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Islamic Studies as a Global Academic Discipline A Comparative Analysis of Curricula, Institutional Models, and Contemporary Transformations

[الدراسات الإسلامية كتخصص أكاديمي عالمي تحليل مقارن للمناهج والنماذج المؤسسية والتحويلات المعاصرة]

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Abstract

This paper traces the historical development of Islamic Studies as an academic discipline and examines its diverse manifestations across different regions of the world. Drawing on primary syllabus documents from universities across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, as well as recent scholarly research from 2022 to 2025, the paper presents a comparative analysis of how Islamic Studies is structured, taught, and applied in diverse contexts. From its origins in classical Islamic learning to its formalization as a university subject in colonial and post-colonial contexts, Islamic Studies has evolved into a multifaceted field that reflects the complex interplay between faith, scholarship, politics, and social context. Through a detailed examination of programs from Japan to Spain, with particular attention to the Indo-Pak subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, Russia, China, the Americas, and Africa, this paper demonstrates how the discipline is shaped by local conditions while engaging with global trends. The paper incorporates a comprehensive review of Islamic Studies syllabi across traditional seminaries and academic institutions, identifying four primary models of Islamic education—the faith-based seminary model, the secular academic model, the state-managed confessional model, and the integrative professional model—and analyses how each serves different purposes in different contexts. The findings reveal that Islamic Studies today is not a monolithic discipline but a dynamic field undergoing significant transformation in response to digitalization, interdisciplinary imperatives, demographic shifts, and contemporary global challenges. The study employs a qualitative comparative case study design grounded in institutional and post-colonial theory

Keywords: Islamic Studies, Curriculum Development, Islamic Education Models, Global Comparative Analysis, Madrasa

الملخص

يتبع هذا البحث التطور التاريخي للدراسات الإسلامية كتخصص أكاديمي، ويدرس مظاهره المتنوعة في مختلف مناطق العالم. بالاعتماد على وثائق المناهج الأساسية من جامعات في آسيا وأفريقيا وأوروبا والأمريكتين، وكذلك على الأبحاث العلمية الحديثة من الفترة 2022-2025، يقدم البحث تحليلاً مقارناً لكيفية تنظيم الدراسات الإسلامية وتدريسها وتطبيقها في سياقات متعددة. انطلاقاً من جذورها في التعلم الإسلامي الكلاسيكي وصولاً إلى تقنياتها كمادة جامعية في السياقات الاستعمارية وما بعد الاستعمارية، تطورت الدراسات الإسلامية لتصبح مجالاً متعدد الأوجه يعكس التفاعل المعقد بين العقيدة والعلم والسياسة والسياق الاجتماعي. من خلال فحص تفصيلي لبرامج تمتد من اليابان إلى إسبانيا، مع اهتمام خاص بشبه القارة الهندية-الباكستانية وجنوب شرق آسيا وآسيا الوسطى وشبه الجزيرة العربية وتركيا وروسيا والصين والأمريكتين وأفريقيا، يوضح هذا البحث كيف يتشكل التخصص بفعل الظروف المحلية مع تفاعله مع الاتجاهات العالمية. يتضمن البحث مراجعة شاملة لمناهج الدراسات الإسلامية في المعاهد الدينية التقليدية والمؤسسات الأكاديمية، ويحدد أربعة نماذج رئيسية للتعليم الإسلامي — النموذج الديني القائم على المعاهد الشرعية، والنموذج الأكاديمي العلماني، والنموذج الطائفي الذي تديره الدولة، والنموذج المهني التكاملي — ويحلل كيف يخدم كل نموذج أغراضاً مختلفة في سياقات مختلفة. تكشف النتائج أن الدراسات الإسلامية اليوم ليست تخصصاً أحادياً، بل مجالاً ديناميكياً يخضع لتحولات كبرى استجابة للرقمنة، والمتطلبات التخصصية المتداخلة، والتحولات الديموغرافية، والتحديات العالمية المعاصرة. تعتمد الدراسة على تصميم دراسة حالة مقارنة نوعية، قائم على النظرية المؤسسية وما بعد الاستعمارية

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدراسات الإسلامية، تطوير المناهج، نماذج التعليم الإسلامي، تحليل مقارن عالمي، المدرسة.

1. Introduction

Islamic studies, as an academic discipline, occupies a unique position at the intersection of theology, history, philology, and social science. Unlike many other fields of study, it is pursued both as a matter of faith formation within Muslim communities and as an object of secular academic inquiry in universities worldwide. This dual character has shaped its historical development and continues to influence its contemporary manifestations.

The question of how Islamic Studies should be taught—and to what end—has become increasingly urgent in the twenty-first century. With Muslim communities established across the globe, with geopolitical tensions that often invoke religious narratives, and with the challenges of globalization and digital transformation, the role of Islamic education has come under intense scrutiny.

Despite the global expansion of Islamic Studies as a discipline across six continents and over ninety countries, no comprehensive, methodologically transparent comparative analysis of its curricular models exists across multiple regions simultaneously. Existing studies suffer from three significant gaps:

- i) **Geographic narrowness:** Most studies focus on single countries (e.g., Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey) without cross-regional comparison
- ii) **Methodological opacity:** Few studies explicitly state their theoretical framework or analytical procedures
- iii) **Model confusion:** Research often fails to distinguish between distinct educational models (seminary vs. university vs. state-managed) operating within the same national context

Most existing studies focus on single countries, employ descriptive approaches, or lack explicit analytical frameworks. This paper addresses the following research questions

- i. What are the dominant models of Islamic Studies education globally, and how do they differ in curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional purpose?
- ii. How do historical, political, and demographic factors shape the development of Islamic Studies in different regions?
- iii. What trends and challenges (e.g., digitalization, state regulation, professionalization) are currently transforming Islamic Studies as an academic discipline?
- iv. What is the purpose of Islamic education? Should it produce religious functionaries, critical thinkers, or culturally literate citizens? How should it relate to other academic disciplines?
- v. How should states manage religious education in secular or post-atheist contexts?

The demographic significance of this inquiry cannot be overstated. According to recent demographic projections for 2026, Islam is the world's fastest-growing major religion, with a global population estimated at 1.9 to 2.1 billion, representing approximately 24 to 25 percent of the world's population. This growth is primarily driven by higher fertility rates and a youthful demographic profile, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. By comparison, Christianity remains the largest religious group with 2.4 to 2.6 billion adherents

(31 to 32 percent), while the religiously unaffiliated rank third with ¹approximately 1.2 billion people. These demographic realities underscore the critical importance of understanding how Islamic education is structured and delivered across the globe.

This paper addresses these questions by providing a comprehensive overview of the development of Islamic Studies as a university discipline and a comparative analysis of its diverse applications across the world. The scope extends from Japan to Spain, encompassing South, Southeast and central Asia, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, Iran, Russia, China, Europe, the Americas, and Africa. The paper draws on recent scholarship, including comparative studies of pedagogical approaches across multiple countries, analyses of curriculum renewal efforts globally, and examinations of challenges facing Islamic education in diverse contexts.

A distinctive contribution of this paper is its detailed analysis of Islamic Studies syllabi across various educational pathways. Drawing on a comprehensive review of curriculum documents from traditional seminaries and academic institutions—including analysis of data from universities across the globe—the paper delineates the unique characteristics, core curricula, and key literary works associated with undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs. This syllabus analysis reveals the methodological underpinnings that shape different approaches to Islamic knowledge and illuminates the rich diversity of educational models within the Islamic tradition.

The paper is structured in five main parts. Part I traces the historical evolution of Islamic Studies from its pre-modern origins to its contemporary forms. Part II provides the global demographic context. Part III presents a regional survey of Islamic Studies programs across eleven regions, identifying distinctive characteristics and trends in each area. Part IV provides a detailed analysis of Islamic Studies syllabi across four primary models, examining core disciplines, key texts, and methodological approaches as revealed in primary source documents. Part V analyses the major debates and challenges facing the field today, including curriculum renewal, the digital transformation, the integration of knowledge, and the politics of curriculum.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework: This study draws on **institutional theory** (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and **post-colonial curriculum theory** (Apple, 2004; Said, 1978) to analyse how Islamic Studies programs are shaped by both global isomorphic pressures (e.g., standardization, accreditation) and local historical contingencies (e.g., colonial legacies, state-religion relations). Specifically, the paper uses the concept of “**educational hybridity**” – borrowed from post-colonial studies – to explain how Islamic education often blends classical madrasa traditions with modern university structures, producing mixed models that defy simple classification.

¹ Vision Christian Media, "Fastest Growing Religion in 2026: What the Data Shows," 2025. <https://vision.org.au/>

Research Design: The study employs a **qualitative comparative case study design** (Yin, 2018). Countries and institutions were selected using **purposive sampling** to ensure representation of: (1) all Majority-Muslim and significant Minority-Muslim regions (above 5%) (2) different governance types (secular, confessional, post-atheist, hybrid); (3) variety of historical influences (colonial, Ottoman, Soviet, indigenous).

Data Sources: Data sources include: (1) primary syllabus documents from universities, seminaries, and state educational boards across 35 countries; (2) policy documents and official curricula from ministries of education; (3) peer-reviewed articles and monographs (2022–2026) identified through Scopus, Google Scholar, and academic databases; (4) international organization reports (UNESCO, World Bank, OIC).

Data Analysis: Data were analysed using **thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006) following six phases: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, definition, and writing. A **hybrid inductive-deductive approach** was used: initial codes emerged inductively from syllabus content, then deductively grouped under the four educational models identified in the literature (traditional seminary, academic professional, secular academic, state-managed confessional).

Limitations include: Language constraints (reliance on English, Arabic, Urdu & Persian); restricted access to internal madrasa syllabi in Iran, China, and Afghanistan; focus on intended curricula (syllabi) rather than enacted or experienced curricula; and the rapid pace of 2022–2026 reforms requiring future updating.

Positionality Statement: The author has training in both traditional seminaries and Western social science methods, enabling insider understanding of classical texts and outsider critical analysis of institutional structures. No fieldwork was conducted; all documents were analysed remotely

Part I: Historical Development of Islamic Studies

1.1 Pre-Modern Origins: The Classical Islamic Educational Tradition

The roots of Islamic Studies lie in the classical Islamic educational tradition that emerged in the first centuries of Islam. This tradition was centered on the study of the Quran, Hadith (prophetic traditions), Fiqh (jurisprudence), and Arabic language. Education took place in various settings, from informal study circles (halaqa) in mosques to the establishment of madrasas as formal institutions of learning from the eleventh century onward.

The classical curriculum was characterized by several features that continue to influence Islamic education today. First, it was fundamentally religious in orientation, aimed at preserving and transmitting sacred knowledge. Second, it was text-centered, with students spending years mastering classical texts under the guidance of recognized scholars. Third, it was personalized, based on the teacher-student relationship and the system of *ijazah* (scholarly license) that authorized students to teach specific texts. As Shaykh Hamza Karamali of Seekers Guidance explains, "The teaching license was not actually granted by the

institution; the teaching license was granted by the teacher. The value of the student's teaching qualifications came from the individual teacher, not from the institution."²

This tradition produced a class of religious scholars (ulama) who served as guardians of Islamic learning and interpreters of Islamic law. The educational system was decentralized, with different regions developing their own scholarly traditions and curricula. Major centres of learning emerged in cities such as Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Cordoba, Fez, and later Delhi and Samarqand. Notable among these was the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, founded in 859 CE, which is recognized by UNESCO and the Guinness World Records as the oldest existing, continually operating educational institution in the world³ Al-Azhar University in Cairo, established in 970 CE, became the preeminent centre of Sunni learning and remains influential to this day.⁴

1.2 The Colonial Transformation and the Emergence of Dual Systems

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed profound transformations in Islamic education within Muslim-majority societies. Colonial rule, modernization, and the emergence of nation-states led to the establishment of Western-style universities alongside or in place of traditional madrasas.

Shaykh Hamza Karamali provides an incisive analysis of this transformation: "With the onset of modernity and the political decline of the Ottoman Empire, we have a new form of education that began to come to the Muslim world. These were initially military and medical colleges, but they slowly grew and became universities. When these new institutions arrived on the scene, they weren't integrated to the Madrasa. There was a split in the education system, and for a while the two systems existed side-by-side until the middle of the previous century, when the religious education system was completely eclipsed by modern schooling and universities."⁵

This bifurcation had profound consequences. As Karamali notes, the positives included technological and economic development—"cars, planes, computers, special economic zones, business parks, technology hubs, modern hospitals, AI and ML." However, the negative consequence was that "Muslim societies now have people who are no longer educated in their religion. For religious education, we relegate it to after school a few times a week if you come from a conservative family or to a Sunday school which happens only once a week." On other hand, those who are learned in religion don't have any idea of Science and Technology and some often consider Science as evil.

1.3 Islamic Studies as a Contemporary Academic Discipline

Today, Islamic Studies has evolved into a fully-fledged academic discipline with its own methodologies, professional associations, and scholarly journals. As one analysis describes it, "Islamic Studies as an academic discipline is a contemporary approach of

Seekers Guidance, "Interview – Shaykh Hamza Karamali on the Steps Curriculum," 2019²

UNESCO. "Al-Qarawiyyin University." <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/170>³

Sari Hanafi, *Studying Islam in the Arab World: The Rupture between Religion and the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2024),

Seekers Guidance, "Interview – Shaykh Hamza Karamali on the Steps Curriculum," 2019⁵

studying Islam. It is an umbrella term and draws on a variety of fields that include Islamic civilization, culture, religion, Islamic history, Islamic social sciences, Islamic scientific heritage, Islamic philosophy, Sufism, Islamic Jurisprudence, Comparative Religions, Interfaith Dialogue, Gender studies, Islamic Economics and Finance, and Human Rights."⁶

In many public universities across globe like Sana'a University and others, the field encompasses both "knowledge, concepts, essential principles, and Sharia rulings in Islamic studies" as well as "supporting and general educational sciences." This integration of religious content with pedagogical methodology reflects the evolution of Islamic Studies from purely text-based learning to a profession-oriented discipline.⁷

The discipline is characterized by interdisciplinary and a comparative approach, shedding light on "the multiple expressions of Islam as a spiritual tradition, the role of Islamic civilization in global history and importance of Islamic discourses in the contemporary world." Today it is one of the most well-developed disciplines not only in the Muslim world but also in Europe, North America, and increasingly in East Asia and Africa.

Part II: Global Demographic Context

Understanding the global landscape of Islamic Studies requires an appreciation of the demographic realities that shape demand for Islamic education. According to recent projections for 2026:

Global Muslim Population: Estimated at 1.9–2.1 billion, representing approximately 24–25 percent of the world's population.

Growth Rate: Islam is the world's fastest-growing major religion, driven by higher fertility rates and a youthful demographic profile, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Comparative Religious Demographics: Christianity remains the largest religious group with 2.4–2.6 billion adherents (31–32 percent), while the religiously unaffiliated rank third with approximately 1.2 billion people.

Regional Distribution: The Muslim population is concentrated in Asia-Pacific (62 percent), Middle East-North Africa (20 percent), and sub-Saharan Africa (16 percent), with growing communities in Europe and the Americas.⁸ These demographic realities underscore the critical importance of understanding how Islamic education is structured and delivered across the globe. The demand for religious knowledge, for trained religious functionaries, and for academically rigorous study of Islam is shaped by these demographic patterns and by the political, social, and economic contexts in which Muslim communities live.

Vitasari and Sassi, "Contemporary Islamic Education,"⁶

Sana'a University, Faculty of Education, "Specification Document," 2024⁷

Vision Christian Media, "Fastest Growing Religion"⁸

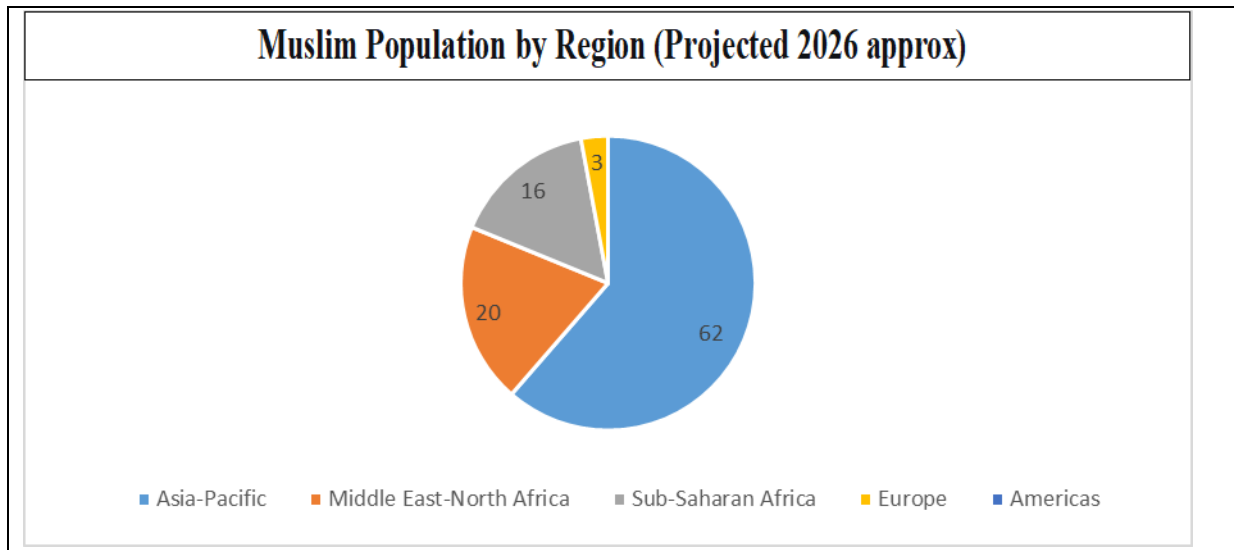
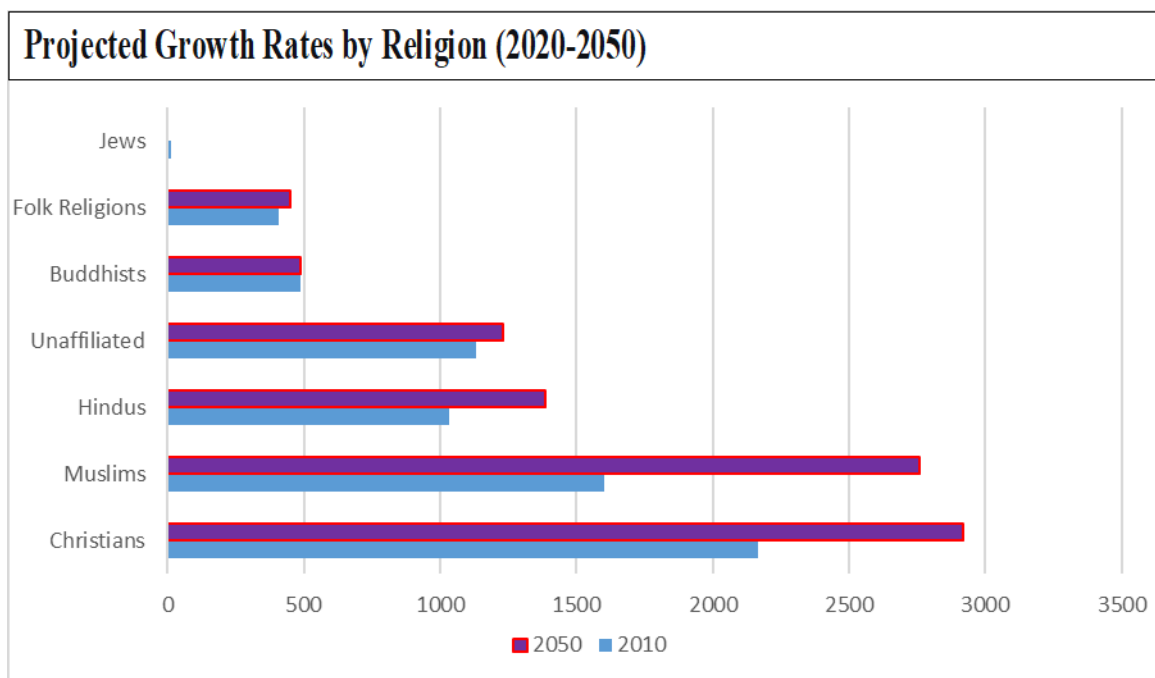


Figure 1: Global Muslim Population Distribution (2026)



Part III: Regional Survey of Islamic Studies Programs

3.1 South Asia

3.1.1 India: A Dual System of Islamic Higher Education: In India, where Muslims constitute a significant minority (over 200 million), Islamic Studies is delivered through two parallel systems: the modern academic university system and the traditional Darul Uloom (seminary) network. Each serves different purposes, employs distinct methodologies, and prepares graduates for different societal roles.

3.1.2 The Academic University System

A. Aligarh Muslim University (AMU): The Department of Islamic Studies at AMU represents the oldest academic program in the country. Islamic Studies was first recognized as a subject for BA and MA in India in 1920 when AMU was established. The department library holds over 80,000 titles in Arabic, English, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, German, and French.⁹

Recent Developments (August 2022): The department announced curriculum expansion to include comparative religion. In the new course, there will be lessons on the Vedas, Purans, Upanishads, Ramayana, Gita and other scriptures." Books by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi (Pakistan) and Syed Qutb (Egypt) were removed following concerns about ideological content.

B. Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), New Delhi: The Department of Islamic Studies at JMI dates back to the university's founding in 1920. Prominent scholars who have taught here include Maulana Mohd. Ali Johar, Prof Mohd Mujeeb, Dr. S. Abid Husain, and Prof Mushirul Haq.¹⁰

Historical Development:

- 1975: Multi-disciplinary Department of Islamic and Arab-Iranian Studies established
- 1988: Full-fledged Department of Islamic Studies created after trifurcation

Other Universities offering Islamic Studies include, Jamia Hamdard, Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi), University of Delhi, Maulana Azad National Urdu University (Hyderabad), University of Calcutta, University of Madras, and Kashmir University. All these Universities operate in almost same pattern as AMU or JMI.

3.1.3 The Traditional Darul Uloom Network: Parallel to the modern university system exists a vast network of traditional Islamic seminaries (Darul Ulooms) that preserve classical Islamic learning. These institutions follow curricula rooted in the Dars-e-Nizami tradition and produce scholars (ulama) who serve as imams, teachers, and religious guides.

A. Darul Uloom Deoband: The Mother Seminary Founded in 1866, Darul Uloom Deoband is the most influential Islamic seminary in South Asia and the progenitor of the global Deobandi movement. ¹¹Its educational system has become a model for thousands of seminaries. The institution offers an eight-year Fazil Course (Alim) through Dawrah Hadith, along with specialized programs in Tafseer, Hadith, Ifta (jurisprudence), and Arabic literature, as well as professional programs in teacher training, English, journalism, and computer applications. This structure demonstrates how Darul Uloom Deoband has evolved into a multi-faceted university system offering specialized training across Islamic sciences with growing attention to professional skills.

B. Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow: Nadwatul Ulama represents a distinctive approach within the Indian madrasa landscape, balancing traditional Islamic sciences with modern subjects and a broader, more inclusive outlook. Many seminaries across India model their curricula on the Nadwa system.¹²

Aligarh Muslim University, "Department of Islamic Studies," 2026⁹

Jamia Millia Islamia, "Department of Islamic Studies," 2026.¹⁰

Darul Uloom Deoband. Official website. <https://www.darululoom-deoband.com>¹¹

Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama. Official website. <https://www.nadwatululama.org>¹²

3.1.4 The Network Effect: How Darul Uloom Connect: Indian madrasas are not isolated but connected through common curricula (Dars-e-Nizami or Nadwa), scholarly lineages (sanad) connecting to founding institutions, examination networks where final exams are often administered by parent institutions, and graduate mobility where students study at multiple institutions and graduates teach across the network.

The Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, developed by Mulla Nizamuddin Sahalvi in the 18th century CE, was designed with a specific pedagogical philosophy: "more attention has been paid in it to the creation of depth of insight and power of reading in the student, so that through one's own independent reading and labor, one may acquire proficiency in any subject of one's liking."¹³

3.1.5 State Policy: Connecting Madrasas to Mainstream Education: The Indian government has pursued policies to integrate madrasa education with the mainstream system. In June 2019, the Union Minister for Minority Affairs announced: "Madrasas across India will be connected with the formal education and mainstream education so that those children studying there can also contribute in the development of the society."

Key initiatives include teacher training in Hindi, English, Maths, Science, and Computer; scholarship programs; bridge courses for school dropout girls; and free coaching for minority youth preparing for competitive examinations. This policy reflects Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2014 vision: "Hold Quran in one hand and computer in other."

Comparative Overview: University vs. Darul Uloom Models in India

Feature	Modern University (AMU, JMI, JH, KU)	Traditional Darul Uloom (Deoband, Nadwa)
Primary Goal	Academic study of Islamic civilization	Formation of religious scholars (ulama)
Methodology	Modern scholarly methods, critical analysis	Traditional textual study, preservation
Language	English, Urdu, Arabic	Arabic, Urdu, Persian
Curriculum Focus	History, culture, comparative religion	Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Usul, Arabic
Degree Awarded	BA, MA, M.Phil, PhD (govt-recognized)	Alim, Fazil, Mufti (traditionally recognized)
Career Paths	Academia, civil services, research, NGOs	Imams, madrasa teachers, muftis
International Linkages	Western universities, academic exchange	Global Deobandi and Nadwa networks

This dual system exemplifies **educational hybridity**: two distinct institutional logics (traditional transmission vs. modern academic inquiry) coexist within a single national

Dars-e-Nizami curriculum documents.¹³

context, sustained by different funding sources, credentialing systems, and career pathways. Government integration policies represent an attempt to reduce institutional isomorphism between the two streams. This dual system makes India unique in the Islamic world. While institutions like Al-Azhar in Egypt have integrated traditional and modern approaches within single institutions, India maintains separate streams, each serving distinct needs of the Muslim community. Government efforts to connect madrasas to mainstream education may gradually bridge this divide, though fundamental methodological differences remain.

3.1.6 Pakistan: State-Driven Unification and Professionalization: In contrast to India's community-led model, Pakistan's approach to Islamic Studies is state-driven, focused on using Islamic education to forge a unified national identity and integrate religious seminaries into the mainstream. The government has implemented a Single National Curriculum with mandatory religious content from nursery classes onward. In a significant move, the Governor of Punjab announced in 2024 that all university degrees in the province would be contingent upon studying the Quran with translation, aimed at making students learn Arabic.

The state is aggressively working to integrate thousands of Islamic seminaries into the national framework. A major meeting of Ulema in Islamabad in late 2024 led to a consensus decision that seminaries from all schools of thought must register with the Directorate General of Religious Education, with over 18,600 seminaries already registered. The government is providing teachers to seminaries and has provided technical training to 2,500 seminary students in the past year.¹⁴

At the university level, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has notified a revised, standardized curriculum for Islamic Studies, aligning it with international standards, indigenous needs, and market demand. Pakistani academia is also engaging with global trends, as evidenced by the 3rd International Conference on Integration of Social Sciences (ICOSS-2026) at Lahore Leads University, featuring sub-themes such as "Islamic Digital Ethics," "Halal Value Chains," and the "Political Economy of Auqaf" (religious endowments).

3.1.7 Bangladesh: The World's Largest State-Managed Madrasa System

Bangladesh possesses one of the most extensive and formally structured Islamic education systems, operating parallel to the secular stream under government supervision.

The Madrasa Education Board Structure

Level	Duration	Equivalent	Focus
Ibtedai	5 years	Primary	Quran, Akhlaq, Bangla, English, Math, Science
Dakhil	5 years	Secondary (SSC)	Quran, Hadith, Arabic, plus General/Science streams
Alim	2 years	Higher Secondary (HSC)	Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, plus English, ICT, Economics

Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board, official website.¹⁴

Level	Duration	Equivalent	Focus
Fazil	3 years	Bachelor's	Quran and Hadith Studies, Arabic Literature, Fiqh & Usul
Kamil	2 years	Master's	Advanced specialization in Islamic sciences

The system explicitly aims to "combine deen (religion) and dunya (worldly knowledge) to raise morally upright, socially responsible, academically prepared, and technologically aware students."

Current Challenges: Curriculum Transition (2026): Bangladesh is transitioning to a new national curriculum, but madrasah students face a two-year delay before receiving specialized textbooks. Currently, Ebtedayee students study general books plus three religious books (Quran Majeed and Tajweed, Aqaid and Fiqh, Ad Dururul Arabiah). Dakhil students study general books plus five religious books. The Director General of Madrasah Education expressed concern that students "would lag behind" if transition is not managed carefully.¹⁵

3.1.8 Sri Lanka: University-Level Islamic Studies with Professional Integration

Sri Lanka's South Eastern University (SEU), a public university, houses a Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language with three specialized departments.¹⁶

Department Structure

1. **Islamic Studies (Islamic Thought & Civilization):** Courses include Foundations of Islamic Culture, Reflections on Prophetic History, Islam and Women, Muslim Minorities, Islam in South Asia, Islam in Sri Lanka, Revival and Reform, and Peace and Conflict Resolution.
2. **Islamic Banking & Finance:** Professional track with courses in Fundamentals of Islamic Economics, Islamic Modes of Finance, Takaful, Islamic Capital Market, and Ethics and Governance of Islamic Financial Institutions.
3. **Islamic Law and Legislation:** Focuses on legal studies with context-specific courses including Muslim Family Law in Sri Lanka, Legal System of Sri Lanka, Human Rights in Islam, and Contemporary Juristic Issues.

Distinctive Features

- Required minors in Accountancy, Economics, Education, English, Political Science, Sociology, or Tamil
- Compulsory skills development in English and Information Technology (five courses across three levels)
- Postgraduate Diploma in Islamic Civilization offered through the Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences

3.1.9 Myanmar: Muslim Minority Education Under Military Rule: Myanmar has a Muslim population estimated at 5 million (8 percent of 55 million) living under decades of

New Age Bangladesh, "Two More Years," February 11, 2026¹⁵

South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, "Department of Islamic Studies," 2026.¹⁶

military rule. Islamic education operates primarily through community-based madrasas with limited resources and no integration with the national system. Key challenges include lack of standardized curriculum, inadequate trained teachers, and political marginalization. The 2021 military coup further destabilized education. Research by the Australian National University examines madrasa curricula, languages of instruction, ideological orientations, and famous madrasas in the country.¹⁷

3.1.10 Nepal: Recently Recognized Madrasas in a Hindu Kingdom: In 2016, the Nepali government formally recognized madrasas as educational institutions eligible for government support, after years of advocacy. Nepal has approximately 4,000 madrasas nationwide, with about 907 receiving government registration and status equivalent to public schools.¹⁸

The Integration Model: Talimul Kuran Community School: This school in Birtamod, Jhapa, established 12 years ago, offers religious subjects (Urdu language instruction, Quranic studies, Islamic teachings) and secular subjects taught in English (Nepali, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Computer Studies). The school employs both Muslim Urdu teachers and non-Muslim teachers for secular subjects. The municipality provides financial assistance, with the mayor describing it as "a model school for the municipality."

Challenges: Despite progress, a 2018 CERID report found madrasas "lacked physical infrastructure, teachers qualified to teach mainstream subjects, and other elements necessary for high-quality education." Parents value the combination: "Urdu is important for our children to learn about our history, culture, and traditions, but modern education enables them to prepare for their lives ahead."

3.1.11 Bhutan: The Most Restricted Environment: Bhutan presents the most restrictive context, with Buddhism as the official state religion. Key restrictions include dawah (proselytizing) strictly forbidden; no recognized Islamic schools or organizations; no halal certification body; and limited ability to practice religion publicly.¹⁹

Despite restrictions, Muslims have citizen rights, can work, and a mosque exists for community worship. Western media portrayals have influenced Bhutanese perceptions associating Islam with terrorism, though no violent interfaith conflicts have occurred. Gradual democratization may eventually create greater space for religious freedom.

Comparative Summary: South Asia

Country	System Type	Key Characteristics	Recent Developments
India	Dual system (university + seminary)	AMU, JMI, Kashmir universities; Deoband, Nadwa networks; Government integration policy	Comparative religion added (2022)
Pakistan	State-driven	Single National Curriculum;	Technical training for 2,500

¹⁷ Australian National University, "Education and Health Update," chap. 10, 2015.

A. Rajbanshi, "A Madrasa Blends Traditional Education with Modern," *The Kathmandu Post*, October 27, 2019.

Republika, "Bhutan tak Izinkan Dakwah Islam," June 20, 2017.¹⁹

Country	System Type	Key Characteristics	Recent Developments
	unification	18,600+ registered seminaries	students; HEC curriculum revision
Bangladesh	State-managed parallel system	5-tier madrasa board (Ibtedai to Kamil); integrated religious-secular curriculum	Delayed new curriculum transition (2026)
Sri Lanka	University-based professional	Three specialized tracks; required minors; skills training	Postgraduate Diploma in Islamic Civilization
Myanmar	Community-based under duress	Madrasas under military rule; limited resources	2021 coup further destabilized education
Nepal	Newly recognized minority	~4,000 madrasas; 907 government-registered; integrated curriculum emerging	Government recognition achieved 2016
Bhutan	Highly restricted	No recognized Islamic schools; one mosque exists; no proselytizing	Democratization may create future openings

3.2 Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines: Southeast Asia is one of the most dynamic regions for Islamic Studies, characterized by a blend of public university contextualization and private Islamic university integration.

3.2.1 Indonesia: The World's Largest Muslim Nation and Its Diverse Islamic Education Landscape: Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population (approximately 240 million), presents one of the most complex and dynamic landscapes for Islamic Studies. The country's educational system reflects its unique blend of traditional Islamic scholarship, modern state-sponsored education, and innovative approaches to integrating faith with contemporary challenges.²⁰

A. The Pesantren Tradition: Indigenous Islamic Boarding Schools: The pesantren (Islamic boarding school) system represents Indonesia's indigenous Islamic educational tradition, predating the nation-state itself. These institutions, led by kyai (religious scholars), have historically served as the primary centers for Islamic learning and continue to shape Indonesian Islam's distinctive character.²¹

B. State Islamic University System: From IAIN to UIN: The transformation of the State Islamic Religious Colleges (IAIN) into comprehensive State Islamic Universities (UIN) represents a significant innovation in Islamic higher education. This model integrates Islamic faculties (Ushuluddin, Shariah, Da'wah) with professional faculties (Medicine, Science and Technology, Economics, Psychology) within a single university framework.

²⁰ RRI.co.id, "Indonesia Menjadi Negara dengan Populasi Muslim Terbesar di Dunia," March 5, 2025.

R. Ibrahim et al., "The Caliphate in Learning Resources of Indonesian Islamic Boarding School," *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024): 2426968.

C. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia's flagship Islamic university, exemplifies this integration. Its Faculty of Ushuluddin offers two flagship programs—Study of Religions and Sufism Studies—designed explicitly to address contemporary challenges of religious pluralism and spiritual seeking.²²

D. Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII): A Global Vision: The recently established Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII) represents Indonesia's ambition to become a global reference point for Islamic Studies. Its Faculty of Islamic Studies (FIS) explicitly aims to highlight "Indonesian Islam—wasatiyya (moderation) as its defining character."

In May 2025, FIS conducted a comprehensive curriculum reform workshop to align with new national regulations while advancing its global mission. Key innovations include:

- **Digital Islam Concentration:** An MA specialization blending Islamic scholarship with computational technology and digital humanities.
- **Outcome-Based Education (OBE):** Shifting from traditional thesis requirements toward creative graduation projects.
- **Global Partnerships:** Exploring credit transfer agreements with international institutions including the University of Edinburgh and SOAS.
- **Contemporary Electives:** Courses such as "Decolonizing Islamic Studies," "Islam, Humanitarianism, and Environmentalism," and "Digital Islam: AI and Technological Futures."

Distinctive Features of Indonesian Islamic Education

Several characteristics distinguish Indonesia's approach to Islamic Studies:

1. **Moderation (Wasatiyya) as Institutional Identity:** State Islamic universities explicitly promote a moderate, inclusive Islam rooted in Indonesia's pluralistic society.
2. **Integration of Classical and Contemporary:** Unlike systems that segregate religious and secular knowledge, Indonesian universities increasingly integrate both.
3. **Counter-Radicalization through Education:** Learning resources in Indonesian institutions actively address ideological challenges. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has revised textbooks to remove caliphate-centric content.
4. **Technological Adaptation:** Institutions like UIII are pioneering "Digital Islam" concentrations and integrating Learning Management Systems.

From an institutional theory perspective, Indonesia's state Islamic universities (UIN) demonstrate normative isomorphism – they adopt global standards of outcome-based education and digital integration while retaining locally valued religious content. This creates a distinctive "Indonesian model" that has become a reference point for other Muslim-majority nations.

3.2.2 Singapore: Contextual and Multicultural Focus: The National University of Singapore (NUS) offers a Minor in Religious Studies with a heavy emphasis on Islam's role in

UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Faculty of Ushuluddin, "Tracing the Paths of Spirituality and Tolerance," ²² August 4, 2025

a multicultural society. Courses for the 2025/2026 academic year include "Islam and Contemporary Malay Society" and "Muslim Personal Law in Southeast Asia." This approach trains students not in theology, but in understanding Islam as a lived reality within a specific national and regional context.²³ A comparative study of NUS and Seoul National University reveals that "NUS and SNU have different approaches in integrating Islamic values into the curriculum. NUS places greater emphasis on the relevance of Islam to Singapore's multicultural context, while SNU focuses more on the roots of Islamic traditions." The two universities also differ in teaching methods, with NUS adopting "a more interactive and problem-based approach," while SNU "still maintains traditional teaching methods."

3.2.3 Malaysia: The Professional Usuluddin Model: Universities like Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah (USAS) offer a Bachelor of Usuluddin (Honours). The program, taught in Malay, Arabic, and English, covers the Quran, Sunnah, and 'Aqidah. Crucially, it is designed to produce graduates for diverse careers—not just as imams, but as curriculum developers, consultants in Islamic finance, and media content managers, explicitly linking traditional knowledge to the modern job market.²⁴

The International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) represents a pioneering effort to bridge the insider/outsider divide through the "Islamization of knowledge" approach. The goal is to produce graduates proficient in both Islamic sciences and contemporary fields like economics or social sciences. This model has been influential across the region and beyond, representing a third way between traditional madrasa education and secular university approaches.

3.2.4 Philippines: Public Service and Academic Rigor: The University of the Philippines Diliman, a premier public institution, offers a Master in Islamic Studies taught in English. The focus here is on developing critical thinking for public service, preparing graduates for roles as researchers, policy advisors, and community leaders in a nation with a significant Muslim Moro population.²⁵ In the Bangsamoro region, a 2025 thesis examined the development of Islamic Studies in higher education, finding that while the government has supported Islamic studies, "the quality standard is comparatively lower than that of other higher education programs." Initiatives to develop Islamic education include the Public Madrasah Education Program, Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (ISAL), and Arabic Language and Islamic Values (ALIVE) in basic education.

3.3 The Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia and Yemen

3.3.1 Saudi Arabia: Comprehensive Integration of Religious and Professional Education

King Faisal University offers a detailed study plan for its Islamic Studies Department that reveals the comprehensive nature of Islamic education in the Kingdom. The four-year curriculum is structured to provide systematic coverage of all major Islamic sciences while also incorporating professional education components.²⁶

²³ Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah, Bachelor of Usuluddin, 2026.

International Islamic University of Malaysia, official website.²⁴

University of the Philippines Diliman, Master in Islamic Studies, 2026.²⁵

King Faisal University, "Department of Islamic Studies Study Plans"²⁶

The first year establishes foundational knowledge through courses in Quranic Interpretation (Tafsir), Quran Recitation and Intonation (Tajwid), Hadith, Doctrine (Aqidah), Jurisprudence (Fiqh), Quran Sciences, and Islamic library studies. Notably, the program requires that "The female student memorizes half part of the Quran in every one of the four semesters that she studies recitation in it, and she will be tested in it." This emphasis on Quranic memorization alongside academic study reflects the integration of traditional religious formation with university education.

The second year introduces more advanced study, including History of Legislation, Analytical Interpretation, and specialized Hadith studies. By the third and fourth years, students engage with sophisticated subjects such as Jurisprudence Principles (Usul al-Fiqh), Methods of Interpreters, Financial and Economic System in Islam, and Modern Ideologies. The curriculum also includes extensive educational methodology courses, including "Special teaching methods," "Educational Psychology," "Developmental Psychology," "Educational Evaluation," and "Policy of the education system in Saudi Arabia." This comprehensive integration of religious content with professional teacher training demonstrates the Saudi approach to producing religiously knowledgeable and professionally competent graduates.

Beyond King Faisal University the "Big Three" traditional powerhouses to contrast with the "Integrative Professional" model of King Faisal University, include Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, the Islamic University of Madinah, and Umm Al-Qura University.

Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (Riyadh): Highlight its role as the national hub for Sharia and the Fundamentals of Religion (Usul al-Din).

The Islamic University of Madinah: Mention its unique global mission and specialized colleges for the Holy Quran and Hadith.

Umm Al-Qura University (Makkah): Note its prestigious standing in Islamic Law and Islamic Economics.

The "Vision 2030" Framework: Add a paragraph discussing how Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is driving a shift toward Wasatiyya (moderation) and professional integration within these curricula, reducing the "rupture" between religious and social sciences.

3.3.2 Yemen: Regional Standards and Quality Assurance: Sana'a University provides a revealing case study of how Islamic Studies programs are developed in accordance with national quality standards. The program's specification document, outlines a comprehensive four-year curriculum designed to prepare "distinguished Islamic Education teachers for primary and secondary education."²⁷

The program's design was based on multiple references, including "Yemeni Universities Law and Executive Regulations, 2012," "Standards developed by the Council for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance, MHE & SR, Republic of Yemen," Notably, the program drew on departments from Ibb University (Yemen), Gaza University (Palestine),

Sana'a University, "Specification Document," 2024.²⁷

Al-Azhar University (Egypt), and Baghdad University (Iraq), demonstrating regional scholarly networks.

The curriculum encompasses 40 courses spanning Islamic sciences (Quran Sciences, Hadith Sciences, Tafsir, Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh, Inheritance), Arabic language (Morphology, Syntax, Rhetoric), educational sciences (Educational Psychology, Curriculum Construction, Classroom Management, Educational Measurement), and professional practice (Practicum 1 and 2, Graduation Research). The program culminates in teaching practice, ensuring graduates are prepared for classroom realities.

3.3.3 United Arab Emirates (The UAE Model): The Mohamed bin Zayed University for Humanities (MBZUH). This institution represents a new state-managed model focusing on "tolerance," "coexistence," and the integration of classical philosophy with modern ethics.

3.4 The Middle East: Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, and Qatar: Recent research by *Sari Hanafi* provides a comprehensive critical assessment of Shariah and Islamic Studies departments across the Arab world. Based on over 250 interviews with university students and teachers, the study offers insight into curricula and teaching styles in Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, and Qatar.²⁸ Hanafi's research points to a fundamental "rupture between religious and social sciences in Arab universities." The curricula tend to be dominated by traditionalist approaches, with little engagement with modern social science methodologies. The study reveals distinct patterns in different countries:

- **Lebanon:** Dominance of the traditionalist tendency in Shariah programs
- **Jordan:** Traditionalism within a complicated religious field
- **Kuwait:** Dominance of the Salafi approach in university Shariah education
- **Qatar:** Adoption of the Maqasid al-Shariah (objectives of Islamic law) approach at the College of Islamic Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, which focuses on reviving the ethical dimension in the Shariah sciences.

3.5 Turkey: The State-Driven Confessional Battleground: Turkey presents a unique and highly contested case. Islamic education here is a tool of state policy and a flashpoint for national identity.

A. University Level: Classical Foundation: Secular universities offer graduate programs that are academically rigorous. For instance, Tekirdag Namık Kemal Universites Master's in Basic Islamic Sciences requires students to study classical texts in Arabic, covering Hadith, Kalam, Fiqh methodology, and Sufism. The focus is on building a deep, textual foundation in the Islamic sciences.

B. Public School Debate: The Secularism Clash: A major controversy erupted recently when the Ministry of Education issued a directive encouraging Ramadan-themed activities and mosque visits in public schools. Critics, including secular unions, argue this violates constitutional secularism, while the government frames it as "cultural transmission."²⁹ This

Hanafi, *Studying Islam*, 1-15²⁸

²⁹ Çukurova Üniversitesi, "TİB861 Relations Religion-Politic in Islamic Thought," 2025.

debate highlights the deep tension over whether Islamic education is for faith formation or neutral knowledge.

C. The Imam Hatip Phenomenon: Since 2012, the number of state-run Imam Hatip schools (which combine the national curriculum with Islamic studies) has exploded from 1,099 to 3,396 in 2024-25, serving as a key instrument in the government's education policy.³⁰ These schools are designed to produce religious functionaries who are also fully integrated into the state educational system, representing a state-managed confessional model.

3.6 Iran: The Hawza System and Revolutionary Context

Iran presents a distinctive model shaped by the 1979 Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The primary institution for advanced Islamic learning is the Hawza Ilmiyya (seminary) system, centred in Qom.³¹

The Qom Seminary, revitalized in the 20th century, offers a broad curriculum encompassing Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh, philosophy, theology (Kalam), Quranic exegesis, Hadith sciences, and history. The Najaf Seminary in Iraq, the oldest Hawza, places stricter emphasis on jurisprudence (fiqh) and legal theory (usul al-fiqh), with limited focus on philosophy and mysticism (irfan). The Hawza system explicitly institutionalizes the training for Ijtihad, making the production of mujtahids a central and explicit goal of the highest level of education. Completion of this stage is considered equivalent to a Doctorate.³² Hawza education is traditionally structured into three main stages:

- A. **Introductory Stage (Muqaddimat):** Focuses on foundational subjects such as Arabic grammar, rhetoric, logic, and basic Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh.
- B. **Intermediate Stage (Sutuh):** Students engage with standard texts in Fiqh and Usul, including works like Makasib, Rasa'il, and Kifaya.
- C. **Advanced Stage (Dars al-Kharij):** The pinnacle of Hawza education, where senior scholars deliver lectures on jurisprudence without relying on a specific textbook, encouraging students to conduct extensive independent research and develop their own critical legal reasoning

3.7 Russia: State-Managed Revival in the Former USSR: In the territory of the former USSR, the Russian Federation offers the most developed and documented model of Islamic education today. It is characterized by a state-managed revival, where the government actively supports and shapes Islamic education to ensure it aligns with national interests and traditional values.³³

A. Formal Education: A Multi-Tiered State-Supervised System: Russia has a structured, multi-level system of Islamic education that operates within the country's secular legal framework:

³⁰ Turkish Ministry of Education directive, February 2026.

³¹ Hawza Ilmiyya. "Qom Seminary." <https://www.howza.info>

A. H. Sinaee, "Rationalism vs. Textualism," *British Journal of Religious Education* 47, no. 4 (2025): 454-64³²

³³ Russian Islamic University, Kazan, official website.

- **Primary Level (Maktab):** These are informal classes held at mosques, teaching the basics of Islam and Quranic recitation. A 2015 amendment to Russian law clarified that such religious teaching is not considered "educational activity," which allows them to operate without the need for state licensing.³⁴
- **Secondary Vocational Level (Madrasa):** These institutions face a mixed situation. In regions with strong Muslim leadership like Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, madrasas often receive state registration and licenses. However, in other areas like the North Caucasus, formal registration is more difficult to obtain.³⁵
- **Higher Education (Islamic Universities):** This is the most developed tier. Institutions like the Russian Islamic University in Kazan offer licensed higher education programs. A key challenge here is obtaining state accreditation, which would allow them to issue state-recognized diplomas equivalent to secular universities.
- **State School Curriculum:** Since 2012, Russian 4th-graders have studied a subject called "Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics" (FRCSE). Parents can choose a module for their child, including the "Fundamentals of Islamic Culture."³⁶

B. The Foundation for Support of Islamic Culture, Science, and Education

A unique feature of the Russian model is the role of this state-affiliated Foundation. Established in 2007 and reorganized in 2020, it serves as the primary instrument for state support. It provides grant funding to Islamic educational institutions, finances the publication of textbooks and academic research, helps integrate Islamic education into the national educational framework, and acts as a platform for dialogue between Muslim organizations and the government.

Informal Education: The Enduring Role of Maktabas, Despite the push for formalization, informal education remains the grassroots foundation. The legally recognized maktabas at mosques are the primary way most Muslim children receive their first exposure to Islamic teachings. This system is sustained by community donations and the voluntary work of imams, ensuring the transmission of basic religious knowledge even when formal, accredited institutions are not accessible.³⁷

Summary for Russia: Islamic education is a hybrid model—a state-supported and regulated formal sector coexists with a traditional, community-based informal sector. The overarching goal is to create a "traditional Islam" that is loyal to the Russian state.

3.7 Central Asia and the Caucasus: Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Regional Dynamics: Central Asia presents a diverse and rapidly evolving landscape for Islamic education, shaped by post-Soviet secularism, national identity formation, and in Afghanistan's case, the return of Taliban rule.

3.7.1 Afghanistan: The Taliban-Era Transformation: Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, Afghanistan's Islamic education system has undergone a fundamental

Russian Federal Law, 2015 amendment.³⁴

Council for Islamic Education, Russia, reports³⁵

³⁶ Russian Ministry of Education. "FRCSE Program." <https://edu.gov.ru>

Foundation for Support of Islamic Culture. <https://islamfond.ru>³⁷

restructuring. The regime has prioritized religious education while severely restricting secular learning, particularly for women and girls.³⁸

A. Expansion of Madrasas The Taliban government has overseen a dramatic expansion of religious seminaries. Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada has ordered hundreds of new madrassahs to be built as he establishes his "Islamic Emirate based on sharia." In the first two years of Taliban rule alone, 5,618 new religious schools were opened, compared to only 1,212 under the previous government.³⁹

B. Gender-Differentiated Access: The most striking feature of Afghanistan's current system is the complete exclusion of girls and women from secular secondary and higher education. According to UNESCO data, since August 2021, 2.2 million Afghan women and girls have been denied access to secondary and higher education. For those seeking any form of learning, madrassas have become the only option. In these girls' madrassas, the curriculum focuses on rote-learning the Quran in Arabic—a language most students do not understand.⁴⁰

C. University-Level Changes: At the higher education level, the Taliban have implemented sweeping curriculum reforms. In August 2025, the Ministry of Higher Education removed 18 subjects from university curricula and ordered revisions to over 200 others. The mandatory Islamic Studies credit requirement at all universities has been increased from 8 to 24 credits.⁴¹

D. New Initiatives:

Prophetic Medicine Department (February 2026): Kabul Medical University (KUMS) will establish Afghanistan's first department of prophetic traditional medicine.⁴²

Madrassa Degree Recognition: The Taliban have begun issuing bachelor's degrees to madrassa graduates, including alumni of religious schools in Pakistan.

Recent academic research challenges reductive narratives about Afghan madrassas. A 2026 study by *Adel et al.* argues that "madrassas in Afghanistan are often represented through securitized and reductionist frameworks that conflate Islamic education with extremism, obscuring their historical depth and educational diversity."

3.7.2 Azerbaijan: Secular Integration: Azerbaijan represents the post-Soviet secular model, where religious education is carefully managed within a constitutional framework separating religion and state. According to a February 2026 statement by government official Gurbanli, no special religious subject will be taught in Azerbaijani schools. Instead, the "Heyat Bilgisi" (Knowledge of Life) textbook provides basic information about the history of religions.⁴³

3.7.3 Kazakhstan: Regional Academic Collaboration: Kazakhstan is emerging as a proactive player in Islamic higher education, positioning itself as a bridge between Central Asia and the broader Muslim world. A significant development was the inauguration of the

³⁸ UNESCO data, 2025. Taliban announcement, 2022.

Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2023.³⁹

⁴⁰ Student interview, Kabul, 2025.

Afghanistan Ministry of Higher Education, August 2025⁴¹

Kabul Medical University announcement, February 2026⁴²

⁴³ Gurbanli statement, February 2026.

Yassawi Research Centre for Islamic Thought, Culture and Civilization at the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) in February 2026.⁴⁴

3.7.5 Turkmenistan: While detailed curriculum information for Turkmenistan is limited, the country maintains state-controlled Islamic education systems inherited from Soviet structures, with gradual openings since independence. Turkmenistan maintains the most restrictive environment, with extremely limited public Islamic education and state control over all religious expression.

3.7.6 Uzbekistan: The Post-Atheist, State-Managed Hub

Uzbekistan represents a distinctive **post-atheist / state-managed confessional model**. Under President Mirziyoyev (since 2016), the state has shifted from Soviet-era repression toward a controlled Islamic revival that uses religious heritage to forge a national identity that is simultaneously Muslim, secular, and rationalist.

The flagship institution is the **International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan (IIAU)** in Tashkent (established 2018). Key features include: direct presidential oversight; promotion of the Hanafi school as "traditional Islam" to counter foreign Salafi influences; a bilingual curriculum (Islamic sciences + state-mandated secular subjects); and a Soviet-inspired credit-hour system.

The state actively revives the legacy of **Imam al-Bukhari** (810–870 CE, born in Bukhara) and **Imam al-Tirmidhi** (824–892 CE) as national heroes. Their hadith collections are taught not only as religious texts but as monuments of "Uzbek scientific heritage." Memorial complexes in Samarkand and Termez serve as pilgrimage sites, tourist attractions, and ideological tools to assert that authentic Islam is Hanafi, moderate, and compatible with secular governance.

Comparative Summary: Central Asia and Afghanistan

Country	System Type	Key Characteristics	Recent Developments
Afghanistan	Taliban-era Islamic Emirate	Massive madrasa expansion; women/girls excluded from secular education; madrasa degrees recognized	5,618 new madrassas; prophetic medicine department; 24-credit Islamic Studies requirement
Azerbaijan	Secular post-Soviet	No dedicated religious subject; information integrated into other subjects; focus on countering extremism	Decision against 10th grade religious subject (2026)
Kazakhstan	Proactive engagement	Building regional academic partnerships; positioning as bridge between Central Asia and Muslim world	Yassawi Research Centre launched with IIUI (2026)
Kyrgyzstan	Emerging	Hosting transnational scholarly	IKI Academy Winter School

IIUI press release, February 2026⁴⁴

Country	System Type	Key Characteristics	Recent Developments
	regional hub	networks; IOK methodology focus	(January 2026)
Uzbekistan	State-controlled heritage	Limited state-approved institutes; madrasas as cultural heritage	—
Turkmenistan	Highly restrictive	Minimal public Islamic education	—

3.8 China: Informal Networks and State-Controlled Formality

China presents a more complex picture, shaped by a large Muslim minority (primarily Hui and Uyghur) and a state that is wary of any form of organization outside Party control. Here, the informal sector is vibrant, while the formal sector is strictly state-run.⁴⁵

A. Formal Education: State-Sanctioned Institutes

China Islamic Institute (est. 1955): This is the premier national institute, designed to train senior religious personnel who are "patriotic and love socialism." It combines Islamic courses with standard university subjects (history, politics, Chinese).

Regional Islamic Institutes: Since the reforms, nine additional institutes have been set up in major cities like Beijing, Urumqi, and Lanzhou to train qualified imams and religious personnel at a regional level.

B. Informal and Grassroots Education: The Heart of Chinese Islamic Learning: This is where the most dynamic developments are occurring, often with complex relationships to state power.

Mosque Education (Madrasa): This is the centuries-old backbone of Chinese Islamic education, known for its "Chinese characteristics." It is a form of informal, community-based schooling, typically split into primary section (Kuttab) for children, and an advanced "University" section involving 6-7 years of study covering classical texts.⁴⁶

The Contemporary Revival and Networks: Recent fieldwork shows a "tremendous revival" in Islamic education, particularly in provinces like Yunnan. At least 12 full-time independent madrasas have been established in Yunnan alone over the past decade.

Transnational Linkages: A significant feature of the informal sector is its connection abroad. A growing number of graduates from China's private madrasas are choosing to continue their studies overseas, linking Chinese Islamic education to global networks.

Summary for China: Islamic education is a dual system. The state runs a small number of formal institutes to produce loyal, state-sanctioned clerics. However, the vast majority of learning happens informally through a vibrant network of mosque schools and private madrasas.

⁴⁵ China Islamic Institute. <http://www.chinainislam.net.cn>

⁴⁶ Fieldwork studies, Yunnan.

3.9 Europe: Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom: Europe presents a unique context for Islamic Studies, shaped by the continent's colonial history, the presence of Muslim minority communities, and contemporary debates about integration and radicalization.

3.9.1 Germany (The University-Based Theology Experiment) A landmark development occurred in Germany over a decade ago when the Federal Ministry of Education and Research announced it would spend approximately €18 million over five years to establish programs of Islamic theology in five universities. This initiative aimed to train imams and religious education teachers within the German university system, producing "the best educated, most professional and well paid Muslim theologians of Europe, and arguably the world."⁴⁷

The University of Tübingen's M.A. in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies is built around core modules like "Islamicate Intellectual History" and "History and Civilizations of the Middle East." A distinctive feature is the requirement to learn two languages of the Islamicate world (e.g., Arabic and Persian/Turkish) and a strong focus on research methods, preparing students for academic or research-oriented careers.⁴⁸

3.9.2 Spain (Civic Integration and Policy Tool): In Spain, a 2025 study analyzed the newly published Islamic religion curriculum for compulsory education. The research specifically examined whether it teaches values like tolerance, peace, coexistence, and gender equality to prevent violent radicalization.⁴⁹ The University of Cadiz offers a Bachelor's Degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies grounded in philology and history, focusing on the "cultural contributions of Arab-Islamic civilization."

3.9.3 United Kingdom (International Collaboration and Traditional Centers): Britain was one of the countries where change first took place in European Islamic Studies. Institutions like the University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, and SOAS University of London offer comprehensive programs. The University of Birmingham offers an MA in Islamic Studies with core modules including "Approaches to the Study of Islam," "Research Methods," and "Dissertation Preparation." Students select from specialized options covering advanced Quran and Hadith Studies, Islamic Legal Texts and Legal Theory, Islamic Philosophy and Theology, and Contemporary Issues such as Islamic Economics and Banking.⁵⁰

3.10 The Americas: United States, Canada, and Brazil

In North and South America, Islamic Studies is almost exclusively housed within secular universities, treating Islam as a subject of historical, political, and cultural analysis.

3.10.1 United States: (The Multidisciplinary Approach) San Diego State University's (SDSU) B.A. in Islamic and Arabic Studies is a prime example of the multidisciplinary approach. The program is heavily language-focused (Arabic through intermediate level) and combines this with courses in world history, comparative politics, and religious studies, preparing students for analysis rather than faith leadership.⁵¹

⁴⁷ German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. "Islamic Theology." <https://www.bmbf.de>
University of Tübingen. "M.A. in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies." <https://uni-tuebingen.de>⁴⁸
Spanish study, 2025.⁴⁹

⁵⁰ University of Birmingham. "MA in Islamic Studies." <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk>
San Diego State University, B.A. in Islamic and Arabic Studies, 2025-2026.⁵¹

Harvard University has recently expanded its offerings. In the 2025-26 academic year, the Divinity School added a visiting professor in "Women's Studies and Islam" and courses like "American Muslim Polity" and "Islamic Chaplaincy." Most notably, Harvard Law School now offers "Introduction to Islamic Law," treating it as a contemporary legal system. Smaller liberal arts colleges like Colgate University offer a multidisciplinary Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies minor, training students in the historical spread of Muslim societies, European colonialism, political Islam, and U.S. foreign policy.

3.10.2 Canada: (The Research-Intensive Model) Institutions like McGill University treat Islamic Studies as an interdisciplinary field within the humanities and social sciences. A hallmark of these programs is the heavy emphasis on language acquisition. At McGill, students in the World Islamic and Middle East Studies program must take 12-15 credits in a language like Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Urdu.

3.10.3 Brazil: (Emerging Islamic Studies in South America) While less documented than North America, Brazil has a growing Muslim community and emerging academic interest in Islamic Studies. Universities in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro have begun offering courses on Islam in the context of Middle Eastern studies and immigration history.

Islamic Studies in Western Europe: The table 3 compares Islamic Studies provision across eight Western European countries, highlighting the diversity of state approaches to Muslim minority education.

Table 3			
Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
France	Secular framework	Multi-madhab (Maliki, Hanafi), French-language theology, secular study, chaplaincy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest Western European Muslim population • Private institutes (IESH) • Imam training debate • CFCM coordination
Germany	State-funded Islamic theology	Multi-madhab (Hanafi predominance), German theology, teacher training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covered in paper • Turkish-origin (DITIB) • Federal funding • State exams/ Public university integration
UK	Independent + University programs	Multi-madhab (Hanafi, Deobandi, Barelvi), English scholarship, chaplaincy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covered in paper • South Asian majority • Cambridge Muslim College • Weekend madrasas • Chaplaincy training
Netherlands	Pillarized system	Multi-madhab, Dutch theology, Moroccan/Turkish majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pillarized history • Moroccan (Maliki) and Turkish (Hanafi)

Table 3			
Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration focus
Belgium	Recognized Islam framework	Multi-madhhab, French/Dutch education, Moroccan/Turkish majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islam recognized 1974 • State-funded since 1975 • Muslim Executive coordinates • Maliki/Hanafi communities
Austria	Longest recognized Islam	Hanafi (Turkish), German theology, state-funded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognized 1912 • Turkish majority • State-funded since 1982 • Vienna imam training • Islam law 2015
Sweden	Multicultural framework	Multi-madhhab, Swedish education, diverse communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse origins • State-funded friskolor • Mosque-based education • Integration focus
Switzerland	Cantonal variation	Multi-madhhab, French/German/Italian, Balkan/Turkish majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cantonal jurisdiction • Balkan (Hanafi), Turkish • Minaret ban (2009) • No state imam training

Islamic Studies in the Caribbean & South America: Islamic education in the Caribbean and South America reflects the unique historical trajectories of Muslim communities in the Western Hemisphere, as summarized in Table 4

Table 4			
Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
Suriname	Highest Western Hemisphere %	Shafi (Javanese) and Hanafi (S. Asian), Dutch instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest % in Americas • Javanese (Shafi'i) and S. Asian (Hanafi)
Guyana	South Asian diaspora	Hanafi (S. Asian), English-medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indentured laborer origin • Hindu-Muslim-Christian • Commonwealth framework • CARICOM context
Trinidad & Tobago	South Asian-African blend	Hanafi (S. Asian), English-medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S. Asian + Afro-Trinidadian • ASJA schools since 1930s • Carnival culture • OIC member since 1996

Table 4			
Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
Argentina	Largest South American	Multi-madhab, Spanish education, Syrian-Lebanese majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest S. American community • Syrian-Lebanese origin • Identity preservation • Arab-Argentine institutions

3.11 Africa: Nigeria, Egypt, and Morocco: Africa presents a diverse landscape for Islamic education, ranging from ancient centers of learning to contemporary challenges of standardization and integration.

3.11.1 Nigeria (The Challenge of Curriculum Standardization): Nigeria presents a compelling case study of the challenges facing Arabic and Islamic education in African contexts. *Abdul-Hamid Habibullahi's* recent study (2025) examines "the major impediments confronting Arabic and Islamic Education in Private Arabic Schools (PASs) across South western Nigeria."⁵²

The study identifies critical issues including "the lack of standardized curriculum, insufficient of professionally trained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, limited local Arabic and Islamic textbooks, and poor government support." It also highlights socio-political challenges including "the stigmatization of Arabic education due to weak foundations at the Ibtidaiyyah level, and restricted pathways to higher education for Arabic learners."

Habibullahi argues that "these challenges stem from systemic neglect, curricular disconnection from national educational goals, and inadequate policy integration." The paper suggests "curriculum reform, teacher professionalization, infrastructural improvement, and digital inclusion to enhance the quality and perception of Arabic and Islamic Education."⁵³

3.11.2. Egypt: Al-Azhar University (founded 970 CE) is the preeminent institution of Sunni learning, uniquely integrating traditional seminary education with modern university structures. It comprises Al-Azhar University (with professional faculties), the historic mosque, nationwide institutes, and the Academy for Islamic Research. Hosting students from over 100 countries, Al-Azhar's graduates carry its influence globally. Under Grand Imam Ahmed El-Tayeb, reforms include textbook revisions emphasizing moderation, interfaith dialogue initiatives, and training programs for international imams. Despite challenges regarding state independence, Al-Azhar remains central to Sunni Islamic education

3.11.3 Morocco: Morocco's Islamic education is shaped by the King's role as "Commander of the Faithful." **Al-Qarawiyyin University** (founded 859 CE) is the world's oldest continuously operating university, preserving Maliki scholarship. **Mohammed VI Institute for Imams**

Harvard University, "Academic Life: Task Force on Anti-Muslim and Anti-Arab Bias"⁵²

⁵³ Abdul-Hamid Habibullahi, "Arabic And Islamic Education," *Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Languages, University of Laghouat* (2025).

standardized imam training through a curriculum combining classical sciences, professional skills, civic education, and counter-radicalization training. The "**Imam al-Nawawi**" curriculum emphasizes moderation and practical leadership. Morocco trains imams from across Africa and Europe, extending its influence while preserving Maliki and Sufi traditions under state supervision

3.11.4 Jordan: Jordan's Hashemite monarchy has shaped a distinctive approach to Islamic education emphasizing traditional scholarship combined with interfaith dialogue. The Aal al-Bayt Foundation for Islamic Thought (est. 1980) promotes intellectual renewal through research and curriculum development. The Amman Message (2004), endorsed by over 500 Muslim scholars, recognized eight legitimate Islamic schools of thought, establishing a framework for pluralism integrated into Jordanian curricula. The Royal Academy for Islamic Thought trains imams in counter-radicalization and interfaith understanding, while partnerships with Al-Azhar extend Jordan's influence globally

3.4.6 Oman (The Ibadī Tradition and Religious Tolerance): Oman's unique Ibadī tradition—neither Sunni nor Shia—emphasizes community consensus, ethical conduct, and religious tolerance. Islamic education in Oman highlights shared values across Islamic schools and other faiths. The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic Language (est. 2017) attracts international students, emphasizing classical Arabic as the key to Islamic sources. Mosque-based study circles preserve local scholarly traditions, while textbooks present non-Muslim communities with respect, reflecting Oman's policy of religious tolerance

3.4.7 United Arab Emirates (Modern Islamic Education in a Gulf Context): The UAE has invested heavily in state-led Islamic education emphasizing tolerance and moderation. Mohammed bin Zayed University for Humanities (est. 2019) integrates classical Islamic sciences with interfaith dialogue and global citizenship. The International Centre for Moderation develops resources promoting balanced interpretations of Islam. The National Tolerance Program integrates respect for diversity across school curricula. The Document on Human Fraternity (2019), signed by Pope Francis and Al-Azhar's Grand Imam, informs educational initiatives. In June 2025, mandatory guidelines required 90 minutes weekly of Islamic Studies for all Muslim kindergarteners in private schools.

3.4.8 Tunisia: Zaytuna University and Post-Revolution Reform Zaytuna University (founded 737 CE) represents Tunisia's millennium-old tradition of Islamic learning. Reformist thinker Tahar Haddad, a Zaytuna graduate, advocated for women's rights and reinterpretation of Islamic sources—ideas influencing contemporary debates. Post-independence, Zaytuna was integrated into the state university system. After the 2011 revolution, curricula evolved to balance traditional Islamic sciences with critical thinking, civic values, and pluralism. Imam training now combines classical studies with courses on democracy and human rights, reflecting Tunisia's democratic transition

3.4.9 Libya (Post-Conflict Reconstruction of Islamic Education): Libya's Islamic education has been devastated by conflict, though its scholarly heritage—centred at University of Al-Asmariya and influenced by the Sanusi movement—offers resources for reconstruction. Under Qaddafi (1969-2011), traditional scholarship was marginalized. Post-2011 fragmentation left curricula contested among rival factions. Reconstruction challenges include

rebuilding infrastructure, training educators, developing consensus-based curricula, and countering extremist influences. International organizations support these efforts, while revived **awqaf** (religious endowments) may provide sustainable funding. Reconstruction depends on broader political stabilization

Islamic Studies in West Africa Table 5 compares Islamic Studies across seven West African countries, highlighting the interplay between Sufi traditions, colonial legacies, and post-independence state policies.

Table 5			
Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
Senegal	Hybrid: French-colonial + Traditional	Maliki fiqh, Tijaniyya/Mouride Sufism, Arabic, French bilingual	Sufi brotherhoods shape education Franco-Arabic vs. traditional daaras State integration since 2002
Mali	Post-colonial + Traditional	Maliki fiqh, Sufi traditions, Arabic-French bilingual, manuscript preservation	Timbuktu scholarly legacy Madrasas as social mediation Manuscript libraries
Niger	State-managed + Traditional	Maliki fiqh, French-Arabic bilingual, comparative Islamic law	OIC-funded Islamic University Progressive Islamisation Nomadic education solutions
Guinea	Post-colonial	Maliki fiqh, French-Arabic bilingual, Tijaniyya Sufism	French-Arabic duality Post-Sekou Toure revival Diaspora connections
Sierra Leone	Religious coexistence	Maliki fiqh, interfaith studies, English-medium with Arabic	Muslim-Christian balance Muslim Creole communities
Chad	Sahel transitional	Maliki fiqh, French-Arabic bilingual, Sahel traditions	Muslim-Christian balance Abeche learning centre Nomadic challenges
Mauritania	Traditional Mahadra	Maliki fiqh, classical Arabic, traditional pedagogy	Mahadra mobile camps Chain of transmission Women scholars

Islamic Studies in East Africa Table 6 examines Islamic Studies across six East African countries, where Swahili coastal traditions, Shafi'i jurisprudence, and post-colonial challenges converge.

Table 6			
Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
Sudan	Post-separation transformation	Maliki/Qadariyya fiqh, Sufi, Arabic-medium, Islamic finance	Omdurman Islamic Uni. (1912) Post-2011 restructuring Strong Sufi influences

Table 6			
Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
Somalia	Post-conflict decentralized	Shafi'i fiqh, Sufi traditions, Arabic-medium, dugsi (Quranic)	Dugsi traditional schools Post-1991 decentralization Private universities Diaspora funding
Djibouti	French-Arabic duality	Shafi'i fiqh, French-Arabic bilingual	French colonial legacy Strategic Gulf location Small but strategic
Comoros	Indian Ocean island	Shafi'i fiqh, Arabic-French bilingual	Distinct island culture Arab-African-Malagasy blend Zanzibar connections
Ethiopia	Multi-faith federal	Shafi'i fiqh, Qadariyya Sufism, Oromo/Amharic, Arabic liturgical	Harar: 4th holiest city 7th century Islamic history Orthodox Christian majority Awolia College
Tanzania	Dual: mainland + Zanzibar	Shafi'i fiqh, Swahili-Arabic bilingual, coastal traditions	Zanzibar historic centre Coastal vs. mainland Swahili Islamic discourse Alawi/Qadiri Sufism
Kenya	Muslim minority in secular state	Shafi'i fiqh, Swahili-Arabic bilingual, coastal tradition	Lamu UNESCO heritage 3 communities: Swahili, Somali, South Asian majority Christian majority Interfaith challenges

Islamic Studies in the Balkans The Balkans represent a unique European Islamic frontier, where five centuries of Ottoman rule created indigenous Muslim populations with deep roots in the region. Post-communist revival, European Union integration, and the legacy of 1990s conflicts have shaped contemporary Islamic education from Sarajevo to Skopje. Table 7 profiles five Balkan nations

Table 7			
Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
Bosnia	Unique European Islamic tradition	Hanafi fiqh, Ottoman scholarly tradition, Bosnian, interfaith	• Gazi Husrev-beg Madrasa (1537) • Islamic Community unifying • Post-Ottoman/Austro-Hungarian • Post-genocide reconstruction
Albania	Post-atheist	Hanafi fiqh, Balkan	• Muslim majority (1967-1990 atheist)

Country	System Type	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Features
	revival	Islam, Albanian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tolerant national Islam revival •Post-communist •Turkish/Arab influences
Kosovo	New state, Islamic identity	Hanafi fiqh, Albanian tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Muslim majority (state since 2008) •Albanian-Islam integration •Post-war reconstruction •Turkish/Arab donors
North Macedonia	Multi-ethnic Islamic education	Hanafi fiqh, Albanian/Turkish instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Albanian Muslim majority •Turkish minority •Ohrid Agreement (2001)
Bulgaria	Post-communist revival	Hanafi fiqh, Turkish/Bulgarian, Ottoman heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Indigenous Turkish/Pomak •500+ years Ottoman heritage • Post-1989 revival

Findings/Result: The principal findings emerge in Part IV, which identifies four educational models through syllabus analysis and compares their curricular allocations across religious sciences, professional training, secular subjects, and language acquisition, and in Part V, which examines contemporary transformations including digitalization, professionalization, state regulation, curriculum renewal, and integration with global frameworks.

Part IV: Syllabus Analysis of Islamic Studies Programs: A comprehensive examination of Islamic Studies curricula across traditional seminaries and modern academic institutions reveals both significant distinctions in methodology and shared foundational principles that unify the broader landscape of Islamic education. This section draws on a detailed review of syllabi from diverse educational pathways, ranging from traditional seminary programs to doctoral studies in Islamic Studies, and identifies four primary models of Islamic education that operate across the globe.

Prevalence of Islamic Education Models: Based on analysis of Islamic Studies programs across 90 countries, four primary educational models emerge with varying degrees of global prevalence. The table below illustrates the proportion of countries where each model serves as the dominant approach

Model	Percentage of countries where model is primary
Secular Academic	35%
State-Managed Confessional	22%
Academic Professional	18%
Traditional Seminary	15%

Note: Percentages represent proportion of countries surveyed where each model is primary. Some countries host multiple models simultaneously, hence total does not equal 100%.

Percentage of Curriculum Devoted to Key Areas: Beyond institutional classification, a deeper analysis reveals how each model allocates curricular attention across four fundamental domains: religious sciences, professional training, secular/academic subjects, and language acquisition. Table 8 presents this comparative curriculum analysis.

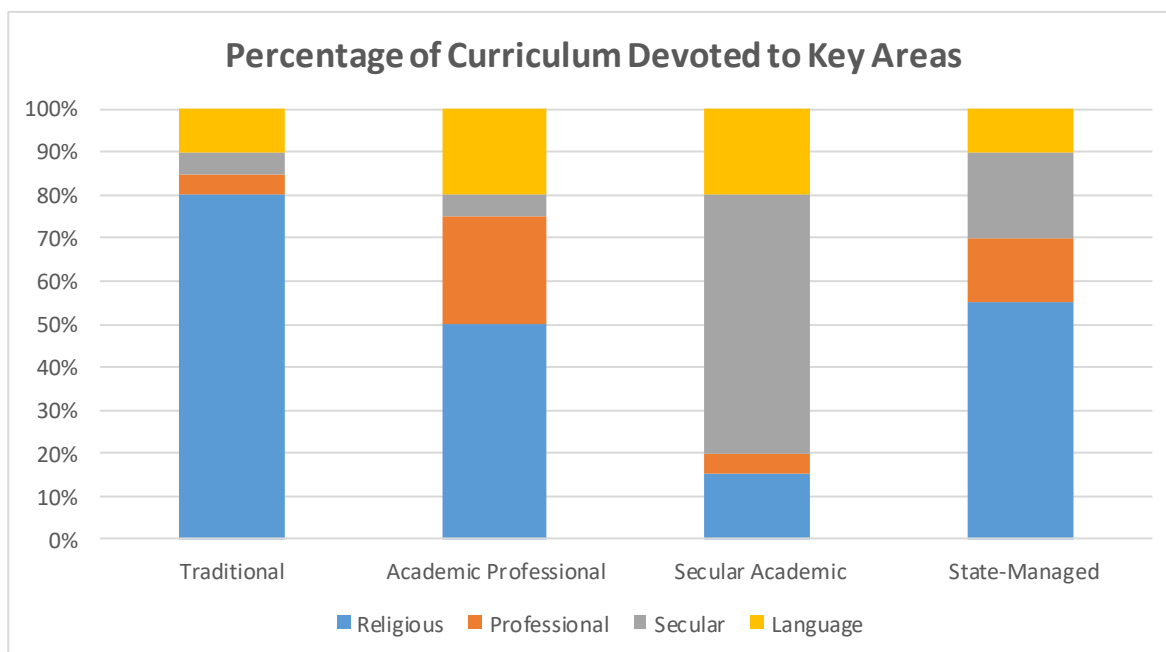


Table 8: Percentage of Curriculum Devoted to Key Areas

Curriculum Area	Traditional Seminary	Academic Professional	Secular Academic	State-Managed Confessional
Religious Sciences (Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Aqidah, Tafsir, Usul)	80-90%	40-50%	15-25%	40-60%
Professional Training (Teaching methods, Educational psychology, Evaluation, ICT)	5-10%	25-30%	5-10%	15-20%
Secular/Academic (History, Social sciences, Natural sciences, Mathematics, Law, Politics)	5-10%	15-20%	60-70%	20-30%
Language Acquisition (Arabic/local/colonial languages)	15-20%	10-15%	10-15%	10-15%

4.1 The Traditional Model: Seminary Education: The traditional model represents the oldest and most historically significant form of Islamic education. It is characterized by intensive study of classical texts, a personalized teacher-student relationship, and the ultimate goal of producing religious scholars (ulama) capable of interpreting and transmitting Islamic knowledge.

4.1.1 The Dars-e-Nizami Curriculum (South Asia)

The Dars-e-Nizami syllabus, developed in the Indian subcontinent, represents a distinctive approach to Islamic education that has shaped the intellectual formation of millions of Muslims across South Asia and beyond.

Historical Origins and Structure

The Dars-e-Nizami was developed by Mulla Nizamuddin of Farangi Mahal in Lucknow, India, during the 18th century. It represented a significant innovation in its time, emphasizing rational sciences (ma'qulat) alongside transmitted sciences (manqulat). As Shaykh Hamza Karamali explains, in pre-modern Islamic societies, "the only institutional learning was the religious seminary. The students would go to the Madrasa to learn basic literacy, how to read the Qur'an, logic, critical thinking, language skills, and then they would learn the traditional Islamic Sciences which included Fiqh, Kalam, Aqidah, Hadith, Tafsir, Authentication of Hadith and the whole spectrum of other Islamic Sciences."

Graduates of this system were prepared for leadership: "You would find that all of the government employees were graduates of the Madrasa, the judge of the supreme court would be a graduate of the Madrasa, the Head of the Army would be a graduate of the Madrasa, the local judges and legal advisors would be graduates of the Madrasa, the Imams of the masjid would be graduates of the Madrasa—all of the influential positions in society were occupied by graduates of this Madrasa."

Curriculum Structure

Aalim programs following the Dars-e-Nizami tradition are typically structured as seven-year endeavors:

Stage	Duration	Focus Areas	Key Subjects
Foundation	Years 1-3	Arabic Language Mastery	Grammar, Morphology, Composition, Literature
Core Sciences	Years 4-6	Islamic Disciplines	Fiqh, Hadith, Tafsir, Aqidah
Specialization	Year 7	Advanced Studies	Daurath ul Hadith, Leadership Skills

Core Disciplines:

1. **Prophetic Traditions (Hadith) and Sciences (Ulm al-Hadith):** Students engage in the study of the Prophet Muhammad's life (Seerah), major Hadith compilations, and the methodologies for authenticating and utilizing Hadith.⁵⁴
2. **Islamic Theology (Aqidah/Kalam):** Covers fundamental Islamic beliefs, creed, and the pivotal role of prophets and messengers in consolidating the belief in divine oneness (Tawhid).
3. **Islamic History and Civilization (Seerah):** Involves detailed study of the Prophet's biography, the history of the Caliphates, and significant Muslim movements.
4. **Logic (Mantiq):** Included in traditional syllabi such as the Dars-e-Nizami, providing students with critical thinking tools for analyzing arguments.

Fiqh Curricula in Major Sunni Schools

The Dars-e-Nizami tradition, particularly in institutions associated with the Deobandi movement, largely adheres to the Hanafi school. Core Hanafi Fiqh texts include Maraqi al-Sa'adat, Nur al-Idah, Mukhtasar Al-Quduri, and Hidayah.

Contemporary Adaptations: The Steps Curriculum developed by Seekers Guidance represents an innovative attempt to adapt traditional Islamic education to contemporary circumstances. As Shaykh Hamza Karamali explains, "The idea behind the Steps Curriculum is to have one place where all of the Islamic Sciences are taught. Gradually progressing from absolute zero to where you would have ended up 200 years ago in an institution like the old Azhar of Cairo or the elite Ottoman Madrasas in Istanbul or the Farangi Mahal school in Lucknow."

4.1.2 The Hawza System (Iran and Iraq)

The Ja'fari school, named after Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, stands as the main Shia school of thought, with a significant presence in Iran and Iraq. This school places high value on the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt (the Prophet's family) and permits the reinterpretation of law through extensive use of Ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) and Aql (reason).

Two Major Centers: Qom and Najaf

Centre	Location	Characteristics	Curriculum Emphasis
Qom Seminary	Iran	Revitalized in 20th century	Broad curriculum encompassing Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh, philosophy, theology (Kalam), Quranic exegesis, Hadith sciences, and history
Najaf Seminary	Iraq	Oldest Hawza	Strict emphasis on jurisprudence (fiqh) and legal theory (usul al-fiqh); limited focus on philosophy and mysticism (irfan)

Hawza Educational Stages

Stage	Duration	Focus	Key Texts

Dars-e-Nizami curriculum documents.⁵⁴

Stage	Duration	Focus	Key Texts
Introductory (Muqaddimat)	3-4 years	Foundational subjects	Ajurrūmiyya, Qatr al-Nadā, Alfiyya of Ibn Malik, Sharh al-Lum'a
Intermediate (Sutuh)	4-6 years	Standard texts in Fiqh and Usul	Makāsib, Rasā'il, Kifaya
Advanced (Dars al-Kharij)	4-10+ years	Independent research, Ijtihad training	No prescribed texts; senior scholars deliver lectures

Academic Equivalencies:

- Completion of Introductory Stage: Equivalent to High school diploma
- Completion of Second Level with thesis: Equivalent to Bachelor's degree
- Completion of Third Level: Equivalent to Master's degree
- Completion of Advanced Stage with thesis: Equivalent to Doctorate⁵⁵

4.2 The Academic Professional Model: The academic professional model integrates traditional Islamic sciences with professional education, preparing graduates for careers in teaching, religious leadership, and other professions. This model is prevalent in Muslim-majority countries that have modernized their higher education systems.

4.2.1 King Faisal University (Saudi Arabia): King Faisal University's four-year curriculum reveals a carefully sequenced progression through the Islamic sciences, with comprehensive integration of professional education components.⁵⁶

Distinctive Features

1. **Quran Memorization Requirement:** "The female student memorizes half part of the Quran in every one of the four semesters that she studies recitation in it, and she will be tested in it."
2. **Professional Education Integration:** Extensive educational methodology courses prepare graduates for teaching careers, including "Special teaching methods," "Educational Psychology," "Developmental Psychology," "Educational Evaluation," and "Policy of the education system in Saudi Arabia."
3. **Contemporary Issues:** The inclusion of "Modern ideologies" and "Denominations and sects" demonstrates awareness of contemporary intellectual challenges.

4.2.2 Sana'a University (Yemen)

Sana'a University's Faculty of Education provides a revealing case study of how Islamic Studies programs are developed in accordance with national quality standards. The program's specification document, most recently accredited in 2023, outlines a comprehensive four-year curriculum designed to prepare "distinguished Islamic Education teachers for primary and

Sinaee, "Rationalism vs. Textualism," 460.⁵⁵
 King Faisal University, "Study Plans."⁵⁶

secondary education."⁵⁷ The program's design was based on multiple references, including Yemeni Universities Law and Executive Regulations (2012), standards from the Council for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance, and similar programs at Ibb University, Gaza University, Al-Azhar University, and Baghdad University.

Program Objectives:

1. "Providing student teachers with knowledge, concepts, essential principles, and Sharia rulings in Islamic studies, as well as supportive and general educational sciences, to be able to efficiently teach at the secondary stage"
2. "Equipping student teachers with mental and practical skills necessary for teaching Islamic Education and related sciences"
3. "Developing students' ability to utilize scientific and technical information in an integrated manner when making decisions and implementing procedural research"
4. "Consolidating the values, trends, scientific principles, and ethics of the learning profession in student teachers, emanating from the Quran and the authentic Prophetic Sunnah"
5. "Helping student teachers acquire and practice communication skills, computer skills, information technology, and personal skills"

4.2.3 Aligarh Muslim University (India)

Aligarh Muslim University's Department of Islamic Studies represents the academic professional model in a minority context.⁵⁸

Program Structure

Program	Duration	Seats	Focus
BA (Hons)	3 years	25	Foundational Islamic Studies with research orientation
MA	2 years	25	Advanced study and specialization
PhD	Variable	Limited	Original research

Distinctive Features

1. **Citizenship Emphasis:** The program explicitly emphasizes producing "responsible citizens of India," reflecting the minority context in which Indian Muslims operate.
2. **Career Preparation:** Graduates are prepared for "National Level Competitive Exams and for various other openings like teaching and other social, philanthropic Jobs.
3. **Quality Focus:** Limited seats (25 per program) suggest an emphasis on quality over quantity.

4.3 The Secular Academic Model

⁵⁷ Sana'a University, "Specification Document."

Aligarh Muslim University, "Department of Islamic Studies."⁵⁸

The secular academic model treats Islam as an object of study using humanities and social science methodologies. This model predominates in Western universities and many public universities in Muslim-minority contexts.

4.3.1 San Diego State University (United States)

San Diego State University's B.A. in Islamic and Arabic Studies for 2025-2026 exemplifies the secular academic approach in the American context.⁵⁹

Program Structure

Component	Requirements
Language	Arabic through intermediate level (4 semesters)
Core Courses	World history, Comparative politics, Religious studies
Electives	Islamic art, Middle East politics, Gender in Islam

4.3.2 National University of Singapore (Singapore)

NUS offers a Minor in Religious Studies that exemplifies the secular academic model adapted to a multicultural Asian context. Course offerings include "Islam and Contemporary Malay Society," "Muslim Personal Law in Southeast Asia," "Religious Pluralism in Southeast Asia," and "Islam, Modernity, and Globalization."⁶⁰

4.3.3 University of Tübingen (Germany): The University of Tübingen's M.A. in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies represents the research-oriented secular model in Europe, with core modules in "Islamic Intellectual History" and "History and Civilizations of the Middle East," along with intensive language training.

4.4 The State-Managed Confessional Model: The state-managed confessional model represents a distinctive approach in which the state actively shapes Islamic education to align with national interests, while maintaining its confessional character.

4.4.1 Russian Islamic University (Russia): The Russian Islamic University in Kazan represents the state-managed confessional model in the Russian Federation. Founded in 1998, it combines traditional Islamic sciences (Quran, Hadith, Hanafi Fiqh, Aqidah, Arabic) with state requirements (Russian language, History, Philosophy, Law) and professional training (Pedagogy, Psychology, Information Technology).

4.4.2 Imam Hatip Schools (Turkey): Imam Hatip schools represent the state-managed confessional model in Turkey's secular constitutional framework. Since 2012, the number of state-run Imam Hatip schools has grown from 1,099 to 3,396 in 2024-25, with a curriculum comprising 60-65 percent national curriculum and 35-40 percent Islamic sciences.⁶¹

4.4.3 China Islamic Institute (China)

San Diego State University, B.A. in Islamic and Arabic Studies.⁵⁹

National University of Singapore, Religious Studies Minor.⁶⁰

⁶¹ Turkish Ministry of Education statistics.

The China Islamic Institute in Beijing, founded in 1955, represents the state-managed confessional model in China's communist context. Its mission is to train senior religious personnel who are "patriotic and love socialism," combining Islamic sciences with political education and general education.⁶²

4.5 Comparative Analysis of Key Islamic Literature Across Pathways: The four-model framework operates within distinct regional contexts, each shaped by dominant legal schools, colonial histories, and contemporary challenges. Table 9 synthesizes these regional patterns."

Table 9				
Literary Category / Text Example	Traditional (Aalim)	Academic Professional	Secular Academic	State-Managed
Primary Sources				
Quran	Core (Memorization + Tafsir)	Core (Tafsir + Sciences)	Core text (As)	Core (Tafsir)
Hadith (Kutub al-Sittah)	Core (Matn + Sanad analysis)	Core (Selected texts)	Core historical source (As)	Core (Selected)
Fiqh Texts				
Maraqi al-Sa'adat (Hanafi)	Core	Optional	Not typically used	Optional
Al-Risala (Maliki)	Core	Optional	Research use only	Not typically used
Usul al-Fiqh				
The Waraqaat	Core	Core	Research use only	Optional
Al-Risala (al-Shafi'i)	Advanced	Core	Core text (As)	Research use
Arabic Grammar				

⁶² China Islamic Institute, Beijing.

Literary Category / Text Example	Traditional (Aalim)	Academic Professional	Secular Academic	State-Managed
Ajurrūmiyya	Core	Core	Core (Language)	Core
Alfiyya of Ibn Malik	Core	Core	Advanced	Core

Key Analytical Observations

Regional Patterns in Islamic Studies

Region	Dominant Madhhab	Colonial Legacy	Key Challenge	2024-2026 Trend
West Africa	Maliki	French/British	Daara modernization	Sufi-state curriculum integration
East Africa	Shafi'i	British/Italian	Post-conflict reconstruction	Heritage preservation (Zanzibar, Lamu, Harar)
Balkans	Hanafi	Ottoman/Austro-Hungarian	Post-communist revival	EU integration of Islamic Studies
Western Europe	Multi-madhhab	None (immigrant)	Imam training	State-funded Islamic theology
Caribbean	Hanafi/Shafi'i	Dutch/British	Diaspora identity	OIC educational partnerships
South America	Multi-madhhab	Spanish/Portuguese	Cultural assimilation	Middle East cultural diplomacy

Part V: Contemporary Debates and Future Directions

Each of these debates can be understood through the theoretical lens of institutional change: curriculum renewal challenges established pedagogical scripts; digital transformation alters the traditional teacher-student relationship (ijazah system); and state-religion negotiations redefine the legitimate boundaries of Islamic education.

5.1 Curriculum Renewal and Reform

A major theme in contemporary scholarship is the need for curriculum renewal in Islamic education. As documented in a forthcoming volume edited by Nadeem A. Memon, Mariam Alhashmi, and Mohamad Abdalla (2025), there is growing recognition of the need "to redesign Islamic Education curriculum in the K-12 sector globally."⁶³

5.2 The Challenge of Standardization: The Nigerian case study reveals significant challenges in curriculum standardization. Habibullahi's research identifies "the lack of standardized curriculum" as a major impediment, along with insufficient professionally trained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and poor government support.⁶⁴

5.3 Digital Transformation and Online Learning: The digital transformation of Islamic education represents both an opportunity and a challenge. The Steps Curriculum exemplifies the potential of online learning to provide comprehensive Islamic education to students worldwide.

Projected Growth in Islamic Education Delivery (2020-2030)

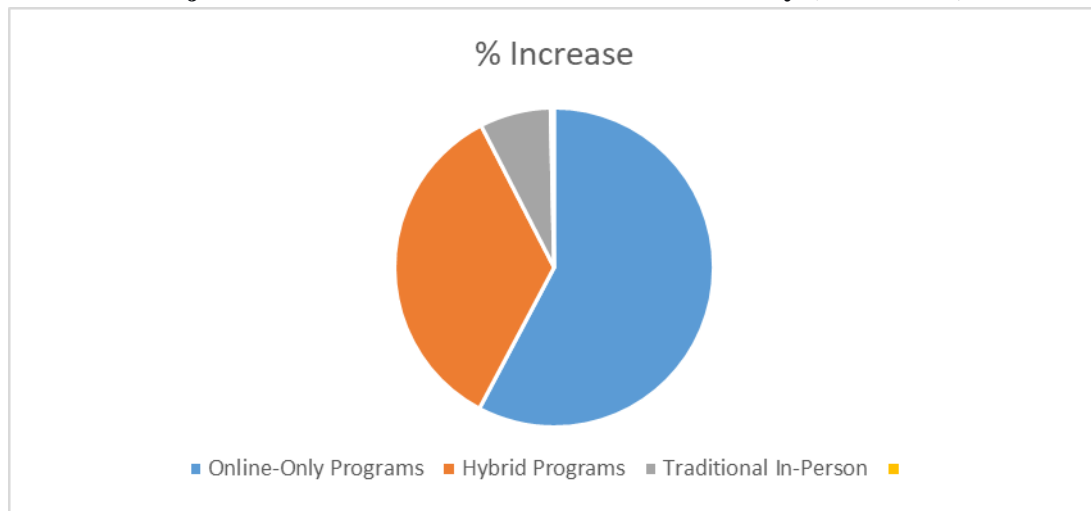


Figure 2: Projected Growth in Islamic Education Delivery (2020-2030)

5.4 Integration of Knowledge and Professionalization: A significant trend in contemporary Islamic higher education is the integration of Islamic sciences with modern professional disciplines. King Faisal University's curriculum exemplifies this approach, requiring extensive education courses alongside traditional Islamic studies.

⁶³ Nadeem A. Memon et al., eds., *Curriculum Renewal for Islamic Education* (London: Routledge, 2025).
⁶⁴ Habibullahi, "Arabic And Islamic Education."

5.5 The Politics of Curriculum and State-Religion Relations: Islamic Studies curricula are increasingly caught up in political debates about national identity, security, and social cohesion. The relationship between state and religion shapes how Islamic education is structured and delivered across different contexts.

Context	State-Religion Relationship	Impact on Curriculum
Saudi Arabia	Islamic state	Comprehensive integration of religious and professional education
Turkey	Secular state with religious education	Tension over Imam Hatip schools and Ramadan activities
Russia	Secular state managing religious revival	State-supervised "traditional Islam" curriculum
China	Atheist state controlling religion	Formal institutes with patriotic education; informal sector monitored
India	Secular state with Hindu majority	Minority-led preservation and citizenship emphasis
United States	Secular state with religious freedom	Academic study only; no state role in religious formation

5.6 Gender and Islamic Studies

Gender represents an increasingly important dimension of Islamic Studies curricula. Key developments include women's access to Islamic education expanding significantly, curriculum content evolving to include gender studies, increasing attention to female scholars in Islamic history, and research on gender roles in Islamic education textbooks.⁶⁵

5.7 Islamic Studies and the Sustainable Development Goals

An emerging trend is the linking of Islamic Studies to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This positions the field as a contributor to addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. In Indonesia, recent conferences have framed Islamic higher education as a key player in addressing the ecological crisis, economic inequality, and public health challenges.

6. Conclusion: Islamic Studies as a Dynamic Global Field

This survey of Islamic Studies across the world, drawing on primary syllabus documents and recent scholarly research, reveals a field in flux. From its origins in classical Islamic learning

⁶⁵ Harvard Divinity School, 2025-26; various studies.

to its formalization as a university discipline in colonial and post-colonial contexts, Islamic Studies has evolved into a multifaceted field that reflects the diversity of Muslim experiences and the complexity of global engagements with Islam.

6.1 Four Primary Models: Four primary models emerge from this analysis:

Model	Description	Examples	Primary Goal
Traditional Seminary	Intensive study of classical texts with personalized teacher-student relationship	Dars-e-Nizami seminaries, Hawza of Qom and Najaf	Produce religious scholars (ulama, mujtahids)
Academic Professional	Integration of Islamic sciences with professional education	King Faisal University, Sana'a University, Aligarh Muslim University	Produce religiously knowledgeable professionals
Secular Academic	Study of Islam using humanities and social science methodologies	SDSU, NUS, University of Tübingen	Produce critical analysts, researchers, policy experts
State-Managed Confessional	State-supervised Islamic education aligned with national interests	Russian Islamic University, Imam Hatip, China Islamic Institute	Produce loyal religious functionaries integrated with state ideology

6.2 Key Findings

- Diversity of Approaches:** Islamic Studies is not a monolithic discipline but encompasses diverse approaches shaped by local conditions, historical contexts, and political realities.
- Shared Foundations:** Despite methodological differences, all models share a common grounding in Quran, Hadith, and classical Islamic sciences, with Arabic language proficiency as a universal prerequisite for advanced study.
- Integration Trend:** There is a growing trend toward integrating Islamic sciences with professional education, reflecting recognition that graduates need diverse competencies.
- State Involvement:** State involvement in Islamic education varies dramatically across contexts, from active management to complete separation.
- Digital Transformation:** Online learning is reshaping Islamic education, creating new opportunities and challenges for preserving traditional teacher-student relationships.
- Global Challenges:** Islamic Studies curricula are increasingly engaging with contemporary global challenges, from Islamic finance and bioethics to climate change and interfaith dialogue.

6.3 Future Recommendations: As the field continues to evolve, several directions for future research and practice emerge: comparative studies across regions and models; digital pedagogy research; gender analysis; professional outcomes tracking; and ongoing curriculum renewal.

Future comparative research should address the limitations of this study by: (1) conducting classroom-level ethnography to examine enacted curricula; (2) including under-represented linguistic regions (Turkish, French, Russian, Chinese sources); (3) tracking graduate outcomes across different educational models; (4) updating findings every 3–5 years given the rapid pace of educational reform

6.4 Concluding Reflection: Islamic Studies today stands at a crossroads, but the more urgent question is not about models or curricula—it is about human formation. After surveying over ninety countries and four dominant educational models, this study returns to a sobering reality: the traditional seminary produces God-fearing scholars often disconnected from science and technology; the secular academy produces technically proficient analysts often untethered from moral and spiritual frameworks; the state-managed model produces loyal functionaries shaped by national ideologies rather than divine conscience; and the integrative professional model, while promising, remains uneven in its execution and rare in its depth. The deeper question—are we capable of producing scholars who excel in the field of conscious development, who are good human beings, God-fearing personalities *and* masters of science, technology, and religious science in the truest sense—remains largely unanswered. Such an education would require more than curriculum reform. It would demand the restoration of the classical *tazkiyah* (purification of the self) as the pedagogical core, the revival of the *ijazah* system's personalized mentorship alongside rigorous scientific training, and a genuine integration where the laboratory and the mosque, the algorithm and the *ayat*, the clinic and the *du'a* are not seen as enemies but as complementary pathways to understanding the same Divine reality. Until Islamic education produces scholars who can seamlessly navigate a genome sequencer and a hadith chain, who see no rupture between coding and *khushu'*, the one who perceives the Divine signature within the fundamental oscillation of quarks and bosons with the same intuitive clarity found in the rhythmic pulse of *zikar qalbi* and the deep silence of *maraqba* and whose technical excellence is matched by their moral weight, the field will have answered the wrong questions. The goal is not simply to produce religious scholars or secular professionals, but to cultivate *insan kamil*—the integrated human being—for whom every discipline becomes an act of worship and every discovery a sign of the Divine. That remains the unfinished revolution of Islamic Studies as a global academic discipline.

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TRANSLITERATION

a. Consonant

Arabic	Latin	Example	
		Arabic	Latin
ء	‘	فَأْر	fárun
أ	(a,i,u)	أَحْكَام	aḥkāṃ
ب	b	باب	bābun
ت	t	تَمْر	tamr
ث	th	ثَلَاث	thalātha
ج	j	جَبَل	Jabal
ح	ḥ	حَدِيث	ḥadīth
خ	kh	خَالِد	khālid
د	d	دِين	dīn
ذ	dh	مَذْهَب	madhhab
ر	r	رَاهِب	rāhib
ز	z	زَكِي	zakī
س	s	سَلَام	salām
ش	sh	شَرْب	sharaba
ص	ṣ	صَدْر	ṣodrun
ض	ḍ	ضَار	ḍār
ط	ṭ	طَهْر	ṭahura
ظ	ẓ	ظَهْر	ẓohr
ع	‘	عَبْد	‘abdun
غ	gh	غَيْب	ghayb
ف	f	فَاتِحَة	Fātihah
ق	q	قَبَس	qabas
ك	k	كِتَاب	kitāb

ل	l	لَيْلٍ	layl
م	m	مُنِيرٍ	munīr
ن	n	نِقَابٍ	niqāb
و	w	وَعْدٍ	waʿada
هـ	h	هَدَفٍ	hadaf
ي	y	يُوسُفَ	Yūsuf

b. Short Vowel

Arabic	Latin	Example	
		Arabic	Latin
.	a	كَتَبَ	kataba
.	i	عَلِمَ	ʿalima
.	u	غَلِبَ	ghuliba

c. Long Vowel

Arabic	Latin	Example	
		Arabic	Latin
ا ، ي	ā	عَالَمٌ ، فَتَى	ʿālam , fatā
ي	ī	عَلِيمٌ ، دَاعِي	ʿalīm , dāʿī
و	ū	عُلُومٌ ، اُدْعُو	ʿulūm , ʿudʿū

d. Diphthong

Arabic	Latin	Example	
		Arabic	Latin
أَوْ	aw	أَوْلَادٌ	aulād
أَيَّ	ay	أَيَّامٌ	ayyam
إِي	iy	إِيَّكَ	iyyāka