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Character Formation and Higher-Order Thinking in Pakistan's Primary-Level SNC Islamiyat Curriculum

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Abstract
This study examines how Pakistan's primary-level Single National Curriculum (SNC) for Islamiyat develops character formation and higher-order thinking across Grades I–V. Using qualitative content analysis, the study analyses the official curriculum structure, standards, benchmarks, Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), suggested activities, Qur'an and Hadith requirements, teacher guidance and assessment provisions. The findings identify 105 distinct named subthemes and a clear increase in curricular breadth from 13 subthemes in Grade I to 28 in Grades IV and V. Character formation also becomes progressively more social and applied: 73 of 105 explicitly behaviour-oriented SLO statements (69.5%) occur in Grades IV–V, with increasing emphasis on trustworthiness, social responsibility, resource use, safety and environmental care. Developmental progression is strongest in sacred-text sequencing, while Grade III emerges as the most abrupt transition point in content and cognitive demand. Higher-order thinking is present but uneven: explanation, distinction, consequence analysis, application and moral judgment are concentrated mainly in character, social and contemporary strands, whereas recitation and memorisation remain central throughout. The study concludes that SNC Islamiyat provides a coherent foundation for knowledge–character integration, but cognitive progression and assessment specificity remain less consistent than curricular expansion.

Keywords: *Single National Curriculum (SNC); Islamiyat Education; Character Formation; Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS); Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs); Curriculum Progression*

1. Introduction

The Single National Curriculum (SNC) of Pakistan restructured primary education on the basis of common standards, benchmarks and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) (Zaman et al., 2021). However, in the case of Islamiyat, common content alone does not establish curricular cohesion. The subject is intended to integrate religious knowledge with belief, conduct and social responsibility; therefore, the sequencing and cognitive quality of its outcomes are significant (Tayyab et al., 2022). Previous SNC studies report mixed findings, with both teacher-based and curriculum analyses recognising the reform's unifying intent alongside tensions associated with implementation, alignment, inclusion and uniformity (Riaz et al., 2023; Hanif, 2023; Shaikh & Benedetti, 2024). The internal design of the Islamiyat curriculum itself is therefore an empirical question that cannot be taken for granted from policy intention. For primary learners, the question is not simply whether Islamic values are mentioned in the curriculum, but how they are structured to enable learners to progress from recognising to understanding, practising and increasingly reasoned behaviour. Research finds a significant amount of moral and character-related content in Pakistani textbooks, but this establishes the

presence of content rather than its developmental progression (Jamil et al., 2023; Khokhar, 2023). Broadly, research on Islamic education also states that character education needs to be integrated with knowledge, habituation, reflection, pedagogy and assessment (Itsnatun & Diantoro, 2022; Abidin et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2023; Pakpahan & Habibah, 2021). The analytical question is therefore whether the SNC operationalises values in increasingly explicit and measurable forms of action or simply names desirable virtues.

The second issue relates to cognitive demand. While it is accepted that some areas of Islamiyat legitimately require memorisation, such as Qur'anic recitation, supplications and certain Hadith, the curriculum in these areas also requires progression toward explanation, application, comparison, reflection and moral reasoning. Research on Islamic Religious Education indicates that the use of HOTS-based pedagogy and evaluation is gradually increasing, while emphasis on lower-order cognitive skills and inconsistencies in classroom task design remain (Ahmad et al., 2020; Sinaga et al., 2020; Mispani et al., 2021; Rochmat et al., 2022; Ramang, 2022). Parallel analyses of SNC content in English and General Science (Ahmed et al., 2023; Mansoor & Din, 2023; Mobeen & Baig, 2024) also show that competency language does not always facilitate higher-order cognitive demand. Thus, the question is not simply whether the curriculum refers to HOTS, but where HOTS appears, how it develops across grade levels, and whether activities and assessment support it.

Hence, there is a gap in the literature. Many studies conducted in Pakistan have focused on SNC implementation, teachers' perceptions, individual textbooks, ideological issues and/or cognitive challenges in subjects other than Islamiyat. They do not provide a grade-by-grade line of development for the primary Islamiyat curriculum showing how character formation and cognitive progression relate to strands, standards, benchmarks, SLOs and activities. This is significant because curricular coherence depends on sequencing that ensures increases in content are accompanied by increases in conceptual and moral complexity (Nurdiyanto et al., 2024). Based on the above, the researchers conduct a qualitative content analysis of SNC Islamiyat for Grades I–V in relation to curriculum structure, character and social responsibility, developmental progression, cognitive demand and shifts from religious knowledge to action. The study does not make claims about classroom outcomes that cannot be supported by curriculum documentation; instead, it identifies strengths, gaps and internal tensions in the documented curriculum.

Therefore, a qualitative content analysis is conducted on the existing primary-level SNC Islamiyat curriculum (Grades I–V). It explores how the curriculum is organised, including character building, social responsibility, progression and the cognitive demand of the SLOs, especially the shift from religious knowledge to behaviour and from lower-order to higher-order thinking. The study identifies strengths and gaps in the documented curriculum, as well as tensions visible in the documentation, and avoids overclaiming classroom outcomes that are not supported by the documents.

2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

2.1 Character Formation in Islamic Education and Child Development

The move away from a purely informative model of character formation has become evident in recent Islamic education research. Agbaria (2024) sees religious education as a formative process of responsibility and relational awareness, while Ni'mah et al. (2023) note increasing

scholarly attention to attitudinal and behavioural change in Islamic pedagogy. Value education is considered educationally influential when values are integrated into planning, activities and lived routines in the classroom and school rather than confined to limited moral instruction (Khaidir & Suud, 2020; Pakpahan & Habibah, 2021; Solihin et al., 2020). The key distinction is therefore between value representation and value operationalisation: a curriculum is not necessarily formative simply because it represents a value; it must also ask learners to act on or interpret that value in a particular way.

This distinction highlights one drawback in much of the literature. Itsnatun and Diantoro (2022) call for intentional curriculum planning of Islamic character, but do not show how learning progresses grade by grade through learning outcomes. Primary-level studies on religious habituation show that prayer, gratitude, discipline and respectful interaction can support beneficial habits, but habituation alone cannot be used as evidence that learners understand the moral basis of an action (Irpan & Sain, 2024). Likewise, affective strategies based on Qur'anic values focus on inner attitudes (Badri & Malik, 2024), yet they do not address how curriculum design can gradually support the development of such attitudes. For the current study, character formation must therefore be evident in the expected learning structure rather than inferred merely from the presence of religious practice.

The issue becomes more concrete when evidence from Pakistan is considered. Messages of personal and social conduct are evident in textbooks of Islamic Education and Ethics (Khokhar, 2023), and explicit character values are also found in a Grade V textbook (Jamil et al., 2023). These studies confirm the existence of moral content, but their focus on a single textbook or grade does not show whether values become more sophisticated throughout primary school. The developmental issue is whether learners in the early grades progress toward social responsibility in later grades, making judgments based on consequences and applying manners and routines more autonomously.

Pedagogical studies, moreover, warn against assuming a direct correlation between documented values and formed character. Modelling, structured religious practice and humanistic interaction are associated with character development, as shown by Habibullah and Sugiono (2026), while purposeful, reflective and contextual engagement is emphasised by Saepudin et al. (2023) and Samsudin (2025). These findings are significant, but they concern enacted pedagogy. A prior question for a curriculum study is whether the formal document provides an integrated pathway for such pedagogy through its SLOs, activities and assessment expectations. Thus, the present analysis considers character formation as a documented transition from knowledge and habit toward internalisation, social responsibility and practical conduct, but does not presume that curricular intentions will necessarily produce learner change.

2.2 Higher-Order Thinking and Developmental Progression

Research on Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) seeks to move beyond religious learning in which recall remains dominant. Ahmad et al. (2020) note that attention to cognitively demanding teaching and higher-order assessment outcomes is increasing; however, their review shows that HOTS outcomes depend not only on terminology but also on task design. This distinction is important in curriculum analysis: a document may call for critical thinking while its SLOs still require primarily recognition and

reproduction/memorisation. The analysis should therefore focus on the action demanded from the learner.

This is corroborated by assessment studies. Mispani et al. (2021) show a significant difference between lower-order and higher-order cognitive abilities in Islamic education assessment, while Rochmat et al. (2022) connect HOTS-based assessment with critical character by relating analysis and judgment to moral education. Similarly, Al-Saqriah and Kazem (2023) indicate that "well-designed learning strategies can boost moral reasoning." Abdul-Jabbar and Makki (2024) introduce a specifically Islamic rationale for reflective engagement through the concept of tadabbur. Together, these studies indicate that cognitive complexity in Islamiyat should not be measured only by the amount of religious material, but also by demands for explanation, comparison, evidence, consideration of consequences and reasoned choice.

Another constraint emerges from the implementation literature. According to Ramang (2022), meaningful religious learning that enhances HOTS is related to contextual problems, reflection, collaboration and application, while Alotaibi (2025) found that teacher-centred learning and inadequate preparation remained significant constraints in the systematic review. A similar point is made by Maisyanah et al. (2024), who link contextual reflection with Qur'anic learning, and Rahmah et al. (2026), who state that HOTS-oriented assessment is strongest when objectives, instruction and assessment align. The analytical question therefore shifts from "Do the SLOs use advanced verbs?" to "Is there a sequence of advanced verbs supported by activities and assessment?"

The present study is therefore developmentally focused. There is no expectation that Grade I and Grade V learners will think at the same level about religious ideas; progression should be evident in an increasing ability to recognise and perform accurately, explain, apply, compare, reflect and make increasingly reasoned moral choices. The present study extends the method of analysing cognitive levels in SNC primary material proposed by Ahmed et al. (2023) by integrating character and conduct into the analysis of Islamiyat. The test is whether curricular breadth increases not merely through content accumulation, but through increasing cognitive and moral complexity.

2.3 SNC Islamiyat Curriculum and Research Gap

Research on the SNC in Pakistan has grown but remains theoretically divided among implementation, policy, textbook content and specific educational constructs. As shown by Zaman et al. (2021) and Sher et al. (2024), teachers may support the goals of the curriculum while also identifying problems related to resources, competence, professional development and assessment. Qumar and Khalil (2024), also, highlight the need for ongoing training and preparation for assessments. While these studies can be valuable for understanding enactment, they also represent the edge of what can be done with documentary analysis, as the analysis of what is expressed in the curriculum cannot be used as evidence for classroom success.

Questions about the religious and ideological aspects of the SNC are raised by studies in this area. Significant religious material is found in the Grade V English and Urdu textbooks (Tayyab et al., 2022), while others, Shaikh and Benedetti (2024), have outlined issues of curriculum uniformity in pluralism and diversity in the longer history of ideology and language in Pakistan. While these studies sheds light on the policy context, they are not to establish the sequence character, social responsibility and cognitive demand in Islamiyah curriculum of

Grade I-V. They are thus of relevance to the present study more from a contextual point of view than as direct evidence. More directly related to the present issue, Bhatti and Chaudhary (2023) investigated the alignment of the National Curriculum of Islamiat, Grade I-VIII and came up with a strongly negative teacher response particularly from the perspective of learning outcomes, content and teaching method. A perception study with eight grades, however, does not show precisely where there is congruence and incongruence within the primary curriculum. Broadly speaking in terms of inclusion and global-citizenship, Hanif (2023) also points out a trend that is moving towards more knowledge than skills. All these findings highlight the need to analyze the cognitive and formative demand in SLOs, activities and assessment expectations at the document level, grade and strand level. In the literature, there are hence three propositions that are not expounded in detail enough to demonstrate how they overlap: Islamic education should be integrated with knowledge, character and conduct; in contemporary religious education, attention is increasingly paid to the ability to apply, reflect and think more deeply; SNC research continues to raise issues on alignment, skill development and enactment. What still has not been analysed is the organization of these dimensions in Primary SNC Islamiyat. The current study addresses this gap, mapping strands, standards, benchmarks, SLOs, content and cognitive demands across Grades I-V where progression is coherent, where discontinuities exist and where content and cognitive demands are not readily measurable.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Paradigm

This research used a qualitative design based on qualitative content analysis of the primary-level Single National Curriculum (SNC) for Islamiyat. A qualitative approach was suitable because the study focused on the meaning, organisation, progression and cognitive demands of curriculum content rather than learner achievement or statistical relationships. Qualitative content analysis is a systematic process for analysing written texts that allows attention to context, patterns, categories and underlying meanings (Schreier et al., 2020). It has also been successfully applied to school textbooks and curriculum-related documents to uncover how particular ideas are represented and structured within students' learning resources (Seddighi et al., 2021).

This study was situated within a pragmatic paradigm. Pragmatism was appropriate because the analysis integrated two types of evidence: principles of Islamic education as an interpretive framework and contemporary curriculum documents as the object of analysis. A pragmatic approach does not confine research to a single philosophical approach; rather, it is problem-driven and uses analytical procedures best suited to answering the research questions (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). The focus of this study was therefore the documented curriculum as it stands and what students across Grades I–V are expected to know, understand, practise and reflect upon.

3.2 Data Sources and Units of Analysis

The documentary corpus focused on the official SNC Islamiyat curriculum for Grades I–V. Its learning strands, standards, benchmarks, suggested activities and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), together with Qur’an and Hadith learning requirements, character-building content, and available guidance for teaching and assessment, were analysed. Where useful, selected

prescribed Islamiyat textbooks already analysed in the thesis were used to clarify how some curriculum expectations were represented in learning materials. The previous (2006) Islamiyat curriculum was used only for a few structural comparisons already mentioned in the thesis, not as a separate historical data set.

Qur'anic verses, authentic Hadith and educational concepts from Muslim scholars, especially al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun and al-Zarnuji, served as the basis for interpreting character formation, gradual learning, the relationship between knowledge and action, and moral responsibility. These Islamic sources were not treated as equivalent curriculum documents or counted as SNC data; rather, they provided conceptual criteria through which curriculum patterns were interpreted.

The units of analysis remained at the level at which curricular intentions could be directly observed. These included individual SLOs, standards, benchmarks, learning strands, grade-level content statements, suggested activities, character-building narratives, textbook exercises (where applicable) and assessment statements. This distinction was important because the SNC operates across multiple document layers; claims about curriculum structure were therefore based on the location of evidence within the document in which it appeared, rather than inferred from one document to another.

3.3 Coding and Data-Analysis Procedure

Analysis was conducted systematically. First, a regrouping of the curriculum materials was done to follow the progression from Grade I to Grade V by grade, learning strand, standard, benchmark and SLO. The textual units identified were then coded based on five general analytical parameters resulting from the study; spiritual formation, moral character, social responsibility, cognitive demand and practical conduct. A rigorous qualitative content analysis (Lindgren et al., 2020) was performed to provide a condensation of the documentary material to meaningful categories, while avoiding the reduction of the analysis to single statements. A second level of analysis aimed specifically at the action verbs, and cognitive demands of the SLOs. SLOs were divided into those that needed to be recognised, named, recited and recalled; those that needed to be explained and understood; and those that needed to be applied, compared, analyzed, reflected on and/or make moral decisions. Include the type of thinking needed with each outcome, as well as the number of verbs. Where appropriate, descriptive counts were used and these were considered as supportive to the primary qualitative analysis.

The coded material has then been compared across the three developmental stages as identified in the thesis as: Foundation Stage (Grades I – II), Transition Stage (Grade III) and Consolidation/Application Stage (Grades IV – V). This comparison was based on whether the religious learning was at the level of recognition and habit or at the level of explanation and application, and reflection and responsible action. Using the method of thematic analysis, the relationships that recurred between the curriculum structure, character formation, and the cognitive progression and hands-on experience were identified. This meant re-reading the data, identifying codes and assigning them to themes, and interpreting patterns that occurred across themes, instead of themes being stand-alone codes (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Finally, the results of the different strands of analysis were brought together to consider curriculum strengths, gaps in progression and tensions within the curriculum. Memorisation, higher-order thinking, knowledge and character, curriculum expectations and assessment, and

stated values and their translation to observable learning activities were particular areas of interest.

4. Results

4.1 Structure and Learning Architecture of the SNC Islamiyat Curriculum

The SNC Islamiyat curriculum is not structured as a linear sequence of religious topics. It has a documented architecture beginning with 22 teaching objectives, followed by seven strands, standards, two official benchmark bands, grade-wise SLOs, suggested activities, teacher guidance, assessment directions and detailed textbook specifications. The seven strands are: Qur'an Majid, Hadith Nabawi and Duas; Emaniyat and Ibadat; Seerat-e-Tayyibah; Akhlaq and Adab; Husn-e-Muamalat-o-Muashrat; Hidayat ke Sarchashmay aur Mashahir-e-Islam; and Islami Taleemat aur Asr-e-Hazir ke Taqazay (Government of Pakistan, 2020, PDF pp. 12–14). Full coding of the grade tables identified 105 distinct named subthemes. Their grade distribution is highly uneven: Grade I contains 13 (12.4%), Grade II 14 (13.3%), Grade III 22 (21.0%), Grade IV 28 (26.7%) and Grade V 28 (26.7%). The largest percentage change in named subthemes from one grade to the next occurs from Grade II to Grade III (+57.1%). In Grades IV–V, the number of named subthemes levels off at 28 per grade, more than double the number in Grade I (+115.4%).

This is confirmed by the stage distribution. There are 27 named subthemes (25.7%) in the Foundation Stage (Grades I–II), 22 (21.0%) in the Transition Stage (Grade III) and 56 (53.3%) in the Consolidation/Application Stage (Grades IV–V). The final stage includes two grades and averages 28 subthemes per grade, a 107.4% increase from 13.5 per grade in the Foundation Stage.

Across strands, Emaniyat and Ibadat account for 25 of 105 named subthemes (23.8%), Qur'an/Hadith for 23 (21.9%), Seerah for 20 (19.0%), Akhlaq for 13 (12.4%), exemplary personalities for 12 (11.4%), Husn-e-Muamalat for 7 (6.7%), and contemporary requirements for 5 (4.8%). The pattern matters because the Qur'an/Hadith architecture remains relatively stable at four to five named subthemes per grade, while Seerah expands from two subthemes in Grades I–II to six in Grade IV and seven in Grade V. Thus, upper-primary growth occurs less through adding new Qur'an/Hadith categories and more through widening narrative, social and applied ethical content.

The two strands absent from Grades I–II are precisely Husn-e-Muamalat-o-Muashrat and Islami Taleemat aur Asr-e-Hazir ke Taqazay. Their introduction in Grade III changes the curriculum from five active strands to seven, a 40% increase in strand breadth. Across Grades III–V these two strands contribute 12 named subthemes, and 10 of those 12 (83.3%) occur in Grades IV–V. The social/contemporary expansion is therefore not evenly distributed after introduction; it is weighted toward the consolidation/application years.

Table 1. Matrix of Distinct Named Subthemes by Grade and Strand

Grade	Qur'an/ Hadith	Emaniyat & Ibadat	Seerah	Akhlaq	Husn-e-Muamalat	Exemplars/ Mashahir	Contemporary
Grade I	4	4	2	2	0	1	0
Grade II	4	4	2	3	0	1	0
Grade III	5	7	3	2	1	3	1
Grade IV	5	5	6	3	3	4	2
Grade V	5	5	7	3	3	3	2
Total	23	25	20	13	7	12	5

Source: Government of Pakistan (2020), PDF pp. 16–49.

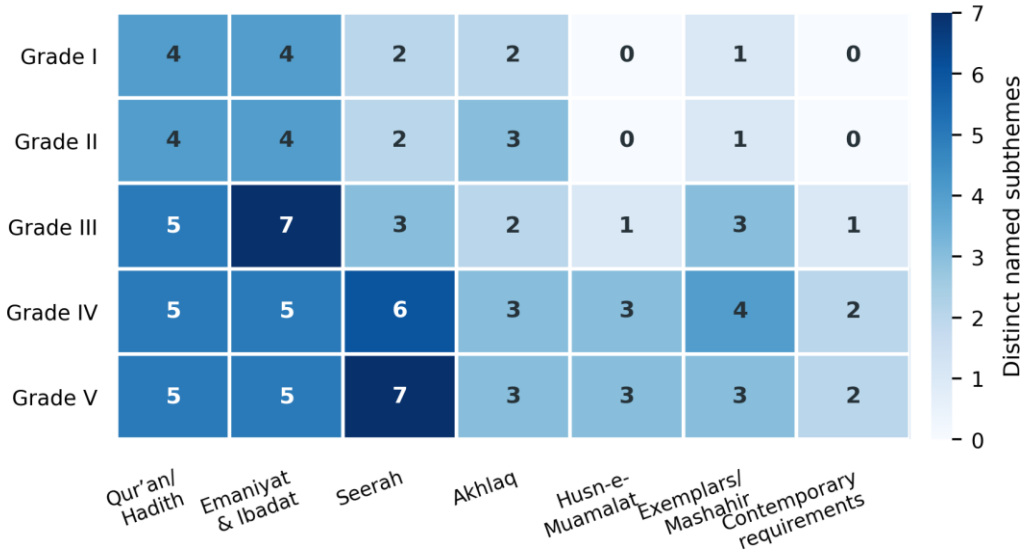


Figure 1. Grade × Strand Matrix of Distinct Named Subthemes

The subject-level implementation apparatus is also unusually explicit. The Islamiyat document contains 14 numbered directions for teachers, eight named teaching approaches, seven reflective questions for teachers, and a separate assessment section distinguishing formative and summative assessment (Government of Pakistan, 2020, PDF pp. 50–53). At the framework level, the NCF organises textbook standards into six categories and 21 numbered indicators; indicator 17 explicitly requires assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes in ways that promote understanding, application, problem-solving, analysis, evaluation, synthesis and creativity. The NCF further lists 15 standards for assessment, including measurement of critical, analytical and creative thinking and outcomes encompassing attitudes, behaviours and skills (Government of Pakistan, n.d., pp. 38–40, 72–73).

Table 2. Implementation and Assessment Architecture Surrounding the Grade Tables

Documentary Layer	Count	Result
Islamiyat teaching objectives	22	Broad subject aims before grade-level operationalisation
Islamiyat teacher directions	14	Explicit teacher-facing guidance
Named teaching approaches	8	Questioning, brainstorming, discussion, individual/pair/group work, survey, role play, project/technology use
Teacher reflective questions	7	Prompts concerning planning, intended learning, method choice, activity ordering, assessment and resources
Subject assessment modes	2	Formative and summative
NCF textbook-standard categories	6	Compliance, content/organisation, instructional support, presentation, assessment, culture/values
NCF textbook indicators	21	Includes explicit HOTS and values requirements
NCF assessment standards	15	Includes SLO alignment, multiple tools, HOTS, attitudes, behaviours and skills
Islamiyat textbook-writer directions	26	Subject-specific content, sourcing, presentation, Hadith and grade-load guidance

Sources: Government of Pakistan (2020), PDF pp. 50–53 and 55–57; National Curriculum Framework, pp. 38–40 and 72–73.

This structural visibility should be understood as documented capacity, not as evidence of successful enactment. SNC implementation has been identified as a persistent challenge in terms of training, resources and assessment by Razzaq et al. (2025); similarly, Bhatti and Chaudhary (2023) found dissatisfaction among 70% of Islamiat teachers with the alignment of curriculum components, particularly the alignment of outcomes with teaching methods, while Sher et al. (2024) emphasise the need for teacher training and assessment support. However, these studies do not contradict the present finding that the curriculum is explicit. Rather, they highlight the central implementation challenge: even with a detailed outcomes architecture, weak learning may result if SLOs, pedagogy and assessment are not operationally aligned.

4.2 Character Formation and Social Responsibility

The dedicated behaviour-oriented tables provide a more tangible view of character outcomes within the overall curriculum. In total, 105 SLO statements appear as bullet points in the Akhlaq, Husn-e-Muamalat-o-Muashrat and contemporary-requirements tables: 6 in Grade I, 10 in Grade II, 16 in Grade III, 38 in Grade IV and 35 in Grade V. This is a conservative count of explicitly operationalised character, social and contemporary conduct outcomes because it excludes strands with moral content that are not explicitly social or contemporary conduct strands, such as Seerah. The distribution across Grades I–V is highly skewed toward the upper-primary grades. Of the 105 dedicated behaviour-oriented SLO statements, 16 (15.2%) occur in Grades I–II, 16 (15.2%) in Grade III and 73 (69.5%) in Grades IV–V. This is particularly noticeable from Grade III to Grade IV, where the count increases from 16 to 38, a 137.5% increase that reflects both a wider range of topics and denser operationalisation of conduct.

Across the three specific domains, Akhlaq contributes 51 of 105 statements (48.6%), Husn-e-Muamalat 36 (34.3%) and contemporary-requirements themes 18 (17.1%). The Foundation Stage contains 16 counted statements, all in Akhlaq, because the other two strands are not present. From Grade III onward, however, the combined proportion of Husn-e-Muamalat and contemporary-requirements statements is 56.3% in Grade III, 63.2% in Grade IV and 60.0% in Grade V. This transition from individual morality to responsibility in relationships can be interpreted in light of Qur'an 16:90:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

English translation: "Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and giving to relatives." Qur'an 16:90

Analytically, the verse frames moral conduct as extending beyond the self to justice, ihsan and obligations toward others, paralleling the curriculum's movement from personal Akhlaq into social dealings and public responsibility.

The Grade IV pattern makes this movement particularly visible. The curriculum broadens the field to simplicity, etiquette of gatherings, punctuality, trustworthiness, service to people, patriotism, cleanliness and water use. The trustworthiness cluster is particularly illuminated by Qur'an 4:58:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا

English translation: "Indeed, Allah commands you to return trusts to those entitled to them."Qur'an 4:58

The movement from knowing a rule to making a morally responsible judgment is further aligned with Qur'an 5:8:

اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ

English translation: "Be just; that is nearer to God-consciousness." Qur'an 5:8

Within the study's analytical framework, these scriptural anchors help distinguish simple value recognition from the curriculum's stronger Grade IV emphasis on consequences, responsible dealings and applied conduct.

Grade V retains eight explicit behaviour subthemes but shifts them toward tolerance, forgiveness and gentleness, frugality, fulfilment of promises, Islamic brotherhood, avoidance of tale-bearing, accident prevention and protection of plants and trees. The brotherhood theme directly resonates with Qur'an 49:10:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ

English translation: "The believers are but brothers."Qur'an 49:10

The Grade V emphasis on frugality and responsible resource use is reinforced by two related Qur'anic statements:

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا

English translation: "Eat and drink, but do not be excessive."Qur'an 7:31

إِنَّ الْمُبَذِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيَاطِينِ

English translation: "Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils." Qur'an 17:27

These links make the Grade V findings more than a list of values: they show a curriculum increasingly concerned with reciprocity, restraint, consequences and socially distributed responsibility.

Table 3. Exact Count of Bullet-Pointed SLO Statements in the Dedicated Behaviour-Oriented Tables

Grade	Akhlaq	Husn-e-Muamalat	Contemporary requirements	Total	Share of 105
Grade I	6	0	0	6	5.7%
Grade II	10	0	0	10	9.5%
Grade III	7	6	3	16	15.2%
Grade IV	14	17	7	38	36.2%
Grade V	14	13	8	35	33.3%
Total	51	36	18	105	100%

Source: Government of Pakistan (2020), PDF pp. 18, 22, 28–30, 36–39 and 46–49.

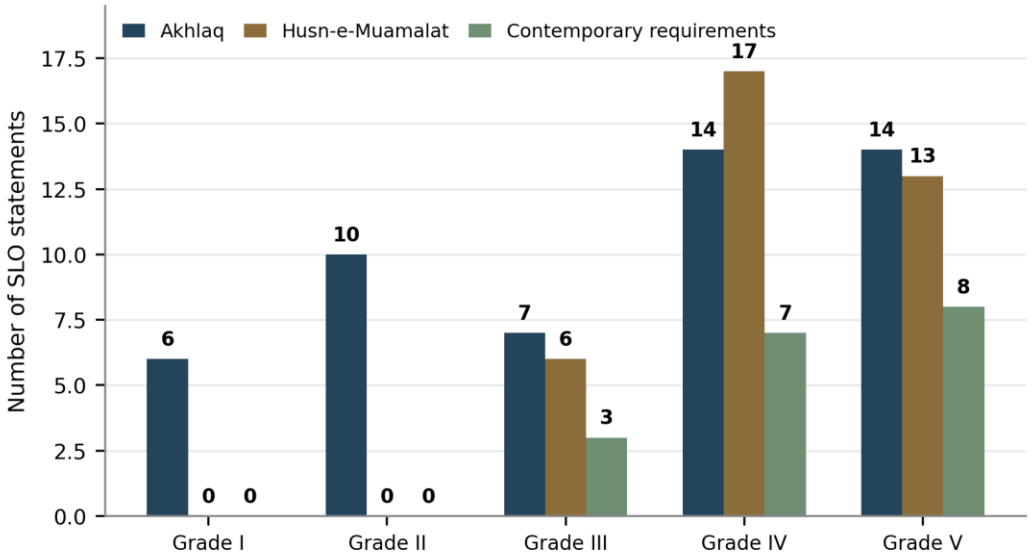


Figure 2. Grade-wise distribution of the 105 dedicated behaviour-oriented SLO statements. The abrupt increase at Grade IV is visible in both density and domain spread.

The pattern is important because it sees the formation of character move from a mainly personal register to the relational and public responsibility. In line with this, the concept of Islamic religious education is seen as formation in responsibility (Agbaria, 2024) and critical character is related to analysis and judgment (Rochmat et al., 2022). The research in the field of elementary education and Islamic education in recent times also has the same conclusion from practice, namely that mentoring and culture in schools are emphasized by Arif et al. (2024), movement from moral knowledge to moral action is described by Ma'arif et al. (2024), and value integration, teacher modeling, and contextual learning are emphasized by Rachman (2026). The SNC's contribution is not causal, but curricular: The upper-primary SLOs place

more and more emphasis on values in relationships, consequences of actions and practical decisions, the document itself, however, does not show internalisation.

4.3 Developmental Progression across Grades I–V

Progress in developmental stages is evident on three different documentary criteria: the number of named subthemes, the number of "sacred-text" (for example, Bible verses), and the number of grade-book specifications. There are 13 and 14 subthemes in Grades I – II, 22 in Grade III and 28 in each of Grades IV – V. The Foundation Stage then consists of 27 subthemes named, 22 subthemes in the Transition Stage and 56 subthemes in the Consolidation/Application Stage. The plateau in the number of subthemes in Grades IV-V is significant: curricular breadth does not continue to grow between grades IV and V, and the textual load and complexity grow. Development is not a mere piling up of ever more and more categories. The most coherent cumulative sequence is found in Nazra Qur'an. The Qur'anic Qaida and the last six Surahs are taught in Grade I. Grade II covers paras 1–2, Grade III paras 3–8, Grade IV paras 9–18, and Grade V paras 19–30. After the Grade I foundation, annual para load increases from 2 to 6 to 10 to 12. Cumulative para completion reaches 2/30 (6.7%) by Grade II, 8/30 (26.7%) by Grade III, 18/30 (60.0%) by Grade IV and 30/30 (100%) by Grade V. Grades IV–V alone contain 22 of the 30 para-based units, or 73.3% of the post-Qaida Nazra sequence (Government of Pakistan, 2020, PDF p. 15). Hadith progression is also graded, but the curriculum uses two different measures. The official appendix lists 18 grade-assigned core Ahadith: 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 across Grades I–V. Their shares are 5.6%, 11.1%, 22.2%, 27.8% and 33.3% respectively; 61.1% of the core list is placed in Grades IV–V. Separately, textbook-writer guidance specifies minimum Hadith inclusion of 4, 6, 8, 12 and 15 per grade book. Summed across five separate books, these minimum placements equal 45, of which 27 (60.0%) occur in Grades IV–V. The figure 45 is therefore a book-placement requirement, not a claim that the primary curriculum contains 45 unique Ahadith. The growth of the textbook volume is more uniform. The total number of pages suggested in all five books is a minimum of 350 pages, a maximum of 400 pages and an average total of 375 pages. There is a 72.7% increase from Grade I to Grade V in the midpoint (55 to 95 pages). So, with the final grades the curriculum is burdened with documentation although the number of named subthemes has already levelled off at 28.

The most focused change point is the grade II to III. Named subthemes increase by 57.1% (14 to 22), active strands by 40% (5 to 7), annual para load by 200% (2 to 6), and core Hadith entries by 100% (2 to 4). This confluence of structural, textual and ethical growth helps to justify the positioning of Grade III as a transition grade and not just the first grade of the official Grades III–V benchmark band.

Table 4. Multi-Dimensional Developmental Progression across Grades I–V

Grade	Named Subthemes	Nazra Requirement	Cumulative Coverage	Core Hadith (n=18)	Textbook Hadith Minimum	Recommended Book Length
Grade I	13	Qaida + final 6 Surahs	Foundation	1 (5.6%)	4	50–60 pp.
Grade II	14	Paras 1–2	2/30 (6.7%)	2 (11.1%)	6	60–70 pp.
Grade III	22	Paras 3–8	8/30 (26.7%)	4 (22.2%)	8	70–80 pp.
Grade IV	28	Paras 9–18	18/30 (60.0%)	5 (27.8%)	12	80–90 pp.
Grade V	28	Paras 19–30	30/30 (100.0%)	6 (33.3%)	15	90–100 pp.

Sources: official grade tables, Nazra plan, Hadith appendix and textbook-writer specifications, Government of Pakistan (2020), PDF pp. 15–59.

Table 5. Complete 18-Item Grade-Assigned Hadith Appendix: Arabic, English Meaning and Dominant Formative Function

Grade	Arabic text as listed in SNC	English meaning	Dominant formative function
I	الإِيمَانِ شَطْرُ الطَّهُورُ	Purity is half of faith.	Cleanliness linked with faith
II	صَلَّى وَاحِدَةً عَلَيَّ صَلَّى مَنْ عَشْرًا عَلَيْهِ اللَّهُ	Whoever sends one blessing upon me, Allah sends ten upon him.	Love and reverence for the Prophet
II	الْمُؤْمِنِ نُورُ الصَّلَاةُ	Prayer is light for the believer.	Worship and spiritual discipline
III	بِالنِّيَّاتِ الأَعْمَالُ إِنَّمَا	Actions are judged by intentions.	Motive and inner accountability
III	وَعَلَّمَهُ الْقُرْآنَ تَعَلَّمَ مَنْ خَيْرُكُمْ	The best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it.	Learning joined with transmission
III	الْعِبَادَةِ مُخُّ الدُّعَاءُ	Supplication is the essence of worship.	Spiritual dependence
III	صَدَقَةٌ مَعْرُوفٍ كُلُّ	Every recognised good deed is charity.	Everyday prosocial action
IV	مِنَّا فَلَيْسَ غَشَّ مَنْ	Whoever cheats is not one of us.	Integrity in dealings
IV	قَتَّاتٌ الْجَنَّةَ يَدْخُلُ لَا	A tale-bearer will not enter Paradise.	Control of harmful speech
IV	قَاطِعٌ الْجَنَّةَ يَدْخُلُ لَا	One who severs ties will not enter Paradise.	Maintenance of relationships
IV	أَحْسَنَكُمْ إِلَيَّ أَحَبِّكُمْ مِنْ إِنَّ أَخْلَاقًا	Among those dearest to me are those best in character.	Character as a criterion of excellence
IV	يَأْمَنُ لَا مَنْ الْجَنَّةَ يَدْخُلُ لَا بَوَائِقَهُ جَارُهُ	One whose neighbour is not safe from his harm will not enter Paradise.	Neighbour safety and social responsibility
V	شِئْتَ مَا فَاصْنَعْ تَسْتَحِ لَمْ إِذَا	If you feel no shame, then do as you wish.	Moral restraint and conscience
V	لِأَخِيهِ يُحِبَّ حَتَّى عَبْدٌ يُؤْمِنُ لَا لِنَفْسِهِ يُحِبُّ مَا	Faith is incomplete until one loves for his brother what he loves for himself.	Reciprocity and empathy
V	بَعْدِي نَبِيَّ لَا النَّبِيِّينَ خَاتَمُ أَنَا	I am the seal of the prophets; there is no prophet after me.	Doctrinal consolidation
V	النَّاسَ يَرْحَمُ لَا مَنْ اللَّهُ يَرْحَمُ لَا	Allah does not show mercy to one who does not show mercy to people.	Mercy in social conduct
V	يَشْكُرِ لَمْ النَّاسَ يَشْكُرِ لَمْ مَنْ اللَّهَ	Whoever does not thank people does not thank Allah.	Gratitude in human relations
V	الْخَيْرَ يُحْرَمِ الرِّفْقَ يُحْرَمِ مَنْ كُلَّهُ	Whoever is deprived of gentleness is deprived of all good.	Gentleness and non-harsh conduct

Source: SNC Islamiyat grade-assigned Hadith appendix, Government of Pakistan (2020), PDF p. 59.

The developmental pattern moves forwards in a stop-start manner. Grade III is a compressed transition where both text load and Hadith exposure increase along with an increase in strand breadth and interpretive demand. According to Alotaibi (2025), teacher mediation and strategy in the learning process are considered as the main focus in developing HOTS, whereas Asmawi and Nasir (2025) state that there are several problems in the learning process, namely limited conceptual ability, training, workload, and teaching materials. The latter is different in terms of setting and level but the mechanism is the same: if a number of demands of the curriculum are increased simultaneously, sequencing alone is not sufficient to guarantee progression. Grade III is thus a curricular hinge as well as a potential stress point where there is a need for intentional scaffolding from recognition to explanation and application.

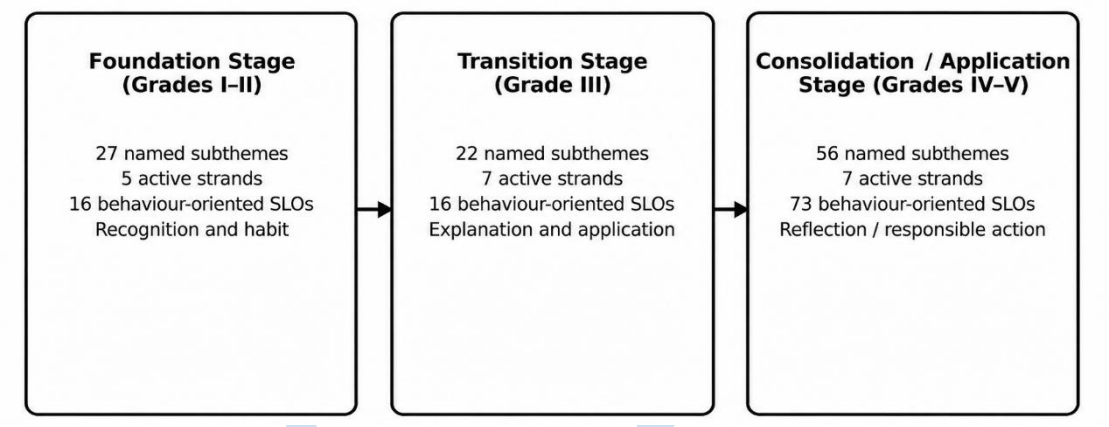


Figure 3. Developmental progression across the three analytical stages.

4.4 Higher-Order Thinking in Islamiyat SLOs

The cognitive pattern is layered rather than uniformly higher-order. A core of accuracy and retention is retained in textual learning: Nazra, memorisation, correct pronunciation, translation and reproduction, continue through grade V. This is not a developmental failure in itself as there are explicit curriculum ends for accurate Qur'anic recitation and memorisation. It is important to note whether more activities need to be understood, compared and applied and/or make moral judgements. In the Islamic analytical lens of the study, going beyond reproduction is captured in the call of the Qur'ān to reflection.

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

English translation: "Do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?" Qur'an 47:24

A related emphasis on observation and reasoned understanding appears in Qur'an 3:190:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

English translation: "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs for people of understanding." Qur'an 3:190

These verses provide an interpretive basis for distinguishing mere recall from understanding that connects signs, meanings and consequences. The grade tables show that such higher demands are concentrated particularly in Akhlaq, social dealings and contemporary themes.

The Grade IV–V behaviour tables demonstrate the clearest move beyond recall. Simplicity is treated through meaning, distinction from other forms of conduct, Prophetic examples, benefits and everyday adoption. Trustworthiness is linked to meaning, importance, distinction from betrayal, social consequences and Seerah evidence. Frugality requires definition, distinction from miserliness, explanation of importance, identification of individual and collective harms of waste, Seerah evidence and practical adoption. Promise-keeping is linked with meaning, importance, Prophetic/Companion examples, daily fulfilment and the consequences of breaking a promise. In these cases, the curriculum requires a sequence from concept to consequence and from consequence to action. The analytical demand for evidence can be read alongside Qur'an 2:111:

قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

English translation: "Say: bring your proof, if you are truthful."Qur'an 2:111

Reflective self-evaluation is similarly foregrounded in Qur'an 59:18:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ

English translation: "O believers, be mindful of Allah, and let every soul consider what it has sent ahead for tomorrow."Qur'an 59:18

These are used here as analytical anchors rather than as substitutes for curriculum evidence. The stronger documentary finding remains strand-specific cognitive differentiation: Qur'an/Hadith carries a larger share of recitation, memorisation and translation, whereas character/social strands more often contain distinction, consequence, contextualisation and application.

Table 6. Cognitive-Demand Evidence in the Documented SLOs

Analytical Level	Typical Curriculum Operation	Curriculum Examples	Result
Recall / accurate performance	recite, memorise, pronounce, reproduce	Nazra Qur'an, selected Surahs, Duas and Hadith across all grades	A continuing textual foundation rather than a disappearing phase
Understanding	explain meaning, importance, benefits	belief, worship, truthfulness, tolerance, brotherhood, cleanliness	Meaning is frequently made explicit before application
Application	practise, adopt, demonstrate, act upon	salam, service, punctuality, frugality, promise-keeping, cleanliness	Most visible in behaviour-oriented upper-primary tables

Analysis / distinction	distinguish concepts, identify effects or consequences	trust vs betrayal; frugality vs miserliness; harms of waste; effects of breaking promises	Concentrated in Grades IV–V
Reflection / moral judgment	connect guidance, consequences and choices	upper-primary Akhlaq, social dealings, safety and resource-use tasks	Present, but not evenly distributed across all strands

Source: qualitative coding of official SLO tables, Government of Pakistan (2020), PDF pp. 16–49; NCF cognitive and assessment standards, pp. 38–40 and 72–73.

Recent evidence supports a layered rather than binary interpretation of cognition in Islamic education. Maisyanah et al. (2024) link Qur'anic engagement with reflective and contextually relevant critical thinking; Alotaibi (2025) shows that higher-order learning depends strongly on teacher mediation; and Rahmah et al. (2026) demonstrate at primary level that HOTS-oriented assessment requires coherence among objectives, instruction and evaluation. Dalimunthe and Siregar (2024) further show how discussion, case analysis and problem-solving can connect religious concepts with moral problems, while Nilpendra et al. (2026) report similar value from reflective discussion and experiential practice. The implication for the SNC is precise: memorisation remains a legitimate textual foundation, but higher-order potential emerges only where meaning, distinction, consequences, judgment and application are deliberately added and assessed.

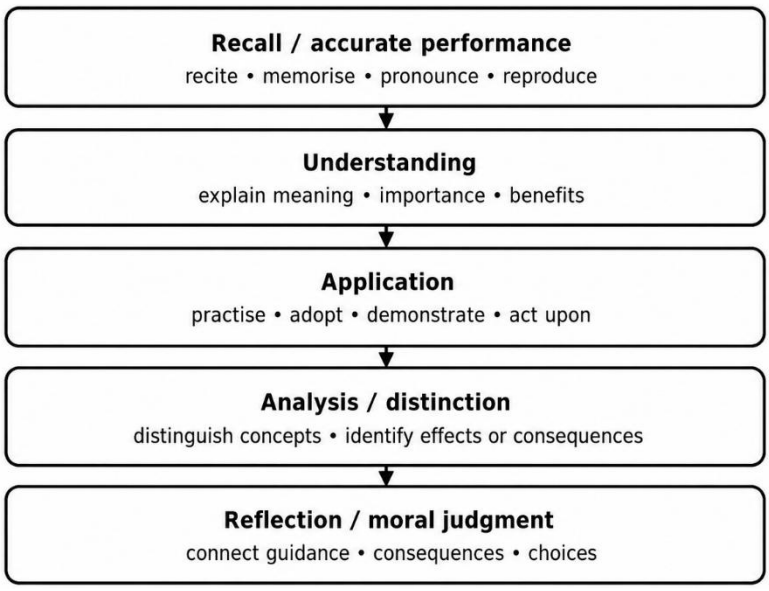


Figure 4. Cognitive-demand continuum in the documented SLOs.

4.5 Integration of Religious Knowledge, Character and Practice

The best integrative pattern in the curriculum is found where there is a religious principle, an observable learning outcome and a suggested activity all from the same document. In Grade I,

belief, prayer, cleanliness, salam and daily supplications are related to daily conduct. Grade II adds in elders and neighbours. Grade III clarifies and makes the rights, truthfulness, speech and cleanliness explicit. Grade IV links trust, service, patriotism and punctuality and cleanliness and water use with action. Grade V brings in promise keeping, brotherhood, frugality, harmful speech, safety and care for the environment. The process of going from knowledge to action is very similar to the integration expressed in Qur'an 31:17:

يَا بُنَيَّ أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا أَصَابَكَ

English translation: "My son, establish prayer, command what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you."Qur'an 31:17

The same analytical logic is sharpened by Qur'an 61:2, which directly foregrounds consistency between professed knowledge and enacted conduct:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ

English translation: "O believers, why do you say what you do not do?"Qur'an 61:2

The quantitative results support the same interpretation. Only 16 of the 105 dedicated behaviour SLO statements occur in Grades I–II, while 73 occur in Grades IV–V. Moreover, in Grade IV and Grade V a majority of the behaviour statements lie outside Akhlaq itself: 24 of 38 (63.2%) in Grade IV and 21 of 35 (60.0%) in Grade V are located in Husn-e-Muamalat or contemporary-requirements tables. Character formation is therefore increasingly externalised into relationships, public responsibility, resource use and safety rather than remaining a private list of virtues. This widening is consistent with the integrated conception of righteousness in Qur'an 2:177:

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ ... وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا

English translation: "Righteousness is not merely turning your faces toward east or west ... and includes those who fulfil their promises when they make them."Qur'an 2:177 (excerpt)

Seerah offers a second integration mechanism: the named subthemes in Grades I–II are expanded in Grades III–V, with 13 of the 20 Seerah subthemes (65.0%) located in Grades IV–V and focused on comprehension, oral performance and conduct. The planned curriculum is therefore a facilitator of knowledge–character integration, with varying degrees of explicitness in the performance criteria.

The integration found here is most strongly a statement of curricular potential rather than learner transformation. Both Sher et al. (2024) and Bhatti and Chaudhary (2023) explain the importance of this distinction: the quality of implementation and alignment continues to depend on teacher capacity and assessment practice. Holistic Islamic-education research reaches a similar conclusion from a different angle. Saepudin (2024) relates an integrative curriculum to moral and spiritual development, and Rachman (2026) highlights the interplay among curricular values, contextual learning and teacher exemplarity. In light of the SNC findings, these studies imply that integration is most convincing when a religious principle is linked to an observable SLO, a learning activity and an assessable performance.

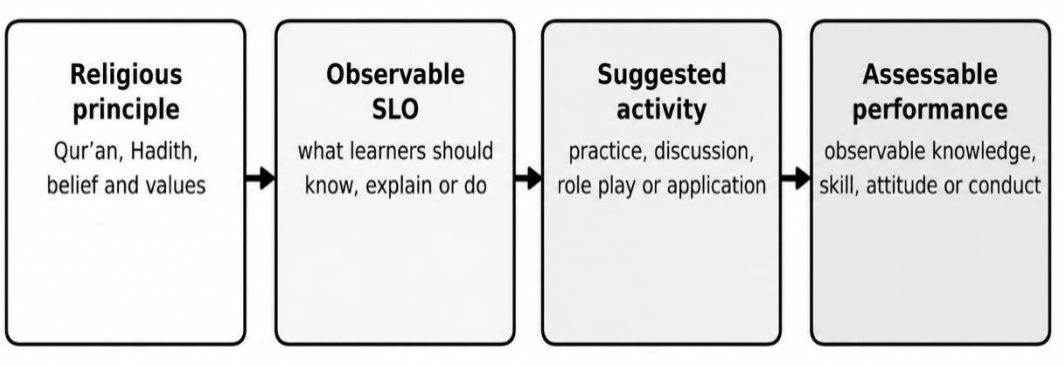


Figure 5. Documented pathway from religious principle to assessable performance.

4.6 Strengths, Gaps and Internal Tensions

Traceability is the first key strength. The main Islamiyat document includes 22 objectives, seven strands, two bands of standards, 105 named subthemes, grade-level SLOs and activities, 14 teacher directions, eight approaches to teaching and learning, seven teacher reflection prompts, two types of assessment and 26 directions to the textbook writer. These layers enable statements around progression to be evidence based and not based on a general policy statement. The second strength is clearly demonstrated progress in sacred-text learning. The number of core Hadith appendix entries rise from 1 to 6 grade-assigned entries and textbook minima rise from 4 to 15 per grade book all the way to Grade V where all 30 paras are complete. The 5 suggested page ranges in the books collectively suggest 350 – 400 pages in the primary cycle. The programme thus has a clear cumulative spine, running through the text.

The third strength is seen in evidence of change to character content. 105 SLO statements are dedicated to behaviour, but they are not evenly distributed with only 69.5% in Grades IV–V, and mostly in the tables of Husn-e-Muamalat and contemporary-requirements as well as NOT only Akhlaq. This gives proof of a growing relationship and applicability of the character model in the curriculum. Three tensions qualify these strengths. Firstly, there is a break in progression at Grade III. Two strands are introduced, subthemes are increased by 57.1%, allocation of paras per year is increased by 200% from two to six, and there is a doubling of core Hadith allocation from two to four in one grade. This is more intense change than what the official two band benchmark structure shows. Second, curricular volume is increasing in a more steady way than is cognitive demand. There is a constant ten-page span increase in text book length at each grade level, and increasing sacred-text requirements at each grade level, while analysis, distinction and moral consequence are largely limited to behaviour strands. The documents thus exhibit more of a developmental progression in volume and extent than in consistent cognitive complexity. Third, there is an asymmetry in the policy-to-assessment chain. The NCF contains six categories (textbook level) with 21 indicators and 15 assessment standards including explicit requirements for HOTS, attitudes and behaviour. The Islamiyat subject document offers formative/summative guidance without being as detailed as the rubric for each character outcome at every grade level. Not to negate the stated intention, but some values are more clearly operationalised in SLOs and activities, whereas others are in assessment criteria.

The last tension relates to memorisation and higher order thinking. The evidence does not warrant the term being used to label the subject as being exclusively rote-based as the curriculum does include a lot of explanation, distinction, application and consequence-based work. It also does not support the notion of a displacement of memorisation, as correct recitation, memorisation and reproduction will still be central up to Grade 5. The more accurate finding is a layered curriculum with textual accuracy as a solid base and with the social and ethical strands showing the strongest movement towards application and moral reasoning. This limited comparison with the 2006 curriculum of Islamiyat is better suited for a structural conclusion as opposed to a historical one. The previous document used in the thesis is based on grade III – XII while SNC Islamiyat starts from grade I and the progression is more operational in the form of standards, benchmarks, SLOs, activities and teacher/assessment guidance. Evidentiary restraint is used in making this comparison and is consistent with Qur'ān 17:36:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ

English translation: "Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge."Qur'an 17:36

Accordingly, the documentary evidence establishes earlier subject-specific exposure and a denser outcomes-based architecture; it does not establish that all classrooms enact that architecture with equal depth.

Table 7. Consolidated Evidence Matrix for the Principal Findings

Finding	Quantitative/Documentary Evidence	Critical Interpretation
Curriculum breadth expands sharply	105 named subthemes; 13, 14, 22, 28, 28 by grade	Largest structural shift occurs at Grade III; breadth plateaus at Grades IV–V
Upper-primary character operationalisation is dense	105 dedicated behaviour SLO statements; 73 (69.5%) in Grades IV–V	Character moves from personal manners toward social and contemporary responsibility
Social/contemporary conduct becomes dominant after introduction	Husn + contemporary = 56.3% of Grade III, 63.2% of Grade IV, 60.0% of Grade V dedicated behaviour statements	Values are increasingly located in relationships and public/practical contexts
Nazra progression is fully cumulative	Qaida + 6 Surahs; then 2, 6, 10, 12 annual para loads; 30/30 by Grade V	Strongest example of explicit grade sequencing
Hadith demand increases through two separate mechanisms	Core appendix 1/2/4/5/6; textbook minima 4/6/8/12/15	Both measures intensify, but they must not be conflated
Textbook load expands steadily	Five grade ranges total 350–400 pages; midpoint rises 55 to 95 pages	Volume increases even after subtheme breadth plateaus
HOTS is strand-dependent	NCF requires HOTS; Islamiyat ethical/social SLOs contain distinction, consequences and application	Higher cognitive demand is real but unevenly distributed
Assessment ambition exceeds subject-level specificity	NCF: 15 assessment standards; Islamiyat: formative/summative narrative guidance	Values are more operationalised in many SLOs than in explicit grade-specific rubrics

The results refute two extremes: first, SNC Islamiyat is not an entirely rote-based curriculum; second, it is not a uniformly higher-order curriculum. Its strongest coherence lies in the explicit sequencing of sacred texts and in the broadening of character from personal discipline to social and practical responsibility, while its weakest coherence lies in the uneven distribution of cognitive and assessment demand across strands. The significance of reflective engagement and moral application is highlighted in recent Islamic-education scholarship (Agbaria, 2024; Maisyanah et al., 2024; Alotaibi, 2025; Rahmah et al., 2026), and implementation studies from Pakistan indicate that curricular ambition cannot be achieved without support through training, resources, pedagogy and assessment (Razzaq et al., 2025; Sher et al., 2024). The critical conclusion is therefore one of conditional coherence: the intended curriculum has significant formative potential, and that potential is strongest when content, SLOs, activities and assessment are congruent, but more limited when volume or policy aspiration exceeds operational specificity.

5. Recommendations

The findings call for specific, targeted curriculum changes rather than another general call for reform. First, the National Curriculum Council should review the content and cognitive demands of the Grade III transition and redistribute some content and cognitive demands across Grades II–IV. A single grade currently carries a 57.1% increase in named subthemes, two new strands, a threefold increase in annual para load and double the core Hadith allocation without specific scaffolding. Second, all character-related SLOs for Grades III–V should be linked to grade-level performance indicators. Outcomes that use verbs such as ‘explain’, ‘distinguish’, ‘apply’ or ‘justify’ should specify the aspects of trustworthiness, frugality, promise-keeping, social responsibility and responsible resource use that learners must address. Generic terms such as ‘understand’ or ‘practise’ should not be used without an observable criterion. Third, Islamiyat assessment guidance should be rewritten as an assessment matrix linked to SLOs. Recall, explanation, application, comparison, consequence analysis and moral reasoning should be represented at an appropriate minimum level in each grade. Character outcomes should be assessed in multiple ways, including short scenarios, oral justification, task-based performance, observable practice and written responses, rather than through memory-based writing alone. Fourth, textbook-writer guidance should clearly align curriculum SLOs, textbook activities and assessment tasks. Content expansion should not be treated as synonymous with page expansion; added content should contribute additional conceptual understanding or applied conduct. Finally, professional development for primary Islamiyat teachers should address documented transition points, especially Grade III and Grades IV–V, using actual SNC SLOs to design scaffolded learning and assessment tasks for each major cognitive level.

6. Conclusion

The analysis shows that the developmental structure of Pakistan's primary-level SNC Islamiyat curriculum is quite clear, although its various components do not develop uniformly. The breadth of the curriculum is significantly expanded from Grades I–V, with a definite progressive programme of learning in the case of sacred-texts and a change in the content of character education from personal manners and routine behaviour to relationships,

responsibility and current social issues. The most significant change is in the upper-primary grades (IV–V) where 69.5% of the explicitly coded behaviour-oriented SLO statements are found. The curriculum is thus not purely memorisation nor is it consistently high order. Memorisation, recitation and accurate reproduction continue to be legitimate and constant requirements, with explanation, application, distinction, consequence analysis and moral reasoning being introduced in an uneven manner, in the strands of Akhlaq, Husn-e-Muamalat and contemporary-requirements. Grade III is the most obvious structural pressure point, in that there are many grade-level content and sacred-text intensifications and cognitive load increases. What is limiting is not necessarily a lack of character or higher order intentions, rather it is uneven progression, SLO specificity and assessment detail. The documented evidence demonstrates that SNC Islamiyat is a solid foundation for integration of religious knowledge and religious behaviour but integration is most convincing when a value is related to a learning activity and an observable action. The refinement of the curriculum should therefore be directed towards ensuring smooth transitions and making cognitive and character expectations explicit and measurable.

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