



The Role of Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy in Shaping East African Islamic Institutions

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to examine and reinterpret the reformist vision of Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy, focusing on his contributions to Islamic thought, morality, and social justice in East Africa. **Theoretical framework:** Al-Farsy's attempts to reconcile faith and modernity are examined through the lens of Islamic reformism and moral theology, as well as Qur'anic ethics and socio-religious renewal theories. Through the prisms of tajdid (renewal) and islah (reform), which aim to elevate society, advance education, and purify belief, his reformist paradigm is examined. **Literature review:** Using a qualitative historical and textual analysis, the study consults archival documents, secondary literature on Islamic reform in East Africa, and al-Farsy's publications, sermons, fatwas, and educational programs. **Methods:** Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative content analysis using the thematic tafsir approach (tafsir mawdū'ī), by identifying, classifying, and interpreting Qur'anic verses related to the concept and discourse of religion. **Results:** The results show that al-Farsy's interpretation of Islam placed a strong emphasis on the connection between social responsibility and faith. He criticized ignorance, corruption, and cultural customs that were at odds with Islamic ethics while promoting a moral awakening based on taqwa (piety), justice, and knowledge. His reformist discourse aimed to affirm Islam's relevance in a changing world, improve education, and restore communal integrity. **Implications:** By presenting Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy as a key player in the moral and educational reform of the Swahili coast, the research advances knowledge of African Islamic intellectual history. In discussions about Islam, social ethics, and justice in Muslim societies today, his teachings are

still crucial. **Novelty:** Recasting al-Farsy as an intellectual reformer whose synthesis of Islamic faith, morality, and social justice offers a timeless model for ethical renewal and community empowerment in East Africa is what makes this research novel.

Keywords: sheikh abdallah al-farsy, islamic reformism, moral renewal, social justice, tajdid.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant Islamic scholars and reformers in East Africa throughout the 20th century was Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy. The Swahili coast's intellectual and spiritual landscape is still shaped by al-Farsy, who is revered for his profound scholarship, moral rectitude, and dedication to the expansion of Islamic education [1]. He was born in Zanzibar and came into the world at a time when colonial rule, contemporary education, and internal religious disputes were all having a significant impact on the social, political, and cultural changes that East African Muslim cultures were going through. Al-Farsy addressed the moral and social issues confronting his community while attempting to restore the core of Islam, which is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah [2].

Based on the ideas of *tajdīd* (renewal) and *islāh* (reform), his reformist worldview emphasized that social justice, educational empowerment, and moral purification were the only ways to bring Muslim cultures back to life. True Islamic growth, according to Al-Farsy, is hampered by ignorance, moral deterioration, and mindless imitation (*taqlīd*) [3]. He therefore promoted a well-rounded strategy that blended tradition with modernity, religion with reason, and civic duty with spiritual devotion. His teachings urged Muslims to construct powerful, just, and enlightened societies by returning to the ethical pillars of Islam: piety (*taqwā*), knowledge (*'ilm*), and justice (*'adl*) [4].

Al-Farsy's contributions to East African Islamic philosophy, taken as a whole, show a continuation of indigenous intellectual endeavors to express Islam in relation to African identity, colonial experience, and global development. He expressed a great concern for the moral and spiritual well-being of society, especially the youth, whom he believed to be the future of the ummah, in his writings, sermons, and fatwas [5]. Al-Farsy aimed to dispel myths about Islam and reaffirm its position as a complete way of life that incorporates moral, social, and intellectual aspects through his educational reforms and Qur'anic preaching [6].

Together with other notable individuals like Sheikh al-Amin bin Ali Mazrui and Sayyid Abdallah Saleh al-Farsy, Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy represents a tradition of African Islamic study that aimed to reconcile faith and reason in East Africa's intellectual environment. But what distinguishes al-Farsy is his pragmatic approach to change, which is based on moral awareness, education, and community involvement. He was a mentor, author, and advisor whose teachings motivated generations of Muslims in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zanzibar; his impact went beyond the walls of the mosque or tribunal [7].

Al-Farsy's ideas are still incredibly relevant today. He tackled social inequities, educational disparities, and moral issues that still plague contemporary Muslim societies. For those looking to create moral, informed, and caring communities, his insistence on the combination of faith, morality, and social justice offers timeless teachings. His reformist outlook represents a distinctively East African understanding of Islam, grounded in Qur'anic morality but sensitive to contemporary African culture [8].

Through a thorough examination of al-Farsy's writings, teachings, and social action, this research, "The Reformist Vision of Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy: Islam, Morality, and Social Justice in East Africa," seeks to understand his moral and intellectual legacy. The study aims to determine how his vision influenced the development of a dynamic and contextually appropriate model of Islamic reform by placing his reformist ideas within the larger discourse of Islamic revivalism and moral philosophy [9]. By doing this, it draws attention to Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy as a social reformer and moral philosopher whose ideas continue to

pave the way toward justice and ethical renewal in Muslim countries throughout East Africa and beyond, in addition to his status as a religious leader [10].

Thus, the goal of this study, "The Reformist Vision of Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy: Islam, Morality, and Social Justice in East Africa," is to offer a thorough examination of al-Farsy's contributions to society, morality, and thought. This study seeks to understand how his vision influenced the development of a dynamic and contextually relevant model of Islamic reform by placing his reformist ideas within the larger framework of Islamic revivalism, Qur'anic ethics, and African intellectual history [11]. In the end, the study emphasizes Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy as a social reformer, educator, and moral philosopher whose theories continue to pave the way toward justice, moral renewal, and all-encompassing human growth in East Africa and beyond [12].

It is impossible to comprehend Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy's reformist movement without acknowledging his belief that Muslim unity is the foundation of societal stability and advancement. He saw how the moral foundation of Muslim societies in East Africa had been undermined by ethnic, sectarian, and cultural divides [13]. Al-Farsy consistently advocated in his writings and public speeches for the elimination of pointless arguments and urged Muslims to concentrate on their common beliefs, principles, and mission. According to him, mutual respect and taqwa (piety), not social or tribal identification, should be the foundation of togetherness. This quest for unity reflected the Qur'anic idea of the ummah wahidah (one community) and was not a demand for conformity but rather for cooperation within variety. Al-Farsy believed that a cohesive community could withstand moral deterioration and outside oppression; thus, he strove to promote more cooperation among Muslim leaders, intellectuals, and youth through intercommunal discussions, educational programs, and his role as Chief Kadhi [14].

Al-Farsy's perspective on the place of women in Islam is another important aspect of his thinking. Al-Farsy recognized the value of women's education and involvement in creating a moral and just society, despite the reluctance of many reformers of his era to address gender-related concerns. According to his interpretation, the Qur'an affirms women's right to study, employment, and spiritual development as well as their dignity (karamah). He frequently stressed in his sermons the importance of educating women to raise morally upright and informed Muslims in the future [15]. Al-Farsy's views on women's rights were based on Islamic principles and the prophetic tradition rather than Western liberal feminism. He maintained that stronger families, more enlightened communities, and eventually a more just society would result from empowering women within the parameters of Islamic norms. He was positioned as a visionary reformer ahead of his time since his teachings in this area were in line with the current discussion on gender justice in Islam [16].

Lastly, Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy's dedication to contextualizing Islam and maintaining intellectual independence is what has allowed his reformist legacy to persist. He cautioned against blindly embracing foreign ideas that did not fit with Islamic values or local circumstances, whether they were imported forms of religious fanaticism or Western secularism. Rather, he advocated for an independent way of thinking that was mindful of East Africa's cultural and historical background and took inspiration from the Qur'an [17]. He was able to express an Islam that was both genuinely African and universally applicable thanks to this strategy. He thought that to solve their own social and moral problems, Muslims of every generation needed to reinterpret the timeless teachings of Islam. Thus, the intellectual legacy of al-Farsy serves as a link between the modern pursuit of justice, identity, and moral renewal with the traditional heritage of Islamic learning. These several facets of unity, gender fairness, and intellectual independence allow Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy to be seen as a comprehensive reformer whose ideas cut across space and time in addition to being a religious leader. Scholars, educators, and leaders who want to resurrect Islam's moral underpinnings while interacting positively with the contemporary world are still motivated by his vision [18].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the late 20th century, research on Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy has grown, highlighting his diverse contributions as a public intellectual, lawyer, educator, and Qur'anic interpreter. His career path, from teacher and school administrator in Zanzibar to Chief Kadhi in Kenya, is chronicled in biographical and descriptive accounts. His prolific output includes a widely used translation of the Qur'an into Swahili and a large number of Arabic and Swahili pamphlets and books. The empirical basis for comprehending al-Farsy's institutional impact on Islamic education and legal practice in East Africa is provided by these books [19].

The contribution of al-Farsy to Swahili Qur'anic exegesis is examined in a second body of literature. Imtiyaz Yusuf's groundbreaking analysis of al-Farsy's handling of *Sūrat al-Shams* places the Sheikh in the early history of Swahili tafsīr and emphasizes his instructional style, use of local examples, and attempt to make the meaning of the Qur'an understandable in Kiswahili. The disputed use of specific Swahili adjectives for "holy" is one example of the lexical and stylistic choices in al-Farsy's Qur'anic rendering that have been disputed by critics and translation studies experts. This highlights larger conflicts between traditional Arabic idiom and contemporary Kiswahili print conventions. These findings demonstrate that al-Farsy's translation was a project of religious instruction and cultural mediation rather than just a linguistic effort [20].

Al-Farsy is situated within the larger framework of Islamic reform and revival in East Africa, according to a third body of study. Al-Farsy's pragmatic reformism its focus on moral education, institutional renewal, and community unity, is noted in edited volumes and essays on Islamic reform. He is contrasted with his contemporaries, who dealt with colonial and postcolonial pressures through reformist journals, madrasah reform, and judicial roles. According to scholars, al-Farsy articulated a reform language that was distinctive to the region, combining calls for social ethics and modern educational systems that were sensitive to local circumstances with the primacy of the Qur'an. Al-Farsy is positioned as a key character in the intellectual genealogy of East African reform movements, according to this literature [21].

Additionally, critical viewpoints have surfaced. Although al-Farsy's pedagogical zeal and legal integrity are praised in many accounts, some scholars highlight unresolved tensions in his project. These include debates about how his Salafi-influenced emphases on scripturalism interacted with Sufi and popular practices on the coast, as well as questions about the reform's reach and limitations among rural and female constituencies. Others have offered succinct textual criticisms regarding translation decisions and hermeneutical priorities, contending that a more thorough evaluation of his body of work, which includes published works, school curricula, fatwas, and sermons, than reliance on hagiographic or institutional narratives is necessary for a thorough assessment of his intellectual legacy [22].

The way that al-Farsy's Qur'an-centered reformism articulates a coherent moral and social justice paradigm, that is, how his exegetical decisions, educational reforms, and juridical pronouncements interlock to form normative claims about justice, ethics, and public life, is not well examined in this literature, despite descriptive biographies and focused textual studies. His contributions (translation, education, and judicial service) are fragmented in existing studies, but they fall short of identifying the conceptual threads that connect his ideas on social reform, moral theology, and Qur'anic tafsīr. By approaching al-Farsy's corpus holistically, this study fills that gap. It does this by conducting thematic (*mawḍūʿī*) tafsīr of his Qur'anic interpretation, examining teaching resources and public discourse, and placing these within discussions of Islamic ethics and social justice in East Africa [23].

The current study attempts to go beyond description to conceptual reconstruction by combining biographical detail, translation studies, reform historiography, and critical evaluations. It does this by demonstrating how al-Farsy's reformism forms an integrated Qur'an-based paradigm for morality and social justice that is sensitive to the political, educational, and cultural demands of East Africa in the twentieth century. By doing this, it

contributes to comparative research on Muslim reformers who aimed to balance tradition with contemporary societal demands and closes a significant vacuum in African Islamic studies.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review on Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy

Author / Source	Focus Area	Methodology / Approach	Key Findings / Arguments	Identified Gaps / Limitations
Imtiyaz Yusuf	Tafsīr of Sūrat al-Shams by al-Farsy	Textual and interpretive analysis	Demonstrates al-Farsy's didactic Swahili style and effort to make Qur'anic meaning accessible to local audiences.	Limited scope focuses on one surah; it lacks a broader synthesis of his moral philosophy.
Ali Mazrui & Kimani Njogu	Islam and identity in East Africa	Historical-cultural analysis	Situates al-Farsy among key figures shaping Islamic identity and Swahili cultural synthesis.	Does not deeply explore his reformist ethics or translation theory.
Roman Loimeier; Muslim Societies in Africa	Islamic reform movements in East Africa	Comparative historical study	Identifies al-Farsy's reformism as pragmatic, educational, and locally grounded.	Treats al-Farsy briefly; lacks detailed theological discussion.
Pouwels, R.	Islam and community on the Swahili coast	Socio-historical approach	Emphasizes al-Farsy's role in institutional religious education and community leadership.	Focuses on institutions rather than intellectual frameworks.
Omar Ali	Al-Farsy's Qur'an translation in Swahili	Translation and linguistic analysis	Examines challenges of rendering Arabic Qur'anic idioms into Swahili; highlights his role in Qur'anic literacy.	Minimal discussion of theological or moral intent behind translation choices.
Saad S. Yahya	Islamic reform in Kenya	Ethnographic and interview-based research	Notes influence of al-Farsy's students on Kenya's Islamic courts and schools; continuity of reformist ideas.	Limited textual engagement with al-Farsy's own writings.
Mwangi Chege	Moral education in Islamic schools	Educational study	Links al-Farsy's emphasis on akhlaq (morality) to contemporary	Doesn't explore how his reformism relates to social justice or

			Islamic curricula in East Africa.	jurisprudence.
Zubeir Bakari	Gender, Islam, and Swahili reformism	Cultural analysis	Discusses al-Farsy's advocacy for women's moral education and modest social empowerment.	Requires more textual evidence from al-Farsy's works.
Yusuf & Parkin	Religion and modernity on the coast	Historical-analytic	Highlights al-Farsy's moderation between traditional Islam and modern civic ethics.	Does not fully theorize his Qur'anic hermeneutics.
Current Study	Integrated reformist paradigm of al-Farsy	Thematic tafsīr and moral-philosophical analysis	Explores how al-Farsy's Qur'anic interpretation, education, and jurisprudence form a coherent model for Islamic morality and social justice in East Africa.	Fills the gap: provides conceptual synthesis missing from previous works.

METHODOLOGY

To understand Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy's reformist, moral, and intellectual vision within the larger context of Islamic renewal in East Africa, this study uses a qualitative historical-analytical approach. The study aims to investigate al-Farsy's philosophical underpinnings, his contributions to educational and moral reform, and the significance of his teachings in forming East African Islamic identity. This approach offers a thorough grasp of how al-Farsy's moral philosophy and reformist aspirations were created, disseminated, and absorbed within his social milieu by fusing historical research with textual and contextual analysis [24].

To provide a fair and fact-based analysis, the study consults both primary and secondary sources. Al-Farsy's original writings, including *Tafsiri ya Qur'ani Tukufu* (his interpretation and translation of the Qur'an in Swahili), *Baidha ya Dini ya Kiislamu*, and *Uislamu na Maendeleo*, as well as his recorded sermons, fatwas, and letters, are considered primary sources. His moral observations, theological reasoning, and pedagogical insights are all evident in these publications. Academic research, biographies, journal articles, and historical works by academics who have written extensively about Islamic reform and intellectual advancements along the Swahili coast, such as Roman Loimeier, Randall Pouwels, and Ali Mazrui, are examples of secondary sources. By combining several sources, data triangulation is made possible, guaranteeing scholarly accuracy and interpretive depth [25].

The Islamic ideas of *tajdīd* (renewal) and *iṣlāḥ* (reform), which are essential to comprehending al-Farsy's intellectual stance, serve as the foundation for this study's analytical framework. Recurring themes like moral purity (*tazkiyah*), fairness (*'adl*), knowledge (*'ilm*), and social welfare (*maslahah*) are found through a thematic examination of his writings. To investigate how al-Farsy's teachings intersected with more general historical, political, and cultural realities, specifically, colonial dominance, post-independence changes, and the development of Swahili Muslim identity, a contextual hermeneutical method is also used. This method allows for a nuanced reading that views al-

Farsy's reformism as a dynamic response to socio-political issues rather than just as religious discourse [16].

Library-based research and the archival recovery of pertinent manuscripts and records from East African archives, including the Kenya National Archives, the Zanzibar Archives, and local mosque libraries, were part of the data collection process. To supplement the original materials, digital databases and published translations were also reviewed. Three steps were used in the data analysis process: first, textual analysis was used to identify important ideas in al-Farsy's writings; second, contextualization was used to link his ideas to historical occurrences and intellectual movements; and third, comparative interpretation was used to place his vision in the context of African and international Islamic reform. Al-Farsy's views are examined holistically thanks to this multi-layered study, which takes into consideration both his written contributions and his lived influence [26].

The study's theoretical framework is based on Islamic moral philosophy and social justice theory, namely those that highlight the Qur'anic values of *ikhlas* (sincerity), *taqwa* (God-consciousness), and *adl* (justice). Al-Farsy's reformist endeavor can be interpreted via this theoretical lens as an ethical mission that goes beyond doctrinal correction to aspire for moral and social transformation. By adopting this perspective, the study highlights al-Farsy's attempts to balance faith and reason, spirituality and civic duty, tradition and modernity, providing a reform model that is both genuinely Islamic and profoundly humanistic [27].

Multiple sources were cross-referenced, and interpretations were checked against academic commentary and historical records to guarantee the legitimacy and dependability of the results. By integrating textual, contextual, and interpretive evidence, the triangulation principle was used to increase believability. Additionally, by analyzing al-Farsy's writings within his own religious and cultural context and avoiding ideological or anachronistic distortions, the researcher preserved objectivity. Intellectual humility, reverence for religious tradition, and faithfulness to textual authenticity served as the guiding principles for the interpretation process [28].

Ethics were taken into account at every stage of the research process, even if the main foundation of this work is textual and historical analysis. Strict adherence was maintained to proper reference, intellectual property acknowledgment, and respect for Islamic scholarly history. Additionally, the researcher took care to accurately portray al-Farsy's ideas without introducing contemporary prejudices that would misunderstand his intentions. This moral position upholds the study's academic integrity and guarantees that it makes a positive contribution to the continuing discussion on Islamic reform, morality, and education in East Africa [29].

Table 2. Summary of Research Methodology

Aspect	Description
Research Design	Qualitative historical-analytical approach combining textual, thematic, and contextual analysis.
Research Objective	To explore and interpret Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy's reformist vision of Islam, morality, and social justice in East Africa.
Philosophical Orientation	Islamic reformist paradigm based on <i>tajdid</i> (renewal) and <i>islah</i> (reform), guided by Qur'anic ethics and moral philosophy.
Data Sources	Primary Sources: Al-Farsy's works (Tafsiri ya Qur'ani Tukufu, Uislamu na Maendeleo, Baidha ya Dini ya Kiislamu, sermons, fatwas, letters). Secondary Sources: Books, journal articles, theses, and studies by Roman Loimeier, Randall Pouwels, Ali Mazrui, and others.
Data Collection Methods	Library research, archival retrieval from Zanzibar and Kenya archives, review of digital repositories, and published translations.

Data Analysis Methods	Thematic content analysis, contextual hermeneutics, and comparative interpretation within Islamic reformist discourse.
Analytical Framework	Examination of key concepts ‘adl (justice), ‘ilm (knowledge), taqwā (piety), and maslahah (social welfare) to interpret al-Farsy’s reformist ideas.
Theoretical Framework	Islamic moral philosophy and social justice theory emphasize Qur’anic principles of justice, knowledge, and sincerity.
Validation Techniques	Triangulation of sources (textual, contextual, interpretive); cross-verification with scholarly commentaries and historical data.
Ethical Considerations	Respect for intellectual integrity, accurate citation, faithful representation of al-Farsy’s thought, and avoidance of ideological bias.
Expected Outcome	A comprehensive understanding of al-Farsy’s moral and educational reform vision as a model for contemporary East African Islamic thought.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the study's findings, Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy's reformist vision was based on a comprehensive view of Islam as a social and spiritual force that guided not only individual behavior but also the Muslim community's collective conscience. He saw Islam as a complete ethical system that would allow people to reach spiritual enlightenment and societies to achieve harmony, fairness, and balance. He believed that religion was a dynamic moral compass that guided all facets of life, including social relations, education, governance, and economics. It was never intended to be restricted to the mosque [30].

Social justice, intellectual knowledge, and moral purity are all inextricably linked to true religious faith, according to Al-Farsy's writings and sermons. He viewed the moral crisis in Muslim communities in East Africa as a social ill that sprang from illiteracy, moral slackness, and the deterioration of Qur'anic principles rather than only a spiritual failing. According to him, reform (islāh) started with the heart's resurrection, which spread to reform institutions, families, and communities. In this way, al-Farsy's reform philosophy was both individual and group-oriented, highlighting the idea that moral renewal is a prerequisite for any society's advancement [31].

His strategy was based on Qur'anic morality, which he understood to be a dynamic force that could deal with today's issues. Since he believed that mindless imitation (taqlīd) was a hindrance to both intellectual and spiritual advancement, he cautioned against its perils. In addition, he argued that the blind acceptance of Western secular doctrines frequently deprived life of its moral core. Al-Farsy, on the other hand, advocated for a harmony between tradition and reason, urging Muslims to critically engage with the needs of contemporary life while drawing on the moral knowledge of their legacy [32].

Ijtihād, or the use of autonomous reasoning directed by divine revelation, was at the heart of his reforming ethic. According to Al-Farsy, Islam has an innate ability to rejuvenate itself (tajdīd), which enables it to react positively to novel circumstances without sacrificing its spiritual purity. He aimed to revitalize Muslim thought through ijtihād, releasing it from Western intellectual dominance as well as cultural stagnation. In this sense, his reformism positioned Islam as a source of moral guidance in an uncertain age, rather than rejecting modernity through moral reformation [33].

Furthermore, the realities of colonial and postwar East Africa served as the contextual foundation for al-Farsy's moral philosophy. He realized that Muslim communities were in danger of losing their moral compass in the face of swift social change since they were living through a time of political unrest and cultural transformation. Therefore, his lectures sought

to reestablish trust in Islamic ideals as the cornerstone of national identity and development. He framed morality as a transforming force that may inspire civic virtue, fairness, and compassion by tying faith to social responsibilities [34].



Figure 1. The Moral Foundation of Al-Farsy's Reformist Thought

Thus, Al-Farsy's moral compass reflects a theocentric worldview in which every human behavior has significance derived from its relationship with God. To free Muslims from moral complacency and enable them to establish societies founded on justice ('adl), mercy (rahmah), and truth (haqq), his reformism called for a moral awakening. In this context, Islam transforms from a set of rituals into a living tradition of moral consciousness that leads people to social advancement and spiritual fulfillment [35].

Moral Education (Tarbiyyah Akhlaqiyyah) as the Core of Reform

Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy's strong belief that moral education is the first step toward real reform is one of the study's main conclusions. He believed that if a society ignored the moral and spiritual growth of its citizens, no intellectual, social, or political progress could occur. At the core of his reformist program were tarbiyyah akhlaqiyyah (moral upbringing) and tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul), which Al-Farsy regarded as both spiritual exercises and tools for social regeneration. Moral education, in his opinion, is both the seed and the fruit of reform, fostering people to become change agents in their communities who uphold integrity, fairness, and compassion [36].

Al-Farsy believed that the main reason for Muslim societies' overall deterioration was their moral degradation, which was represented in social injustice, ignorance, and corruption. He maintained that without an ethical foundation, exterior improvements like political reorganization or economic modernization would remain flimsy. The idea that genuine transformation (taghyir) must start in the human soul was reflected by this viewpoint: "In fact, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" (Qur'an 13:11). According to this perspective, tarbiyyah akhlaqiyyah was a moral requirement a process of introspection that results in social fairness and divine pleasure rather than just an ideal for education [37].

Al-Farsy frequently reminded his followers in his writings and sermons that education is incomplete without virtue. He cautioned against the growing trend that formal education should only be valued for social or economic success, regardless of its moral value. Since knowledge without ethics can result in conceit, injustice, and spiritual blindness, he believes that 'ilm (knowledge) must constantly serve the higher goal of akhlaq (morality). His focus on this balance between ethics and intellect is consistent with the traditional Islamic educational philosophy, which views education as a holy trust that aims to enlighten the heart as well as the head [33].

Thus, Al-Farsy's educational philosophy served as a link between contemporary educational demands and classical Islamic learning. In addition to producing intelligent people, he promoted schools and madrasas that would also generate morally upright citizens

who had a thorough understanding of their faith and practiced it with balance and sincerity. He believed that the ability of an educational system to instill in its students a sense of taqwā (God-consciousness) and social responsibility was essential to its success. This conviction guided his ceaseless efforts to advance Islamic education in mainland Tanzania, Kenya, and Zanzibar, where he urged educators and preachers to serve as moral role models rather than merely disseminators of knowledge [38].

Al-Farsy's perspective on moral education also demonstrated his contextual understanding of colonial and postcolonial changes. He saw that while Western-style education had its merits, it sometimes overlooked the ethical aspect of education, creating technically proficient but morally and spiritually blind persons. In response, he put out a paradigm for education that is grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah but is also subject to logical and scientific investigation. His goal was to establish a well-rounded educational system that combined civic engagement, spiritual commitment, and faith and reason [39].

Al-Farsy's emphasis on tarbiyyah akhlaqiyyah ultimately demonstrates his conviction that self-reformation must come before societal transformation. He aimed to create a generation that could exemplify the values of justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and honesty (sidq) by fostering hearts and minds under the guidance of divine light. His legacy serves as a timeless reminder to Muslim communities confronting the moral dilemmas of modernity that moral education is not a subsidiary issue but rather the cornerstone of long-term change [40].

Qur'an Translation and Tafsir in Kiswahili

Al-Farsy's interest in Qur'anic transmission in the vernacular was a key element of his intellectual program. He worked on Qur'anic commentary intended for audiences that speak Swahili and initiated and supported the translation of the Qur'an into contemporary Kiswahili. He decreased the knowledge gap between clergy and laypeople and increased public access to sacred sources by translating the text and its meanings into understandable Swahili and using an understandable register. His dedication to contextualization—making scripture speak to local linguistic, cultural, and sociopolitical realities—while maintaining faithfulness to traditional interpretive principles was strengthened by this endeavor. Therefore, his tafsir projects and Kiswahili translations served as tools for intellectual and theological democratization [41].

Al-Farsy saw language as a tool for emancipation and saw that the average believer needed to be able to understand Islamic knowledge for it to have a transformational effect. Arabic, which is used in madrasa education but is unavailable to many coastal Muslims, was the primary medium of the Qur'an before his work. This language barrier made it more difficult for people to interact with the Qur'an on their own. Al-Farsy shattered a historical barrier and brought Qur'anic literacy back to the masses by translating the Qur'an into Kiswahili and providing lucid commentary on its meanings. Through his efforts, East African farmers, fishermen, and traders were able to establish a direct spiritual connection with the Qur'an, which had previously been exclusive to religious elites [36].

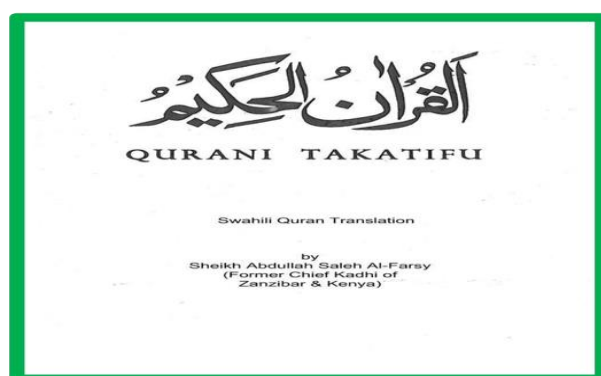


Figure 2. Swahili Version of the Quran

Additionally, his tafsir work encouraged tadabbur, or thoughtful engagement, with the Qur'an rather than literalism. According to his method, scripture was a moral and intellectual force that could influence social ethics and human behavior rather than a text that should be memorized. In an approachable way, he skillfully combined vocabulary explanations, historical background (asbāb al-nuzūl), legal ramifications, and moral teachings. By doing this, he made intellectual information accessible while maintaining methodological rigor. His tafsir connected divine revelation to East African daily life by providing helpful advice on family, justice, unity, and social duty [42].

Furthermore, al-Farsy's commentary and translation demonstrated a deliberate awareness of cultural sensitivity. When needed, he used Swahili proverbs and culturally relevant analogies to make difficult theological ideas easier to understand. However, he was adamantly opposed to any kind of cultural fusion that might undermine Islamic principles. He gained widespread recognition in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and the Comoros for striking a balance between local familiarity and theological accuracy; his writings are still used in Islamic mosques and schools there [43].

Conservative academics who felt that the Qur'an should never be translated from Arabic because doing so would change its meaning also opposed al-Farsy. In response, he made a distinction between the substitution of revelation and the translation of meaning (tarjamat al-ma'ānī). Although the Arabic version of the Qur'an was still divine revelation, comprehension, instruction, and application required translation. His defense of translation was based on Islamic tradition itself, pointing out that the Prophet's early companions used their native tongues to explain the meaning of the Qur'an to non-Arabs. Al-Farsy believed that it was a betrayal of Islam's global mission to conceal divine direction beneath linguistic snobbery [44].

Al-Farsy was successful in creating an intellectual framework for the Islamic renaissance in East Africa with his translation of the Qur'an and Kiswahili tafsir. He gave communities the freedom to read on their own, think, and behave morally. He demonstrated that Islam can have a strong African language legacy without sacrificing its validity by bridging the gap between classical research and contemporary African Muslim identity. One of the most significant turning points in the history of Islamic knowledge in East Africa is still his contribution.

Unity of the Ummah (al-Wahda) and Social Cohesion

According to the findings, al-Farsy believed that social stability and moral fortitude depended on intra-Muslim unity. On the Swahili coast and elsewhere, he continuously opposed the polemical excesses, tribalism, and sectarianism that undermined communal solidarity. He promoted cooperative pluralism based on mutual respect and shared adherence to Qur'anic ideals rather than calling for consistency in thought. Rebuilding trust among varied Muslim groups and enhancing their collective ability to face moral and civic difficulties were the goals of his institutional efforts, which included discussions between schools of thought, cooperative educational initiatives, and appeals to civic unity [41].

Al-Farsy understood that ignorance and manipulation by outside powers looking to take advantage of internal problems were frequently the causes of dissension among Muslims. He condemned divisions based on political allegiances, social distinctions, or ethnic ancestry, contending that these fabricated boundaries ran counter to the Qur'anic idea of a single ummah. He underlined that unity necessitated a dedication to common values like justice, integrity, and mutual aid rather than the eradication of cultural variety. He regularly emphasized Muslims' moral duty to set aside minor disagreements and conduct their lives as examples of social cohesion, fraternity, and consultation (shūrā) [45].

Al-Farsy's quest for togetherness went beyond words in reality. He founded and backed communal organizations that united Muslims from various intellectual and social backgrounds, including schools, mosques, and legal councils. To address shared issues of

education, morality, and social development, he frequently served as a facilitator of discussions between academics, young leaders, and local elders. He gained the trust of Muslim communities from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds because of his efforts as Chief Kadhi, which allowed him to settle disputes amicably and wisely. Through these efforts, he showed how community-centered education, inclusive leadership, and moral governance might foster harmony.

Al-Farsy also made a connection between social justice and unity. He thought that a divided ummah was more susceptible to moral degeneration, poverty, and oppression. He saw unity as a strategic imperative for group empowerment rather than just a spiritual catchphrase. He urged Muslims to establish robust organizations, provide financial assistance to one another, and work together on development projects that benefited the community as a whole. By doing so, he connected moral rejuvenation, economic advancement, and spiritual union [46].



Figure 3. Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy and his fellow companions in the struggle

Women, Gender Roles, and Social Development

The results demonstrate that al-Farsy promoted a sophisticated and forward-thinking perspective on women's duties within an Islamic ethical framework. He maintained that women's status determines a community's ability to advance morally and intellectually, and he upheld women's rights to education, spiritual agency, and socially constructive employment. His strategy did not imitate secular feminist models; rather, it based women's rights on prophetic antecedents and Qur'anic dignity (*karāmah*), promoting more female involvement in social life and education as a way to support families and society [47].

Al-Farsy disapproved of cultural customs that, in the name of religion, marginalized women. He chastised social norms that considered women intellectually inferior, barred them from attending schools, or unfairly excluded them from public life. He believed that rather than being a result of Islamic principles, such acts were the result of cultural stagnation. He reminded his audience that women had made contributions to Islamic history as intellectuals, educators, corporate executives, and defenders of the faith. Al-Farsy aimed to eliminate damaging gender stereotypes and reinstate the Qur'anic idea of men and women working together to achieve social justice and welfare by citing these historical instances [48].

One of the main pillars of al-Farsy's discourse on women was education. He underlined that an illiterate mother erodes society's moral base by producing an uneducated generation. Because of this, he fervently supported the founding of schools and learning circles for girls, maintaining that both sexes had a divine duty to acquire knowledge. According to him, women who receive theological and intellectual training are better able to raise morally upright families, actively engage in community development, and fight against societal injustices. He believed that women's education protected against ignorance and moral deterioration rather than endangering tradition [39].

Al-Farsy simultaneously upheld a fair stance on gender roles. He highlighted the significance of moral integrity, family unity, and devotion to Islamic ethical principles while

simultaneously empowering women in society. He maintained that Islam gives women rights and obligations that respect and uphold their inherent worth. His writings stressed cooperation rather than competition between genders. He saw men and women as collaborators in carrying out collective duties rather than rivals in a power war. Thus, his reformist strategy disapproved of both the repressive patriarchy and the foreign liberal ideas that threatened the Islamic family unit [49].

Al-Farsy also supported women's employment and economic participation as long as it adhered to Islamic principles. He maintained that if women had abilities that were useful to the community, they shouldn't be restricted to economic dependency. There was no Islamic prohibition against women working in healthcare, education, commerce, and community leadership as long as modesty, morality, and purpose were upheld. His viewpoint broadened the social impact of women on the Swahili coast and inspired a new generation of Muslim women to actively participate in public life.

In conclusion, al-Farsy promoted a gender reformist philosophy with Islamic ethical foundations that emphasized moral purity, shared responsibility between men and women, and educational empowerment, as well as balanced advancement. His opinions were crucial in changing how Muslim women were perceived in East Africa, especially in coastal areas, juggling the demands of tradition and modernity [50].

Table 3. Al-Farsy's Reformist Perspective on Women and Social Development

Theme	Key Findings	Implications for Society
Women's Education	Al-Farsy emphasized that education is a right and obligation for women just as for men. He encouraged the establishment of schools for girls and criticized cultural barriers to female learning.	Empowered women become educators of future generations and strengthen community morality and intellectual progress.
Spiritual and Moral Agency	He affirmed women's equal spiritual status before God and promoted their participation in religious activities and moral leadership.	Women contribute to upholding ethical values in families and communities, reducing moral decline.
Rejection of Cultural Oppression	He condemned harmful customs that disguised themselves as religion, such as forced isolation and intellectual exclusion of women.	Helped distinguish between true Islamic teachings and cultural practices that undermine dignity.
Balanced Gender Roles	Advocated complementary roles between men and women based on cooperation, justice, and Islamic ethics, not male domination or Western feminism.	Promoted family stability, mutual respect, and protection of moral values while allowing progress.
Women in the Workforce	Supported women working in education, trade, healthcare, and social services so long as Islamic ethics were upheld.	Encouraged socio-economic development and reduced dependency and poverty in Muslim communities.
Women as Reform Agents	Viewed women as essential partners in social reform and moral reconstruction.	Positioned women not as passive recipients of reform but as proactive contributors to communal progress.

Analysis

The study titled *"The Role of Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy in Shaping East African Islamic Institutions"* provides a rich examination of one of East Africa's most influential twentieth-century reformers. It highlights how Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy

integrated Islamic morality, social justice, and educational renewal into a coherent reformist paradigm that remains relevant today. His intellectual project was deeply rooted in the concepts of *tajdīd* (renewal) and *iṣlāḥ* (reform), positioning him within a broader Islamic revivalist movement that sought to reconcile faith and modernity while preserving moral integrity. The findings reveal that al-Farsy's reformism was both spiritual and structural. He viewed Islam as a moral framework for societal transformation, where faith inspired ethical governance, equitable education, and community empowerment. His rejection of *taqlīd* (blind imitation) and emphasis on *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) underscored his belief that Muslims must actively engage reason and revelation to address new realities. This intellectual independence distinguished him from many contemporaries, enabling him to articulate an Islam that was both authentically African and globally relevant.

A major strength of al-Farsy's legacy lies in his holistic vision of education as the foundation for moral and intellectual awakening. Through *tarbiyyah akhlaqiyyah* (moral education), he aimed to cultivate individuals who embodied *taqwā* (piety), *'ilm* (knowledge), and *'adl* (justice). His insistence that knowledge must serve morality rather than mere material success reflects an enduring critique of modern education systems that neglect ethical formation. In founding schools and revising madrasa curricula, he bridged classical Islamic learning with civic responsibility, fostering a generation of spiritually conscious leaders. Al-Farsy's contributions to Swahili Qur'anic translation and *tafsir* were equally transformative. His *Tafsiri ya Qur'ani Tukufu* democratized access to the Qur'an, dismantling linguistic barriers that confined scripture to the educated elite. By rendering divine guidance into Kiswahili, he empowered ordinary Muslims—farmers, traders, and laborers—to engage directly with revelation. His interpretive approach combined philological precision with moral relevance, linking Qur'anic principles to daily life. This linguistic reform not only advanced Islamic literacy but also strengthened Swahili identity within the global ummah.

Another defining aspect of his thought was the pursuit of unity (*al-wahda*) as the moral foundation of social justice. Al-Farsy considered division among Muslims a cause of oppression and moral decay. His call for cooperation across ethnic, sectarian, and class lines was both strategic and spiritual, seeking empowerment through collective solidarity. This principle resonates with modern theories of community-based development and interfaith dialogue. Finally, his reformist stance on women's education and social participation demonstrates progressive insight anchored in Qur'anic ethics. By promoting gender-balanced education and rejecting cultural practices that marginalized women, al-Farsy expanded the moral and intellectual space of Islamic reform. In essence, Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy's vision presents a timeless model of ethical leadership and intellectual renewal. His synthesis of faith, morality, and social responsibility continues to inspire efforts toward just, educated, and unified Muslim societies in East Africa and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The study comes to the conclusion that Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy was a visionary reformer in addition to being a religious scholar, and his views are still highly relevant in Islamic culture and thought today. His reformist movement effectively closed the gap between Islamic tradition and contemporary issues, proving that faith can be a potent catalyst for social change when it is based on moral integrity and Qur'anic values. True reform, according to Al-Farsy, must start with intellectual awakening and moral purification under the direction of justice, knowledge, and *taqwa* (God-consciousness). He enabled Muslim communities in East Africa to fight against colonial oppression and internal stagnation by promoting education as a means of emancipation and enlightenment. His teachings urge the restoration of Islamic ideals

in social life while embracing the positive features of modernity, reflecting a balanced synthesis of *tajdīd* (renewal) and *iṣlāḥ* (reform). According to the study's findings, al-Farsy's legacy provides a timeless framework for moral leadership, communal empowerment, and educational advancement. In addition to making a substantial contribution to African Islamic intellectual history, his reformist viewpoint continues to be a useful point of reference in current debates about Islam, morality, education, and social justice in the contemporary world.

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Author Contribution

Alwy Ahmed Mohamed conceptualized the research framework, conducted a literature review, and drafted the initial manuscript. Munaiya Hakika Fadhila contributed to data interpretation, linguistic editing, and contextual analysis. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the paper. Their joint effort ensured balanced scholarly and cultural perspectives on Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy's institutional influence.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. The study was conducted solely for academic purposes, without any financial or organizational influence. Both authors affirm their independent positions and shared commitment to advancing research on East African Islamic scholarship and institutional development.

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