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Utilizing Islamic Religious Studies Curriculum in Nigerian Universities to Achieve 21st Century Skills in the Country

Oniye, Olayinka Ibrahim

Department of Religions
 University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria
 Email: oniye.oi@unilorin.edu.ng

Abstract:

Islamic Studies is a subject taught at all levels of education in Nigeria. The curriculum aims to produce religious scholars primarily for work in mosques. The objectives of Islamic Studies in Nigeria, outlined in the National Policy of Education (NPE), are to instill morals and spiritual consciousness in students and to enable them to apply other knowledge for the benefit of humanity. However, the current curriculum has not fully addressed the NPE's objectives. As a result, graduates of Islamic Studies are primarily relevant in religious contexts, lacking the necessary skills for success in the 21st century. To address this, the curriculum in Nigerian universities needs to be reviewed to foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, making Islamic Studies graduates relevant in a modern context characterized by global competition, cooperation, information growth, and a service economy. By aligning the curriculum with these demands, the study of Islamic Studies in Nigerian universities can become more attractive, relevant, and enterprise. A qualitative analysis of the current Islamic Studies Central Curriculum in Nigerian universities revealed the need for improvement to strike a balance between religious and mundane life. Moreover, the study found that Islamic education has the potential to address socio-political, economic, and ethical challenges in contemporary Nigeria if properly integrated into the curriculum. Therefore, it recommends an all-inclusive curriculum to achieve 21st-century skills in the country.

Keywords: Curriculum, Islamic Studies, Worship, Morals, Skills

Introduction

The curriculum is central to educational journey of a country because of its pivotal role in shaping the values, culture and norms of society. It does not only reflect the identity of the people, but also influences their yearnings, hopes and aspirations.¹ Curriculum is a medium through which norms and values of people are defined, redefined, appraised, transmitted, changed, shaped or challenged. It has enormous effects on individuals and communities at large. Curriculum is also used to understand and impart a concept to people or prepare them for a future occurrence.² Curriculum to educational system of a country or society is like a nucleus to organism. It is the nerve centre where others derive inspiration, hence the changes in society will often necessitate the review of the curriculum to meet up with the demands and needs of time. Curriculum review will aid the achievement of the goals and purpose of education and advance its course. One of the critical necessities for curriculum review is modernity. The world is ever changing

and is experiencing different developments in the recent times. The 21st century has brought numerous changes and transformations and there are new trends and events that depict a clear departure from the old system. There is globalization, digital revolution, climate change, urbanization, biotechnology and space exploration³ among others that have changed and transformed the world. These changes have brought a complete shift from an industrial to an innovative economy. The world has turned to a global village where distance has been eliminated, hence interactions and communication networks have evolved to meet the demands of 21st century. In education sector generally, there has been a growing movement towards infusing 21st century skills into the curriculum and teaching. These are skills that are needed by today's educational actors, policy makers, trainers and trainees to compete favourably in the global workforce. It is for this reason that Nigerian government reviewed the existing universities curriculum to meet up with the demands of time. This paper therefore seeks to investigate how the new Core-Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) factored in the 21st century skills which could enable the graduate of Islamic Studies from Nigerian Universities successfully navigate the demand of time. This is imperative because there is need to make Islamic Studies relevant and enterprise in the 21st century.

Islamic Studies in Nigerian Universities

Islamic Studies is the academic study of Islamic religion as a cultural entity, and a civilization with values across the sphere of life.⁴ It is also a system of learning Islam that divorces the traditional way due to its pedagogical setting, which is comprehensive and adequate for understanding the religion. It has theology (ideology) (*aqidah*), social relations (*Muamalat*), Worship (*Ibadah*), Eschatology (*al-akhirah*) and legal aspect otherwise known as *Shari'ah* among others as the basic features. The course is holistic, universal or global, practical, dynamic and interdisciplinary in nature. The study of Islam as an academic discipline started in Nigerian Universities after the independence of 1960 from the University of Ibadan in 1961,⁵ the primer University in Nigeria. This was after the Nigerian Muslims had passed through the phases of colonial and Christian evangelical missions against Islam in Nigeria. Western education was essentially and successfully used for proselytization. Many Muslims were converted to Christianity for their zeal to acquire education, while many found themselves in the shackles of confusion about the religion, especially those who refused to accept the religion of the frontiers of education in Nigeria.⁶ It was closely followed by Ahmadu Bello University in 1963/64.⁷ Having successfully scaled through the hiccups in the primary and post-primary levels, conscious Muslims advanced to the University to further their studies of Islam. It was also initially not laughing as there were high list of challenges, ranging from paucity of qualified and competent hands to handle the subject or deliver it in English language to acceptability of the programme by the parents who were sceptical and had no confidence and interest in schooling arising from conversion of Muslim children to Christianity.⁸ It was not long before the scenario changed, courtesy of some conscious Muslims who risked the situation to liberate others.

The curriculum was largely put together by Christians scholars, especially from London school of Africa and Oriental Studies (SOAS) who equally doubled as the teachers of Islamic Studies. The curriculum then was not originally to produce Islamic scholars, but to infused confusion and propagate Christianity.⁹ It was thereafter that Muslim started awaking from their deep slumber, thus the like of Prof M.O.A. Abdul, I.A.B. Balogun and the likes who were basically trained by the western scholars, came in to rescue the Muslims in Nigeria. The first achievement was the phasing out of the Christian teaching of Islamic Studies, then building the confidence of the parents and gradual restructuring

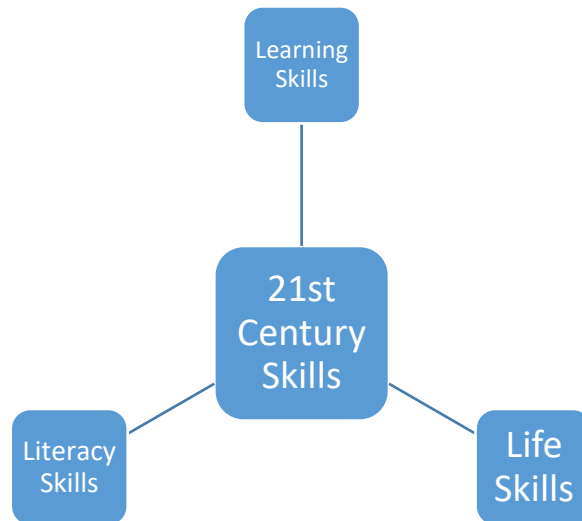
and reviewing of the curriculum to produce a scholar of Islam. However, the Islamic Studies curriculum in Nigerian Universities has not gone through any massive or aggressive review, since it started in 1961, as earlier mentioned. There has been calling for the review as stated by Oloyede to make the course to be relevant to the contemporary society.¹⁰ This has accounted for various lacuna in the existing curriculum. It has been a generational transfer, while the inadequacies remain constants till the present time.

The Islamic Studies Curriculum in Nigerian Universities is far from achieving the objectives of Nigerian Education, as could be inferred from the National Policy of Education (NPE), which is meant to produce a balance citizen. The curriculum is essentially to produce an Islamic scholar with a narrow view of the reality of the life, reducing everything to understanding the primary sources, and observing the Islamic rites, without consideration for striking a balance between the religion and the mundane life.¹¹ According to Adegoke, the anomaly was observed by some Universities in the Northern part of the country like Bayero University, Kano, and Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, hence the introduction of some Islamic related courses in some departments borrowing a leaf from International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). To this end, courses like Islamic Economics, Production and Consumption in Islam, Islamic Economic Analysis, and Economic of Islamic Welfarism among others were introduced. In the Social Sciences, courses like Sociology of Islamic Society, Islamic Social Thought, Islam and Social Factors in Nigeria among others were offered.¹²

Although the deficiencies in the curriculum became more glaring in the recent time with the advent of 21st century characters, it was not only Islamic Studies that revealed such but across all the courses that are taken in the Nigerian Universities. The government and the stakeholders through the National Universities Commission (NUC), have embarked on the review of all Universities curriculum, otherwise known as Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS), which Islamic Studies is one of them. The efforts have been to the final stage to introduce a new curriculum, called Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) to Nigerian Universities. The Islamic section of the document is framed to produce individuals that can strike the necessary balance between the religious and mundane responsibilities. The curriculum aims to churn out graduates who can solve societal problems, while bringing prosperity to the society using religious values.

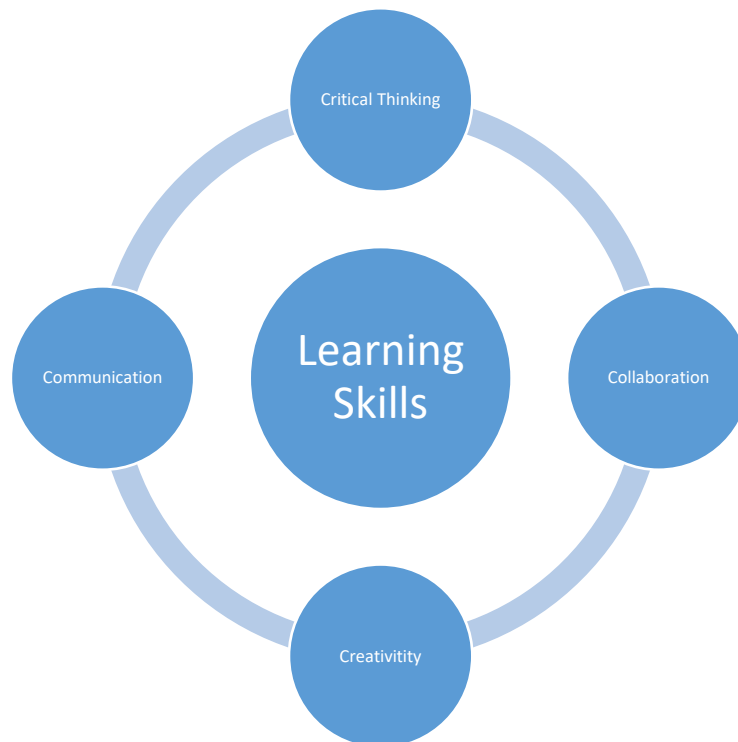
21st Century Skills and Demands

The 21st century refers to the current century in the Gregorian calendar, spanning from January 1, 2001, to December 31, 2100. It is characterized by rapid transformation in every sphere of life through technology which has brought about significant changes in social, economic, and political life of man.¹³ There are technological innovation and advancement, globalization, environmental awareness, climate and social change, health and educational advancements. The 21st century skills are important for success in a rapidly changing world of today. They embrace different abilities that can assist individuals in navigating and living a worthy life. The chart below shows the key areas of the skills:



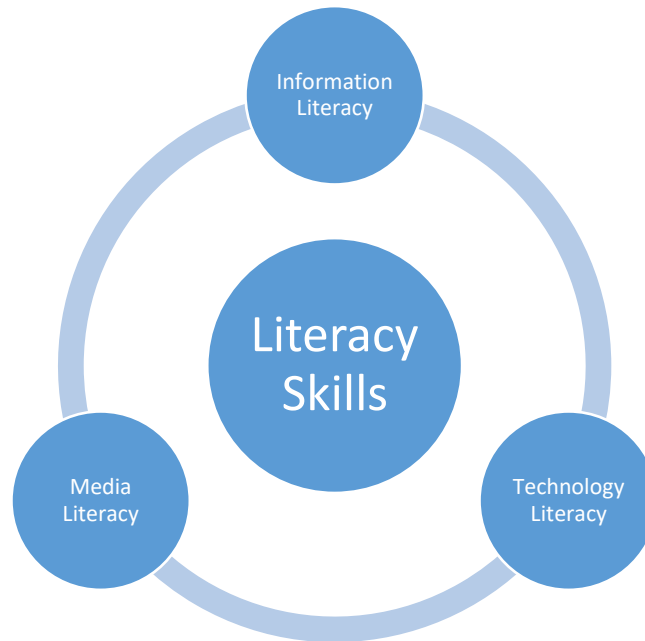
These are the basics skills that need to be understood for one to navigate the century successfully. Each of the key components is further breakdown in the following charts.

A. Learning Skills

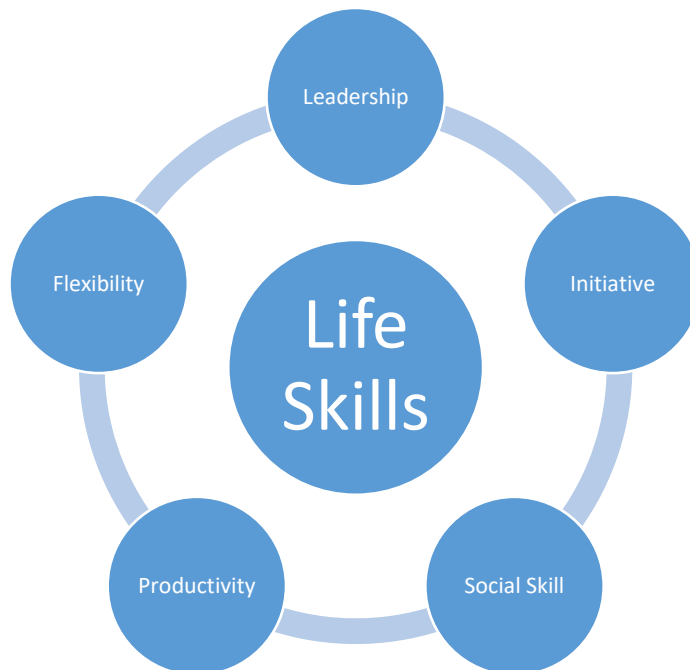


This is otherwise referred to as 4Cs

B. Literacy Skills



C. Life Skills



These are the essential skills that are necessary for 21st century, which Islamic Studies curriculum ought to be designed to achieve, otherwise the graduate will not be relevant, while the course will fizzle out within the limited time.

Also, the skills are further explained by CISCO, and VSO¹⁴ among other international organisations that had understudied the changes in the global system. The explanations are as follow:

a. Critical Thinking and making judgement:

The myriads of information that is available on daily basis across the medial requires a critical thinking to empower people in making right judgement and decisions, having

properly and adequately processed the information to ensure credibility, accuracy and adequacy. This will propel their analysis, and evaluation that will engender reasonable decisions and purposeful action.¹⁵

b. Problem Solving:

Solving complex, multidisciplinary, and open-ended problems that characterize daily activities, and endeavor is posing challenges that require special skills. The world is facing challenges that come in a multiple-choice format and typically do not have a single correct or right answer. Societies and employers expect scholars and employees to proffer solutions to various lingering problems, and to evolve new options and new ways of doing things. Often, the task of solving problems involves people of different orientations and backgrounds with different knowledge and skills to collectively solve a problem and add value to the society or organization.¹⁶

c. Creativity and Entrepreneurial Mindset:

Innovation drives the economy in 21st century and it is important to have skills that can enhance innovative thinking. There is a high rate of job loss, hence the need for job creation to solve associated problems in the fastest growing and changing world. Both society and the organization rely on experts' creative capacity to navigate through. Therefore, the ability to think unconventionally, question the heard, imagine new scenarios and produce astonishing results is indispensable. It also requires the ability to identify or recognize and act on opportunities and the willingness to embrace risk and responsibility.¹⁷

d. Communication and collaboration:

The 21st century economy requires information dissemination, network and teamwork. This is essential to inform and carry the people or the dynamic and diverse society along in proffering solutions to the existing problem. This will enable their minds to be at rest. Also, with teams of people across cultural, geographic and language boundaries, a necessity in diverse and multinational workplaces and communities. Mutually beneficial relationships are a central undercurrent to accomplishments in achieving a set goal. All entrepreneurs must be skilled at interacting competently and respectfully with others.¹⁸

A Critique of Islamic Studies in the CCMAS and 21st Century Skills

As previously stated, the Islamic Studies Curriculum in Nigerian Universities has never undergone a critical review as an independent subject in Nigerian Universities to enable the experts brainstorm and produce a unique document that will cater for all interest. It used to receive attention each time the general curriculum is to be reviewed. Such is the case in 1989 when the National Universities Commission (NUC) mulled over the need to address the national challenges through the University programmes in the country. These moves birthed Minimum Academic Standards (MAS), but later transformed to BMAS in 2016 and CCMAS.¹⁹ The contents of Islamic Studies in the previous two documents remained the same, but with some additions and subtraction in the new CCMAS. The contents focus on having a balanced, comprehensive and purposeful Islamic Studies programme in the nation's universities. The overview of the Islamic Studies in CCMAS reads:

Islamic Studies, as an academic discipline, is comprehensive, balanced and it targets the holistic development of the students through the inculcation of Islamic values, norms and principles, without which any ideological, moral, intellectual and economic

development becomes impossible. The B.A. Islamic Studies Programme comprises a number of courses, including, al-Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, Tawḥīd, Islamic Moral Philosophy, Islamic History and civilization. Islamic Studies also helps in finding practical solutions to problems confronting contemporary societies in particular and the Muslim world in general, through a number of courses, such as, Islam and Gender Issues, Islam and Pluralism, Fiqh of Contemporary Issues, among others. It also forges on interdisciplinary relationship with such disciplines as Arabic, History, Linguistic, Sociology, Economics, Political Science, Comparative Religious Studies as well as Law. Islamic Economic System, Islamic Political Thought, Islamic Calligraphy and Islamic Law, are some of the courses that have been derived from such cross-fertilization. Thus, a high level of competence in Islamic Studies becomes a great service to the Nigerian university system and the contemporary world at large. It is hoped that this curriculum will help towards the production of graduates with adequate knowledge of the epistemological foundations of Islam as a belief system and the requisite competences and capacities in this field of scholarly endeavor. The multi-dimensional nature of Islamic Studies will eventually translate to greater job opportunities for the graduates of this programme.

The curriculum reveals its interest in addressing the contemporary challenges in not only Nigeria, but across the globe, highlighting essential areas that necessary to solving the problems of the world. It accentuates the study of *aqidah* (creed), the *fiqh*, the texts (Qur’an and Hadith), the *Sirah* and *Tarikh*, and morals among other that can stick the learners to the primary sources of Islam and make them having a proper and better understanding of them. This is important to serve as the basement, since religious studies is a structured study that must align with the texts. The curriculum fosters critical thinking, collaborations, service economy and cross-fertilization of ideas. The curriculum also highlights ten (10) different 21st century skills that are achievable from the broad outline of Islamic Studies programme. They include independence of mind, self-discipline, self-direction, innovation and creativity, digital literacy, logical reasoning and critical thinking, teamwork skills, intellectual honesty, integrity, and maturity. This is better understood in the light of the skills identified above.

21 st Century Skills	Relevant Courses in the CCMAS
Learning Skills	ISS 106: Basis of Islamic Thought and Civilization ISS 107: Introduction to Islamic Philosophy ISS 201: Early Muslim Philosophers ISS 401: Fiqh of contemporary Issues ISS 403: Islamic Contributions to the Renaissance
Life Skills	ISS 207: Islam and Gender Studies ISS 303: Islamic Economic System ISS 306: Entrepreneurial Skills in Islamic Studies (Calligraphy) ISS 307: Moral Philosophy ISS 308: Islamic Political Thought and Movements ISS 406: Islam and Pluralism

From the above chart, it is understood that the curriculum caters for the learning skills that can propel and enhance critical thinking and problem-solving minds. It aims to engender creativity and awaken the sleeping giant within the graduates to be more productive, relevant and entrepreneur, hence those courses listed against learning skills are philosophically driven and spanned across levels. The Islamic political thoughts, Moral teachings, Religious Pluralism, Islamic Economic System and Gender Studies are to aid the attainment of life skills and collaborations.

However, an assessment of the courses breakdown in the curriculum that posed to making all the 21st century skills achievable have left wider gaps that serve as a significant barrier to achieving those skills. It is clear from the above chart that literacy skills are left out. There is no course designed to achieve information, media and technology literacies. One of the major drivers of the century is Information Communication Technology (ICT). The world has gone digital, and graduates must be prepared for the digital needs of time. Inclusion of courses to take care of information or medial literacy, like Islam and Media studies will serve the main purpose of attaining ICT demands of time. This course will study the media and its diversities, print, electronic and social media in the light of Islamic ethics. It will also advance the course of presenting the true teachings of Islam as against the various wars against Islam which are executed through the media. Although there are courses outside the Islamic domain which can enhance literacy skills, especially the general studies courses, these are not within the Islamic framework. It will be a double advantage if there are homegrown courses within the Islamic framework to cater for media studies and other essential skills.

In the same light, Oloyede²⁰ in the recent times argues for a reconceptualization of Islamic Studies through its combination with other disciplines, such as Islamic Studies and Digital Humanities, which will be taught in an interdisciplinary way. This discipline will enable students to explore Islamic texts and culture using digital tools. He identifies its advantage as the ability for the potential graduates to have dual competences in Islamic culture and in digital media. Other combinations could be Islamic Studies and Political science, Islamic Studies and Medical Sociology. He also advocates that scholars of Islamic Studies can delve into different aspects of sciences. He cites the instance of Islamic Bioethics, which according to him would explore the study of current and existential issues affecting Muslims' health with a view to not only to document them but equally offer Islamically approved positions on them. This would be interdisciplinary course connecting between Islamic studies, ethics and medical practice and social work.

Also, there are no specific courses, from the beginning to the final stage of the programme, as spelt out in the CCMAS that cater for international studies and relations, leadership training and Health and Medical Sciences, Finance and Banking, Agriculture Sciences and Environmental Studies among others. These are areas that can create much relevance and more opportunities for the graduates of Islamic Studies, because they are living courses that Islam can be factored into them by professionals. For instance, in Nigeria the Jaiz Bank, which operates on the tenets of Islam has been growing steadily in terms of performance and it has given birth to Taj Bank which has equally started operations recently as the Islamic Banking system.

Other Necessary 21st Century Skills and Islamic Studies Curriculum Framework

A critical starting point to tackle the challenges of 21st century in making Islamic Studies worthy of study and provide adequate needs for the global challenges lies in both what is taught and how it is taught. These therefore make it necessary to prepare experts and trainers in the field who can strike the necessary balance between the course and the

Nigerian society with full skills and toolkit of resources that allow them to bring 21st century skills into the classrooms in a relevant and meaningful ways. Thus, the following are essential.

University Teacher Preparation Programmes

Teaching preparation programmes for teachers of Islamic Studies in Nigerian Universities is essential to achieving the 21st century skills through teaching. Teachers are recruited not necessarily on the expertise in teaching but in the field whereas there is a clear difference between having the knowledge and understanding the techniques of imparting it to others. Teaching of Islamic Studies should not largely be library-based, but also practical. The methodology should be improved to combine theory with practical. This is better achieved in variety of ways, such as concept training, Development projects and qualitative assessments.

Professional Development

The 21st century is a digital age that demands compliance from all and sundry. Islamic Studies Curriculum should not only design teaching standard, but also should prepare the graduates for the workforce or labour markets. In catering for this, therefore, the training skills and developmental programmes should be geared towards understanding training gap, analyse progress and technology training and support. This will put them at an advantage being graduates with potential skills in digital literacy.

Information, Media and Technology

The 21st century about technology and media-suffused environment marked by various characteristics such as access to abundance of information, rapid changes in technology tools, and the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. To be effective in the 21st century, therefore, graduates must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills related to information, media and technology. Therefore, information literacy, media literacy and other means of effective application of Information Communication Technology are necessary in the 21st century skills for Islamic Studies.

Conclusion

The need to utilize the Islamic Studies Curriculum in Nigerian Universities to achieve the 21st century skill is the crux of this paper. It is imperative because the century has brought about many changes, such as learning, literacy and life skills, which relevance and effectiveness necessitate the review of curriculum across the Universities to meet up with the demands of time. Islamic Studies curriculum in particular needs such review to address the myriads of wrong impressions about the course in the University and to harness the full potentials of the course on its graduate. No doubt, Islamic Studies is a conflux of all disciplines, and this is what this paper demonstrated. It is discovered that the newly introduced Islamic Studies curriculum captures two out of the three essential skills of 21st Century, thus the aspect of information literacy skill is largely left out. There are also areas that need to be inculcated into the curriculum as identified by different scholars such Islam and Bioethics, Islam and Media studies, Islam and Health, international relations and the likes. These are areas that needs to be improved upon in the curriculum to make the graduates of Islamic Studies from Nigerian Universities relevant, productive and enterprise.

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