
Developing Religious Identity: Assessing the Effects of Aliya Madrasahs on Muslim Students in Bangladesh

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Abstract: *This study explores the complex function of Aliya Madrasahs in Bangladesh, particularly emphasising how they affect Muslim students' identities and religious practices. The study clarifies the complex roles these institutions play through qualitative methods. Aliya Madrasah offers contemporary and religious education, encouraging academic instruction, spiritual development, moral improvement, and community involvement. The curriculum covers various topics and incorporates modern knowledge with Islamic principles. The research also outlines areas that require improvement, including community participation programs, teacher preparation programs, infrastructural development, and curriculum improvements. Aliya Madrasahs can improve their ability to mould practising Muslims who can navigate both the religious and secular arenas by putting these suggestions into practice. This study provides ideas for future growth and development while highlighting Aliya Madrasah's crucial role in shaping Muslim students' religious identities and practices in Bangladesh.*

Keywords: *aliya madrasah, religious education, practising Muslim, pedagogy, Bangladesh.*

INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, Aliya Madrasahs play a significant role in the educational landscape of Bangladesh, particularly in providing religious education to Muslim students. These institutions impart knowledge of Islamic teachings and aim to instil religious identity and practice among their students. The alia system is like the general education system, except that Arabic is taught in addition to general education. The Madrasah Education Board covers religious education in government-registered Madrasahs at the secondary level. After passing "Alim", a student can enrol for 3 additional years to obtain a "Fazil" level. Students can go for further general education and earn a university degree. After passing successfully, they can further enrol for another 2 years to obtain a "Kamil" level degree [1].

This study explores the complex function of Aliya Madrasahs in Bangladesh to shed light on how these establishments support students' socialization, moral upbringing, and religious instruction. The study makes use of qualitative techniques, such as conducting interviews with instructors, students, and administrators from particular Aliya Madrasahs located around Bangladesh. Through an analysis of these institutions' curricula, pedagogical approaches, and sociocultural milieu, the research aims to

disentangle how Aliya Madrasahs mould the religious identities and practices of their pupils.

The ability of Aliya Madrasahs to offer both contemporary and religious education has long been acknowledged [2], [3]. Founded under the Aliya system, these educational establishments provide instruction up to the Kamil (Master) level, fusing Islamic knowledge with modern subjects. The curriculum covers a broad range of topics, such as science, math, languages, Hadith, Arabic, Fiqh, and Quranic studies [4], [5].

In addition, Aliya Madrasahs are centres for spiritual growth, encouraging a close relationship with Allah via regular prayers, recitations of the Quran, and other spiritual exercises [6], [7]. Along with emphasizing moral and ethical principles, they help their students develop virtues like compassion, honesty, integrity, and respect for others. Using community engagement programs, students are motivated to actively engage in societal endeavours and make positive contributions to their communities [8], [9]. Aliya Madrasahs keeps the focus on Islamic education while making adjustments to meet the needs of the modern world. In addition to religious studies, many schools also provide courses in modern education, equipping students with the practical skills and knowledge of religion necessary to thrive in the contemporary world. This essay aims to elucidate the essential role that Aliya Madrasahs play in shaping the religious practices and self-concept of Muslim students in Bangladesh. It looks at these institutions' curriculum, pedagogy, and sociocultural elements to shed light on how Aliya Madrasahs help shape practising Muslims who are rooted in Islamic principles and teachings [10]–[12].

This research aims to provide recommendations for strengthening Aliya Madrasahs and advancing their mission of raising pious and conscientious Muslims through an analysis of the obstacles these institutions face and possible approaches for improving the quality and relevance of their education.

However, it is undetermined how much Aliya Madrasahs contribute to the development of practising Muslims in Bangladesh. This study intends to bridge this gap by conducting a thorough investigation of Bangladeshi Aliya Madrasahs with a focus on their curriculum, pedagogical practices, and sociocultural settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A particular region of great interest and significance is how Muslim students' identities and practices are shaped by the Aliya Madrasahs in Bangladesh. These establishments have long been acknowledged for their support of moral uplift, religious instruction, and socialization within Bangladeshi Muslim communities. As such, understanding the mechanisms through which Aliya Madrasahs create practising Muslims is essential for policymakers, educators, and scholars alike. According to a study [13], The Calcutta Aliya Madrasah was founded in 1780 while under British rule, marking the beginning of the history of Aliya Madrasahs. This historical backdrop sheds light on the beginnings and development of these educational establishments, emphasizing their importance in British colonial policy and Bangladesh's eventual ascent to independence.

On the other hand, from basic to postgraduate, there are five levels in the Aliya Madrasah educational system. At each level, students can choose from a combination of modern and religious instruction. Numerous areas are covered in the curriculum, including physics, math, social sciences, Arabic, and Quranic studies. This integrated approach reflects the dual aim of Aliya Madrasahs, which is to impart to students both modern knowledge and religious education [14].

In a study [15], The teaching and learning methodologies employed in Aliya Madrasahs combine theoretical instruction with practical application. Lab experiments, taking notes, and holding class debates are some of the strategies used to involve

students and enhance their understanding of both religious and secular issues. The goal of creating well-rounded individuals who can thrive in the modern world is aligned with the emphasis on problem-solving, critical thinking, and creative expression.

According to research titled, “In Bangladesh, Aliya Madrasahs Shape Muslim Students' Religious Identities and Practices in a Variety of Ways.” These institutions foster in their students a sense of piety, compassion, and social responsibility by offering Islamic education, spiritual growth, moral training, and community engagement. Through the integration of religious studies and modern education, Aliya Madrasahs equip students with the skills necessary to face modern challenges while maintaining a firm foundation in Islamic values [16].

In research, Several suggestions are made to improve the relevance and efficacy of Aliya Madrasah education. These include infrastructure development projects to handle resource limits, teacher training programs to improve pedagogical abilities, curriculum modifications to comply with contemporary educational standards, and community involvement activities to promote cooperation and support [17].

The literature on Bangladeshi Aliya Madrasahs emphasizes how crucial a role these institutions played in forming Muslim students' religious identities and customs. By providing a comprehensive overview of their historical context, educational system, pedagogical approaches, and impact on student development, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of these institution's significance in the Bangladeshi context. Moreover, the recommendations offered aim to strengthen Aliya Madrasahs and empower them to continue their mission of creating practising Muslims who are well-equipped to thrive in the modern world [18], [19].

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a library research methodology specifically to conduct a literature evaluation to gain a thorough comprehension of the research area. For this kind of research, theoretical data is gathered, compiled, and analyzed from a variety of literary sources, including books, journals, and other library resources [20]. The study was conducted on the information published in different newspapers and websites, and various contemporary research. The sources are chosen depending on their significance to the study [21]–[23].



Figure 1. Profile of Aliya Madrasahs on Muslim Students in Bangladesh

Source: <https://www.google.com/09/05/2024>

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Aliya Madrasah in Bangladesh and It's Education Level

One of the recognized education programs conducted by the Bangladeshi government is called Aliya. Since “Aliya” means “high,” another name for it is “High Madrasah.” It offers modern and religious education up to the Kamil (Master) level. Part of the Calcutta Aliya Madrasah, which was founded in 1780 in Calcutta by Warren Hasting, the Governor-General of British Bengal in India, is the Aliya Madrasah of Bangladesh. The British created the first formal Aliya Madrasah in Calcutta to train young Muslims for the East India Company's public service. However, the Arabic Department, library, and certain office records of the Calcutta Aliya Madrasah were transported to Dacca (Dhaka) in 1947, when the British were leaving the Indian subcontinent, and founded a new Madrasah-E-Aliya Dacca, which is today known as Govt. Madrasah-E-Aliya Dhaka. The first Aliya Madrasah in Bangladesh is the Government Madrasah-E-Aliya Dhaka [24].

Table 1. Equivalence of Aliya Madrasa Degrees in Bangladesh

| Levels | Madrasa Degree | Equivalence to Secular Degrees | Years of Education |
|--------|----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Ibtidai | Primary | (Grades 1–5) |
| 2 | Dhakil | Senior Secondary | (Grades 6–12) |
| 3 | Alim | Higher Secondary | (Grades 13–14) |
| 4 | Fazil | Tertiary | (Grades 15–16) |
| 5 | Kamil | Tertiary | (Grades 17–18) |

The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) published a report in 2016 titled Bangladesh Education Statistics, which states that there are 10,450 Alia madrasahs in operation in Bangladesh with over 3.5 million students enrolled in various classes ranging from primary to postgraduate.

There are five stages in Aliya's educational system. The five levels of Aliya Madrasah are Ibtidae (Primary), Dakhil (Secondary), Alim (Higher Secondary/Intermediate), Fazil (Degree), and Kamil (Postgraduate) [25]. Alim (Higher Secondary/Intermediate) level was made equivalent to the higher secondary formal education system in 1987, while Dakhil (Secondary) level was made equivalent to the formal secondary school in 1985. length of study It is five years for Madrasahs at the Ibtidae (Primary) level, and pupils can enrol between the ages of six to ten.

The formal primary school system and the education systems at various levels are comparable. Ibtidae class 1, class 2, class 3, class 4, and class 5 were the five classes that were studied in these five years of Ibtidae (Primary) level. To complete the Ibtidae (Primary) education, which is similar to the Primary School Certificate (PSC), children in class 5 take the Ibtidae Madrasa test (EBT). This significant public test is administered throughout Bangladesh at the end of the school year.

Following successful completion of the Ibtidae Madrasa Examination (EBT), students begin the three-year Dakhil (Junior Secondary) level. Students have to complete Dakhil lessons on the sixth, seventh, and eighth days of these three years. To pass the Junior Dakhil Certificate (JDC) Examination after the school year and earn the Junior School Certificate (JSC), pupils must pass the Dakhil (Junior Secondary) level 8.

After passing the JDC, students will be able to enrol in the secondary Dakhil level. There are two classes in Dakhil Secondary School: Dakhil Class 9 and Dakhil Class 10. Students in class 9 take the annual exam, which is overseen by the relevant madrasah, after the school year. Students will be placed in Dakhil Class 10, also known as Dakhil (secondary), after passing level 9. At this level, pupils will take the Dakhil Certificate

Examination, which is the equivalent of the Secondary School Certificate SSC, after the year by sitting for a large public exam. The General group, Science group, Muzabbid group, and Hifzul Qur'an group are the four groups that make up this Dakhil (secondary) level. Pupils have a choice based on their interests and plans.

The two-year Alim (Higher Secondary/Intermediate) level begins after the Dakhil (secondary) level is finished. There are four groups at this level as well: business studies, science, Muzabbid-e-Mahir, and general. These two Madrasah levels, Alim (Higher Secondary/Intermediate) and Dakhil (Secondary) are crucial for the student's future academic success. The results of these two stages dictate whether postsecondary education will be available in the future at domestic or foreign public or private universities. The final two classes in the Aliya Madrasah educational system are called Fazil and Kamil. The General and Muzabbid parts of the Fazil are often split into two years and studied independently, according to the Curriculum and Textbook Wing's 2008 Fazil Examination. As to the BANBEIS (2000) report, Fazil (Degree) maintained the 2-year pass course duration while creating a new 3-year Honors course system.

According to the Curriculum and Textbook Wing, The four subjects covered at the two-year college level of the Kamil Examination, 2008, are Arabic literature, Hadith, Fiqh, and Tafsir. Through the Madrasah Education Board, the Ministry of Higher Education oversees the academic and administrative goals of Aliya Madrasah's six levels: Ibtidae (Primary), Dakhil (Secondary), Alim (Higher Secondary/Intermediate), Fazil (Degree), and Kamil (Postgraduate). With the equivalent of a general degree and a master's, Fazil and Kamil levels were transferred in 2009 to the Islamic University, one of the largest government universities in the Kustia District of Bangladesh [26].

Aliya Madrasahs—often just called madrasahs—are essential to the advancement of Islamic education and the formation of students' religious identities in a variety of Muslim communities across the globe. These educational establishments function as hubs of knowledge where students gain a thorough grasp of Islamic ethics, values, and principles in addition to learning about the Quran and Islamic teachings. Giving pupils a thorough understanding of the Quran, Hadith (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Tafsir (Quranic exegesis), and other religious disciplines is one of the main goals of Aliya Madrasahs. Students acquire competence in Arabic, the language of the Quran, via rigorous study and teaching from experienced experts. This allows them to immediately access and read Islamic scriptures.

Moreover, the purpose of Aliya Madrasahs is to facilitate the generational transfer of Islamic customs, legacy, and culture. Students interact with Islam's rich literary, cultural, and intellectual traditions in addition to studying its theological tenets. A profound appreciation for Islamic civilization and its contributions to numerous disciplines of knowledge is fostered by this all-encompassing approach to education. Aliya Madrasahs place a strong emphasis on helping students develop moral and ethical virtues in addition to academic knowledge. Students are encouraged to live their lives as examples of compassion, fairness, humility, honesty, and empathy through the inclusion of these principles in the curriculum. Students' religious identities are shaped by this emphasis on character development, which also instills in them a strong feeling of duty towards their faith and community.

Additionally, Aliya Madrasahs play a significant role in the diffusion and preservation of Islamic scholarship. These institutions have produced numerous well-known academics and jurists who have made significant contributions to Islam's intellectual heritage. In the Muslim community, madrasahs are essential for developing future leaders, teachers, and intellectuals because they foster a scholarly atmosphere and promote critical thinking. While maintaining a traditional emphasis on religious instruction, Aliya Madrasahs are also changing to accommodate the changing demands

of contemporary society. In addition to religious studies, many schools today provide modern courses like physics, math, and languages. This gives pupils a well-rounded education that not only prepares them for the difficulties of the modern world but also maintains a firm foundation in Islamic principles.

In conclusion, Aliya Madrasahs have a variety of functions in advancing Islamic education and forming students' religious identities. These establishments, with their focus on the teachings of the Quran, moral growth, cultural preservation, and academic pursuits, remain essential foundations of Islamic education, educating a new generation of devout followers who are dedicated to maintaining the tenets of their religion [27],[28].



Figure 2. Learning Process of Aliya Madrasah Students in Bangladesh

Source: <https://www.google.com/09/05/2024>

Aliya Madrasah Curriculum and Preparing Individuals

The present curriculum of Bangladesh Aliya Madrasah is not the same as the Calcutta Madrasah curriculum of that time [29]. Modern subjects are integrated into the curriculum. Because both religious and modern education are taught together, Aliya education has currently evolved into a distinctive system [30], [31]. The Ibtidae Madrasah follows a curriculum akin to that of elementary schools. Bengali, arithmetic, and general studies are examples of modern courses; on the other hand, students must learn Arabic and grammar, the Quran and Hadith, Aqaid and Fiqah, and Tazwid in the primary level of the Ibtidae Madrasah (Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board [BMEB], n.d.).

Eight subjects are required of students in the four Dakhil groups, according to the curriculum of Aliya Madrasah Bangladesh. These subjects consist of three general subjects (mathematics, English, and Bengali), five religious subjects (Quran Majid, Hadith Sharif, Arabic 1st part, Arabic 2nd part, Fiqh, and Usul-ul-Fiqh), and no mathematics for the Mujabbid and Hifzul Quran groups. Two more subjects—Islamic history and the social sciences—as well as one elective, are required for the general education group, while two additional subjects—chemistry and physics—and one elective are required for the science group. Islamic history, two additional general group topics, and one elective must be taken by the Mujabbid and Hifzul Qur'an groups instead of mathematics.

The general group is required to take 12 subjects in total at the Alim level, with 10 coming from majors and 2 from electives. According to Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board [BMEB], (n.d.), the ten subjects are Qur'an Mazid, Hadith Sharif and Usul-ul-Hadish, Fiqh First Part, Fiqh Second Part, Arabic Second Part, Bengali, English, Islamic History, and Blagat Mantik. The electives are Islamic Economics, Civics, Higher English, Urdu, Farsi, and Computer.

The scientific group's students will study Arabic, Bengali, and English together with the Qur'an, Hadith, Usulul-Hadish, Fiqh, and Usul-ul-Fiqh for the first, second, and third papers in physics, chemistry, and biology. Science students will study any two of the following as elective courses: Arabic Grammar and Fiqh, Higher Math 1st and 2nd papers, and Biology 1st and 2nd papers.

The Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Arabic, Bengali, and English are all included in the Alim Business Studies Group, along with Business Studies 1st and 2nd part, Accounting 1st Part, and Accounting 2nd Part with Qur'an and Hadish, Arabic and Fiqh, Bangla and English, and the study of any two of these subjects for elective courses.

The Qur'an Mazid, Hadith, Usul-ul-Hadish, Fiqh, Bengali, English, and Arabic literature will all be studied by the Alim Mujabbid Group in addition to Tajwid 1st and 2nd parts, Qirati Tertil, and Qirati Hador. Mujabbid Group will select two electives from Islamic Economics, Civics, Higher English, Urdu, Farsi, and Higher Math to study. At the Fazil and Kamil levels, no social science courses are offered. Their instruction is in Arabic, and they place a lot greater emphasis on religious topics [32].

Because Aliya Madrasah focuses on contemporary themes in addition to religious and social science disciplines, its teaching and learning methodologies are both theoretical and practical. In the classroom, the instructor talks go over theories, and writes explanations of complex concepts for the students to understand. The students then take notes on the major ideas that are put on the board [33],[34]. In addition, students take notes on the chapter's theory and content, pose questions when they are learning, and occasionally engage in debates about intriguing but unclear topics.

To assess each student's level of inventiveness and comprehension, the teacher also poses questions based on the preceding chapter. In science and contemporary courses, students are taken to the lab to receive a practical explanation from the teacher after the teacher provides a theoretical and understandable explanation inside the classroom [35]. Students develop their logical reasoning, creative thinking, argumentative, and observational skills through this technique. For instance, the teacher at the madrasah explains water to the pupils as a Niyamot (bounty) from Allah. The theoretical discussion of water covers a rational explanation for why Allah provides us with water, while the practical talk covers the composition and origin of water.

The Role of Alia Madrasah in Creating Practicing Muslims

Alia Madrasah plays a major and diverse function in educating future Muslims. As Islamic educational establishments, Alia Madrasahs are essential in fostering students' development into pious, practising Muslims. These are a few essential facets of their role [36]–[39]:

1. **Islamic Education:** Teaching the Quran, Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Tafsir (Quranic exegesis), and other facets of Islamic theology and law is the main objective of Alia Madrasah. These institutions promote strong religious ideas and practices in their students by giving them a thorough understanding of Islam.
2. **Spiritual Development:** In addition to academic instruction, Alia Madrasahs places a strong emphasis on spiritual growth. Students are encouraged to cultivate a deeper

connection to Allah and a sense of piety and devotion through daily prayers, Quranic recitation sessions, dzikr (remembrance of Allah), and other spiritual practices.

3. **Moral and Ethical Principles:** Alia Madrasas places a strong emphasis on teaching its pupils moral and ethical principles in addition to religious lessons. They place a strong emphasis on qualities like humility, compassion, honesty, integrity, and respect for others. The madrasas strive to raise people who uphold moral standards in all facets of their lives by fostering these ideals.
4. **Community Engagement:** Alia Madrasas frequently act as hubs for outreach and community involvement. Students are encouraged to take part in a variety of community service projects, including events and gatherings organized by their religion, working for neighbourhood projects, and providing aid to the less fortunate. Students gain an understanding of the value of giving back to society and making constructive contributions to their communities through such events.
5. **Role Models:** Students looked up to the instructors and academics at Alia Madrasas as role models. Students are motivated to aspire to be as good as they are in their academic and religious endeavours by their knowledge, morality, and model behaviour.
6. **Inclusion of Modern Education:** Although the main focus of Alia madrasahs is Islamic education, many of them also include modern education courses like science, math, and languages in their curricula. With the help of this all-encompassing approach, students can learn various religious and secular subjects, enabling them to manage the contemporary world while maintaining a strong sense of their Islamic identity.

All things considered, the function that Alia Madrasas plays in creating practising Muslims is essential to raising people who are not only knowledgeable about Islamic teachings but also actively live out the teachings of Islam. Alia Madrasas play a vital role in the raising of devoted and conscientious Muslims by offering a comprehensive education that covers religious knowledge, spiritual development, moral values, and community engagement.

Recommendations of the Study

- a. **Curriculum Reforms:** Examine and update the curriculum to make sure it meets both the needs of students in a society that is changing quickly and modern educational standards. Along with religious instruction, place a strong emphasis on the development of practical skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving techniques.
- b. **Programs for Teacher Training:** Create specific courses for teachers that are adapted to the particular requirements of Aliya Madrasahs. Give educators the chance to continue developing professionally so they may improve their subject-matter expertise, pedagogical acumen, and awareness of best practices in education.
- c. **Infrastructure Development Initiatives:** Give infrastructure development initiatives top priority to solve the infrastructure issues that Aliya Madrasahs are now facing. This entails building new school structures, remodelling already existing ones, and furnishing classrooms with cutting-edge teaching aids and technology.
- d. **Initiatives for Community Engagement:** Provide venues for significant interaction between Aliya Madrasahs and the communities they cater to. Involve parents, community leaders, and other interested parties in the school's operations and decision-making processes by planning frequent meetings, workshops, and events.

By putting these suggestions into practice, Aliya Madrasahs will be able to overcome obstacles, improve the calibre and relevance of their education, and more effectively

carry out their objective of producing practising Muslims who are prepared for success in both the religious and secular spheres [40].

CONCLUSION

A thorough grasp of the importance of Aliya Madrasahs in forming the identities and customs of Muslim students in Bangladesh may be gained from the research “Creating a Practising Muslim: A Study of Aliya Madrasah in Bangladesh.” The study clarifies how Aliya Madrasahs support their students' religious education, moral growth, and socialization through a qualitative examination of the curriculum, pedagogy, and sociocultural setting of these establishments. The results highlight the complex nature of Aliya Madrasahs, which promote spiritual development, moral and ethical values, community involvement, and the integration of contemporary education in addition to teaching religious knowledge. These establishments are essential foundations for the advancement of Islamic education and the raising of a new generation of pious adherents dedicated to keeping the precepts of their religion. The research also highlights important areas for development and makes suggestions for bolstering Aliya Madrasahs, such as curriculum revisions, teacher training programs, infrastructure development projects, and community engagement activities. By implementing these suggestions into practice, Aliya Madrasahs will be able to overcome obstacles and improve the calibre and applicability of their instruction, better achieving their goal of generating practising Muslims who are capable of thriving in situations that are both religious and secular. The study's findings emphasize the critical role Aliya Madrasahs play in forming Muslim students' religious identities and practices in Bangladesh. They also point to future directions for growth and improvement that are in step with current demands and issues.

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Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the main contributor to this paper, all authors read and approved the final paper, and all authors declared no conflict of interest.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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