

Islamic Education and the 4Rs of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: A Critical Integrative Review of Selected Conflict-Affected Settings in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

Global discourse on Islamic education in sub-Saharan Africa is often framed through a securitization lens, positioning madaris and Qur'anic schools as deradicalization objects or security threats, overlooking their standing as grassroots actors with cultural legitimacy in peacebuilding. This article examines whether, and under what conditions, Islamic educational institutions in conflict-affected settings function as legitimate peacebuilding actors. Drawing on a Critical Integrative Review of literature (2005–2026, prioritizing 2020–2026), UN field reporting, and African Union policy documents, the analysis applies the 4Rs framework (Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, Reconciliation) to evidence from Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia/Somaliland, Niger, and Cameroon. Four bounded findings emerge, each qualified by disconfirming evidence. *First*, faith-financed institutions appear to sustain access to basic literacy where state provision has receded, though redistributive effects are uneven and gendered. *Second*, value-based curricula may affirm religious identity in ways that complicate extremist alienation narratives, though reduced recruitment susceptibility is a testable hypothesis rather than a finding. *Third*, engaging the ulama as co-designers is associated with greater community acceptance, while narrowing the space for women and youth in some settings. Fourth, Islamic ethical traditions offer locally intelligible repertoires for reconciliation, though direct evidence of outcomes in African conflict settings remains thin. The article proposes a bounded faith-based extension of the 4Rs, conditioned on low state and high religious legitimacy, aligning policy implications with the African Union Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development framework. Findings are context-specific, not generalized to sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

Keywords: Islamic Education; Counter-Narrative; Peacebuilding; 4Rs Framework; Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

Contemporary security debates in sub-Saharan Africa turn on a tension. Africa's growing youth population, the "youth bulge," is widely framed as a potential demographic dividend for economic development.¹ Yet in the Lake Chad Basin, the central Sahel, Sudan, and the Horn of Africa, the same cohort becomes a recruitment pool for armed groups. That vulnerability comes less from ideology than from economic marginalization, weak state provision, and the manipulation of religious narratives.² Human Rights Watch,³ and Francis et al.,⁴ document that in northeast Nigeria, insurgent actors have gone further, systematically exploiting children. These dynamics are real. Any credible account of education and peace in the region has to start by acknowledging them rather than explaining them away.

International counter-terrorism discourse has responded by putting Islamic educational institutions, from formal madāris to traditional Qur'anic systems such as Tsangaya, under sustained suspicion, or "securitization." Policy literature often treats these institutions as incubators of anti-Western sentiment, a reading compressed into the popular gloss of Boko Haram as rejection of "Western" schooling.⁵ A geopolitical framing reinforces this further, casting Islamic education as an alternate "truth" that outside intervention must discipline or reform.⁶ The result is top-down intervention that targets curricula, leaves the structural roots of grievance untouched, and fails because it bypasses the community authorities whose endorsement it needs.

Concern is not wholly unfounded. Documented harms exist in particular settings, and this review does not romanticize the institutions it examines. The problem is that the dominant threat-versus-savior binary is analytically inadequate. Recent empirical work argues that conflict and education studies should examine Islamic schools "in their own

¹ T S Akinyetun, "Demography and Insecurity: Youth Bulge and the Lake Chad Basin Security Quandary," *African Security Review*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2023.2179413>.

² S Brakoniecka, "The Role of Religion in Triggering Radicalism in Northern Nigeria," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 4 (2024): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340291>.

³ Human Rights Watch, "'They Set the Classrooms on Fire': Attacks on Education in Northeast Nigeria" (Human Rights Watch, 2016), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/nigeria0416web.pdf.

⁴ A T Francis et al., "Assessment of Boko Haram Insurgents' Threats to Educational Development in the Northeast Nigeria: The Way Forward," *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research* 3, no. 1 (2020): 31, <https://www.abjournals.org>.

⁵ M N Alkali, A K Monguno, and B S Mustafa, "Overview of Islamic Actors in Northeastern Nigeria" (Nigeria Research Network, 2012), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268435905>.

⁶ G Ndiaye, "Private Islamic Education in Africa," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Islam in Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 577–98, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45759-4_28.

right," attending to students and teachers rather than asking only whether the schools breed militancy. Comparative research on higher education in conflict-affected societies makes a similar argument: move past the good/bad binary, because the same institution can support, impede, or reveal the dynamics of peacebuilding.⁷ A further problem is conflation. Tsangaya and Almajiri arrangements in northern Nigeria,⁸ Khalwa in Sudan, Duksi in Somalia, and integrated madāris are distinct institutional forms with distinct histories,⁹ funding bases, and relationships to the state.¹⁰ They cannot be assessed as a single object.

Set the binary aside, and a different picture emerges in specific collapsed-provision contexts. Fonka et al.¹¹ and UNICEF¹² document that in parts of Sudan and northeast Nigeria, where state schooling has contracted under protracted conflict, community-based and faith-financed institutions have sustained basic literacy for populations that formal systems no longer reach, including displaced and undocumented children. That contribution is uneven and gendered. Gender, language, and class structure determine who gets access to Islamic education and who holds authority within it,¹³ even as women's Islamic education movements have expanded female textual scholarship in northern Nigeria and beyond.¹⁴ Any redistributive claim, then, has to specify for whom access is secured, and at what cost to others.

These observations expose a gap in the theory. The literature remains polarized between state-centric security approaches and a secular liberal peace-education model

⁷ K Kester et al., "Higher Education Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Societies: Beyond the Good/Bad Binary," *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development* 24, no. 3–4 (2022): 160–76, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-04-2022-0027>.

⁸ H Hoechner et al., "Exploring the Nexus between Islamic Education and Violent Conflict: Qur'anic Schools and the Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeast Nigeria," *Comparative Education Review* 70, no. 2 (2026): 279–98, <https://doi.org/10.1086/740452>.

⁹ A Breidlid, "Education and Armed Conflict in Sudan and South Sudan: The Role of Teachers in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building," *Journal of Advances in Education Research* 4, no. 3 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.22606/jaer.2019.43005>.

¹⁰ Y S Omar, "The Role of Islam in Peace and Development in Somalia (Continuity and Change)," *Religions* 13, no. 11 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13111074>.

¹¹ H M Fonka et al., "Education for Peace Building in Conflict-Hit Regions in Africa: Perspectives from Cameroon and Sudan" 2 (2025): 1–10.

¹² UNICEF, "UNICEF Sudan: Education Report 2021" (UNICEF, 2021).

¹³ H Hima, "'Francophone' Education Intersectionalities: Gender, Language, and Religion," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Education and Indigenous Knowledge* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 463–525, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38277-3_23.

¹⁴ M Bano, *Female Islamic Education Movements: The Re-Democratisation of Islamic Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316986721>.

that often fails to resonate with local religious legitimacy,¹⁵ and it rarely analyzes Islamic education through a social-justice or transitional-justice lens. The 4Rs framework, Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation, developed by Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith¹⁶ from Nancy Fraser's theory of justice¹⁷ and applied to post-conflict societies by Adan,¹⁸ offers exactly that lens. But it was built chiefly around state and secular systems, says little about faith-based actors, and has known limits: Pherali argues that the framework exposes structural tensions well but underspecifies how entrenched power relations might actually be broken.

This article addresses that gap through a Critical Integrative Review of peer-reviewed literature, vetted field reports, and African Union policy documents. Rather than simply re-describing the 4Rs, it proposes a bounded faith-based extension: in conflict-affected settings marked by low state legitimacy and high religious legitimacy, Islamic educational institutions can perform the four R-functions with greater cultural intelligibility, and therefore gain greater community uptake than functionally equivalent secular interventions, while also reproducing injustice along some dimensions even as they advance it along others.

Four questions guide the study, each designed to elicit both supporting and disconfirming evidence. RQ1 (Redistribution). Where state provision has receded, how do faith-based educational institutions affect access to education, and for whom, including by gender, and under what conditions does access break down? RQ2 (Recognition). How do value-based curricula shape the recognition of religious identity in relation to extremist alienation narratives, and where does the evidence show identity-affirming curricula reinforcing rather than countering exclusionary narratives? RQ3 (Representation). Under what conditions does engaging religious educators and ulama strengthen the representation of marginalized communities in peacebuilding, and when does it instead constrain marginalized voices? RQ4 (Reconciliation). What role, if any,

¹⁵ G Daoust, "Education and the Critique of Liberal Peacebuilding: The Case of South Sudan" (University of Sussex, 2018), https://sussex.figshare.com/articles/thesis/Education_and_the_critique_of_liberal_peacebuilding_the_case_of_South_Sudan/23458907.

¹⁶ M Novelli, "Education and Countering Violent Extremism: Western Logics from South to North?," *Compare* 47, no. 6 (2017): 835–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1341301>.

¹⁷ N Fraser, "Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World," *New Left Review* 36 (2005): 69–88.

¹⁸ M Y Adan, "The Role of Peace Education in Promoting Social Justice and Sustainable Peace in Post-Conflict Societies: A 4Rs Framework Analysis," *Frontiers in Political Science* 7 (2025): 1650027, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1650027>.

do faith-based practices play in reconciliation and post-conflict psychosocial recovery, and what are the limits of the available evidence?

Reporting disconfirming evidence and the tensions among the four dimensions are methodological commitments built into each question, not a separate line of inquiry. The analysis aligns its conclusions with the local-ownership principle of the African Union Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy framework.

Research Method

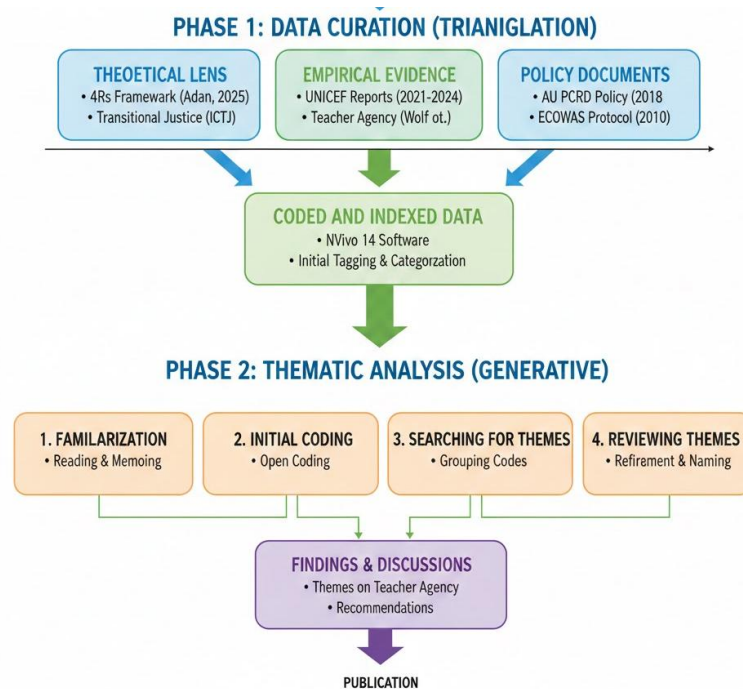
This study employs a Critical Integrative Review (CIR). Whitemore and Knafl,¹⁹ Torraco,²⁰ and Snyder,²¹ established the integrative-review tradition, which permits the synthesis of heterogeneous evidence (empirical studies, theoretical literature, field reports, and policy documents) to generate new conceptual understanding. Dixon-Woods et al.²² Established the critical interpretive synthesis (CIS) tradition, which adopts a theory-driven, reflexive orientation toward the dominant framings in a field. The design draws on these two traditions in deliberate combination, reconciled across review stages as follows. At the search and inclusion stage, the logic is integrative: heterogeneous source types are admitted on transparent eligibility criteria. At the appraisal stage, quality is assessed by source-appropriate checklists without filtering for paradigmatic fit. At the synthesis stage, the logic is interpretive-critical: the dominant securitization framing of Islamic education is treated as a position to be interrogated rather than as a neutral starting point, and the 4Rs framework operates as an a priori analytical lens that nevertheless remains open to inductively derived sub-themes. This design is well-suited to conflict-affected sub-Saharan contexts, where the most current and policy-relevant evidence often resides in vetted grey literature (e.g., UNICEF, the African Union, ICTJ) that documents field developments faster than the peer-reviewed cycle allows.

¹⁹ Robin Whitemore and Kathleen Knafl, "The Integrative Review: Updated Methodology," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 52, no. 5 (2005): 546–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2005.03621.x>.

²⁰ R J Torraco, "Writing Integrative Literature Reviews: Using the Past and Present to Explore the Future," *Human Resource Development Review* 15, no. 4 (2016): 404–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484316671606>.

²¹ Hannah Snyder, "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines," *Journal of Business Research* 104 (2019): 333–39.

²² M Dixon-Woods et al., "Conducting a Critical Interpretive Synthesis of the Literature on Access to Healthcare by Vulnerable Groups," *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 6 (2006): 35.



We conducted a structured search across three bibliographic databases, Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC, and extended it to the document libraries of UNICEF (including UNICEF Innocenti), the African Union, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI), and ReliefWeb, to capture policy-relevant grey literature. The search combined three concept blocks (i) Islamic education institutions, (ii) peacebuilding, social justice, or counter-narrative, and (iii) the sub-Saharan African context using Boolean operators and field syntax. Supplementary Appendix A provides full reproducible search strings for each source.

The search covered 2005–2026. We retained sources from the earlier portion of this range as foundational conceptual references and as evidence of institutional histories, and we grounded substantive claims about current dynamics in conflict-affected settings primarily in evidence from 2020–2026. In the synthesis, pre-2020 sources contributed mainly to Basket A (theoretical lens) and to the background institutional description in Basket B. At the same time, empirical claims about current dynamics of redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation rest on evidence from 2020–2026. We limited searches to English-language outputs.

Inclusion criteria: (a) Islamic educational institutions or actors in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., madrasa, Tsangaya/Almajiri, Khalwa, Duksi, integrated Islamic schools,

muallim, ulama); (b) an explicit link to peacebuilding, social justice, counter-radicalization, transitional justice, psychosocial recovery, or education governance; (c) conflict-affected or post-conflict settings; (d) peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books or chapters, or institutionally authored grey literature meeting the appraisal threshold below; (e) 2005–2026; (f) English.

Exclusion criteria: studies on Islamic education outside sub-Saharan Africa with no comparative relevance; sources lacking any peace, conflict, justice, or governance dimension; opinion pieces and non-attributable web content failing grey-literature appraisal; duplicates; records without retrievable full text. Figure 1 summarises the selection process.

The bounded extension this review proposes applies under two scope conditions: low state legitimacy and high religious legitimacy in the relevant educational domain. To avoid the unfalsifiability that under-specified scope conditions invite, we operationalize each condition through observable proxies that are traceable in the reviewed evidence.

We identify low state legitimacy where the reviewed sources document at least two of the following: (i) collapsed or severely contracted state education provision in the relevant area, evidenced by school closures, sustained teacher displacement, or interrupted funding flows; (ii) absence or active contestation of state authority in the relevant territory, as conflict-monitoring reports document; or (iii) reported community distrust of state educational institutions in the period under study.

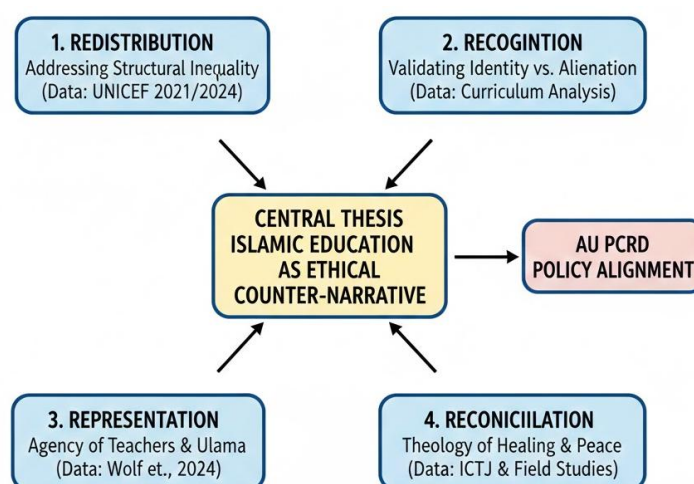
We identify high religious legitimacy where the reviewed sources document at least two of the following: (i) sustained community participation in faith-based educational institutions in the relevant area; (ii) recognition of religious authorities as legitimate dispute-resolution actors in community accounts; or (iii) the continued functioning of faith-based educational provision in domains where state provision has lapsed.

These thresholds are not numerical but configurational: they make the scope claim falsifiable. A case where neither condition holds, yet a study still argues that faith-based institutions advance the 4R dimensions, would disconfirm the extension.

We appraised methodological quality by source type. We assessed empirical qualitative studies against the CASP Qualitative Checklist and grey-literature documents against the AACODS checklist (Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date, Significance). For mixed-methods and quantitative studies, we applied the methods-

relevant CASP equivalent. We appraised scholarly books and chapters on scholarly authorship, peer-reviewed publishers, and date appropriateness. Supplementary Appendix B provides a summary of appraisal outcomes by source type. We excluded sources that fell below the threshold on CASP or AACODS from the evidence base; we retained borderline-quality sources but down-weighted them, flagging this status in the extraction matrix.

We extracted data into a standardized matrix (Supplementary Appendix C) capturing author(s) and year, country and setting, institution type, conflict phase, methodology, key findings, appraisal outcome, and the corresponding 4R dimension(s).



Synthesis followed a directed (deductive) thematic analysis,²³ using the four 4R dimensions as initial coding categories, while remaining open to inductive sub-themes the framework did not anticipate. We compared evidence constantly across three complementary baskets.

Basket A (theoretical lens) drew on conceptual and theoretical literature on social justice and education in conflict, including the 4Rs framework and its critiques (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, & Smith; Fraser; Galtung; Daoust; Adan). Basket B (empirical evidence) drew on qualitative studies and vetted field reports on Islamic education in conflict-affected sub-Saharan settings, together with UNICEF field reporting (e.g., UNICEF Sudan Education Report 2021; UNICEF Innocenti 2024; Murugaiah; Fonka et al., 2025).

²³ V Braun and V Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (SAGE, 2021).

Basket C (policy anchor) drew on continental strategic documents, chiefly the African Union Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD, 2006),²⁴ and on Tibbitts et al. and Jayasooriya, who²⁵ offer scholarship on post-conflict educational reconstruction and human-rights education against which this study's findings can be read.

To counter the confirmation bias built into framework-driven coding, we deliberately sought disconfirming evidence: cases in which Islamic educational institutions failed to contribute to or actively undermined peacebuilding (for example, gendered exclusion or the reproduction of inequality). The Results section reports this evidence alongside confirming cases, using Galtung's²⁶ typology of direct, structural, and cultural violence as an interpretive tool. We then cross-referenced the emergent themes against the pillars of the African Union PCRD framework to derive policy implications.

We addressed credibility, dependability, and confirmability through an audit trail of search strings, screening decisions, appraisal outcomes, and the extraction matrix (Supplementary Appendices A–C). Because the authors work within Islamic educational institutions, we offer a reflexivity statement: we hold a prior commitment to the educational value of faith-based institutions, and we have tried to limit the resulting risk of romanticizing them by (i) systematically appraising source quality, (ii) actively seeking disconfirming evidence, and (iii) reporting documented harms and limitations where the evidence shows them.

Four limitations qualify the review. *First*, we restricted the search to English-language sources, which excludes relevant scholarship in Arabic, French, Hausa, and Swahili. *Second*, our necessary reliance on grey literature introduced variable evidentiary certainty; we addressed this through AACODS appraisal. *Third*, the available evidence concentrates in a small number of countries, notably Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia/Somaliland, Niger, and Cameroon, so the findings should be read as context-specific rather than generalizable to sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. The evidence base lacks Mali, Burkina

²⁴ African Union, “African Union Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD)” (African Union, 2006).

²⁵ L B Jayasooriya, “Human Rights Education and Global Citizenship: An Analysis of Sri Lankan Civic Education Curricula,” *Human Rights Education Review* 8, no. 3 (2025): 451–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25355406.2025.2555377>.

²⁶ J Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>.

Faso, Mozambique's Cabo Delgado region, and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, all conflict-affected settings with significant Islamic education sectors, so we have bounded the geographic scope of our findings accordingly. Fourth, a few individual works recur across dimensions, particularly Bano,²⁷ on women's Islamic education, Howard on faith-based reconciliation repertoires, and Kester et al.,²⁸ on higher-education peacebuilding. This partly reflects a genuine gap in the peer-reviewed literature, as few studies treat Islamic education in conflict-affected sub-Saharan settings through a peacebuilding rather than a securitization lens, itself a finding of this review, and partly reflects the language and date restrictions noted above.

Results

This section reports the findings of the critical integrative review, organized by the four dimensions of the 4Rs framework and a cross-cutting analysis of gender. For each dimension, we report both supporting and disconfirming evidence. We bound our findings to the contexts where we located evidence, principally Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia/Somaliland, Niger, and Cameroon, and do not generalize them to sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. The four dimensions are not equally well evidenced; we signal the differential evidence base at the start of each section.

Redistribution: educational access where state provision has receded

In specific contexts of state contraction, faith-based and community-based institutions sustained basic literacy for populations that formal systems no longer reached. UNICEF 2021²⁹ documents severe learning poverty and interrupted provision in the region: during active conflict in Sudan, a substantial proportion of public schools stood inoperative or destroyed. In parts of Sudan and northeast Nigeria, community Qur'anic schools (Khalwa in Sudan, Tsangaya in northern Nigeria) continued to provide instruction, and non-formal education programs in conflict-affected East Africa reached populations excluded from formal provision.³⁰ A field study in Cameroon and Sudan

²⁷ Bano, *Female Islamic Education Movements: The Re-Democratisation of Islamic Knowledge*.

²⁸ Kester et al., "Higher Education Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Societies: Beyond the Good/Bad Binary."

²⁹ UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, "From Faith to Action: Working with Faith-Based and Inter-Religious Actors to Protect Refugee and Migrant Children," 2021, <https://jlfic.com/resources/from-faith-to-action-working-with-faith-based-and-inter-religious-actors-to-protect-refugee-and-migrant-children/>.

³⁰ S Datzberger, "Peacebuilding through Non-Formal Education Programmes: A Case Study from Karamoja, Uganda," *International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 2 (2017): 326–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2016.1214073>.

found that traditional madāris reached "left-behind" populations, including refugee children and orphans who lacked the civil documentation required to enroll in formal schools.³¹ The self-financing model of many such institutions, drawing on waqf and ṣadaqah, helped them survive fiscal collapse; teachers frequently kept teaching without formal salaries, sustained by religious motivation and community support.

These contributions were partial and uneven. Treating Tsangaya, Almajiri, Khalwa, Duksi, and integrated madāris as a single category obscures real differences in funding, curriculum, and relationship to the state, and their redistributive effects varied accordingly. The Almajiri model of itinerant Qur'anic study was historically a vehicle of mass literacy,³² But in some settings, it was also associated with child destitution, street begging, and heightened vulnerability to recruitment. Gender factors also influence access. Therefore, we view this redistributive contribution as a marginal safety net—one in which the state's role has diminished rather than as a substitute for the state's provision of services.

Recognition: identity validation and its limits

Where state curricula were perceived as religiously mute or hostile, value-based Islamic curricula affirmed religious identity and countered the alienation narrative that recruiters exploit, condensed in the Boko Haram framing of "Western" education as forbidden (Abu-Nimer & Nasser,³³ and Peters,³⁴ cited in review). Framing rights principles through *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and *Ḥaqq al-Ādamī* made human-rights language more culturally intelligible in religiously conservative communities, consistent with critiques showing that liberal human-rights education is rejected when perceived as an external imposition.³⁵ A comparative study of Kenya and Indonesia found that when

³¹ Fonka et al., "Education for Peace Building in Conflict-Hit Regions in Africa: Perspectives from Cameroon and Sudan."

³² T A Bashar, "An Appraisal of the Role of Qur'anic and Madrasa Education in the Sokoto Caliphate," *Global Academic Journal of Linguistics and Literature* 7, no. 1 (2025): 10–13, <https://doi.org/10.36348/gajll.2025.v07i01.002>.

³³ Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Ilham Nasser, "Building Peace Education in the Islamic Educational Context," *International Review of Education* 63 (2017): 153–67.

³⁴ M A Peters, "'Western Education Is Sinful': Boko Haram and the Abduction of Chibok Schoolgirls," *Policy Futures in Education* 12, no. 2 (2014): 186–90, <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2014.12.2.186>.

³⁵ Tibbitts et al., "Human Rights Education in Situations of Conflict: Survey Report."

teachers explicitly taught theological values such as *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) and *rahmah* (compassion), students described a stronger "anchor of identity".³⁶

Recognition cut both ways. National curricula in the region, at times, deepened in-group/out-group divisions,³⁷ and textbook content in comparable settings reproduced gendered and hierarchical inequalities even within peace-oriented reforms.³⁸ A recognition gain for a majority identity could thus coincide with a recognition loss for women or religious minorities. Decolonial scholarship further cautions that framing certain schools as "dangerous" is itself a form of epistemic violence that obscures their internal diversity. The reviewed literature also advances a "cognitive-immunization" claim: that identity-affirming curricula confer measurable resistance to recruitment. We treat this as a hypothesis rather than an evidence-based finding, since we have no primary data to establish such a mechanism.

Representation: educator agency and religious authority

Religious educators exercised meaningful agency rather than functioning as passive conduits of doctrine. In conflict-affected Niger and the Lake Chad region, community-school teachers improvised pedagogically. They acted as "*First responders*," providing psychosocial support and physical protection despite the acute risk of kidnapping and unpaid labor (*Murugaiah*). In South Sudan, local teachers helped mediate inter-ethnic tensions in the classroom.³⁹ Comparative work on higher education in Afghanistan and Somaliland found that educators' roles could support, impede, or reveal peacebuilding dynamics.⁴⁰

At the institutional level, engaging ulama as co-designers rather than as targets of intervention was associated with greater community acceptance. In contrast, interventions

³⁶ A A Mohamed and M K Ridwan, "Promoting Justice and Peace through Islamic Education: Comparative Insights from Interfaith Engagements in Kenya and Indonesia," *Solo Universal Journal of Islamic Education and Multiculturalism* 3, no. 2 (2025): 199–212, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sujiem.v3i2.409>.

³⁷ A Breidlid, "Education in the Sudan: The Privileging of an Islamic Discourse," *Compare* 35, no. 3 (2005): 247–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920500212530>.

³⁸ S Akseer, "Reproducing Inequalities through Social Studies Textbooks in Afghanistan," in *Teaching Peace and Conflict: The Multiple Roles of School Textbooks in Peacebuilding* (Springer, 2022), 101–17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04676-6_6.

³⁹ Breidlid, "Education and Armed Conflict in Sudan and South Sudan: The Role of Teachers in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building."

⁴⁰ Kester et al., "Higher Education Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Societies: Beyond the Good/Bad Binary."

that bypassed religious authority were frequently rejected as foreign.⁴¹ Bekalo,⁴² Brophy,⁴³ Welford, and Kester et al. found that the Somaliland case, which incorporated clan elders and clerics into a hybrid governance arrangement, was associated with greater educational stability than the more state-centric arrangements in south-central Somalia. This representation was unevenly inclusive: elevating clerical authority could secure community legitimacy while narrowing the space for women and youth, and women's Islamic education often expanded through movements that operated alongside, rather than within, male-dominated clerical hierarchies.⁴⁴

Reconciliation: faith-based psychosocial resources

Faith-based practices, including Qur'anic recitation, communal dhikr, and congregational prayer, were reported as coping resources that provided structure and meaning amid disruption (Teklemariam, cited in the review). However, we found illustrative accounts rather than evidence of outcomes in African conflict settings. Theological narratives of *qaḍā' wa qadar* and of trial (*balā'*) reportedly helped students frame suffering as an endurable phase rather than a terminal condition, again on illustrative rather than measured grounds. In relation to reconciliation, Islamic ethical traditions of *ṣulḥ*, *iṣlāḥ*, and *'afw* offered locally intelligible repertoires for repairing communal relations.⁴⁵

Religiously framed reconciliation was not inherently pluralistic: it could reinforce in-group cohesion at the expense of out-group inclusion. Islamic thought is also internally plural. Reformist currents in Sudan, for instance, advanced gender equality and nonviolence against more authoritarian interpretations, which cautions against treating "Islamic education" as a single normative position.⁴⁶

Gender as a cross-cutting finding

Gender cut across all four dimensions and was the clearest site of tension among them. Schooling outcomes in the region were structured by the intersection of gender,

⁴¹ A P Gwaza and J Ochogwu, "Building Inclusive Religious Education in Nigeria," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4947012>.

⁴² S A Bekalo, M Brophy, and G Welford, "Post-Conflict Education Development in Somaliland," 2010.

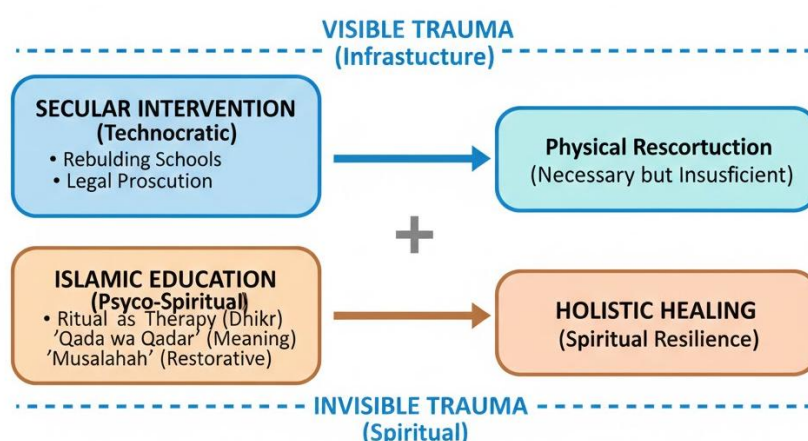
⁴³ Bekalo, Brophy, and Welford, "Post-Conflict Education Development in Somaliland."

⁴⁴ Bano, *Female Islamic Education Movements: The Re-Democratisation of Islamic Knowledge*.

⁴⁵ Mohamed and Ridwan, "Promoting Justice and Peace through Islamic Education: Comparative Insights from Interfaith Engagements in Kenya and Indonesia."

⁴⁶ S Howard, "On the Path of the Prophet in Unsettled Times: Sudan's Republican Brotherhood Looks Abroad," *Religions* 12, no. 2 (2021): 100, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020100>.

language, and class, such that nominal access did not translate into equitable participation (Hima, cited in review). As noted above, textbook content in comparable settings reproduced gendered role hierarchies even within peace-oriented reforms.⁴⁷ At the same time, women's Islamic education movements in northern Nigeria expanded female textual scholarship, exemplifying a form of agency that complicates any uniform account of faith-based education as either emancipatory or constraining.⁴⁸ An institution could therefore advance Recognition while constraining Redistribution and Representation for girls and women.



Discussion

A faith-based extension of the 4Rs framework

The 4Rs framework was developed chiefly in relation to state and secular education systems and is comparatively silent on faith-based actors in settings where the secular state lacks legitimacy or presence.⁴⁹ The contribution proposed here is a bounded extension: under conditions of low state legitimacy and high religious legitimacy, faith-based educational institutions can perform the four R-functions with greater cultural intelligibility and, therefore, greater community uptake than functionally equivalent secular interventions. This same intelligibility can coexist with reproduced injustice along some dimensions, even as it advances justice along others.

Cultural intelligibility is operationalized here as the extent to which an intervention's normative vocabulary, ritual repertoire, and authorizing voices are

⁴⁷ Akseer, "Reproducing Inequalities through Social Studies Textbooks in Afghanistan."

⁴⁸ Bano, *Female Islamic Education Movements: The Re-Democratisation of Islamic Knowledge*.

⁴⁹ M Novelli, M T A Lopes Cardozo, and A Smith, "The 4Rs Framework: Analysing Education's Contribution to Sustainable Peacebuilding with Social Justice in Conflict-Affected Contexts," *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 3, no. 1 (2017): 14–43, <https://doi.org/10.17609/N8S94K>.

recognized within the host community's moral grammar. In the reviewed evidence, observable proxies include: (i) indigenous-language and religious-language framing of rights and reconciliation concepts (e.g., framing rights principles through *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and *Haqq al-Ādamī*); (ii) involvement of locally authoritative figures, ulama, clan elders, and *muallim* in program design and delivery; and (iii) reported community acceptance and uptake, particularly relative to comparable secular alternatives. Cultural intelligibility does not denote uncritical endorsement of local norms; where these reproduce gendered or sectarian exclusion, intelligibility may coexist with structural violence.

To keep the extension falsifiable rather than advocational, it is stated as four propositions, each carrying a disconfirmation condition. Three propositions (P1, P3, P4) are grounded directly in the evidence synthesized here, with the limitations. P2 differs in kind from the other three. It is a research agenda for primary empirical testing, not a finding of the present review, though it draws indirect support from the Recognition evidence.

P1 (Redistribution; evidence-grounded). Where state provision has receded, faith-financed institutions sustain access for the most marginalized at higher continuity than fee-dependent secular alternatives, disconfirmed if continuity is equal or lower, or if specific groups are systematically excluded.

P2 (Recognition; research-agenda proposition). Identity-affirming curricula reduce the purchase of extremist alienation narratives, the cognitive-immunization hypothesis. This proposition is advanced for primary empirical testing. It is not established by the present review, which contains no primary data on susceptibility to recruitment. This finding would be disconfirmed if such curricula show no or a positive association with susceptibility.

P3 (Representation; evidence-grounded). Engaging ulama and religious educators as co-designers raises community acceptance of peace interventions. Disconfirmed if no acceptance advantage obtains, or if clerical authority suppresses marginalized participation.

P4 (Reconciliation; evidence-grounded but preliminary). Faith-based practices function as psychosocial coping and social-cohesion resources. The supporting evidence in African conflict settings remains illustrative rather than outcome-based (Section 3.4);

the proposition is therefore stated tentatively. Disconfirmed if such practices show no psychosocial benefit or reinforce in-group/out-group division

Tensions among the dimensions

Galtung's typology of direct, structural, and cultural violence shows why the same institutions that advance justice along one dimension can transmit structural or cultural violence along another.⁵⁰ Gendered exclusion, the misrecognition of minorities, and a narrowed scope of representation are the clearest routes that surface whenever the scope conditions do not hold, or internal hierarchies go unexamined. The contribution is conditional: the disconfirming cases are part of the finding, not exceptions to it. Galtung himself treated the four dimensions as interdependent and sometimes in tension, not as uniformly reinforcing, so this reading stays close to the original framework rather than departing from it.

Situating the contribution

Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith,⁵¹ Describe the 4Rs as a heuristic that needs translation into specific local contexts. The faith-based extension offered here is one such translation: it specifies a scope condition, the relative legitimacy of state versus religious authority, that the original framework left undeveloped. Pherali argues the framework exposes structural tensions well but says less about how entrenched power relations might actually be broken. The legitimacy condition proposed here identifies one mechanism for that rupture: cultural intelligibility, which determines whether local communities take up the framework at all. This reading also fits comparative work that rejects a simple good/bad verdict on education's role in conflict-affected societies,⁵² and it supports critiques of liberal peacebuilding for its secular, externally imposed character.⁵³

Policy implications

The cases reviewed here point to one policy conclusion: Islamic educational institutions need a formal place in the African Union's peace architecture. The AU's Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD, 2006) calls for local ownership and indigenous capacity, yet external secular actors continue to dominate

⁵⁰ Galtung, "Cultural Violence."

⁵¹ Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith, "The 4Rs Framework: Analysing Education's Contribution to Sustainable Peacebuilding with Social Justice in Conflict-Affected Contexts."

⁵² Kester et al., "Higher Education Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Societies: Beyond the Good/Bad Binary."

⁵³ Daoust, "Education and the Critique of Liberal Peacebuilding: The Case of South Sudan."

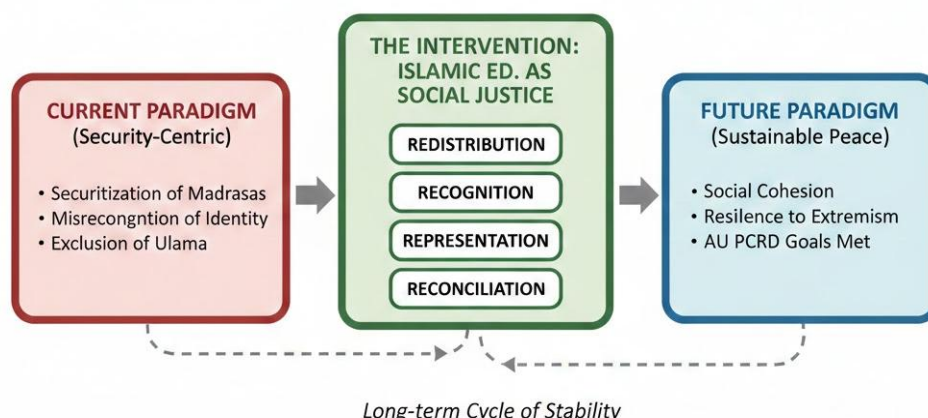
educational interventions in Nigeria and Somalia. Treating Islamic education as a security risk to monitor or secularize provokes theological resistance and performs worse. Bringing religious and traditional authorities into governance, instead of a hybrid partnership model, correlates with greater stability, as in Somaliland, though this is an associated case, not a controlled test.⁵⁴ Table 1 sets out what these implications mean in practice.

Table 1.
Policy matrix aligning the 4Rs with the African Union PCRD framework.

4R dimension	Current gap (securitization / secular approach)	Faith-based approach	Action aligned with the AU PCRD pillar
Redistribution (equity & access)	State schools are absent or closed in active conflict zones; Tsangaya/Almajiri graduates are excluded from the formal economy because their qualifications are unrecognized.	Faith-financed (<i>waqf</i> -based) institutions extend access at the margin where the state has receded.	Integrate eligible <i>madrasah</i> provision into national education planning; recognize traditional qualifications for access to vocational training (TVET).
Recognition (identity & values)	Curricula perceived as religiously mute or hostile; the "Western education is forbidden" narrative gains traction.	Value-based curricula affirm religious identity (the claim that this <i>reduces susceptibility to recruitment</i> is advanced as a hypothesis for primary testing, see P2).	Adopt contextualized human rights education rooted in local and religious values; revise biased textbooks with safeguards for minority and gender inclusion.
Representation (agency & participation)	Peace programs are top-down; religious educators and <i>ulama</i> are treated as suspects or bypassed.	<i>Ulama</i> and educators engaged as co-designers and gatekeepers of legitimacy, with safeguards to protect the voices of women and youth.	Institutionalize an advisory role for religious educators in local peace design and mediation, with explicit inclusion criteria.
Reconciliation (trauma recovery)	Technocratic focus on physical reconstruction; spiritual and psychosocial dimensions are neglected.	Faith-based psychosocial coping repertoires (proposed; efficacy in African conflict settings requires primary study).	Pilot and evaluate faith-based psychosocial support use mosques and <i>madā</i> community reconciliation venues, monitoring for group bias.

⁵⁴ Bekalo, Brophy, and Welford, "Post-Conflict Education Development in Somaliland."

Gambar 4
The Policy Matrix for Faith-Based Peace Education



Each proposal certifying traditional qualifications to widen labor-market access, contextualizing human-rights education, and formally including religious educators in local peace design needs evaluation on its own terms, with explicit safeguards against entrenching gendered or sectarian exclusion. Revitalizing Islamic education matters beyond religious policy: it bears directly on the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Limitations and future research

Four limitations, detailed in Section 2.7, qualify these conclusions. The review is restricted to English-language sources; the grey literature varies unevenly in evidentiary quality; the geographic base is concentrated in Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia/Somaliland, Niger, and Cameroon, with Mali, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and the eastern DRC notably absent. The source base leans on a small set of works cited repeatedly across studies. The Reconciliation dimension is the weakest of the four: it rests on illustrative rather than outcome evidence, and claims about faith-based psychosocial support need primary, ideally longitudinal, testing.

Future work should test propositions P1–P4 directly, starting with P2, which remains at the research-agenda stage. It should also disaggregate findings by gender, extend coverage to settings not included in this review, and examine how the AU's PCRD framework plays out in specific national contexts. Longitudinal ethnographic work would best serve this.

Conclusion

This article examined whether, and under what conditions, Islamic educational institutions in conflict-affected settings of sub-Saharan Africa contribute to peacebuilding, read through the 4Rs framework. The review finds bounded support under two scope conditions, low state legitimacy and high religious legitimacy, and reports evidence against the claim as well as for it.

Three findings hold with reasonable confidence. *First*, where state provision has receded, faith-based and community institutions have sustained basic literacy for populations that formal systems no longer reach. However, the benefits are uneven: they vary across institutional types (Tsangaya, Almajiri, Khalwa, Duksi, integrated madāris) and split along lines of gender, language, and class. *Second*, value-based Islamic curricula affirm religious identity in ways that complicate the alienation narratives extremist actors exploit. Whether such curricula also reduce recruitment is a hypothesis this review raises for empirical testing, not a finding it establishes. *Third*, when ulama and religious educators co-design interventions, communities accept those interventions more readily, but in some settings, this same arrangement narrows space for women and youth. The framework must surface this tension, not conceal it.

A fourth finding, on Reconciliation, rests on weaker ground. Islamic ethical traditions of ṣulḥ, iṣlāḥ, and 'afw give communities a familiar vocabulary for repairing relations, and case studies describe devotional practice as a coping resource amid disruption. But the evidence from the African settings reviewed here is illustrative rather than outcome-based. Establishing that these practices produce measurable psychosocial benefits will require primary research, ideally longitudinal.

The theoretical contribution is a bounded, faith-based extension of the 4Rs framework. It specifies a scope condition that the original framework left underdeveloped, the relative legitimacy of state versus religious authority, and it identifies cultural intelligibility as one mechanism that enables grassroots uptake. The contribution holds only conditionally: where these scope conditions fail, or where internal hierarchies go unexamined, the same institutions can transmit structural and cultural violence along the very lines where they otherwise advance justice.

For policy, the African Union's PCRD framework commits to local ownership; that commitment gives policymakers reason to engage faith-based educational actors in the

settings reviewed, as one set of measures to test, rather than a guaranteed solution. Three avenues follow: certifying traditional qualifications to widen labor-market access, grounding human-rights education in local religious values, and including religious educators in local peace design. Each needs explicit safeguards to prevent the entrenchment of gendered or sectarian exclusion. These findings are specific to the settings reviewed; they do not generalize to sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

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