

Awareness and Attitudes of Customers Towards Islamic Banking Products in a Non-Muslim Country: The Case Study of Cameroon

Issa Hamadou,^{1*} Luthfi Hamidi,¹ Aimatul Yumna¹ & Aboubakar Mohamadou Souidi^{2*}

¹Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Islam International Indonesia (UIII), Depok, Indonesia

²INCEIF University

*Email: hamadouissa16@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the level of potential customers' awareness and attitude towards Islamic banking products in Cameroon, a non-Muslim country. This research used a mixed-method approach. First, Primary data obtained from a structured questionnaire with 300 respondents are analyzed using appropriate tools to examine the customers' level of awareness and their attitude. Secondly, the study employed a qualitative approach, involving interviews with 10 experts in Islamic finance. The awareness of Islamic banking products among potential customers in Cameroon is very low. They know just the bare minimum about the difference between Islamic banking and conventional banks. Unfortunately, they are not aware of the principles and workings of Islamic banking products. Their understanding is limited to the fact that Islamic banks are interest-free, as opposed to conventional banks that charge interest. Although they have a low level of awareness, they have a positive attitude towards Islamic banking. Consequently, they are willing to patronize Islamic banking. The quantitative survey focused on respondents from Muslim-majority regions of Cameroon, while the qualitative interviews involved Islamic finance experts nationwide, targeting non-users of Islamic banking products. The results of this study fill the existing gap in the literature in Cameroon regarding Islamic banking, specifically in terms of customer awareness. It gives managerial implications to the levels of Islamic finance operators. In the meantime, this study offers certain policy suggestions that can assist in enhancing the growth of Islamic finance in Cameroon and financial inclusion. Based on the author's knowledge, there is no prior research about potential customers' awareness and attitude toward Islamic banking products in Cameroon. Therefore, this study remains the first of its kind to be conducted.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: September 10, 2025

Accepted: December 3, 2025

Published: December 30, 2025

KEYWORDS

Islamic banking; customer awareness; customer attitude; financial inclusion; Cameroon

JEL CODES

G21; G41; Z12; O165;

HOW TO CITE

Hamadou, I., Hamidi, L., Yumna, A. & Souidi, A. M. (2025). Awareness and Attitudes of Customers Towards Islamic Banking Products in a Non-Muslim Country: The Case Study of Cameroon. *Journal of Economics, Law and Society*, 2(2), 25-37. <https://doi.org/10.70009/jels.2025.2.2.2>

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Islamic banking and finance have seen substantial expansion. Since 1970, one of the most important contributors to this rise has been the expansion of the oil industry in Arab countries, which has increased the availability of financial resources. During that historical period, the leaders of Muslim countries considered the possibility of establishing a new banking system that is in compliance with Islamic law (*Shari'ah*). After this, on September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States of America, which prompted Middle Eastern investors to withdraw their money from Western institutions and repatriate it to their home countries in order to secure their assets (Gonne & Mohamadou, 2022). It is notable that the so-called subprime mortgage crisis, which occurred in 2008, motivated the evolution of Islamic financing in both developed and developing economies. Most banks in Europe and the United States were affected by the crisis, although Islamic banks

largely escaped its impact. Due to this trend, other non-Muslim countries such as France, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), and Germany have created Islamic windows in their conventional financial systems (Kaabachi, 2012).

Gait and Worthington (2015) noted that although Islamic finance has been around for some time, it has only modest market penetration, even among Muslim nations. The low level of awareness, comprehension, and demand for Islamic products is among the primary obstacles to the sector's development. For example, despite the fact that Indonesia is home to the biggest Muslim population in the world. Other hurdles include the smaller capital bases of Islamic banks, the limited product offerings of Islamic banks, the still-developing branch and E-banking networks, and the lack of experience by employees in Islamic banks (Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB), 2022).

Yusoff (2021) observes that the lack of familiarity with Islamic financial system goods and services is the main factor contributing to the unwillingness of some Malaysians to engage with the system. An example is given of the misconception of consumers about the functioning of Islamic banks, and that most of them (primarily, non-Muslim clientele) do not understand how Islamic banks can earn profits without performing interest-based operations. This implies that the propensity to believe is not always a determining factor when deciding on which bank to choose. Moreover, it shows that Islamic banking segments in these countries lack a high degree of marketing initiatives that can help them reach a larger customer base and educate society about Islamic banking products. Moreover, some non-Muslim nations have shown a lack of awareness of Islamic banking by their customers in non-Muslim African nations, including South Africa (Cheteni, 2014), The Gambia (Sonko, 2020), Uganda (Bananuka et al., 2019), and Nigeria (Kewuyemi, 2015). They claimed that most of the population is unaware of Islamic banking products. This can be caused by the low level of literacy related to Islamic banking and the marketing strategies existing in those countries. Consequently, this lack of awareness constitutes the major obstacle to the development of Islamic banks in such countries. Although there is a lack of awareness about Islamic banking products, many studies have shown that Islamic banks are quite attractive in various countries with non-dominant Muslim populations. For instance, there is interest of non-Muslim consumers towards the Islamic finance industry in the United States, in New Zealand, and in South Korea (Junaidi et al., 2022). Consequently, it is essential to understand the driving factors behind customers' intentions to engage with Islamic banking products. In African countries, particularly those in North Africa (Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco), but also Tanzania, Nigeria, and Senegal, have demonstrated a significant interest in Islamic banking and are speeding up efforts to build this new financial system because of the benefits it will bring to each of their economies (Ngaha & Binam, 2019).

Why is the spread of Islamic finance in Cameroon relevant to us? As it was claimed by IMF Report (2022) and Tabash and Dhankar (2014), the introduction of the Islamic principles and tools of finance have numerous beneficial implications, such as enhancing financial stability and well-being, financial equity, fair distribution of gains, and economic growth (but the author does not neglect the limitations). Within the context of the fact that there is not always an effective solution to the issue of high interest rates that deny businesses and the owners of other projects access to loans and the lack of awareness of Islamic banking products in particular, such a type of intermediation would represent an opportunity not only to the financial sector but also to the economic landscape of Cameroon (Ngaha & Binam, 2019). This is largely because the Islamic banking system within Cameroon remains a young system. Currently, there are three conventional banks that have already established Islamic windows, and one is a fully established Islamic microfinance institution. However, to date, there is no fully established Islamic bank in operation in Cameroon. According to the current knowledge of the authors, the research conducted in the Cameroonian context related to the interaction between consumers and Islamic banks includes Ngaha and Binam (2019), Gonne and Mohamadou (2022), and the study by Mohammadou and Aissatou (2020). The key discoveries of their study indicated that

Islamic finance is a new phenomenon in Cameroon and people have a low level of knowledge on the same. Additionally, it is worth noting that Islamic banking is generally considered more beneficial than traditional banking; however, certain challenges hinder its growth, and clients are not always eager to adopt Islamic finance. Consequently, this study aims to address the gap in the literature regarding the development of Islamic banking in Cameroon by examining the level of awareness and attitudes of customers towards Islamic banking in the country. The study is regarded as a primary study on the customers' awareness and attitude towards Islamic banking in the country. This study has important implications for policymakers, practitioners in Islamic banks, as well as customers of the banks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Islamic Banking in Cameroon

Of all the countries in central Africa, Cameroon has the most developed economy. By 2022, it is predicted that Cameroon will become the economic powerhouse in the entire Central African region, with a GDP per capita of \$ 16,664 (World Bank Annual Report, 2022). The CEMAC region has the greatest number of financial institutions in Cameroon. The country hosts the headquarters of the Bank of the Central African States. Currently, there are 850 microfinance institutions in Cameroon, in addition to the 15 operational banks. The estimates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also indicate that the total assets of banks in Cameroon stand at CFA 5,300 billion (approximately \$ 9 billion). This is a percentage greater than 27 percent of the GDP in Cameroon and above 40 percent of the total banking assets in CEMAC. The fact that the government has loosened part of the restrictions on liquidity since 2017 is why financial institutions continue to make a profit, and the environment of borrowing money has become more favourable.

This situation implies that a large portion of Cameroon's monetary system is governed by regional regulations, as the country is part of the CEMAC region. These regional laws are consequently responsible for the frequent stalling of court actions. The accounting rules have yet to be fully aligned with the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Conversely, country officials have recently stated that they intend to restructure the banking and financial sectors of the state to increase the scale of financial intermediation (Gonne & Mohammadou, 2022). Additionally, they plan to establish a central credit register, introduce new financial instruments to small and medium-sized enterprises, establish a court of law to resolve commercial disputes, and enhance the enforcement of contracts.

Traditional commercial banking infrastructure in Cameroon is limited, but access to microfinance institutions is better than the average across sub-Saharan African states (IMF Report, 2022). The reason behind this low level of financial inclusion is the limited number of commercial bank branches and ATM, whereby traditional banking services are only available to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as individuals. As shown in the table below, the number of branches per 100,000 adults (or per 1,000 km²) has been increasing in recent years. Nevertheless, despite this increase, it remains quite low in comparison to the median indicator of Sub-Saharan Africa, which is 4.02 (or 1.28) as of the end of 2019.

Signs of access to microfinance institutions are fairly favorable, as the number of branches of microfinance institutions is equal to or greater than the average in Sub-Saharan Africa, with respect not only to the number of branches per 100,000 adults but also to the number of branches per 1,000 km². However, the same situation is not true of Cameroon, which has not experienced any changes in access to microfinance since 2014, unlike other sub-Saharan African countries, where the average and median access have increased (IMF Report, 2022). Moreover, banks do not offer a wide range

of financial products: most loans are short-term in duration, although a middle-term loan is gaining popularity, and savings products turn out to be the most sought-after (demand, term deposits, and passbook savings accounts). Despite limited access to financial services, commercial banks and microfinance institutions are striving to expand their customer base by creating innovative products, launching digital banking products and services such as Mobile Money, and enhancing the infrastructure of financial service providers, including ATM machines and branches.

The IDB has been collaborating with government and business institutions in recent years to provide support for the country's growth and development. As an example, this is a syndicated agreement between the government of Cameroon and the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), which is a member of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group, and which has signed a deal with the government to provide financing to over 300,000 cotton farmers totaling to a sum of €100 million (\$118 million). This agreement aims to provide financial support. As one of the releases states, this investment may be of help to Cameroon's cotton development company, SODECOTON, to enable it to purchase raw cotton produced by farmers, distribute fertilizer to them, and process the cotton for sale. This type of financial arrangement is referred to as a salam contract.

Moreover, the government of Cameroon just recently published a new version of the National Development Strategy of 2020-2030. The document illustrates the plans of the government to expand banking, microfinance and Islamic financial services to the whole nation. This consequently offers a great opportunity to the growth of the Islamic banking system in Cameroon

2.2. Awareness and attitudes towards Islamic banking

In general, being aware of anything results from having an understanding of that thing, whether it be a service, a product, or a person (Ahmad & Bashir, 2014). People are encouraged and motivated to act and make judgments based on the subject's advantages and drawbacks, as well as analysis or intuition, when they are aware of the subject's pros and cons. In other words, customer awareness reveals other aspects of the psychological side of customers, such as their understanding and knowledge of services and products, or whether the person would support a specific product or not. Specifically, these aspects are related to whether or not the person would support Islamic banks. Islamic banking services (IBS) are rapidly becoming one of the

The most frequent financial services in the world. Therefore, numerous studies on customer awareness of Islamic banking services have been done by many writers and academics in many countries. Therefore, we shall analyze those that were carried out in countries where Muslims constitute the majority before delving into countries where Muslims constitute a minority.

According to a study conducted in Bahrain, more than half of the respondents were familiar with Islamic banking and held a favorable opinion of the services offered by Islamic financial institutions (Buchari et al., 2015). Similarly, Gait and Worthington (2015) investigated the attitudes of retail clients in Libyan Islamic banks toward Islamic banking services. Based on the findings of their study, most respondents are familiar with some Islamic banking products, such as *Musharakah* (which refers to full-equity business partnerships) and *Qard Hassan* (which refers to interest-free benevolent loans), but they are less familiar with many other Islamic financial products. It creates an impression that the general population does not make very frequent use of Islamic banking. This directly leads to the situation where clients are unaware of other available options. Similarly, Jameel (2017) conducted a study in the city of Duhok, in the Kurdistan Region, to assess the level of knowledge among clients regarding Islamic banking services. In his opinion, the customers of Cihan Islamic Bank-Duhok and Kurdistan International Bank of Investment and Development lack a comprehensive understanding of the Islamic banking system. Again, in Quetta, Pakistan, Raja et al. (2020) found that women who owned their own businesses were unaware of the products and services offered by Islamic banks.

Furthermore, the results of Zouitene and Bensbahou (2020) in Morocco and Obeid and Kaabachi (2016) in Tunisia assumed that most Muslims are aware of the services provided by Islamic banks. When selecting a bank, Muslim clients are more concerned with efficiency, reduced bank fees, highly profitable and innovative products, rather than adhering to Islamic rules. Due to this, the use of these customs is very minimal. Most customers claim that Islamic banks are fully *Shari'ah*-compliant, which is why they are hesitant to consume products sold by these banks (Sonko, 2020).

Conversely, the study carried out in Russia found out that the level of awareness among the staff working in financial institutions was much below average. The responders did not know that *Riba*, *Maysir*, and *Gharar* are prohibited under the strictest form of the Islamic religion. Similarly, the respondents were unfamiliar with the numerous financial products offered, though they were conversant with the terminology of the different types of financing (Hidayat et al., 2020).

Islam and Rahman (2018) conducted a study to investigate the level of knowledge among Indian Muslims regarding Islamic banking services. They found that the majority of people are unaware of how Islamic banking operates; however, despite this, they are willing to transact with Islamic banking products. This conclusion was based on data gathered from 290 respondents in New Delhi. This implies that the level of communication methods offered by Islamic banks is inadequate, and Islamic financial literacy should also be incorporated into their education system. In the same spirit, Sheikh and Ahammad (2013) have researched the possibility or otherwise of having Islamic financial institutions in the United Kingdom. They had solid arguments that only a mere 45 percent of the Muslim population in Nottingham city know about the existence of Islamic banks. It appears to indicate and evidence that Islamic banks lack the right marketing strategy. Their products cannot access the majority of the Muslim population in the country, not to mention that these people are, theoretically, their main customers.

Again, Kaakeh et al. (2017) investigated the extent to which customers in Spain are aware of Islamic banking by collecting data from 154 respondents in the city of Barcelona. The study employed descriptive statistics and logit regression. Based on the findings of their study, the Muslim community in Spain lacks the knowledge of Islamic banking, and they lack adequate information on this topic, especially in the practical tenets of Islamic banks. Notwithstanding this, they will be willing to learn more and use Islamic financial services. It is insinuated that they are being driven by a religious cause, though they lack adequate knowledge of the concepts of Islamic banking.

In the Philippines, a recent study by Latif (2020) examined the level of awareness among customers regarding Islamic banking. They employed descriptive methods to analyze data collected from 233 individuals who have bank accounts with either conventional banks or Islamic banks. Based on the findings, the level of knowledge possessed by Muslim people is very low, but their stance towards Islamic banking is positive.

Moreover, some studies have demonstrated that the level of knowledge among clients with respect to Islamic banking is low in countries such as South Africa (Cheteni, 2014), The Gambia (Sonko, 2020), Uganda (Kasera and Nalukenge, 2019), and Nigeria (Kewuyemi, 2015). Based on the conclusion of their study, a significant proportion of customers are unfamiliar with the availability of Islamic banking products, including *Mudarabah*, *Musharakah*, and *Murabahah*. It creates the impression that the general population is characterized by a lack of financial awareness and employs inefficient marketing techniques. Due to this, it is advisable for Islamic banks to focus more on the distribution of their goods in order to target a wider range of consumers.

Lastly, Islamic banking products awareness is high in the Muslim countries, but the level of market penetration is low because of the marketing approaches, financial literacy, and *Shari'ah*-compliance issues. This was discovered in a study that correlated with the level of awareness among customers

of Islamic banking products. However, in countries where the number of Muslim minorities is minimal, there is a low level of awareness, but some of the clients are still willing to use Islamic banking products provided they are within the *Shari'ah* law.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data and sample description

The data collection employed online and convenience sampling. The convenience samples will provide the narration for the online samples. The overwhelming majority of the time, when conducting research on Islamic approaches to behavioural finance, this sampling method is utilized (Kaakeh et al., 2018). A section containing questions about the respondent's demographic characteristics is included at the beginning of the survey. In the second section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked about their knowledge of Islamic banking products, which were formulated based on previous literature (see Appendix A). Customers with accounts at conventional banks who are interested in utilizing Islamic banking products will constitute the population. This category will include all customers who utilize traditional banking services and have accounts at multiple financial institutions.

An evaluation of dependability was conducted. According to Hair et al. (2014), Cronbach's alpha for awareness and attitude are 0.82 and 0.87, respectively, which are greater than the minimum required. Therefore, we confirm the dependability of the items.

3.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis is used to confirm the scale validity of the factors. **Table 1** below presents the results. All of the factors have an eigenvalue higher than 1. The KMO value is equal to 0.697, with a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity. Furthermore, the results in the table suggest that all the factors are valid, as their factor loadings are greater than the minimum required, which is 0.4 (Hair et al., 2014).

3.3. Qualitative Methods

To support the quantitative results, an interview was conducted with 10 respondents. These respondents are Islamic finance experts working in various conventional banks in Cameroon, including Afriland First Bank, CCA Bank, and UBA. There are also those who lecture at universities, and finally, those who are working in the private sector. All the respondents have at least a Master's degree holder. From the transcript of the interview, we came out with important themes related to the level of awareness of potential customers about Islamic banking in Cameroon and also their attitudes to deal with Islamic Banking Products.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Likert Scale Analysis of the Items

The initial analysis that we carry out is the Likert scale of the items. It presents the percentage of respondents in each scale, ranging from strongly disagreeing to strongly agreeing. It assists respondents in perceiving each factor (Obeid and Kaabachi, 2016). Each of the scales employs an average formula to capture the respondents' perception of the given factor. This is interpreted as follows by examining the average percentage for each scale. The mean scale of each factor is available in **Table 2** below.

Table 1: Factor Analysis Results

Construct	Items	Eigen Value	Loadings
Awareness		3.62	
	Awareness 1		.415
	Awareness 2		.680
	Awareness 3		.661
	Awareness 4		.540
	Awareness 5		.634
	Awareness 6		.605
	Awareness 7		.710
	Awareness 8		.843
Attitude		3.84	
	Attitude 1		.783
	Attitude 2		.598
	Attitude 3		.527
	Attitude 4		.630
	Attitude 5		.831
	Attitude 6		.471

Source: Results obtained from SPSS

Table 2: Interview Respondents Profile

Code	Category	Education	Institution	Position
R1	Client	Masters Holder	Election Cameroon	Head of the Branch
R2	Client	PhD holder	University of Maroua	Lecturer
R3	Expert	PhD holder	University of Tschang	Researcher
R4	Expert	Masters Holder	Savana Islamic Finance	Head of the Branch
R5	Academician	PhD holder	University of Garoua	Head of Department
R6	Expert	Masters Holder	Afriland First Bank	Head of Islamic Finance Branch
R7	Expert	Masters Holder	Savana Islamic Finance	Director
R8	Expert	Masters Holder	Afriland First Bank	Islamic Finance Expert
R9	Expert	Masters Holder	-	Islamic Finance Expert
R10	Expert	Masters Holder	United Bank of Africa	Resident Controller

Source: Elaborated by author based on interview results

In the case of item AWR4, one-third of the respondents say that they strongly or agree that the Islamic banking products and services are not the same as conventional banking. This means that 71 percent of customers are aware that Islamic banking differs from conventional banking. Consequently, they have been exposed to the basic principles of Islamic banking, such as the fact that Islamic banks do not charge or accept interest.

In the case of item AWR5, 26% agree and 19% strongly agree that they have been informed about the instruments contained in the financing products that Islamic banks offer. Although 12 percent respond negatively, 21 percent respond strongly negative and 20 percent respond neutral, this means that 45 percent of the customers have been informed of the instruments that are being used in the financing products that Islamic banks are offering. On the other hand, 33% of them have not been informed about the Islamic banking product.

In the case of item AWR6, 20% of the respondents confirm that they are aware of the fundamental principles of Islamic-based banking products, thus agreeing or strongly agreeing with the item. This

indicates that 38% of customers are familiar with the fundamental principles of Islamic banking products in detail. Although 43 percent of them are not aware of the fundamentals of the Islamic banking products. And 17% of them are neutral.

In the case of item AWR7, we find out that 24 per cent of the people who respond to the item that they agree with, and 18 per cent of those who strongly agree with the item that they are aware of the Islamic banking modes of financing that include *Murabahah*, *Mudarabah*, *Musharakah*, *Ijarah* and *Salam*, and 42 per cent of those who respond are not aware and 44 per cent are neutral. It means that most respondents are unaware of Islamic financing methods, such as *Mudarabah*, *Murabahah*, and *Musharakah*.

When we compute the percentage of items that depict the awareness variable, on average, we find that only 45% of the respondents are aware of Islamic products in Cameroon.

Finally, regarding attitudes, on average, 73% of customers have a positive attitude towards Islamic banking products. It implies that they are considering whether choosing Islamic banking is a wise and good idea for them.

Table 3: Likert Scale Analysis of the Items

Likert Scale	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Awareness					
AWR4	9%	5%	14%	30%	41%
AWR5	21%	12%	20%	26%	19%
AWR6	25%	18%	17%	20%	18%
AWR7	29%	15%	12%	24%	18%
Average	21%	13%	16%	25%	24%
Attitudes					
ATT1	7%	2%	12%	25%	52%
ATT2	5%	4%	11%	30%	48%
ATT3	7%	9%	25%	24%	32%
ATT4	3%	1%	16%	25%	53%
ATT5	5%	2%	14%	26%	52%
Average	5%	4%	16%	26%	47%

Source: Authors' own.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Customer Awareness Level Quantitative Results Discussion.

The purpose of the research was to analyse the level of awareness and attitude of potential customers regarding Islamic banking products in Cameroon. Descriptive statistics indicate that 45% of respondents are knowledgeable about Islamic banking products, while 55% are unfamiliar with the system in its basic sense. This observation represents a crucial gap in the Cameroonian financial market and aligns with the first research objective of the study, which is to identify the level of awareness.

The awareness deficit manifests in two distinct dimensions. First, among the 45% who claim awareness, their knowledge is superficial and largely confined to understanding that Islamic banking

operates without *riba*, while conventional banks operate with *riba*. This surface-level comprehension falls short in extending to the operational mechanisms and specific products offered by Islamic banks. Second, respondents demonstrate particularly low awareness of Islamic financing modes, with only 42% recognizing products such as *Murabahah*, *Mudharabah*, *Musharakah*, *Ijarah*, and *Salam*. This limited product knowledge represents a significant barrier to market penetration, as customers cannot adopt products they do not understand

These findings are consistent with studies conducted in other Muslim-minority contexts. Islam and Rahman (2018) in India, Sheikh and Ahammad (2013) in the United Kingdom, Kaakeh et al. (2017) in Spain, and Latif (2020) in the Philippines. All reported similarly low awareness levels among Muslim populations in non-Muslim majority countries. The pattern suggests that the religious composition of a country has a significant influence on Islamic financial literacy levels. In African contexts, our results align with those of Cheteni (2014) in South Africa, Sonko (2020) in The Gambia, Bananuka et al. (2019) in Uganda, and Kewuyemi (2015) in Nigeria, where customers demonstrated a limited understanding of Islamic banking principles and products.

Nonetheless, our results differ from those carried out in Muslim-dominant nations. In Libya, Gait and Worthington (2015), Morocco, Zouitene and Bensbahou (2020), and Tunisia, Obeid and Kaabachi (2016), which indicated that the population awareness was higher. Such deviation can be explained by various situational factors, including the increased teaching of Islamic finance in schools, increased advertising by Islamic financial institutions, a greater concentration of Islamic banks, and more effective religious frameworks to promote financial literacy in Muslim-dominated countries.

Three major factors can be cited as the cause of the low awareness level in Cameroon. First, the nascent stage of Islamic banking development in the country, where only three conventional banks offer Islamic windows and one Islamic microfinance institution, restricts market exposure and customer awareness. Second, the lack of Islamic finance education in the formal curriculum implies that potential customers lack a structured way of acquiring knowledge about such products. Third, the modest promotional campaigns by current Islamic financial institutions do not reach the general population, resulting in a lack of information between providers and prospective customers.

4.2.2. Discussion of Quantitative Results: Customer Attitudes

Despite low awareness levels, the study reveals remarkably positive attitudes toward Islamic banking products, with 73% of respondents expressing favorable views. This finding directly addresses the study's second objective of examining customer attitudes and presents a significant opportunity for the development of Islamic banking in Cameroon.

The positive attitude-awareness paradox postulates that customers have a positive predisposition to Islamic banking, even though they have very little knowledge of its operational mechanisms. This circumstance can be projected on using a number of theoretical perspectives. First, even with the limited product knowledge, i.e., customers that have little or no product knowledge, religious compatibility becomes an issue; since Islamic banking is seen as part of religious value, an instinctive trust benefit is created. Second, customers who value fair financial services can relate to the ethical aspects of Islamic banking, specifically the profit-and-loss sharing principles and the prohibition of exploitative practices. Third, dissatisfaction with traditional banking habits, such as high interest rates and a perceived lack of transparency, creates latent demand for alternative banking models.

Since 79% of respondents believed that choosing Islamic banking is a wise idea, and 78% expressed interest in using Islamic banking products, this indicates strong market potential. Such a positive attitude is distributed in various dimensions: 80% believe Islamic banking can work in Cameroon, demonstrating confidence in the system's viability within the local context; 59% believe it is easier

to acquire business development loans through Islamic banking, suggesting perceived accessibility advantages; and 74% express explicit preference for choosing Islamic banking, indicating behavioral intention beyond mere attitude.

This positive attitude despite low awareness parallels findings from Islam and Rahman (2018) in India, where Muslim respondents expressed willingness to engage with Islamic banking despite limited understanding of its principles. Similarly, Kaakeh et al. (2017) in Spain found that Muslim populations were eager to acquire additional knowledge and utilize Islamic financial services, driven primarily by religious motivation rather than comprehensive understanding. These patterns suggest that positive attitudes can serve as a foundation for market development, provided that awareness-building initiatives are implemented to translate favorable dispositions into actual adoption.

4.2.3. Integration of Qualitative Findings: Understanding the Awareness-Attitude Relationship

The qualitative part of this study, which consisted of interviewing 10 Islamic finance experts and practitioners, is vital in providing insights that explain the quantitative results and help understand the processes behind customer awareness and attitudes. This triangulation will cover both the research objectives by bringing out the depth and nature of customer knowledge while explaining the sources of their attitudes.

4.2.3.1. Theme 1: Surface-Level Awareness - The Riba-Centric Understanding.

The interview data reveal that customer awareness is almost entirely concentrated on a single concept: the prohibition of *riba* (interest). This finding explains why quantitative results show 71% of respondents are aware that Islamic banking differs from conventional banking, yet only 38% understand basic Islamic banking principles in detail. The qualitative evidence suggests that most respondents equate “awareness” with knowing that Islamic banks do not charge interest, without fully understanding the alternative mechanisms Islamic banks employ.

The observation made by Expert R4 of the fact that “customers are simply limited to the only difference which is that the Islamic bank proscribes the interest rate” and the observation made by Expert R8 of the fact that “do not know the real differences except to say that the Islamic bank, there is no interest”, directly supports the quantitative finding that while respondents claim awareness, their knowledge lacks depth. This *riba*-driven conception is based on the prevalence of religious education among the Muslim and Christian communities alike, which teaches about the forbiddance of interest, but does not extend to the practical operational models of Islamic banking.

It is important to explain the meaning of Expert R9 to put it into perspective: “According to a common approach, customers are aware of the existence of the Islamic bank as a bank that upholds the concepts of the Islamic religion... However, the traditional bank regarded the cost, i.e., the interest and usury. Simply stated, customers distinguish between Islamic banking and conventional banking, yet they do not fully understand it because the Bible also contains a few verses that prohibit interest, or usury.” This observation suggests that awareness is more likely due to the broad-based religious principles employed by religions, rather than individual knowledge of Islamic finance processes.

The given theme directly holds the quantitative finding, according to which the levels of awareness seem to be moderate in the general case but fail in the case of evaluating specific product knowledge. It also helps explain why attitudes remain positive despite limited awareness; customers perceive Islamic banking as ethically superior based on the single principle they understand (no *riba*), without requiring detailed knowledge of alternative mechanisms.

4.2.3.2. Theme 2: Gap in product knowledge - Lack of Operational Knowledge.

Data from the interviews provide significant quantitative support for the outcome, which is that only 42 percent of the respondents have knowledge about Islamic modes of financing. Most importantly, there is qualitative evidence that even among individuals who claim to be conscious, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of products, at least in terms of a literal lack of awareness and understanding of products. This has been confirmed by Customer R2, who states: The reality is that I don't know. I believe this is because the Islamic banking system operates under the rate of interest, unlike the conventional banking system, which operates under the interest rate. Not more than that. It is an example of the average level of knowledge.

Multiple experts confirmed that customers often assume Islamic banking simply provides interest-free loans (*Qard Hasan*) without understanding that Islamic banks employ profit-sharing, cost-plus financing, and leasing arrangements. This misconception creates unrealistic expectations and may lead to disappointment when customers discover that Islamic banking involves costs and returns, albeit structured differently from conventional interest.

The lack of product knowledge is also a significant concern, as it is one of the obstacles to informed adoption. Even customers with positive attitudes cannot make apparently informed decisions about Islamic banking products without understanding how they work, the risks they present, and what is required to meet various financial requirements. This gap is the reason why quantitative data include high intentions to use Islamic banking (determined by positive attitudes) but comparatively low adoption rates in Cameroon.

4.2.3.3. Theme 3: Sources and Drivers of Positive Attitudes.

The qualitative data sheds light on the reasons why attitudes are positive despite a lack of awareness. Some of the drivers were identified by the experts: religious consonance, even without in-depth product familiarity, customers consider Islamic banking to be consistent with the religious commandments and this leads to the development of an inherent trust, ethical appeal, that is the prohibition of interest resonates with customers across religious backgrounds who view interest-based lending as exploitative; perceived fairness, also another reason is due to curiosity and openness, many respondents would be willing to learn more about Islamic banking, which means that the positive attitudes would lead to receptivity to future educational programs.

Expert R9's observation that both Muslim and Christian customers respond positively to Islamic banking's ethical foundations suggests that positive attitudes transcend religious boundaries in Cameroon. This finding has significant implications for market development strategy, indicating that Islamic banking can appeal to broader populations beyond Muslim communities by emphasizing ethical and fair finance principles rather than exclusively religious compliance.

4.2.4. Synthesis: The Awareness-Attitude Paradox and Its Implications.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative results gives rise to a paradox that characterizes the current situation in Islamic banking in Cameroon: customers have positive attitudes about a system that they barely know. This paradox is both an opportunity and a challenge to the development of Islamic banking.

On the opportunity side, positive attitudes create favorable conditions for entry and growth in the market. The receptive nature of customers and their readiness to interact with Islamic banking products act as a ready source of consumers for the educational and marketing campaigns. Ethical marketing of Islamic banking appeals has a religious transcendence, indicating wider potential in

the market than could be anticipated in a Muslim minority country. Initial adoption can be motivated by religious reasons, with or without detailed knowledge, which can open up the opportunities of experiential learning, as customers can use the products.

On the challenge side, surface-level awareness cannot sustain long-term adoption without a deeper understanding. Customers may become disillusioned if their expectations (particularly regarding “free” financing) do not match reality. The lack of product knowledge prevents customers from selecting suitable Islamic financial products that meet their needs. A limited understanding makes customers vulnerable to misconceptions and may reduce trust if they feel that products have been misrepresented.

The paradox also highlights a significant disparity between supply and demand. While latent demand exists (evidenced by positive attitudes), the supply side has failed to convert this demand into actual market penetration through effective awareness-building and education. The qualitative evidence suggests that this failure stems from inadequate marketing strategies, insufficient investment in customer education, limited branch networks and customer touchpoints, and the absence of Islamic finance literacy programs in formal and informal education systems.

4.2.5. Comparative Context Cameroon in Regional and Global Context.

Placing Cameroon’s results in a comparative context reveals important patterns. Even in African countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, which are predominantly Muslim and are dominated by Muslims, the degree of awareness is associated with more developed Islamic banking, implying that the market evolves, and this, in turn, leads to a further rise in awareness, which provokes advancements in the market. In Muslim-minority African nations like South Africa, The Gambia, Uganda, and Nigeria, awareness levels comparable to Cameroon’s exist, indicating that this is a regional rather than country-specific challenge.

These awareness shortfalls are also observed in the Asian cases of minority Muslim countries (India, Philippines), where similar awareness deficits persist, but some countries have implemented systematic literacy programs that Cameroon could emulate. In European markets (UK, Spain), though less popular, niche markets of Islamic banking have been established through more developed promotion and educational programs.

With the level of awareness indicating a low level and positive attitudes being high, Cameroon is in a good starting point compared to some similar countries. The problem lies in the fact that one must capitalize on this favorability before negative experiences or misconceptions have the opportunity to undermine positive attitudes. The three Islamic windows and one microfinance institution, which are currently -operational, are seeds that, with adequate nurturing through awareness building, will eventually form a large market segment.

4.2.6. Addressing the Religiosity Factor

The study findings support the research posit hypothesis, which states that the composition of religion affects the financial literacy of Islamic and developing countries. The qualitative data further show that though the diversity of Cameroon may relate to the religious dimension, and this is a challenge to the Islamic banking awareness, it also presents some unexpected opportunities. Interviewing experts, Christian respondents are not opposed to the concepts of Islamic banking; most of them are at least interested in the ethical foundation of Islamic banking, without being motivated by religious considerations to invest in such products.

It implies that Islamic banking development in Muslim-minority communities may need to transform the marketing narrative to focus more on broader ethics than religious compliance. Even the

name of the concept of Islamic banking as such could present some perceived obstacles to non-Muslim prospective clients. Other experts proposed that a stronger focus on so-called ethical banking, participatory finance, or profit-sharing banking, combined with Islamic branding, could be more attractive and at the same time keep the religious sincerity.

This rebranding should, however, be well-controlled to avoid diluting the Islamic identity that attracts religiously motivated customers. The dilemma is to appeal to both Muslim and non-Muslim customers who want *Shari'ah*-compliant products at the same time and to non-Muslim who want ethical substitute of conventional banking, yet not to lose the unique value proposition of Islamic banking.

5. CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to investigate the awareness of potential customers about Islamic banking in Cameroon. The results indicated that the awareness of potential customers about Islamic banking products is extremely low in Cameroon. The descriptive statistics revealed that 45 percent of the customers are aware of the availability of Islamic finance in Cameroon, while 55 percent are unaware of the existence of Islamic banking. However, there are customers who understand the fundamental differences between Islamic banking and conventional banks. Their knowledge is regrettable, as they do not understand the principles and operations of Islamic banking products, such as *Mudarabah*, *Musharakah*, and *Salam*. Their understanding of the matter is minimal to the fact that Islamic banks are interest-free, whereas their traditional counterparts are not. As a result, the level of awareness of the Cameroonian customers regarding Islamic banking is minimal. These findings were supported by numerous empirical studies. Nevertheless, there are studies that indicate that Islamic banking products are known to customers in Muslim countries. These conflicting findings are reflected in the level of religiosity among the countries under study. Studies conducted in the Muslim minority countries reveal low awareness, whereas studies that have been conducted in the Muslim majority countries reveal high awareness. It implies that there is a high degree of religious diversity in those countries, which is a significant factor in Islamic financial literacy and the construction of the Islamic banking system.

This study has tri-dimensional implications. To begin with, the findings of this research paper are significant to the literature, as they address the knowledge gap regarding awareness and adoption of Islamic banking products in the central economy of Africa, with a focus on Cameroon in particular.

Secondly, this research has a managerial implication for Islamic finance operators. The factors that influence customers' intentions towards Islamic banking products in the Cameroon islands should be considered. The attitude is positively relevant to the adoption of Islamic banking products. Islamic bank managers should aim to identify the factors that help customers develop a positive attitude, such as the disclosure of the benefits of their products, and consider the *Shari'ah*-compliance issues of their products to influence customers to have a positive attitude towards Islamic banking. They are also able to redesign their product development by providing new and appropriate products to their customers, making them more likely to patronize Islamic banking due to their positive attitude towards the system. They can also launch a major campaign promoting their Islamic banking products, aiming to raise awareness about the availability of Islamic financial products in the country. This is due to the ignorance of potential customers regarding the principles and operation of Islamic banking products. This plan should be achieved by conducting a substantial marketing campaign in the country. Furthermore, the operators of Islamic banking must fully disclose the benefits of Islamic finance to customers, as relative advantage is a notable predictor of intention to transact business with Islamic banking products. Lastly, all these strategies must be implemented by experts in Islamic finance; thus, Islamic banks must offer rigorous training and seminars to their

employees and recruit new professionals with proper knowledge of how Islamic banking works, which can help ease the interaction between the bank and its clients.

Thirdly, this study provides a few policy recommendations that can be used to enhance the growth of Islamic finance in Cameroon, thereby supporting financial inclusion. The evolution of the IF in Cameroon may only evolve through a great awareness of the banking product among the populace, the enhancement of the Islamic banking offer, the enhancement of the legal and tax framework customized to the specifics of the Islamic finance, the involvement of politics in the national level with the general vision and specific plans and plans of the evolution of the Islamic finance in Cameroon. Additionally, develop a national initiative focused on Islamic financial literacy. It may be a certification program, such as a Bachelor's and Master's Holder in Islamic finance. This can enlighten intellectuals in Islamic finance. Once again, build a holistic capacity-building program if the capacities of the different stakeholders, particularly in government bodies, are lacking. Moreover, full-fledged legislation and other compliance provisions must also be established to facilitate the regulation of Islamic financial institutions.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has some limitations. First, this research focused mainly on the Muslim zone; future research should provide a comparison between the Muslim and non-Muslim zones to understand the perceptions of customers living in the non-Muslim zone as well. Secondly, this study used only 300 respondents. Future studies could utilize a large number of samples to obtain a more generalized result. Finally, this study was focused only on potential customers. Therefore, we suggest that future research provide a comparative.

Declarations

The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose. The data are available upon a reasonable request from the author.

REFERENCES

- Aaminou, M. W., & Aboulaich, R. (2017). Modeling Consumers' Behavior in New Dual Banking Markets: The Case of Morocco. *Review of Pacific Basin Financial Markets and Policies* 20(2), 1750009. <https://doi.org/10.1142/s0219091517500096>
- Ahmad, A., & Bashir, R. (2014). An Investigation of Customer 's Awareness Level and Customer' Service Utilization Decision In Islamic Banking. *Pakistan Economic and Social Review*, 52(1), 59-74.
- Alfarizi, M. A., & Sari, R. M. (2022). Indonesian Muslim Consumers' Perspectives and Behavior on Intentions to Use Islamic Financial Products Post-Covid-19. *EkBis Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Bisnis*, 6(1), 30-43. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ekbis.2022.6.1.1549>
- Bananuka, J., Kaawaase, T. K., Kasera, M., & Nalukenge, I. (2019). Determinants of the intention to adopt Islamic banking in a non-Islamic developing country. *ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance*, 11(2), 166-186. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijif-04-2018-0040>
- Cheteni, P. (2014). Awareness of Islamic Banking Products and Services among Consumers in South Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(9), 96-103. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n9p96>
- Gait, A. H., & Worthington, A. C. (2015). Attitudes of Libyan retail consumers toward Islamic methods of finance. *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, 8(4), 439-454. <https://doi.org/10.1108/imefm-04-2013-0056>
- Hidayat, S. E., Rafiki, A., & Svyatoslav, S. (2020). Awareness of financial institutions' employees towards

- Islamic finance principles in Russia. *PSU Research Review*, 4(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1108/prr-08-2019-0026>
- IMF Report. (2022). Cameroon: 2021 Article IV Consultation and First Reviews Under the Extended Credit Facility and the Extended Fund Facility Arrangements and Requests for Waivers for Performance Criteria Applicability and Nonobservance and Modification Of Performance Criterion-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Cameroon. *IMF Country Report 2022*(075), 1-148. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400203985.002>
- Islam, J. U., & Rahman, Z. (2017). Awareness and willingness towards Islamic banking among Muslims: An Indian perspective. *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, 10(1), 92–101. <https://doi.org/10.1108/imefm-01-2016-0017>
- Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB). (2022). *Islamic Financial Services Industry Stability Report*. Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB), Kuala Lumpur. <https://www.ifsb.org>
- Jameel, S. A. (2017). Customer's Awareness Towards the Islamic Banking System: Case Study on Selected Banking in Duhok City- Kurdistan Region. *Humanities Journal of University of Zakho*, 5(1), 230–238. <https://doi.org/10.26436/hjuoz.2017.5.1.305>
- Kaakeh, A., Hassan, M. K., & Van Hemmen Almazor, S. F. (2018). Attitude of Muslim minority in Spain towards Islamic finance. *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, 11(2), 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1108/imefm-11-2017-0306>
- Kewuyemi, K. M. (2015). Customers' Awareness, Attitude and Patronage of Islamic Banking in Nigeria. *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*, 6(3), 388–408. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0019195>
- Latif, S. D. H. (2020). Knowledge and attitudes towards Islamic banking in the Philippines. *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, 12(2), 169–185. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jiabr-05-2019-0092>
- Mindra, R., Bananuka, J., Kaawaase, T. K., Namaganda, R. H., & Teko, J. (2022). Attitude and Islamic banking adoption: moderating effects of pricing of conventional bank products and social influence. *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, 13(3), 534–567. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jiabr-02-2021-0068>
- Ngaha, R., & Binam, F. F. (2019). Déterminants de la réticence au marché de la finance islamique au Cameroun. *Revue Congolaise De Gestion*, Numéro 28(2), 41-85. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rcg.028.0041>
- Obeid, H., & Kaabachi, S. (2016). Empirical Investigation Into Customer Adoption Of Islamic Banking Services In Tunisia. *Journal of Applied Business Research*, 32(4), 1243–1256. <https://doi.org/10.19030/jabr.v32i4.9734>
- Raja, S., Ahmed, J., & Fatima, K. (2020). Awareness on Islamic Banking: An Investigation on Women Entrepreneurs in Quetta. *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies*, 6(4), 1595–1609. <https://doi.org/10.26710/jbsee.v6i4.1513>
- Sheikh, R., & Ahammad, M. F. (2013). The feasibility of establishing Islamic banks in the UK: the case of Nottingham. *International Journal of Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 2(1), 67-82. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSEI.2013.052762>
- Sonko, M. (2020). Customers' Perceptions on Islamic Banking: A Case Study in the Gambia. *Journal of Islamic Finance*, 9(1), 13–23. https://www.academia.edu/43266930/Customers_Perceptions_on_Islamic_Banking_A_Case_Study_in_the_Gambia
- Tabash, M. I., & Dhankar, R. S. (2014). The Flow of Islamic Finance and Economic Growth: an Empirical Evidence of Middle East. *Journal of Finance and Accounting*, 2(1), 11-19. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.jfa.20140201.12>
- World Bank. (2022). *World Bank Annual Report 2022*. World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/annual-report>
- Zouitene, I., & Bensbahou, A. (2020). La perception des instruments de financement participatifs par les dirigeants des TPE au Maroc. *Recherches Et Applications En Finance Islamique*, 4(1), 113–128. <https://doi.org/10.48394/imist.prsm/rafi-v4i1.19170>

