

Three Pedagogical Approaches to Higher Islamic Education in South Africa

Yasien Mohamed*

Abstract

This article covers the historical background of Islamic education in South Africa, and deals more specifically with three institutions of higher Islamic education in the Western Cape: the Madina Institute, the International Peace College South Africa, and Dār al-‘Ulūm al-‘Arabiyyah al-‘Islāmiyya (the Strand Seminary). These three institutions have been chosen partly because they have not been studied before, and partly because they were founded after South Africa became a democratic country in 1994. They share the common concern that Islamic education should imbue students with traditional Islamic knowledge, which is important for their faith, salvation, and identity. However, they also reveal certain important differences in their aims and pedagogical approaches.

Keywords

Islamic education, Western Cape, pedagogical approach, tertiary education, Madina Institute, Peace College, Strand Seminary, Islamic studies, South Africa.

This article deals with three institutions of higher Islamic education in the Western Cape: the Madina Institute, the International Peace College South Africa, and Dār al-‘Ulūm al-‘Arabiyyah al-‘Islāmiyyah (the Strand Seminary). These institutions emerged after Apartheid ended in 1994. Previous research on community-inspired institutions of higher Islamic learning has only examined institutions that were founded before 1994.¹ This is therefore the first comparative study of institutions founded after significant social and political change in South Africa. The article examines their common features and identifies their differences, especially with respect to their pedagogical approaches to teaching Arabic and Islamic studies.

* Prof. Dr. emer. Yasien Mohamed is Emeritus Professor of Arabic & Islamic Philosophy in the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa.

1 See Yasien Mohamed, “*Early Islamic Education and Approaches to Teaching Arabic in South Africa*”, in: Yasien Mohamed (ed.), *The Teaching of Arabic in South Africa. History and Methodology*, Cape Town 1997, pp. 1–19, here: pp. 1ff.; Haron and Mohamed, “*The Theory and Practice of Islamic Education*”, in: Yasien Mohamed (ed.), *The Teaching of Arabic in South Africa. History and Methodology*, Cape Town 1997, pp. 17f.; Muhammed Haron, “*The Arabic Programmes of Four Community-Based Colleges*”, in: Y. Mohamed (ed.), *The Teaching of Arabic in South Africa. History and Methodology*, Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, 1997, pp. 134–145, here: p. 136.

1 Historical Background

Muslims arrived on the southern tip of Africa in 1658 from the Indonesian archipelago. The next 150 years saw an influx of political exiles, convicts, and slaves from the islands of Southeast Asia and indentured labourers from parts of India. These communities established the foundations of the Muslim community in South Africa, sometimes referred to as the Cape Malays. The most notable political exile was Shaykh Yusuf from Macassar (d. 1111/1699). He was banished to the Cape in 1694 and became a symbol of the founding of the Muslim community in South Africa. A century after his arrival, Muslims were finally allowed to establish their own mosques and Islamic schools (*madrasas*). Another, distinct group of Muslims arrived from India from 1860. They served as British indentured labourers on sugar plantations, and later became independent traders, merchants, and street vendors. Indian Muslims contributed to the building of mosques, schools, and cemeteries, and have since lived mainly in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.²

The first figure to be associated with Islamic education in South Africa, Abdullah Kadi Abdus Salaam (d. 1222/1807), known as Tuan Guru, was exiled from Indonesia. After his release from Robben Island Prison, he established the “first mosque” and Islamic school (*madrasa*) on Dorp Street in Cape Town. In 1860, Shaykh Abu Bakr Effendi (d. 1298/1880), an Ottoman scholar who had been sent to the Cape by Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I at the request of the British Queen Victoria, established a school of higher Islamic education. This was the precursor to the Islamic seminaries (Dār al-‘Ulūms) and community-based colleges.

To this day, the madrasa remains an institution of Islamic education for children in South Africa. They learn the basic principles of Islam, including the recitation of the Qur’an. Since the 1960s, Muslim parents have expressed greater interest in their children attending state universities to pursue a Western education. This nevertheless did not affect the madrasa education, which has continued to provide a primary source of preserving the Islamic faith and practice in South Africa for more than three centuries. The Muslim community, although only two percent of the country’s population, has maintained its identity as Muslims, and today their members play a significant role in all spheres of South African society.³

During the Apartheid period, two Islamic institutions of higher learning emerged. The first was the Dār al-‘Ulūm Newcastle (Newcastle Seminary), and the other was the Islamic College of Southern Africa (ICOSA). These two institutions were the precursors to the Strand Seminary and the Islamic Peace College South Africa (IPSA), respectively.

The Newcastle Seminary followed the Deobandi *Dars-i Nizami* syllabus, which teaches traditional Islamic knowledge, including Arabic grammar, the Prophetic Tradition (*ḥadīth*), Sacred Law (*sharī‘a*), and Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*). These

2 See Mohamed, “*Early Islamic Education*”, pp. 1ff.

3 See *ibid.*, pp. 1ff.

kinds of seminaries were suspicious of Western education, as they considered it to be “poisonous knowledge”⁴. They were more concerned with preserving the Islamic faith, cultivating piety, and preparing graduates to become imams, preachers, and religious scholars.⁵ We also have to look at the broader context of Muslims marginalised under British India, and where there were attempts to strip them of their cultural and religious identity. The reaction against such Westernising influences led many of the *Dars-i Nizami* authorities to become increasingly insular in order to protect Muslims from secular British education.

In 1971, the first Deobandi Islamic seminary was established in Newcastle, Kwa-Zulu-Natal. Their Distinguished Scholar (*‘ālim fādil*) course, which qualifies one to become a fully-fledged traditional Islamic scholar, is offered over a period of six years, and includes the following subjects: Islamic history, the Islamic creed (*‘aqīda*), jurisprudence (mainly the Ḥanafī School), principles of jurisprudence, the *ḥadīth*, principles of the *ḥadīth*, Qur’anic exegesis, and Arabic.⁶ The seminary’s approach to teaching was the transmission of traditional Islamic knowledge, and the memorisation of the Qur’an, the *ḥadīth*, and texts of other disciplines. However, independent reading and critical thinking were not encouraged. In many cases, seminary graduates are averse to further study at modern universities. Many of them refuse to even have their degrees accredited in the higher education systems of their respective countries. There is a fear that traditional graduates may become professionals in their career, and ignore the calling of the Islamic seminaries, which is to become pious teachers and disseminators of their Islamic faith.⁷ Modern education is regarded as inferior in status compared to traditional Islamic learning. For instance, a Deobandi student wanted to continue his education at Aligarh Muslim University in India. His professor disapproved, saying, “You dismounted a horse to ride a donkey”⁸.

An alternative to the Islamic seminary emerged in 1990 with the establishment of the Islamic College of Southern Africa (ICOSA) in Gatesville, a suburb of Cape Town. It offered traditional Islamic subjects along with practical modern subjects for the first time in South Africa. The four-year bachelor degree in Islamic Theology cultivated tolerance and respect for the diverse theological schools of Islam.⁹ Although this degree was not accredited by the Department of Education, some of the institution’s graduates were accepted for postgraduate studies in Arabic at the University of the Western Cape.

4 Ebrahim Moosa, *What is a Madrasa?*, Chapel Hill 2015, p. 51.

5 See *ibid.*, pp. 139–140.

6 See Haron, “*The Arabic Programmes*”, p. 136.

7 See Moosa, *What is a madrasa?*, p. 54.

8 Quoted from Moosa, *What is a madrasa?*, p. 202.

9 See Mohamed, “*Early Islamic Education*”, p. 102; Haron, “*The Arabic Programmes*”, pp. 138f.

2 Three Community-Inspired Institutions of Higher Islamic Education

As mentioned, this paper compares the pedagogy of three institutions of higher Islamic education in the Western Cape. They share the same goal as traditional Islamic seminaries – the teaching of Islamic knowledge to preserve the Islamic faith and practice within the Muslim community. There are nevertheless differences in their pedagogical approach, and in the way they respond to the new challenges of secular democracy.

2.1 The Islamic Peace College South Africa (IPSA)

The Islamic Peace College South Africa (IPSA) was established in 2005. It offers the following programmes: a Higher Certificate in Islamic Studies, a Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies, a BA Honours degree in Islamic Studies, and a Master of Arts in Applied Islamic Thought. All of these degrees are now accredited by the Department of Higher Education. The implication is that graduates from this institution will be able to continue with postgraduate studies at any recognised South African university where Arabic and Islamic studies are offered.

The MA focuses on Contemporary Islamic Thought, based on a framework of the *Objectives of the Revealed Law (maqāṣid al-sharī‘a)*. There are five Objectives of the Revealed Law, according to al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), namely the preservation of religion, the preservation of life, the preservation of property, the preservation of progeny, and the preservation of the intellect.¹⁰ This approach is a departure from approaches of a traditional Islamic seminary, where the graduates are expected to not only practice the faith, but also to propagate the faith to others, and to prepare them for personal piety and salvation. The Islamic seminary shows no interest in confronting the challenges of secular modernity, or in finding pragmatic solutions to contemporary Muslim problems. At IPSA, on the other hand, students are encouraged to reflect upon the contemporary problems of the Muslim world, and to write a research paper or thesis examining these problems within the framework of the Objectives of the Revealed Law.

The Bachelor of Arts degree offers majors in Islamic law and Arabic. Apart from the traditional Islamic subjects, they also teach Islamic history, Islamic civilisation, life-orientation skills, and writing skills.¹¹ Arabic is taught for the purpose of studying *sharī‘a*. Seven lessons per week are devoted to Arabic. Lecturers normally read and translate an Arabic text into English, sentence by sentence. Some lecturers prefer not to do a literal translation, but will simply explain the meaning in English. For example, Ibn Kathīr’s commentary of Surah Yusuf is read in Arabic, followed by an explanation in English. In this way, students become familiar with at least the content of the text and the key Arabic terms.¹²

10 See Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*, London 2008, p. 18.

11 See URL: www.ipsa.edu.org (accessed on 15/2/2021).

12 Personal communication with Head of Department Tawffeeq Mohammad, 20 October 2020.

The aim of the postgraduate programme in Islamic studies is to combine Islamic and Western, classical and contemporary, traditional and critical scholarship into a framework of shared values. This is intended to implement the Objectives of the Revealed Law, i.e. the preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and property. As Dr. Jasser Auda, the chair of the Maqāṣid Programme, stated:

It is about time that the Muslim ummah has an Islamic Studies programme that integrates true Islamic knowledge with a contemporary approach to the study of natural and social realities, and within the framework of the Higher Objectives of Islamic jurisprudence. South Africa's strong record of emancipation and diversity make it the best place for such a programme. Holders of a bachelor's degree in professions other than Islamic Studies could take [the] one-year honours programme as a [prerequisite] to be admitted to the master's programme in Applied Islamic Thought.¹³

Thus, IPSA teaches Islamic subjects at the undergraduate level to empowered students with traditional Islamic knowledge and to strengthen their Muslim identity. At the postgraduate level, however, IPSA has a different aim, which is to equip students with the powers required to reflect upon the challenges facing Muslims in the contemporary world. They should be able to make a diagnosis of contemporary Muslim problems, using whatever secular or religious knowledge they have at their command, and come up with a plausible solution in the light of the Objectives of the Revealed Law. As mentioned, students are required to complete a research paper. To give an idea of the topics covered, I will just mention two examples. One paper dealt with Islamic inheritance, and the need to introduce the *usufruct*, a limited right in Western civil law, but within the spirit of the Objectives of the Revealed Law. The *usufruct* can be justified Islamically as being able to protect the widow, the orphan, and the unemployed. Another paper dealt with the problematic issues concerning apostasy within the spirit of the Objectives of the Revealed Law. The paper describes the situation of a husband who converted to Islam, and married a Muslim woman. After the divorce, the husband reverted to Christianity. The student argued that this did not constitute apostasy, and that the law of punishment by death was not applicable.

Pedagogy and Teaching Methodology

IPSA's honours degree is intended to cultivate research and critical thinking skills to help students respond to the challenges confronting Muslim society. It offers a module in Research Methodology, as many of the students are graduates from Islamic seminaries and are not familiar with Westernised methods of writing and research. The module teaches them how to read academic papers critically, and how to write a research proposal. They are required to select a problem affecting Muslim society in South Africa, Europe, or any other part of the Western world. This is followed by a research paper, and, as mentioned, they are required to deal

¹³ Personal communication with Dr. Auda, 10 January 2020 (postgrad@ipsa.edu.org).

with a particular problem within the framework of the Objectives of the Revealed Law. There is a mixed group of students. Those who are university graduates are generally stronger in English, and therefore tend to have better writing skills, while the Islamic seminary graduates are usually stronger in Arabic, and typically have better Arabic reading skills.

There was also a compulsory module on Contemporary Islamic Thought for both honours and master's degree students in 2020. Most students are exposed to this module for the first time. They were never before introduced to contemporary Islamic thinkers and their responses to the challenges of secular modernity. A typical lecture session of three hours is conducted in the following manner: The Professor starts with Muhammad Abdu, an early Islamic thinker and reformer who responded to Western colonialism and secular modernity in the Egyptian context. Prior to presenting his lecture using the conferencing software Zoom, he uploads at least two journal articles on Abdu for his students. Not all students will read the assigned articles; but if they do, they may have questions ready for the lecturer. The professor gives a 90-minute lecture, followed by a discussion, also lasting 90 minutes. The lecture has three parts: a historical background of Egypt, a biography of Abdu, and an overview of his ideas and their impact. The lecturer sometimes adopts the Socratic approach by asking questions, followed by answers, and then those answers in turn raise more questions. The lecturer leads the discussion, allowing students to discover new insights into Abdu, both within the context of his time, and in relation to his relevance for our current context.

In this way, the honours course at IPSA aims to develop critical thinking concerning current historical problems faced by the Muslim world and their possible solutions, within the framework of the Objectives of the Revealed Law. It is also designed to develop the skills of academic writing and research.

2.2 Madina Institute, Cape Town

The Madina Institute, established in 2014, offers a one-year intensive *uṣūl al-dīn*, or Islamic Studies programme, which combines the study of Arabic and Islamic theology (*kalām*). Students are attracted to this institute partly because of the attention it gives to spirituality and theology, and partly because it is centrally located in the heart of Cape Town, and offers the convenience of the latest technology.¹⁴ The one-year intensive course attracts local and international students from Europe and America. Haroon Kalla, a patron of the Institute, said:

My vision of the institute is to see students who are professionals in disciplines like accounting, medicine, and engineering, to infuse Islamic values into their professions and make a meaningful contribution to society. Our postgraduates will either follow an academic career or become religious scholars and hopefully make a meaningful contribution to society.¹⁵

14 See URL: www.madinainstitute.ac.za (accessed on 15/2/2021).

15 Personal communication with Haroon Kalla, 1 November 2020.

Muḥammad b. Yaḥya al-Ḥusayni al-Ninowi, the founder of the Madina Institute, is a medical doctor, and an expert in the *ḥadīth* and Sufism. Many students attend the Madina Institute because they are attracted to his charismatic personality and his Sufi perspective.¹⁶ Professor Khadija Maloi, an expert on education, advises on pedagogical matters, but does not consider herself qualified to comment on the Islamic Studies syllabus.

The Institute intends to introduce postgraduate studies in the future, but most of its lecturers are from al-Azhar, and therefore lack knowledge in many secular disciplines. A great deal of attention is given to the preservation of faith and to salvation, and the cultivation of spirituality and moral character. Unlike IPSA, the Madina Institute is less concerned with the challenges of modernity. Its approach is traditional, and it places a great deal of emphasis on the memorisation of primary texts, especially the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth*. They are less concerned with critical thinking and the contextualisation of knowledge.¹⁷

The Institute offers a three-year Bachelor of Arts degree in Islamic Studies (*uṣūl al-dīn*). This three-year BA degree is recognised by the Department of Education, but the one-year intensive course is not an accredited degree programme. Students find it challenging and sometimes overwhelming because they are exposed to so many subjects in the first year of the BA degree. It would be prudent to teach the basic subjects in the first year; more advanced subjects, such as principles of jurisprudence or Islamic theology (*kalām*), can be taught in subsequent years. This would also free up much time needed for Arabic in the first year, where they are also exposed to classical Arabic texts. However, the students' level of Arabic in the first year is not sufficient to read these texts independently. Hence, they are reliant on the lecturer to provide the translations of these texts. It would, however, make more pedagogical sense for students to be exposed to simpler Arabic texts in the first year; preferably modern prose, as the style is easier to read compared to classical texts. This would be less intimidating, and the students would have more confidence to attempt to comprehend simpler Arabic texts by themselves.¹⁸

The lecturers are generally approachable, and students feel free to ask them questions. The lecturers are also tolerant, being open to all the Sunni theological schools of thought.¹⁹ However, it appears that many of the students are less concerned with contemporary challenges such as Islamophobia. They do not seem to be affected by the same challenges often confronting Muslims in Western Europe.²⁰ However, should the Institute introduce postgraduate studies, then it would also have to cultivate the critical mind, and to consider academic approaches to the study of Islam.

16 Personal communication with Student 2, 4 October 2020.

17 Personal communication with Maloi, 30 October 2020.

18 Personal communication with Student 2, 1 November 2002.

19 Personal communication with Graduate 1, 3 June 2020.

20 Personal communication with Student 2, 7 August 2020.

2.3 The Strand Seminary (*Dār al-‘Ulūm al-‘Arabiyya al-Islāmiyya*)

The Strand Seminary was founded by Moulana Taha Kieran in 1996. He was a graduate of Deoband *Dār al-‘Ulūm*, and became an erudite scholar of Shāfi‘ī jurisprudence. Moulana Kieran is also the legal expert (mufti) of the Muslim Judicial Council in Cape Town. Although not a graduate of a secular university, he is widely read in philosophy, psychology, and science. He is open-minded and proposes the reconstruction of certain aspects of the classical Ash‘arī theology. For instance, he has mentioned that classical Islamic theology is based on old physics, and needs to be reformulated in the light of newer quantum physics.²¹

The Strand Seminary offers a two-year introductory course, with the following subjects: the Islamic creed (*‘aqīda*), legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Prophetic narrations (*ḥadīth*) and its critical sciences, sciences of the Qur’ān (*‘ulūm al-qur’ān*), Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), Islamic spirituality (*tazkiya*) and Prophetic biography (*sīra*). These two years are intended for the training of imams. The programme follows the classical *imam/khaṭīb* courses. It also offers a six-year *‘ālim fāḍil* degree, where students are expected to read classical Arabic texts independently and with comprehension.²²

The Strand Seminary follows the *Dars-i Nizami* curriculum, yet some of the lecturers are open to engagement with the physical and social sciences. These sciences are not taught as formal lessons, but lecturers typically try to present an Islamic response to subjects such as evolution or utilitarianism. For example, one of the former lecturers used to incorporate the concept of evolution from an Islamic perspective. He subsequently completed his MA at the University of the Western Cape, and published his thesis, entitled “Biological Evolution and Islam”.²³ Thus, the institute is flexible enough to allow lecturers to bring their own knowledge to bear on its teaching of Islam.

The Pedagogical Approach

In the first two years, students have to memorise the Qur’an, the *ḥadīth*, and other classical Arabic texts. The lecturer reads and explains the text, and the students memorise certain sections, and become familiar with key Arabic Islamic terms. For Arabic, they have to memorise the morphology of Arabic verbs (*ṣarf*). By the third year, they are able to engage with classical Arabic texts.²⁴ The pedagogical style depends on the lecturer and the subject matter. For instance, a lecturer who taught Islamic jurisprudence to third-year students covered the following topics:

21 Personal communication with T. Kieran, 4 May 2020.

22 See URL: <http://www.duai.co.za/> (accessed on 15/2/2021).

23 Personal communication with T. Kieran, 4 May 2020.

24 Personal communication with Lecturer 3, 20 October 2020.

purification, prayer, almsgiving (*zakāh*), fasting, pilgrimage (*hajj*), and minor pilgrimage (*‘umra*).²⁵ Here is a sample of his lesson plan:

Objectives

- Introducing history-makers in the Shafi‘ī legal school (*madhhab*) or jurisprudence.
- Understanding purification, prayer, *zakāh*, fasting, and *hajj*.
- Studying the “Sufficer for the Needy of knowledge of the meanings of words of the *minhāj*” (“*Mughnī al-muhtāj ilā ma ‘rifat ma ‘āni alfāz al-Minhāj*”). This is a text in Islamic jurisprudence.
- Cultivating Islamic legal thinking.

Activities:

- Reading and explaining the text.
- Reading out loud.
- Keeping a diary: summary, key concepts, sections not understood.
- Participating in class debates.
- Presenting a lesson on a chapter to the class.

Assessments:

- Class tests, closed book.
- Class tests, open book.

Reflection:

- Assess periodically if our activities fulfil the objectives.
- Consult the students for better ways of teaching/learning.
- Ask Allah to guide us to learn, practice, and preserve His religion (*dīn*).

The lecturer introduces the discipline gradually, and starts with the historical background, introducing the key figures of Islamic jurisprudence. This is important because the student will acquire an overview of the discipline and how it developed historically, before studying particular aspects of Islamic law. The historical context is always important, so that the student can more deeply appreciate the subject-matter as a whole. The reading of Arabic texts, line by line, with translation, is important. Often, lecturers at the Islamic seminaries complete a whole book in this manner, which can take up to an entire year. But the text will have little meaning to the student if the lecturer does not discuss the biography of the author, the importance of the work, and the historical context in which it was written.

25 Personal communication with Lecturer 3, 20 October 2020.

One of the activities is reading aloud in class. This is important not only for students to get a feel for the Arabic style, but also to enable the lecturer to correct their pronunciation. Students also become familiar with key Arabic terms and concepts, without which comprehension of the text is not possible. The diary activity is useful for students to assess their own progress, and to identify the areas in which they may be struggling. This can also be a useful source of constructive feedback for the lecturer, who can improve on future lessons.

Graduate 1 is a physician by profession who wanted to pursue Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Strand Seminary purely for the sake of knowledge, and not to work as an imam or Shaykh. He said:²⁶

I spent many hours in the richly-stocked library to explore the rich legacy of Islamic scholarship. Our library is our prized possession; and it is open, day and night. The seminary adopts the approach of Shāh Walīyallāh ad-Dihlawī, who was open to all knowledge; traditional Islamic knowledge and modern acquired knowledge. We are encouraged to build our personal library, as we are taught that reading is a lifetime pursuit. There is no graduation, as we are life-long learners.²⁷

The institute provides a learning milieu that promotes a profound commitment to lifelong study, continuous self-reformation, and an ethic of community service. Students are actively encouraged to read extensively and curate their own personal libraries. Focus is less on memorisation, and more on comprehension of classical texts. While they must pursue research independently, no research paper is required.²⁸

The Strand Seminary is different from the mainstream Deobandi seminaries in South Africa in at least two respects. First, although memorisation of the fundamental texts is important in the first two years, students in the senior stages of learning are encouraged to read the Arabic texts independently, and not to memorise them. Moreover, they are expected to understand the texts, and not to simply regurgitate them for examinations. Second, students are exposed to the intellectual Islamic disciplines, such as Islamic theology (*kalām*) and the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). They are also introduced to modern topics, including Darwinism, Science, Orientalism, post-modernism, family psychology, and gender studies, as well as interfaith engagement, minority Islamic creeds such as Shi'ism, and the *fiqh* of Muslim minorities. The mainstream Deobandi seminaries limit teaching to a particular *madhhab*. This is *taqlid*, or imitation of a particular legal Sunni doctrine. However, the Strand Seminary cultivates the spirit of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). They are open to all the Sunni schools of jurisprudence, and attempt to address contemporary issues within the framework of the objectives of Islamic law. A favourite textbook is the “*Ḍawābiṭ al-Maṣlaha*” by Muḥammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī (d. 1434/2013), where the author critiques

26 Personal communication with Graduate 1, 2 July 2020.

27 Personal communication with Graduate 1, 2 July 2020.

28 Personal communication with Graduate 1, 2 July 2020.

the utilitarian ethics of John Steward Mill and Jeremy Bentham. This open-minded approach is a departure from the contemporary Deobandi pedagogy, but more faithful to the spirit of Shāh Walīyallāh al-Dihlawī, who was an original source of inspiration for the formation of the Deobandi madrasa.

The core subjects of traditional Islamic knowledge remain largely unchanged at the Strand Seminary. The goal of spiritual and ethical self-reform is uppermost in the minds of the lecturers. Changes have occurred in students' exposure to modern knowledge, critical reflection on contemporary challenges, the cultivation of independent reading, and the comprehension of classical Arabic texts.

3 Conclusion

These three institutions of higher Islamic learning share the teaching of the core traditional Islamic subjects, such as the Qur'an, the *ḥadīth*, and Islamic injunctions pertaining to matters of worship. The primary objective of these core Islamic disciplines is to educate Muslims to understand the basics of their religion, both with respect to belief and practice. In the Strand Seminary, where students live in the dormitory, their practice of the faith has to conform to the rules and regulations of the facility, where every day begins with the early morning prayer (*fajr*), and they have to lead a simple, frugal lifestyle.

However, in spite of the common objective of faith and practice, each institution has its own way of responding to the challenges of secular modernity, as well as its own distinctive character and pedagogical approach. The Strand Seminary emphasises mastery of the Arabic language, and the ability of students to read Arabic texts independently and with full understanding. IPSA has a unique accredited postgraduate programme on the Objectives of the Revealed Law (*maqāsid al-sharī'a*), where students are encouraged to reflect upon contemporary issues, and find solutions within the framework of the *maqāsid*. The Madina Institute teaches Islamic theology (*kalām*), and in doing so encourages students to critically reflect upon their Islamic belief. A strong Sufi ethos prevails at the institute, and so students are exposed to the culture and customs of Islamic spirituality.

All three institutions of higher Islamic education are concerned with teaching the core Islamic subjects, and with nurturing Islamic faith and identity. They differ in degree as to their success in developing critical minds. We have shown how each institution has its own distinctive character and pedagogical approach. Since the institutions are trying to gain accreditation for their postgraduate programmes, they will in the future have to adjust their disciplines and pedagogy to meet the standards of South Africa's Department of Higher Education.