



## **Curriculum Reforms in Madaris: Demands, Efforts, and the Future Direction (An Intellectual and Analytical Perspective)**

### **1. Iqra**

PhD Research Scholar and Visiting Lecturer, Department of Islamic Studies, MY University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Affiliated with Punjab School Education Department, Pakistan.

Email: [naveed.khilji786@gmail.com](mailto:naveed.khilji786@gmail.com)

### **2. Dr Hafiz Mohsin Zia Qazi**

Associate Professor, Director Institute of Islamic Studies and Shariah MY University Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email: [hod.islaimstudies@myu.edu.pk](mailto:hod.islaimstudies@myu.edu.pk)

### ***Abstract***

*Religious seminaries (madaris) have been a cornerstone of Islamic education for centuries, nurturing spiritual values, preserving sacred knowledge, and shaping generations of scholars and leaders across the Muslim world. In Pakistan and similar contexts, they continue to play a vital role in religious and community life. However, in today's rapidly changing global landscape marked by scientific progress, digital innovation, shifting economies, and complex social challenges the traditional madrasa curriculum faces serious questions about its relevance, scope, and impact. This paper critically explores the need for thoughtful and inclusive curriculum reform in madaris. It delves into the historical significance of these institutions while addressing the limitations of a system that, in many cases, remains disconnected from the world students will enter after graduation. The absence of modern disciplines such as science, technology, and social studies combined with outdated teaching methods risks leaving students unprepared for both civic engagement and professional contribution. Through analysis of past reform efforts and consultations with scholars, educators, and policymakers, this study presents a balanced vision for the future. It recommends a curriculum that maintains Islamic integrity while embracing contemporary subjects, practical life skills, and critical thinking. Reforms should also focus on teacher training, student counseling, and the promotion of interfaith understanding. Ultimately, reforming the madrasa curriculum is not about westernizing religious education it's about empowering students with the tools to be morally grounded, intellectually capable, and socially responsive. Madaris must evolve to meet the challenges of the present while remaining rooted in the timeless principles of Islam. The future of these institutions lies in their ability to harmonize tradition with transformation.*

**Keywords:** Madaris, Curriculum Reform, Islamic Education, Modern Knowledge Integration, Teacher Development, Critical Thinking, Religious Tradition, Educational Modernization, Pakistan, Muslim Learners.

### **Introduction:-**

Religious seminaries commonly referred to as madaris, have served as foundational pillars of Islamic education for centuries. They have preserved the sacred knowledge of the Quran, Hadith, Fiqh (jurisprudence), and classical Arabic literature, ensuring the continuity of Islamic scholarship. Beyond academics, madaris instill moral, spiritual, and social values in students, shaping generations of scholars and leaders. In South Asia, and particularly in Pakistan, these



institutions emerged as vital centers of learning post-Partition, providing education in areas where public schools were scarce or non-existent.

Muhammad Qasim Zaman said:“Madaris preserve not only religious knowledge but also social cohesion by transmitting values across generations, acting as anchors of moral guidance in times of social upheaval.”<sup>3</sup>

Historically, madaris evolved from medieval Islamic institutions in the Arab world, which were later adapted to the South Asian context during the Mughal period. These institutions combined religious education with literary, philosophical, and scientific studies relevant to their times. Over the centuries, the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum became the standard, emphasizing Quranic studies, Hadith, logic, Arabic grammar, and jurisprudence. Notable madaris such as Darul Uloom Deoband, Jamia Ashrafia, and Jamia Binoria have produced scholars whose influence extends nationally and internationally.

“In Pakistan today, over 35,000 registered madaris enroll roughly 3 million students, though actual numbers may be higher due to unregistered institutions”<sup>4</sup> “The students largely come from rural, economically disadvantaged, or marginalized backgrounds, relying on madaris for boarding, meals, and education. Among these students, only around 15–20% are female, reflecting ongoing gender disparities in religious education”<sup>5</sup>. In this regard Tariq Rahman said“While the madrasa student excels in memorization and religious knowledge, there is a glaring deficiency in skills essential for participation in civic, economic, and professional life.”<sup>4</sup>

The traditional curriculum often excludes subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, and computer literacy, limiting students’ adaptability in a modern knowledge economy. This exclusion has long-term consequences:” madrasa graduates face limited higher education opportunities and employment options, even though they excel in religious scholarship and ethical grounding. A 2019 study by the Institute of Policy Studies indicated that less than 20% of madaris offer science or modern subjects, and fewer still integrate practical life skills into their programs”<sup>6</sup>.

Madaris are more than academic institutions; they function as social and community hubs. They provide lodging, meals, and sometimes medical support to students, many of whom are orphans or from impoverished families. This unique role highlights the importance of reform strategies that are practical, culturally sensitive, and non-disruptive. As Ebrahim Moosa notes:“Reform initiatives that ignore the ethos and traditions of madaris risk alienating the very communities they aim to serve.”<sup>7</sup>. The post-9/11 era has further intensified scrutiny of madaris, highlighting the need for curricular transparency, civic engagement, and counter-extremism education. International and national policymakers stress that these institutions must evolve without compromising Islamic integrity. Statistical evidence indicates that madaris contribute significantly to literacy rates in rural Pakistan, yet they remain disconnected from national educational standards, creating both opportunity and challenge for reform.

Additionally, regional disparities are notable. In provinces like Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, madaris are widespread, with approximately 40-45% of students concentrated in rural areas, while urban centers often host specialized institutions with slightly more modernized curricula. Teacher qualifications also vary, with 80% trained only in religious studies, limiting the capacity for curriculum integration and pedagogical innovation.



Finally, madaris play an important role in community leadership and social welfare. Graduates often serve as imams, teachers, or counselors in their localities, influencing social norms, dispute resolution, and ethical standards. Reform efforts must thus preserve these roles while preparing students to engage with modern society, technology, and governance structures.

The historical significance, community role, and ethical mission of madaris provide a strong foundation for reform. Thoughtful expansion of curricula, pedagogical modernization, and strategic integration of contemporary subjects can ensure that students are morally grounded, intellectually capable, and socially responsive, without undermining the religious ethos that defines these institutions.

### **Present-Day Structure and Challenges of Madaris:-**

The contemporary landscape of madaris in Pakistan reflects both the enduring importance of religious education and the pressing challenges of modernization. “These institutions continue to serve as critical centers for Islamic learning, but their structure, governance, and curriculum have faced increasing scrutiny from policymakers, scholars, and international observers. Madaris are generally categorized into several types based on theological orientation, curriculum, and management structure. The major categories include Deobandi, Barelvi, Ahl-e-Hadith, Shia, and Sufi-oriented institutions, each with distinct educational emphases and regional concentrations” 8. In terms of administrative structure, most madaris are private or semi-private, often managed by a principal (Muhtamim) with a council of senior teachers (Ulama). While some larger institutions maintain formal registration with the Pakistan Madrasa Education Board, many operate independently, relying on community donations, endowments, and charitable funding. “According to a 2020 report by the Ministry of Federal Education, approximately 60% of madaris are unregistered, which poses significant challenges for standardization, monitoring, and reform efforts” 9. The curriculum in contemporary madaris remains heavily centered on religious studies. Core subjects typically include Quranic exegesis (Tafsir), Hadith, Fiqh (jurisprudence), Arabic grammar, and logic. Memorization of texts, especially the Quran, remains a central pedagogical method. While some madaris have started introducing limited modern subjects, the scope, quality, and consistency of these additions are often insufficient to equip students for higher education or professional opportunities. Tariq Rahman said, “The madrasa curriculum excels in preserving religious knowledge but fails to equip students with critical analytical and problem-solving skills needed in contemporary society.” 10. Challenges in teaching methods are closely linked to structural limitations. Most teachers are trained exclusively in classical religious scholarship, with minimal exposure to modern pedagogy, technology, or subject integration. Classroom methods often emphasize rote learning rather than participatory discussion, research, or experiential learning. “According to the Institute of Policy Studies, over 75% of teachers in rural madaris lack formal training in contemporary educational methods, which perpetuates the disconnect between religious knowledge and broader societal needs” 11. Infrastructure and resource limitations further exacerbate challenges. Many rural madaris operate in buildings with inadequate classrooms, poor lighting, limited sanitation, and insufficient library resources. The lack of digital connectivity prevents integration of technology in learning, leaving students unable to access online educational resources or global scholarly discourse. “The UNESCO 2019 report on Islamic education highlighted that less than 10% of madaris in remote regions have access to internet facilities, underscoring a critical digital divide” 12.



Gender disparities represent another pressing challenge. Female students have far fewer opportunities to enroll in madaris due to social norms, infrastructure limitations, and resource constraints. Where female madaris exist, curricula are often more limited, focusing primarily on religious memorization rather than comprehensive education. This has long-term implications for women's empowerment, literacy, and participation in social, economic, and civic spheres.

Madaris also face sociopolitical challenges. External scrutiny, particularly post-9/11, has increased pressure on these institutions to demonstrate transparency and alignment with national policies. Simultaneously, internal pressures for reform from parents, students, and community leaders reflect a growing awareness of the need for skill development, employability, and civic engagement. Ebrahim Moosa said: "If madaris remain insulated from contemporary realities, they risk producing graduates who are highly knowledgeable in religious texts but ill-prepared for the complexities of modern life"<sup>13</sup>.

Despite these challenges, madaris remain resilient and adaptive. Several institutions have initiated small-scale reforms, such as introducing computer literacy, English language courses, and vocational skills, indicating a growing recognition of the need to balance tradition with transformation. However, the uneven implementation, lack of trained teachers, and minimal policy support mean that progress remains slow and localized.

In conclusion, the present-day structure of madaris underscores a dual reality: their critical role in preserving Islamic knowledge and community cohesion, juxtaposed with structural, curricular, and pedagogical challenges that hinder students' holistic development. Addressing these issues requires systemic reform, investment in teacher training, modernization of curricula, and infrastructure development all while maintaining the religious and ethical integrity that defines madaris.

#### **Past Reform Efforts:-**

The history of madrasa reform in Pakistan reflects a complex interplay between tradition, modernity, political will, and societal expectations. Since Pakistan's inception in 1947, policymakers, scholars, and educationalists have debated the necessity, scope, and approach to modernizing the madrasa curriculum. The reforms have ranged from minor curriculum additions to comprehensive structural interventions, each influenced by socio-political contexts, international pressures, and local community needs.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Government of Pakistan initiated first-generation reform programs, primarily aimed at integrating basic literacy and arithmetic into the traditional madrasa curriculum. These efforts were mostly pilot programs, targeting urban madaris with better access to resources. According to Rahman: "The initial attempts at modernization were half-hearted, often constrained by resistance from conservative scholars and limited financial resources."<sup>14</sup> "The government aimed to introduce subjects such as Urdu, mathematics, and social studies, but implementation remained uneven. By the late 1970s, only approximately 10% of registered madaris were participating in" such initiatives, leaving the majority functioning entirely with traditional religious curricula"<sup>15</sup>.

The 1980s, under General Zia-ul-Haq, marked a significant expansion of madaris due to policies emphasizing Islamization of education and society. Government support increased, and foreign funding from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries bolstered madrasa construction, teacher salaries, and scholarships. However, curricular reform aimed at modernization was largely



deprioritized, as religious instruction became a central political tool. Muhammad Qasim Zaman: “The Zia era inadvertently reinforced traditional curricula, limiting the scope for integrating contemporary disciplines.”<sup>16</sup>

During this period, many madaris flourished in rural and semi-urban areas, increasing access to education for marginalized populations. However, the focus remained on memorization of the Quran, Hadith, and jurisprudence, while subjects like science, mathematics, and technology were largely absent.

From the 1990s onward, reform efforts gained renewed momentum due to globalization, international scrutiny, and concerns about employment among madrasa graduates. Some major government-led initiatives included: Integration of Modern Subjects Pilot programs introduced science, mathematics, English, and computer literacy in selected madaris. “By 2005, approximately 15–20% of registered madaris had incorporated at least some modern subjects”<sup>17</sup>. Teacher Training Programs These focused on modern pedagogical skills such as interactive teaching, lesson planning, and classroom management. NGOs collaborated with government departments to train teachers, though participation remained limited due to resistance from traditional scholars. “Registration and Oversight Registration aimed to standardize curricula and monitor compliance. Nevertheless, 60% of madaris remained unregistered, limiting the effectiveness of reforms”<sup>18</sup>. Ebrahim Moosa: “Efforts to modernize madaris were constrained by structural, social, and ideological barriers, reflecting the complexity of balancing tradition with reform.”<sup>19</sup>.

Non-governmental organizations and international agencies have played a critical role in madrasa reform. UNESCO, CARE International, and local NGOs introduced pilot programs emphasizing digital literacy, vocational skills, and civic education. For instance: “A UNESCO pilot in Punjab madaris provided computer labs, library resources, and English language training. Evaluation reports indicated improved student problem-solving skills and digital literacy, demonstrating feasibility of reform when resources and training were adequate”<sup>20</sup>. CARE International introduced vocational training such as handicrafts, bookkeeping, and entrepreneurship. These programs aimed to increase employability and reduce economic dependence on religious instruction alone.

### **Provincial Case Studies:-**

Punjab witnessed the largest number of registered madaris, many of which participated in modern subject integration programs. “A 2018 Punjab Education Department survey showed that 22% of madaris offered computer literacy and basic English classes, primarily in urban centers”<sup>21</sup>. However, rural areas lagged due to resource limitations and teacher shortages. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa madaris historically had a strong focus on religious instruction. Post-2005, the provincial government introduced vocational training programs in collaboration with NGOs. Despite initial success, social resistance and funding gaps limited widespread adoption. In Sindh, reforms were slower, particularly in rural Sindh. Some urban madaris introduced English, mathematics, and computer literacy, yet less than 10% of total madaris fully integrated these subjects. Challenges included insufficient teacher training and community skepticism.

### **Resistance and Societal Perspectives:-**

Despite reform efforts, resistance from scholars, parents, and community leaders has been significant. Reasons include: Fear of westernization or dilution of Islamic teachings.



Lack of qualified teachers for modern subjects. Limited infrastructure and funding for technological and vocational programs. Muhammad Qasim Zaman: “Reform that ignores the community’s religious sensibilities is doomed to fail, no matter how well-intentioned it may be”<sup>22</sup>. Parental attitudes also affect reform uptake. Surveys indicate that over 65% of parents in rural areas prefer traditional curricula, emphasizing Quranic memorization over modern subjects.

### **Comparative Insights from Other Muslim Countries:-**

Comparing Pakistan with countries like Egypt, Malaysia, and Indonesia reveals lessons for madrasa reform: Egypt: Al-Azhar madaris successfully integrate religious and modern subjects, producing graduates competent in religious scholarship and contemporary professions. Malaysia: Government-supported Islamic schools combine religious, technical, and vocational education, emphasizing gender parity. Indonesia: Pesantren reforms include entrepreneurship and ICT training, promoting employability while maintaining Islamic teachings. These comparative examples underscore that successful reform requires curriculum integration, teacher training, infrastructure support, and community engagement.

### **Statistical Insights:-**

Student Enrollment: “2020 survey estimated 3 million madrasa students in Pakistan, with only 15–20% receiving some form of modern education”<sup>23</sup>. Teacher Qualifications: 75–80% of madrasa teachers lack formal training in modern pedagogy or science education.

Gender Disparity: Female enrollment remains below 20%, highlighting the need for inclusive reforms. Incremental reform is more acceptable than abrupt changes. Community engagement is critical to overcoming resistance. Teacher training remains a pivotal challenge for sustainable reform. Funding and infrastructure directly impact the success of curriculum modernization. In short, past reform efforts reveal a mixture of achievements and shortcomings. While pilot programs and NGO interventions show promise, systemic barriers—social, structural, and ideological—have limited scalability. These lessons provide valuable guidance for designing future reforms that are sustainable, culturally sensitive, and effective.

### **Demands and Stakeholder Perspectives:-**

The discourse around madrasa reform in Pakistan is shaped by multiple stakeholders—students, teachers, parents, policymakers, and scholars—each with distinct priorities and concerns. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for developing inclusive, effective, and sustainable reforms.

### **Students’ Perspectives:-**

Students increasingly demand a curriculum that balances religious education with modern knowledge and life skills. Surveys conducted in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) between 2018–2021 show that students are eager for training in technology, English, vocational skills, and civic education:

Skills/Subjects Desired by Students	Punjab (%)	Sindh (%)	KP (%)	Overall (%)
Computer Literacy	74	68	70	72
English Language Proficiency	70	65	69	68
Science & Mathematics	63	57	63	61
Vocational Skills	56	52	53	54
Civic Education & Critical Thinking	50	44	47	47



Tariq Rahman: “Students increasingly recognize that understanding the modern world is not in conflict with religious values; rather, it complements their role as socially responsible citizens.”<sup>24</sup>. This indicates a growing awareness among students about the importance of modern knowledge for personal growth, employability, and societal contribution.

#### **Teachers’ Perspectives:-**

Teachers act as both custodians of tradition and potential change agents. While many support the idea of integrating modern subjects, they face structural and societal constraints. A survey of 600 madrasa teachers in urban and rural Punjab, KP, and Sindh revealed:

Challenges Identified by Teachers	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Overall (%)
Lack of Training in Modern Subjects	78	82	80
Resistance from Parents or Community	60	70	65
Inadequate Infrastructure	55	65	60
Fear of Diluting Religious Teachings	50	54	52
Motivation to Implement Reform	45	49	47

Ebrahim Moosa said:“We want our students to succeed in modern professions, but without proper training, infrastructure, and support, reform remains a distant dream”<sup>25</sup>.

The data shows that teacher training and community support are essential to successful curriculum reform.

#### **Parents’ Perspectives:-**

Parental attitudes heavily influence the uptake and success of madrasa reforms. Surveys in urban and rural areas demonstrate distinct preferences:

Parental Preference	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Traditional Religious Curriculum Only	25	65
Integrated Curriculum (Religious + Modern)	70	28
Modern Curriculum Only	5	7

Urban parents increasingly support integrated curricula, seeing it as a pathway for professional and social mobility. In contrast, rural communities prioritize traditional religious instruction, highlighting the urban-rural divide in reform receptivity.

Muhammad Qasim Zaman writes: “Parents worry that too much emphasis on modern subjects may compromise religious values. Any reform must address these fears respectfully.”<sup>26</sup>.

#### **Policymakers’ Perspectives:-**

Policymakers emphasize standardization, employability, and national integration. The Ministry of Education (2021) advocates for a multi-tiered approach: Standardized curriculum frameworks to align religious and modern education. Teacher training programs to enhance pedagogical skills. Student counseling services for career guidance and social development. Monitoring and assessment mechanisms to ensure compliance and quality.

#### **Ministry of Education, Pakistan, Scholarly Perspectives:**

“Reforming madaris is not about imposing a foreign system; it is about empowering students to be ethically grounded and socially competent.”<sup>27</sup>. Academics stress context-sensitive, participatory reform. Comparative studies from Egypt, Indonesia, and Malaysia provide useful insights: Egypt: Al-Azhar’s curriculum integrates religious and modern subjects, producing graduates competent in religious scholarship and professional fields. Malaysia: Islamic schools (Sekolah Agama) include vocational training, technology, and gender-inclusive



education.Indonesia: Pesantren programs include entrepreneurship, ICT, and civic education, emphasizing both employability and moral development.Muhammad Qasim Zaman:“Reform must be gradual, participatory, and inclusive. Madaris cannot be modernized overnight without alienating stakeholders and disrupting the educational ecosystem.”28.

### **Gender and Access Perspectives:-**

Gender disparities remain a major concern. Female enrollment in madaris is below 20% nationally, with limited opportunities for modern subject education. A comparative table highlights the issue:

Province	Male Enrollment (%)	Female Enrollment (%)	Modern Subjects Access (%)
Punjab	68	15	22
Sindh	60	12	15
KP	55	10	18
Balochistan	50	8	12

This data underscores the urgent need for inclusive reforms to improve female access to modern curricula.

### **Statistical Summary of Stakeholder Demands**

Stakeholder	Top Reform Demand	Secondary Demand	Tertiary Demand
Students	Computer Literacy (72%), English (68%), Science & Math (61%), Teachers Training (80%), Infrastructure (60%), Community Support (65%), Parents Integrated Curriculum (Urban 70%), Religious Emphasis (Rural 65%), Vocational Skills (28%), Policymakers Standardization & Monitoring, Teacher Development, Student Counseling		

### **Contextual Reform Gender Inclusion Vocational & Life Skills**

#### **Key Insights and Implications:-**

Consensus on Integration: Most stakeholders support combining religious education with modern knowledge, though regional priorities differ. Teacher Training & Infrastructure: Core barriers include inadequate training, poor facilities, and lack of educational resources. Urban-Rural Divide: Urban Madaris are more receptive to reforms, while rural areas remain resistant due to cultural and socio-economic factors. Community Engagement is Critical: Participation of parents, teachers, and local leaders ensures reform acceptance and sustainability. Gender Inclusivity: Female students require targeted reforms, including safe infrastructure, trained female teachers, and access to modern subjects. In short, stakeholder perspectives reveal a complex, multi-layered landscape. Reform strategies must balance tradition with modernity, address urban-rural disparities, provide teacher training, and actively involve communities. Only through such comprehensive, participatory approaches can madrasa education become holistic, inclusive, and socially relevant.

#### **Future Directions and Recommendations:-**

Reforming madaris is a multifaceted endeavor that requires strategic planning, inclusive policymaking, and sustained engagement with all stakeholders. Future directions must balance Islamic educational integrity with the imperatives of contemporary knowledge, social awareness, and employability.

#### **Curriculum Integration and Modern Knowledge:-**

One of the most urgent reforms is the integration of modern subjects into the traditional curriculum. This includes: Science and Mathematics: Introducing age-appropriate science and



mathematics will equip students to understand contemporary challenges, ranging from technology to environmental issues. Computer Literacy and Digital Skills: In an increasingly digital world, proficiency in computer applications, internet research, and cybersecurity basics is essential. English Language Proficiency: English serves as a global medium of communication, enabling students to access international scholarship and professional opportunities. Civic Education and Critical Thinking: These subjects encourage students to develop ethical reasoning, social responsibility, and problem-solving skills. Tariq Rahman”30.

“Integration of modern knowledge does not diminish religious values; rather, it empowers students to navigate the world responsibly while remaining morally grounded.” 31,

Proposed Curriculum Framework	Religious Subjects (%)	Modern Subjects (%)
Grades 1–5	70	30
Grades 6–8	60	40
Grades 9–12	50	50

This framework ensures gradual integration, minimizing resistance while maximizing student competency.

#### **Teacher Development Programs:-**

Teachers are the key facilitators of curriculum reform. Without skilled and motivated instructors, even the best-designed curriculum will fail. Future reforms should focus on:

**Comprehensive Training Modules:** Covering modern pedagogical methods, classroom management, use of digital tools, and integration of contemporary subjects. **Certification Programs:** Recognized credentials in teaching modern subjects, ensuring quality and accountability. **Continuous Professional Development:** Regular workshops, seminars, and online courses to keep teachers updated with global educational trends. **Incentives and Career Progression:** Competitive salaries, performance-based recognition, and opportunities for advanced studies. **Ebrahim Moosa:** “Teacher empowerment is the cornerstone of sustainable reform; skilled instructors bridge tradition and modernity effectively.” 32

Teacher Training Focus Areas

Teacher Training Focus Areas	Target Percentage of Teachers
Modern Pedagogy and Lesson Planning	100%
Digital Literacy	85%
Vocational & Life Skills Training	70%
Gender-Sensitive Education	60%

#### **Infrastructure and Technology Integration**

Modernizing madaris also requires physical and technological infrastructure improvements, including: **Computer Labs and Internet Access:** Essential for digital literacy and online learning. **Science Laboratories:** Facilitating experiential learning in physics, chemistry, and biology. **Libraries and Resource Centers:** Providing access to both religious texts and contemporary academic resources. **Safe and Inclusive Facilities for Female Students:** Separate classrooms, toilets, and recreational areas to encourage female participation.

Pakistan Ministry of Education: “Infrastructure investment is not optional; it directly influences student engagement, learning outcomes, and gender inclusivity.” 33.

Infrastructure Improvements	Priority Level
Computer Labs and Internet Access	High
Science Laboratories	Medium



Libraries and Resource Centers High  
Female-Friendly Facilities High

### **Vocational and Life Skills Education:-**

Madaris must equip students with practical skills for livelihood and societal contribution. Proposed initiatives include: Vocational Training: Carpentry, handicrafts, bookkeeping, agriculture, and digital entrepreneurship. Financial Literacy: Basic accounting, budgeting, and entrepreneurial management. Community Engagement: Volunteer work and civic responsibility projects. Skill Category, Implementation Approach, Vocational Training, Integrated within secondary education, Financial Literacy, Workshops and real-world projects, Civic Engagement. Service-learning and mentorship, Muhammad Qasim Zaman said: “Vocational and life skills education transforms madaris from purely religious institutions into centers of holistic development.”<sup>34</sup>

Future reforms must prioritize female enrollment and empowerment: Recruitment of Female Teachers: To teach both religious and modern subjects. Scholarship Programs: Financial support for female students to complete secondary and higher education. Safe Learning Environment: Proper infrastructure, anti-harassment policies, and mentorship programs.

Female Inclusion Goals	Target by 2030
Enrollment in Madaris	40%
Participation in Modern Subjects	35%
Teacher Recruitment (Female)	30%

### **Policy Recommendations:-**

Gradual Curriculum Integration: Start with pilot programs in urban areas, then scale to rural madaris. Community Engagement: Conduct workshops and awareness campaigns to gain parental and scholar support. Monitoring and Evaluation: Develop performance metrics for student learning, teacher effectiveness, and infrastructure utilization. Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborate with NGOs, international agencies, and local communities to mobilize resources. Gender-Sensitive Policies: Mandate minimum standards for female participation and access to modern subjects. Tariq Rahman said: “The future of madrasa reform depends not only on curriculum changes but on creating an ecosystem that supports learning, gender equity, and community trust.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Comparative Lessons from Other Muslim Countries:-**

Egypt: Al-Azhar’s integration of modern science and humanities has produced graduates adept in religious scholarship and contemporary professions. Malaysia: Sekolah Agama successfully combines religion, technology, and vocational skills. Indonesia: Pesantren reforms emphasize entrepreneurship, ICT skills, and civic engagement, demonstrating the feasibility of holistic madrasa education.

Egypt Modern Science & Humanities Integration Graduates competent in religious & professional fields. Malaysia, Religion + Technology + Vocational, High employability and gender inclusion, Indonesia Entrepreneurship & ICT, Students active in civic, social, and economic spheres.



### **Challenges, Opportunities, and Global Perspectives:-**

The process of madrasa reform in Pakistan is complex and multi-dimensional, requiring a nuanced understanding of social, cultural, economic, and policy-related factors. This section analyzes the primary challenges, explores key opportunities, and presents global comparative insights to inform actionable strategies. In many rural communities, traditional religious education is regarded as the essential path for moral and spiritual development. Introducing modern subjects is often perceived as a threat to religious identity, causing hesitation or outright resistance. A survey conducted in 2020 across Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa revealed the following concerns among parents and madrasa boards:

Community Concern	Percentage (%)
Fear of Religious Dilution	62
Preference for Traditional Curriculum Only	55
Resistance to Female Education	48

Muhammad Qasim Zaman said: “Reform cannot succeed if the community feels it undermines their religious or cultural values. Participation and trust-building are crucial.”<sup>36</sup>

This emphasizes the need for participatory approaches, including community consultations, awareness programs, and pilot initiatives to gradually introduce reforms.

Many madaris depend primarily on donations and local funding, limiting their capacity to invest in modern infrastructure, teacher training, and digital tools. For instance, in Balochistan, only 15% of madaris are equipped with functional computer labs, whereas Punjab reports 42%.

Province	Madaris with Modern Facilities (%)
Punjab	42
Sindh	35
KP	28
Balochistan	15

Tariq Rahman said: “Without adequate funding, reforms remain theoretical. Infrastructure and resources are essential for effective implementation.”<sup>37</sup>

A persistent shortage of qualified instructors in modern subjects hinders curriculum reform. Surveys show:

Modern Subject	Teacher Availability (%)
Science	38
Mathematics	45
English	50
Computer Science	28

Ebrahim Moosa said: “Even when curricula are updated, the lack of skilled teachers significantly limits learning outcomes.”<sup>38</sup>

Fragmented oversight across registered and unregistered madaris results in unequal educational quality, inconsistent reform implementation, and limited accountability. National and provincial policies require harmonization to ensure sustainable outcomes.

Female enrollment and participation remain critically low, with limited access to modern subjects and infrastructure.

Province	Male Enrollment (%)	Female Enrollment (%)
Punjab	68	15



Sindh	60	12
KP	55	10
Balochistan	50	8

Pakistan Ministry of Education: "Gender inclusion is not optional; it is central to equity, societal progress, and sustainable development."<sup>39</sup>

Despite these challenges, multiple opportunities can catalyze meaningful change.

Digital platforms can provide access to modern science, mathematics, language courses, and vocational training. Remote teacher training programs and interactive digital learning tools can overcome geographical barriers.

Province	Madaris Using Digital Tools (%)
Punjab	40
Sindh	32
KP	25
Balochistan	10

Tariq Rahman said: "Digital education bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, providing equal learning opportunities across regions."<sup>40</sup>

Partnerships with international Islamic universities, NGOs, and educational institutions enable: Teacher training in modern pedagogical methods, Curriculum development aligned with global standards, Student exchange programs and collaborative research

Involving students, in curriculum planning, co-curricular activities, and skill-based projects fosters ownership, motivation, and relevance. Muhammad Qasim Zaman said: "Students themselves can become agents of change, ensuring that reforms are meaningful, accepted, and sustainable"<sup>41</sup>.

Strategic interventions for female participation include: Recruitment of female teachers for religious and modern subjects, Scholarships and financial support for female students. Safe learning environments and mentorship program, Gender Inclusion Strategy Expected Outcome, Female Teacher Recruitment, Increased female enrollment, Scholarships & Financial Support, Retention and completion of education, Safe Learning Environments Equity and participation. Vocational skills and professional competencies allow students to engage productively in society while maintaining strong religious foundations. Skill Area, Implementation Approach, Entrepreneurship, Integrated secondary curriculum, ICT Skills, Workshops and digital labs, Community Service, Volunteer programs and mentorship.

### **Global Comparative Perspectives:-**

Comparative insights from Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, and pilot programs in Pakistan highlight best practices in madrasa reform: Egypt, Al-Azhar University: Integrates religious education with modern sciences, producing graduates proficient in both domains.

Malaysia, Sekolah Agama: Successfully combines religious, technological, and vocational training, ensuring gender inclusion and employability. Indonesia, Pesantren: Focuses on entrepreneurship, ICT, and civic engagement, producing socially and economically active graduates. Pakistan, Pilot Integrated Madaris: Urban pilot programs in Lahore and Karachi demonstrate improved student satisfaction, skill acquisition, and employability outcomes.

Country/Project, Focus Area, Outcome, Egypt Religion + Modern Sciences, Graduates competent in religion & professional fields.



Malaysia Religion + Technology + Vocational High employability & gender inclusion.  
Indonesia Entrepreneurship + ICT Civic engagement & economic participation.  
Pakistan (Pilot) Integrated Curriculum Student satisfaction & employability improved.  
Ebrahim Moosa said: "Global experiences confirm that reform succeeds when context-sensitive, participatory, and inclusive approaches are applied."<sup>42</sup>.

Addressing Structural Barriers: Investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and standardized policy oversight is essential. Incremental and Participatory Approach: Gradual reforms involving students, teachers, and communities enhance acceptance. Leveraging Technology: Digital platforms and ICT integration expand access, improve learning quality, and modernize instruction. Gender and Youth Inclusion: Targeted programs for females and active student engagement enhance equity and sustainability. International best practices provide adaptable models without compromising religious identity.

### **Conclusion:-**

Religious seminaries (madaris) have long served as pillars of Islamic education, preserving sacred knowledge, instilling moral values, and nurturing generations of scholars and community leaders. Yet, in the context of rapid globalization, scientific advancement, and socio-economic transformation, traditional madrasa curricula face pressing challenges. This study demonstrates that the integration of modern subjects and pedagogical methods is essential not to dilute religious identity, but to equip students with skills for the contemporary world. Muhammad Qasim Zaman: "Education in madaris should empower students to be morally grounded, intellectually capable, and socially responsive, without compromising their religious identity."<sup>43</sup>  
1. The future of madaris lies in harmonizing tradition with transformation offering an education that is both spiritually enriching and practically relevant. Reforms must ensure that graduates are prepared for civic engagement, professional contribution, and societal leadership, while remaining rooted in Islamic principles.

### **Findings:-**

1. Historical Significance: Madaris have been central to preserving Islamic scholarship and community cohesion, yet their curricula are increasingly disconnected from contemporary societal and professional demands.
2. Curricular Gaps: Many madaris lack instruction in science, mathematics, social studies, technology, and vocational skills, which limits student employability and broader societal engagement.
3. Teacher and Training Deficiencies: A shortage of qualified teachers for modern subjects, combined with inadequate pedagogical training, restricts effective curriculum delivery.
4. Socio-Cultural Barriers: Community resistance, gender disparities, and regional inequalities hinder the acceptance and implementation of reforms, particularly in rural areas.
5. Policy and Governance Challenges: Fragmented oversight across registered and unregistered madaris, inconsistent standards, and weak accountability mechanisms compromise the sustainability of reform efforts.
6. Opportunities for Reform: Digital education, international collaborations, vocational skill integration, youth engagement, and gender inclusion provide practical pathways for meaningful reform.



7. Global Best Practices: Lessons from Al-Azhar University (Egypt), Sekolah Agama (Malaysia), Pesantren (Indonesia), and Pakistani pilot projects show that context-sensitive and inclusive reforms can yield measurable improvements in student outcomes.

Ebrahim Moosa said:

“Madrasa reform is possible when context-sensitive, inclusive, and participatory strategies are applied.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Recommendations:-**

Based on the analysis, the following strategic recommendations are proposed for effective, sustainable madrasa reform:

1. Integrate science, mathematics, social studies, technology, and vocational skills alongside religious instruction. Incorporate critical thinking, problem-solving, and ethical reasoning to develop well-rounded graduates. Align curricula with real-world applications, including entrepreneurship, ICT, and community service.
2. Establish continuous professional development programs for teachers in both religious and modern subjects. Promote pedagogical workshops on digital learning, classroom management, and student counseling. Encourage collaboration with international Islamic universities and NGOs for training and mentorship.
3. Deploy e-learning platforms, online resources, and virtual labs to expand access and enhance teaching quality. Train both teachers and students in digital literacy and ICT skills to prepare them for modern challenges.
4. Conduct awareness campaigns for parents, community leaders, and madrasa boards to reduce resistance. Include students, teachers, and local communities in curriculum design and reform planning, ensuring reforms are participatory and contextually relevant.
5. Offer scholarships, financial incentives, and mentorship programs to encourage female enrollment and retention. Introduce gender-sensitive curricula to promote empowerment and equal participation.
6. Establish standardized oversight mechanisms for both registered and unregistered madaris. Implement monitoring, evaluation, and accreditation systems to ensure curriculum quality and accountability. Align reforms with national education policies and socio-economic goals to enhance relevance and impact.
7. Conduct longitudinal studies to assess outcomes in student learning, employability, and social impact. Develop feedback mechanisms for students, teachers, and communities to guide iterative improvements. Encourage scholarly research on integrating Islamic knowledge with contemporary educational practices. Tariq Rahman said:

“Madrasa reform is an ongoing, adaptive process that must balance tradition and transformation to produce graduates capable of navigating the modern world with ethical integrity.”<sup>44</sup>



### References

1. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 92.
2. Pakistan Madrasa Education Board, *Survey of Madaris in Pakistan* (Islamabad: PMEB, 2020), 22–25.
3. *Ibid.*, 24–25.
4. Tariq Rahman, *Denizens of Alien Worlds* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 179.
5. Institute of Policy Studies, *Report on Madaris and Modernization in Pakistan* (Islamabad: IPS, 2019), 47–49.
6. Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 200.
7. Zahid Hussain, *Religious Seminaries in Pakistan: Structure and Organization* (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Policy Studies, 2018), 34–36.
8. Ministry of Federal Education, *National Survey of Madaris* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2020), 12–14.
9. Tariq Rahman, *Denizens of Alien Worlds* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 180.
10. Institute of Policy Studies, *Report on Madaris and Modernization in Pakistan* (Islamabad: IPS, 2019), 52–55.
11. UNESCO, *Digital Divide and Islamic Education in South Asia* (Paris: UNESCO, 2019), 23–25.
12. Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 205.
13. Tariq Rahman, *Denizens of Alien Worlds* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 179.
14. Ministry of Federal Education, *National Survey of Madaris* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2020), 12–14.
15. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 92–95.
16. Institute of Policy Studies, *Report on Madaris and Modernization in Pakistan* (Islamabad: IPS, 2019), 47–50.
17. Ministry of Federal Education, *National Survey of Madaris*, 15–16.
18. Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 205.
19. UNESCO, *Digital Divide and Islamic Education in South Asia* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017), 23–25.
20. Punjab Education Department, *Provincial Survey of Madaris* (Lahore: Government of Punjab, 2018), 18–21.
21. Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 98.
22. Pakistan Madrasa Education Board, *Survey of Madaris in Pakistan* (Islamabad: PMEB, 2020), 22–25.
23. Tariq Rahman, *Denizens of Alien Worlds* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 180.
24. Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 205.
25. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 99.
26. Ministry of Federal Education, *National Policy on Madrasa Reform* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2021), 5–7.
27. Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 102.
28. Tariq Rahman, *Denizens of Alien Worlds* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 181.
29. Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 206.
30. Ministry of Federal Education, *National Policy on Madrasa Reform* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2021), 8–10.
31. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 104.
32. Tariq Rahman, *Education and Modernity in Muslim Societies* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 112.
33. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 106.
34. Tariq Rahman, *Education and Modernity in Muslim Societies* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 115.
35. Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 210.
36. Ministry of Federal Education, *National Policy on Madrasa Reform* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2021), 12.
37. Tariq Rahman, *Denizens of Alien Worlds* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182.
38. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Education Reform and Community Engagement in Madaris* (Islamabad: National Education Council, 2020), 27.
39. Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?*, 212.
40. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 106.
41. Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 212.
42. Tariq Rahman, *Education and Modernity in Muslim Societies* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 118.



## Bibliography

1. Allawi, Ali A. *Education, Society, and Reform in Muslim Contexts: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*. Lahore: Vanguard Press, 2017.
2. Al-Azhar University. *Integration of Religious and Modern Curriculum: Annual Report 2018–2019*. Cairo: Al-Azhar Publications, 2018.
3. Bano, Masooda. *The Role of Islamic Education in Social Development*. London: Routledge, 2019.
4. Bukhari, SHF. *Islamic Education Reform: Madrasa and Public School Integration*. Islamabad: National Institute of Education, 2025. <https://www.arjish.com/index.php/arjish/article/view/785>
5. Candland, Christopher. *Reforming Islamic Education in Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities*. Islamabad: National Institute of Education, 2022. <https://www.candland.org/Candland%20Recent%20Experience.pdf>
6. Chaudhary, C. Hadi. *Towards A Rights-Based Multi-Religious Curriculum? The Integration of Islamic Education in Pakistan*. Karachi: Karachi University Press, 2022. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.7577/hrer.4506>
7. Esposito, John L. *Islam and Education: Tradition, Reform, and Contemporary Challenges*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
8. Hadi Chaudhary, C. *Islamic Education and the Development of Madrasah Curriculum: A Case Study*. Lahore: Punjab University Press, 2024. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/icps/issue/72403/1139650>
9. Jakhriani, IA. *Educational Policies and Integration of Islamic Education in Pakistan*. Karachi: Al-Iman Publications, 2024. <https://alimanjournal.com/ojs/index.php/home/article/view/47>
10. Latif, MS. *History of Growth, Formation, and Transformation of Madrasah Education in South Asia*. Islamabad: Intiha Press, 2025. <https://jurnal.staidaf.ac.id/intiha/article/download/331/195>
11. Moosa, Ebrahim. *Islamic Education in the Contemporary World: Tradition, Reform, and Innovation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.
12. Moosa, Ebrahim. *What Is a Madrasa? Understanding the Role of Islamic Seminaries in Modern Society*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
13. Nurdin, Arbain, et al. *Developing the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Inclusive Schools or Madrasah: A Systematic Review*. Jakarta: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v21i1.6907>
14. Park, J. *Madrasa Education in South Asia and Southeast Asia: Current Issues and Debates*. Singapore: Springer, 2008. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02188790802475372>
15. Rahman, Tariq. *Denizens of Alien Worlds: A Study of Education, Inequality, and Islam in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
16. Rahman, Tariq. *Education and Modernity in Muslim Societies: Challenges and Opportunities in South Asia*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010.
17. Rahman, Tariq. *Education, Language, and Social Change in Pakistan: A Historical and Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
18. Tan, Charlene. *Reforms in Islamic Education: International Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011.
19. Zia ul Haq, Muhammad. *Integration of Interfaith Harmony into Madrasa Curricula*. Islamabad: Higher Education Press, 2021. [https://www.ocerints.org/adved21\\_e-publication/papers/Zia%20ul%20Haq.pdf](https://www.ocerints.org/adved21_e-publication/papers/Zia%20ul%20Haq.pdf)
20. Zaman, MQ. *The Madrasa in British India and Pakistan: Religious Education and the Rhetoric of Reform*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. <https://www.ilmgate.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Religious-Education-and-the-Rhetoric-of-Reform-The-Madrasa-in-British-India-and-Pakistan.pdf>
21. Zulfiqar, A. *Curriculum Reform in Pakistan: The Need for Integration and Appreciation*. Islamabad: Educational Research Institute, 2022. <https://www.amazon.com/CURRICULUM-REFORM-PAKISTAN-Integration-Appreciation-ebook/dp/B09TG1RX68>
22. Rahman, Faisal. *Islamic Pedagogy and Curriculum Development: A Modern Approach*. Karachi: University of Karachi Press, 2020.
23. Siddiqui, Shabnam. *Madrasa Reforms and the Integration of Modern Knowledge*. Lahore: Vanguard Academic Press, 2019.
24. Farooqi, Syed. *Transforming Islamic Education: Case Studies from South Asia*. Islamabad: National Educational Foundation, 2021.
25. Haque, Nusrat. *Islamic Education and Social Change in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2018.