

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Factors Influencing the Deterioration of Traditional Madrasahs' Performance in Zanzibar: The Teachers' Experiences

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Abstract:

This qualitative study was carried out to examine the factors influencing the deterioration of traditional madrasahs' performance in Zanzibar. In addition, the study also sought to analyse the measures which were taken to address those factors. Four male and two female experienced teachers from three different madrasahs were purposely selected as the respondents. Semi-structured in-depth interview was used to collect primary data while secondary data source included the relevant documents such as official documents, journals articles, and proceedings. The interviews were transcribed, coded, classified and then analysed. The content analysis method was used for analysing the documents. The findings of this study showed that traditional madrasahs' performance in Zanzibar was deteriorating. Although some efforts have been taken by the Madrasahs to address the problem, the intended performance did not seem to be up to the expectation. Based on these findings, it is recommended that all stakeholders should play more effective role to solve the problems that hinder the attainment of such performance.

Keywords: *Traditional madrasah, Religious education, Zanzibar*

1. Introduction

Islamic education has been playing a pivotal role in the promotion and the maintenance of peace, love, integration and security in the world societies. For instance, Ministry of Education in Kenya (2012) reports that the learners in Qur'anic schools are taught about taking care of the neighbourhood and promoting the relationship to stay with others in the wider community. The link between Islamic religious education and social development in the country seems to be inseparable as indicated by Anzar (2003) reveals that the purpose of Islamic education is to strengthen and advance human societies. In this context, *Madrasah*¹ in Zanzibar is the most important institution in the provision of Islamic religious knowledge since the early years of Islamic expansion.

Zanzibar is a multi-ethnic, semi-autonomous country that comprises two major Islands of the Indian Ocean situated on the coast of East Africa. The Islands include Unguja and Pemba with a total population of 1,303,569 (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2013) in which 99 % are Muslims (Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, 1999). Islam came to the East African coast including Zanzibar in the early Islamic era through trade and economic migration on dhows. The Indian Ocean trade was organised around the monsoons and this was the case as far back as historical knowledge goes (Vilhanova, 2010).

Traditional madrasahs as the focus of this study can be simply described as the long-established Qur'anic schools which have retained their original features since their establishment in the 8th century, the period of the advent of Islam in East Africa (Lodhi, 1994). Mushi (2006; 2009) affirms that education at that time was devoted to learning the Qur'an, writing Arabic script, calculating and reading. The primary function of the Qur'anic schools was to contribute to the early upbringing of the Muslim children by training them in the reading and memorisation of the Qur'an (Baba, 2011). Zanzibar emerged as one of the early centres of Islamic scholarship in East Africa as mentioned by Ausef saying that a student graduating from Qur'anic schools who had the funds and desire to continue their education was taken to study in the East African coastal cities like Lamu, Zanzibar or Mombasa (cited in Hassan, 2015).

According to the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Zanzibar (2016), up to the end of 2016, there were 2,251 registered madrasahs in Zanzibar in which 1,393 were in Unguja and 858 were in Pemba. The total number of teachers was 6,014. Unguja consisted of 4,574 teachers in which 3,533 were males and 1,041 females. In Pemba, there were a total of 4,695 teachers whereby

¹ The term 'madrasah' is an Arabic term. However, in this paper the term is used as an English term and therefore will not be subsequently italicized.

2,481 were males and 2,214 females. The total number of students was 272,686. Unguja comprised 176,202 whereby 78,022 were males and 98,180 females. Pemba had a total of 102,484 students in which 42,930 were males and 49,554 females. The distribution of the number of madrasahs, teachers and students is summarized in Table 1 below:

Island	Madrasah	Teachers		Students	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Unguja	1,393	3,533	1,041	78,022	98,180
Pemba	858	2,481	2,214	42,930	59,554
TOTAL	2,251	6,014	3,255	120,952	157,734

Table 1: Summary of Number of Madrasahs, Teachers and Students
Source: Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Zanzibar, 2016

Table 1 above shows the current statistics of madrasahs, teachers and students in Zanzibar. With regard to the performance of the madrasahs, there has not been any study conducted so far to determine their actual condition. However, there are some studies which have somehow indicated the state of affairs of these religious schools in this regard. Jussa Ismail, a parliamentarian, for example is of the opinion that "...it's very difficult for the traditional madrasahs that are in really poor shape to rival the influence of those who are being funded by foreigners and Wahhabi-based institutions," (Manson, 2012). From this statement, it implies that the madrasahs' performance is poor especially due to the competition from other new and more modern institutions with good financial support. This condition might also be caused by other factors particularly the changes experienced by the madrasahs over time as indicated by Abdalla (2006) who states that "the challenge to Islamic education today, however, is different than the challenges of the past two centuries" (p. 43).

Therefore, it is necessary that an investigation be carried out to identify some of these factors. This paper reports the findings of a study on madrasahs in Zanzibar focusing on the factors influencing their performance and the measures taken by the teachers to address those challenges. The discussion in this paper covers the following areas: significance of the study, research questions, literature review, methodology and findings. The paper ends with a conclusion and recommendations.

1.1. Significance of the Study

Madrasahs education has recently received a considerable attention by many researchers in the West, particularly after the incidence of September 11, 2001 (Anzari, 2003). Among the researchers are Blanchard (2008); Fair (2006); USAID (n.d); and Anderson, Tan and Suleiman (2011). Anzari exposes some of the questions asked including: what are these schools? How did they evolve? How do they function? What do they teach? How do they teach? Where do they get their money? Who supports them? What kind of students do they produce? Why are some madrasahs associated with radical activities? Based on these research questions, there seems to be little interest in such question as: what are the factors for the deterioration of performance of these schools? Therefore, a research was conducted to fill this gap and contribute to this growing area of study from teachers' viewpoints particularly in Zanzibar context. The study also revealed areas for further studies that can be undertaken by other researchers such as the contribution of madrasah education in the maintenance of world peace and security. This paper reports some of the findings of that study.

1.2. Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following two questions: 1) what are the factors for the deterioration of madrasahs' performance in Zanzibar? 2) what measures are taken by the teachers to address the factors that caused the deterioration of madrasahs?

2. Review of Studies on Factors of Deterioration of Madrasah and Measures for Its Improvement

2.1. Studies on the Factors and Measures

This section gives a brief account of the existing studies on this topic. It begins with some highlights of studies on the factors influencing the deterioration of madrasahs' performance followed by studies on measures to improve it and ended with studies on both in the context of Zanzibar.

Abdalla et al. (2006) point out several challenges that are faced by Islamic education particularly in the Muslim world. Among these challenges are that the Islamic education system provides mainly memorization-based religious knowledge which limits students' chances for job choices in society, the graduates are not recognized by the public educational system, the provision of Islamic education has particularly become more difficult and challenging in the aftermath of the September 11 incidence presumably in soliciting financial support for its management and sustenance. Due to the dominance of memorization methods, Islamic pedagogy in the madrasahs also suffers from the habit of imitation and lack of creativity. For example, it has long been the belief among people that true education is only confined to religious knowledge as taught in madrasah. Since most teachers who teach at the madrasahs are the products of the same madrasah system, they have minimal exposure to the alternative teaching methods which allow students to ask questions as part of learning process. As a result, the current Islamic education fails to keep up with modernity and rapid technological advancements specifically in the areas of communication and economy. This is made worse with the exploitation of religious institutions by some governments and militants in the Muslim world for their own political interests. Added to this is the rise of threat of militancy and terrorism in the name of Islam as a response to perceived injustices and of radical fundamentalism as a response to cultural changes.

Describing his opinion on the state of affairs of the Islamic schools today, Baba (2011) states that:

- “Like all other Islamic schools, Traditional Qur’anic Schools (TQS) have suffered from neglect by the state. However, these schools have suffered even more because they lack the internal dynamism to push for change from within, as was the case with the more advanced Islamic schools described above. They have also had a long history of aversion to externally induced change. It is this contradictory reality of the TQS that informed the floating of an integrated programme for the TQS by the Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN]” (p. 20).

According to Hassan (2015) the challenges faced by the Qur’anic schools include “...Absence of Qur’ān books and related literature, a number of ‘Mualims’, a number of Muslim teachers, number of pupils in the school and the nature of the school uniform” (p. 245). Anzar (2003) exposes the resistance of the Islamic scholars to the improvement of the curriculum in madrasahs which can reflect new religious and political realities. For example, the old views on women which might not reflect Islamic teachings in contemporary context. Lubish et al. (2011) argue that there are still many students who are unable to perform Qur’anic *tarannum* competently. Some of the causes of this failure can be attributed to factors such as; some teachers are poor in terms of pedagogical ability and many teachers do not have the appropriate knowledge, competency, right attitude, or experience in teaching Qur’anic *tarannum*. Meanwhile, Ministry of Education in Kenya (2012) identifies poverty, lack of fund, lack of recognition by the government, the current dual educational system of having formal education being taught besides Islamic religious education in the Islamic integrated schools, the curriculum which is not well structured, lack of national body charged with responsibility of setting and marking of examinations, poor salaries and terms of service provided to the teachers (*maalims*) which are not enough to cater for their daily needs, lack of proper training to the teachers and lack of proper and adequate infrastructure at the schools, as the main challenges which are faced by Qur’anic schools. Kazeem and Balogun (2013) conclude that Islamic education has been confronted with the challenges of acceptability, resources and enlightenment among nominal Muslims and Christians.

Some researchers discussed the ways to address the factors that led to the deterioration of madrasahs’ performance. For example, Baba (2011) exposes the programme of reforms in which the Government of Nigeria hopes that Qur’anic schools will be better empowered for integration into the Universal Basic Education programme as delivery mechanisms for basic education to a number of children who have been deprived and isolated. Anzar (2003) proposes two ways, if implemented, Islamic education will bring about greater social and societal changes in the Muslim world. They include first, having a programme in which the Qur’ān is translated into the local or national language along with the Arabic and children are taught the translation of the Qur’ān. Second, there should be reorientation of the Islamic education curricula. Abdalla et al. (2006) recommend various strategies for improving education in Islamic schools. These include encouraging rather than discouraging community’s ownership of Islamic education institutions, making efforts on the provision of religiously credible and legitimate information about tolerance and peaceful coexistence via various information dissemination venues such as the internet and media, providing equitable education for girls, correcting misperceptions in Western societies and Muslim societies particularly among the elites and middle class people via dissemination of appropriate information. Government should support the inclusion and strengthening of Islamic subjects and curriculum especially in public schools.

Very few madrasahs studies have been conducted in Zanzibar. Loimeier (2016) exposes the negative impact that madrasahs suffered due to integration of Islamic religious knowledge into the western education system. He maintains that: “By successfully integrating Islamic education into the government school system, Islamic knowledge lost the major rationale of education in Qur’anic schools and madrasahs, namely, to provide social skills and to prepare students for an examination in a school system, which essentially provided marketable skills. Thus, the apparent success of redefined version of Islamic education in Zanzibar’s government schools led to the marginalisation of Qur’anic schools and madrasahs” (p. 70).

Although the literature shows that there is a range of factors for the deterioration of madrasahs’ performance and the measures taken to address them, it is obvious that their impact varies with place, time and extent. Thus, identifying the most contributing ones in a generalized way is very challenging. Keeping in mind all these differences, the researchers undertook a study to examine the factors that contribute to the deterioration of madrasahs’ performance as well as the measures initiated to deal with them specifically in Zanzibar. This paper reports some findings of that study.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

From the reviewed literature, it is found that there are several factors which can be associated with the deterioration of madrasahs’ performance in Zanzibar. The factors can be classified into two categories, namely technical and non-technical. While the technical factors include the presence of some unqualified teachers, dominance of poor methods of teaching, lack of teaching and learning materials as well as poor curriculum, the non-technical factors are among others lack of recognition by the government, lack of salaries to teachers, lack of fund, poor cooperation between parents and teachers, poor level of concentration on study among students, preference for secular education over the religious among the parents.

Based on the above explanation, Figure 1 below presents a conceptual framework of this study depicting the relationship between the two types of factors of the deterioration.

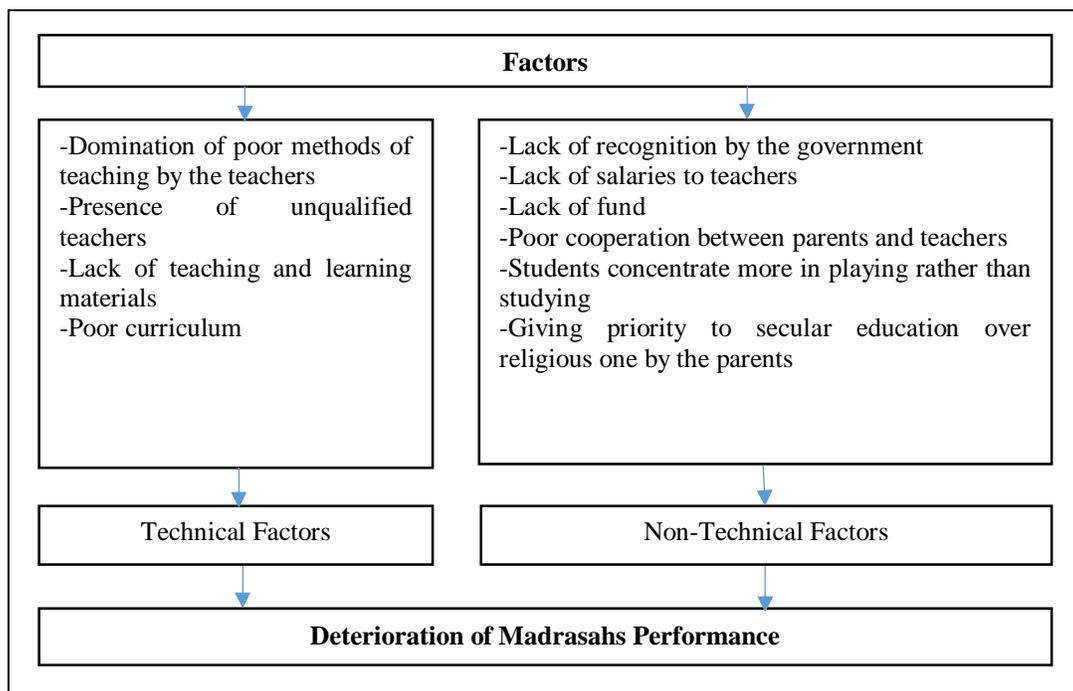


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative research based on case study. Four male and two female experienced teachers from three madrasahs were purposely selected as respondents. One teacher had a teaching experience of 29 years and two had 28 years. While the rest had between 8 to 19 years’ experience. The profile of respondents can be summarized in the following Table 2.

Name	Age	Sex	Education Level	Years of T/Experience
Ahmada	50	M	Diploma & Thanawy	28
Amour	52	M	Bachelor	28
Ashraf	49	M	Graduate from Traditional Madrasah	29
Arqam	30	M	Diploma & Graduate from Traditional Madrasah	19
Atifah	45	F	Graduate from Traditional Madrasah	14
Ashura	30	F	Certificate	8

Table 2: The Profile of Respondents
Source: Field data, 2016/17

The study collected both primary and secondary data. The primary data were derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews while secondary data were solicited from relevant materials including official documents, journals articles, and proceedings. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The data were then transcribed, coded, classified and analysed. The obtained materials were sorted out to isolate meaningful patterns and processes by identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalities or disparities. The identified patterns were used to establish a set of meaningful information. Finally, the content analysis method was used for analysing the said documents.

4. Research Findings and Discussions

This section reports the results of the research focusing on two major themes and their respective sub-themes as summarized in Table 3 below.

The Factors	The Measures
The dominance of secular education over religious education.	Discussion with responsible governmental, educational officials and heads of secular schools
Poor parents’ support for madrasah education	Holding meetings with students’ parents
Poor or lack of payment to the teachers	Exercising tolerance

Table 3: The factors and the measures taken in addressing those factors for the deterioration of Madrasahs’ performance
Source: Field data, 2016/17

4.1. *The Factors Influencing the Deterioration of Madrasahs' Performance*

This theme discusses the factors for the deterioration of madrasahs' performance according to the respondents. The findings of the research exposed three main factors namely 1) the domination of religious education with a secular one, 2) poor parents' support of madrasah education and 3) poor or lack of payment to the teachers.

4.1.1. The Dominance of Secular Education over Religious Education

This is one of the factors mentioned by the respondents. Ahmada (50) asserted that:

- “The first challenge is the tension between madrasahs and secular schools to win over the students... we as madrasahs are defeated... because students become very busy with secular studies, particularly in attending tuition or extra classes... Currently, this challenge has become serious because even the students who are in standard three, four and five attend tuitions daily from morning to night...”

Similarly, Ashraf (49) reported to the researcher that:

- “... Secular schools are under government authority which means they have certain power over the students compared to madrasahs. For example, in case a student is required to attend the school at any time, he will attend the school although he is supposed to attend at madrasah class at the same time”.

In the same line of thinking, Amour (52) shared his experience in the following way: “One of the challenges I experience is to go to the class and find out that a quarter of the students are absent. When I ask, where are they?...The answer is, they have gone to tuitions...”. These findings match with that of Hassan (2015) which says “All in all, the result of integrating Qur'an and secular education was the declining of Islamic religious education. (Since) Qur'anic education has many subjects, the timetable (previously) allocated to the Qur'anic education is not enough. Most schools preferred to devote most afternoons to co-curricular activities” (p. 248).

These results imply the dominance and superiority of secular education over the religious one in Zanzibar society. In most cases, the madrasahs have always been overpowered by the modern secular schools for instance in terms of quality of education and students' class attendance. This tendency can be associated with two main factors. First, the secular schools used to conduct extra classes outside official class hours. This has forced the students to also spend their time with the schools in order to learn more about the subjects that were taught during the official hours. As a result, they missed to attend the religious classes conducted at the same time by the madrasahs. Second, the priority given by both parents and their children to secular education over religious one is another factor. In recent years, it has been a common practice that if a student really wants to pass the examinations, he has to attend tuition. This tendency cuts across all levels from primary to University. The argument is that the teachers do not teach effectively and efficiently while they are at schools. As a result, the same students who are supposed to attend classes at madrasahs end up concentrating on secular education.

4.1.2. Poor Parents' Support for Madrasah Education

The students' academic achievement in the madrasahs depends largely on the attitude and role played by the parents to their children. Ahmada (50) for instance indicates this when he said that “While parents can provide 100,000 or more shillings for education in secular schools, but for madrasah education it becomes very difficult to provide even only 2000 or 1000² shillings. And, even if you call and tell them about that problem, they do not mind”.

In the same sense, Ashraf (49) narrated his view in the following way:

- “... The mentalities of the parents focus on giving priority to schools rather than madrasahs. They are only thinking about the certificate which will be provided to their children after completing secular education and enable them to get a job. Contrary to education provided in madrasah, parents think that it will not enable their children to get a job and other things”.

Additionally, Atifah (45) pointed out her opinions that:

- “... A student can be absent for two to three weeks from the madrasah... when a teacher makes a follow-up with a parent, he (parent) is the one who shouts and complains saying that his child has no progress in studies while at the same time, the same parent fails to make follow up to know whether his child attends the madrasah classes or not”.

Furthermore, Arqam (30) shared his views that “It is the parents who are supposed to be responsible to buy textbooks for their children, but they don't. We have talked much to remind them. It has reached a point that sometimes a teacher has to buy the books on his own expenses and give them to the students”. These findings are in agreement with Kazeem and Balogum (2013) who report that “An average Nigerian Muslim parent does spend heavily on Western education for their children. Some view Islamic education as secondary; while some send them to Islamic schools, the children who, in their opinion and conclusion, cannot mentally cope with Western education or who have one form of disability or the other” (p. 167).

This observation shows that there is a deliberate contempt among Muslims themselves on madrasah education which is in turn linked to their belief that the graduates of madrasah education lack earning life skills and this limits their chances for development and work choices (Abdalla, et al., 2006). Building on this perception, the majority of Muslims regard religious education only for ritual services in the society.

² 1 US Dollar equals 2241.20 Tanzanian shilling. Retrieved September 10, 2017.

4.1.3. Absence or Lack of Payment to the Teachers

Another factor of deterioration of madrasahs' performance mentioned by the respondents is related to the payment received by the teachers. Generally, teaching in madrasahs in Zanzibar is voluntary in nature whereby there is no fixed monthly salary given to the teachers. If there is at all any payment given to them (normally in a very small amount), such payment is only possible when the schools receive contributions from the public especially the parents. However, the contribution is very small and not regularly received. Ahmada (50) explained that "We expect parents to help us to give at least some amount of money for buying soap, yet, it has become very difficult to get any amount".

Likewise, Ashraf (49) shared his experiences saying that:

- "... Usually, the allowance earned by the teacher of madrasah is the lowest compared to what is earned by workers in other sectors. This leads teaching in madrasahs to be viewed as a fragile job, whereas it is a crucial and very helpful to the society".

Meanwhile, Ashura (30) believed that "... Some of the parents do not pay monthly fees for their children. We have been talking a lot about this. The amount to be paid is only 2000 shillings. And, some of the teachers are waiting for these fees to be paid so as they can earn something".

Arqam (30) revealed that:

- "... We do not get any salary for our job... The parents contribute nothing. Normally, each student is required to contribute only two thousand (2000) shillings per month. But, some of the students do not pay".

The above results are consistent with the findings of the Ministry of Education in Kenya (2012) which reveals that "Teachers in Qur'anic schools, particularly *maalims* in madrasah and *duksi/chuo*, are poorly paid and their terms of service are not enough to cater for their daily needs..." (p. 39).

The findings suggest that in order for the teachers in madrasahs to teach effectively and efficiently, a conducive working environment is needed. For instance, if the teachers are assured that the monthly salary is sufficient to meet their basic needs, it will not be necessary anymore for them to engage in other businesses for extra income and thus are able to concentrate on teaching. Even in the countries where salary is paid to madrasahs' teachers, they still do other jobs to earn extra income. For example, the Ministry of Education in Kenya indicates that "Many teachers supplement with private businesses such as weaving and agriculture. In order to earn their living, some teachers undertake religious and ritual services to their clients during teaching time" (p. 39). If such a conducive environment exists, the teachers will be in a position to maintain both their income and their reputation in the society. All these factors have perpetuated poor performance of the madrasah in general.

4.2. Measures Taken to Address the Factors

The second objective of the study is to investigate the measures taken to address those deterioration factors. In this regard, the study has revealed three measures namely; 1) discussions with relevant governmental and educational officials, 2) meetings with students' parents and 3) exercising tolerance.

4.2.1. Discussion with the Relevant Governmental and Educational Officials

This is the first sub-theme that emerged from the study. Ahmada (50) revealed that:

- "... We as an association of madrasahs in Zanzibar, went to the Ministry of Education and met with the Permanent Secretary who assigned us to his Committee of Directors and discuss with them. We were required to submit the negative impacts of tuitions/extra classes and we submitted, but we didn't reach a solution. This is because in between, the whole exercise was interfered with general election matters in which the situation was still unstable and thus we delayed to go and make follow up once again although we have an intention to make the follow up".

Similarly, Ashraf (49) was in opinions that:

- "... We had already met with government school teachers and discuss about (utilization of) Saturdays and Sundays as the weekend in which public schools are closed. We agreed that students should be free so that they can attend madrasah classes. Nevertheless, they are still required to attend at the tuitions in those schools..."

These findings are in line with the recommendation of the Ministry of Education in Kenya (2012) in which having an open forum between the government and Muslim educational stakeholders to address challenges facing Qur'anic schools was proposed as a means to assist Qur'anic school system to achieve Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development goals. This implies that discussion is one of the best ways to solve such problems. The Ministry of Education in Zanzibar and its officials seem to be aware of the negative impacts brought about by tuitions in the public schools to the madrasah education. This follows a report submitted by the madrasah teachers to the Ministry although no immediate measures were taken to address the problem. Such a discussion is also needed because of the continuation of the teachers in the respective public schools to teach on the weekend which is against the agreement reached with the madrasah teachers.

4.2.2. Meetings with Students' Parents

This is another sub-theme that emerged under the measures taken in addressing the factors. On this, the respondents aired their views as follows.

Ashraf (49) stated that "... There have been meetings to educate the parents and the students about the importance of religious education and Qur'an in particular, give advice and make follow up with the students but the success has not been achieved".

Arqam (30) said that:

- "... We normally meet with the parents every three months to discuss the development of the madrasah. We remind them of their responsibilities and discuss the challenges that we are facing and the ways forward".

These results are consistent with a suggestion given by Mushtaq and Khan (2012) on improving students' learning. They recommended that "the students should perform well if they are properly guided by the parents and also by their teachers. If the students know well about their abilities and their competences, then they will perform well" (p. 7).

This implies that cooperation between the parents and the teachers is of paramount importance for a student to succeed in his learning. On this ground, the parents seem not to play their collaborative role with the teachers of madrasahs. This tendency can be associated with two main reasons. First, most of the parents are busy with their jobs particularly during daytime. As a result, they are not able to attend for example meetings at the same school even for half an hour. This is linked to their other attitude of preferring public schools over madrasahs. For example, the same parents would find time to attend meetings with teachers in public schools even though they are busy. As a result, those problems mentioned earlier have always been increasing in the madrasahs.

4.2.3. Exercising Tolerance

This is the last theme developed under the measures taken in addressing the above factors. One of the respondents, Ashura (30), expressed that "What we do is to take the situation easy and keep on teaching as we normally do". Another respondent, Atifah (45), affirms that "In general, we used to regard many of the problems as normal challenges which are inevitable. So that we would not be discouraged".

This finding is in line the suggestion by Abdalla, et al. (2006) who recommended for the promotion of tolerance and peaceful coexistence as the way for improving education in Islamic schools. They suggested that "Efforts must be made to provide religiously credible and legitimate information about tolerance and peaceful coexistence via various information dissemination venues such as the internet and media" (p. 48).

The results seem to undermine the typical thinking of the teachers in madrasahs on how to deal with the problems that they encountered. For example, regarding as their tolerance as the solution, it is doubtful whether it can contribute or hinder the attainment of the objective of madrasah education. For the teachers, tolerance has its own limits. When it reaches certain level, they may not be able to tolerate anymore, the impact is the total decline of madrasah education in the society.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

From the above discussion, we found that there is no doubt that traditional madrasah education is important in the Zanzibar context. However, as the findings of this study showed, its performance has been deteriorating for the reasons discussed above. As also reported earlier, some measures have been taken to address these problems and challenges but the expected results of the madrasahs performance within the society seems not to be satisfactorily attained yet, particularly when comparing to that of the previous generations. For this reason, there is a necessity for all stakeholders in the society to play their roles in addressing the problems which hinder the madrasah performance.

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