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Aligning Arabic and Islamic Studies Curricula with 21st-Century Skills: An Assessment of Sustainable Development and Peacebuilding Themes in Senior Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The rapid transformation of education, technology, labour markets, and global society has increased the need for curricula that develop not only subject-specific knowledge but also critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, digital competence, intercultural understanding, and peace-oriented dispositions. Within this context, Arabic and Islamic Studies at the senior secondary-school level have considerable potential to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), peacebuilding, social cohesion, ethical citizenship, and responsible participation in an increasingly interconnected world. However, the extent to which existing curricula explicitly and systematically integrate these 21st-century competencies remains insufficiently understood. This study therefore assesses the alignment of Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula in senior secondary schools with selected 21st-century skills, with particular attention to themes related to sustainable development and peacebuilding. Using a qualitative curriculum-analysis approach, the study examines curriculum objectives, content, learning experiences, and expected competencies to identify the extent to which sustainability, peaceful coexistence, dialogue, tolerance, ethical responsibility, critical thinking, and related skills are embedded within the subjects. The analysis is guided by a conceptual intersection between 21st-century skills, the Sustainable Development Goals, peace education, and the educational objectives of Arabic and Islamic Studies. The study is expected to identify areas of substantive alignment as well as gaps, fragmentation, and opportunities for curriculum enhancement. It argues that repositioning Arabic and Islamic Studies around relevant contemporary competencies need not weaken their linguistic, cultural, or religious foundations; rather, it can strengthen their educational relevance by connecting established Islamic ethical principles and Arabic-language learning with sustainability, peacebuilding, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. The study consequently proposes directions for curriculum reform, teacher preparation, instructional practice, and assessment to enhance the contribution of Arabic and Islamic Studies to sustainable development and peaceful, inclusive societies.

Keywords: Arabic and Islamic Studies; 21st-century skills; sustainable development; peacebuilding; curriculum alignment; senior secondary education.

Introduction

The rapid transformation of societies under the influence of technological advancement, globalization, demographic change, environmental pressures, and growing social and political tensions has fundamentally altered the competencies expected of contemporary learners. Education is increasingly required to move beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge towards the development of learners who can think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate across differences, use digital technologies responsibly, solve complex problems, and participate constructively in increasingly diverse societies. The contemporary education agenda therefore places substantial emphasis on 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, problem-solving, social and emotional competencies, and responsible citizenship. These competencies are closely connected to the broader Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda, particularly SDG 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities, including education that supports sustainable development, human rights, peace, non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2017; United Nations, 2015).

Within this changing educational landscape, the curriculum assumes a particularly important role because it determines not only what learners are expected to know, but also the values, dispositions, competencies, and forms of participation that education seeks to cultivate. UNESCO's recent work on education for sustainable development emphasizes that learners need competencies that enable them to understand interconnected social, economic, cultural, and environmental challenges and to act responsibly in addressing them (UNESCO, 2020, 2021). Similarly, the OECD's competency framework highlights the importance of students' capacity to apply knowledge creatively, interact effectively with others, and exercise agency in unfamiliar and complex situations (OECD, 2019). Consequently, curriculum relevance in the twenty-first century increasingly depends on the extent to which academic subjects provide meaningful opportunities for learners to connect disciplinary knowledge with contemporary societal challenges.

This issue is particularly significant for Arabic and Islamic Studies, which occupy an important position in the educational and cultural development of students in many Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts. Arabic is not merely a language subject; it provides access to a substantial intellectual, literary, cultural, and religious heritage. Islamic Studies, similarly, encompasses ethical, spiritual, social, intellectual, and civilizational dimensions of learning. Properly conceived, therefore, both subjects possess considerable potential to contribute to values such as justice, compassion, responsible stewardship, peaceful coexistence, respect for human dignity, dialogue, moderation, and social responsibility. These principles have conceptual affinities with contemporary agendas concerning sustainable development, peace education, intercultural understanding, and responsible citizenship. Islamic educational thought, for example, places considerable emphasis on human responsibility, justice (*ʿadl*), social welfare, knowledge, moderation (*wasatiyyah*), and stewardship (*khilāfah*), while contemporary

Islamic scholarship increasingly explores their relevance to sustainable human development and social wellbeing (Abdullah, 2018; Dirie et al., 2024).

The potential contribution of Islamic Studies to contemporary educational objectives is particularly relevant to peacebuilding. In contexts characterised by religious misunderstanding, social polarisation, violent extremism, communal tensions, and weakening social cohesion, education can function as an important mechanism for developing attitudes and competencies conducive to peaceful coexistence. UNESCO (2017) identifies education for peace, human rights, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity as central dimensions of quality education. Peace education similarly emphasises dialogue, empathy, conflict transformation, non-violent communication, tolerance, respect for difference, and the development of learners' capacities to address conflict constructively (UNESCO, 2023). Islamic Studies can potentially reinforce these objectives through the systematic treatment of justice, human dignity, peaceful coexistence, reconciliation, ethical disagreement, social responsibility, and respect for others. The critical question, however, is whether these themes are explicitly and coherently embedded within existing school curricula, rather than merely being implicit possibilities within the subject matter.

A related concern arises from the growing recognition that sustainable development requires more than environmental knowledge or economic growth. The 2030 Agenda conceptualises sustainability through interconnected economic, social, environmental, and institutional dimensions, while SDG 16 specifically emphasises peaceful and inclusive societies, justice, accountable institutions, and inclusive decision-making (United Nations, 2015). Education consequently has a dual responsibility: preparing learners with practical competencies for a changing world and developing the ethical and civic dispositions necessary for sustainable and peaceful societies. In this respect, Arabic and Islamic Studies may provide a distinctive educational space in which linguistic, cultural, ethical, spiritual, and civic learning can be integrated with contemporary sustainability and peacebuilding objectives.

Nevertheless, the relationship between traditional subject curricula and 21st-century competencies remains problematic. Existing curriculum structures in many educational systems continue to emphasise content coverage, memorisation, reproduction of knowledge, and examination performance, potentially leaving insufficient space for critical inquiry, collaborative learning, problem-solving, creativity, digital literacy, and applied learning. This concern is not unique to Arabic or Islamic Studies. International evidence indicates that curriculum implementation frequently lags behind policy aspirations concerning competency-based and transformative education (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). The problem becomes particularly important where subjects with strong textual and knowledge-transmission traditions are expected to respond to contemporary challenges without losing their disciplinary identity.

The existing literature provides valuable foundations but remains fragmented. One body of research examines 21st-century skills and competency-based education, establishing the importance of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, digital competence, and learner agency (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). A second body focuses on education for sustainable development, demonstrating that education should equip learners with the knowledge, values, attitudes, and competencies necessary to contribute to sustainable societies (UNESCO, 2020, 2021). A third strand examines peace education and global citizenship, emphasising dialogue, tolerance, human rights, intercultural understanding, non-violence, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2017, 2023). A fourth, increasingly relevant strand considers Islamic social and educational thought in relation to sustainable development, showing that concepts derived from *maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*, social justice, human welfare, and ethical responsibility can provide an Islamic normative foundation for contemporary development objectives (Abdullah, 2018; Dirie et al., 2024).

However, these strands have rarely been brought together in a systematic assessment of Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula at the senior secondary-school level. Much of the existing discussion treats 21st-century skills, sustainable development, peace education, and Islamic education as separate domains. Consequently, there remains limited empirical understanding of whether the actual curriculum content and learning objectives of Arabic and Islamic Studies sufficiently address contemporary competencies and whether sustainability and peacebuilding themes are explicitly, consistently, and pedagogically integrated. This represents an important curricular gap because the mere presence of concepts such as morality, tolerance, social responsibility, or environmental stewardship does not necessarily demonstrate alignment with 21st-century competency-based education. Meaningful alignment requires these themes to be connected to learning outcomes, learner activities, critical inquiry, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and assessment practices.

The gap is also conceptual. There is a need to distinguish between the intrinsic educational objectives of Arabic and Islamic Studies and their potential contribution to broader contemporary policy agendas. The objective should not be to instrumentalise Islamic education simply to satisfy external development frameworks. Rather, curriculum alignment should identify points of genuine convergence between established disciplinary and Islamic educational principles and contemporary requirements for sustainable, peaceful, inclusive, and technologically capable societies. Such an approach can preserve the intellectual and religious integrity of the subjects while enhancing their relevance to the realities confronting contemporary learners.

Against this background, the present study assesses the alignment of Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula in senior secondary schools with 21st-century skills, with particular emphasis on sustainable development and peacebuilding themes. The study specifically examines the extent to which curriculum objectives and content reflect competencies such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, ethical reasoning, social responsibility, and responsible citizenship, while also identifying the presence and treatment of sustainability, peaceful coexistence, dialogue, tolerance, justice, environmental responsibility, and related themes. It further seeks to identify areas of alignment, omissions, fragmentation, and opportunities for curricular improvement. By bringing together the literature on 21st-century skills, education for sustainable development, peace education, and Islamic educational values, the study seeks to provide an evidence-informed basis for strengthening Arabic and Islamic Studies as relevant components of contemporary secondary education without compromising their disciplinary and ethical foundations.

21st-Century Skills and Curriculum Transformation

The concept of 21st-century skills reflects a shift from education centred primarily on knowledge acquisition towards education that enables learners to apply knowledge effectively in complex and changing contexts. Contemporary frameworks emphasise competencies involving critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, digital competence, agency, and the responsible application of knowledge, values, and attitudes. The OECD Learning Compass 2030, for example, conceptualises future-oriented education around student agency, well-being, and the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, rather than the passive acquisition of prescribed content.

This perspective has important implications for curriculum design. A curriculum aligned with 21st-century requirements should therefore provide opportunities for learners to analyse information, engage with alternative perspectives, communicate ideas, collaborate with others, solve authentic problems, and make responsible decisions. The OECD's comparative curriculum work further demonstrates that

countries increasingly seek to embed such competencies within formal curriculum frameworks, although their incorporation varies considerably across subjects and educational systems.

For Arabic and Islamic Studies, this suggests that curriculum relevance should not be assessed solely by the quantity or accuracy of linguistic, textual, historical, or religious content. It should also be examined in terms of whether students are encouraged to interpret, question, communicate, collaborate, reason ethically, and apply knowledge to contemporary problems**.** Such an approach does not require abandoning the traditional foundations of the subjects; rather, it requires moving from predominantly content-oriented learning towards a more competency-oriented application of disciplinary knowledge.

Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) provides an important bridge between curriculum and the wider sustainability agenda. UNESCO identifies knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes as essential for enabling learners to make informed decisions and take responsible action for environmental integrity, economic viability, and social justice. ESD therefore extends beyond teaching learners about environmental problems; it seeks to develop the capacities required to participate actively in creating more sustainable societies.

This understanding is particularly relevant to curriculum assessment because sustainability can be represented through several interconnected dimensions, including environmental stewardship, responsible consumption, social justice, resource conservation, climate awareness, community responsibility, and intergenerational responsibility. Consequently, a curriculum may demonstrate sustainability alignment even where the expression "sustainable development" does not appear explicitly, provided that its learning objectives and content cultivate relevant knowledge, values, and competencies.

Recent scholarship on Islamic education has similarly argued that sustainability can be connected to Islamic ethical concepts such as *khalīfah* (stewardship), *amānah* (trust and responsibility), *ʿadl* (justice), and *mīzān* (balance). Emerging studies therefore advocate integrating sustainability more systematically into Islamic education rather than treating environmental responsibility as an external addition to religious learning.

Peace Education and Peacebuilding

Peace education represents a second major dimension of the present study. Contemporary peace education extends beyond the absence of physical violence to include the development of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviours that enable individuals to live constructively with others, resolve disagreements peacefully, respect diversity, and contribute to inclusive societies. UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development explicitly identifies curricula, teaching practices, learning environments, and assessment as important mechanisms for developing learners as agents of peace.

From this perspective, peacebuilding themes within school curricula may include dialogue, tolerance, empathy, respect for diversity, justice, human dignity, conflict resolution, non-violence, cooperation, social responsibility, and peaceful coexistence. Their educational significance is particularly strong in contexts where social, religious, ethnic, or political differences can generate misunderstanding or conflict. Curriculum therefore has the potential to develop not only learners' intellectual capacities but also the interpersonal and ethical competencies required for constructive engagement with difference.

Islamic Education, Sustainability and Contemporary Curriculum

Islamic education provides a distinctive normative foundation for linking knowledge with ethical responsibility. Contemporary research increasingly examines the potential of Islamic education to contribute to sustainable development through the integration of religious values, environmental ethics, social justice, and responsible citizenship. Recent studies argue that principles such as stewardship, justice, public benefit, accountability, and moderation can provide meaningful foundations for sustainability-oriented curriculum development.

There is also emerging empirical evidence that sustainability can be incorporated into Islamic Religious Education curricula through explicit connections with the SDGs. For example, recent curriculum research has examined the integration of SDGs into Islamic Religious Education and identified links particularly with quality education and peace, justice, and strong institutions. This indicates that Islamic education need not be positioned outside contemporary sustainable-development discourse; rather, its ethical and educational resources can potentially complement that discourse.

Nevertheless, the emerging literature remains relatively fragmented. Much of the research focuses on Islamic Religious Education generally, environmental ethics, institutional sustainability, or individual SDGs. Comparatively less attention has been given to the simultaneous assessment of Arabic Studies and Islamic Studies, particularly at the senior secondary level, through an integrated framework combining 21st-century skills, sustainable development, and peacebuilding.

Curriculum Alignment and the Emerging Research Gap

The literature therefore establishes three important propositions. First, contemporary curricula increasingly require competencies extending beyond disciplinary knowledge. Second, sustainable development requires education to cultivate appropriate knowledge, values, attitudes, and action-oriented competencies. Third, peacebuilding requires educational environments and curricula that develop dialogue, respect, cooperation, justice, and peaceful interaction. These three dimensions are increasingly recognised as interconnected rather than separate educational agendas. UNESCO's current framework explicitly brings peace, human rights, sustainable development, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment into a common educational framework.

Despite this convergence, a significant analytical gap remains. Existing studies have not sufficiently established how far Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula at senior secondary level actually embody these three dimensions simultaneously. In particular, there is insufficient systematic attention to whether curriculum objectives and content translate Islamic and Arabic educational knowledge into opportunities for critical thinking, communication, collaboration, ethical reasoning, sustainability awareness, peaceful coexistence, and responsible citizenship.

The present study addresses this gap by treating curriculum alignment as more than the identification of isolated keywords or topics. It examines whether the curriculum provides substantive opportunities for learners to develop contemporary competencies while engaging with sustainability and peacebuilding themes. This distinction is important because the presence of a concept in curriculum content does not necessarily constitute competency development. Genuine alignment requires correspondence between curriculum objectives, content, learning processes, and expected learner outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the preceding literature, the study conceptualises curriculum alignment through three interconnected dimensions**:** 21st-century competencies, sustainable development, and peacebuilding, interpreted within the educational foundations of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

The first dimension concerns 21st-century competencies, particularly critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, digital competence, ethical reasoning, and learner agency. These represent the capabilities through which students can apply knowledge rather than merely reproduce it. The OECD Learning Compass provides a useful foundation for this dimension by conceptualising competencies through the interaction of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values.

The second dimension concerns sustainable development, including environmental responsibility, resource conservation, social justice, responsible consumption, climate awareness, sustainable lifestyles, and concern for future generations. This dimension follows UNESCO's understanding of ESD as education that empowers learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for responsible action.

The third dimension concerns peacebuilding, including tolerance, dialogue, empathy, respect for diversity, non-violence, conflict resolution, justice, social cohesion, and responsible citizenship. This dimension is consistent with UNESCO's contemporary conception of education for peace, which emphasises the development of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviours that enable learners to contribute to peaceful societies.

The framework consequently assumes that Arabic and Islamic Studies can serve as a point of intersection between disciplinary learning and contemporary societal competencies**.** The analytical relationship can be expressed as:

Arabic and Islamic Studies Curriculum → 21st-Century Skills + Sustainable Development + Peacebuilding → Competent, Ethical and Responsible Learner

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative curriculum-content analysis to assess the alignment of Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula at the senior secondary-school level with 21st-century skills, sustainable development, and peacebuilding themes. The approach is appropriate because the study seeks to examine the presence, treatment, and integration of relevant competencies and themes within existing curriculum documents rather than measure students' performance directly.

The analysis focuses on relevant curriculum objectives, content areas, learning outcomes, recommended learning activities, and assessment provisions. A structured coding framework was developed from the conceptual framework, comprising three principal categories: (i) 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, digital competence, and ethical reasoning; (ii) sustainable development, including environmental stewardship, resource conservation, social justice, climate awareness, and responsible citizenship; and (iii) peacebuilding, including tolerance, dialogue, empathy, peaceful coexistence, conflict resolution, respect for diversity, justice, and social cohesion.

The curriculum documents were systematically reviewed and relevant textual units were coded according to these categories. Attention was given not only to the explicit occurrence of themes but also to their contextual treatment and connection with expected learner competencies. The analysis subsequently compared the identified curriculum elements against the study's conceptual framework to determine areas of alignment, partial alignment, omission, and potential curricular gaps.

To enhance analytical rigour, the coding categories were defined before the detailed document analysis, and interpretations were grounded directly in the curriculum texts. The findings are presented thematically, focusing on the extent to which Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula can support the development of competent, ethically responsible, sustainability-conscious, and peace-oriented learners.

Discussion of Results and Findings

The findings indicate that Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula possess a substantial but uneven potential for alignment with 21st-century skills, sustainable development, and peacebuilding. The analysis suggests that several relevant values and themes are already embedded within the subjects, particularly ethical responsibility, respect, social relations, justice, peaceful coexistence, and responsible conduct. However, these elements are not always articulated as explicit competencies or systematically connected to contemporary sustainability and peacebuilding objectives. This distinction is important because contemporary curriculum frameworks increasingly emphasise the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values as an integrated whole rather than the transmission of subject content alone (OECD, 2019, 2020).

Alignment with 21st-Century Skills

The findings suggest that the curricula provide a reasonable foundation for ethical reasoning, communication, reflection, and interpersonal development, but comparatively less explicit emphasis appears to be placed on higher-order and transformative competencies such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving, collaboration, digital literacy, and learner agency. This represents an important distinction between a curriculum that contains valuable knowledge and one that deliberately develops competencies through that knowledge.

This finding is consistent with broader international curriculum evidence. The OECD's curriculum-mapping work demonstrates that critical thinking and problem-solving are among the most frequently represented future-oriented competencies, while collaboration, responsibility, empathy, and conflict resolution are also increasingly incorporated into curricula. The implication for Arabic and Islamic Studies is not that traditional content should be reduced indiscriminately, but that students should be given greater opportunities to interpret texts, compare perspectives, analyse contemporary issues, debate ethical questions, collaborate on problems, and apply Islamic and linguistic knowledge to real-life situations.

Accordingly, the central issue is one of pedagogical and curricular orientation rather than disciplinary relevance. Arabic and Islamic Studies already contain intellectual and ethical resources capable of supporting 21st-century learning; the challenge is to translate these resources into explicit competency-oriented learning outcomes and activities.

Sustainable Development as an Emerging but Underdeveloped Dimension

The findings further indicate that sustainability-related ideas can be connected naturally to Arabic and Islamic Studies, particularly through themes of responsibility, stewardship, moderation, justice, social welfare, and responsible use of resources. Nevertheless, the treatment of sustainable development appears more likely to be implicit than systematically structured around contemporary sustainability competencies.

This is significant because UNESCO's approach to Education for Sustainable Development moves beyond awareness towards learning objectives that develop cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural capacities for responsible action. More recent UNESCO guidance similarly advocates a comprehensive and action-oriented approach in which climate and sustainability concepts are reflected in curriculum outcomes across cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioural dimensions.

Thus, the findings suggest an opportunity to strengthen the connection between established Islamic concepts and contemporary sustainability challenges. Topics such as environmental stewardship, conservation of water and other resources, responsible consumption, climate change, food security,

biodiversity, and sustainable communities could be approached not as unrelated additions to Islamic Studies but as contemporary applications of established ethical principles. Such integration would make sustainability more concrete while preserving the intellectual identity of the subject.

Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

The analysis also indicates considerable potential for Arabic and Islamic Studies to contribute to peace education and social cohesion. Themes associated with morality, justice, tolerance, respect, peaceful relations, human dignity, and social responsibility provide a substantive foundation for peace-oriented learning. However, the presence of these values does not automatically guarantee the development of peacebuilding competencies.

UNESCO's 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development is particularly relevant in this respect. It identifies knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviours as essential learning outcomes and calls for their integration through curriculum development, teaching practices, learning environments, and assessment. UNESCO's curriculum work further emphasises dialogue, intercultural understanding, recognition of diverse perspectives, social cohesion, and democratic participation as important dimensions of education for lasting peace.

The implication is that peacebuilding should move beyond teaching students about tolerance or peaceful conduct towards enabling them to practise dialogue, perspective-taking, collaborative problem-solving, respectful disagreement, mediation, and conflict resolution. This would transform peacebuilding from a predominantly normative theme into a practical educational competency.

The Need for Stronger Integration Rather Than Curriculum Addition

One of the most important findings emerging from the analysis is that effective reform should not necessarily involve adding numerous new topics to an already demanding curriculum. Rather, the stronger approach is to integrate contemporary competencies and themes into existing Arabic and Islamic Studies content.

This is consistent with OECD curriculum research, which shows that future-oriented competencies can be embedded within existing subjects rather than necessarily established as separate subjects. For example, an Islamic Studies lesson on justice can incorporate critical analysis and debate around contemporary social justice; a lesson on human relations can develop communication, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills; and Arabic-language activities can use sustainability and peacebuilding issues as contexts for reading, argumentation, presentation, and collaborative writing.

Such an approach is more pedagogically sustainable because it connects existing disciplinary knowledge with new competencies instead of creating an additional layer of curriculum content.

Implications for Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

The findings also indicate that genuine alignment cannot be achieved through curriculum-content revision alone. If critical thinking, sustainability, and peacebuilding are identified as desired outcomes but classroom instruction remains predominantly teacher-centred and assessment continues to reward memorisation, the intended reform is unlikely to produce substantial changes in learner competencies.

The OECD similarly emphasises the relationship between curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and learner agency. UNESCO likewise identifies curriculum, teaching practices, learning environments, and assessment as interconnected areas for implementing education for peace and sustainable development.

Consequently, Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers require pedagogical strategies that support discussion, inquiry, collaborative learning, case analysis, project-based activities, reflective writing, structured debate, digital research, and problem-solving. Assessment should likewise include tasks capable of measuring analysis, interpretation, application, ethical reasoning, communication, and collaborative problem-solving rather than relying predominantly on recall.

Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that Arabic and Islamic Studies should not be regarded as peripheral to the 21st-century education agenda. On the contrary, their linguistic, cultural, ethical, and religious foundations provide significant opportunities for developing learners who are critically minded, socially responsible, sustainability-conscious, and capable of peaceful engagement with others. The principal challenge is therefore alignment and operationalisation. The relevant values are present, but their transformation into explicit competencies, learning activities, and measurable outcomes remains insufficiently systematic. The study consequently supports a model of curriculum renewal rather than curriculum replacement: existing Arabic and Islamic Studies content should be retained and strengthened while being deliberately connected to 21st-century competencies, sustainable development, and peacebuilding.

In this sense, the future relevance of these subjects depends not on abandoning their traditional foundations, but on demonstrating how those foundations can respond intelligently to contemporary educational and societal challenges. This approach is consistent with the broader international movement towards curricula that enable learners not merely to acquire knowledge, but to navigate complexity, reconcile differences, act responsibly, and contribute to sustainable and peaceful societies.

Conclusion

This study examined the extent to which Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula at the senior secondary-school level align with the demands of 21st-century skills, sustainable development, and peacebuilding. The analysis demonstrates that the two subjects possess substantial intellectual, ethical, linguistic, and cultural resources that can support contemporary educational priorities. In particular, themes relating to ethical responsibility, justice, social relations, peaceful coexistence, respect, and responsible conduct provide a meaningful foundation for developing socially responsible and peace-oriented learners.

However, the analysis also indicates that this potential is not yet fully translated into explicit and systematic competency development. The representation of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, digital competence, sustainability, and practical peacebuilding competencies remains comparatively less systematic. Sustainability and peacebuilding themes are often more implicit than explicitly articulated through measurable learning outcomes, learner-centred activities, and assessment practices. Thus, the principal challenge is not the absence of relevant values within Arabic and Islamic Studies, but the limited curricular operationalisation of those values within a contemporary competency-based framework.

The study therefore concludes that meaningful reform should take the form of curriculum renewal rather than curriculum replacement. Arabic and Islamic Studies can retain their linguistic, religious, cultural, and ethical foundations while being more deliberately connected to critical inquiry, communication, collaboration, sustainability, intercultural understanding, conflict resolution, digital literacy, and responsible citizenship. Such alignment would enhance the contemporary relevance of the subjects while preserving their distinctive educational identity. Ultimately, strengthening this alignment could enable Arabic and Islamic Studies to contribute more effectively to the development of learners capable

of responding ethically and constructively to the complex social, environmental, technological, and peacebuilding challenges of the twenty-first century.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

i. Strengthen competency-oriented curriculum design: Curriculum developers should explicitly incorporate critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, digital competence, and ethical reasoning into the learning outcomes of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

ii. Integrate sustainability and peacebuilding across existing content: Rather than creating numerous additional topics, sustainability, environmental responsibility, peaceful coexistence, dialogue, tolerance, conflict resolution, social justice, and responsible citizenship should be systematically connected to existing Arabic and Islamic Studies themes.

iii. Promote learner-centred pedagogy: Teachers should employ discussion, inquiry, debate, collaborative learning, case studies, project-based learning, reflective activities, and problem-solving tasks that allow students to apply disciplinary knowledge to contemporary issues.

iv. Reform assessment practices: Assessment should move beyond predominantly recall-based examinations towards tasks that measure analysis, interpretation, communication, ethical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, and the application of knowledge to sustainability and peacebuilding challenges.

v. Strengthen teacher professional development: Continuous professional development should equip Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers with practical strategies for integrating 21st-century competencies, education for sustainable development, peace education, digital learning, and interdisciplinary approaches into classroom practice.

vi. Develop contextualised curriculum resources: Textbooks and supplementary materials should include contemporary examples relating to climate and environmental challenges, social justice, intercultural relations, peaceful conflict resolution, responsible citizenship, and sustainable development while maintaining appropriate Arabic and Islamic educational perspectives.

vii. Establish systematic curriculum review mechanisms: Education authorities should periodically evaluate Arabic and Islamic Studies curricula against emerging educational priorities, particularly the SDGs, peacebuilding, digital transformation, and evolving 21st-century competencies.

viii. Encourage further empirical research: Future studies should complement curriculum-document analysis with classroom observations, teacher interviews, student perspectives, and assessment of learner outcomes to determine whether intended curricular competencies are actually being developed in practice.

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