



Historical Barriers to the Implementation of Islamic Integrated Education in Kenya: A Case of Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School

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Abstract

The arrival of Muslims in Kenya around 7th C, allowed for the introduction of Koranic schools as an avenue for channeling Islamic education. This Islamic education was challenged by the arrival and introduction of Western formal education by the Europeans. This led to the push for the establishment of Integrated Islamic schools by Muslims; which allowed Muslim learners an opportunity to receive religious education and formal education simultaneously while in the school. Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School is one of the schools established with the mandate of offering this dual program. Even with the success accrued through Integrated schools such as Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School, they still face challenges in the growth, development and continued search for the academic success for their learners.

Subject Areas

Language Education

Keywords

Koranic Schools, Western Education, Islamic Education, Integrated Islamic Schools

1. Introduction

Following the death of Prophet Mohammed, Islam spread from Saudi Arabia in the Arabian Peninsula to the rest of the world, including Africa, through teaching and debates, trade routes, and military conquests [1]. As Muslims moved and shared their faith, they also brought along their way of life and a structured system of education. When Muslim communities first settled in these new areas including

Mumias, they built Koranic schools out of practical necessity to teach their children. These schools were essential because they provided a foundation in the core beliefs of Islam as taught in the Quran [2]. Today, this tradition has evolved into Integrated Education, which allows students in places like Mumias to learn both their religious values and the national school subjects in one place [3].

The reason for this evolution was the introduction of Western Education by Europeans in Kenya, around 19th Century. British colonialists had accorded Christian Missionaries the task of managing education in Kenya; and in return, they used this analogy as a tool for conversion to Christianity and equally for evangelization purposes, besides education [4]. This made it hard for those who had strong allegiance to their denomination, like the Muslims. As a necessity, some Muslims got converted in order to receive this western formal education, besides their children undertaking religious education in Koranic schools. However, as time went by, resentment from the Muslim camp grew louder; calling for the establishment of schools that will provide both formal education and religious education simultaneously to the learners [5].

This eventually led to the establishment of Integrated Islamic school in Muslim dominated centers. At Mumias, one of the schools established in 1965 was Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School but as an Integrated Islamic school in 1985. The school, like other similar schools, faced the daunting task of managing themselves due to the mere fact of running a double curriculum of both religious and formal education within the school simultaneously. This paper discusses these challenges faced by Integrated Islamic schools, with a focus on Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School.

2. Theoretical Grounding

This study has applied the Policy Historiography Theory by Trevor Gale [6]. The theory attempts to explain that documentation of historical studies should be done in a historical and systematic manner. Drawing on this heritage, policy historiography asks three broad questions: firstly, what were the “public issues” and “private troubles” within a particular policy domain during some previous period, and how were they addressed? Secondly, what are the issues right now? And thirdly, what is the nature of the change from the first to the second period? Critical policy historiography adds to these a further two questions by first asking, what are the complexities in these coherent accounts of policy? And then, what do these reveal about who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by these arrangements? [7]. Therefore, this study has applied the Policy Historiography theory to explain in a historical and systematic manner the challenges faced at Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School as an Integrated Islamic school in Kenya.

3. Methodology

Overall, the study was situated at Mumias area in Kakamega County and was anchored to qualitative approaches; including, the interpretivist research paradigm

and historical research methods in the data collection process and analysis [8]. The study relied mostly on primary sources of data and only used secondary sources as addition to the primary sources. Primary sources involved data from oral interviews and archival data from the Kenya National Archives, Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary Schools records, Mumias Jamia Mosque records and Mumias Muslim Association records; which included diaries, letters, photographs and speeches. Secondary sources involved books and other written materials. For the interviews, the study employed purposive sampling technique, where, fifteen participants that suit the study including former and current elderly community members, sheikhs, imams, alumni, teachers and education officials, were purposively selected and their identification through snowballing method; with the researcher keen on data saturation as opposed to sample size [8]. As a result of this, the study generated two sets of data; archival data and data from oral interviews. To establish the trustworthiness of the data, archival data it was subjected to the historical techniques of internal and external criticism while audio recordings from interviews were transcribed verbatim. All these verified data were then analyzed qualitatively through the use of N-Vivo software; where similarities and differences were outlined using time periods, eventually assisting in coming up with themes and sub-themes that were presented descriptively as per the study objectives [9].

4. Historical Barriers to Islamic Integrated Education in Kenya

4.1. Community Engagement

Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School was established in 1965 as a harambee school. As a harambee school, community support was required for the development of the school. The community was responsible in the setting up of the school as was seen by the minutes of an education meeting of 1965, where it was shared that the government should alert and remind the chiefs, sub chiefs and village elders to lobby community members for resources and participation in the development of Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School [10]. Following the construction of the first ever classroom in 1965, what followed was a sluggish show from the parents in support of the development of the school.

Parents have been accused as failing to support the development as well as daily running of the school. This is corresponded through a report of fee arrears accrued by learners from school records [11]. Mumias region is widely known as the place for sugar processing, with the presence of Mumias Sugar Company. However, in the recent past, the company has struggled due to management issues and delayed salary payments. With majority of learners from within, it is possible that some of their parents work in the factory and this would be the reason for poor fee payment. Therefore, in as much as keeping learners in school is the overall goal of any institution, it was impossible to achieve this without a credible source for fees.

Parental support goes a long way even on matters attitude. The concern is that

some parent's concern to the school is just because their children were in school. Some of parents' attendance of school gatherings like school meetings of Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and Annual General Meetings (AGM) or even Prayer Days is distressing. Unavailability for such important school gatherings speaks volumes about the attitude of the parents towards the school and the education of their children.

4.2. Administrative Barriers

The administration of the school is an interplay between the government and the school's management. From the government's perspective, there is a lot of expectation, especially the fact that the government is in control of public schools in Kenya. However, in the recent past, there have been reported cases of delayed capitation from the government. This might be attributed to a number of factors, ranging from the sudden shift to a new curriculum of Competency-Based Education (CBE) to financial constraints of the country. The ripple effects of this, is poor service delivery in the school, including a change of the school's diet as well as poor creditors and suppliers' records. In order to survive, the school regularly seeks the assistance of donors and Muslim sponsors to maintain its liquidity [12].

Concerning management of the school there have been concerns about the longevity of the current principal in the school. Whereas his as the Head Teacher in 2003 was marked with joy, there have been continued disquiet from the general public in the recent past [11]. Although the main concerns about his replacement is an inherent fear of the unknown, others argue that this prolonged tenure of a single principal may be a catalyst to the grave problems academic performance and a rise in indiscipline that the school has been facing in the recent past. From this perspective, a change in leadership would literally mean a change in fortunes as per the expectations of the general public.

Last but not least, is the issue of Muslim donors as well as Muslim sponsors. Historically, Muslim donors provided the essential capital for bursaries, scholarships, and infrastructure, alongside vital psychological and spiritual encouragement [11]. However, in the recent past, there have been honest concerns in terms of support from the benefactors. There are reports of a significant decline in support from the donors, especially during Islamic holidays, where they used to be active. For instance, during the holy month of Ramadan, Muslim donors actively provided *Dhawabu* (including rice and dates) for the students' *Iftar* (evening meal) and for the wider community. The absence or rather, decline of such support, is detrimental to the school's ambition as a Muslim school as parents and community at large might not view the institution as before.

4.3. Religious Orientation

This has been one of the greatest challenges affecting Muslim schools as well as Islamic Integrated schools. With Christian Missionaries controlling majority of education during the colonial period, faith was a dominant force in how education was dispensed. For instance, most schools established during that time, bore the

names of particular faiths or names of people from a particular religion [13]. In the wake of independence, the position of the new Kenyan government was the stoppage as to the use of religious names for religious institutions as this prevented some parents from taking their children to those particular schools due to their religious backgrounds [14]. The establishment of the school in 1965 had a similar bone of contention, as whether to name the school, Wanga Mumias Muslim Secondary School or Mumias Muslim Secondary School [10]. The latter decision of naming the school Mumias Muslim Secondary School had ripple effects, similar to the ones during colonial period, such as poor performance and initial slow enrollment trends; with just seven boys and one girl as at 1965 [10].

As an Islamic Integrated school the school is expected to equip itself with a rigorous program that enable it run both the normal Kenyan curriculum as well as the Islamic religious curriculum simultaneously [15]. In this regard, the school installed a mosque within the school boundaries, in order to oversee the five daily congregational Islamic prayers. However, since the school offers both day and boarding learning, these congregational prayers were moderated to at least three of *Adhkar* (Morning prayers around 7 a.m.), *Dhuhr* (Midday prayers around 1 p.m.) and *Asr* (Afternoon prayers around 4 p.m.), so that all learners get acquainted to the program [11]. Besides congregational prayers, learners pursuing IIE also learn Arabic subject, where aspects of *Fiqh* and memorization are imparted, as part of the larger Integrated curriculum.

The challenge of having such a double-edged curriculum in a diversified institution such as Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School, is how to accommodate non-Muslims [11]. The school for instance houses learners from different sects such as Catholics, Anglican Church of Kenya, African Inland Church and Pentecostal Assemblies of God. The school rules are clear for learners from these religious background; that they should stick to their faith. This is because, as Muslim learners are allowed to conduct all their five daily congregational prayers and Fridays, non-Muslim learners are also allowed to worship on Sundays from 9 a.m, as to their faiths [11]. Although the decision for non-Muslim learners to stick to a particular faith and pursuance of this IIE program is optional, it is difficult to adjust to the situation. For non-Muslim learners, as it breeds the temptation of Islamicization that is feared by majority of the parents.

4.4. Structural Limitations

On matters structure, this includes classrooms, dormitories, administration blocks and latrines. The school was established in 1965 as a harambee school. It is therefore nearly impossible for the school to have modern structures. Due to aging by the school, it is also possible that these structures are aged too. For instance, an inspection report by the Inspector of schools in Mumias Division in 1974, shared an unwanted reality of the situation on the ground. The school was reported to have inadequate classrooms, inadequate desks few teachers, messy latrines as well as untidy classrooms [14]. In as much as the current situation shows a change of structures through visible paint as well as new dormitories, one cannot miss to

still see the lurking old classrooms. The government's responsibility in management of schools bears a heavy weight on its shoulders, as the affairs of the school as a county school, probably seem heavy for it to bear.

4.5. Human Resource Barriers

The development of Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School has been constantly shadowed by challenges in human resource management. While personnel are an institution's most vital asset, they have historically presented the school with its most complex problems. Archival evidence from a 1974 school inspection highlights an early crisis; the Inspector, Mr. Mburu, noted a severe staff shortage and a troubling power dynamic where the Head teacher appeared to fear his own subordinates [14].

This administrative instability persisted into the 1980s, during the implementation of the Integrated Islamic Education (IIE) program, where there was a significant difference between the school's religious mandate and its staffing capacity. Despite the expectation that an Islamic institution would prioritize the recruitment of specialists in Islamic Religion subject and Arabic Language, historical records indicate a chronic deficit. Upon his arrival in 1981, Principal Mirza discovered a complete absence of qualified teachers for these core subjects; much to the disadvantage of any Muslim school or Islamic Integrated school [11].

To address this vacuum, the Board of Governors (BoG) went beyond formal TSC channels to recruit a local Imam as an untrained teacher, Imam Mohamed. Mr. Mohamed became the sole custodian of the IIE program, tasked with teaching both aspects of Islamic Religion and Arabic while also officiating school prayers. Remarkably, this model persists; as of 2024, the school still relies on a single teacher to manage the entire IIE curriculum and serve as the school Imam. This staffing challenge highlights a risky reliance on individual effort rather than institutional structure to maintain the school's Islamic character; going a long way to matters performance and school's interests [11].

5. Conclusion

It is clear from the above discussion that the establishment of Integrated Islamic schools such Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School, has not only been a success to the promotion of dual-education to Muslim learners, but has also been marred by challenges. These challenges have either hindered its growth and development or contributed to indifferent academic performance in one way or another. These challenges range from human resource challenges, structural challenges, religious challenges, administrative challenges as well as community challenges. By looking at these challenges, it is clear that they can be addressed through a united push by the stakeholders of the school and the community at large. It is good to note that these are the challenges Mumias Boys Muslim Secondary School encounters as an Islamic Integrated school, but the same would not be said to all Islamic Integrated schools in Kenya as geographical and institutional differences would provide varied barriers.

6. Policy Recommendations

From the historical barriers outlined, the study makes the following recommendations. To policy makers in the state department for Basic Education in Kenya, they should provide all the prerequisite support to Muslim schools that install Islamic Integrated Education in their curricula. This includes provision of more financial support of the installation of the required structures in school and ensuring that there is enough human resource in terms of teachers of Islamic Integrated Education. This will help solve these administrative as well as structural hindrances to the progress of Integrated Islamic Education.

Additionally, to Islamic schools with Islamic Integrated education, they should set aside time to engage the communities where they are situated on the nature, aims and the philosophies behind Islamic Integrated Education. This will go a long way to ensure that both Muslim and non-Muslim parents are sensitized about the tenets of the rigorous program and what their children are expected to encounter while studying in the school. This will help solve hindrances from the communities where such schools are situated.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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