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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Educating Children in Crisis: Adaptive Islamic Curricula as Drivers of Transitional Justice in Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel

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ABSTRACT

Prolonged conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa has disrupted formal schooling for millions of children aged 6–18 years, threatening educational continuity and their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Despite their continued presence in conflict-affected communities, local Islamic educational institutions remain insufficiently examined within Education in Emergencies and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. This study aims to examine how adaptive Islamic curricula support conflict-affected children and contribute to transitional justice in Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel. Using Qualitative Document Analysis, 42 strategically selected documents published between 2015 and 2025, comprising humanitarian reports from UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank and peer-reviewed academic case studies, were triangulated and analysed through deductive thematic coding using a standardized 4R Framework codebook encompassing Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation. The findings identify three context-specific mechanisms. In Nigeria, hybrid Tsangaya curricula promote Redistribution by integrating basic literacy into traditional learning and expanding access to education for disadvantaged, conflict-affected children. In Somalia, adaptations of Aqidah and Akhlaq pedagogy foster Reconciliation through prophetic narratives that support trauma healing and cognitive-emotional stability. In the Sahel, religious educators strengthen Representation by translating universal human rights concepts into vernacular Fiqh frameworks for community dispute mediation. These findings demonstrate that adaptive Islamic curricula function not merely as alternative schooling but as grassroots educational "survival infrastructure" linking learning continuity, psychosocial recovery, and locally grounded justice practices. The study therefore proposes Faith-Based Transitional Justice as a context-sensitive framework for strengthening post-conflict child education policy and practice.

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ABSTRAK

Konflik berkepanjangan di Afrika Sub-Sahara telah mengganggu pendidikan formal bagi jutaan anak berusia 6–18 tahun, serta mengancam keberlanjutan pendidikan dan perkembangan kognitif, sosial, dan emosional mereka. Meskipun terus hadir di tengah masyarakat yang terdampak konflik, lembaga pendidikan Islam setempat masih kurang mendapat perhatian dalam kajian Pendidikan dalam Situasi Darurat (*Education in Emergencies*) maupun dalam *Nexus* Kemanusiaan-Pembangunan-Perdamaian. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana kurikulum Islam yang adaptif mendukung anak-anak terdampak konflik dan berkontribusi terhadap keadilan transisional di Nigeria, Somalia, dan wilayah Sahel. Melalui metode Analisis Dokumen Kualitatif, 42 dokumen yang dipilih secara strategis—yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2015 dan 2025 serta mencakup laporan kemanusiaan dari UNICEF, UNESCO, dan Bank Dunia maupun studi kasus akademis yang telah melalui telaah sejawat (*peer-reviewed*)—ditriangulasi dan dianalisis menggunakan pengodean tematik deduktif. Analisis ini berpedoman pada buku kode Kerangka Kerja 4R yang baku, yang meliputi Redistribusi, Pengakuan (*Recognition*), Representasi, dan Rekonsiliasi. Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga mekanisme yang spesifik terhadap konteks wilayah masing-masing. Di Nigeria, kurikulum *Tsangaya* hibrida mendorong Redistribusi dengan mengintegrasikan literasi dasar ke dalam pembelajaran tradisional serta memperluas akses pendidikan bagi anak-anak kurang mampu yang terdampak konflik. Di Somalia, adaptasi pedagogi Akidah dan Akhlak menumbuhkan Rekonsiliasi melalui narasi kenabian yang mendukung pemulihan trauma serta stabilitas kognitif dan emosional. Di wilayah Sahel, para pendidik agama memperkuat Representasi dengan menerjemahkan konsep hak asasi manusia universal ke dalam kerangka Fikih lokal untuk mediasi sengketa di masyarakat. Temuan-temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kurikulum Islam adaptif tidak sekadar berfungsi sebagai alternatif sekolah, melainkan sebagai "infrastruktur bertahan hidup" pendidikan berbasis akar rumput yang menghubungkan keberlanjutan pembelajaran, pemulihan psikososial, dan praktik keadilan yang berakar pada konteks lokal. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini mengusulkan Keadilan Transisional Berbasis Agama (*Faith-Based Transitional Justice*) sebagai kerangka kerja yang peka terhadap konteks guna memperkuat kebijakan dan praktik pendidikan anak pascakonflik.

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Keywords: Education in Emergencies (EiE), Islamic Education, Peaceful Curriculum Development, Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

Protracted armed conflict has transformed access to education into one of the most consequential challenges facing children and adolescents in crisis-affected regions (Karstensen et al., 2025), particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ramos et al., 2026; Setyorini et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2026). Education in such settings is not limited to the acquisition of literacy (Zúñiga, 2025), numeracy (Mapunda & Chambile, 2026), or academic credentials; functioning learning environments also provide children with routine (Abbas & Ganesan, 2025; Yang et al., 2026), protection (Stevens, 2023), psychosocial support (Benkhalfallah & Laouar, 2023), social interaction, and opportunities to rebuild a sense of normality during prolonged instability. Recent evidence indicates that crisis-affected children are increasingly exposed to interrupted schooling, displacement, violence, exploitation, and deteriorating mental and psychosocial well-being. UNICEF reported that more than 14,000 schools in West and Central Africa were closed mainly because of

conflict in 2024, affecting approximately 2.8 million children, while more than 2,500 attacks on schools had been verified across Africa during the preceding nine years (UNICEF, 2024a, 2024b). More broadly, over half of the world's crisis-affected children live in Sub-Saharan Africa, and approximately one in four crisis-affected primary-school-aged children in the region are out of school (UNICEF Innocenti, 2024; UNICEF, 2024a). These disruptions are particularly significant because conflict simultaneously undermines educational continuity, child protection, psychological recovery, and longer-term social cohesion. Consequently, sustaining meaningful education during armed conflict is increasingly understood as part of humanitarian protection and peacebuilding rather than merely the restoration of conventional schooling (Aptel et al., 2020; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024).

These pressures are especially visible in Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel, although the nature of educational disruption differs across the three settings. Northern Nigeria has experienced repeated attacks and abductions affecting schools; during the escalation of insecurity in 2020–2021, 11,536 schools were temporarily closed as a precautionary response, disrupting learning for approximately 5.3 million children (UNICEF Nigeria, 2022; UNICEF, 2024a). Somalia combines prolonged insecurity with displacement, drought, poverty, and limited state educational capacity, making alternative and community-based educational arrangements particularly important for displaced children (UNICEF Somalia, 2023; UNICEF, 2024a). Across the Sahel, conflict-related closures coexist with deeper problems of educational access and learning quality; although primary enrolment has expanded substantially, many children remain outside school and learning poverty remains severe (World Bank, 2021; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024). The principal challenge is therefore not simply how to reopen formal state schools, but how to preserve educational continuity when state capacity is fragmented, conventional infrastructure is unsafe, and communities continue to depend on locally embedded educational institutions. In Muslim-majority communities, traditional Qur'anic schools, Tsangaya institutions, madrasas, and religious educators frequently remain part of this educational landscape. Their persistence creates an important but insufficiently explored question for Education in Emergencies: whether culturally legitimate faith-based educational institutions can contribute simultaneously to learning continuity, child protection, psychosocial recovery, and locally grounded forms of justice during and after conflict (Idriss & Hamzah, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

Recent scholarship provides important but fragmented insights into this issue. Research on the Nigerian Tsangaya system has documented its continued role in Qur'anic literacy, moral formation, discipline, and community-based education (Idriss & Hamzah, 2021), while Idriss et al. (2022) traced its historical resilience as an indigenous Islamic educational institution. Idriss and Gwadabe (2021), however, demonstrated that poverty, weak infrastructure, and insufficient financial support constrain its educational potential. In contrast, Umar et al. (2024) identified persistent governmental neglect and institutional marginalization as central challenges facing contemporary Tsangaya education. More recent evidence also suggests possibilities for curricular integration and diversification within Almajiri/Tsangaya systems (Abdur-Rafiu et al., 2025), while Hoechner et al. (2025) challenge the tendency to examine Qur'anic schooling primarily through the lens of militancy by showing the importance of investigating how teachers and learners themselves experience violent conflict. Parallel Education in Emergencies research emphasizes system resilience, alternative provision, psychosocial support, and community participation (UNICEF Somalia, 2023; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024), while transitional-justice scholarship identifies education as a potential vehicle for psychological recovery, institutional reform, truth engagement, and sustainable peacebuilding (Aptel et al., 2020; Velez, 2021). Nevertheless, these literatures largely remain separated: Islamic education studies seldom operationalize child-sensitive transitional justice, while transitional-justice and emergency-education scholarship rarely treats adaptive Islamic curricula as educational mechanisms in their own right.

The novelty of the present study lies in connecting these previously separated domains through the comparative analysis of adaptive Islamic curricula as mechanisms of child-centred transitional justice. Rather than treating Islamic schools merely as traditional alternatives to formal schooling or assessing them primarily through counter-extremism and security concerns, this study investigates what curricular adaptations actually do for conflict-affected children. The analysis focuses on three distinct mechanisms already visible across the selected contexts: the integration of basic literacy within Nigeria's Tsangaya tradition, the adaptation of Aqidah and Akhlaq pedagogy in Somalia to support cognitive-emotional stabilization and reconciliation, and the translation of universal human-rights concepts into locally intelligible Fiqh frameworks by religious educators in the Sahel. Existing work has shown that Tsangaya institutions possess significant educational and moral functions while also facing institutional neglect and resource constraints (Idriss & Hamzah, 2021; Idriss & Gwadabe, 2021; Umar et al., 2024). Research on education and transitional justice, meanwhile, demonstrates that educational reform can contribute to child recovery, social cohesion, acknowledgement, and peacebuilding (Aptel et al., 2020; Velez, 2021). What remains underdeveloped is an analytical account of how faith-based curricular adaptation may connect these functions. The contribution is therefore not to claim that Islamic education is universally protective, but to examine specific curricular mechanisms through which locally rooted educational institutions may function as educational "survival infrastructure" when conflict weakens formal systems.

A more precise research gap consequently emerges at the intersection of Education in Emergencies, Islamic education, child development, and transitional justice. Existing Education in Emergencies scholarship and humanitarian practice have substantially documented school closure, displacement, learning loss, psychosocial vulnerability, system resilience, and the need for alternative learning opportunities during crises (UNICEF Somalia, 2023; UNICEF, 2024a; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024). Studies of Islamic education in Nigeria have examined the historical development, moral functions, institutional challenges, financial vulnerability, and reform potential of Tsangaya and Almajiri schooling (Idriss & Gwadabe, 2021; Idriss & Hamzah, 2021; Idriss et al., 2022; Umar et al., 2024). Conflict-focused research has also begun to question reductionist assumptions linking Qur'anic education automatically with radicalization (Hoechner et al., 2025). Separately, transitional-justice scholars have demonstrated that educational institutions can contribute to the reintegration and recovery of children, acknowledgement of past violence, social cohesion, and longer-term peacebuilding (Aptel et al., 2020; Velez, 2021). Yet insufficient attention has been given to the curriculum itself as the connecting mechanism across these domains. In particular, previous research has not systematically compared how redistribution of educational access, recognition of religious-cultural identity, representation through locally legitimate educators, and reconciliation-oriented psychosocial pedagogy can operate through Islamic curricula across different African conflict ecologies. This omission constitutes the central gap addressed by the present comparative study. From a normative perspective (*das sollen*), Education in Emergencies and transitional justice frameworks emphasize that conflict-affected children should have equitable access to quality education, culturally responsive learning environments, meaningful participation, and opportunities for psychosocial recovery (Novelli et al., 2015; Novelli & Sayed, 2016; Aptel et al., 2020). However, the documentary evidence (*das sein*) reveals a more fragmented reality. In Nigeria, locally accessible Islamic schooling continues to face limitations in educational quality and institutional recognition; in Somalia, culturally grounded psychosocial practices are documented without sufficient direct evidence of their effects on children's well-being; and in the Sahel, religious educators participate in community mediation while children's own perspectives remain inadequately represented. This discrepancy highlights a research gap that extends beyond educational access: existing scholarship has not sufficiently explained how adaptive Islamic curricula connect culturally legitimate educational practices with the interrelated justice dimensions of Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation across distinct conflict-affected contexts.

To investigate this gap, the study employs the Social Justice 4R Framework—Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation—as its principal theoretical lens. The framework integrates concerns with educational inequality, cultural and identity recognition, participation in decision-making, and the rebuilding of relationships after conflict. In education, Redistribution concerns equitable access to educational resources and opportunities, especially for marginalized groups; Recognition concerns the affirmation of identities, languages, cultures, and religions within educational processes; Representation concerns participation and voice in governance and educational decision-making; and Reconciliation concerns rebuilding relationships and addressing the legacies of conflict through educational practice (Novelli et al., 2015; Novelli & Sayed, 2016; Wong et al., 2022). Transitional-justice scholarship similarly emphasizes education's relevance to children's cognitive and psychological recovery, institutional reform, social cohesion, and sustainable peace (Aptel et al., 2020; Velez, 2021). In the present study, the 4R framework is operationalized at the level of Islamic curricular adaptation rather than merely at national education-system level. Redistribution is examined through expanded educational access in Nigerian Tsangaya settings; Reconciliation through the psychosocial and ethical functions of Aqidah and Akhlaq pedagogy in Somalia; Representation through religious educators' translation and mediation of rights concepts in the Sahel; while Recognition operates across the cases by treating religious-cultural identity as an educational resource rather than an obstacle to post-conflict reconstruction.

Conceptually, the study links adaptive Islamic curricula, Education in Emergencies, and transitional justice through the child-centred functions of educational continuity, psychosocial stabilization, cultural legitimacy, and community mediation. Adaptive Islamic curricula are understood here not as a single standardized curriculum but as context-responsive modifications of established religious educational practices that enable Islamic institutions to respond to changing educational and social conditions. Evidence from Nigerian Tsangaya research already demonstrates that such institutions combine Qur'anic education, moral development, discipline, community legitimacy, and—in some reform initiatives—additional educational or livelihood-oriented content (Idriss & Hamzah, 2021; Idriss et al., 2022; Abdur-Rafiu et al., 2025). Education in Emergencies scholarship likewise stresses that learning environments in crises can provide protection, structure, psychosocial support, and continuity in addition to academic learning (UNICEF, 2024a; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024). Transitional justice adds a further dimension by asking how education can address inequality, acknowledge affected communities, support recovery, and contribute to peaceful social reconstruction (Aptel et al., 2020; Velez, 2021). Bringing these concepts together permits the study to investigate Islamic curricula neither as substitutes for functioning public education nor as inherently peace-promoting institutions, but as locally embedded educational structures whose actual curricular practices can be analysed in relation to identifiable justice functions. This conceptual linkage provides the basis for the proposed notion of Faith-Based Transitional Justice.

What makes this comparison particularly important is the coexistence of severe educational disruption with locally resilient forms of schooling that are often poorly represented in dominant humanitarian and peacebuilding frameworks. In northern Nigeria, the persistence and scale of Tsangaya schooling demonstrate both its social embeddedness and the need to understand its adaptive capacity rather than considering it only through deficiency or security narratives (Idriss & Hamzah, 2021; Karofi, 2024; Hoechner et al., 2025). In Somalia, conflict and displacement continue to create demand for educational arrangements capable of reaching children whose participation in conventional schooling has been disrupted (UNICEF Somalia, 2023; UNICEF, 2024a). In the Sahel, public education systems face simultaneous pressures from insecurity, weak learning outcomes, limited access, and uneven state reach, while religious and other non-state providers already educate substantial numbers of learners (World Bank, 2021; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024). These cases therefore allow comparison not because Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel are assumed to be homogeneous or representative of Sub-Saharan Africa, but because they

illuminate different functions of locally grounded education under distinct conflict conditions. The analytical interest lies precisely in these differences: access and redistribution in Nigeria, psychosocial reconciliation in Somalia, and vernacular representation and mediation in the Sahel. Such comparison makes it possible to identify mechanisms without erasing the historical, religious, political, and institutional specificity of each setting.

Accordingly, this study aims to critically examine how adaptive Islamic curricula function as context-dependent mechanisms of child-centred transitional justice across conflict-affected educational settings in Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel. Using Qualitative Document Analysis of 42 documents published between 2015 and 2025, the study applies deductive thematic coding based on the Social Justice 4R Framework to compare documented educational practices and their justice-related functions. The central thesis advanced in this article is that adaptive Islamic curricula can contribute to educational justice not merely by sustaining access to learning, but by connecting educational continuity with cultural recognition, locally grounded community representation, and reconciliation-oriented educational practices. However, these contributions depend on institutional quality, child safeguarding, inclusion, and meaningful participation rather than religious legitimacy alone. This argument positions faith-based curriculum adaptation as a potential component of post-conflict educational reconstruction while avoiding the assumption that Islamic educational institutions are inherently protective or peace-promoting.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) with deductive thematic coding based on the Social Justice 4R Framework—Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation—to examine how adaptive Islamic curricula contribute to educational continuity, psychosocial support, and transitional justice in Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel. Drawing on 42 selected documents published between 2015 and 2025, the analysis involved document identification, eligibility screening, thematic coding, within-case interpretation, and cross-case synthesis. As the study relied exclusively on secondary sources, reported psychosocial and developmental outcomes were interpreted as documentary evidence rather than direct measurements. The overall methodological framework is illustrated in Figure 1. The overall methodological flow is summarized in Figure 1 and elaborated in the following subsections.

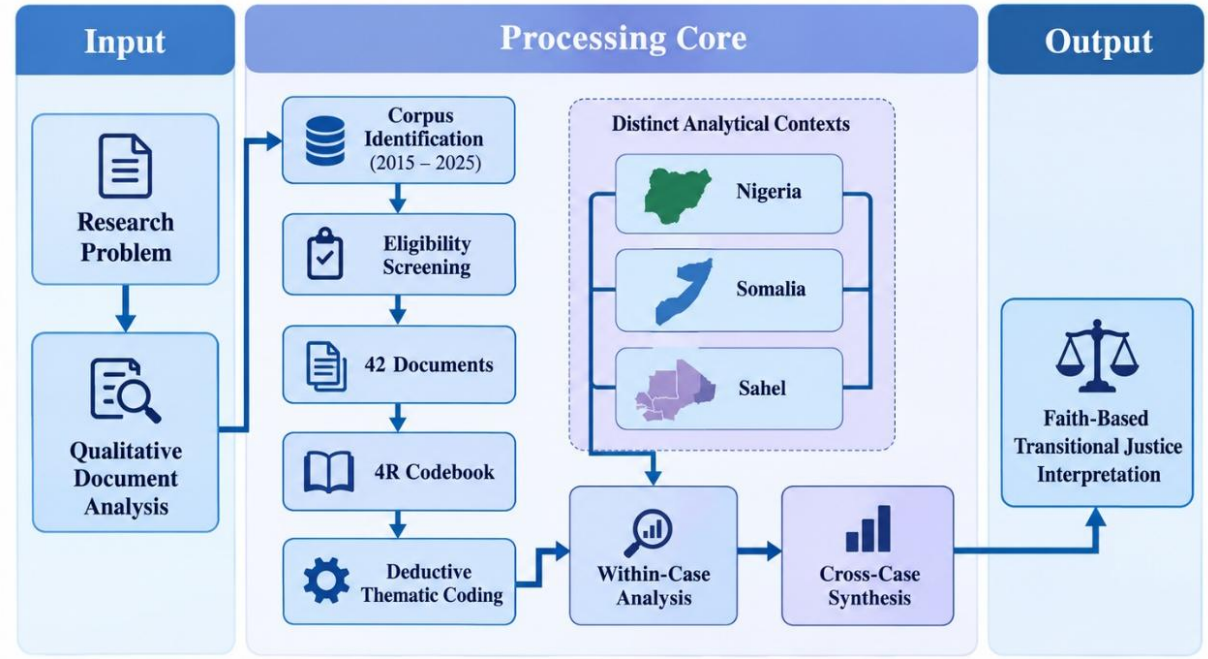


Figure 1. Overall Methodological Framework of the Study
Source: Authors' elaboration based on Qualitative Document Analysis and the Social Justice 4R Framework (Novelli, 2017; Adan, 2025).

Figure 1 illustrates the overall methodological sequence used in this study. The process begins with the identification of the research problem and proceeds through systematic documentary selection and qualitative coding before reaching comparative interpretation. Importantly, the three geographical cases were not treated as homogeneous representations of Sub-Saharan Africa. Instead, each case was retained as a distinct analytical context, while the 4R framework provided a common conceptual lens that enabled structured cross-case comparison.

2.1. Research Design

This study employed Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) to investigate the socio-pedagogical functions of adaptive Islamic curricula in conflict-affected educational settings. QDA was selected because the study seeks to interpret context-dependent meanings embedded in humanitarian reports, policy documents, institutional publications, and empirical academic studies rather than statistically aggregate findings across publications. This methodological orientation is consistent with the interpretive function of document analysis, in which documents are examined as socially produced texts that reflect institutional assumptions, policy priorities, educational practices, and contextual meanings rather than as neutral repositories of information (Bowen, 2009). The study adopted a constructionist orientation in interpreting how education, conflict, religion, child development, and justice are represented within the documentary corpus. The Social Justice 4R Framework provides the principal deductive analytical lens, consisting of Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation (Novelli, 2017; Adan, 2025). These dimensions were operationalized as categories for examining reported curricular adaptation, educational access, cultural-religious identity, educator participation, community mediation, and documented psychosocial or reconciliation-oriented practices. Because the study used documentary evidence rather than direct observation of children, indicators such as emotional stability, trauma recovery, or agency were treated strictly as outcomes reported by the selected sources. This design therefore allows the study to examine curriculum, child education, and transitional justice systematically without presenting secondary

documentary evidence as direct measurements of children's lived experiences. To translate the design into observable analytical categories, Table 1 presents the operational structure of the 4R framework.

Table 1. Operationalization of the Social Justice 4R Framework

Dimension	Main Analytical Focus	Documentary Indicators
Redistribution	Educational access and resource distribution	Curriculum adaptation, literacy/numeracy integration, access for displaced or marginalized learners, reach of Islamic educational networks
Recognition	Cultural and religious identity	Local Islamic epistemologies, indigenous languages, culturally grounded curriculum, responses to educational marginalization
Representation	Participation and community voice	Religious educators' participation, community mediation, translation of rights concepts into locally intelligible frameworks
Reconciliation	Recovery and rebuilding social relationships	Reported trauma-sensitive pedagogy, prophetic narratives, emotional-regulation practices, psychosocial or reconciliation-related outcomes

Table 1 transforms the 4R framework from a broad social-justice model into a documentary coding structure applicable to the educational contexts investigated in this research. Recognition is treated as a cross-cutting analytical dimension rather than being restricted to only one geographical case.

2.2. Data Collection

The documentary corpus was constructed through a structured search of Scopus, Google Scholar, ReliefWeb, UNICEF Innocenti, World Bank repositories, and related institutional sources. The search combined terminology relating to Islamic education, conflict, children, and the geographical settings under investigation. The principal Boolean structure was: *("Islamic education" OR "Madrasa*" OR "Tsangaya" OR "Qur'anic school") AND ("conflict" OR "emergency" OR "peacebuilding") AND ("child*" OR "primary education") AND ("Nigeria" OR "Somalia" OR "Sahel")*. The search was limited to documents published between 2015 and 2025, matching the study's temporal scope. Initial searching identified 187 records. The team then screened these records using predefined relevance criteria. The search excluded journalistic materials, documents unrelated to education, purely theological discussions without an educational dimension, and sources that did not substantively address the selected conflict contexts. The final corpus included 42 documents: international humanitarian reports, regional policy documents, national-level materials, and peer-reviewed empirical or analytical studies. Institutional claims were cross-checked against relevant academic evidence where available, including ethnographic research such as Bentley et al. (2021), in order to reduce overdependence on single institutional narratives. Because this study is a QDA rather than a systematic review, the purpose of screening was not to calculate pooled effects, but to construct a theoretically relevant documentary corpus suitable for comparative qualitative interpretation. Figure 2 presents the transition from the initial documentary pool to the final corpus.

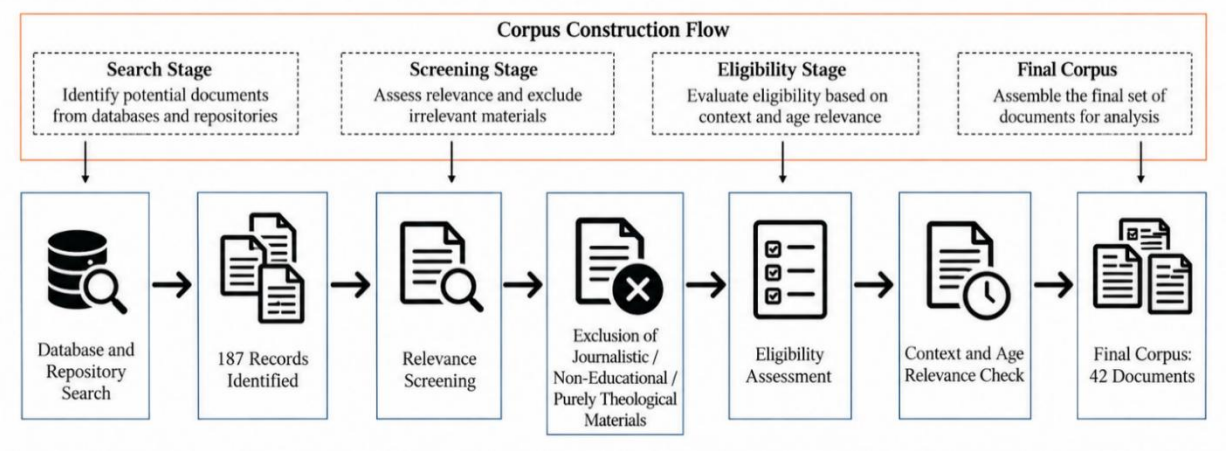


Figure 2. Documentary Selection and Corpus Construction Process
Source: Authors' elaboration based on Qualitative Document Analysis principles (Bowen, 2009) and the corpus selection procedure used in this study

Figure 2 demonstrates that the final 42 documents resulted from a structured selection procedure rather than an unrestricted collection of convenient sources. However, where database-specific record counts or duplicate-removal figures were not available in the . research documentation, these should not be invented and should instead be reported transparently as unavailable.

2.3. Data Analysis

The analytical framework used deductive thematic analysis structured by the four categories of Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation. Documentary passages were coded when they contained substantive evidence concerning educational access, curriculum adaptation, cultural or religious identity, religious educators' representational roles, community mediation, psychosocial support, or reconciliation-oriented educational practices. The unit of coding was the meaningful textual segment, normally a paragraph or coherent passage, rather than an entire document. This clarification is important because a single paragraph could contain more than one analytical dimension and could therefore receive multiple codes where conceptually justified. Coding focused specifically on segments relating to school-aged learners, educational practices, curriculum content, Islamic educational institutions, and conflict-affected communities. The analytical process was conducted manually and documented through a coding audit trail. Rather than assuming that particular mechanisms were present before analysis, phenomena such as literacy integration, religious narrative use, community mediation, or culturally grounded rights translation were treated as potential documentary manifestations to be identified and interpreted through coding. The final analysis proceeded from individual coded segments to within-case thematic patterns and subsequently to cross-case comparison. This strategy preserved contextual specificity while allowing the same 4R analytical language to be applied across Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel. Table 2 summarizes the connection between research questions and analytical treatment.

Table 2. Research Questions and Types of Analysis

Research Question No.	Research Question	Type of Analysis
RQ1	How do adaptive Islamic curricula in Nigeria's Tsangaya system redistribute educational access to conflict-affected school-aged children?	Deductive thematic analysis; Redistribution-focused within-case analysis

RQ2	How does Aqidah and Akhlaq pedagogy in Somali Madrasahs contribute to documented reconciliation and psychosocial recovery among school-aged learners?	Deductive thematic analysis; Reconciliation-focused within-case analysis
RQ3	How do religious educators in the Sahel represent community interests through vernacular interpretation of rights and justice?	Deductive thematic analysis; Representation-focused within-case analysis
Cross-case	How do the three contexts collectively illuminate the 4R dimensions of adaptive Islamic education?	Cross-case thematic synthesis

The analytical mapping in Table 2 prevents the documentary material from being treated as a single undifferentiated dataset and explicitly links each research question with its principal analytical operation.

2.4. Research Instruments

The principal research instrument was a documentary coding matrix developed from the Social Justice 4R Framework. In qualitative document analysis, the instrument does not function as a psychometric scale; instead, it provides a systematic structure for identifying, categorizing, comparing, and recording documentary evidence. The coding matrix contained four principal dimensions—Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation—with operational indicators derived from the theoretical framework and research questions. Each selected document was examined for relevant textual segments, documentary context, geographical setting, educational population, curriculum or pedagogical focus, and evidence related to one or more 4R dimensions. Additional fields recorded source type, publication year, institutional or academic origin, target educational group, and analytical notes. The use of a standardized matrix allowed the researchers to distinguish between direct documentary evidence, institutional claims, academic interpretation, and researcher-generated analytical inference. This distinction was particularly important for psychosocial outcomes, because the study did not directly assess children's trauma, PTSD symptoms, emotional regulation, or sense of agency. Such outcomes were recorded only where the . documentary source explicitly reported them. The coding instrument therefore supported analytical consistency while maintaining the interpretive nature of QDA.

Table 3. Documentary Coding Instrument

Component	Indicator	Sub-indicator / Recorded Evidence	Source
Redistribution	Educational access	enrolment, displaced learners, network reach, curriculum integration	Documentary source
Recognition	Identity validation	religion, language, local epistemology, cultural inclusion	Documentary source
Representation	Participation	mediation, educator role, community voice, rights translation	Documentary source
Reconciliation	Recovery/social rebuilding	reported psychosocial support, narratives, emotion-regulation practices	Documentary source
Source Profile	Documentary characteristics	year, country/context, document type, target learners	Researcher coding sheet

Table 3 demonstrates that the instrument was designed for documentary analysis rather than direct child assessment.

2.5. Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Because the study employed qualitative document analysis, methodological rigor was addressed primarily through the qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, rather than through statistical validity and reliability testing. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation across international agency reports, regional policy materials, national documents, and peer-reviewed academic publications. This procedure reduced the likelihood that interpretations would depend entirely on

the claims of a single institution or source type. Transferability was supported through contextual descriptions of Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel, allowing readers to judge the extent to which the interpretations may be relevant to comparable conflict-affected educational settings. Dependability was addressed through a documented coding procedure and audit trail recording decisions concerning source inclusion, coding, category assignment, and cross-case synthesis. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive recognition that humanitarian agencies, governments, academics, and religious institutions may frame Islamic education and conflict differently. The researchers therefore treated documentary claims as situated representations rather than objective descriptions of children's experiences. Recent documentary and conflict-sensitive research further emphasizes the value of triangulating institutional materials with independent academic evidence when studying contexts where direct access is constrained (Bentley et al., 2021; Adan, 2025). Importantly, trustworthiness procedures strengthened the interpretation of the documentary corpus but did not transform secondary evidence into direct evidence of children's subjective experiences.

2.6. Research Corpus, Educational Population, and Case Contexts

The research corpus consisted of 42 selected documents published between 2015 and 2025 and concerning Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel. Since this study was documentary rather than field-based, the term *research subjects* refers primarily to the populations represented within the documents rather than individuals directly recruited by the researchers. The documentary population includes school-aged children, conflict-affected learners, displaced children, Islamic educational institutions, religious educators, humanitarian organizations, and policy actors where these groups were substantively discussed in the selected sources. The study .ly referred to K-12 learners aged approximately 6–18 years; therefore, this broader term should be used consistently rather than interchangeably describing the entire population as "primary education." Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel were selected as analytically distinct conflict contexts in which Islamic educational institutions coexist with disrupted formal schooling. Nigeria provides documentary evidence concerning Tsangaya education and educational access; Somalia provides a context for examining reported religious pedagogy and reconciliation-oriented educational functions; and the Sahel provides evidence concerning religious educators, mediation, and locally grounded representation. The cases are therefore comparative rather than statistically representative. Their selection enables theoretically structured comparison across different conflict ecologies while retaining the historical and institutional specificity of each context.

Table 4. Research Corpus and Case Contexts

Context	Main Educational Focus	Main Documentary Actors	Principal 4R Analytical Emphasis
Nigeria	Tsangaya / Islamic education	children, educators, institutions, policy actors	Redistribution; Recognition
Somalia	Madrasa, Aqidah/Akhlaq-related pedagogy	learners, educators, humanitarian actors	Reconciliation; Recognition
Sahel	Religious education and community mediation	educators, communities, policy actors	Representation; Recognition

Table 4 clarifies the analytical logic of case selection without suggesting that each 4R dimension occurs exclusively in one country or region.

2.7. Data Analysis Technique

The analytical procedure was implemented through three sequential stages: Identification, Coding, and Cross-Case Synthesis. During the Identification stage, documents were screened using educational and age-related terms such as *children*, *school-aged*, *primary*, *learner*, and *curriculum* to ensure substantive

relevance to child education. During the Coding stage, relevant textual segments were manually assigned to one or more predefined 4R categories. A coding segment could receive multiple codes where the documentary evidence addressed overlapping concerns, such as culturally recognized curriculum that simultaneously expanded educational access. Coding decisions were documented through an audit trail to support consistency and later comparison. In the Cross-Case Synthesis stage, coded findings were first organized within each geographical case and subsequently compared across Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel. The comparison focused on recurring mechanisms, contextual differences, and relationships among the four social-justice dimensions rather than on statistical frequencies alone. Documentary evidence concerning psychosocial recovery or developmental outcomes was interpreted only as reported evidence from the underlying sources. The analytical procedure therefore did not test causal effectiveness or directly measure child outcomes. Instead, it identified and compared how adaptive Islamic educational practices were documented as contributing to educational access, cultural legitimacy, community representation, and reconciliation-oriented practices.

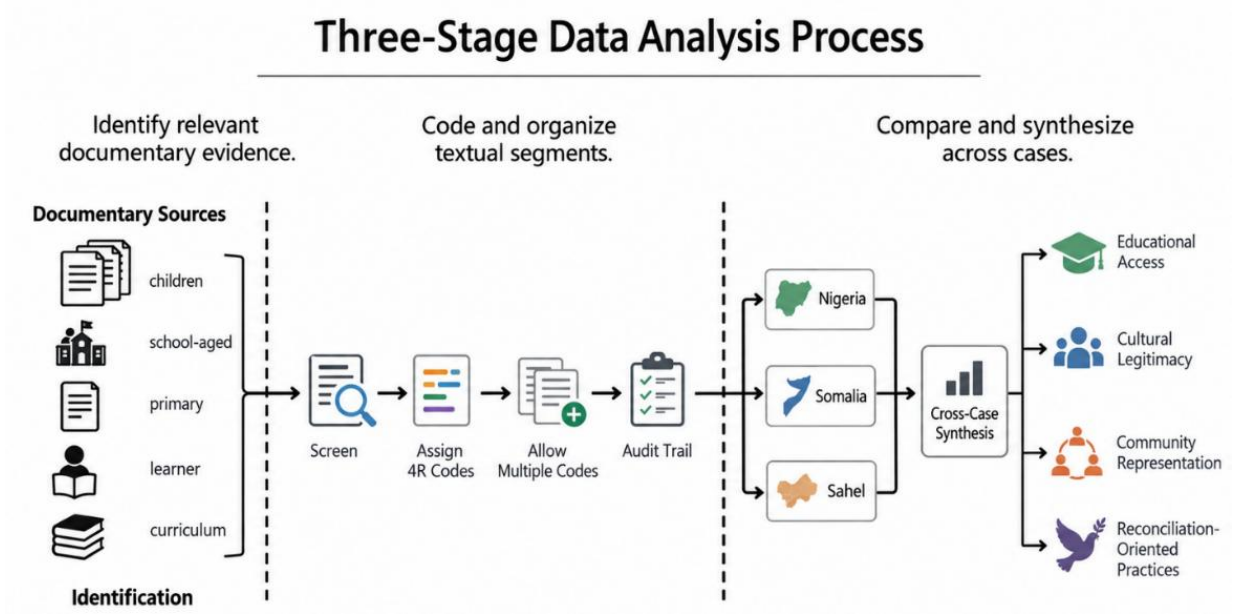


Figure 3. Three-Stage Data Analysis Process

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the deductive thematic coding procedure, the 4R framework, and the cross-case synthesis process used in this study.

Figure 3 emphasizes the distinction between initial document selection and subsequent interpretive analysis.

2.8. Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through structured documentary retrieval and criterion-based selection. Searches were undertaken in academic and institutional repositories using combinations of keywords referring to Islamic education, conflict, peacebuilding, children, educational emergency, and the selected geographical contexts. The retrieval period was limited to 2015–2025. Records identified through the search were documented before undergoing eligibility screening. Inclusion required substantive relevance to at least one of the following areas: Islamic educational institutions or curricula; education in conflict or emergency contexts; school-aged children or educational access; Nigeria, Somalia, or the Sahel; and documentary evidence that could be interpreted through one or more 4R dimensions. Exclusion criteria removed journalistic commentary, purely theological materials without an educational component, non-

relevant geographical studies, and documents without sufficient substantive information for qualitative coding. Institutional reports were retained because humanitarian and policy organizations play an important role in documenting educational crises, but they were not treated uncritically. Where possible, institutional claims were compared with academic studies in order to identify convergence, divergence, or potential institutional framing. This procedure generated the final corpus of 42 documents from an initial pool of 187 records.

Table 5. Documentary Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Publication period	2015–2025	Outside period
Geography	Nigeria, Somalia, Sahel	Unrelated geographical context
Educational relevance	Child/school-aged education, curriculum, Islamic schooling	No substantive educational content
Conflict relevance	conflict, emergency, peacebuilding, post-conflict	Unrelated to crisis/conflict
Source type	academic research, policy/humanitarian reports	journalistic or unsupported commentary
Analytical relevance	interpretable through 4R dimensions	insufficient analytical relevance

Table 5 makes the documentary selection logic explicit and improves the reproducibility of corpus construction.

2.9. Ethical Considerations and Methodological Limitations

This study did not recruit children, teachers, religious educators, or other human participants directly and therefore did not generate primary interview, observation, clinical, or psychological data. The analysis relied exclusively on published or institutionally available documentary materials. Nevertheless, the study addressed ethical issues associated with representing conflict-affected children by avoiding the treatment of institutional documents as substitutes for children's direct voices. References to trauma, psychological recovery, emotional regulation, agency, or child well-being were therefore attributed to the documentary sources in which such outcomes were reported rather than presented as outcomes independently measured by the researchers. The study also recognizes that humanitarian reports, government publications, and academic studies may reflect different organizational priorities, political assumptions, and representations of Islamic educational institutions. Source triangulation and reflexive analysis were used to reduce, but cannot entirely eliminate, these limitations. Another limitation concerns geographical comparison: Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel differ substantially in historical, political, linguistic, institutional, and conflict characteristics. Accordingly, cross-case synthesis was used to identify analytically comparable mechanisms rather than to generalize uniformly across Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, the documentary design limits direct access to children's spontaneous experiences, perceptions, and voices. The study therefore interprets documents as evidence of reported educational practices, policy orientations, and documented child-related outcomes, not as direct testimony from the children themselves.

3. RESULTS

This section presents findings derived from the Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) of 42 unique documents published between 2015 and 2025 concerning Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel. The analysis was guided by the Social Justice 4R Framework—Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation—and focused on documentary evidence concerning school-aged learners, adaptive Islamic curricula, educational continuity, community mediation, and reported psychosocial or reconciliation-

oriented practices. The findings are presented as documentary evidence rather than as direct measurements of children's lived experiences. Because several documents addressed more than one country or regional context, case-specific document counts are non-mutually exclusive and therefore exceed the total corpus when summed. The Results section first summarizes the documentary corpus, then presents the dominant findings for each case, followed by Recognition as a cross-cutting dimension, a cross-case synthesis, and a final finding concerning the limited direct representation of children's voices in the documentary record.

Table 6 provides an overview of the documentary evidence by case, the number of relevant documents, the main evidence types represented in the corpus, and the principal child-education findings identified through coding.

Table 6. Summary of Documentary Evidence by Case and 4R Dimension

Case and 4R Dimension	Relevant Documents (n/42)	Types of Evidence	Key Findings for School-Aged Children
Nigeria – Redistribution	18 (42.9%)	UNICEF/UBEC reports and academic studies	Tsangaya is documented as an accessible learning structure in conflict-affected settings, while formal recognition, teacher support, and learning quality remain inconsistent.
Somalia – Reconciliation	17 (40.5%)	UNICEF reports and academic/clinical studies	Aqidah/Akhlaq-related pedagogical practices are reported as culturally grounded mechanisms associated with psychosocial support, cognitive reframing, and reconciliation-oriented learning.
Sahel – Representation	14 (33.3%)	UNICEF/AU materials and academic studies	Religious educators are documented as community mediators and interpreters of rights-related concepts, although their direct educational representation of children remains limited.
Cross-case – Recognition	Cross-cutting	Evidence across all three cases	Religious-cultural legitimacy, local language or jurisprudential framing, and community trust repeatedly shape the acceptability and continuity of educational practices.

Source: Authors' analysis of the 42-document corpus.

3.1. Redistribution: Curriculum Hybridity and Educational Access in Northern Nigeria

Of the 42 documents analyzed, 18 (42.9%) contained explicit evidence concerning educational access in Northern Nigeria, and 12 of these addressed the Tsangaya system as a mechanism relevant to conflict-affected or marginalized school-aged populations. Across the corpus, the Nigerian case is dominated by the Redistribution dimension because the documents repeatedly connect educational continuity with physical access, affordability, and the availability of locally embedded Islamic schools when conventional schooling is disrupted. The documentary evidence describes a severe educational-access crisis. UNICEF Nigeria (2022) reported large-scale school closures associated with abductions and insecurity, alongside extensive displacement of teachers and damage to school infrastructure. More recent UNICEF reporting also documents a very large population of out-of-school children, reinforcing the scale of educational exclusion in the country. Within this context, Tsangaya institutions are repeatedly represented as accessible educational spaces for children who may otherwise remain outside formal schooling.

The corpus further indicates that some Tsangaya settings have incorporated basic literacy and numeracy into traditional Qur'anic learning, producing forms of curricular hybridity documented by Gwaza and Ochogwu (2024) and Rauf and Paramole (2024). The documents nevertheless identify continuing tensions between access and educational quality. Abdulkadir (2021), for example, documents persistent socio-economic and rights-related vulnerabilities affecting Almajiri children, while the broader corpus repeatedly notes uneven teacher preparation, limited formal recognition, and inconsistent alignment with basic learning outcomes. Redistribution in this case therefore refers not to evidence of uniformly high-quality

provision, but to the documented capacity of locally embedded Islamic schools to sustain access under conditions in which formal educational opportunities are constrained. Recognition also intersects with Redistribution in the Nigerian case. The documents repeatedly attribute the continued use of Tsangaya education to its cultural and religious legitimacy, low cost, and embeddedness within local social structures. However, the corpus contains limited direct testimony from primary-aged or school-aged children themselves. Children are generally represented through enrolment estimates, vulnerability categories, and policy descriptions rather than through first-person accounts of educational experience.

3.2. Reconciliation: Aqidah/Akhlaq and Reported Psychosocial Recovery in Somalia

Seventeen of the 42 documents (40.5%) addressed psychosocial or protective educational functions relevant to children in Somalia, and nine specifically discussed pedagogical practices within madrasah or Islamic learning environments. The Reconciliation dimension emerged most clearly in this case because the documentary sources describe religiously grounded narratives, recitation practices, and moral instruction as culturally legitimate approaches through which learners may interpret distress, loss, and prolonged insecurity. The Somalia corpus documents severe disruption to children's education and protection. UNICEF (2023b) reports substantial numbers of school-aged children without access to protective quality education, especially among internally displaced populations. Academic and clinical sources in the corpus further describe high levels of trauma-related distress among conflict-affected Somali populations (Ali et al., 2023; Salad et al., 2023). These findings set the context for religiously grounded educational and psychosocial practices documented in the corpus.

The documentary evidence identified three recurring mechanisms. First, prophetic narratives are reported as tools for cognitive reframing, including stories emphasizing patience, forgiveness, endurance, and meaning-making (Bentley et al., 2021; Tahir & Cochrane, 2025). Second, structured Qur'anic recitation and collective religious practices are described as providing routine, predictability, and culturally familiar forms of emotional regulation. Third, interpretations of suffering as spiritual testing are reported as offering a religious vocabulary through which learners and communities can interpret adversity. These findings are treated as reported outcomes from the underlying sources rather than as direct clinical measurements conducted in this study. The corpus also contains evidence of culturally adapted trauma interventions, including the Islamic Trauma Healing approach described by Zoellner et al. (2021). However, the documentary analysis does not establish that Aqidah/Akhlaq instruction itself causally reduces PTSD or produces measurable psychological recovery. Instead, the evidence supports a more cautious conclusion: religious pedagogical frameworks are documented as culturally acceptable resources for psychosocial support and reconciliation-oriented meaning-making. As in Nigeria, direct child testimony is sparse, limiting the extent to which documentary evidence can represent children's own interpretations of these practices.

3.3. Representation: Religious Educators, Community Mediation, and Rights Translation in the Sahel

Fourteen of the 42 documents (33.3%) addressed the civic, representational, or mediation roles of religious educators in the Sahel, with eight documents specifically referring to child protection or community representation. In this case, Representation appears through two recurring documentary patterns: the participation of religious actors in community mediation and the translation of rights-related concepts into religiously and culturally intelligible language. The documentary corpus situates these practices within a severe regional education crisis characterized by insecurity, displacement, school closure, climate-related pressures, and chronic underfunding. UNICEF (2025b) reports extensive humanitarian needs among children in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and continuing disruption of schooling across the region. These

conditions increase the relevance of non-state and community-based actors in sustaining communication, trust, and local problem-solving.

Within the analyzed sources, religious educators are described as socially legitimate intermediaries who may participate in community dialogue, conflict mediation, humanitarian access, or local interpretation of child-protection concerns. The representational role documented in the corpus is therefore primarily community-level rather than child-led. The sources also describe processes of vernacularization in which abstract rights concepts are reframed through locally meaningful Islamic ethical or jurisprudential language. This translation can strengthen cultural intelligibility, but the available documents provide limited evidence about how such concepts are actually received, understood, or internalized by school-aged learners. A central limitation therefore emerges within the Sahel case: representation is documented more strongly as mediation on behalf of communities than as direct representation of children's voices. The documentary evidence supports the existence of religious educators as locally legitimate intermediaries, but it does not establish that children participate directly in these mediation processes or that rights-related curricular concepts lead to measurable changes in child outcomes.

3.4. Recognition as a Cross-Cutting Dimension Across the Three Cases

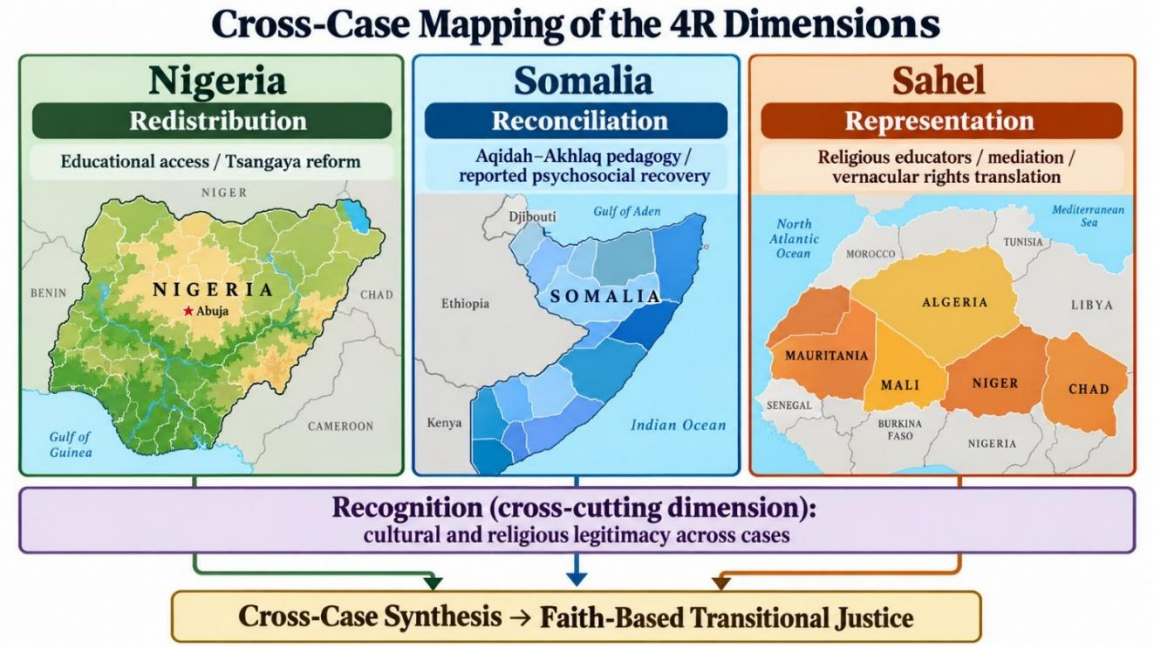
Recognition did not emerge as an isolated country-specific finding; instead, it appeared across Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel as a cross-cutting condition that shaped the legitimacy of educational practices. In Nigeria, recognition is evident in the continued reliance on Tsangaya education because it is embedded within local religious and social structures. In Somalia, recognition appears through the use of Aqidah, Akhlaq, prophetic narratives, and culturally grounded psychosocial practices that align educational support with religious meaning-making. In the Sahel, recognition is visible in the translation of rights and justice concepts into locally intelligible Islamic language and jurisprudential frames. Across the three cases, documentary evidence therefore suggests that educational continuity and community engagement are influenced not only by the availability of educational provision, but also by whether educational practices are perceived as culturally and religiously legitimate. Recognition functions as an enabling dimension connecting Redistribution, Reconciliation, and Representation rather than as a separate institutional mechanism confined to one case. The relationships among the four 4R dimensions are summarized in Figure

4. The figure presents the dominant analytical emphasis in each geographical case while also showing Recognition as a cross-cutting dimension and the common transition toward cross-case interpretation.

Figure 4. Cross-Case Mapping of the 4R Dimensions
Source: Authors' synthesis based on the documentary findings across Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel.

3.5. Cross-Case Synthesis

Cross-case comparison shows that the three settings illuminate different but related functions of adaptive Islamic education. Nigeria foregrounds Redistribution because access, affordability, and local availability dominate the documentary evidence. Somalia foregrounds Reconciliation because the corpus repeatedly links religious narratives and practices with culturally grounded psychosocial support and meaning-making.



The Sahel foregrounds Representation because religious educators are documented as community intermediaries and interpreters of rights-related concepts. Recognition cuts across all three cases by shaping cultural legitimacy and community acceptance. These patterns do not indicate that each 4R dimension is exclusive to one context; rather, they identify the dominant analytical emphasis within each case while preserving overlap across the documentary corpus. Table 7 consolidates the comparative findings, the principal documented mechanisms, and the key limitations that should be retained when interpreting the evidence.

Table 7. Comparative Findings Across Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel

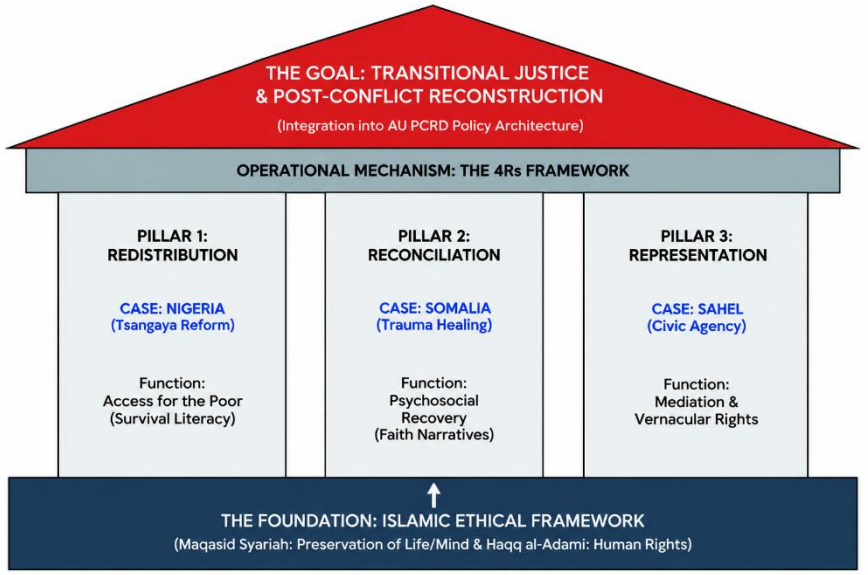
Case	Dominant 4R Dimension	Documented Mechanism	Cross-Cutting Recognition	Key Limitation
Nigeria	Redistribution	Access through Tsangaya and hybrid curriculum	Religious-cultural legitimacy and affordability	Learning quality and direct child voice remain inconsistently documented.
Somalia	Reconciliation	Religious narratives, recitation, and reported psychosocial support	Culturally legitimate religious meaning-making	Documentary evidence does not directly establish causal psychological effects.
Sahel	Representation	Community mediation and vernacular interpretation of rights	Religious legitimacy in community communication	Direct participation and educational outcomes for children remain weakly documented.

Cross-case	Recognition	Cultural legitimacy supports continuity and acceptance	Recognition interacts with the other three dimensions	Evidence is mediated through institutional and academic documents rather than direct child testimony.

Source: *Authors' synthesis of the 42-document QDA corpus.*

The cross-case synthesis indicates that the three empirical contexts illuminate complementary justice functions within the 4R framework. Nigeria primarily reflects redistribution through access-oriented Tsangaya reform, Somalia highlights reconciliation through psychosocial and faith-based recovery mechanisms, while the Sahel demonstrates representation through mediation and vernacular rights translation. These case-specific functions can be conceptually integrated within a broader Islamic ethical foundation and transitional-justice orientation, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Cross-Case Synthesis of the 4R Framework toward Faith-Based Transitional Justice



Source: Developed by the authors based on the cross-case synthesis of the 42-document corpus and the 4R analytical framework

Figure 5 illustrates how the three case contexts operate as complementary pathways rather than isolated findings. Redistribution in Nigeria addresses educational access, reconciliation in Somalia reflects documented psychosocial recovery mechanisms, and representation in the Sahel emphasizes mediation and locally grounded rights translation. The Islamic ethical framework functions as a normative foundation connecting these mechanisms, while transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction represent the broader interpretive outcome of the cross-case synthesis.

3.6. Cross-Cutting Finding: Limited Direct Representation of Children's Voices

A cross-cutting finding across the three cases is the limited direct representation of children's voices in the documentary corpus. In Nigeria, children are predominantly presented through statistics concerning enrolment, displacement, school closure, vulnerability, and educational access. In Somalia, institutional and academic documents describe psychosocial needs and culturally grounded forms of support, but direct first-person accounts from school-aged learners remain uncommon. In the Sahel, religious educators and community actors are documented as mediators and representatives, yet children's own participation in these processes is rarely recorded. This pattern is analytically important because the study concerns child education but relies on documentary sources that largely represent children through institutional,

humanitarian, policy, or adult perspectives. The absence of direct child testimony should therefore be understood as a property of the documentary evidence itself rather than as evidence that children lack views or agency. It also defines an important boundary of the present findings: the QDA can identify how institutions and researchers document educational access, psychosocial support, cultural legitimacy, and representation, but it cannot substitute for field-based research centered on children's lived experiences.

Overall, the Results indicate that adaptive Islamic educational practices are documented as performing differentiated but interconnected roles across the three conflict-affected contexts. The Nigerian corpus emphasizes access and redistribution, the Somali corpus emphasizes reconciliation-oriented and psychosocial meaning-making, and the Sahel corpus emphasizes community representation and rights translation. Recognition operates across all three settings by shaping the cultural legitimacy through which educational practices are received. At the same time, the evidence remains documentary and context-dependent. The findings therefore support comparative interpretation of documented educational mechanisms, but they do not establish causal effectiveness, clinical outcomes, or direct child-level impact.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that madrasas in Sub-Saharan Africa are not merely static religious institutions, but dynamic entities that actively navigate the complexities of conflict. Through the lens of 4R, these institutions perform state functions—such as providing access (redistribution), mental health (reconciliation), and civil order (representation)—precisely when the state itself is paralysed. This section discusses the implications of these findings for global policy, highlights double standards in international aid, and proposes a new framework for Transitional Justice.

4.1. Redistribution in Nigeria: Confirming Access, Extending the Meaning of Redistribution

The Nigerian findings suggest that the redistributive contribution of the Tsangaya system is located primarily in its capacity to maintain educational access for economically marginalized and conflict-affected children when formal schooling is disrupted. This interpretation is broadly consistent with Idriss and Hamzah (2021), who found that Tsangaya education continues to provide Qur'anic literacy, moral formation, and basic scholastic training for Almajiri children in northern Nigeria. Idriss and Gwadabe (2021) also supported this, showing that the system remains educationally important despite serious financial constraints affecting accommodation, food, learning facilities, and learners' socioeconomic well-being. However, these earlier studies primarily examined Tsangaya's educational and social functions at the institutional and community levels; they did not explicitly conceptualize access as a redistributive justice mechanism in conflict-affected education. Hoechner et al. (2026) further complicate conventional interpretations by showing that Qur'anic schools should not be examined only through questions of militancy and radicalization, but also through the experiences of learners and teachers exposed to conflict. This aligns with the present study's finding that the educational role of Tsangaya cannot be reduced to a security discourse. At the same time, UNICEF Innocenti (2024) emphasizes that improving African education requires attention not only to participation but also to equity, learning quality, local conditions, and implementation capacity. Therefore, the present findings support previous evidence that Tsangaya provides culturally embedded educational access, but they also extend that literature by interpreting this

access through the Redistribution dimension of the 4R Framework, where educational participation is understood as a question of social justice rather than mere institutional survival (Novelli et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, the findings do not support an unqualified interpretation of Tsangaya as an adequate substitute for formal education. The corpus indicates a persistent tension between access and educational quality, a problem that also appears in previous scholarship. Idriss and Gwadabe (2021) documented material deprivation and insufficient educational resources, while Idriss and Hamzah (2021) emphasized strengths in Qur'anic mastery and moral training without demonstrating equivalence with broader formal curriculum outcomes. Hoechner et al. (2026) similarly caution against simplistic representations of Qur'anic schooling, whether negative or romanticized, because such institutions are embedded in wider structures of poverty, conflict, social marginalization, and epistemic hierarchy. UNICEF Innocenti (2024) adds an important system-level perspective by arguing that educational expansion must be accompanied by improvements in pedagogical quality, equity, teacher support, and locally responsive implementation. These points qualify the redistribution finding: providing a learning space is not equivalent to achieving educational justice if children remain excluded from recognized certification, broader literacy and numeracy pathways, or progression into subsequent levels of schooling. The present study therefore contributes not by claiming that Tsangaya "solves" the education crisis, but by reframing it as an incomplete redistributive mechanism. Redistribution is achieved partially through accessibility and affordability, yet remains structurally constrained by quality, recognition, and institutional support (Idriss & Hamzah, 2021; Idriss & Gwadabe, 2021; Hoechner et al., 2026). This distinction advances the 4R literature by showing that redistribution and recognition cannot be treated as separate domains: access without institutional and cultural recognition may reproduce a parallel system in which marginalized learners remain educationally visible but structurally disadvantaged. In this sense, the Nigerian case extends prior studies by showing that adaptive Islamic education contributes to crisis resilience while also exposing the limits of redistribution when it is not connected to quality assurance, teacher development, certification, and equitable public support (Novelli et al., 2017; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024).

4.2. Reconciliation in Somalia: From Religious Pedagogy to Culturally Embedded Recovery

The Somali findings suggest that religious pedagogy may contribute to reconciliation not simply through doctrinal instruction, but through culturally meaningful ways of interpreting suffering, regulating distress, and rebuilding psychological and social continuity. Bentley et al. (2021) support this interpretation by developing Islamic Trauma Healing as a faith-integrated, community-based intervention that combines empirically supported trauma-focused principles with Islamic teachings and prophetic narratives. Their work demonstrates that Islamic stories, supplication, community participation, and trauma-focused cognitive processes can be integrated within culturally acceptable approaches for Muslim communities affected by war and displacement. Zoellner et al. (2021) similarly argue that community faith infrastructure can help address the psychological consequences of war where specialist mental-health services are difficult to access. More recent randomized evidence by Zoellner et al. (2024) strengthens the broader proposition that trained lay facilitators can deliver culturally aligned trauma interventions, although such evidence concerns a structured intervention and should not automatically be generalized to ordinary madrasa classrooms. Tahir and Cochrane (2025), meanwhile, show that post-conflict education in Somalia remains deeply shaped by institutional fragmentation, displacement, poverty, and uneven access to formal schooling. Taken together, these studies support the present finding that religious institutions possess forms of cultural legitimacy that may make psychosocially sensitive educational practices more accessible. However, the present study differs from clinical trauma research because it does not measure psychological recovery directly. Its contribution is interpretive: it identifies how documentary sources represent Aqidah

and Akhlaq pedagogy, prophetic narratives, and religious meaning-making as possible educational mechanisms associated with reconciliation and psychosocial support.

At the same time, the findings require a more cautious interpretation than a straightforward claim that Islamic pedagogy "heals trauma." The evidence from Bentley et al. (2021) and Zoellner et al. (2021) demonstrates that culturally adapted Islamic interventions can be deliberately structured around trauma-focused psychological principles; this is different from assuming that all Qur'anic recitation, Aqidah instruction, or prophetic storytelling automatically generates measurable therapeutic effects. Tahir and Cochrane (2025) also remind us that educational exclusion in Somalia is produced by intersecting structural conditions, including conflict, displacement, historical fragmentation, and institutional weakness, none of which can be resolved solely through classroom-level religious pedagogy. In this respect, the present study both supports and qualifies previous research. It supports the argument that culturally meaningful religious idioms can enhance the acceptability and contextual relevance of psychosocial practices, but it does not establish that madrasa education is clinically equivalent to professional trauma treatment. This distinction is theoretically important for the Reconciliation dimension of the 4R Framework. Novelli et al. (2017) conceptualize reconciliation as rebuilding relationships, trust, and social cohesion rather than simply restoring institutional access (Tahir & Cochrane, 2025; Novelli et al., 2017). The Somali findings extend this concept by suggesting that reconciliation may also operate through culturally embedded meaning-making practices that help learners interpret disruption and suffering. The novelty therefore lies in positioning religious pedagogy as a potential educational interface between psychosocial support and reconciliation, rather than treating it as either theology alone or a substitute for mental-health care. Future empirical research should directly test how children experience these practices, whether effects vary by age and gender, and whether documented psychosocial benefits persist outside structured faith-based interventions (Bentley et al., 2021; Zoellner et al., 2021, 2024).

4.3. Representation in the Sahel: Religious Educators Beyond Community Mediation

The Sahel findings indicate that religious educators can perform representational functions through mediation, community mobilization, and translating externally formulated rights norms into locally intelligible moral vocabularies. This interpretation is broadly consistent with evidence from the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (2020), which documented the involvement of imams, ulema, Qur'anic teachers, and other religious leaders in intra-religious dialogue and local conflict management across several regions of Mali. Such evidence supports the proposition that religious actors possess community legitimacy and social access that conventional institutions may not always command in fragile environments. UNICEF's recent work similarly recognizes that faith leaders can influence social norms and child protection practices because religious authority is often embedded within community moral systems (UNICEF, 2025). At the wider regional level, UNICEF's Central Sahel reporting shows the scale of conflict-related threats to children's education, protection, and development, reinforcing the need for community-level actors who can operate where formal systems are constrained (UNICEF, 2024a, 2024b). These findings are also consistent with the 4R Framework, in which Representation concerns participation, voice, and influence over institutions and decisions affecting marginalized groups (Novelli et al., 2017). However, the present study extends previous mediation-oriented literature by asking a specifically educational question: whether the legitimacy of religious educators can be mobilized not only to stabilize communities but also to represent children's educational interests. The corpus suggests this potential exists, but children's representation remains indirect and largely mediated through adults, community leaders, and institutional actors.

This finding also exposes a significant contradiction between community representation and child participation. Religious educators may be legitimate representatives of communities, but that does not necessarily mean they represent children's own perspectives. UNICEF's child-rights work in the Sahel repeatedly emphasizes the protection risks children face, while recent faith-engagement guidance shows that religious leaders can help reinterpret social norms related to children's rights and protection (UNICEF, 2024; UNICEF, 2025). Nevertheless, these sources do not show that children routinely participate in decisions mediated by religious authorities. This distinction is central to the present study's contribution. Representation within the 4R framework should not be understood only as the presence of trusted adults in decision-making structures; it also requires attention to whose voice is represented, who defines the problem, and whether children's views are directly incorporated. Comparative research on social justice and peacebuilding has similarly warned that formal inclusion can coexist with deeper structures of marginalization if power relations remain unchanged (Novelli et al., 2017; Higgins & Novelli, 2020). The present study therefore partially supports earlier claims regarding the peacebuilding potential of religious actors but challenges any assumption that community legitimacy automatically constitutes child-centred representation. Its novelty lies in separating religious mediation, vernacular rights translation, and child agency as analytically distinct processes. This distinction has practical implications: religious educators may provide culturally legitimate channels for child-rights communication, but mechanisms for direct child participation, safeguarding, gender-sensitive consultation, and accountability remain necessary. Thus, the Sahel case expands Representation from a peacebuilding concept into a child-education question, while also demonstrating that cultural legitimacy must not be confused with democratic or child-centred representation (HD Centre, 2020; UNICEF, 2024, 2025; Higgins & Novelli, 2020; Novelli et al., 2017).

4.4. Recognition as a Cross-Cutting Dimension: Cultural Legitimacy across the Three Cases

Recognition emerges from the cross-case synthesis as a dimension that cannot be confined to a single country because it conditions how Redistribution, Reconciliation, and Representation operate across all three contexts. In Nigeria, Tsangaya schooling retains legitimacy partly because it is historically and religiously embedded in Muslim communities; Idriss and Hamzah (2021) demonstrate that Qur'anic education is valued not simply for instructional access but for spiritual formation, discipline, and social continuity. Hoechner et al. (2026) similarly argue that Islamic schools should be understood in their own social and epistemic contexts rather than primarily through externally imposed security categories. In Somalia, Bentley et al. (2021) and Zoellner et al. (2021) show that the acceptability of faith-integrated trauma approaches depends in part on their alignment with Islamic understandings, community practices, and culturally familiar narratives. In the Sahel, UNICEF's faith-engagement work indicates that religious leaders can influence community norms precisely because rights, protection, and social change are communicated through culturally and spiritually meaningful language (UNICEF, 2025). These patterns reflect the Recognition dimension of the 4R Framework, which concerns whether educational systems acknowledge and value marginalized identities, languages, cultural knowledge, and religious traditions rather than requiring learners to detach themselves from them (Novelli et al., 2017). Therefore, Recognition in this study functions as a cross-cutting mechanism: it helps explain why Tsangaya remains accessible, why faith-based psychosocial approaches may be acceptable, and why religious mediators can translate rights discourse into locally intelligible forms.

However, cultural recognition should not be romanticized. Recognition can strengthen educational legitimacy, but cultural legitimacy alone does not guarantee educational quality, child protection, gender equality, or meaningful participation. Grace and Wodon (2022) show that faith-based schools constitute a

major component of education provision in Sub-Saharan Africa, illustrating that religious education is not peripheral to the continent's educational systems. Yet the diversity of faith-based institutions means recognition must be paired with accountability and minimum standards, rather than interpreted as unconditional validation. The same tension appears in the Nigerian case, where cultural legitimacy coexists with financial deprivation and uneven learning conditions (Idriss & Gwadabe, 2021). It also appears in Somalia, where culturally aligned interventions may improve acceptability without replacing the need for professional mental-health and educational services (Bentley et al., 2021; Zoellner et al., 2024). More broadly, Higgins and Novelli (2020) warn that peace education can reproduce unequal power relations when cultural and political contexts are insufficiently examined, while research applying the 4Rs framework in other conflict-affected settings similarly cautions that recognition must be connected to redistribution and representation if it is to contribute to social justice (Zoellner et al., 2024; Higgins & Novelli, 2020; Novelli et al., 2017). The present study therefore conceptualizes recognition not as a celebratory endorsement of local tradition but as a conditional bridge between cultural legitimacy and educational justice. Recognition matters because interventions that are culturally unintelligible are unlikely to gain sustained community support; however, recognition becomes socially just only when coupled with access, quality, child agency, safeguarding, and opportunities for reconciliation (Grace & Wodon, 2022; Idriss & Gwadabe, 2021; Bentley et al., 2021)

4.5. What the Three Cases Add Beyond Previous Studies

The most important contribution of the cross-case comparison is that it brings together literatures that have generally developed separately. Research on Tsangaya education has focused on Qur'anic learning, poverty, institutional sustainability, and the social conditions of Almajiri children (Idriss & Hamzah, 2021; Idriss & Gwadabe, 2021). Recent conflict research has begun to challenge securitized interpretations of Qur'anic schooling and to foreground the experiences of teachers and students affected by insurgency (Hoechner et al., 2026). Somali scholarship, by contrast, has highlighted post-conflict educational fragmentation and exclusion (Tahir & Cochrane, 2025), while faith-integrated trauma research has examined culturally adapted psychological interventions in Somali Muslim communities (Bentley et al., 2021; Zoellner et al., 2021). Research and practice in the Sahel have focused more strongly on mediation, religious authority, community dialogue, child protection, and the role of trusted local actors in fragile contexts (HD Centre, 2020; UNICEF, 2024). Each literature therefore identifies an important part of the relationship between religion, education, conflict, and recovery, but none by itself explains why similar religious institutions can simultaneously function as educational providers, psychosocial resources, mediators, and sources of cultural legitimacy. By applying the 4R framework comparatively, the present study identifies a patterned relationship among these functions rather than treating them as isolated observations. Redistribution is most visible in Nigeria, Reconciliation in Somalia, Representation in the Sahel, while Recognition cuts across all three cases.

This comparative structure also distinguishes the present study from previous uses of the 4R Framework. Novelli et al. (2017) developed the 4Rs to analyse education's contribution to sustainable peacebuilding through Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation, while subsequent applications have used the framework to examine conflict transformation and social justice in specific national contexts. For example, research on Southern Thailand demonstrates how the 4Rs can reveal tensions between educational reform, minority recognition, and enduring power structures, while Higgins and Novelli (2020) caution against assuming that peace-oriented curriculum interventions are automatically emancipatory. The current study extends these approaches in two ways. First, rather than applying all four dimensions to a single state education system, it uses cross-case functional comparison to identify how distinct dimensions

become especially visible under different forms of educational disruption. Second, it applies the framework to adaptive Islamic educational institutions that often lie partly outside formal state systems (Pherali, 2021; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024; Hoechner et al., 2026). This produces a different theoretical insight: educational justice in fragile contexts may be distributed across multiple institutions rather than delivered solely through state schooling. The novelty is therefore not the observation that Islamic education exists during conflict, but the proposition that its adaptive functions can be systematically analysed as interconnected justice mechanisms. At the same time, the comparison reveals limits: none of the cases independently fulfils all four dimensions, and child voice remains weak across the corpus. This prevents the proposed framework from becoming a celebratory narrative and instead positions it as a diagnostic tool for identifying both contributions and deficits in faith-based educational provision (Novelli et al., 2017; Higgins & Novelli, 2020).

4.6. Theoretical Contribution: Toward Faith-Based Transitional Justice

The findings support the proposition, rather than definitive validation, of a Faith-Based Transitional Justice framework for analysing how religious educational institutions may contribute to post-conflict recovery. This proposition builds on the 4R Framework's argument that education can contribute to sustainable peace only when questions of redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation are addressed together (Novelli et al., 2017). It also resonates with wider peace-education scholarship demonstrating that education is not politically neutral: educational institutions may reproduce inequalities and conflict narratives, but they may also provide resources for social reconstruction when embedded within broader processes of transformation (Higgins & Novelli, 2020). The African Union's PCRD policy similarly treats post-conflict reconstruction as a process extending beyond immediate stabilization toward institutional rebuilding, human security, social recovery, and sustainable development, although it does not provide a specific model for Islamic educational institutions (African Union, 2006/2026; African Union, 2018). The present study adds to these frameworks by identifying religious education as a possible intermediary layer between formal peace architecture and community-level educational practice. Nigeria illustrates how educational access can be maintained through non-state religious institutions; Somalia suggests that culturally meaningful religious pedagogy can intersect with documented psychosocial-support practices; and the Sahel demonstrates how religious educators can participate in mediation and community norm translation. Taken together, these findings justify exploring Faith-Based Transitional Justice as an analytical model linking education, cultural legitimacy, social justice, and post-conflict reconstruction.

The theoretical novelty of Faith-Based Transitional Justice is therefore best understood as an integrative proposition rather than a claim that religious schooling constitutes a formal transitional justice mechanism. Formal transitional justice normally involves institutional processes concerned with accountability, truth, reparations, institutional reform, and guarantees of non-recurrence; the documentary evidence analysed here does not establish that madrasas perform these functions in a juridical sense. Instead, the study identifies functional parallels at the grassroots level: redistribution of educational opportunity, recognition of cultural and religious identity, representation through trusted community actors, and reconciliation-oriented meaning-making. This distinction is important because it prevents conceptual inflation while preserving the study's contribution. Existing 4R scholarship has already argued that education can contribute to positive peace and social justice (Novelli et al., 2017), while culturally informed peace-education research emphasizes that interventions must be interpreted within specific political and cultural contexts rather than assumed to be universally transformative (Higgins & Novelli, 2020). Grace and Wodon (2022) further demonstrate the substantial role of faith-based education within African education systems, while UNICEF's faith-engagement research shows that religious leaders can shape social norms and child-

protection practices when engagement is contextually grounded (UNICEF, 2025). The present study brings these strands together by proposing that faith-based education may constitute a locally legitimate interface between educational continuity and broader justice processes. Future research should therefore test the model through fieldwork, comparative case studies, child-centred methods, and longitudinal designs before it is treated as a validated framework for policy implementation (Novelli et al., 2017).

4.7. Implications, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

The combined findings have implications for Education in Emergencies, faith-based education, and post-conflict education policy, but these implications should be framed as policy options informed by documentary evidence rather than proven interventions. UNICEF Innocenti (2024) emphasizes that educational reform in Africa requires context-responsive implementation, stronger local capacity, data-informed decision-making, and investment in pedagogical quality. This principle is particularly relevant to the institutions examined here: incorporating Islamic educational actors into broader education strategies would require more than formal recognition. In Nigeria, policy engagement would need to combine access with teacher preparation, curriculum pathways, child safeguarding, and recognized progression opportunities. In Somalia, culturally aligned psychosocial practices should complement rather than replace professional mental-health, protection, and education services, consistent with the distinction between structured faith-integrated trauma interventions and ordinary classroom practice identified by Bentley et al. (2021) and Zoellner et al. (2024). In the Sahel, religious leaders' community legitimacy may make them valuable partners for rights communication and mediation, but UNICEF's faith-engagement evidence also demonstrates that such partnerships require attention to gender, safeguarding, accountability, and harmful social norms (UNICEF, 2025). The AU PCRD framework provides a broader institutional setting for locally responsive reconstruction, yet any inclusion of religious education should be governed by child-rights standards, quality assurance, and transparent public accountability rather than assuming that local legitimacy is sufficient in itself (African Union, 2018; UNICEF Innocenti, 2024).

Several limitations also qualify the study's theoretical claims. First, Qualitative Document Analysis captures documented and institutionalized representations rather than children's direct lived experiences. This is particularly important because one of the strongest cross-case findings is the limited presence of children's own voices. Second, documentary evidence is heterogeneous: humanitarian reports, policy documents, ethnographies, clinical studies, and academic analyses operate with different purposes, quality standards, populations, and evidentiary thresholds. Third, the three cases are analytically useful but not representative of all Islamic education or all conflict-affected settings in Sub-Saharan Africa. Fourth, evidence density is uneven: Nigeria has a substantial literature on Tsangaya, while evidence connecting ordinary Somali madrasa pedagogy directly to child-level psychosocial outcomes is comparatively weaker and must not be conflated with structured Islamic Trauma Healing interventions. Fifth, religious educators' mediation roles in the Sahel are better documented at community level than their direct educational effects on children (UNICEF Innocenti, 2024; Grace & Wodon, 2022). These limitations are consistent with broader scholarship warning against transferring conclusions across diverse conflict contexts without attending to political economy, culture, institutional history, and power relations (Higgins & Novelli, 2020; Novelli et al., 2017). Future research should therefore prioritize direct child-centred fieldwork, gender-sensitive comparison, longitudinal tracking of educational and psychosocial outcomes, comparative studies of religious and secular emergency education, and empirical testing of the proposed Faith-Based Transitional Justice framework. Such research is necessary to determine whether the cross-case mechanisms identified here are transferable, under what conditions they generate educational benefits, and where cultural legitimacy may coexist with exclusion or inadequate quality (Tahir & Cochrane, 2025; Hoechner et al., 2026)

5. CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is that adaptive Islamic curricula contribute to different dimensions of educational justice across conflict-affected contexts, while cultural and religious recognition serves as a common condition connecting these contributions. The comparative analysis of 42 documents reveals an important distinction: expanding educational access does not necessarily ensure educational quality, culturally grounded psychosocial practices do not independently establish psychological recovery, and community-based representation does not automatically guarantee children's participation in decisions affecting their lives. In Nigeria, the Tsangaya system demonstrates the potential of locally embedded Islamic education to sustain learning opportunities for marginalized children, although institutional support and educational quality remain uneven. In Somalia, Aqidah and Akhlaq pedagogy provides culturally meaningful resources for reconciliation-oriented learning and reported psychosocial support, but the documentary evidence does not establish direct causal effects on children's psychological well-being. In the Sahel, religious educators facilitate community mediation and the contextual interpretation of rights-related concepts, yet their representative roles do not necessarily translate into children's direct participation. These findings indicate that the effectiveness and justice-related contributions of adaptive Islamic curricula cannot be assumed from their religious legitimacy alone.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the development of a Faith-Based Transitional Justice Architecture, which integrates the Social Justice 4R dimensions of Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation within the analysis of adaptive Islamic educational practices. This perspective extends existing scholarship on Education in Emergencies and transitional justice by positioning curriculum adaptation as a potential mechanism connecting educational continuity, cultural legitimacy, psychosocial support, and community-level justice processes. Rather than confirming that faith-based institutions are inherently protective or peace-promoting, the findings challenge generalized assumptions about their educational functions and emphasize the importance of contextual conditions, institutional accountability, safeguarding, and children's rights. Empirically, the study contributes a structured comparison of three distinct conflict-affected settings, while methodologically demonstrating how deductive thematic analysis of heterogeneous documentary sources can identify relationships between educational practices and justice-oriented processes. The proposed architecture remains a conceptual contribution derived from secondary evidence rather than an empirically validated intervention model.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the exclusive reliance on Qualitative Document Analysis restricts the findings to practices, experiences, and outcomes reported in existing humanitarian, policy, and academic documents rather than independently observed educational processes. Second, the comparison encompasses only three geographical contexts, namely Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel, limiting the transferability of the findings to other conflict-affected regions. Third, the documentary evidence is unevenly distributed across contexts and analytical dimensions, with differences in source availability, institutional perspectives, and the depth of reported educational outcomes. Most importantly, children's direct voices are largely absent from the documentary corpus, preventing the study from establishing how learners themselves experience curricular adaptations, interpret religiously grounded pedagogical practices, or participate in justice-related educational decisions. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effectiveness or measurable psychological recovery.

Future research should address these limitations through context-sensitive field investigations involving conflict-affected learners, teachers, religious educators, caregivers, and relevant educational stakeholders. Participatory and longitudinal studies could examine how children experience adaptive curricula, whether culturally grounded pedagogical practices contribute to educational engagement and psychosocial well-being, and under what institutional conditions religious educational settings support meaningful child participation. Comparative investigations across additional conflict-affected regions would also help assess the transferability of the proposed framework. Furthermore, empirical evaluation of the Faith-Based Transitional Justice Architecture should incorporate child safeguarding, educational quality, inclusion, and rights-based participation as explicit criteria. Such investigations would provide a stronger evidentiary foundation for determining when and how adaptive Islamic curricula can contribute to educational justice and sustainable post-conflict reconstruction.

Ethical & Author Statements

CRediT Statement: Ramdhan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – . Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Project Administration; Alfiya: Data Curation, Writing – Review & Editing, Visualization; Masuwd: Validation, Investigation, Writing – Review & Editing; Sholeh: Formal Analysis, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing; Mukminin: Investigation, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing

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AI Policy: Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, including large language models, were used solely for linguistic consistency and grammar refinement. All analytical work, including coding, interpretation, theoretical synthesis, and conclusion drawing, constitutes . human intellectual output. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the content

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