

Malezya ve Türkiye’de Devlet Üniversitelerinde Yüksek Din Öğretimi: Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışma

Higher Religious Education at Public Universities in Malaysia and Turkey: A Comparative Study

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Higher Religious Education at Public Universities in Malaysia and Turkey: A Comparative Study

Abstract: Higher religious education institutions, like other fields, operate within the universities today. While countries establish and develop their own institutions according to their history, society and state, the experience and knowledge of similar institutions in other countries is vital for the development of the universities. Comparative studies can make significant contributions in this regard. Therefore, this article aims to compare higher religious education at public universities in Malaysia and Turkey in terms of six themes: history, current situation, aims, programme structure, student admission and graduate employability. Malaysia and Turkey represent two strikingly different countries in terms of the state’s relationship with religion and the religious composition of society even though they both have a Muslim majority population. This is a qualitative, literature-based study which employs document analysis. Official documents, academic articles and internet sources are used as references to examine and present information about higher religious education in both countries. The findings of the article are as follows: The development of higher religious education in Turkey has been intermittent and is closely related to the politics of religion, as the major political changes have had an impact on higher religious education. In contrast, the development of higher religious education has been steadier in Malaysia. Even though the politics of religion and electoral calculations of political parties have influenced higher Islamic education in Malaysia, this has not at least resulted in their closures or dramatic decreases in their numbers. Currently, higher religious education is thriving in both countries, but more rapidly (at least quantitatively) in Turkey than in Malaysia. Regarding the aims of higher religious education, there are direct references to *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah* and raising practising Muslims in Malaysia, where the aims and programme outcomes are determined by a national agency. Historically, the official mission statements of theology faculties in Turkey were more inclined towards modern aims/concepts, partly to legitimise the place of theology in a secular university. However, in recent years, there has been a tendency towards overtly Islamic values and concepts. However, due to the lack of a national agency which defines the aims of theology/Islamic sciences faculties, the official mission and vision statements seem patchy and vague, but the accreditation process might lead to more common and unified aims and programme outcomes. In Turkey, higher religious education officially does not adopt any branch of Islam, as opposed to Malaysia, which might be an opportunity for becoming more accommodative and integrative in a modern society which is marked by plurality and diversity. There are different higher religious education programmes in Malaysia, which has sought to integrate Islamic knowledge with professional one. This has resulted in the introduction of multi and cross-disciplinary programmes and specializations. The graduates of these programmes, in turn, can work in very different professions from security to finance and from judiciary to religious services. Multi and cross-disciplinary programmes are currently unavailable in Turkey, as higher religious education faculties only offer a single programme. Another important difference between the two countries is the process of student admission. While there are different post-secondary education/examination systems in Malaysia, in Turkey there is a national university entrance exam. Despite the different examination systems, in Malaysia students need to have a solid background in Islamic education, Arabic and English in order to enrol on Islamic Studies programmes; whereas in Turkey there are just few questions regarding religious education in the university entrance exam; therefore, no background in religious education, Arabic or English is necessary. Even though this can provide an opportunity for those who do not have any Islamic education background, there are problems that theology/Islamic sciences faculties have to start from the basics, such as teaching how to read the Qur’an. Finally, in both countries the employability of higher religious education graduates seems one of the most pressing issues, but this issue is more prevalent in Turkey than in Malaysia.

Keywords: Religious Education, Religious Studies, Higher Education, Malaysia, Turkey

Malezya ve Türkiye’de Devlet Üniversitelerinde Yüksek Din Öğretimi: Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışma

Öz: Yüksek din öğretimi kurumları diğer alanlar gibi günümüzde üniversite bünyesinde faaliyet göstermektedir. Ülkeler tarihsel, kültürel ve devlet yapıları doğrultusunda kendi kurumlarını kurup geliştirmekle birlikte, dünyadaki benzer diğer kurumların tecrübe ve birikimlerinin öğrenilmesi üniversitelerin gelişimi için önem arz etmektedir. Karşılaştırmalı çalışmaların bu konuda dikkate değer katkıları bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Malezya ve Türkiye’de devlet üniversitelerindeki yüksek din öğretimi tarih, mevcut durum, hedefler, program yapısı, öğrenci kabulü ve mezun istihdam edilebilirliği gibi 6 farklı tema üzerinden karşılaştırılması hedeflenmektedir. Malezya ve Türkiye, nüfuslarının çoğunluğu Müslüman olmakla birlikte, din-devlet ilişkisi ve toplumun dini yapısı açısından birbirinden oldukça farklı iki ülkeyi temsil etmektedirler. Nitel, literatür bazlı olan bu çalışma doküman analizine dayanmaktadır. Her iki ülkedeki yüksek din öğretimini anlamak ve ortaya koymak amacıyla resmi belgeler, akademik makaleler ve internet kaynakları kullanılmıştır. Makalenin bulguları şöyledir: Türkiye’de yüksek din öğretiminin gelişimi kesintili olmuştur ve önemli siyasi değişimler yüksek din eğitimi etkilemiş olduğundan dinî siyaset ile yakından ilişkilidir. Buna karşılık, Malezya’da yüksek din öğretiminin gelişimi daha istikrarlı olmuştur. Siyasi partilerin din siyaseti ve seçim hesapları Malezya’daki yüksek İslami öğretimi etkilemiş olsa da, bu en azından kurumlarının kapanmalarına veya sayılarının dramatik bir

şekilde azaltılmasına yol açmamıştır. Güncel bakıldığında yüksek din öğretimi kurumlarının her iki ülkede de gelişmekte olduğu, ancak Türkiye'de bunun (en azından sayısal olarak) Malezya'dan daha hızlı olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Yüksek din öğretiminin amaçlarıyla ilgili olarak, amaçların ve program çıktılarının ulusal bir kurum tarafından belirlendiği Malezya'da Ehl-i Sünnet ve'l-Cemaat ve dinini icra eden öğrencilerin yetiştirilmesine doğrudan atıflar vardır. Türkiye'de tarihsel olarak, ilahiyat fakültelerinin resmi misyonları, kısmen ilahiyatın laik bir üniversitedeki yerini meşrulaştırmak amacıyla modern amaçlara/kavramlara daha çok yer vermekte idi. Ancak son yıllarda açıkça İslami değer ve kavramlara atıflar yapan amaç ve misyonlar belirlenmektedir. Ancak ilahiyat/İslami ilimler fakültelerinin amaçlarını belirleyen ulusal bir kurumun olmaması nedeniyle, resmi misyon ve vizyon ifadeleri düzensiz görünmektedir, ancak akreditasyon süreci daha ortak ve bütünlüklü amaç ve program çıktılarının belirlenmesini sağlayabilir. Türkiye'de yüksek din öğretimi, Malezya'nın aksine, resmi olarak İslam'ın herhangi bir mezhebini benimsemekte olup, bu çoğulculuk ve çeşitliliğin olduğu modern bir toplum için daha uyumlu ve bütünleştirici olma fırsatı sunmaktadır. Malezya'da İslami bilgiyi mesleki bilgiyle bütünleştirmeyi amaçlayan farklı yüksek din öğretimi programları vardır. Bu, çok yönlü ve disiplinler arası programların ve uzmanlıkların oluşturulmasını sağlamıştır. Bu programlardan mezun olanlar ise güvenlikten finansa, yargıdan din hizmetlerine kadar çok farklı mesleklerde çalışabilmektedir. Türkiye'deki yüksek din öğretimi fakülteleri ise sadece tek bir program sunmakta olup, çoklu ve disiplinler arası programlar bulunmamaktadır. İki ülke arasındaki bir diğer önemli fark, öğrenci kabul sürecidir. Malezya'da farklı ortaöğretim sonrası eğitim/sınav sistemleri bulunurken, Türkiye'de merkezi bir üniversite giriş sınavı vardır. Farklı sınav sistemlerine rağmen, Malezya'da öğrencilerin İslami ilimler programlarına kaydolabilmeleri için İslam eğitimi, Arapça ve İngilizce konularında sağlam bir altyapıya sahip olmaları gerekmektedir; Türkiye'de ise üniversite sınavında din eğitimi ile ilgili çok az soru bulunmakta; bu nedenle, yüksek din öğretimi için din eğitimi, Arapça veya İngilizce herhangi bir altyapıya gerek bulunmamaktadır. Bu, din eğitimi geçmişi olmayanlar için bir fırsat olsa da, ilahiyat/İslami ilimler fakültelerinin Kuran okumayı öğretmek gibi en temel işlerden başlaması problemini gündeme getirmektedir. Son olarak, her iki ülkede de yüksek din öğretimi mezunlarının istihdam edilebilirliğinin en acil sorunlardan biri olduğu, ancak bu sorunun Türkiye'de Malezya'dan daha fazla olduğu anlaşılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Eğitimi, Din Çalışmaları, Yüksek Eğitim, Malezya, Türkiye

Introduction

Looking at the history of higher education, it can be seen that religious education has always had an important and central place in higher education. Today, higher religious education institutions within the university seek to produce knowledge and meet the needs of society. Although higher religious education institutions reflect the basic characteristics of the society within which they were established and developed, they can benefit from the knowledge and experience of different countries. For this reason, comparative studies are important in terms of exploring the experiences of various countries.

This article, therefore, aims to explore higher religious education¹ at public universities in Malaysia and Turkey. Even though Malaysia and Turkey have a Muslim majority population, they also represent two strikingly different cases in terms of state's relationship with religion and the religious composition of society. Malaysia is officially an Islamic state, as "Islam is the religion of the Federation" (Article 3).² In contrast, Turkey is officially a secular (*laik*) state, describing itself as "a democratic, secular and social state" (Article 2).³ Even though Islam remains the religion of the state and Malays are regarded as the original people, Malaysia is a multi-religious country. According to the 2010 census, which is the latest available statistics published by the Malaysian government on the religious composition of Malaysia, 61.3% of the 28.3 million population are Muslims, while 35.3% are non-Muslims, mainly followers of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and 3.4% comprised of other religions, unknown religions, and no religion.⁴ The vast majority of the population of Turkey, however, has historically remained Muslim, though there are no publicly available official statistics on the religious affiliation of the population. Some organisations, for example, Minority Rights Group International, which is an international human rights non-governmental organisation, estimates that 99% of the population are Muslim; while the religious minorities such as Christians and Jews comprise less than 1% of the population.⁵ In World Values Survey in 2018, 98% of

¹ By higher religious education at public universities, we mean theology and Islamic sciences faculties and programmes at state universities in Turkey and all Islamic Studies faculties and programmes, not only the programmes related to religious education teacher training, at federal government universities in Malaysia.

² https://www.jac.gov.my/spk/images/stories/10_akta/perlembagaan_persekutuan/federal_constitution.pdf

³ https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/constitution_en.pdf

⁴ Department of Statistics Malaysia, "The 2010 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia (Census 2010)" (2015).

⁵ Minority Rights Group International, "Turkey" (2018).

the respondents stated that they are Muslim⁶, but in another survey, 6% stated that they do not have any belief (*dini inancı yok*), which might mean that Muslims constitute around 94% of the population.⁷

In terms of higher religious education, there are some important differences between Malaysia and Turkey. One central difference is that in Malaysia, there are diverse religious education programmes, while in Turkey theology and Islamic sciences faculties only offer a single programme. Moreover, in Turkish religious education literature, comparative studies often tend to focus on the western countries which have a substantial Turkish/Muslim minority, or on Turkic countries with less focus on Muslim majority countries, such as Malaysia, which have a Muslim majority but also a substantial non-Muslim minority.⁸ There is only one article which compares higher religious education in Turkey and Malaysia, but the article only focuses on Arabic education in Malaysia, rather than different aspects of higher religious education in both countries.⁹

A comparison of Malaysia and Turkey, therefore, can help us to discern different paths of higher religious education in two Muslim-majority countries, which also have important differences in terms of state’s relationship with religion and religious composition of the society. Other countries could have been chosen for comparison, such as Indonesia, and there is a need for further comparative studies on this issue.

A comparative study can help us in numerous ways. Firstly, it can help us “to be aware ... of other nations’ points of view”.¹⁰ In other words, through a comparative study, we can explore higher religious education from a *global* perspective, rather than an *ethnocentric* one. Secondly, studying other countries’ educational systems can “result in our being better fitted to study and to understand our own”.¹¹ In other words, when we study other countries’ education systems, we can better reflect upon and understand our own system. This paper, therefore, explores different paths of higher religious education in Malaysia and Turkey both to be aware of other nations’ points of view and to understand our own education system better.

Higher religious education can be explored in several ways, as this is a vast area of study. In this article, however, we focus on these themes: history and current situation, aims, programme structure, student admission and graduate employability. There are also other themes such as teacher education, faculty management, internationalisation, international students/academics, gender, teaching, and learning outcomes, and we call for further comparative works focusing on these issues, but the themes the article cover seem enough to offer a wider view of higher religious education in Malaysia and Turkey in one article.

This is a qualitative, literature-based study, employing document analysis. Published and online official documents in Turkish and Malay and English have been used as well as academic studies and internet sources in order to examine and present history, current situation, aims, programme structure, student admission and graduate employability in higher religious education in both countries. There are different models for comparative study of education. Due to space limitations, the article follows one of comparative study models, recommended by Bray et al.¹² In this model there are two locations and one main theme which is higher religious education. This main theme has sub-themes: history and current situation, aims, programme structure, student admission and graduate employability. In each theme, related information about higher religious education in Malaysia and Turkey is presented in sequence. In the last part of the article, there is an exploration of differences and similarities and the discussion of important comparative points such as the problem of graduate employability, diversity of programmes and the impact of politics on higher religious education.

1. Historical Background and Current Situation

Historically, many Malay students have pursued further education in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, due to a lack of Islamic education programmes offered by Malaysian institutes of higher education.¹³ However, with the increase of Islamic religious

⁶ <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp?COUNTRY=3460>

⁷ <https://interaktif.konda.com.tr/turkiye-100-kisi-olsaydi>

⁸ Bilal Yorulmaz, “Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi Alanında Yapılan Lisansüstü Çalışmalar Hakkında Genel Bir Değerlendirme,” *Marmara Üniversitesi Öneri Dergisi* 12/46 (2016), 53; Adem Güneş, “Akademik Dergilerde Yayınlanan Din Eğitimi Konulu Makalelerin Bibliyometrik Analizi (1925-2020),” *Türkiye Din Eğitimi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 12 (2021), 213.

⁹ Ahmet Turan Arslan, “Malezya’da Din Eğitimi ve Arapça Öğretimi,” *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13-14-15 (1997), 27-52.

¹⁰ George Z. F. Bereday, *Comparative Method in Education* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 6.

¹¹ George Z. F. Bereday, “Sir Michael Sadler’s ‘Study of Foreign Systems of Education,’” *Comparative Education Review* 7/3 (1964), 310.

¹² Mark Bray et al., “Different Models, Different Emphases, Different Insights,” *Comparative Education Research: Approaches and Methods*, ed. Mark Bray et al. (London: Springer, 2014), 418.

¹³ Rosnani Hashim, “The Reformation of Muslim Education in Malaysia: Ensuring Relevance and Overcoming Challenges (Paper Presented at International Symposium of Imam-Hatip (Vocational Religious) Schools in Their Centennial Anniversary, November 23-24, 2013 Istanbul, Turkey)” (2013), 9.

secondary schools around 1950s, along with the return of Malay graduates from the Middle East who could serve as lecturers, higher Islamic education had been gradually established.¹⁴ According to Abu Bakar, higher Islamic education in Malaysia can be presented in three phases: *religious*, *linguistic*, and *pragmatic and liberal*. Each phase has its particular as well as common characteristics, which are educational and national. It seems that this presentation captures well the development of higher religious education in post-colonisation period in Malaysia, as it includes the consideration of national and educational factors. The first phase, which is called *religious* phase,¹⁵ started with the establishment of Malaya Islamic College (*KIM: Kolej Islam Malaya*) which began to offer Islamic education programmes in 1955,¹⁶ even before the establishment of Malaysia. However, KIM was not a university. The emergence of higher religious education at the university level dates back to 1959, when the first Islamic education department in Malaysia, which was Islamic Studies Department (*JPI: Jabatan Pengajian Islam*), was established at the University of Malaya (*UM: Universiti Malaya*) under the Faculty of Art and Social Sciences, as a result of a formal relationship between KIM and UM.¹⁷ This department was later transformed into an academy within the university, which led to the establishment of the Academy of Islamic Studies (*API: Akademi Pengajian Islam*) in 1996.

Moreover, in 1970, the National University of Malaysia (*UKM: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*) established its first Faculty of Islamic Studies (*FPI: Fakulti Pengajian Islam*).¹⁸ The establishment of FPI marked the second phase of the history of higher Islamic education in Malaysia namely the *linguistic* phase.¹⁹ This is because, UKM was the first university in Malaysia in which the Malay language was the medium of instruction. As Malaysia was colonized by British for more than 100 years, the use of Malay language was not common at the educational institutions. Therefore, the introduction of Malay language as the medium of instruction at a higher education institution marked an important step of the reconstruction of national identity and provided an opportunity to study Islam in their own language for the Malays.

The third phase of history of higher Islamic education in Malaysia namely the *pragmatic and liberal* phase started in 1980's when the International Islamic University Malaysia (*UIAM: Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia*) was established in 1983. The university made English language as the most important medium of instruction to attract international students and lecturers to join the university.²⁰ In addition to public universities, established by the federal government, Islamic colleges and institutes have been also established by the regional state governments, which offer bachelor's degrees in Islamic education, as well as diploma and certificate programmes.

The development of higher Islamic education in Malaysia was finally further strengthened by the introduction of *Islamic civilization* courses in all Malaysian public and private institutions of higher learning. The implementation has eventually led to Islamic education also being taught indirectly in all institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.²¹

While higher religious education has been steadily developed in Malaysia, a more intermittent development took place in Turkey. The history of higher religious education in Turkey can be tentatively presented in four phases. The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. One of the first laws introduced focussed on education. In 1924, the Unification of Education Act placed all education institutions, public and private alike, under the control of the Ministry of Education. Soon all madrasas were abolished, and a new theology faculty (*ilahiyat fakültesi*) was established at Dar-al Funun in 1924.²² This was the first phase of higher religious education in Turkey, when only one faculty offered higher religious education.²³ The theology faculty was abolished in 1933, when Dar-al Funun was reformed and became Istanbul University.²⁴ In 1949, after 16 years, a new theology faculty was established, this time, at Ankara University.²⁵ In 1959, Higher Islamic Institute in Istanbul was established under the auspices of the Ministry of

¹⁴ Abdul Halim Hj Mat Diah, *Pendidikan Islam Di Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, 1989), 19.

¹⁵ Ibrahim Abu Bakar, "A History of Islamic Studies in Malaysia," *Oriente Moderno* 19/2 (2000), 371-393.

¹⁶ Mat Diah, *Pendidikan Islam Di Malaysia*, 19.

¹⁷ Mazlan Ibrahim - Kamarudin Salleh, *Islam Pasca Kemerdekaan* (Shah Alam: Karisma Publication, 2008).

¹⁸ Abdul Aziz Abdullah et al., "Snapshot on the Career and Employability of Islamic Studies Graduates in Malaysia," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 9/11 (2019), 864-879.

¹⁹ Abu Bakar, "A History of Islamic Studies in Malaysia."

²⁰ Abu Bakar, "A History of Islamic Studies in Malaysia."

²¹ Mat Diah, *Pendidikan Islam Di Malaysia*, 19.

²² Nevzat Yaşar Aşikoğlu, "Yüksek Öğretimde Din Eğitimi ve Öğretimi," *Din Eğitimi El Kitabı*, ed. Recai Doğan - Remziye Ege (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2012), 215-231.

²³ Zeki Salih Zengin, *Medreseden Darülfünuna Türkiye'de Yüksek Din Eğitimi* (İstanbul: Çamlıca Yayınları, 2011), 125.

²⁴ Bayramali Nazıroğlu, "İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları," *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları*, ed. Mustafa Köylü (İstanbul: Dem, 2018), 172.

²⁵ Nazıroğlu, "İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları," 173.

National Education.²⁶ This marked a new phase of higher religious education in Turkey, which was strengthened with the establishment of a new faculty, the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, in 1971 at Atatürk University.²⁷ The new phase saw diversity in terms of names, programmes, courses and student admission in higher religious education in Turkey, though some argued that these institutes and faculties were not much different from each other.²⁸

The third phase started in 1983 when seven Higher Islamic Institutes and Islamic Sciences Faculty were transformed into theology faculties, offering identical programmes, and admitting Imam-Hatip as well as other secondary school graduates.²⁹ The number of theology faculties increased from 8 to 24 during the 1990s. Some of the theology faculties began to offer *Primary Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge Teaching Programme (İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretimi Programı)* along with *Theology Programme (İlahiyat Programı)* in 1998.³⁰ It means that the theology faculties started to offer two different programmes. One was designed to raise religious education teachers for work as Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge teachers at primary and lower secondary schools. The other programme was intended as a general theology programme, graduates of which could become religious functionaries, but who needed to attend a one-and-a-half-year post-graduate teacher education programme to become religious education teachers at upper secondary schools and Imam-Hatip schools.³¹

In 2006, *Primary Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge Teaching Programme* was transferred to the education faculties,³² which left the theology faculties offering only one programme, i.e., the Theology Programme. However, in 2012, the Council of Higher Education transferred this programme back to the theology faculties³³ and then subsequently abolished it altogether in 2014, by not admitting new students to this programme.³⁴

The fourth phase in higher religious education in Turkey started in 2010, when new faculties with a different name were opened. In 2010, the Council of Higher Education started to name new faculties Islamic sciences (*İslami ilimler*) instead of theology (*ilahiyat*), which created a diversity in higher religious education in terms of name, if not in terms of programmes, as the theology and Islamic sciences faculties’ programmes are not significantly different.³⁵ Moreover, in 2013, the Council of Higher Education proposed that all theology faculties would be named *Islamic sciences* faculties and that courses related to philosophy would be reduced.³⁶ However, due to criticisms, the Council abandoned the proposal, but the new faculties established since then have, for the most part, been named Islamic sciences. More courses related to the Quran were added to both the programmes of theology and Islamic Sciences faculties by the Council in 2015.³⁷

Currently in Malaysia, there are 20 public universities,³⁸ 12 of which offer religious education programmes. Higher religious education in Malaysia are officially called *Islamic Studies* by the Islamic Studies Programme Standards, published by Malaysian Qualifications Agency.³⁹ Since the universities has some degree of autonomy, the name of the faculties, departments and programmes related to Islamic Studies differ, but they have generally been coined by using several keywords related to the field of Islamic Studies, as mentioned in the Islamic Studies Programme Standards.⁴⁰

Some of the programmes are offered by a faculty or academy specifically established to offer higher Islamic education, such as the Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya,⁴¹ but some programmes are offered by generic faculties. These include the Bachelor of Education (Islamic Studies) which is offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Technology Malaysia (*UTM: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*).⁴²

²⁶ Halit Ev, “Yükseköğretimde Din Eğitimi,” *Din Eğitimi*, ed. Mustafa Köylü - Nurullah Altaş (İstanbul: Ensar, 2017), 275.

²⁷ Ev, “Yükseköğretimde Din Eğitimi,” 278.

²⁸ İsmail Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiyesi’nde Bir Mesele Olarak İslâm 2* (İstanbul: Dergah, 2017), 375.

²⁹ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 173.

³⁰ Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı, *Türk Yükseköğretiminin Bugünkü Durumu* (Ankara: Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı, 1997).

³¹ Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı, *Türk Yükseköğretiminin Bugünkü Durumu*.

³² Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı, *Öğretmen Yetiştirme ve Eğitim Fakülteleri (1982-2007)* (Ankara: Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı, 2007), 66.

³³ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 180.

³⁴ Muhammet Şevki Aydın, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde Din Eğitimi Öğretmeni Yetiştirme ve İstihdamı* (İstanbul: Dem, 2016), 374.

³⁵ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 187.

³⁶ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 178.

³⁷ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 178.

³⁸ Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi, “Senarai Institusi/Agensi” (2022).

³⁹ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies* (Petaling Jaya: Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2013).

⁴⁰ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies*.

⁴¹ <https://apium.um.edu.my>

⁴² <https://humanities.utm.my/programmes/undergraduate/>

In Turkey, there are 127 public universities; more than 100 offer higher religious education.⁴³ As opposed to Malaysia, higher religious education are offered by the faculties specifically established for higher religious education, but in recent years, some multi-disciplinary programmes have emerged. For example, the Islamic Economics and Finance (*İslam Ekonomisi ve Finansı*) 4-year undergraduate (*lisans*) programme is offered by Political Science Department at Sakarya University as of 2021-2022.⁴⁴ The names used by the faculties related to higher religious education are few in Turkey, as compared to Malaysia. The faculties are called either theology (*ilahiyat*) or Islamic sciences (*İslami ilimler*).

2. Aims

In Malaysia, the aims of higher Islamic Studies are defined and determined by the Islamic Studies Programme Standards, which states that “the general aims of Islamic Studies programmes” are as follows:

1. To equip learners with true knowledge of Islam in both theory and practice according to the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah;
2. To ensure that learners are committed to Islamic moral, ethical and spiritual values; and
3. To equip learners with competencies relevant to contemporary times and global environment.⁴⁵

The Standards also state that when universities (and other higher education providers) offer Islamic Studies programmes, they “should subscribe to the ultimate aim of Islamic education” which is, according to the Standards, “to nurture learners to become committed Muslims who practice Islam as the true way of life, observing not only its rituals but also its code of moral conduct and spiritual piety”.⁴⁶ The aim of higher Islamic education is thus clearly defined by a national agency. The twin emphases on *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah* and *practising Islam* are quite striking, and indicate that the higher Islamic education in Malaysia officially aim at raising practicing and God-conscious Muslims who are officially expected to follow Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah branch of Islam. The courses and the teaching methods in these programmes, therefore, must follow this aim.⁴⁷

In Turkey, no national agency, currently, defines and determines the aims of higher religious education. The Unification of Education Act once defined the aim of theology faculty as raising “higher religious experts” (*yüksek diniyat mütehasısları*)⁴⁸, which was broad and to some extent vague and it did not include any reference to Islam. Currently in Turkey, each theology and Islamic sciences faculties declare their own aims, missions and visions. When the official statements of theology and Islamic sciences faculties are investigated, it emerges that they include references to concepts such as “knowledge, science, problem solving, critical thinking, interpretation, lifelong learning, tolerance, respect, virtue, openness to innovation and universality”.⁴⁹ According to Nazıroğlu these faculties have adopted these concepts, which are produced by “the modern (Western) world” to justify their existence in a secular university, but he argued that “it is very difficult to say that education and research activity [in these faculties] are carried out in the same direction”.⁵⁰ In other words, there has been a mismatch between the official statements and the actual teaching in these faculties.

However, with the establishment of Islamic sciences faculties there has been a tendency in official statements to highlight Islam and Islamic values.⁵¹ For example, one faculty states that, among others, its aim is to raise a “generation” who “embraces, absorbs and lives Islamic consciousness and awareness at the personal level”, as well as including references such as “modern, democracy, human rights and freedom of belief”.⁵²

The problem here is that as there is no national agency that defines and determines the aims of these faculties, according to Osmanoğlu, the aims, missions and visions of theology and Islamic sciences faculties remain *patchy* (*yamalı bohça*) and *vague* (*muğlak*).⁵³ However, in recent years some theology and Islamic sciences faculties have started accreditation process, which is

⁴³ Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı, “Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi” (2022).

⁴⁴ <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/lisans-bolum.php?b=97171>

⁴⁵ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies*, 11.

⁴⁶ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies*, 38.

⁴⁷ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies*, 38.

⁴⁸ Aydın, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde Din Eğitimi Öğretmeni Yetiştirme ve İstihdamı*, 62.

⁴⁹ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 183.

⁵⁰ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 183.

⁵¹ Osmanoğlu, *Yüksek Din Öğretimi Kurumlarının Mezun Tasavvuru*, 25.

⁵² <https://iif.aksaray.edu.tr/misyon--vizyon>

⁵³ Osmanoğlu, *Yüksek Din Öğretimi Kurumlarının Mezun Tasavvuru*, 29, 33.

currently overseen by the Islamic Sciences Accreditation Agency (IAA: *İlahiyat Akreditasyon Ajansı*).⁵⁴ The agency has not defined the aims, missions and visions of these faculties but expects the faculties to follow the programme outcomes it has defined according to National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey (*Türkiye Yükseköğretim Yeterlilikler Çerçevesi*).⁵⁵ This in turn might help the theology and Islamic sciences faculties to have more common and unified aims in the future. However, this accreditation process is currently voluntary in Turkey, which means that some faculties may choose not to apply to it, while in Malaysia, “the programme standards is compulsory to be complied with in conducting [Islamic Studies] programmes”,⁵⁶ which means that all Islamic Studies programmes in Malaysia must follow the programme standards, which defines the aims and programme outcomes of such programmes.

In Turkey, higher religious education officially do not follow any branch of Islam, but the practice might be much more complex. On the one hand, it can be safely assumed that due to historical and demographic reasons, *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah*, and especially its Hanafi branch, is the default position in many of the courses from *fiqh* to hadith, and from tafsir to history of madhabs. On the other hand, in some cases, teaching in theology and Islamic sciences faculties is accommodative and very broad, partly because of the influence of faculty members, who might have different views regarding Islam and especially pluralism within Islam. This complexity in practice sometimes leads to criticisms from conflicting sides: while some accuse theology faculties of raising *Sunni/Hanafi* teachers and imams⁵⁷, others warn their fellow *Ahl al-Sunnah* brothers against sending their children to theology faculties because of, among other issues, *madhablesness* (*mezhepsizlik*) of some academics at these faculties.⁵⁸

3. Programme Structure

In Malaysia, each university has its own programme structure, but higher Islamic education are all required to follow the general framework defined by the Islamic Studies Programme Standards. According to the Standards, students should complete minimum 120 credits to earn a bachelor’s degree in higher Islamic Studies. Minimum 30 credits should be allocated to Islamic Studies Fundamental courses, which are the Islamic creed, tafsir, hadith, Arabic language, *fiqh*, *tasawwuf*, Quranic recitation and memorisation, life of Prophet Muhammad, and da’wah.⁵⁹ Moreover, at least 42 credits must be devoted major fields of Islamic Studies, which are defined as 1) Usul al-Din, 2) Shari’ah, 3) History and Civilization, 4) Arabic Language and 5) Applied Sciences.⁶⁰

Islamic Studies can be organised in different ways: as a single major; a single major with specialization, a double major (Islamic Studies can be the first major or the second major) and a major with a minor (Islamic Studies can be the major or the minor).⁶¹ When we look at the Islamic Studies programmes offered by the public universities in Malaysia, it appears that the programmes are diverse and to some extent complex. In order to better understand it, we can look at the programmes offered by the University of Malaya. This university has an academy devoted to Islamic education, which is called the Academy of Islamic Studies. It currently offers 8 bachelor’s Islamic Studies programmes, namely Bachelor of Al-Quran and Al-Hadith, Bachelor of Usuluddin, Bachelor of Shariah, Bachelor of Muamalat Management, Bachelor of Shariah and Law, Bachelor of Islamic Education (Islamic Studies), Bachelor of Islamic Education (Quranic Studies), and Bachelor of Islamic Studies and Science.⁶²

As can be seen, there is not just a single undergraduate programme for Islamic Studies. Even though all these programmes offer Islamic Studies Fundamental courses (30 credits), other credits are devoted to courses related to the major or the specialisation of the programmes. Some of the programmes are designed as a single major (e.g., Bachelor of *Muamalat* Management). Some of them are designed as a major with a specialisation. For example, in Bachelor of Islamic Education (Quranic Studies) students specialise in teaching courses related to al-Qur’an. Some of the programmes are double major (e.g., Bachelor of Shariah and Law, and Bachelor of Islamic Studies and Science), which means that students must complete minimum 162 credits, with the additional major comprising at least 60 credits.⁶³ Graduates of Bachelor of Shariah and Law, then, can work as Shariah lawyers.

⁵⁴ <https://iaa.org.tr/en/>

⁵⁵ <https://iaa.org.tr/belgeler/liste/iaa-lisans-programlari-degerlendirme-olcutleri-turkce/>

⁵⁶ <https://www2.mqa.gov.my/qad/v2/types3new.cfm>

⁵⁷ This issue was raised in European Court of Human Rights judgements on RE in Turkey, see *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey* (Application no. 1448/04) and *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey* (Application no. 21163/11).

⁵⁸ <https://www.ensonhaber.com/gundem/cubbeli-ahmet-cocuklarinizi-imam-hatip-ve-ilahiyata-gondermeyin>

⁵⁹ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies*, 67.

⁶⁰ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies*.

⁶¹ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies*.

⁶² Akademi Pengajian Islam Universiti Malaya, *Struktur Program Sesi Akademik 2021/2022* (Kuala Lumpur: Bahagian Ijazah Dasar APIUM, 2021).

⁶³ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Islamic Studies*, 42–43.

In Turkey, students must complete 240 ECTS credits to gain a bachelor's degree. Compared to Malaysia's 120 credits, this seems an important difference. However, the meaning of *credit* in Malaysia and Turkey is slightly different. In Malaysia, for each credit, students are expected to spend 40 hours of work.⁶⁴ In Turkey, following European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), one credit corresponds to 25 or 30 hours of work.⁶⁵ This means that approximately 4 credits in Turkey corresponds to 3 credits in Malaysia.

In Turkey, basically, each theology/Islamic sciences faculty basically offers just one programme: theology faculties offer a Theology Programme and Islamic sciences faculties offers an Islamic Sciences Programme. There is not substantial difference between these two programmes. Moreover, there is no difference between these programmes in terms of student admission and graduate employability, i.e., both graduates can work in the same vocations without any further qualification. However, there is a difference in terms of academic structure between these faculties. In both faculties, there are three departments: Basic Islamic Sciences, Philosophy and Religious Sciences and Islamic History and Arts. The difference occurs between the sub-departments. For example, in theology faculties there are generally eight sub-departments within Philosophy and Religious Sciences Department: Religious Education, Philosophy of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, History of Religions, History of Philosophy, Islamic Philosophy and Logic. This is typically reduced to two sub-departments in Islamic sciences faculties: Islamic Philosophy and Religious Sciences. Reducing it to two sub-departments in the faculty of Islamic sciences is seen as an attempt to reduce the influence of philosophy and religious sciences on Islamic sciences faculties in academic circles. However, even though there are some differences in academic structure, the programmes of both faculties are almost the same.

4. Student Admission

In Malaysia, there is not a university entrance examination at the end of secondary school. Rather, students should get post-secondary education (also known as pre-university education) to enter university and there are different post-secondary systems.⁶⁶ One of them is the Malaysian Higher School Certificate (*STPM: Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia*). In this system, students take General Studies (*Pengajian Am*) and at least four other subjects, and examinations are divided into three semesters. For these four subjects, students can choose Islamic subjects, such as Islamic Jurisprudence (*Syariah*), Islamic Theology (*Usuluddin*) and Arabic Language (*Bahasa Arab*).⁶⁷

Another system is Malaysian Higher Religious Certificate (*STAM: Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia*), which is issued by the Ministry of Education. This system fully utilises Arabic as the medium of instruction in the examination. The system is aimed at testing students at religious schools before admission to the al-Azhar University of Egypt and to Islamic education at Malaysian higher education institutions.⁶⁸

After the completion of post-secondary education/examination, students can apply to undergraduate programmes through the UPUOnline which is an online application portal for admission to public universities under the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, except for the foundation programmes' students who have already applied through the UPUOnline after they completed their secondary education. Each student has the opportunity to list down 12 options of academic programmes. Once the online form is submitted, the form is forwarded to universities which are the providers of the academic programmes based on the ranking of the options.⁶⁹ Each university will then decide whether to accept or reject the application based on the applicant's qualifications. The selection criteria adopted by the university do not only look at the academic background, but also at the co-curricular background of the applicant, as well as other related aspects.

There are general and programme-specific requirements, as well as grade-point minimums for the admission to undergraduate programmes. Moreover, because there are different types of post-secondary education, the requirements also depend on the type of the post-secondary education the applicant obtained. For example, for the admission to the Islamic Studies undergraduate programmes at the Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, the general requirements for STPM are as follows:

Passed STPM with a minimum CGPA of 3.00; and

Obtained at least Grade B at STPM level in *Syariah/Usuluddin* subjects; and

⁶⁴ Malaysian Qualifications Agency, *Programme Standards: Education* (Petaling Jaya: Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2016), 84.

⁶⁵ European Commission, "ECTS Users' Guide" (2015), 77.

⁶⁶ For information about different options, see <https://www.malaysia.gov.my/portal/subcategory/105>

⁶⁷ <https://www.mpm.edu.my/en/soalan-lazim/soalan-lazim-stpm/pemilihan-matapelajaran>

⁶⁸ <https://www.malaysia.gov.my/portal/subcategory/138>

⁶⁹ <https://upu.mohe.gov.my>

Obtained at least Grade B at STPM level in Arabic; and

Passed Mathematics at SPM level; and

Obtained at least Level 2 (Band 2) in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET); and

Passed the Malaysian Educators Selection Inventory (MEdSI) test and interview.⁷⁰

For STAM graduate applicants, the requirements are as follows:

Obtained at least the rank of *Jayyid Jiddan* at the STAM level; and

Obtained at least Grade B at SPM level in any two (2) of the following subjects: Arabic/Al-Lughah al-‘Arabiah al-Mu’asirah, Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah Education/Maharat al-Quran /Al-Syariah, Syari’ah Islamiah Education/Hifz al-Quran/Usul al-Din, Tasawwur Islam; and

Passed Mathematics at SPM level; and

Obtained at least Level 2 (Band 2) in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET); and

Passed the Malaysian Educators Selection Inventory (MEdSI) test and interview.⁷¹

As can be seen there is an emphasis on four subjects: Arabic, Islamic subjects, English and Mathematics. From these requirements, it is understood that students should have solid background in Arabic and Islamic subjects to be able to be admitted to higher Islamic education programmes, as well as in English and Mathematics as both subjects are believed to indicate the ability of the applicant to understand English references and to possess good quality of thinking and numerical calculating.

Unlike Malaysia, students in Turkey must take the national university entrance examination to enrol at a university. The current system has two parts: Core Proficiency Test (*TYT: Temel Yeterlilik Testi*) and Advanced Proficiency Test (*AYT: Alan Yeterlilik Testi*).

In these two examinations, there are three different routes: social science (*sözel*), which include courses such as Turkish, History, Geography, Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge and Philosophy, science (*sayısal*), which include courses such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology, and equal weight (*eşit ağırlık*), which focuses on especially Turkish and Mathematics. Students who want to apply to higher religious education programmes should take the social science route. However, in these exams there are limited number of questions related to religious education. There are only five questions (out of 120 questions in total) related to Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge in TYT and 6 questions (out of 80 in social science route) in AYT.⁷² There is no question about Arabic at all in these exams.

This means that students do not have to have any solid background in religious education or Arabic to apply to higher religious education. Even though most students who enrol at higher religious education come from Imam-Hatip schools which provide students with a background in Islamic education and Arabic, and there is a compulsory Religious Culture and Ethics course in ordinary state schools, the lack of any meaningful number of questions about religious education in university exams mean that students focus more on subjects which have more questions in the national exams and show less interest in religious subjects at ordinary schools,⁷³ and even at Imam-Hatip schools.⁷⁴

In short, the most important difference in terms of student admission is that Islamic education programmes in Malaysia require students to have a solid background in Islamic education, Arabic and English, while in Turkey none of them seems essential, as long as students score enough points in other subjects such as Turkish and History at the university entrance exams.

5. Graduate Employability

As there are different Islamic Studies programmes in Malaysia, there are also different career opportunities. Based on the Academy of Islamic Studies website, each program has determined career opportunities for their graduates.⁷⁵ The list of career opportunities is as follows:

Graduates of Bachelor of Muamalat Management can work as banking executive or financial advisor, as most banks or insurance companies in Malaysia are providing shariah-compliance products and services. Graduates of Bachelor of Islamic Education can work as Islamic religious education teacher at public/government schools. Moreover, graduates can also work as

⁷⁰ <https://apium.um.edu.my/bachelor-of-islamic-education-islamic-studies>

⁷¹ <https://apium.um.edu.my/bachelor-of-islamic-education-islamic-studies>

⁷² ÖSYM Ölçme Seçme ve Yerleştirme Merkezi Başkanlığı, 2021 Yükseköğretim Kurumları Sınavı (YKS) Kılavuzu (Ankara: ÖSYM, 2021), 48.

⁷³ see Mahmut Zengin - Abdurrahman Hendek, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretmenlerine Göre Din Dersleri: Statü, Programlar ve Çoğulculuk* (İstanbul: Dem, 2021).

⁷⁴ İbrahim Aşlamacı, *Öğrenci ve Öğretmenlerine Göre İmam-Hatip Liseleri: Profiller, Algılar, Memnuniyet, Aidiyet* (İstanbul: Dem, 2017), 154.

⁷⁵ <https://apium.um.edu.my>

Islamic religious teacher at private/community religious schools. Graduates of different programmes can work as religious officer, who work in the field of *da'wah* management/training/research, imam, khatib, law enforcement, mosque management and maintenance, *Baitulmal* management, halal management.⁷⁶ Graduates of Bachelor of Islamic Studies and Science can work as science officer, who work at government agencies or institutes under the Ministry of Health Malaysia and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation Malaysia.⁷⁷ Graduates of Bachelor of Shariah and Law can work as Shariah lawyer, who work in cases where the Shariah Court has jurisdiction, such as personal law as well as Islamic family law.⁷⁸ They can also work as Shariah officer, who are responsible for operating the Shariah Court at the district level, acting as a Shariah Subordinate Court Judge, preparing the ground of judgment of appeal cases, making legal reports for publication in the Shariah Law Journal and confirming the application certificate for division of estate under the field prescribed power.⁷⁹

In 2011, there was a total of 71,565 arts and social sciences graduates produced by public universities in Malaysia, and 1,804 of them were graduated from Islamic Studies programmes. Most of the graduates (62.8%) worked in the field of education.⁸⁰ This finding was in line with the initial study at the Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya in 2011 which also found that the teacher employment is one the highest field of employment among graduates at 62.4%. Other fields, including banking and finance, information and communication technology, marketing, graphic design, the judiciary, and research officer were around 17.3%.⁸¹

As there are different higher Islamic Studies programmes in Malaysia and they offer different employment opportunities, not all programmes' graduates have the opportunity to work in their areas of academic qualification. In 2016, only 40% of higher Islamic Studies graduates from Islamic Science University of Malaysia (*USIM: Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia*) have the opportunity to work in their area of academic qualification while the other 60% are not as fortunate, as well as the graduates from Sultan Zainal Abidin University (*UniSZA: Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin*) in which 36-50% were employed in areas unrelated to their academic qualification. On the other hand, those from USIM who hold a bachelor's in education for Islamic Studies obtained 100% employability.⁸²

As graduate employability already became the main criteria of the *quality* of higher education system,⁸³ this pressing issue in Malaysia has also made the higher Islamic Studies providers to focus more on providing students with the new emerging soft skills.⁸⁴ Even though the orientation of Islamic Studies programmes in Malaysia has been moving to integrate between Islamic knowledge and professional knowledge like Shariah and Law and Islamic Studies and Science,⁸⁵ as well as Quranic Studies with Multimedia and Sunnah Studies with Information Management,⁸⁶ it is insufficient to fulfil the recent demand of the employers who require their employees to acquire technical and digital competencies as well as personal and humanistic soft skills.⁸⁷ In order to maintain the continuity of higher Islamic Studies programmes, it is crucial for the programmes' providers to maintain the rate of employability of their graduates as the higher rate of the graduate employability, the higher number of student quota will be given to the programmes. In this regard, the annual graduate tracer study provided by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia will be more helpful to learn the rate of graduate employability of every programme as it is requested for graduates to respond to the study if they want to attend their convocation ceremonies and receive their scrolls.⁸⁸

In Turkey, the vast majority of the theology/Islamic sciences graduates have been employed as either religious functionaries, such as Imams and Qur'an teachers under the auspices of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, or as religious education teachers in state or private schools under the control of the Ministry of National Education. Some graduates stay in higher education for further study to become academics in the faculties.

⁷⁶ <https://www.spa.gov.my/spa/laman-utama/gaji-syarat-lantikan-deskripsi-tugas/ijazah-sarjana-phd/pegawai-hal-ehwal-islam-gred-s41>

⁷⁷ <https://www.spa.gov.my/spa/laman-utama/gaji-syarat-lantikan-deskripsi-tugas/ijazah-sarjana-phd/pegawai-sains-gred-c41>

⁷⁸ <http://www.peguamsyariefaa.com.my/peguam-syarie-malaysia-peranannya/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.spa.gov.my/spa/laman-utama/gaji-syarat-lantikan-deskripsi-tugas/ijazah-sarjana-phd/pegawai-syariah-gred-ls41>

⁸⁰ Mohd Adha Mohd Zain, "Kebolehpasaran Graduan Lepas Pengajian Islam" (2011).

⁸¹ Ruzman Md. Noor - Rahimin Affandi Abd. Rahim, "Bagaimana Program Pengajian Islam Mapu Membekalkan Graduan Yang Mempunyai Kebolehpasaran: Pendekatan Universiti Malaysia" (2011).

⁸² Abdullah et al., "Snapshot on the Career and Employability of Islamic Studies Graduates in Malaysia."

⁸³ Shukran Abdul Rahman et al., "Ideologies and Structures of Higer Learning Institution Model: Reconstructing the Worldview of Higher Education," *Journal of Islamic Educational Research* 2/2 (2017), 22-35.

⁸⁴ Abdullah et al., "Snapshot on the Career and Employability of Islamic Studies Graduates in Malaysia."

⁸⁵ <https://apium.um.edu.my>

⁸⁶ <https://www.usim.edu.my>

⁸⁷ <https://www.bharian.com.my/bisnes/lain-lain/2021/11/884591/majikan-pilih-pekerja-ada-kemahiran-teknikal-sahsiah>

⁸⁸ <http://graduan.mohe.gov.my/mainpage2.html>

The graduates might be also employed in other areas, such as in Islamic financial sector or in local and national administrations, but the job opportunities in these sectors seem marginal and irregular in comparison to the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of National Education which remain the largest employers of the graduates of these faculties.

Regarding higher religious education graduate employability, there seem two recurring problems in Turkey. The first one is how theology/Islamic sciences faculties can raise well-equipped graduates who will work in very different vocations with almost identical programmes.⁸⁹ There is a significant difference not only between the Ministry of National Education and the Presidency of Religious Affairs vocations, but also within them. For example, within Religious Affairs, the graduates can become imam, Qur’an courses teacher (for adults), Qur’an courses teacher (for children aged 4-6), religious counsellor (for families, orphanages, hospitals and prisons). Within the Ministry of National Education, they can become specialist teachers at Imam-Hatip schools, where they teach courses from hadith to tafsir; or they can become Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge (RCEK) teacher who teach compulsory RCEK which is officially a supra-denominational course,⁹⁰ as well as optional religious courses. In other words, the theology/Islamic sciences faculties should be producing graduates who can work in very distinct vocations.

The second one is related to the number of theology/Islamic sciences faculties and their graduates in recent years. Currently there are more than 100 theology/Islamic sciences faculties. According to the official statistics there are about 115.000 students enrolled in these faculties (as of 2021-2022) and about 27.000 of them are new admissions.⁹¹ This means that theology/Islamic sciences faculties produce around 25,000 graduates every year. However, the Ministry of National Education and the Presidency of Religious Affairs combined cannot employ all these graduates.⁹² Altaş, therefore, argues that the theology/Islamic sciences graduates can therefore form “an army of unskilled [and] unemployed” workforce in the near future.⁹³

Discussion

The history of higher religious education in Malaysia and Turkey shows that its development in Turkey has been intermittent and slow in the first half of the twentieth century. There was even a period when there was no higher religious education programme (between 1933 and 1949). Their numbers increased in the beginning of 1990s, but their quotas were reduced significantly during the February 28th post-modern coup period.⁹⁴ Since 2010, however, the number and quotas of higher religious education faculties soared dramatically. There are currently more than 100 theology and Islamic sciences faculties with more than 115,000 students.⁹⁵ This shows that the development of higher religious education has been closely related to the politics of religion in Turkey, which means that the major political changes have also had an impact on higher religious education. In contrast, the development of higher religious education has been steadier in Malaysia. Even though the politics of religion and electoral calculations of political parties have also influenced religious education, including higher Islamic education in Malaysia,⁹⁶ this has not at least resulted in their closures or their dramatic decreases.

Currently, higher religious education is thriving in both countries, but more rapidly in Turkey than Malaysia. Moreover, in Malaysia, *Islamic and Asian Civilisations* course, which has been restructured in 2019 to a new course named *Appreciation of Ethics and Civilizations*, is compulsory for all undergraduate students.⁹⁷ In Turkey there is no compulsory course related to religion or Islam at the university level, therefore this issue can be discussed widely, taking the similar examples in other countries, as well as the views of academics and students into account.

Regarding the aims of higher religious education, there are direct references to Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah and raising practising Muslims in Malaysia, where the aims and programme outcomes of higher Islamic education are determined by a national agency. Historically, the official mission statements of theology faculties were more inclined towards modern concepts in Turkey, partly to legitimise the place of theology in a secular university of a secular country. However, in recent years, there has been a tendency especially among Islamic sciences faculties towards overtly Islamic values and concepts. Due to the lack of a national agency which defines the aims of theology/Islamic sciences faculties, the official mission and vision statements seem *patchy* and

⁸⁹ Aydın, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde Din Eğitimi Öğretmeni Yetiştirme ve İstihdamı*, 487.

⁹⁰ MEB, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı (İlkokul 4 ve Ortaokul 5, 6, 7, 8. Sınıflar)* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018).

⁹¹ Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı, “Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi” (2022).

⁹² Nurullah Altaş, *Din Eğitimi* (Ankara: Nobel, 2022), 389.

⁹³ Altaş, *Din Eğitimi*, 389.

⁹⁴ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 177.

⁹⁵ Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı, “Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi” (2022).

⁹⁶ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, “Islamic Education in Malaysia,” *Handbook of Islamic Education*, ed. Holger Daun - Reza Arjmand (Dordrecht: Springer, 2018), 1-17.

⁹⁷ <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2019/09/611033/dua-kursus-wajib-baharu-ua>

vague.⁹⁸ According to Nazıroğlu and Ev, theology faculties in Turkey, therefore, have an “aim” problem.⁹⁹ However, the accreditation process in recent years might lead the theology and Islamic sciences faculties to adopt more common and unified aims and programme outcomes, even though the accreditation is currently a voluntary process.

In Turkey, higher religious education officially does not adopt any branch of Islam, as opposed to Malaysia, which might be the result of the secular character of the Republic of Turkey.¹⁰⁰ However, this might be an opportunity for these faculties to be more accommodative and integrative of different understandings of Islam. As modern societies are marked by plurality and diversity,¹⁰¹ higher religious education which does not adopt any branch of religion might be more likely to meet the needs of modern plural societies.

A major difference between Malaysia and Turkey in terms of higher religious education is that there are different Islamic Studies programmes in Malaysia, which was highlighted in the beginning of the article. It seems that in this way, Malaysia has sought to integrate Islamic knowledge/commitment with professional/vocational knowledge. This has resulted in the introduction of cross-disciplinary programmes and specializations such as Shariah and Law, Islamic Studies and Science, Quranic Studies with Multimedia, Sunnah Studies with Information Management, Islamic Defence Management and Security, Muamalat Management, Shariah and Economics, Islamic Governance, Da’wah and Human Development, and so on. The graduates of these programmes, in turn, can work in very different vocations from security to finance and from judiciary to education and religious services.

According to Altaş, the future of theology faculties lies in their transformation towards multi- and inter-disciplinary programmes, as this is important for the sustainability of theology faculties in modern era.¹⁰² However, this is currently lacking in Turkey, as the theology and Islamic sciences faculties only offer a single programme. The establishment of Islamic finance institutes and recently undergraduate degrees can be a move in this direction, but the relationship between theology/Islamic sciences faculties and these institutes and undergraduate programmes remains to be seen.

In Turkey, graduates of theology/Islamic sciences faculties generally work in education and religious services sectors. In recent years, this has been slowly extended to finance sector, but it is difficult to say that the sectors that theology/Islamic sciences graduates can work in are as broad as in Malaysia. This seems partly because of the secular character of the Republic of Turkey, which has strived to confine religion to certain areas, such as official religious services and to some extent education. Despite this limitation, theology/Islamic sciences faculties’ graduates still work in very different vocations in the Ministry of National Education and in the Presidency of Religious Affairs. Whether theology and Islamic sciences faculties raise well-equipped graduates who can work in very different vocations with almost identical programmes remains an important issue.¹⁰³ Therefore, there can (and should) be more discussion about the introduction of multi-programme system in Turkey. Specialisation, double-major and minor programmes which are applied extensively in Malaysia can be helpful, if different programmes will not be introduced in the theology and Islamic sciences faculties. Even though it is possible to do double-major and minor degrees at universities in Turkey, this can be made more systematic and wide-spread for the theology and Islamic sciences students. Double-major programmes such as *theology and early childhood education*, *theology and education*, *theology and law*, *theology and science*, and *theology, counselling and care* can be few examples of the double-major programmes.

Another important difference between Malaysia and Turkey occurs in the process of student admission. There are different post-secondary education/examination systems in Malaysia, while in Turkey there is a national university entrance exam. Despite the different examination systems, in Malaysia, students need to have a solid background in Islamic education, Arabic and English in order to enrol at Islamic Sciences programmes; whereas in Turkey there are just few questions regarding religious education in university entrance exam; therefore, no background in religious education, Arabic or English is necessary. Moreover, because courses such as Turkish and Mathematics have more questions and bring more points, students focus more on these subjects, rather than religious subjects, even at Imam-Hatip schools. The current system offers an opportunity for those who did not have a chance to get a proper religious education and Arabic at the secondary level to enrol at theology/Islamic sciences faculties in Turkey. Therefore, the student admission system applied in Turkey is more favourable for students who do not have any Islamic education background than that of Malaysia. Nevertheless, there might be a need to rethink about the university entrance system for

⁹⁸ Osmanoğlu, *Yüksek Din Öğretimi Kurumlarının Mezun Tasavvuru*, 29, 33.

⁹⁹ Nazıroğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerinde Din Eğitimi ve Sorunları,” 182–185; Ev, “Yükseköğretimde Din Eğitimi,” 290–295.

¹⁰⁰ Mahmut Zengin, “How Secular Educational Policies Changed the Content of Religious Education Curricula and Teachers’ Training Programmes in Modern Turkey,” *European Perspectives on Islamic Education and Public Schooling*, ed. Jenny Berglund (Sheffield: Equinox, 2018), 234–269.

¹⁰¹ Cemil Osmanoğlu, *İlahiyat Eğitiminde Çoğulcu Motifler* (İstanbul: Dem, 2021).

¹⁰² Altaş, *Din Eğitimi*, 397–405.

¹⁰³ Aydın, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde Din Eğitimi Öğretmeni Yetiştirme ve İstihdamı*, 487; Ev, “Yükseköğretimde Din Eğitimi,” 293.

theology/Islamic sciences programmes, as there are concerns that theology/Islamic sciences faculties have to do the work of Imam-Hatip schools and start from the basics,¹⁰⁴ such as teaching how to read the Qur’an.

Furthermore, in Malaysia, as in Turkey, the quotas of higher religious education programmes are decided by a national agency. In Turkey, this is the Council of Higher Education. In Malaysia, the number of higher religious education programmes graduates remains low, compared to that of Turkey. However, in both countries the employability of higher religious education graduates seems one of the most important issues. In the future, it seems that this issue will be more pressing for Turkey, as there are criticisms that the number of theology and Islamic sciences have grown “uncontrollably”¹⁰⁵, and for a “quality” higher religious education, the number of students admitted should be reduced.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this paper, we compared higher religious education in Malaysia and Turkey in terms of history, current situation, aims, programme structure, student admission and graduate employability. Higher religious education in Malaysia and Turkey can be compared further, for example, in terms of assessment, faculty/university management, and academics and there is a need for further comparative studies on these issues.

The fact that Malaysia is officially an Islamic state have impacted greatly on higher religious education. This can be also said for the secular character of the Republic of Turkey. In both countries, politics play a significant role in higher religious education, but seems more so in Turkey than in Malaysia.

The diversity of religious education programmes, their multi-disciplinarity, and broad employability opportunities they offer seem the strengths of higher religious education in Malaysia. Higher religious education is thriving in Turkey, which shows the strong political and public support for these faculties. Teaching in higher religious education is not officially confined to one branch of Islam in Turkey. This pluralist character can be seen positively, as this can be accommodative and integrative. In Turkey, students do not need to have a background in Arabic or religious education to enrol at the theology/Islamic sciences programmes. This might hinder students from understanding classical sources if they do not get a proper Arabic education in the preparatory year, and that the programmes need to start from basics in case there are students who do not have any background in religious education. However, some can see this as an opportunity, because even students who did not have a chance to get a proper religious education at the secondary level still have a chance to study higher religious education at the university. However, in both countries one of the most pressing issues is graduate employability.

Malaysia and Turkey have developed their higher religious education according to their history, national characteristics, society and state. It would thus be difficult to transfer any particular aspect from one country to another, even when that aspect appears to be successful. However, both countries can still look at each other to explore and investigate higher religious education from a global perspective, rather than an ethnocentric one. This in turn will help both countries to better reflect on their own models, considering both strengths and weaknesses.

YAZAR KATKI ORANI BEYANI/ AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Makaledeki Yazar Katkılarının Yüzde ile Gösterilmesi (Showing Author Contributions in the Article as Percent)	1. Sorumlu Yazar (Responsible Author)	2. Katkı Sunan Yazar (Contributer Author)	3. Katkı Sunan Yazar (Contributer Author)	4. Katkı Sunan Yazar (Contributer Author)
Çalışmanın Tasarlanması	Conceiving the Study	%30	%30	%10
Veri Toplanması:	Data Collection	%30	%30	%20
Veri Analizi	Data Analysis	%30	%30	%20
Makalenin Yazımı	Writingup	%35	%25	%20
Makale Gönderimi ve Revizyonu	Submission and Revision	%40	%20	%20

Not(e): Belgenin imzalı asıl nüshası dergi süreç dosyalarında mevcuttur/The signed original copy of the document is available in the journal process files archive.

¹⁰⁴ Ev, “Yükseköğretimde Din Eğitimi,” 294.

¹⁰⁵ Muhammet Fatih Genç, “İmam Hatip Okulları ve İlahiyat Fakülteleri Örneğinde Din Eğitiminde Kalite Sorunu,” *Türkiye Din Eğitimi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7 (2019), 158.

¹⁰⁶ Köylü, “Türkiye’de Yüksek Din Öğretimi: Nicelik Mi Nitelik Mi?,” 43.

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