

MUSLIM SCHOOLS: THEIR FORMATION, DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACT ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Though Southern Africa may not be regarded as a multi-religious region as is the case in other parts of the (Western) world, it is among those regions that have adopted an open-door policy towards religious traditions. As a consequence, the regional governments have generally permitted the establishment of private religious educational institutions (such as the Muslim schools). In this presentation the focus intends to be on the Muslim educational institutions with specific reference to the primary/secondary Muslim schools that have been established. Whilst it will reflect on Muslim schools in South Africa as such, it however wishes to specifically zoom in on Botswana where such schools have been around for almost two decades and where they have made an indelible impression on the Gaborone community.

Field of Research: *Education, Schools, Southern Africa, South Africa, Botswana, Educational Development*

1. Introduction

Schooling in Southern Africa has generally been organized by the various governments in the region. The Ministries of Education were the one that established schools, maintained them and charted out policies for them. In the process, these Ministries budgeted for and controlled the schooling system fairly tightly. As time moved on, globalization was on the rise and its impact was felt and witnessed in almost all sectors of development including education (Tooley 2001); the latter remains one of the critical cogs in the social system and it is an area where the internationalization process of education in particular private schooling was observed as a significant development towards the end of the twentieth century.

According to Hofmeyer and Lee (2004) and Du Toit (2004) these independent private schools began to emerge from the 1990s and by turn of the millenium were flourishing. These schools, which attracted many pupils from the middle and upper class families who were economically mobile, included those who were managed by (affluent) religious communities (such as Jewish,

Christians, Hindus and Muslims). Independent Muslim private schools started out in the early 1980s and their increasing numbers resulted in the formation of the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS) during 1989; these schools were considered alternatives to state run public schools that were overcrowded and underfunded (Du Toit 2004). Even though they were relatively successful they had their detractors who expressed their misgivings about the presence of such types of schools within a multi-religious and multi-cultural environment (Mohamed 2002).

In this essay the concentration is on the independent Muslim private schools that came into existence from the 1980s onwards as alternatives to the state and other private schools. Apart from reflecting briefly upon these schools regionally, it specifically zooms in on South Africa and Botswana where a number of such schools exist for almost two decades. The Gaborone based Al-Nur Muslim School is the major focus towards the latter part of this essay since it had made an indelible mark on the families of those pupils that attended it. Before discussing the overall emergence and development of (some of) these schools, it is perhaps important to make reference to earlier educational developments; developments that laid – in some way - the foundations for the establishment of these types of schools.

2. South(ern) African Muslim Schools: In Context

Before these independent Muslim private schools were set up by an array of enthusiastic representatives from within the Muslim community (Tayob 2011), there were earlier educational efforts that laid the foundations of Muslim schooling in Southern Africa (Mohamed et al 1991; Ajam 1989); throughout the twentieth century these special schools provided the communities with a sense of identity and they undoubtedly not only complemented the state schools but they demonstrated to what extent these schools' management committees managed to run their school affairs independently with partial state support.

Well at the beginning of the twentieth century a Cape Muslim reformer, namely Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman (d.1940), initiated the formation and establishment of what came to be known as Muslim mission schools; he and his support group eventually succeeded to set the foundations for a string of these schools. Mogamat Ajam (1989) gave us a rich insight into the development and challenges that these schools faced; and his study of these schools was complemented by later by a few general studies produced by Ali Adam; the latter became the prime mover behind Cape based Islamia College (www.islamiacollege.co.za) that pioneered independent Muslim private schools in 1983. Instead of regurgitating the educational story about these emerging Muslim mission schools, this essay gives a paint-brush picture of the developments that took place during the early part of the century compared to what has so far taken place towards the end of the twentieth century.

As already indicated, Abdurahman was of the opinion as a socio-educational reformer that the formation of Muslim mission schools will assist in reinforcing and shaping the religious identity of the Muslim community; a community that was constantly encountering major social and educational challenges at that time. The Muslim children were, for example, not permitted to attend Christian schools because they belonged to a tradition labled as the 'slamse gevaar' (i.e. Muslim danger); thus an alternative had to be sought so that these children did not lag behind educationally.

Abdurahman, who exercised tremendous influence upon socio-political developments at the Cape, in time succeeded to create the first two schools, namely Rahmaniyyah and Talfalah Primary Schools respectively, in 1912 and 1913 (some studies seem to query the dates mentioned here). In any case, thereafter a number of others (see Table 1 below) followed during the subsequent years. These were not only confined to Cape Town city centre by they were scattered in different parts of the Cape Peninsula; for example, schools were established in Paarl and Worcester respectively.

Table 1: Muslim Mission Schools

Cape Town Muslim Mission Schools (circa 1912-1931)

Name	Place	Date
Rahmaniyyah Institute	Bo-Kaap	1912
Talfalah Institute	Claremont	1913
Salt River Moslem Primary	Salt River	1917
Simonstown MP	Simonstown	1923
Worcester MP	Worcester	1928
Mohammadiyyah MP	Wynberg	1929
Strand MP	Strand	1929
Muir Street MP	District Six	1930
Schotche's Kloof MP	Bo-Kaap	1931

On the whole these schools served the communities quite handsomely and many 'graduated' from them; some went onto to attend secondary school; and those who completed their studies at this level moved further to complete their university studies by the 1950s and 1960s. Though these were all relatively new educational developments among the Cape Muslims, parallel developments more-or-less were taking place in other cities such as Durban (see Table 2 below). The Muslim communal leadership in these cities also undertook comparable initiatives. They, for example, established the Orient Islamic School to specifically serve the needs of the Indian Muslims. This was, among others, a significant development. The outcome of the setting up of this and other similar schools during the early part of the century helped to gradually transform the position of the Indian Muslims; many of whom moved from the high schools - that catered for their needs - to specialize at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW); an institution that was specially built by the South African apartheid regime for Indians only.

Table 2: Greater Durban Muslim Schools (1947 – 1957)

Greater Durban: Muslim Schools (circa 1947-1957)

Name	Place	Date
Ahmediyyah State Aided School	Central	1947
South Coast Madrasa SAS	South of Durban	1947
Anjuman Islamic Primary SAS	Central	1953
Jumma Masjid Trust SAS Indian Girls	Central	1957
Orient Islamic Institute	Central	1957

These Muslim mission primary and secondary schools played a key role in changing the socio-economic situation of the Muslim community. Many of the pupils/students who eventually entered UDW and other universities such as the University of the Western Cape (UWC) that was established for 'Coloureds' of whom the 'Cape Malays' formed an integral part racially. Many of those who graduated since the late 1960s and the subsequent decades contributed substantially towards the profile of the Muslim community. These graduates specialized in various fields such as the Humanities, Commerce, Law, Engineering and the Health Sciences; the result of these developments implied that Muslims had representatives in almost all the areas of specialization. Be that as it may, the point that is being made is that these early Muslim (primary and secondary) schools complemented the independent Muslim private schools that came onto the scene during the latter part of the twentieth century. At this juncture it is opportune to turn the attention of the essay to these institutions since their educational inputs over the past two decades and more have been fairly substantial.

Muslim Educational Developments

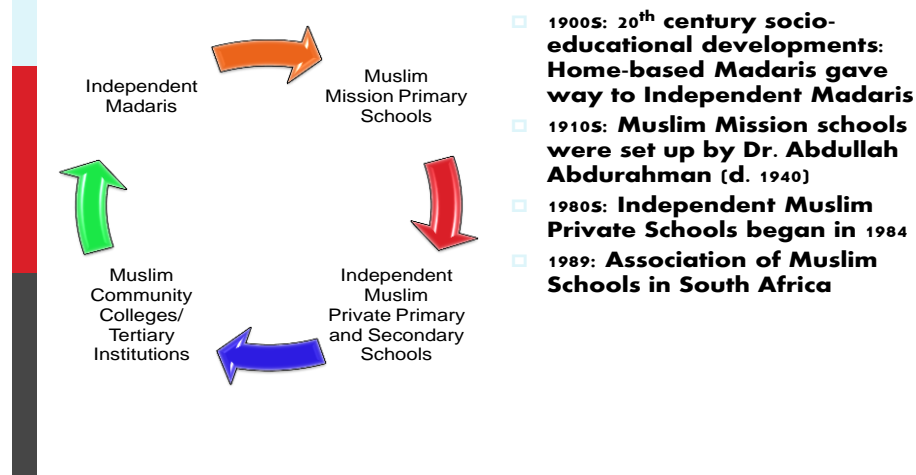


Figure 1:

Muslim Educational Developments – A Synopsis

3. The Independent Muslim Private Schools (Du Toit 2004; Tayob 2011)

Earlier reference was made to the formation of the first Independent Muslim Private School, namely Islamia College in 1983; an institution that officially opened in 1984. It was a project that was conceived by Maulana Ali Adam who - soon after the 1976 student protests against South Africa's apartheid education system – felt the need of coming up with alternative educational structures that would serve the interest and needs of the Muslim community (Niehaus 2008; Tayob 2011). As the school built its reputation - despite the critique levelled against it by some who stated these 'schools have been criticized for being elitist, excluding the poorer segments of society, and for not preparing the Muslim child for integration into the broader society' (Mohamed 2002) - as a viable option amidst the educational challenges that were encountered by the South African students in general and the Muslim community in particular, more groups around the country saw the socio-religious and economic spin-offs in establishing such schools.

All of these eventually resulted in the formation of Association of Muslim Schools (www.ams.org.co.za) in 1989. AMS articulated its vision stating that it aimed “to provide quality services which will enable our schools to deliver an islamcally-based education of the highest standard and quality,” and it identified its mission by intending to (a) “advance, promote and represent the interests of private Muslim schools, (b) encourage cooperation between schools and (c) organize activities for schools.” AMS' mission thus drove it to organize activities that fulfilled the needs of its affiliated schools. At the time Tayob (2011) published his chapter, he recorded 74 as opposed to the earlier recording of 68 by AMS. Though this might not seem to be a substantial number in relation to the numerical strength of Muslims in South Africa (Haron 2003), it is clear evidence that many Muslim families were attracted to this model as opposed to the state run schools (Davids 2014). It also

suggests that these schools' ethos and values were in sync with those expressed by the Muslim community and particularly by those who could financially afford to send their children to these private schools.

3.1 Framing the 'Islamic Education' Discourse (Waghid 2011)

One of the reasons for these families enrolling their children in these types of alternative schools was based on the fact that these institutions were created to disseminate 'Islamic education'; a concept that is somewhat problematic and that has been addressed by Panjwani (2004). Notwithstanding this, Islamic education is essentially concerned with 'the formation of moral character and behaviour (known as *tarbiya*)...'. Though Islamic education's goal is to 'integrate faith with learning', scholarly forums such as the Cambridge 'Reformation in Islamic Education' Conference (2011) have interrogated what the integration of beliefs and the accumulation of knowledge meant in practice. This specific forum also questioned whether it meant 'the teaching of Muslim pupils' or whether it had to do with 'the teaching of Islamic sources in a confessional environment' or whether it concerned itself with 'the pursuit of knowledge with particular ethical attitudes and aims?'

Now since the essence of the dissemination of Islamic education lies in the manner in which the curriculum is organized and presented, the conference participants debated the various methods that have been adopted. They pointed to the fact that a few 'schools simply adopt(ed) a secular national curriculum to which they append(ed) a discrete Islamic studies component'; and they stated that others argued 'that this makes religion too mundane, since it compartmentalises religious faith away from the rest of the curriculum'. They observed that there were others who used 'the Quran as a dynamic framework for organising knowledge and research'; an approach that seems to suggest a more thorough-going approach to the 'Islamisation of knowledge' one.

In Southern African Muslim schools the 'Islamisation of knowledge' model was adopted by AMS under Maulana Ali Adam's leadership; the latter was however influenced by those who advocated its adoption and implementation in Muslim (minority) communities residing in the West. Maulana Adam like many others was inspired Professors Habib and Salman Nadvi who taught at UDW; the last-mentioned was, however, influenced by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (d.1986) and the Muslim Think Tank, namely International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT); Al-Faruqi with the support of IIIT proposed this model and it led to many Muslim activist scholars drawing upon it for their educational projects (Mohamed 2002; Tayob 2011). Some, moreover, severely critiqued it because according to them it was a desparate 'attempt to Islamise knowledge (by) put(ing) the cart before the horse'; in response to their criticisms they provided an alternative by stating that the concentration 'should (rather) be on pursuing knowledge for the benefit of humanity, not creating an 'Islamic system' for its own sake' (Yazaki et al 2011).

The general outcomes of this conference demonstrated that Muslim (and non-Muslim) scholars held various views of what is understood by the concept 'Islamic education' and it showed that they differed as to which model to adopt in order to achieve the necessary results. Be that as it may, it is indeed these issues that are still being debated at Muslim schools and other related institutions in and beyond Southern Africa where various attempts are being made to offer a

balanced curriculum underpinned by an Islamic ethos; well, one doubts whether this concept and related aspects will ever be resolved by the array of scholars who are intimately involved in the field of Islamic education. In fact though AMS has been able to facilitate the curricula and other pedagogical matters, it has not as yet succeeded to satisfactorily define and explain this concept. In fact it has not been able to completely convince Muslim teachers, who offer science and related subjects, how to draw upon the 'Islamisation of Knowledge' model (Tayob 2011; Dangor 2014).

3.2 Independent Muslim Private Schools: A Selective Insight (Tayob 2011)

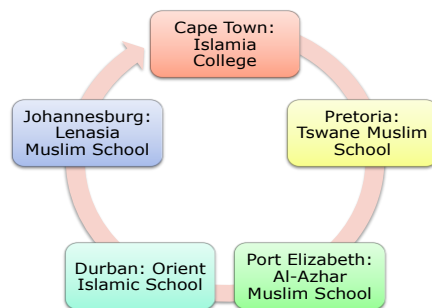
Even though these schools still grapple with the 'Islamisation of knowledge' model as well as other approaches, they continued to progress educationally. Over the last twenty five years (circa 1990 and 2015) that coincide with what has been characterised as the post-apartheid era, Muslim educational developments in Southern Africa were rapidly on the increase. These schools, which were established in the mid-1980s, found themselves in a fortunate position in that the freshly legislated South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996) provided special provision for them as relatively newly established educational institutions alongside the traditional public state schools. As a consequence the Muslim groups, who were in control of and who had set up these faith-based or religious oriented schools, naturally benefitted from these legal developments and educational provisions. Though these developments were welcomed, Tayob (2011) opined that since those who were enrolled at these schools were mainly from specific racial communities, namely Coloureds and Indians, they 'appeared to propagate and preserve the racial identities of apartheid South Africa' (Davids 2014).

Besides South Africa where these schools were set up, similar ones were established in, among others, Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Leaving South Africa aside for a moment, one observed that Botswana is the home of the reputable Al-Nur Muslim School, whilst Zimbabwe is the locale of the noteworthy Mobeen Bashir Ebrahim – formerly Ridgeview - Primary school. And in Mozambique and Zambia one comes across Fundacao Muhammad Faruk Zambia and the Lusaka Islamic Cultural and Educational Foundation School. When comparing these three states with South Africa, it is obvious that South Africa remains the place where many such schools - that operate under AMS - have prospered and remain active; a few however closed as a result of bad management and other socio-educational factors.

Returning to AMS, it was noted that it and its affiliated schools linked up with international partners in the USA and elsewhere to organize related educational activities. Iqra International Schools in Chicago, for example, teamed up with AMS to work on joint 'Islamisation of Knowledge' projects such as curriculum design and text book authoring (<http://www.iberr.co.za>). In Cape Town AMS, for example, hosted a fairly successful 'Islamic Education' conference; the sixth conference of its kind (Adam 1997). During this period Al-Azhar University's international unit entered South Africa by setting up a number of Al-Azhar Muslim primary and secondary schools; it partnered with the Cape Town based Muslim Judicial Council (est.1945) to achieve its specific educational goals; it therefore not only set up schools in Cape Town but it also established similar schools in Port Elizabeth. In this manner it had spread its educational tentacles regionally.

Muslim Schools: A Selection

South Africa



Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia

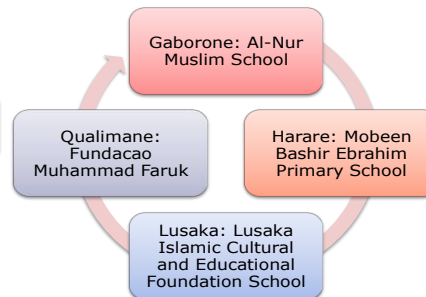


Figure 2: Southern African Independent Muslim Private Schools

Whilst Al-Azhar was expanding its wings in South Africa through the formation of these schools, Turkish schools were also set up by Turkish based Trusts and Foundations. For example Fethullah Gulen 'missionary' schools (<http://www.fethullahgulen.org>) have entrenched themselves in the South African educational system; these schools (e.g. Star International) designed secular programmes that also exposed the learners to the studying of Islam (Mohamed 2014). In addition the Fountain Educational Trust (FET) started out purely as a religious charitable trust and one of its first projects was setting up the SAMA school in Cape Town in 2000 and in Johannesburg in 2002; since then it further expanded by creating the Nizamiye schools (www.nizamiyeschools.co.za) – replacing the word SAMA - in Midrand and Mayfair respectively; as mentioned these educational efforts started out in 2000 and its most recent school opened its doors at the beginning of 2015. According the schools' website, they are 'committed to empowering learners to achieve their goals and realize their potential through Holistic approach, universal values and quality education'. Since 2013 the Turks have travelled to neighbouring South African states such as Botswana to find out what opportunities there are to set up a school; so far they have not secured a land or a place, and it is assumed that they will eventually achieve their goal of establishing one.

3.3 Botswana's Al-Nur Muslim School: A Case Study (Haron 2006; Haron 2012; Moorad 2012)

Gaborone: Al-Nur Muslim School



Figure 3: Al-Nur Muslim School (pic: F. Moorad)

Botswana has basically two Muslim schools that are affiliated to AMS; the one is the Gaborone based Al-Nur Muslim School (est.1992) that is more than two decades old and the other is the Molepolole based Al-Haq English Medium Primary School. Al-Nur began its life on the premises at the main mosque in Gaborone with a vision and mission of bringing about a 'balance between their secular and religious programme' within the schooling system. Though the pioneering principal, Mr. Nasr Ebrahim, did not highlight or strictly adhere to the 'Islamisation of knowledge' model, he set the school on course to be one of the premiere schools in the city. Before Mr. Ebrahim left his post, he along with the school committee secured a large track of land for the school; it is located not far from Sir Seretse Khama International Airport; this location suited the school quite well and by 2001 it shifted to its new premises (Moorad 2004; 2012).

Unlike other private English-medium schools located in Botswana, Al-Nur offers a unique dual curriculum that comprises of both religious and secular subjects. In fact, the uniqueness of these offerings also brought along with it numerous challenges for the school's Board and its management team, spearheaded by the principal; the team encountered, inter alia, time-table challenges and the appointment of suitable teachers in teaching Islamic Studies and Arabic respectively. During 2004 and 2012 respectively the school was evaluated under the leadership of Dr. Fazlur Moorad – a UB Faculty of Education member - who used to be a member of the school board since its inception until 2014. He was assisted by a team of colleagues, and this section is based upon the 2012 report furnished by Haron.

Now al-Nur like many other Muslim Schools follows an Islamic ethos (Moorad 2004). Since this is the case, its Board and Management Committee agreed that Islamic Studies be part of its curriculum; this idea was accepted because it was a programme that aimed at reinforcing the

learners' Muslim identity. The Islamic Studies programme, however, could not be included alongside the list of 'secular' subjects that were IGCSE examined. That aside, as a result of the logistical issues at hand the time-table committee at both the primary and secondary levels had to consider where and how to fit Islamic Studies into the school time-table; this was indeed one of the important logistical challenges that was faced.

3.3.1 Islamic Studies Time-Table

As mentioned, the school's time-table committee encountered a tremendous challenge and that was: at what time should Islamic Studies be offered and how should it be inserted into a time-table that had to accommodate many other subjects? Another problem that they faced was that Islamic Studies unlike Arabic consists of a variety of subjects; and since this is the case each of these has to be given equal attention. As a result of this time-table dilemma, it was decided to devise a system in which two time-tables were developed: one for Islamic Studies and the other for the 'secular' subjects. And after much deliberation and experimentation, it was agreed to teach Islamic Studies from 7h15 until 8h20 in the morning; during this period the different subjects are taught and each of them are allocated a time slot within the Islamic Studies time-table.

3.3.2 The Islamic Studies syllabus

Islamic Studies is a rich and vast discipline and as such consists of many subjects; since it will be well nigh impossible to include all of the subjects in an overloaded school al-Nur curriculum only a selected few could be considered and accommodated. Although a selected list is provided below, the only subject not taught – despite its relevance and importance – is *Akhlaq* (Morals/Ethics); it has, however, been weaved into the overall Islamic Studies programme thematically by the teachers. Notwithstanding this, the Islamic Studies subjects include the following:

- *Qur'an* (the science or the art of recitation known as *tajwid*, short commentaries referred to as *tafsir*, and daily recitation of verses/chapters)
- *Hifz* (memorization of [usually] Quranic chapters and a list of supplications)
- *Fiqh* (jurisprudential aspects of the Muslim rituals such as the ritual prayer (*salat*) and fasting (*sawm*))
- *Sira & Ta'rikh Islami* (Life of the Prophet & Islamic History)
- *Aqa'id* (Basic beliefs and doctrines of Islam)
- *Hadith* (Prophet Muhammad's [s] sayings/statements)
- *Akhlaq* (morals and ethics: Islamic etiquette)

As a matter of interest, the Islamic Studies programme followed at Al-Nur is not very different from what is being pursued at 'Madrassa Himayatul Islam'; an afternoon madrasa ([Muslim] school) which is based at the Jamia Masjid that is also referred to as the 'Gaborone Islamic Centre' opposite the University of Botswana. The current syllabus, as a matter of interest, has been adopted from the *Jamiat ul-'Ulama* of South Africa syllabus (popularly referred to as the *Jamiat* syllabus) as far back as 2001.

Prior to that the school and madrasa employed a combination of syllabi; they were drawn from the Lenasia Muslim Association (LMA) syllabus, the Central Islamic Trust (CIT) syllabus and

Jamiat syllabus (Moorad 2004). The new *Jamiat* syllabus is not a radically revised syllabus as might be expected; it is simply re-organized syllabus that included a list of topics and themes that were organized and standardized. Now that the syllabus has been streamlined and organized to achieve specific educational objectives, it is accompanied by a series of texts that have been prepared by Muslim theologians who worked under The Syllabus Committee known as the *Jamiat ul-'Ulama* Taalimi Board which is under the jurisdiction of the *Jamiat ul-'Ulama* of Gauteng (South Africa). The *Jamiat's* Taalimi Board called their series of booklets in each of the subjects *Tashil* - transliterated slightly differently by the *Jami'at* - (Made Easy) series. So for each of the above mentioned subjects, they have a series of about 12 booklets; in some instances two booklets are included in one. A brief reflection on this series will be in order at this juncture.

3.3.3 Prescribed Islamic Studies Texts

As stated in the previous section, a series was created for each of the listed subjects. Among the list in the series, we find the *Tas-heelul Aqaa-id* (Doctrines Made Easy), *Tas-heelul Taa-reekh* (History Made Easy), *Tas-heelul Akhlaaq wal Aadaab* (Morals and Ethics Made Easy) and *Tas-heelul Fiqh* (Jurisprudence Made Easy). The series in each subject was prepared by a different set of Muslim theologians who published the first sets of booklets during 1996.

On the whole, the series in each of the subjects have been reasonably graded. Since there are twelve booklets in the series, the authors tried to grade the texts in such a manner that the one booklet built and expanded upon the contents of the other. They were simply written and thus make easy reading. Despite these positive dimensions, the booklets including the revised ones should be re-visited and further revised because they showed up a number of weaknesses. Once again it should be underlined that it is not possible to highlight each mistake and shortcoming and here follows a few general observations that the *Jamiat's* Taalimi Board should consider in the future.

- Some of the stories not well thought out to underscore the lesson's objective;
- Phrasing of questions is rather clumsy and should be revised/rephrased;
- Posing questions that do not relate to the lesson/passage;
- Construction of sentences need to be revised;
- Spelling of words;
- Grammatical construction;
- Uneven list of exercises; and
- Inconsistent use of transliteration/spelling.

In spite of some of the weaknesses that appeared in different parts of these booklets, they have been usefully employed by Al-Nur teachers in a classroom setting. Before bringing this sub-section to a conclusion, one has to take into account the teachers' performance and reflect how they managed the syllabus and apply the contents as contained in the prescribed texts.

3.3.4 Islamic Studies Teachers' Performance

The teachers who have been employed to teach at both the primary and secondary levels at Al-Nur possess different qualifications. Whilst all the male teachers have been trained at a Muslim

theological institution in South Africa and South Asia/Middle East, some of the female teachers were trained in both Islamic Studies and secular professions; for the school, this was and remains a plus. Related to teacher qualifications, it was noted that though there were teachers that have not really been trained in the field they succeeded to learn whilst in the position and managed to perform reasonably well.

But even though the Islamic Studies teachers succeeded in making a good impression in terms of their class presentations and class control, they like many teachers at other schools need to be given in-house or in-service training on occasions; these can be done through regular workshops and seminars. In addition, the teachers should be encouraged to pursue further training programmes in Botswana or in the region with AMS to which they are affiliated; these will definitely help in their personal transformation as teachers, add value to the subjects that they are teaching, and made an impact upon the pupils/learners. All of these activities will assist in not only upgrading their skills and the teaching standards at school but they will also help in 'a smooth transition between the primary and secondary sections of the school by laying a solid foundation' (Moorad 2004).

4. Conclusion

The transition from primary to secondary schools has not been easy in some of the Southern African countries because of the challenges that were being experienced. But despite these challenges, it cannot be denied that the regional educational environment, which has been ever changing, has been a dynamic one; it is one in which religious minorities have been provided unfettered freedom of expression and freedom of belief. As a result of the friendly religious surroundings, religious communities such as the Muslims took advantage of the opportunities. They did so by creating institutions such as schools and setting up structures such as businesses that reflected their identity and that contributed towards the ethnically and racially diverse region.

The independent Muslim private schools that emerged and developed over the three decades have undoubtedly added to the image of these Southern African states; as a result of their open door-policies towards religious and other minority communities their environments have been enriched and enhanced by the presence of these religious oriented schools. The impact of schools such as Al-Nur Muslim School has been enormous as far as the Muslim communities are concerned; they helped to shape their religious identity, and they assisted to transform their outlook as citizens towards the democratic environments within which they are located.

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