latter. Practices of Westernization and modernization were introduced into the daily lives of Muslims, for example in Egypt (Cook, 2000).

Islam was introduced in Uganda through the Buganda Kingdom in 1844 by Arab traders during the reign of Kabaka Suuna II (1824-1854), but it was his son Kabaka Mutesa I (1854-1884), who popularized it by directing his chiefs and relatives to embrace and practice it; and at one time, proclaiming it as the state religion of the Kingdom (Kasozi, 1986). The major Islamic rituals emphasized

included circumcision (for males), daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan and ensuring that any meat consumed was lawful. The Kabaka's palace in Banda was the first Islamic teaching education centre and later on, Islamic knowledge came to be taught from mosques, madrasas and homes of learned men (Kasozi, 1986; Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 2004). However, with the introduction of Christianity in 1877 and after religious wars in the late 1880s and early 1900s, Islam lost popularity and power, the status of Muslims became inferior, their identity threatened, and they came to be despised in most sectors of the communities, including schools (Kasumba, n.d.). The religious wars also led to Muslims fleeing Buganda to other regions like Bukedi in Eastern Uganda, consequently leading to the spread of Islam in this region (Kasozi, 1986). Madrasas have continued to play a big role in the teaching of Islam, although after September 11, 2001 when militant Islamist terrorists hijacked commercial airliners and crashed them into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the teaching of Qur'an in these institutions came to be associated with inculcating terrorism which led to the closure of some of them (Mayanja, 2015).

With increased globalization through information technology, Muslim students have been exposed to a number of cultures and information. There has been a tendency for them to desire to live in line with current developments, i.e., modernization (Jarvis, 2004). With modernization came concepts like

freedom of religion and worship, freedom of speech and association, etc. (Owoyemi & Ali, 2011). There is increasing tension between what Islam teaches and what is globally 'acceptable'. Today's Muslim youths find themselves caught up between either following the teachings of Islam such as identifying with and practicing Islam, and dressing decently; or succumbing to the temptations from the global world which include behaviors like dating, cohabiting, and consumption of drugs and intoxicants (Abbasi & Tirmizi, 2020).

2.2 Aims of Islamic Religious Education

The aims of IRE have been conceptualized differently, but what runs across most conceptualizations is the emphasis on the spiritual, intellectual, and moral aspects of human development. Generally, the discipline aims at developing humankind's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings, and bodily senses (Al Azemi, 2010; Husain & Ashraf, 1979; Yakubu & Usman, 2019). It also aims at attaining eternal salvation and obtaining God's blessings; brightening the heart, developing morals, character, values and ethics, and citizenship; and at promoting purity, piety and sincerity (Al-Ghazali, in Sheikh & Ali, 2019; Muflih, 2010). IRE has also been said to aim at creating awareness (ta'liim), enabling spiritual and ethical growth (tarbiyah), and inculcating manners (ta'diib) (Tahira & Saad, n.d.). Other aims include spreading Islam, explaining Islamic guidance and commands, performance ibadah, promoting honorable life, mental, physical and

spiritual sound, developing a spirit of brotherhood and tolerance, acquiring information about affairs of the contemporary world, and acquiring firm religious belief and good morals (Suraju, 2017), mastering science and technology; and improving skills in working and society interaction (Al-Abrasyi (2006 as cited in Muchtarom, 2013).

The major aims of teaching IRE in Ugandan secondary schools include contributing towards Muslim civilization, developing fundamental values and practices of Islam, acquiring Islamic faith and virtues, appreciating the rich Islamic heritage and civilization, developing religious tolerance, good moral and social conduct, healthy attitudes and self-discipline (National Curriculum Development Centre, 2008, p. 9).

2.3 Learning Experiences

UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2012) defines learning experience as a wide variety of experiences across different contexts and settings which transform the perceptions of the learner, facilitate conceptual understanding, yield emotional qualities, and nurture the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. This includes what goes on inside and outside the classroom besides actual teaching and can be in the form of pupil-pupil interaction, pupil-teacher interaction, interaction of pupils with members of the community including family, and also the tools at the learners' disposal. Learning experiences therefore do have an element of school culture, which

among others includes; values; beliefs; assumptions; and norms (consolidation of all of the above into everyday actions) (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Culture may be enacted through rituals and strengthened with the use of cultural tools such as language (Moes, n.d.).

2.4 Islamic Religious Experiences and Students' Belief and Practices

Given the diversity in the aims of teaching Islamic Religious Education, it follows that the scope of the characteristics of an ideal Muslim student varies among scholars. These include Islamic ethical behavior consisting of four components including faith, interaction with friends of other faiths, socializing the Islamic way, and morality to oneself (Laeheem, 2018); positive Islamic personality and character whose indicators include hard work, discipline, enthusiasm and integrity (Andriyan, 2018; Suyadi et al., 2020); moral behavior reflected in good conduct and relationship with others (Mwatamu, 2012); practicing the pillars of Islam and ethics (Nuriman & Fauzan, 2017); spirituality, i.e., a sense of connectedness vertically and horizontally, and fulfillment of spiritual obligations like prayer (Satiawan & Jatmikowati, 2020); and demonstrating mastery and practice of themes such as Ulūmul Qur'an, Hadith, pillars of faith and Islam, morality (akhlāq), relationships (muammalāt), and History of Islam (Shaaban, 2012).

Influences on students' beliefs and practices have been conceptualized in a number of ways including family and

societal upbringing (Andriyan, 2018; Laeheem, 2018; Mwatamu, 2012); curriculum issues (Mwatamu, 2012; Suyadi et al., 2020); pedagogical factors (Altinyelken, 2021; Setiawan & Jatmikowati, 2020; Shaaban, 2012); and school-related factors (Huda & Fattah, 2020; Siregar, 2021). Family background is very important in the transmission of Islam. In Thailand, students who received an Islamic studies education in a family environment were 7,636 times more likely to have a good Islamic personality as opposed to those who only received it in secondary schools, whose likelihood was 6,238 times (Andriyan, 2018). Still in Thailand, Islamic ethical behavior was also found to have statistically significant correlation with practicing of Islamic principles ($r=.60$). (Laeheem, 2018).

Islam is a comprehensive religion and therefore, its teaching has to be holistic although in most schools, it is taught in a fragmented manner with little time given to it. The role of integration in an Islamic studies education curriculum cannot be underestimated. In Kenya, Mwatamu (2012) found boarding schools in Nairobi to play a significant role in moral religious development of learners which was attributed to the availability of time to accommodate both religious and secular systems of education. But before we talk of moral religious development, students have to acquire or possess Islamic moral values which consist of God-consciousness and social life responsiveness (Nuriman & Fauzan, 2017).

Other influences on students' beliefs and practices are pedagogical and administrative in nature. For instance, some of the challenges facing the teaching of IRE in secondary schools in Nairobi include shortage of trained IRE teachers, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and inadequate qualified staff (Shaaban, 2012). Teachers of IRE have also been accused of suppressing higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) among Muslim youth in the Netherlands and Indonesia (Altinyelken, 2021; Setiawan & Jatmikowati, 2020).

However, the school in its totality has been found to be quite influential in enabling teachers to build students' character in one Islamic secondary school in Malaysia (Siregar, 2021). Elements that contribute to this are the disciplinary measures, co-curricular activities, teachers' competences, personality and character, and their decision-making. Other elements are students' background and abilities. Administratively, teaching of the subject was found to be hindered by the lack of commitment by administration in a Muslim minority setting in Indonesia (Huda & Fattah, 2020).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Bioecological approach to development where he proposed four levels of environment that simultaneously influence individuals and these include; the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Feldman, 2015). The microsystem is the immediate

environment in which individuals lead their daily lives and are directly exposed to, consisting of activities and interactions with close members of settings like families, schools, mosques etc. Here, children actively participate in constructing this system, that is, they are influenced by, but also do influence the people that they interact with. The mesosystem provides connections between the various components of the microsystem by binding members from the various social settings of the individual, such as parental involvement in school activities, and parental work experience vis-à-vis child care. The exosystem is made up of social settings that do not directly involve an individual but represent broader influences which encompass societal institutions, e.g., local and social media. The macrosystem represents larger cultural influences on the child such as a society's political, religious and economic value systems. Then there is another system which cuts across and underlies each of the four systems and it involves the passage of time that constitutes important events and turning points, i.e., the chronosystem. This theory guided the analysis of various forces and relations that shape students' experiences in learning IRE.

2.6 Statement of the Problem

Youths with an Islamic studies exposure are expected to demonstrate values, faith, virtues and practices in accordance with the aims and teachings of Islam (Husain & Ashraf, 1979; National Curriculum Development

Centre, 2008). On the contrary, some Muslim students in Ugandan secondary schools have been found to shy away from being identified as Muslims and to engage in un-Islamic activities (Kirinya, 2019; Lukyamuzi, 2010); Nimulola, 2018), raising concern about the role Islamic Religious Education in their religious inclination. Therefore, the present study investigated the relationship between students' learning experiences and their beliefs and practices.

Mu'azu (2015) analyzed the relationship between child upbringing practices and moral behavior among Muslim Youth in Muslim founded secondary schools in Northern Borough, Mbale Municipality, Eastern Uganda. Childrearing practices were conceptualized as parental, school environmental, and societal which were found to be positively and significantly related to Muslim students' moral behaviors. Conceptually, Mu'azu's focus was moral behavior and geographically, the study was limited to one of three divisions in Mbale Municipality. The current study covered the Eastern Region of Uganda and focused on students' learning experiences related to IRE, both inside and outside the classroom.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

The study used a cross-sectional survey design which was found appropriate in describing Muslim students' competences in basic Islamic teachings; and explaining relationships

between learning experiences and students' beliefs and practices, and differences in beliefs and practices among Muslim students from various school types (see Creswell, 2012).

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of study constituted secondary school students in Eastern Uganda who were studying IRE in the classes of Senior 4 and 6. A multi-stage sampling technique was used. Out of the 32 districts in Eastern Uganda, 15 of them were identified as having schools with students that had registered with Uganda National Examination Board to sit for IRE (Uganda Schools, 2020; UNEB, 2019). Each of these 15 districts was treated as a cluster, nine of which – with a total population of 102 schools – were randomly selected (Table 1). Forty-eight schools were proportionally selected from the nine districts, and using class registers, students were randomly sampled from each class, making a total of 890.

Table 1
 Distribution of Schools per Selected Districts

District	School Population	School Sample Size	Number of students
Budaka	5	2	28 (3.1%)
Bugiri	13	5	60 (6.7%)
Butaleja	9	7	105 (11.8%)
Iganga	33	6	119 (13.4%)
Jinja	9	5	110 (12.4%)
Kapchorwa	3	3	70 (7.9%)

Mbale	20	13	287 (32.2%)
Sironko	7	6	88 (9.9%)
Tororo	3	1	23 (2.6%)
Total	102	48	890 (100.0%)

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire used was developed by the researchers based on literature on the pillars of faith and Islam. Reference was also made to Abu Raiya et al.'s (2008) subscales of measurement of Islamic religiousness, specifically the "beliefs", "practices", and "Islamic religious struggle" dimensions. The questionnaire items used in this study are part of a larger questionnaire that consisted of seven sections that explored demographic and background characteristics (8 items), IRE content (8 items), learning experiences (8 items), students' beliefs (20 items), students' practices (10 items), students' conduct (16 items), and IRE assessment (12 items); of which 4 (demographic, learning experiences, beliefs, practices) were used in this study. To test for validity, the questionnaire was given to three lecturers in the department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language - Islamic University in Uganda, who rated the items and the Content Validity Index was found to be .77; while reliability was determined by giving the questionnaire to seventeen students of IRE who had earlier on completed Senior Classes Four and Six, and the Cronbach's alpha was found to be .73. The questionnaire was later

administered to students with the help of research assistants. Data was collected between August and December 2020, and analyzed through descriptive statistics, correlation and ANOVA.

4. Result and Discussion

This section begins with presentation of demographic data on students, followed by data on learning experiences of IRE, and beliefs and practices. Note that missing values have been included in the presentations thus, accounting for the fluctuations in total percentages.

4.1 Students' Demographic Profile

Students' demographic profile includes district, school type, gender, age and class. Almost one third of the students in the study were from Mbale (32.2%), followed by Iganga (13.4%), Jinja (12.4%) and Butaleja (11.8%) districts (see Table 1).

Tables 2 and 3 highlight data on school type, gender, age, and class of students. More than one third (35.4%) of the students were from Private Muslim schools, followed by 22.8% from Government Muslim, 22.1% from Government Non-Muslim, 11.5% from Private Islamic, and lastly 8.2% from Private Non-Muslim schools. About one half the students (49.9%) were girls and 47.2% boys. The high percentages in the Private Muslim and Government Muslim schools are due to the tendency of parents preferring to enroll their children in schools under the management of their religious denomination, other factors constant. Private Islamic schools are relatively few compared to the

mainstream ones and their student populations are also relatively low, despite the fact that they are Muslim dominated. This explains the low representation of students in the study.

About 40% of the students were aged between 15 - 17 years, more than one half of them (52.4%) were between 18 and 20 years, while only 6.1% of them were above 20 years. More than three quarters (81.9%) of the students were in Senior four while less than a quarter were at Advanced level. Enrolment at O' Level is relatively higher than at A' Level because, as pointed out earlier, IRE is among the popular subjects for O' Level Muslim students in the Muslim founded schools and in some of these schools, Muslim students are required to take it in their first two years at secondary school. The average age of a Senior 4 student is 16 years and one would expect a majority of students in the study to fall in the age range of 15 - 17, although those in this study were mainly between 18 and 20 years. This indicates that probably some of these students joined school when they were slightly older than the average age of six, repeated some class, or interrupted. The introduction of Universal Primary Education in 1997 and Universal Secondary Education in 2007 has also witnessed a rise in the age of enrolment. The other explanation could be from the side of the theological schools where children study two curricula concurrently. In these schools, especially for candidate classes, some students tend to concentrate on one curriculum, do examinations in it, and study for another year to complete the second curriculum.

Table 2
Distribution of Students per School Type

School Type	Number of schools	Number of students
Government Muslim	8 (16.7%)	203 (22.8%)
Private Muslim	16 (33.3%)	315 (35.4%)
Private Islamic	4 (8.3%)	102 (11.5%)
Government Non-Muslim	11 (22.9%)	197 (21.1%)
Private Non-Muslim	9 (18.8%)	73 (8.2%)
	48 (100%)	890 (100%)

Table 3
Characteristics of Students by Gender, Age and Class

Characteristic	Number	%
Gender		
Male	420	47.2
Female	444	49.9
Age		
15 - 17	357	40.1
18 - 20	466	52.4
21 - 23	51	5.7
24+	4	0.4
Class		
S.4	729	81.9
S.6	146	16.4

4.2 Learning Experiences of Islamic Religious Education and Muslim Students' Beliefs

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The second objective sought to find out the relationship between students' IRE learning experiences and their beliefs. Data was collected on these two variables as shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4
Learning Experiences

Students' Activities	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	N	M	SD
Workshops on IRE	586 (65.8)	167 (18.8)	57 (6.4)	35 (3.9)	845	1.46	0.80
Youth camps on IRE	565 (63.5)	153 (17.2)	79 (8.9)	41 (4.6)	838	1.52	0.86
Muslim Association	263 (29.6)	262 (29.4)	201 (22.6)	101 (11.3)	827	2.17	1.01
Community work	249 (28.0)	258 (29.0)	184 (20.7)	123 (13.8)	814	2.22	1.04
Qur'an competition	427 (48.0)	281 (31.6)	89 (10.0)	38 (4.3)	835	1.69	0.84
Islamic drama	502 (56.4)	209 (23.5)	75 (8.4)	44 (4.9)	830	1.59	0.86
Muslim seminars	151 (17.0)	383 (43.0)	184 (20.7)	102 (11.5)	820	2.29	0.91
Congregational prayers	73 (8.2)	90 (10.1)	64 (7.2)	62 (7.7)	856	3.46	0.99
Reading IRE books	00 (0.0)	474 (53.3)	245 (27.5)	102 (11.5)	821	1.55	0.71
Total						2.04	0.57

Results on learning experiences were interpreted as Low (1.00 - 1.74); Moderate (1.75 - 2.49); High (2.50 - 3.24); and Very High (3.25 - 4.00). Data in Table 5 shows that students' participation in workshops, youth camps, Qur'an competition, Islamic drama, and reading IRE texts was found to be low, while their participation in Muslim associations, community work, and seminars was reported to be moderate. Their participation in congregational prayers was found to be very high. Overall, students' learning experiences of IRE were found to be moderate with a Mean of 2.04 and SD of 0.57.

Table 5
Muslim Students' Beliefs

Beliefs	n	Uncertain	Yes	N	M	SD
Allah should be trusted under all circumstances.	4 (0.4)	6 (0.7)	875 (98.3)	885	2.94	0.16
*One's life ends on the day s/he dies.	567 (63.7)	70 (7.9)	222 (24.9)	859	1.60	0.87
Those who obey Allah will go to paradise.	19 (2.1)	8 (0.9)	853 (95.8)	880	2.95	0.31
Those who disobey Allah's teaching	75 (8.4)	34 (3.8)	767 (86.2)	876	2.79	0.58

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s will go to hell.						
Angels were created for a purpose.	11 (1.2)	12 (1.3)	852 (95.7)	875	2.9 6	0.25
The world of <i>Jinns</i> is real.	91 (10.2)	129 (14.5)	636 (71.5)	856	2.6 4	0.67
Satan leads man astray.	54 (6.1)	46 (5.2)	765 (86.0)	865	2.8 2	0.52
Some prophets that Allah sent are more superior than others.	162 (18.2)	103 (11.6)	599 (67.3)	864	2.5 1	0.79
The sacred texts were revealed to prophets.	47 (5.3)	112 (12.6)	661 (74.3)	820	2.7 5	0.55
*When disappointed, I find myself doubting the existence of Allah.	612 (68.8)	74 (8.3)	163 (18.3)	849	1.4 7	0.80
*The aspect of hell is unfair.	517 (58.1)	137 (15.4)	191 (21.5)	845	1.6 4	0.83
*The existence of afterlife is	605 (68.0)	90 (10.1)	153 (17.2)	848	1.4 7	0.78

doubtful						
*Islam does not fit the modern time.	615 (69.1)	81 (9.1)	146 (16.4)	842	1.4 4	0.77
The Holy Qur'an is the exact words of Allah.	44 (4.9)	42 (4.7)	776 (87.2)	862	2.8 5	0.48
*Islam makes people intolerant.	587 (66.0)	104 (11.7)	140 (15.7)	831	1.4 6	0.77
*It is embarrassing to be a Muslim	756 (84.9)	20 (2.2)	72 (8.1)	848	1.1 9	0.57
*Islam encourages terrorism	724 (81.3)	58 (6.5)	70 (7.9)	852	1.2 3	0.59
*I believe in traditional customs more than Islamic ones	801 (90.0)	32 (3.6)	36 (4.0)	869	1.1 2	0.43
Muslims are peaceful people	26 (2.9)	50 (5.6)	777 (87.3)	853	2.8 8	0.41
*The world exists because of some chemical and physical	612 (68.8)	131 (14.7)	111 (12.5)	854	1.4 1	0.71

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reactions						
Overall					2.72	0.21

Descriptive results on students' beliefs were interpreted as Low (1.00 - 1.66); Moderate (1.67 - 2.33); and High (2.34 - 3.00). Before computing, ten (of 20) items with negative implications were re-coded following Pallant's (2016) descriptions. Table 6 shows that students' beliefs were generally high (Mean, 2.72; SD 0.21). The items that were highly believed in were 'Angels were created for a purpose', and 'Allah should be trusted under all circumstances'; while the least believed in were 'Some prophets that Allah sent are more superior than others' (Mean, 2.51; SD 0.79), and 'The aspect of Hell is unfair' (Mean, 1.64; SD 0.83). Correlation results between students' learning experiences and their beliefs indicate that the relationship is not significant ($p > .05$), i.e., the null hypothesis was accepted; meaning that the varying experiences that students were exposed to were only slightly related to their beliefs and moreover, this relationship was insignificant (see Table 6).

Table 6
Correlation Between Students' Learning Experiences and Their Beliefs

		Total learning experiences	Total beliefs
Total learning experiences	Pearson Correlation	1	.080
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.065
	N	697	537

Total beliefs	Pearson Correlation	.080	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.065	
	N	537	645

4.3 Learning Experiences of Islamic Religious Education and Muslim Students' Practices

The third objective sought to find out the relationship between students' IRE learning experiences and their practices. Results on students' practices were interpreted as Almost Never (1.00 - 1.74); Rarely (1.75 - 2.49); Sometimes (2.50 - 3.24); and Often (3.25 - 4.00). Data on practices is shown in Table 7. Nearly two-thirds of the students indicated to be praying five times a day, while less than 20% of them performed voluntary prayers on a daily basis. One quarter of the students indicated reading the Qur'an on a daily basis and an equal number admitted that they never read the Qur'an at all. About 40% of them listened to Qur'an recitation on a daily basis, while about 12% never listened to its recitation. About two-thirds of the students claimed to make daily supplication to Allah, as opposed to nearly 10% who indicated that they never supplicated; and an equal number of them claimed to normally fast all the days of the holy month of Ramadan, while 10.1% of them never fasted. The overall frequency of students' practices was 'Sometimes' (Mean, 2.95; SD 0.81), meaning that the majority of them skipped a few days (or times) of practicing. Pearson Product Moment Correlation results in Table 8 indicate a statistically significant moderate relationship between students' IRE

learning experiences and their practice ($r = .516$, $p < .001$); meaning that the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 7
Muslim Students' Practices

Practices	Frequency				N	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4			
*How often student performs obligatory prayers	159 (17.9)	78 (8.8)	107 (12.0)	537 (60.3)	881	3.16	1.18
*How often student performs voluntary prayers	309 (34.7)	189 (21.2)	207 (23.3)	165 (18.5)	870	2.26	1.13
**How often student reads the Holy Qur'an	216 (24.3)	212 (23.8)	222 (24.9)	225 (25.3)	875	2.52	1.12
**How often student listens to the Holy Qur'an	104 (11.7)	204 (22.9)	224 (25.2)	347 (39.0)	879	2.93	1.05
**Number of times student makes supplication	87 (9.8)	85 (9.6)	80 (9.0)	614 (69.0)	866	3.41	1.02
***Number of days of Ramadan student normally fasts	90 (10.1)	28 (3.1)	185 (20.8)	578 (64.9)	881	3.42	.96

Overall						2.95	.81
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* 1 = Less than 3 times a month; 2 = 1 - 3 times a week; 3 = 1 - 3 times a day; 4 = 5 times a day

** 1 = Never; 2 = 1 - 3 times a month; 3 = 1 - 3 times a week; 4 = Daily

Table 8
Correlation Between Students' Learning Experiences and Their Practices

		Total learning experiences	Total practices
Total learning experiences	Pearson Correlation	1	.516**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	697	653
Total practices	Pearson Correlation	.516**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	653	824
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

4.4 Impact of School Type on Students' Practices

A one-way between-groups of analysis of variance was conducted to explore further the impact of school type on students' practices. There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in students' practices scores for the school types: $F(4, 818) = 32.7$, $p = .000$, hence rejecting the null hypothesis; and the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was medium, the effect size calculated using eta squared, being 0.13.

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test (see Table 9) indicated that the mean score for GNM ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.91$) was statistically lower than

those of GM ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.83$), PM (3.07 , $SD = 0.70$), PI (3.53 , $SD = 0.37$) and PNM (3.06 , $SD = 0.71$); and the mean scores for PI ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.37$) were significantly different from those of GM ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.83$), PM ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.70$), PNM ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 0.71$) and GNM ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.91$). Thus, students from Government Non-Muslim schools scored relatively low on practices, while those from Private Islamic schools scored highest on practices.

Students' learning experiences were generally moderate, characterized by low participation in workshops, youth camps, Qur'an competition, Islamic drama, and reading Islamic texts. Their practice of Islamic rituals was generally found to be occasional, save for those students in Private Islamic schools. This concurs with what Nsereko (2010) observed about the teaching of IRE in conventional schools arguing that it is taught like any other academic subject focusing on what Muslims believe in, do, and on their history; and that as such, students of any religion can opt to study it. Despite the limitations in students' practice of Islam, their belief in Islamic teachings was found to be relatively high and its correlation with learning experiences being negligible and insignificant.

The context in which students acquired IRE knowledge, skills and values is quite important, right from their immediate environment to the global

one. The different components of the microsystem (such as school, home, and mosque) to which students belong provided different learning experiences and these had a bearing on the students' practices. Students' interaction with one another, with members of their schools, and with members of their families had an influence on the ways in which they acquired and practiced IRE. Teachers, peers, Muallimūn, school imams and other members of the school communities influence and are influenced by students. This study found students from private Islamic schools to be highly practicing Islam compared to those from other school types. This concurs with the findings of Mwatamu (2012) who found students in Islamic Integrated Education Programme (IIEP) schools, especially those who resided within the schools, to display high Islam values and morality.

The actions that members of the various microsystems take are interconnected, constituting the mesosystem, which indirectly impact on the students for instance, the nature of students' interaction with the school imam or Muallim will determine how students practice IRE taught in class. This will also depend on what happens with the parents and siblings when the students go back home. Children's experiences are also influenced by exosystems, like the economy. Children from low socioeconomic status families, or those who attend schools with limited

resources may not have access to adequate instructional materials to supplement their learning of IRE. Besides the economy, the nature of society also matters. As much as Uganda has no state religion, Christianity being the dominant religion means that practicing Islam is given secondary importance (Musisi & Kiggundu, 2018; Schultz, 2013).

The learning and practice of IRE is also influenced by macro factors like politics. After the unfortunate event of 9/11/2001, Islam received negative perception and became associated with terrorism, which came to be linked to some of the ways in which children are taught IRE (Arif et al., 2017; Syah, 2016). This has prompted a call for revisiting the curriculum of Islamic Religious Education in the various institutions. The Government of Uganda also promotes sciences (Presidential directive) and therefore Arts subjects – including Islamic studies – seem to receive less attention which makes teachers and students of these subjects feel inferior. African culture also plays a role in the ways in which Islam is practiced. Before the introduction of Islam, Ugandans used to live an African life in terms of dress, food, ceremonies etc.; some of which have persisted and were assimilated in Islam. However, some of the beliefs and practices are not in line with Islamic teachings but still crop up in Muslim's lives. Like during Introduction ceremonies, women wear traditional dresses which are usually long enough to

cover the legs, but leave the hands bare. Similarly, the Western culture lifestyle has also influenced Muslim students where some of them tend to imitate modern lifestyles, and anything to do with religion is viewed as backwardness. Modernity leads an individual to shun those beliefs and practices that are perceived to impede development, freedom, democracy, and rationality (Ali, 2023). Another system is the chronosystem, the temporal dimension that occurs in students' lives. After September 11, the world's perception of Islam and attitude towards Muslims changed. The ongoing wars in the Middle East have further weakened support of Islamic studies education.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings that irrespective of their learning experiences, students' beliefs were relatively high, an indication that all types of schools equally contribute to transforming students' beliefs. On the other hand, students' practices were not regular but were found to be moderately related with learning experiences. It is also evident that different types of schools offer different IRE learning experiences which affect the way Islam is practiced by students, with Private Islamic schools being the most influential while Government Non-Muslim being the least, underscoring the importance of extracurricular activities in practicing Islam.

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