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

[1]Maimuna Aminah Nimulola[*], [2]Halima Wakabi Akbar

Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda, Uganda

Corresponding author: m.a.nimulola@iuiu.ac.ug

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the influence of IRE learning experiences on Muslim students' beliefs and practices. The population consisted of Senior Four and Six students from Eastern Uganda from which a sample of 890 was selected using multi-stage sampling. A questionnaire was used to collect data, which was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation and ANOVA. The relationship between students' learning experiences and their beliefs was found not to be statistically significant, while that between learning experiences and their practices was statistically significant and moderate. A statistically significant difference in students' practices among school types was also found, where students from Government Non-Muslim schools had the lowest while those from Private Islamic schools had the highest. It was concluded that different types of schools offer different IRE learning experiences which influence ways in which Islam is practiced by students, although these experiences were not that influential on students' beliefs. It therefore is recommended that Islamic extra-curricular activities be organized for students to boost their knowledge and skills.

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INTRODUCTION

In Uganda, some secondary school students are reluctant to identify as Muslims and are instead apologetic for being so, which may have consequences on their practice of the religion (Ssekamanya, 2024). This is coupled with the perceptions of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in the country, who noted that the subject did not seem to translate into strengthening the faith of its students and graduates (Nimulola, 2018). Also, contrary to the teachings of Islam, Muslim students in one city in Eastern Uganda were found to be involved in a number of unbecoming behaviors like snatching bags, phones, and other valuable properties of citizens, as well as bullying, and displaying violent behavior in schools (Kirinya, 2019).

The basic tenets of Islam include belief in the six articles of faith (*imaan*), practicing the five pillars of Islam, and perfection (*ihsaan*) in the worship of Allah (The Holy Qur'an, 2:177, 4: 136, 54:49; Sahih al-Bukhari, 1:2:8). Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was the best model in *imaan*, Islam, and *ihsaan*, followed by his companions and those who came after them. Islam came to be transmitted through homes, mosques, *kataatib* (elementary schools, singular: *kuttaab*), *madrasas*, and, eventually, formal schools. *Madrasas* have continued to play a big role in the teaching of Islam, although after September 11, 2001, when militant Islamist terrorists hijacked commercial airliners and crashed them into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the teaching of Qur'an in these institutions came to be associated with inculcating terrorism which led to the closure of some of them (Mayanja, 2015).

After the Golden Age (8^{th} – 13^{th} centuries) of Islam, which was characterized by advancements in science and philosophy, the influence of Islam began to decline. This was aggravated by colonization (early 19^{th} century) of countries in the Muslim world (Tan, 2017). Western influence affected Islamic education and practice by separating religion from the secular and promoting the latter, for example, in Egypt (Cook, 2000). With increased globalization and modernization, Muslim students have been exposed to a number of cultures and information, including concepts like freedom of religion and worship, freedom of speech and association, etc. (Owoyemi & Ali, 2012). There is increasing tension between what Islam teaches and what is globally 'acceptable', and today's Muslim youth find themselves caught up between either following the teachings of Islam or succumbing to the temptations from the global world, which include behaviors like dating, cohabiting, and consumption of drugs and intoxicants (Abbasi & Tirmizi, 2020).

Islam was introduced in Uganda through the Buganda Kingdom in 1844 by Arab traders during the reign of Kabaka Suuna II (1824-1854), but it was his son Kabaka Mutesa I (1854-1884) who popularized it by directing his chiefs and relatives to embrace and practice it; and at one time, proclaiming it as the state religion of the Kingdom (Kasozi, 1986). The major Islamic rituals emphasized included circumcision (for males), daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and ensuring that any meat consumed was lawful. The Kabaka's palace in Banda was the first Islamic teaching education center, and later on, Islam came to be taught in

mosques, madrasas, and homes of learned men (Kasozi, 1986; Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 2004). However, with the introduction of Christianity in 1877 and after religious wars in the late 1880s and early 1900s, Islam lost popularity and power, the status of Muslims became inferior, their identity threatened, and they came to be despised in most sectors of the communities, including schools (Kasumba, n.d.). The religious wars also led to Muslims fleeing Buganda to other regions like Bukedi in Eastern Uganda, consequently leading to the spread of Islam in this region (Kasozi, 1986).

The aims of teaching Islam have been conceptualized differently by various scholars, but the common feature is the emphasis on the spiritual, intellectual, and moral aspects of human development. Generally, the discipline aims at developing humankind's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings, and bodily senses (Al Azemi, 2010; Husain & Ashraf, 1979; Yakubu & Usman, 2019). It also aims at attaining eternal salvation and obtaining God's blessings; brightening the heart; developing morals, character, values and ethics, and citizenship; and promoting purity, piety, and sincerity (Al-Ghazali, in Sheikh & Ali, 2019; Muflih, 2010). Islamic education has also been said to aim at creating awareness (*ta'liim*), enabling spiritual and ethical growth (*tarbiyah*), and inculcating manners (*ta'diib*) (Tahira & Saad, n.d.). Other aims include spreading Islam, explaining Islamic guidance, commands, and worship, promoting an honorable life mentally, physically, and spiritually, developing a spirit of brotherhood and tolerance, acquiring contemporary world information, firm religious belief and good morals (Suraju, 2017), mastering science and technology; and improving skills in working and society interaction (Al-Abrasyi (2006 cited in Muchtarom, 2013).

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

UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2012) defines learning experience as a wide variety of experiences across different contexts and settings that transform the perceptions of the learner, facilitate conceptual understanding, yield emotional qualities, and nurture the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This includes what goes on inside and outside the classroom besides actual teaching and can be in the form of pupil-pupil interaction, pupil-teacher interaction, the interaction of pupils with members of the community, including family, and also the tools at the learners' disposal. Learning experiences, therefore, do have an element of school culture, which, among others, includes values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms (Deal & Peterson, 2009).

Given the diversity in the aims of teaching Islam, it follows that the scope of the characteristics of an ideal Muslim student varies among scholars. These include: Islamic ethical behavior consisting of faith, interaction with friends of other faiths, socializing the Islamic way, and morality to oneself (Laeheem, 2018); positive Islamic personality and character such as hard work, discipline, enthusiasm and integrity (Andriyan, 2018; Suyadi et

al., 2020); moral behavior reflected in good conduct and relationship with others (Mwatamu, 2012); practicing the pillars of Islam and ethics (Nuriman & Fauzan, 2017); a sense of connectedness vertically and horizontally, and fulfillment of spiritual obligations like prayer (Satiawan & Jatmikowati, 2020); and demonstrating mastery and practice of themes such as *Ulūmul* Qur'an, Hadith, pillars of faith and Islam, morality (*akhlāq*), relationships (*muammalāt*), and History of Islam (Shaaban, 2012).

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

Islam is a comprehensive religion, and therefore, its teachings have to be holistic. In Kenya, Mwatamu (2012) found that boarding schools in Nairobi play a significant role in the moral and religious development of learners, which was attributed to the availability of time to accommodate and integrate both religious and secular systems of education.

Other influences on students' beliefs and practices are pedagogical and administrative in nature. For instance, some of the challenges facing the teaching of IRE in secondary schools in Nairobi include a shortage of trained IRE teachers, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and inadequate qualified staff (Shaaban, 2012). Teachers of IRE have also been accused of suppressing higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) among Muslim youth in the Netherlands and Indonesia (Altinyelken, 2021; Setiawan & Jatmikowati, 2020) although school in its totality has been found to be quite influential in enabling teachers to build students' character in one Islamic secondary school in Malaysia (Siregar, 2021). Elements that contribute to this are the disciplinary measures, co-curricular activities, teachers' competencies, personality and character, and their decision-making. Other elements are students' backgrounds and abilities. Administratively, the teaching of the subject was hindered by the administration's lack of commitment to a Muslim minority setting in Indonesia (Huda & Fattah, 2020).

The current study was informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Bioecological approach to development, where he proposed four levels of the environment that simultaneously influence individuals, and these include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Feldman, 2015). The microsystem is the immediate environment in which individuals lead their daily lives and are directly exposed, consisting of activities and interactions with close members of settings like families, schools, mosques, etc. Here, children actively participate in constructing this system. That is, they are influenced by but also do influence the people that

they interact with. The mesosystem provides connections between the various components of the microsystem by binding members from the various social settings of the individual, such as parental involvement in school activities and parental work experience vis-à-vis child care. The exosystem is made up of social settings that do not directly involve an individual but represent broader influences that encompass societal institutions, e.g., local and social media. The macrosystem represents larger cultural influences on the child, such as a society's political, religious, and economic value systems. Then, there is another system that cuts across and underlies each of the four systems, and it involves the passage of time that constitutes important events and turning points, i.e., the chronosystem. This theory guided the analysis of various forces and relations that shape students' experiences in learning IRE.

Youths exposed to Islamic studies are expected to demonstrate values, faith, virtues, and practices in accordance with the aims and teachings of Islam (Husain & Ashraf, 1979; National Curriculum Development Centre, 2008b). On the contrary, some Muslim students in Ugandan secondary schools have been found to shy away from being identified as Muslims and to engage in un-Islamic activities (Kirinya, 2019; Ssekamanya, 2024); Nimulola, 2018), raising concern about the role of IRE in their religious inclination.

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

The study's general objective was to find out the influence of various IRE learning experiences on Muslim students' beliefs and practices. Specifically, the study sought to:

a. Analyze the relationship between the learning experiences of IRE and Muslim students' beliefs.
b. Analyze the relationship between the learning experiences of IRE and Muslim students' practices.
c. To analyze whether there are differences in beliefs among Muslim students from different school types.
d. To analyze whether there are differences in practices among Muslim students from different school types.

The study also sought to test the following hypotheses:

$H_0$1: There is no statistically significant relationship between the learning experiences of IRE and Muslim students' beliefs.

$H_0$2: There is no statistically significant relationship between the learning experiences of IRE and Muslim students' practices.

$H_0$3: There is no statistically significant difference in beliefs among Muslim students from different types of schools.
$H_0$4: There is no statistically significant difference in practices among Muslim students from different types of schools.

The study was confined to the students of IRE in candidate classes of Senior 4 (2017 – 2020) and 6 (2019 – 2020) because, ideally, they had covered enough content of the syllabi and were assumed to have acquired substantive exposure and experiences of Islam.

This study is expected to contribute to ways of improving the environments in which teaching and learning of IRE is facilitated among secondary school students vis-à-vis the development of Islamic understanding and personality among students.

METHOD

The study used a cross-sectional survey design, which was found appropriate in describing Muslim students' competencies in basic Islamic teachings, explaining relationships between learning experiences and students' beliefs and practices, and determining differences in beliefs and practices among Muslim students from various school types (see Creswell, 2012).

The population of study constituted secondary school students in Eastern Uganda who were studying IRE in the classes of Senior 4 and 6. Uganda is divided into four regions: Northern, Eastern, Central, and Western, and these are subdivided into 135 districts, 32 of which fall in the Eastern Region (Ministry of Local Government, 2020). This region has a relatively high representation of Muslims (17.0%), second to the Central one (18.4%), and the national percentage is 13.7 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014). It is also in the Eastern region where the Islamic University in Uganda's Main Campus is located – a major player in the training of IRE teachers.

The structure of secondary education in Uganda consists of four years of Ordinary Level (Lower Secondary) and two years of Advanced Level (Upper Secondary). In terms of foundation and ownership, schools can be categorized as government, i.e., founded and funded by the government; government-aided, i.e., jointly managed and funded by the funding body and government; and private, i.e., founded and funded by individuals and organizations (Education Act, 2008). In terms of students' residence, they can be in categorized in the form of day, boarding, or both. For purposes of this study, schools were categorized according to inclination to Islam: Government Muslim (GM), i.e., founded by Muslims and funded by government; Private Muslim (PM), i.e., founded and funded by Muslims; Private Islamic (PI), i.e., founded and funded by Muslims but also offer a duo curriculum of theology and secular; Government Non-Muslim (GNM), i.e., founded by non-Muslims and funded by government; and Private Non-Muslim (PNM). i.e., founded and funded by non-Muslims.

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select students for the study. Out of the 32 districts in Eastern Uganda, 15 of them were identified as having schools with students who had registered with the Uganda National Examination Board to sit for IRE (Schools

Uganda, 2020; Uganda National Examinations Board, 2019). Each of these 15 districts was treated as a cluster, nine of which – with a total population of 102 schools – were randomly selected (Table 1). Forty-eight schools were proportionally selected from the nine districts, and using class registers, students were randomly sampled from each class, making a total of 890.

Table 1. Distribution of Schools Per Selected Districts

District	School Population	School Sample Size	Number of students
Budaka	5	2	28 (3.1%)
Bugiri	13	5	60 (6.7%)
Butaleja	9	7	105 (11.8%)
Iganga	33	6	119 (13.4%)
Jinja	9	5	110 (12.4%)
Kapchorwa	3	3	70 (7.9%)
Mbale	20	13	287 (32.2%)
Sironko	7	6	88 (9.9%)
Tororo	3	1	23 (2.6%)
Total	102	48	890 (100.0%)

The questionnaire was developed by the researchers based on literature on the pillars of faith and Islam. Reference was also made to Abu-Raiya et al (2008) subscales of measurement of Islamic religiousness, specifically the "beliefs", "practices", and "Islamic religious struggle" dimensions. The questionnaire items used in this study are part of a larger questionnaire that consisted of seven sections that explored demographic and background characteristics (8 items), IRE content (8 items), learning experiences (8 items), students' beliefs (20 items), students' practices (10 items), students' conduct (16 items), and IRE assessment (12 items); of which 4 sections (demographic and background characteristics, learning experiences, students' beliefs, and students' practices) were used for this study.

To test for validity, the questionnaire was given to three lecturers in the Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language – Islamic University in Uganda, who rated the items and the Content Validity Index was found to be .77; while reliability was determined by giving the questionnaire to seventeen students of IRE who had earlier on completed Senior Classes Four and Six, and the Cronbach's alpha was found to be .73. The questionnaire was later administered to students with the help of eight research assistants. Data was collected between August and December 2020 and analyzed through descriptive statistics, correlation, and ANOVA.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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

Students' demographic profiles included district, school type, gender, age, and class. Almost one-third of the students in the study were from Mbale (32.2%), followed by Iganga

(13.4%), Jinja (12.4%), and Butaleja (11.8%) districts (see Table 1 above). In comparison, tables 2 and 3 highlighted data on school type, gender, age, and class of students. More than one-third (35.4%) of the students were from Private Muslim schools, followed by 22.8% from Government Muslim, 22.1% from Government Non-Muslim, 11.5% from Private Islamic, and lastly 8.2% from Private Non-Muslim schools. Nearly one-half of the students were girls, and 47.2% were boys. The high percentages in the Private Muslim and Government Muslim schools are due to the tendency of parents preferring to enroll their children in schools under the management of their religious denomination, other factors constant. Private Islamic schools are relatively few compared to the mainstream ones, and their student populations are also relatively low despite the fact that they are Muslim dominated. This explains the low representation of students in the study.

Table 2. Distribution of Students Per School Type

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

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

Table 3. Characteristics of Students by Gender, Age, and Class

Characteristic	Number	%
Gender		
Male	420	47.2
Female	444	49.9

Table 3. Characteristics of Students by Gender, Age, and Class (cont')

Characteristic	Number	%
Age		
15 – 17	357	40.1
18 – 20	466	52.4
21 – 23	51	5.7
24+	4	0.4
Class		
S.4	729	81.9
S.6	146	16.4

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

Table 4. Learning Experiences

Students' Activities	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	N	M	SD
Workshops on IRE	586 (65.8)	167 (18.8)	57 (6.4)	35 (3.9)	845	1.46	0.80
Youth camps on IRE	565 (63.5)	153 (17.2)	79 (8.9)	41 (4.6)	838	1.52	0.86
Muslim Association	263 (29.6)	262 (29.4)	201 (22.6)	101 (11.3)	827	2.17	1.01
Community work	249 (28.0)	258 (29.0)	184 (20.7)	123 (13.8)	814	2.22	1.04
Qur'an competition	427 (48.0)	281 (31.6)	89 (10.0)	38 (4.3)	835	1.69	0.84
Islamic drama	502 (56.4)	209 (23.5)	75 (8.4)	44 (4.9)	830	1.59	0.86
Muslim seminars	151 (17.0)	383 (43.0)	184 (20.7)	102 (11.5)	820	2.29	0.91
Congregational prayers	73 (8.2)	90 (10.1)	64 (7.2)	629 (70.7)	856	3.46	0.99
Reading IRE books	00 (0.0)	474 (53.3)	245 (27.5)	102 (11.5)	821	1.55	0.71
Total						2.04	0.57

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

Table 5. Muslim Students' Beliefs

Beliefs	No	Uncertain	Yes	N	M	SD
Allah should be trusted under all circumstances.	4 (0.4)	6 (0.7)	875 (98.3)	885	2.94	0.16
*One's life ends on the day s/he dies.	567 (63.7)	70 (7.9)	222 (24.9)	859	1.60	0.87
Those who obey Allah will go to paradise.	19 (2.1)	8 (0.9)	853 (95.8)	880	2.95	0.31

* Items with negative wording and implications were recorded

Table 5. Muslim Students' Beliefs (cont')

Beliefs	No	Uncertain	Yes	N	M	SD
Those who disobey Allah's teachings will go to hell.	75 (8.4)	34 (3.8)	767 (86.2)	876	2.79	0.58
Angels were created for a purpose.	11 (1.2)	12 (1.3)	852 (95.7)	875	2.96	0.25
The world of *Jinns* is real.	91 (10.2)	129 (14.5)	636 (71.5)	856	2.64	0.67
Satan leads man astray.	54 (6.1)	46 (5.2)	765 (86.0)	865	2.82	0.52
Some prophets that Allah sent are more superior to others.	162 (18.2)	103 (11.6)	599 (67.3)	864	2.51	0.79
The sacred texts were revealed to prophets.	47 (5.3)	112 (12.6)	661 (74.3)	820	2.75	0.55
*When disappointed, I find myself doubting the existence of Allah.	612 (68.8)	74 (8.3)	163 (18.3)	849	1.47	0.80
*The aspect of hell is unfair.	517 (58.1)	137 (15.4)	191 (21.5)	845	1.64	0.83
*The existence of the afterlife is doubtful.	605 (68.0)	90 (10.1)	153 (17.2)	848	1.47	0.78
*Islam does not fit the modern time.	615 (69.1)	81 (9.1)	146 (16.4)	842	1.44	0.77
The Holy Qur'an is the exact words of Allah.	44 (4.9)	42 (4.7)	776 (87.2)	862	2.85	0.48
*Islam makes people intolerant.	587 (66.0)	104 (11.7)	140 (15.7)	831	1.46	0.77
*It is embarrassing to be a Muslim	756 (84.9)	20 (2.2)	72 (8.1)	848	1.19	0.57
*Islam encourages terrorism	724 (81.3)	58 (6.5)	70 (7.9)	852	1.23	0.59
*I believe in traditional customs more than Islamic ones	801 (90.0)	32 (3.6)	36 (4.0)	869	1.12	0.43
Muslims are peaceful people	26 (2.9)	50 (5.6)	777 (87.3)	853	2.88	0.41
*The world exists because of some chemical and physical reactions	612 (68.8)	131 (14.7)	111 (12.5)	854	1.41	0.71
Overall					2.72	0.21

* Items with negative wording and implications were recorded

Descriptive results on students' beliefs were interpreted as Low (1.00 – 1.66); Moderate (1.67 – 2.33), and High (2.34 – 3.00). Before computing, ten (of 20) items with negative implications were re-coded following Pallant's (2016) descriptions. Table 6 shows that students' beliefs were generally high (Mean, 2.72; SD 0.21). The items that were highly believed in were 'Angels were created for a purpose' and 'Allah should be trusted under all circumstances', while the least believed in were 'Some prophets that Allah sent are more superior than others' (Mean, 2.51; SD 0.79), and 'The aspect of Hell is unfair' (Mean, 1.64; SD 0.83). Correlation results between students' learning experiences and their beliefs indicate that the relationship is very weak (r= .08) and insignificant (p > .05), i.e., the null hypothesis was accepted, meaning that the varying experiences that students were exposed to were only slightly related to their beliefs and moreover, this relationship was insignificant (see Table 6).

Table 6. Correlation Between Students' Learning Experiences and Beliefs

		Total learning experiences	Total beliefs
Total learning experiences	Pearson Correlation	1	.080
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.065
	N	697	537
Total beliefs	Pearson Correlation	.080	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.065	
	N	537	645

The second objective sought to find out the relationship between students' IRE learning experiences and their practices. Results on students' practices were interpreted as *Almost Never* (1.00 – 1.74), *Rarely* (1.75 – 2.49), *Sometimes* (2.50 – 3.24), and *Often* (3.25 – 4.00). Data on practices is shown in Table 7. Nearly two-thirds of the students indicated that they were praying five times a day, while less than 20% of them performed voluntary prayers on a daily basis. One-quarter of the students indicated that they read the Qur'an on a daily basis, and an equal number admitted that they never read the Qur'an at all. About 40% of them listened to Qur'an recitation on a daily basis, while about 12% never listened to its recitation. About two-thirds of the students claimed to make daily supplication to Allah, as opposed to nearly 10% who indicated that they never supplicated, and an equal number of them claimed to normally fast all the days of the holy month of Ramadan, while 10.1% of them never fasted. The overall frequency of students' practices was 'Sometimes' (Mean, 2.95; SD 0.81), meaning that the majority of them skipped a few days (or times) of practicing. Pearson Product Moment Correlation results in Table 8 indicate a statistically significant moderate relationship between students' IRE learning experiences and their practice ($r = .516$, $p < .001$), meaning that the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 7. Muslim Students' Practices

Practices	Frequency				N	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4			
*How often student performs obligatory prayers	159 (17.9)	78 (8.8)	107 (12.0)	537 (60.3)	881	3.16	1.18
*How often student performs voluntary prayers	309 (34.7)	189 (21.2)	207 (23.3)	165 (18.5)	870	2.26	1.13
**How often student reads the Holy Qur'an	216 (24.3)	212 (23.8)	222 (24.9)	225 (25.3)	875	2.52	1.12
**How often student listens to the Holy Qur'an	104 (11.7)	204 (22.9)	224 (25.2)	347 (39.0)	879	2.93	1.05

* 1 = Less than 3 times a month; 2 = 1 – 3 times a week; 3 = 1 – 3 times a day; 4 = 5 times a day
** 1 = Never; 2 = 1 – 3 times a month; 3 = 1 – 3 times a week; 4 = Daily
*** 1 = Less than 6 days; 2 = 6 – 15 days; 3 = 16 – 25 days; 4 = 26 – 29/30 days

Table 7. Muslim Students' Practices (cont')

Practices	Frequency				N	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4			
**Number of times student makes supplication	87 (9.8)	85 (9.6)	80 (9.0)	614 (69.0)	866	3.41	1.02
***Number of days of Ramadan student normally fasts	90 (10.1)	28 (3.1)	185 (20.8)	578 (64.9)	881	3.42	.96
Overall						2.95	.81

* 1 = Less than 3 times a month; 2 = 1 – 3 times a week; 3 = 1 – 3 times a day; 4 = 5 times a day
** 1 = Never; 2 = 1 – 3 times a month; 3 = 1 – 3 times a week; 4 = Daily
*** 1 = Less than 6 days; 2 = 6 – 15 days; 3 = 16 – 25 days; 4 = 26 – 29/30 days

Table 8. Correlation Between Students' Learning Experiences and Practices

		Total learning experiences	Total practices
Total learning experiences	Pearson Correlation	1	.516**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	697	653
Total practices	Pearson Correlation	.516**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	653	824

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore further the impact of school type on students' practices. This analysis could not be conducted on the impact of school type on students' beliefs to test $H_0$4 because there was no need after finding the correlation between the two variables to be insignificant. The ANOVA results show that there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in students' practice scores for the school types: $F(4, 818) = 32.7$, $p = .000$, hence rejecting the null hypothesis, and the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was medium, the effect size calculated using eta squared, being 0.13.

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test (see Table 9) indicated that the mean score for GNM (M = 2.56, SD = 0.91) was statistically lower than those of GM (M = 2.81, SD = 0.83), PM (3.07, SD = 0.70), PI (3.53, SD = 0.37) and PNM (3.06, SD = 0.71); and the mean scores for PI (M = 3.53, SD = 0.37) were significantly different from those of GM (M = 2.81, SD = 0.83), PM (M = 3.07, SD = 0.70), PNM (M = 3.06, SD = 0.71) and GNM (M = 2.56, SD = 0.91). Thus, students from Government Non-Muslim schools scored relatively low on practices, while those from Private Islamic schools scored highest on practices.

Table 9. Tukey HSD Comparison for Students' Practices

(I) type of school	(J) type of school	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
GM	PM	-.26134*	.07106	.002	-.4556	-.0671
	PI	-.71330*	.09595	.000	-.9756	-.4510
	GNM	.25621*	.07927	.011	.0395	.4729
	PNM	-.24553	.10739	.150	-.5391	.0481
PM	GM	.26134*	.07106	.002	.0671	.4556
	PI	-.45196*	.08949	.000	-.6966	-.2073
	GNM	.51755*	.07130	.000	.3226	.7125
	PNM	.01581	.10165	1.000	-.2621	.2937
PI	GM	.71330*	.09595	.000	.4510	.9756
	PM	.45196*	.08949	.000	.2073	.6966
	GNM	.96951*	.09613	.000	.7067	1.2323
	PNM	.46777*	.12038	.001	.1387	.7969
GNM	GM	-.25621*	.07927	.011	-.4729	-.0395
	PM	-.51755*	.07130	.000	-.7125	-.3226
	PI	-.96951*	.09613	.000	-1.2323	-.7067
	PNM	-.50173*	.10755	.000	-.7958	-.2077
PNM	GM	.24553	.10739	.150	-.0481	.5391
	PM	-.01581	.10165	1.000	-.2937	.2621
	PI	-.46777*	.12038	.001	-.7969	-.1387
	GNM	.50173*	.10755	.000	.2077	.7958

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

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

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

schools, especially those who resided within the schools, displayed high Islamic values and morality.

The actions that members of the various microsystems take are interconnected, constituting the mesosystem, which indirectly impacts the students. For instance, the nature of students' interaction with the school imam or *Muallim* will determine how students practice the IRE taught in class. This will also depend on what happens with the parents and siblings when the students go back home. Children's experiences are also influenced by exosystems, like the economy. Children from families with low socioeconomic status or those who attend schools with limited resources may not have access to adequate instructional materials to supplement their learning of IRE. Besides the economy, the nature of society also matters. As much as Uganda has no state religion, Christianity is the dominant religion, which means that practicing Islam is given secondary importance (Musisi & Kiggundu, 2018; Schultz, 2013).

The learning and practice of IRE are also influenced by macro factors like politics. After the unfortunate event of 9/11/2001, Islam received a negative perception and became associated with terrorism, which came to be linked to some of the ways in which children are taught IRE (Arif et al., 2017; Syah, 2016). This has prompted a call to revisit the curriculum of Islamic students in various institutions. The Government of Uganda also promotes sciences (Presidential directive), and therefore, Arts subjects – including Islamic studies – seem to receive less attention, which makes teachers and students of these subjects feel inferior. African culture also plays a role in the ways in which Islam is practiced. Before the introduction of Islam, Ugandans used to live an African life in terms of dress, food, ceremonies etc.; some of which have persisted and were assimilated into Islam. However, some of the beliefs and practices are not in line with Islamic teachings but still crop up in Muslim's lives. During Introduction ceremonies, women wear traditional dresses, which are usually long enough to cover the legs but leave the hands bare. Similarly, the Western culture lifestyle has also influenced Muslim students, where some of them tend to imitate modern lifestyles, and anything to do with religion is viewed as backwardness. Modernity leads an individual to shun those beliefs and practices that are perceived to impede development, freedom, democracy, and rationality (Ali, 2023). Another system is the chronosystem, the temporal dimension that occurs in students' lives. After September 11, the world's perception of Islam and attitude towards Muslims changed. The ongoing wars in the Middle East have further weakened support for Islamic studies education.

CONCLUSION

Students' learning experiences in Islamic-related workshops, youth camps, drama, reading, associations, community work, seminars, and acts of worship were found to be generally moderate, while their belief in the pillars of faith and in the relevance of Islam was found to be generally high. However, the relationship between the two variables was very weak and insignificant. It can be concluded from the findings that irrespective of the moderate

learning experiences, students' beliefs were relatively high, an indication that all types of schools in this study equally contributed to transforming or sustaining students' beliefs. On the other hand, prayers, Qur'an recitation, supplication, and fasting were found to be just occasionally practiced by a majority of students and to be moderately related to learning experiences, an indication that different types of schools offered different IRE learning experiences that affected ways in which Islam was practiced by students, with Private Islamic schools being the most influential while Government Non-Muslim being the least. This leads to the conclusion that school culture is very important in promoting the practice of Islam and that having faith in the pillars of Islam does not automatically translate into one practicing it.

It is recommended that teachers emphasize the relevance of practicing the teachings of Islam by linking what Muslim students should believe in with what they should practice, based on the fact that the majority of Muslim students, irrespective of their level of practicing the religion, scored relatively high on belief.

Students should be exposed to a variety of learning experiences, both formal and non-formal, through extra-curricular activities like seminars, debates, clubs, associations, competitions, and drama.

Muslim students' associations should be established and the existing ones empowered, if they are not yet, to enable students to engage in Islamic activities, especially those students from Non-Muslim founded schools.

Parents and guardians should be sensitized about the importance of strengthening the beliefs of their children and monitoring them in the practice of Islam since the first environment of a child is the home.

This study involved students only, and the authors suggest that similar studies could be conducted to involve teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers. Case studies could also be conducted in specific schools to obtain in-depth information on the unique processes that go on there, as well as on students with outstanding Islamic character.

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