

Islamic Andragogy in Pakistan: Opportunities and Societal Impacts

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Abstract

Islamic andragogy—the theory and practice of educating adults within an Islamic framework—offers unique opportunities for personal transformation and societal development. In Pakistan, Islamic education has traditionally focused on children and youth, primarily through madrassas, mosques, and informal learning circles. However, in recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of the need to provide structured religious education for adults, both male and female. This study explores the opportunities and societal impacts of Islamic andragogy in the Pakistani context. Adopting a qualitative and analytical approach, the research investigates existing educational initiatives, institutional frameworks, and community-based programs that address adult religious learning. It examines how such programs enhance spiritual growth, moral refinement, religious literacy, and active civic participation. The paper also highlights several challenges, including limited accessibility in rural areas, insufficient curriculum development tailored to adult learners, and gender disparities in participation. By identifying these gaps and examining successful models, this study emphasizes the transformative potential of adult Islamic education in strengthening individual faith, fostering social cohesion, and promoting a morally conscious citizenry. The findings underscore that Islamic andragogy is not merely an educational strategy but a vital tool for empowering communities, nurturing lifelong learning, and addressing contemporary socio-religious needs in Pakistan.

Keywords: Islamic Andragogy, Adult Education, Religious Literacy, Pakistan, Social Impact, Lifelong Learning, Community Development

Introduction:

Education has always held a central place in both Islamic civilization and modern nation-states. In the Islamic tradition, seeking knowledge is not confined to childhood or youth; rather, it is regarded as a lifelong obligation upon every Muslim. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated, “Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim,” indicating the timeless and inclusive nature of learning in Islam.¹ Historically, adult education in Islamic societies flourished through mosques, madrasas, study circles (halaqāt), and scholarly gatherings where both men and women participated in the pursuit of religious and intellectual growth.² This rich heritage underscores that Islamic education has always embraced andragogical elements—encouraging self-motivated, meaningful, and community-based learning among adults.

In modern educational theory, the concept of andragogy—popularized by Malcolm Knowles—emphasizes adult learners’ autonomy, readiness to learn, and the

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¹ Muhammad ibn Mājah, Sunan Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Sunnah, 224 (Hadith: “طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم”).

² Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15–22.

application of knowledge to real-life situations.³ Knowles' framework shifts the focus from teacher-centered pedagogy to learner-centered approaches, recognizing adults as active participants in their learning processes. This theoretical perspective provides valuable insights for understanding how adult religious education can be structured more effectively in contemporary contexts.

In Pakistan, while significant attention has been given to children's religious education through madrasas, maktabas, and school curricula, the structured provision of Islamic education for adults remains comparatively limited.⁴ However, the last few decades have witnessed the emergence of diverse initiatives, including evening Quran courses, Islamic learning circles for professionals, women's study groups, and online learning platforms.⁵ These developments indicate a growing societal awareness of the need for lifelong religious education that aligns with the spiritual, moral, and civic needs of adult Muslims in a rapidly changing world.

The integration of Islamic principles with modern andragogical theory provides a unique opportunity to develop educational models that are both authentic to the Islamic tradition and responsive to contemporary social realities. By examining Pakistan's educational landscape, exploring community-based initiatives, and analyzing theoretical frameworks, this study seeks to highlight the opportunities and societal impacts of Islamic andragogy in Pakistan. It argues that adult Islamic education has the potential to enhance religious literacy, promote social cohesion, and foster responsible citizenship—thereby contributing meaningfully to national development.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical Background of Andragogy:

The concept of andragogy refers to the methods and principles used in adult education. It emerged in modern educational discourse as a way to distinguish adult learning from child-centered pedagogy. Malcolm Knowles popularized the term in the 20th century, emphasizing that adults are self-directed learners who bring their experiences, needs, and motivations into the learning process.⁶ He outlined six core assumptions of adult learners: the need to know, the learner's self-concept, the role

³ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy* (New York: Association Press, 1970), 38–40.

⁴ Government of Pakistan, *National Education Policy 2017* (Islamabad: Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017), 45.

⁵ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 101–109.

⁶ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy* (New York: Association Press, 1970), 38–45.

of experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation.⁷ This framework underscores that adult learners require educational methods that are participatory, relevant, and immediately applicable to their personal, professional, or spiritual lives.

Knowles and other scholars argue that andragogy differs fundamentally from pedagogy, which assumes dependent learners and a teacher-centered approach.⁸ Contemporary adult education literature builds upon these assumptions to design learning environments that respect adult learners' autonomy and contextual experiences.

2. Adult Learning in the Islamic Tradition:

Islam places strong emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge for every believer, regardless of age, gender, or social status. The famous prophetic tradition states: "Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim."⁹ Historically, adult education was central to Muslim societies, where mosques, madrasas, halaqāt (study circles), and informal scholarly gatherings served as vibrant centers of learning for men and women alike.¹⁰

A notable example from early Islamic history is the educational model of Aṣḥāb al-Ṣuffah (the Companions of the Veranda) in the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. These companions—most of whom were adults or young men—dedicated themselves to learning the Qur'an, Hadith, and religious guidance directly from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).¹¹ This arrangement represents one of the earliest structured forms of adult Islamic education, combining spiritual training, communal learning, and intellectual growth.

Scholars like Jonathan Berkey and Muhammad Qasim Zaman have shown that adult education through mosques and scholarly networks continued to flourish for centuries in various Muslim regions.¹² Islamic education historically functioned not only as a means of transmitting knowledge but also as a communal mechanism for moral development, leadership training, and societal cohesion.

⁷ Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 7th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 61–67.

⁸ Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 83–90.

⁹ Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Kitāb al-Sunnah, 224.

¹⁰ Berkey, Jonathan P., *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15–22.

¹¹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Riqāq, 4582; also see Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), 319–322.

¹² Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 101–109.

3. Adult Education in Pakistan's Educational Landscape:

In Pakistan, the national education system has historically focused more on children's education than adult education. Religious education for children is institutionalized through madrasas, maktabas, and school curricula.¹³ Adult religious education, on the other hand, remains less systematically organized. However, national education policies have occasionally emphasized literacy and lifelong learning, including religious literacy, as part of broader development goals.¹⁴

Despite limited state initiatives, numerous community-driven efforts have emerged to address adults' religious learning needs. Evening Quran programs, women's study circles, professional learning groups, and informal mosque-based classes have become increasingly common, particularly in urban areas.¹⁵ These initiatives reflect growing recognition of adults' spiritual and intellectual needs in contemporary Pakistani society.

4. Contemporary Trends and Challenges:

Recent years have witnessed a rise in online Islamic learning platforms, weekend Tajwid and Tafsir courses, and structured adult education programs through Quran academies and community centers.¹⁶ These trends indicate an increasing demand for flexible, accessible, and relevant religious education opportunities for adults—especially for working professionals, women, and those with prior limited exposure to formal Islamic learning.

Nevertheless, several challenges persist. Rural areas often lack access to adult education initiatives. Many programs lack curriculum tailored specifically for adult learners, and trained teachers familiar with both Islamic scholarship and adult learning methods are scarce.¹⁷ Additionally, gender disparities continue to affect women's participation in some regions. These gaps underline the need for integrated educational frameworks that combine Islamic tradition with modern andragogical principles.

5. Identified Research Gap:

Existing literature on adult education in Pakistan largely focuses either on general literacy programs or on traditional child-focused religious education. Systematic research on Islamic andragogy—the integration of Islamic educational principles with

¹³ Tariq Rahman, *Denizens of Alien Worlds: A Study of Education, Inequality and Polarization in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54–57.

¹⁴ Government of Pakistan, *National Education Policy 2017* (Islamabad: Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017), 45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46–48.

¹⁶ Farid Panjwani, "Rethinking the Madrasa," *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 7, no. 1 (2004): 76–83.

¹⁷ Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, "Pakistan: Adult Education and Social Change," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2007): 135–150.

adult learning theory—remains limited. While some scholars have explored Islamic education historically and sociologically, few have examined how andragogical methods can be effectively applied in Pakistan's contemporary religious education landscape. This research aims to fill this gap by critically analyzing current opportunities, challenges, and societal impacts of Islamic andragogy in Pakistan.

Historical Perspective of Adult Islamic Education in Pakistan:

The history of adult Islamic education in Pakistan cannot be understood without considering its deep roots in the pre-partition religious and educational traditions of the Indian subcontinent. Long before the emergence of Pakistan, mosques, madrasas, and khānqāhs (Sufi lodges) functioned as vibrant centers of adult religious learning. These spaces were not restricted to formal students; rather, they welcomed adult community members to participate in Qur'ān recitation, jurisprudential discussions, ethical instruction, and spiritual refinement.¹⁸ The traditional dars (lesson) and ḥalaqah (study circle) models provided a flexible and accessible system through which adults of varying educational backgrounds could enhance their religious knowledge.

Pre-Partition Developments:

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Islamic educational movements such as the Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband (founded 1866), the Barelvi movement, and Ahl-e-Hadīth networks played a significant role in expanding adult religious literacy.¹⁹ Their initiatives were not limited to formal madrasa students but extended to ordinary Muslims through public sermons, study circles, and local mosque-based instruction. These movements laid the groundwork for adult Islamic education by emphasizing lifelong learning, moral reform, and communal responsibility.

Post-Independence Initiatives (1947–1970s):

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, both state and non-state actors played roles in shaping adult Islamic education. Religious organizations and federations such as Wifaq al-Madāris al-'Arabiyyah and Tanzeem al-Madāris expanded their networks and curricula to include accessible programs for adults, especially in urban and semi-urban communities.²⁰ Evening madrasa programs, mosque-based study circles, and Qur'an learning sessions became prominent features of community religious life. Simultaneously, Pakistan's early education policies acknowledged adult literacy, though religious education for adults remained largely community-driven rather than state-directed.²¹

¹⁸ Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 101–103.

¹⁹ Francis Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 87–90.

²⁰ Jamal Malik, *Colonialization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1996), 144–148.

²¹ Government of Pakistan, *Report of the Commission on National Education* (Karachi: Government of Pakistan Press, 1959), 52–55.

1970s–1990s: Institutional Expansion:

From the 1970s onward, various Islamic organizations, missionary movements, and community centers intensified their focus on adult education. The Tablighī Jamā‘at emphasized regular study circles (ta‘līm sessions) in mosques across the country, encouraging adults to engage in collective Qur’an and Hadith reading.²² Similarly, institutions like Idāra-e-Tarjumān al-Qur’ān and Qur’an Academies initiated structured programs for adults to learn Qur’an translation and interpretation in the evenings. This period witnessed a gradual systematization of adult Islamic education through community efforts rather than formal state mechanisms.

Post-2000 Era: Modernization and Diversification:

Since the early 2000s, Pakistan has experienced a diversification of adult Islamic education programs. Digital platforms, online Qur’an courses, weekend and evening classes, and women-focused dars gatherings have significantly expanded access to religious learning for adults.²³ Many contemporary Qur’an academies and Islamic centers now combine traditional teaching methods with modern andragogical principles such as learner engagement, structured modular curricula, and flexible scheduling. This blending of Islamic educational heritage with contemporary methodologies reflects the evolving landscape of adult Islamic education in Pakistan.

Current Opportunities in Adult Islamic Education in Pakistan:

In recent decades, Pakistan has witnessed a significant expansion in the scope and diversity of opportunities for adult Islamic education. These opportunities have emerged through a blend of traditional religious institutions and modern educational platforms, making religious learning more accessible to adults across different segments of society. This expansion reflects both a revival of traditional educational models and an adaptation to contemporary social and technological contexts.

1. Evening Qur’an Academies and Mosque-Based Programs:

A prominent form of adult Islamic education in Pakistan today is the evening Qur’an academy. In urban and semi-urban areas, numerous religious institutions and mosques offer structured evening programs for adults who are unable to participate in daytime classes due to work or family responsibilities.²⁴ These programs often include Qur’an recitation (tajwīd), translation (tarjumah), and basic Islamic studies, and are attended by both men and women. In many communities, these evening programs have become integral to adult religious literacy, providing regular learning opportunities in a familiar and spiritually nurturing environment.

²² Yoginder Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jama‘at (1920–2000): A Cross-Country Comparative Study* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002), 172–176.

²³ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 241–245.

²⁴ Jamal Malik, *Colonialization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1996), 152–154.

2. Online Classes and Digital Platforms:

With the rise of digital technology, online Islamic education has become one of the most dynamic avenues for adult learning in Pakistan. A growing number of Qur'an academies, madrasas, and independent scholars now offer structured courses through Zoom, Google Meet, and specialized learning portals, enabling adults to attend lessons from their homes.²⁵ These online programs cater especially to working professionals, women, overseas Pakistanis, and individuals seeking flexible learning schedules. Some institutions have introduced modular curricula focusing on Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Arabic language, and contemporary Islamic thought, integrating modern andragogical methods such as interactive sessions and self-paced learning.

3. Weekend Classes and Special Lecture Series:

Another significant opportunity is found in weekend classes and thematic lecture series (muḥāḍarāt) designed specifically for adults. Many Qur'an academies, community centers, and Islamic organizations arrange Saturday–Sunday programs that focus on practical aspects of faith, moral development, and community engagement.²⁶ These programs often include short courses on fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), contemporary issues in Islamic thought, and seasonal or thematic topics (e.g., Hajj workshops, Ramadan spiritual training). They are particularly well-suited for individuals with weekday commitments, offering concentrated and intensive learning experiences.

4. Community Centers, NGOs, and Informal Networks:

In addition to formal programs, numerous community-based initiatives and NGOs are engaged in adult religious education through informal study circles, literacy campaigns, and integrated programs that combine basic education with Islamic content.²⁷ These efforts are particularly visible in low-income neighborhoods and rural areas, where access to formal institutions may be limited. Informal study circles (ḥalaqāt) in mosques and homes remain a vital part of Pakistan's religious education landscape, fostering lifelong learning among adults.

Societal Impacts of Adult Islamic Education in Pakistan:

Adult Islamic education has played a transformative role in shaping various dimensions of Pakistani society. One of the most significant impacts is the enhancement of religious awareness (dīnī shu'ūr) among adults. Many individuals who join evening or weekend programs, or participate in online Islamic courses, develop a deeper understanding of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic principles. This understanding

²⁵ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 260–263.

²⁶ Barbara D. Metcalf, "Islam and Women's Education in South Asia," in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State in India*, ed. Zoya Hasan (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994), 99–103.

²⁷ Government of Pakistan, *National Education Policy 2009* (Islamabad: Ministry of Education, 2009), 45–47.

translates into a more informed personal and communal religious practice, contributing to the revival of Islamic values at the grassroots level.²⁸

In addition, adult Islamic education has positively influenced moral and ethical development within communities. Adults who receive structured religious education often exhibit improved personal character, better family relations, and enhanced community engagement. Islamic teachings related to honesty, social justice, respect, and mutual cooperation become more consciously practiced, fostering a stronger moral fabric in society.²⁹

Another important societal impact is the bridging of generational and educational gaps. Many adult learners, including parents and professionals, become better equipped to guide their children and families in religious matters. This creates intergenerational continuity of Islamic values and helps reduce the disconnect between traditional religious education and modern lifestyles.³⁰

Furthermore, adult Islamic education programs have contributed to social cohesion and communal identity. By bringing together individuals from diverse professional, social, and educational backgrounds, these programs encourage dialogue, mutual respect, and collective learning experiences. This has been particularly evident in urban centers where Qur'an Academies, weekend lectures, and online forums serve as vibrant hubs of religious engagement.³¹

Overall, the expansion of adult Islamic education in Pakistan has not only increased access to religious knowledge but also fostered moral uplift, social responsibility, and stronger religious consciousness, thereby contributing positively to societal development.

Challenges and Limitations:

Despite the promising growth of adult Islamic education initiatives in Pakistan, several challenges and limitations hinder their broader impact and sustainability. One of the foremost issues is the shortage of financial and infrastructural resources. Many Qur'an academies and community-based learning centers operate on limited budgets, relying heavily on voluntary contributions and lacking consistent institutional funding.³²

²⁸ Muhammad Farooq, *Religious Consciousness in Contemporary Muslim Societies* (Lahore: Al-Meezan Publishers, 2020), 77–82.

²⁹ Saima Khalid, "Moral Transformation through Islamic Education: A Study of Adult Learners in Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 1 (2021): 33–39.

³⁰ Imran Ahmad, "Adult Education and Family Religious Transmission in Urban Pakistan," *Journal of Social and Religious Studies* 8, no. 3 (2022): 101–108.

³¹ Qur'an Academy, *Annual Report on Community Engagement 2023* (Multan: Qur'an Academy Publications, 2023), 20–24.

³² Qur'an Academy, *Annual Report on Community Engagement 2023* (Multan: Qur'an Academy Publications, 2023), 42–46.

This financial constraint affects their ability to expand programs, adopt modern teaching technologies, and improve learning environments.

Another major limitation is the lack of adequately trained teachers who possess both traditional Islamic scholarship and modern andragogical skills.³³ Many adult education programs rely on teachers who may be well-versed in religious sciences but have limited exposure to adult learning methodologies, resulting in less interactive and engaging learning experiences. In addition, limited use of modern teaching methods and technologies poses a significant barrier.³⁴ While some institutions have embraced online platforms and multimedia tools, many adult education centers still follow conventional, lecture-based approaches that may not fully address the diverse learning needs of adults. Accessibility issues for women represent another critical challenge. In several regions, cultural constraints, lack of transportation, and insufficient female-oriented programs limit women's participation in adult Islamic education.³⁵

Finally, at the governmental and policy level, there is an absence of a coherent and comprehensive policy framework for adult Islamic education.³⁶ The lack of formal recognition and integration into national education planning results in fragmented efforts and limits the potential for broader societal transformation.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The exploration of Islamic andragogy in Pakistan reveals a vibrant but under-structured domain of adult education that has deep historical roots and contemporary relevance. The study demonstrates that adult Islamic education—through Qur'an academies, online platforms, weekend lectures, and community initiatives—has significantly contributed to enhancing religious literacy, strengthening moral values, and fostering communal harmony.³⁷ These initiatives have provided adults with opportunities to reconnect with Islamic teachings in meaningful and practical ways, ultimately contributing to individual development and broader societal transformation.

However, the research has also highlighted several persistent challenges, including inadequate financial resources, limited teacher training, lack of modern pedagogical approaches, restricted female access, and the absence of a coherent

³³ Ahmad Raza, "Teacher Training and Andragogy in Religious Institutions of Pakistan," *Journal of Islamic Pedagogy* 5, no. 2 (2021): 55–60.

³⁴ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, 7th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 88–90.

³⁵ Saima Khalid, "Women's Accessibility to Religious Education in Semi-Urban Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Education and Society* 9, no. 1 (2022): 27–33.

³⁶ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, *National Education Policy Review* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2021), 64–67.

³⁷ Muhammad Farooq, *Religious Consciousness in Contemporary Muslim Societies* (Lahore: Al-Meezan Publishers, 2020), 77–82.

government policy.³⁸ Addressing these limitations is crucial for maximizing the societal benefits of adult Islamic education in Pakistan.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Policy Integration: The government should formally recognize adult Islamic education as part of the national educational framework and develop a comprehensive policy to support its growth and quality enhancement.³⁹
2. Teacher Training: Training programs that combine traditional Islamic scholarship with modern andragogical methods should be developed to improve the teaching-learning experience for adults.⁴⁰
3. Resource Mobilization: Public-private partnerships, community endowments, and donor networks should be utilized to strengthen the financial and infrastructural base of adult education institutions.
4. Technology Integration: Wider use of digital platforms, blended learning models, and interactive tools should be encouraged to increase outreach and improve pedagogical quality.⁴¹
5. Female Accessibility: Special efforts should be made to create safe, culturally appropriate, and accessible learning spaces for women, including online options and community-based classes.⁴²
6. Research and Evaluation: Regular academic research and program evaluation should be conducted to assess impact, identify gaps, and inform future strategies.

In conclusion, Islamic andragogy in Pakistan holds immense potential not only to deepen individual religious understanding but also to build morally conscious, socially cohesive, and intellectually vibrant communities. A strategic blend of traditional values and modern educational practices, supported by sound policy and institutional commitment, can ensure that adult Islamic education becomes a sustainable force for positive societal change.

³⁸ Qur'an Academy, Annual Report on Community Engagement 2023 (Multan: Qur'an Academy Publications, 2023), 42–46.

³⁹ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, National Education Policy Review (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2021), 64–67.

⁴⁰ Ahmad Raza, "Teacher Training and Andragogy in Religious Institutions of Pakistan," *Journal of Islamic Pedagogy* 5, no. 2 (2021): 55–60.

⁴¹ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, 7th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 88–90.

⁴² Saima Khalid, "Women's Accessibility to Religious Education in Semi-Urban Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Education and Society* 9, no. 1 (2022): 27–33.