

# The Pursuit of Quality in Higher Religious Education and Artificial Intelligence (A Comparison of ChatGPT and DeepSeek)

*Yüksek Din Eğitiminde Kalite Arayışı ve Yapay Zekâ (ChatGpt ve DeepSeek Karşılaştırması)*

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## The Pursuit of Quality in Higher Religious Education and Artificial Intelligence (A Comparison of ChatGPT and DeepSeek)

### Abstract

This study examines the role of artificial intelligence technologies (ChatGPT and DeepSeek) in shaping the future-oriented vision of higher religious education. Taking as its historical point of departure the reports prepared by Ali Fuat Başgil (1961) and Muhammed Hamidullah (1962) on the quality of higher religious education, it subjects these texts to AI-based analyses and offers a comparative evaluation. The aim is twofold: to adapt the insights of these historical documents to contemporary conditions and to assess the capacity of AI tools to analyze and interpret academic texts. The research was conducted using a qualitative methodology; for data analysis, content, thematic, discourse, and descriptive analyses were employed in conjunction with an ethnographic approach. The findings coalesce around the themes of the need to update the curriculum, the quality of the academic staff, integration with society through practical applications, internationalization, and technological transformation. The report, in particular, underscores the necessity of preserving the traditional Islamic sciences while synthesizing them with modern scientific methods. The recommendations generated by the AI models were evaluated within these thematic frames. While both models similarly identify chronic issues such as inadequate interdisciplinarity and a static curriculum, they diverge in their remedial approaches: ChatGPT prioritizes systematic, digitization-oriented reforms, whereas DeepSeek emphasizes critical pedagogical orientations and the integration of local religious epistemologies into the global context. For example, ChatGPT's proposal for a "smart curriculum" envisions a dynamic structure adaptable to students' individual learning paces, whereas DeepSeek's emphasis on a "critical pedagogy of religion" focuses on enabling students to interpret religious knowledge in pluralistic societies and to apply it within a social-justice framework. Both approaches can lay the groundwork for a holistic model that simultaneously strengthens the technical infrastructure of religious education and deepens its philosophical foundations. However, the success of this integration depends on harmonizing technology with its social context and ethical parameters. A synthesis of the traditional Islamic sciences and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies would enhance the sustainability of higher religious education, enable more effective responses to societal needs, and make possible the design of hybrid models aligned with global academic standards.

**Keywords:** Higher Religious Education, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Transformation, Critical Pedagogy, Epistemological Transformation.

### Yüksek Din Eğitiminde Kalite Arayışı ve Yapay Zekâ (ChatGPT ve DeepSeek Karşılaştırması)

#### Öz

Bu çalışma, yüksek din eğitiminin geleceğe dönük vizyonunu belirlemede yapay zekâ teknolojilerinin (ChatGPT ve DeepSeek) rolünü incelemektedir. Tarihsel bir zemin olarak Ali Fuat Başgil'in (1961) ve Muhammed Hamidullah'ın (1962) yüksek din eğitiminin niteliğine ilişkin raporları esas alınmış; bu metinler yapay zekâ tabanlı analizlerle karşılaştırmalı biçimde değerlendirilmiştir. Amaç, hem tarihsel öngörülerini günümüz koşullarına uyarlamak hem de yapay zekâ araçlarının akademik metinleri çözümleme ve yorumlama kapasitesini sınamaktır. Araştırma nitel yöntemle yürütülmüş; veri çözümlemesinde içerik, tema, söylem ve betimsel analiz ile etnografik yaklaşım birlikte kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, müfredatın güncellenme ihtiyacı, akademik kadronun niteliği, pratik uygulamalar yoluyla toplumla bütünleşme, uluslararasılaşma ve teknolojik dönüşüm başlıklarında yoğunlaşmaktadır. Raporda geleneksel İslami ilimlerin korunmasıyla modern bilimsel yöntemlerin sentezlenmesi gereği özellikle vurgulanmaktadır. YZ modellerinin ürettiği öneriler bu temalar çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiştir. Her iki model, disiplinlerarası eksiklik ve statik müfredat gibi kronik sorunları benzer biçimde tespit ederken çözüm yaklaşımlarında ayrışmaktadır: ChatGPT, sistematik ve dijitalleşmeyi önceleyen reformlara; DeepSeek ise eleştirel pedagojik yönelimlere ve yerel-dinî epistemolojilerin küresel bağlama entegrasyonuna ağırlık vermektedir. Örneğin ChatGPT'nin "akıllı müfredat" önerisi öğrencilerin bireysel öğrenme hızlarına uyulanabilir dinamik bir yapı sunarken, DeepSeek'in "eleştirel din pedagojisi" vurgusu çoğulcu toplumlarda dinî bilginin yorumlanması ve sosyal adalet bağlamında uygulanmasına odaklanmaktadır. Her iki yaklaşım, din eğitiminin hem teknik altyapısını güçlendirecek hem de felsefi derinliğini artıracak bütüncül bir modelin temelini oluşturabilir. Ancak bu entegrasyonun başarısı, teknolojinin toplumsal bağlam ve etik parametrelerle uyumlaştırılmasına bağlıdır. Geleneksel dini ilimler ile YZ teknolojilerinin sentezi, yüksek din eğitiminin

sürdürülebilirliğini artıracak, toplumsal ihtiyaçlara daha etkin cevap verebilecek ve küresel akademik standartlara uyumlu hibrit modellerin tasarlanmasını mümkün kılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yüksek Din Eğitimi, Yapay Zekâ (YZ), Dijital Dönüşüm, Eleştirel Pedagoji, Epistemolojik Dönüşüm.

## Introduction

Since the advent of Islam and the beginning of its proclamation by the Prophet, religious education has been one of the cornerstones of the socio-cultural, intellectual, and spiritual life of Muslim societies. The Islamic educational tradition initially began in informal settings such as Dâr al-Arqam, and later gained a systematic structure through institutional establishments like the suffa.<sup>1</sup> Higher religious education institutions have persisted through a lineage extending from madrasas to faculties of theology and Higher Islamic Institutes. Their foundational purpose is to preserve the religious sciences in forms responsive to contemporary needs and to provide moral and intellectual guidance to society. Today, globalization and technological transformation make it imperative both to safeguard traditional identity and to develop dynamic educational models capable of addressing contemporary challenges. Accordingly, a meaningful and sustainable future vision can be articulated only through a perspective grounded in historical foundations, attentive to societal needs, and aligned with scientific advances.

The Ottoman Empire distinguished itself through its contributions to Islamic scholarship and education. Its madrasas were pivotal in transmitting both religious sciences and the scientific-cultural heritage of Islam. However, their eventual inability to meet modern demands spurred the creation of alternative institutions.<sup>2</sup> This The Tanzimat reforms catalyzed this shift, underscoring the need for modernization in religious pedagogy. A seminal development was the establishment, by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1900, of the "Ulûm-ı Âliye-i Dîniye" within the Dârü'l-Fünûn-ı Şâhâne. Recognized as the first modern higher religious education institution, it was later dissolved and its functions transferred to the Medresetü'l-Mühassısîn.<sup>3</sup>

With the proclamation of the Republic, the Law on-Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat), which entered into force on 3 March 1924, initiated a profound transformation in religious education in Turkey. Article 4 of the law stipulated, on the one hand, the establishment of a Faculty of Theology within the Dârülfünûn to train advanced religious scholars, and, on the other, the opening of schools to educate personnel, such as imam-hatips, who would carry out religious services.<sup>4</sup> This dual approach sought to place both academic training in religious studies and the preparation of practitioners for religious services on an institutional footing. Indeed, pursuant to this provision, a Faculty of Theology was established within the Istanbul Dârülfünûn; however, when the Dârülfünûn was closed in 1933, the faculty likewise ceased its activities.<sup>5</sup>

During this period, higher religious education underwent a sixteen-year interruption; with the opening of Ankara University Faculty of Theology in 1949, a process of restructuring began.<sup>6</sup> Ten years after the establishment of the faculty in 1959, the Istanbul Higher Islamic Institute was founded to meet the higher-education needs of imam-hatip school graduates. As a higher religious education institution affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, it commenced its academic activities. By 1981, the number of such institutions had reached eight.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Muhammed Hamidullah, *İslam Peygamberi*, trc. Mehmet Yazgan (İstanbul: Beyan Yayınları, 2004), 158.

<sup>2</sup> Ziya Kazıcı, *Osmanlı'da Eğitim Öğretim* (İstanbul: Kayıhan Yay., 2016), 163-169; İbrahim Turan, "Tanzimat Sonrasında Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi", *Din Eğitimi*, ed. İbrahim Turan, Bayram Ali Nazıroğlu (Ankara: BİLAY Yay., 2020), 91-100.

<sup>3</sup> Mustafa Öcal, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi* (İstanbul: Dergah, 2015), 336; Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, "Darülfünun", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yay., 1989), 8/ 524.

<sup>4</sup> Öcal, *Türkiyede Din Eğitimi*, 84-87; Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi* (İstanbul: DEM, 2004), 53.

<sup>5</sup> Öcal, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi*, 350-351; Ayhan, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi (1920-1998)*, 48-50.

<sup>6</sup> Öcal, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi*, 354-355; Ayhan, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi*, 244.

<sup>7</sup> Nevzat Aşıkoğlu, "Yüksek Öğretimde Din Eğitim ve Öğretimi", *Din Eğitimi El Kitabı*, ed. Recai Doğan & Remzi Ege (Ankara: Grafiker Yay., 2012), 235; Beyza Bilgin, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi ve Liselerde Din Dersleri* (Ankara: Eser Matbaası, 1980), 63.

By 1971, in addition to Ankara University Faculty of Theology and the Higher Islamic Institutes, the Faculty of Islamic Sciences was established in Erzurum.<sup>8</sup>

The conversion of the Higher Islamic Institutes into Faculties of Theology in 1982 constituted a critical stage in the institutionalization of higher religious education. In the 2000s, particularly during the AK Party period, the field expanded; the number of faculties increased and the range of programs diversified. These trends indicate an effort to reconcile a deep historical legacy with contemporary pedagogical imperatives. Throughout the Ottoman and Republican periods, institutions of higher religious education have played central roles in the production, systematization, and transmission of religious knowledge to society. As of 2025, Turkey hosts more than one hundred institutions titled Faculty of Islamic Sciences or Faculty of Theology; these institutions educate personnel for both formal and non-formal education, as well as future academics. Nevertheless, whether these institutions possess adequate qualifications and distinctive curricula remains contested in academics.<sup>9</sup> Despite measurable increases in the number of faculties and student quotas, qualitative enhancement is required to ensure sustainable alignment with contemporary standards. Despite quantitative expansion, the imperative for qualitative enhancement intensifies, given historical structural deficiencies and the demands of contemporary educational paradigms.<sup>10</sup>

Within this context, a salient reference point is the critical assessments and constructive proposals advanced in the reports of Ali Fuat Başgil (1961) and Muhammad Hamidullah (1962) regarding the academic and administrative design of the Higher Islamic Institutes. Both documents systematically diagnosed core deficiencies, narrow curricula, methodological weaknesses, and misalignment with societal demands and furnished a conceptual basis for subsequent scholarly debates and reform initiatives. Yet, six decades on, the persistence of these problems in contemporary discussions signals structural inertia and enduring shortfalls in transformation. Accordingly, a substantive paradigm shift remains imperative; absent such change, theology faculties risk crises reminiscent of the Ottoman madrasa system. Mitigation urgently requires rigorous self-evaluation, need-responsive curricular revision, and quality-centered academic productivity.

## 1. Artificial Intelligence and New Horizons

Artificial intelligence's impact on text analysis is increasingly growing as a product of rapid advancements in information technologies. Natural language processing (NLP) techniques enable comprehensive examination of texts in terms of meaning, context, and content; they facilitate processes such as text summarization, correlation, and contextual analysis through methods like word embeddings, language models, and semantic inference.<sup>11</sup> This situation offers new research opportunities across a broad spectrum of disciplines, from social sciences to theology.

One of the most important contributions of artificial intelligence to text analysis is scalability and speed. The ability to process large datasets beyond human capacity in a short time and deliver results to the user provides a distinct advantage in the analysis of historical sources and comparative studies.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, analyses based on principles of accuracy and objectivity have the potential to produce consistent and nearly error-free results.

<sup>8</sup> Öcal, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi*, 383; Ramazan Buyrukçu, *Din Görevlisinin Mesleğini Temsil Gücü* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1995), 99-102.

<sup>9</sup> See: Z. Şeyma Altın, *İstatistiklerle Türkiye'de Yüksek Din Eğitiminin 100 Yılı (1923-2023)* (İstanbul: DEM Yay., 2024); Nurullah Altaş -Umut Kaya, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi: Genel Görünüm ve Eğilimler (2012-2022)* (İstanbul: İLKE Yay., 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Aşıkoglu, "İlahiyat Fakültelerinin Eğitim Öğretime Katkıları ve Kaliteye Yolculuk", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 9/1 (2005), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell, T. M., "Machine Learning: Trends, Perspectives, And Prospects", *Science* 349/6245 (2015), 255-260. Ruoxi Xu et al. "AI for Social Science and Social Science of AI: A survey", *Information Processing & Management* 61/3 (2024), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Diksha Khurana et al. "Natural Language Processing: State of the Art, Current Trends and Challenges", *Multimedia Tools and Applications* 82/3 (2023), 3713-3744.

However, artificial intelligence also carries certain limitations and challenges in text analysis. The susceptibility of algorithms to bias can lead to partial results when clean and balanced datasets are not used.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, AI's capacity for semantic inference and contextual interpretation remains insufficient compared to human intelligence; there is a risk of failing to capture the depth of meaning, especially in complex and multi-layered texts.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, a robust data infrastructure and meticulous algorithmic design are required to achieve reliable results in AI-based text analysis.

In the future, artificial intelligence is expected to enhance its technical capacity in the field of text analysis and become enriched through interdisciplinary interactions. Therefore, researchers' deep understanding of the potential of AI-based tools and their effective use will provide significant contributions to scientific studies.

## 2. Research Method

This study was designed within a qualitative research framework, aiming to examine historical texts through artificial intelligence-based analyses and evaluate them using a comparative method. The research is based on a descriptive and comparative qualitative design, encompassing both traditional text analysis and comparative evaluation of data generated by ChatGPT and DeepSeek models.

In the data collection process, reports prepared by Professor in Ordinary Ali Fuat Başgil in 1961 and Muhammad Hamidullah in 1962 on the future of higher religious education were used as primary sources, while responses obtained from the free version of ChatGPT and the free version of DeepSeek on the same day and time constituted the secondary data source. This approach enabled a multidimensional evaluation combining historical perspective with the capabilities of digital tools.

The research first examined the reports in their original form, then presented them to both AI models with predetermined questions. The obtained responses were analyzed in terms of the models' capacity to comprehend, interpret, and compare texts. The study employed qualitative data analysis methods; content analysis identified themes such as curriculum, autonomy, and internationalization, while thematic analysis grouped these concepts under broader categories. Discourse analysis revealed the conceptual framework of the reports, and descriptive analysis provided a systematic summary of findings. Additionally, ethnographic analysis examined how the reports reflected cultural values and social expectations.

The applied comparative method enabled the evaluation of ChatGPT and DeepSeek's performance across three dimensions (comprehension, interpretation, comparison), identifying both models' strengths and limitations while discussing the methodological contributions of AI-based academic analyses.

## 3. Research Problem

Higher religious education institutions are undergoing transformation due to social changes, globalization, and technological developments. This dynamic process requires both updating the structure and curriculum of institutions and developing a forward-looking vision. The main research problem of this study is to examine the performance of artificial intelligence technologies such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek in shaping the future vision of higher religious education.

## 4. Research Limitations

This study is limited to the responses produced by ChatGPT and the free version of DeepSeek at the same dates and times. This limitation prevents the findings from constituting a comprehensive assessment of overall AI performance and requires focusing solely on the performance of these two platforms within a

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<sup>13</sup> Michael J. Reiss, "The Use of AI in Education: Practicalities and Ethical Considerations", *London Review of Education* 19/1 (2021), 1; Cansu Şahin Kölemen, "Artificial Intelligence Technologies and Ethics in Educational Processes: Solution Suggestions and Results", *Innoeduca. International Journal of Technology and Educational Innovation* 10/2 (2024), 201-216.

<sup>14</sup> Holmes, Wayne et al., "Ethics of AI in Education: Towards a Community-Wide Framework", *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education* 32/3 (2021), 504-526.

specific context. Although it restricts generalizability, this approach offers a valuable view of how these platforms function under specific conditions.

Such a restriction is a deliberate methodological choice, given the dynamic and continually evolving nature of AI models. Comparing within the same time window aims to reflect the models' current performance more consistently; however, the validity of the findings may become questionable in the face of different versions and subsequent updates. Therefore, the results should be interpreted in light of data obtained within a particular time period and under specified conditions. These limitations provide a starting point for future research seeking to understand the potential contributions of AI technologies in education, religion, and related fields; more comprehensive studies should be designed to include different versions, updates, and contexts.

## 5. Comparison of Reports by ChatGPT and DeepSeek

In this section, the reports authored by Ali Fuat Başgil and Muhammad Hamidullah each outlining their respective visions for the future of higher religious education will be analyzed and compared using ChatGPT and DeepSeek. The insights of both scholars regarding higher religious education are highly significant for the modern understanding of pedagogy and the future of religious studies. By examining how each AI model interprets and engages with these visionary perspectives, the study aims to assess the capabilities of artificial intelligence in understanding and analyzing complex, value-laden academic texts within the field of higher religious education.

These two reports will be analyzed by the artificial intelligence models ChatGPT and DeepSeek, with the aim of identifying similarities and differences in their interpretations. During the analysis process, the models' abilities to comprehend, interpret, and compare the texts will be evaluated. This comparison will provide insight into the strengths and limitations of each AI tool in handling complex academic content, particularly within the domain of higher religious education.

Tablo 1: Two Different Visions in Higher Religious Education

Topic	ChatGPT's Vision	DeepSeek's Vision
<b>General Approach</b>	Advocates for integrating higher religious education with modern educational principles and fostering an interdisciplinary structure.	Emphasizes the preservation of traditional Islamic sciences while integrating modern academic approaches.
<b>Curriculum</b>	Proposes a structure supported by comparative religious history, contemporary intellectual movements, and social sciences, moving away from rote memorization.	Adopts a curriculum centered on the Qur'an and Hadith, emphasizing analytical and critical thinking, distancing from scholastic models.
<b>Interdisciplinary Approach</b>	Supports an integrated educational system involving fields such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and law.	Argues that religious education should be addressed together with social sciences, law, and philosophy.

Tablo 2: AI Solutions to Higher Religious Education Challenges

Topic	Issues Highlighted by ChatGPT	Issues Highlighted by DeepSeek
<b>Curriculum Deficiency</b>	Characterized by a superficial, rote-learning structure; requires substantial updates	Necessity to move away from a scholastic framework; emphasizes the lack of analytical thinking skills.
<b>Academic Staff</b>	Inadequacy of faculty members in both traditional and contemporary academic methodologies.	Religious instructors should receive both domestic and international training to be methodologically competent.

<b>Practical Applications</b>	Theoretical knowledge should be reinforced through fieldwork and hands-on experience.	Practical training should incorporate skills such as rhetoric and community leadership.
<b>Internationalization</b>	Students should be provided with education in Arabic, English, and other foreign languages.	Academic collaborations should be established with successful religious education models in the West.

Tablo 3: AI-Driven Design of Educational Models and Institutional Structures

Topic	Recommendations by ChatGPT	Recommendations by DeepSeek
<b>Educational Model</b>	Proposes the <i>Islamic Sciences Academy</i> model, resembling the British university system.	Faculties with academic autonomy should be established by granting university status to the institution.
<b>Faculty Structure</b>	a) Faculty of Islamic Sciences b) Faculty of Complementary Sciences c) Faculty of Foreign Languages	a) Faculty of Tafsir and Hadith b) Faculty of Fiqh c) Faculty of Comparative Religions
<b>Research and Publishing</b>	Students should be encouraged to engage in academic research, and digital publishing initiative developed.	Research centers should be established to enhance scientific output and academic productivity

Tablo 4: Societal and Global Outreach with Artificial Intelligence

Topic	Points Highlighted by ChatGPT	Points Highlighted by DeepSeek
<b>Engagement with Society</b>	Argues that religious officials should receive training in psychology, rhetoric, and pedagogy.	Emphasizes that preaching and guidance activities should be supported by modern communication techniques.
<b>International Students</b>	Recommends international student exchange programs to enhance Turkey's role the Islamic World	Stresses the importance of developing specialized educational programs tailored for foreign students

Tablo 5: AI-Driven Development of Technological and Physical Infrastructure

Topic	Recommendations by ChatGPT	Recommendations by DeepSeek
<b>Digital Education</b>	Open-access resources should be expanded, and online course materials should be developed.	Online libraries and interactive educational platforms should be established.
<b>Physical Infrastructure</b>	Seminar and thesis writing programs should be encouraged to support academic research.	Modern campuses should include sports facilities, conference halls, and extensive libraries.

Tablo 6: Secularism and Pluralism: A Comparative AI Analysis

Topic	ChatGPT's Approach	DeepSeek's Approach
<b>Secularism and Religious Education</b>	Does not directly address this issue.	Proposes a model of religious education that aligns with the principles of secularism and pluralism.
<b>Comparative Religions</b>	Recommends courses on the history of comparative religions and contemporary intellectual movements.	Suggests that the teachings of other religions and modern ideologies should be examined from a critical perspective.

The ChatGPT report functions as a detailed plan or strategic blueprint that offers a clear, structured model for institutional reorganization and curricular updates. By contrast, the DeepSeek report resembles a vision statement or philosophical manifesto, outlining the core principles that should underpin any

structural reform, such as autonomy, balancing tradition with modernity within a secular context, and moving beyond scholasticism.

Taken together, they present a compelling and comprehensive case for transformation. While the DeepSeek report articulates the “why” and the guiding principles, the ChatGPT report elaborates the “how” through specific structural and curricular recommendations. Their differences are not contradictory; on the contrary, they are complementary, yielding a more holistic vision for the future of higher religious education.

## 6. Review of ChatGPT and DeepSeek Reports

To contextualize the transformation of higher religious education, the ChatGPT and DeepSeek reports will be subjected to qualitative textual analysis.<sup>15</sup> Findings derived from content, thematic, discourse, descriptive, and ethnographic approaches will be systematically presented and evaluated under their respective headings. These findings will then be synthesized and discussed within a conceptual framework that encompasses the integration of contemporary sciences into the curriculum, the quality of the academic staff, institutional autonomy, internationalization, digitalization and pluralism, and the balance between tradition and modernity.

**Content analysis:** In qualitative content analysis, categories are constructed from themes deemed important within the text, and descriptions are produced through multiple representations of social reality.<sup>16</sup> Through the method of content analysis, it becomes evident that certain concepts and themes are prominently featured within the examined texts. In this context, the most frequently encountered and focal concept is *higher religious education*. Both reports emphasize the necessity of enhancing the quality of higher religious education, particularly highlighting the importance of integration with contemporary sciences.

The issue of curriculum emerges as a critical element in aligning religious education with current conditions. The inadequacy of existing curricula, the need for their continuous updating, and the imperative to structure them in an interdisciplinary manner are recurrently emphasized.

The quality of academic staff is identified as one of the key factors directly affecting the standards of higher religious education. It is noted that academic personnel should specialize in their respective fields and possess a strong command of modern pedagogical methods. Furthermore, it is underlined that religious education should not remain confined to theoretical knowledge transmission; rather, it must foster stronger interaction with society through practical applications.

In the context of international integration, it is argued that institutions of higher religious education in Turkey should align their practices and curricula with global standards. In this process, foreign language instruction is identified as a key element, facilitating greater engagement with the international academic community. Furthermore, the critical importance of digitalization is highlighted, with specific recommendations for development of digital educational materials, online resources, and robust technological infrastructure. Adopting a holistic approach to these elements is considered indispensable for ensuring the continued relevance and advancement of higher religious education in the future.

**Thematic analysis:** Thematic analysis is a method that aims to identify recurring ideas and patterns in texts to construct meaningful themes. This analysis seeks to reveal the main topics the texts focus on and how those topics are addressed as a coherent whole.<sup>17</sup> A thematic analysis of reports on higher religious education reveals a consistent advocacy for a transformative synthesis, aiming to harmonize traditional

<sup>15</sup> See: Ali Yıldırım - Hasan Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (Ankara: Seçkin Yay., 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Osman Metin - Şükriye Ünal, “İçerik Analizi Tekniği: İletişim Bilimlerinde ve Sosyolojide Doktora Tezlerinde Kullanımı,” *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 22/2 (2022), 275–278.

<sup>17</sup> Gökhan Hınz - Aysun Yavuz, “Yansıtıcı Tematik Analiz: Bir Doktora Tez Çalışması Örneği,” *Eğitimde Kuram ve Uygulama (EKU)* 19/2 (2023), 389.



Islamic sciences with the demands of the modern world. This central vision is constructed through several interconnected themes that outline a comprehensive roadmap for reform.

The most prominent theme is the modernization of the curriculum. The reports strongly recommend moving beyond a rigid, traditional syllabus by integrating disciplines like the comparative history of religions, contemporary intellectual movements, and philosophy. This expansion is designed to equip students with the analytical tools needed to engage critically with both classical texts and modern ideologies, thereby preparing them to address complex contemporary challenges.

Closely linked is the theme of technological transformation. The integration of digital education platforms, online resources, and digital libraries is emphasized as crucial for enhancing accessibility and enriching the learning experience. This technological shift is seen as vital for modernizing pedagogical methods and supporting academic research, ensuring religious education remains relevant in a digital age.

Another critical theme is the enhancement of societal engagement. The analysis calls for moving beyond theoretical knowledge by strengthening practical applications and pedagogical training for religious officials. This aims to ensure that graduates are not only theologically proficient but also possess the communication and counseling skills necessary to effectively serve and guide their communities.

Furthermore, the reports highlight the importance of academic autonomy and institutional restructuring. A key proposal is elevating institutions to university status with the autonomy to establish dedicated faculties and research centers. This strengthened institutional framework is considered foundational for fostering innovation and ensuring academic rigor.

In the study, the principle of balancing secularism and pluralism constitutes a crucial thematic focus. The envisioned model aims to ensure that religious education operates inclusively within a diverse society by promoting a supra-sectarian and universal approach. This balance is essential for fostering social cohesion and for cultivating scholars who can contribute constructively to a pluralistic world.

**Discourse analysis:** Discourse analysis aims to make visible the underlying structures of thought, the intended messages, and the effects those messages seek to produce in texts. By focusing on linguistic features, lexical choice, discursive patterns, metaphors, and contextual positioning, it clarifies how texts are constructed and interpreted within a given context and what kinds of effects they aim to generate.<sup>18</sup> Within this framework, the discourse analysis of two reports on higher religious education examines the texts' linguistic properties, the rhetorical strategies employed, degrees of modality, evaluative stance, and intertextual references; it traces how legitimacy is constructed through evidence, analogy, and international comparison.

Both reports present an ambitious vision for the future of higher religious education. Expressions such as "future vision," "restructuring," and "transformation" underscore a forward-looking orientation and a resolve to transcend current limits. This visionary language assesses the present critically while proposing actionable steps, thereby rendering change both necessary and feasible; it cultivates in the reader a sense of anticipation, responsibility, and purpose. In this way, the text brings together normative orientation and a practical roadmap within the same frame.

The reports indicate that, alongside the identification of problems, they develop concrete proposals, thereby establishing a reliable bridge from theoretical analysis to practical action plans. The register is consistently academic and formal, implying an audience of scholars, policymakers, and professional practitioners, and conferring scientific rigor and the character of an official document upon the texts.

Finally, the tone of the reports is inclusive and conciliatory. By bringing together and synthesizing diverse perspectives, this approach seeks to ensure that religious education addresses broad social constituencies, strengthens dialogic engagement, and directs reforms toward consensual, measurable, and

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<sup>18</sup> Hilal Çelik - Halil Ekşi, "Söylem Analizi," *Marmara Üniversitesi Atatürk Eğitim Fakültesi Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi* 27/27 (2013), 105-106.

sustainable outcomes. Such a discourse enhances governance capacity, fosters social cohesion, and provides a legitimate basis for implementation. It is enduring.

**Descriptive analysis:** Descriptive analysis is an approach that seeks to generate meaning through the summarization and interpretation of data; by making the core features of texts visible, it explains how those texts construct meaning.<sup>19</sup> The descriptive examination of two reports on higher religious education comparatively identifies their main foci and the ways these topics are addressed. The ChatGPT Report argues that religious education should not be limited to-Islamic sciences alone; it emphasizes drawing on the possibilities of contemporary sciences, updating the curriculum, strengthening the academic staff, practical applications and societal integration, and internationalization, advancing concrete proposals. In this way, it aims to reinforce the theoretical and practical dimensions of education together. By contrast, the DeepSeek Report, within a future-oriented vision, highlights the need to preserve traditional Islamic sciences while developing a dynamic and multi-dimensional structure responsive to modern needs; it stresses a contemporary and analytical curriculum, qualified academic staff, academic autonomy and institutional design, social and global impact, and a balance of secularism and pluralism. Taken together, the two reports offer a complementary framework for evidence-based policy design and sustainable reform, proposing an actionable roadmap.

**Ethnographic analysis:** Ethnographic analysis is a method aimed at understanding the cultural characteristics of a particular community or group.<sup>20</sup> Although these reports do not directly reflect the ethnographic features of a specific community, they can be examined from an ethnographic perspective on the assumption that they reflect the viewpoints of scholars and practitioners within the field of higher religious education. This analysis seeks to uncover how the reports address elements such as cultural values, behaviors and practices, and social structures.

In relation to cultural values, the reports underscore key themes such as the synthesis of tradition and modernity, the multidimensional nature of knowledge, and the imperative of service to society. These values are intended to ensure that religious education maintains its foundational roots while simultaneously adapting to the demands of contemporary society. The emphasis on the multidimensionality of knowledge aims to equip students not only with a robust grounding in religious scholarship but also with contemporary scientific and intellectual competencies. Furthermore, the focus on service to society reflects an aspiration for religious education to attain practical relevance, thereby transcending its confinement to abstract theory and contributing meaningfully to communal life.

Regarding behaviors and practices, the reports propose actions such as curriculum updates, technological infrastructure improvements, and international collaborations. These practices aim to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of religious education. Updating the curriculum ensures that students are equipped with contemporary knowledge, while improving technological infrastructure contributes to modernizing the educational process. International collaboration seeks to provide religious education with a global perspective.

From the perspective of social structure, the reports highlight efforts to promote academic autonomy, achieve a balance between secularism and pluralism, and strengthen engagement with society. These elements are designed to render religious education more democratic and inclusive. Academic autonomy safeguards the independence of religious education, while balancing secularism and pluralism helps ensure that such education is accessible and relevant to diverse segments of society. Moreover, initiatives to increase societal engagement are intended to facilitate a more substantial contribution of religious education to social life.

<sup>19</sup> Eser Ültay vd., "Sosyal Bilimlerde Betimsel İçerik Analizi", *IBAD Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 10 (2021), 190.

<sup>20</sup> Nurşen Aydın, "Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri: Etnoloji", *Uluslararası Beşeri ve Sosyal Bilimler İnceleme Dergisi* 2/2 (2018), 62-64.

## 7. Evaluation of the Comprehension, Interpretation, and Comparative Abilities of ChatGPT and DeepSeek Reports

Upon examining the reports prepared by ChatGPT and DeepSeek on higher religious education, it becomes evident that both models utilize their comprehension, interpretation, and comparative abilities within distinct methodological frameworks. This evaluation aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each model and to compare their capacities for academic analysis.

**Text comprehension ability:** ChatGPT demonstrates a strong capability in understanding core concepts within texts and offers a holistic approach by synthesizing knowledge from various academic disciplines. For example, it emphasizes that higher religious education should not be confined solely to Islamic sciences, but should integrate fields such as social sciences, philosophy, psychology, and law into the educational framework. When analyzing concepts such as curriculum reform, digitalization, and internationalization, ChatGPT adopts a broad perspective. However, it tends to overlook certain critical issues, providing a somewhat more superficial analysis on these points.

DeepSeek engages in a more in-depth analysis of the texts, thoroughly examining the relationship between traditional Islamic sciences and modern academic approaches. It advocates for the replacement of scholastic educational methods with the promotion of analytical and critical thinking, thereby offering reform proposals for the educational system. With particular emphasis on topics such as secularism, pluralism, and international academic networks, DeepSeek evaluates the texts within a broader and more nuanced framework.

While both models exhibit strong capabilities in text comprehension, ChatGPT focuses more on conceptual and general academic approaches, whereas DeepSeek addresses topics with greater specificity and methodological rigor. ChatGPT provides a wide-ranging analysis, while DeepSeek offers a more in-depth academic evaluation.

**Interpretation ability:** ChatGPT demonstrates a more structured and systematic approach in its interpretations. It establishes a clear academic framework, offering concrete reform proposals such as modifications to the educational model and faculty-based system recommendations. However, it tends to address some abstract concepts indirectly rather than engaging with them explicitly. Its interpretations remain somewhat general, with noticeable gaps in detailing institutional structures and practical strategies.

DeepSeek adopts a more critical approach in its interpretations. It provides clearer and more assertive recommendations on issues such as moving away from a scholastic educational structure, achieving academic autonomy, gaining university status, and collaborating with successful religious education models in the West. DeepSeek approaches sensitive topics, particularly the relationship between international collaboration, secularism, and religious education, with greater boldness and clarity.

While ChatGPT offers a systematic and broad analysis with a well-structured perspective, DeepSeek provides more critical and methodologically in-depth interpretations. This highlights DeepSeek's capacity to foster an academic discussion environment during the interpretation phase.

**Comparative ability:** In conducting comparisons between the reports, ChatGPT adopts a more schematic and categorical approach. Topics are addressed under specific headings, and similarities and differences are systematically summarized. Distinctions between different educational models, faculty structures, and curriculum contents are clearly articulated. However, certain critical issues addressed by DeepSeek are not sufficiently emphasized in ChatGPT's comparative analyses.

DeepSeek utilizes a more critical perspective in its comparative processes, frequently juxtaposing religious education models in the West with those in the Islamic world. It evaluates reform proposals within the educational system from multiple angles, highlighting methodological differences. In its comparative analyses, DeepSeek advocates for a supra-sectarian and universal approach to religious education. However, some headings within its comparison tables exhibit redundancy, leading to a degree of focus dispersion.

While ChatGPT presents comparisons in a more schematic and categorical manner, DeepSeek engages in a deeper and more critical comparative process. ChatGPT enhances the clarity and systematic structure of comparisons, whereas DeepSeek emphasizes methodological analysis during comparative evaluations.

## 8. Which Model is More Effective

ChatGPT provides a comprehensive and structured analysis regarding higher religious education, presenting its recommendations in a clearer and more systematic manner. It excels in understanding the texts and outlining a general framework. However, it remains somewhat limited in offering in-depth analysis and innovative proposals.

DeepSeek, on the other hand, emphasizes academic autonomy and the international context of the educational system through critical thinking and methodological evaluations. Nevertheless, certain areas such as the practical applicability of its proposals and the occasional lack of focus in its comparative analyses represent aspects that require improvement.

ChatGPT and DeepSeek's reports are written in an academic tone, but their word choices differ. ChatGPT generally uses clearer and more direct expressions; for instance, it defines curricula with phrases like 'a structure avoiding rote learning.' It incorporates commonly used academic concepts without delving deeply into technical terms. Its most frequently repeated words are broad concepts like 'education,' 'academic,' and 'religion.'

Conversely, DeepSeek utilizes a more diverse and specific vocabulary, incorporating high-level technical terms such as "scholastic," "analytical," and "methodological." Additionally, DeepSeek integrates abstract qualities like "intellectual" as well as ideological concepts such as "secularism" and "supra-sectarian."

While both models adopt a formal and terminology-based language, ChatGPT's lexicon remains at a more accessible academic level, whereas DeepSeek employs more specialized terminology. Therefore, in terms of readability, ChatGPT's language is simpler, while DeepSeek's is more terminological and specialized.

The best results can be achieved by combining the strengths of both models. When ChatGPT's schematic and systematic analysis is integrated with DeepSeek's critical and academic depth, it becomes possible to develop more comprehensive and actionable recommendations for higher religious education.

## Conclusion and Evaluation

The rapid advance of technology and the ongoing digital transformation are reshaping educational systems, necessitating the renewal of traditional models in intellectual, methodological, and pedagogical dimensions. Within this process, artificial intelligence offers significant opportunities for higher religious education. With an institutional lineage extending from madrasas to faculties of theology, the field must, in the face of globalization, technological revolutions, and secularization, simultaneously safeguard its tradition, adapt to contemporary demands, and deepen its engagement with global discourse.

This study aims to formulate a strategic vision for the future of higher religious education by examining artificial intelligence's capabilities in textual analysis and interpretation, evaluating its potential contributions to the field. AI-driven analysis not only facilitates educational transformation but also advances the systematization of academic thought. Models such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek have revealed distinct methodological approaches to higher religious education, thereby identifying critical developmental priorities within the discipline. While ChatGPT excels in conceptual analysis and systematic framework development, DeepSeek enriches academic discourse through rigorous critical analysis and methodological depth. Integrating the strengths of both models can generate more comprehensive and actionable solutions.

In this context, the salient factors in the development of higher religious education will be assessed in light of the existing literature.

**An interdisciplinary integrated education model:** In Turkey, higher religious education inherited the madrasa legacy and operated for a long time with a primary focus on religious sciences. The pluralistic reality of today's information society has revealed the limitations of this approach. Although the transition from madrasas to modern faculties of theology aimed to diversify curricula, interdisciplinary integration remained limited.<sup>21</sup> European European experience demonstrates that when theology is integrated with philosophy, sociology, psychology, and law, both scholarly output and professional competencies are strengthened.<sup>22</sup> Within this framework, undergraduate theology programs in Turkey should be transformed into an interdisciplinary, integrated model that preserves the field's classical strengths while aligning it with contemporary academic demands.

The theoretical framework of the integrated model should be constructed on three levels: curriculum integration; pedagogy and assessment integration; and institutional integration. These three layers require decision-making autonomy at the faculty level, as centralized designs hinder swift and flexible updates responsive to local needs.<sup>23</sup> In developing the program, with the Basic Islamic Sciences forming the foundation, components that enhance students' critical thinking, such as comparative history of religions and scientific critique methods, should be made compulsory. Specialization tracks aligned with employment fields should be introduced in the final four semesters.<sup>24</sup> Field integration in practitioner training should include structured internship modules in diverse settings such as mosques, schools, and hospitals. Drawing on the past experience where theoretical courses like 'Religious Oratory' failed to produce the expected impact when not connected to field practice, a feedback loop should be defined for each internship setting.<sup>25</sup> A feedback loop should be defined for each internship setting. In this way, competencies such as communication, counseling, and crisis management can be measured reliably. In addition, regular needs assessments should be conducted to identify society's changing religious needs, and the necessary adjustments should be made.

**Academic autonomy and quality enhancement:** The centralized governance and the Council of Higher Education's (YÖK) stringent oversight mechanisms in Turkey's higher education system limit universities' academic autonomy in critical areas such as program design.<sup>26</sup> In the context of theology faculties, this dependency impedes the diversification of program content. Strengthening autonomy is possible by increasing decision-making authority at the faculty level and ensuring transparent, merit-based human resources processes.<sup>27</sup>

Quality assurance literature indicates that the most decisive variable in academic outcomes is the faculty member. An academic's ability to engage meaningfully with students also determines quality.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Mehmet Paçacı, "Modernliğe Geçiş Sürecinde Bir Yüksek Din Öğretim Kurumu Olarak İlahiyatın Neliğine Dair", *Tevilat* 1/1 (2020), 139-154.

<sup>22</sup> M. Fatih Genç, "Avrupa ve Türkiye'de İlahiyat Fakülteleri Lisans Programları", *Din Bilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 13/1 (2013), 43; Aşıkoğlu, "İlahiyat Fakültelerinin Eğitim Öğretime Katkıları ve Kaliteye Yolculuk", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 9/1 (2005), 3; Mesut Arslan, *Din Devlet İlişkileri Bağlamında Almanya'da İslam İlahiyat Fakülteleri* (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2019), 94-101.

<sup>23</sup> Bünyamin Çakırcı, *Türkiye'deki Yüksek Din Öğretiminin Gelecek Vizyonu* (Kocaeli: Kocaeli Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2025), 40-54; Songül Sallan Gül - Hüseyin Gül, "Türkiye'de Yükseköğretimin Gelişimi, Güncel Durumu ve Eleştirisi", *Toplum ve Demokrasi Dergisi* 8/17 (2016), 51-66.

<sup>24</sup> Mehmet Bayyigit, "Yüksek Din Öğretimi Kurumlarında Bölümleşme Sorunu", *Iğdır Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 26 (2021), 392-393; Aşıkoğlu, "Değişen Dünyada Değişmeyen Kurumlar: İlahiyat Fakülteleri", *IV. Din Şurası Tebliğ ve Müzakereleri II* (2009), 887-898; Bayramalı Nazıroğlu, "Yüksek Din Öğretimi", *Din Eğitimi*, ed. İbrahim Turan ve Bayramalı Nazıroğlu (Ankara: BİLAY, 2022), 159-160.

<sup>25</sup> Kasım Kocaman, "Türkiye'de Din Hizmetleri Bağlamında Yüksek Din Öğretiminde Meslekî Uygulama", *Turkish Studies* 14/4 (2019), 2542.

<sup>26</sup> Gül - Gül, "Türkiye'de Yükseköğretimin Gelişimi, Güncel Durumu ve Eleştirisi", 51-66.

<sup>27</sup> Cemal Baltacı-Fehmi Akın, "1946 Üniversite Reformu", *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi* 12/1 (2007), 83-94; Dilek Altaş, "Üniversite Öğrencileri Memnuniyet Araştırması", *Marmara Üniversitesi İİBF. Dergisi* 21/1 (2006), 439-440.

<sup>28</sup> Bora Açı - Reha Saydan, "Öğretim Elemanlarının Akademik Kalite Özelliklerinin Değerlendirilmesi: Kafkas Üniversitesi İİBF Örneği", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 13/2 (2009), 225-253.

Therefore, multi-dimensional evaluation systems, including pedagogical formation within career progression, should be placed at the center of the autonomy reform.

Contrary to rapid increase in student numbers, the shortage of sufficient academics leads to overcrowded classes and a decline in educational quality. The quality deficit created by these adverse conditions is directly reflected in the Ministry of National Education and the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the institutions that employ graduates, and affects the quality of their personnel.<sup>29</sup> The extensive in-service training provided by the Presidency of Religious Affairs,<sup>30</sup> where graduates are employed, is an indirect indicator that undergraduate-level preparation alone does not guarantee job competencies. As seen in European examples, lower teaching loads and smaller classes enhance quality by allowing faculty members time for research.<sup>31</sup> Another requirement in the autonomy-quality equation is program-employment alignment.<sup>32</sup> Academic autonomy and quality are parts of a complementary whole. When, in governance, delegation of authority and accountability; in human resources, pedagogical formation and merit; in instruction, student-centered design and multiple assessment; in research, time and incentives; and, at the system level, quality assurance based on the Higher Education Quality Council (YÖKAK) and field-specific accreditations are operated together.<sup>33</sup> it can transform faculties of theology into high-impact institutions aligned with contemporary standards in both scholarly output and service competence.

**Technological and pedagogical transformation:** Today, the rapid transformation of educational technologies necessitates a comprehensive renewal in higher religious education in terms of both access and quality.<sup>34</sup> Digital course materials, online seminars, AI-supported advising, and interactive platforms should be integrated into instructional design in ways that address not only 'accessibility' but also enhance the quality of learning.

Technology does not replace pedagogical design; it can make it more evidence-based and student-centered. It is recommended that theology programs in Turkey move away from traditional, teacher-centered pedagogy and systematically employ practice-intensive methods such as case studies, projects, collaborative learning, and role-playing.<sup>35</sup> This transformation centers not only on the question 'what does the student want to learn?' but also 'how does the student learn?', strengthening learning through active participation and constructivist principles.

On the other hand, the employment field for theology/Islamic studies graduates spans a wide spectrum, from mosques to hospitals and prisons, from classroom settings to civil society projects. The inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all program for such multiple roles makes it necessary to design the pedagogical transformation in close integration with practice.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, compulsory internships and structured practicum courses in diverse contexts, mosques, schools, hospitals, and prisons, should be placed at the core of the program.

<sup>29</sup> Çağfer Karadaş, "Türkiye İlahiyat ve İslami İlimler Fakülteleri Dekanlar Konseyi," 120. Yılında İlahiyat ve İslami İlimler Fakülteleri Çalıştayı, ed. Ahmet Bostancı (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2021), 66; Muhammed Tarık İslam vd., "Türk Diyanet Üzerinde 14 Yıllık Araştırma Trendleri: Bibliyometrik ve Tematik Analizler", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 23/1 (2023), 286-287.

<sup>30</sup> M. Fatih Genç, "Günümüz Dünyasında Din Hizmetlerinin Sunumunda Alternatif Öneriler", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 17/1 (2013), 142-144.

<sup>31</sup> Köylü, "Türkiye Ve Batı Ülkelerinde Yüksek Din Öğretimi: Niteliksel Bir Karşılaştırma" *MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 7/3 (2018), 267.

<sup>32</sup> Altaş-Kaya, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi: Genel Görünüm ve Eğilimler (2012-2022)*, ed. Mehtap Nur Öksüz (İstanbul: İLKE, 2023), 188-189.

<sup>33</sup> Didem Sipahi Mencet - Nuray Akar, "Kalite Aktörlerinin Yükseköğretimde Sürdürülebilir Kaliteye İlişkin Görüşleri Üzerine Bir Durum Çalışması", *Erciyes Akademi* 36/1 (2022), 119-120; Mustafa Bulut - Servet Özdemir, "Yükseköğretim Sistemleri Sıralamaları ve Türk Yükseköğretimi Üzerine Değerlendirmeler", *Gazi Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 42/3 (2022), 2747-2748.

<sup>34</sup> İlyas Erpay, "Yaygın Din Eğitim Kurumlarında Teknolojinin Önemi ve Kullanımı", *Şarkiyat* 11/3 (2019), 1318-1352; Mualla Selçuk vd., "COVID-19 Pandemisi Sırasında Türkiye'deki İlahiyat Öğrencilerinin Çevrimiçi Öğrenme Deneyimi: Din Eğitimi İçin Yeni Bir Yönelim mi?", *Religious Education* 116/1 (2021), 87-88.

<sup>35</sup> Nihat Oyman, "Din Eğitiminin Önündeki Engeller Araştırması Bağlamında Yeni Yöntem ve Teknikler", *Uluslararası Türk Kültür Coğrafyasında Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4/2 (2019), 133-134.

<sup>36</sup> Mustafa Kiriş, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Personel Yeterlikleri Bağlamında İlahiyat Fakültesi Lisans Fakültesi Lisans Programlarının Fonksiyonelliği (Sivas: Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2017), 217.

Another key issue in the program is aligning course weights with professional objectives. For teaching-oriented goals, blocks in educational sciences, assessment, and classroom management should be made compulsory; while for religious services-oriented tracks, contents such as counseling, crisis communication, and congregational psychology should be added.<sup>37</sup> Digitalization should transform not only course delivery but also the evidence of learning. AI-supported feedback (for example, in oratory practice or Qur'anic recitation training) makes performance-based learning visible. However, to maintain assessment integrity, overreliance on multiple-choice tests should be avoided, and multiple evidence sets such as portfolios and performance tasks should be employed.<sup>38</sup> Therefore the quality of distance education depends on strengthening programs like İLİTAM/İÖP in terms of equivalence and practical components, supported by mandatory in-person practicums.

Another factor that will make the pedagogical transformation sustainable is institutional partnerships within the university-field-NGO triangle. These partnerships equip students with not only technical skills but also ethical reasoning and communication competencies.<sup>39</sup>

Compared to contemporary European examples, theology programs in Turkey lag behind due to reliance on rote learning and deficiencies in practical components. The claim that a single degree can prepare individuals for every role must be abandoned. Instead, specialization should be achieved by placing technology at the service of pedagogy through an evidence-based assessment culture.

**Alignment with international standards and academic networks:** The limited international visibility of Turkish theology faculties and low foreign-language proficiency directly impact both educational quality and research productivity.<sup>40</sup> This necessitates full compliance with international standards like the Bologna Process, implemented meaningfully through learning outcomes, qualifications frameworks, and recognition processes. Expanding student and faculty mobility via programs like Erasmus, launching joint graduate programs, and developing co-supervision models are crucial pillars of this alignment. Internationalization should be redefined beyond increased enrollment or agreements, focusing instead on foreign-language policy, program quality, and the research ecosystem.<sup>41</sup> It is a holistic process encompassing educational, research, and service activities abroad. For mobility to be meaningful, it must be supported by strengthened language proficiency and academic equivalence mechanisms.

Foreign-language proficiency is central to aligning theology with international standards. A robust bilingual policy, Arabic alongside a global academic language like English, is essential.<sup>42</sup> At the undergraduate level, compulsory academic literacy courses should build field-specific terminology from the first year. At the graduate level, mandatory modules in scholarly writing, presenting, and peer-review are needed. For faculty, micro-certifications in academic English/Arabic and short-term research fellowships abroad can translate language skills into research output. Accreditation and quality assurance are key tools for international recognition. Theology faculties' participation in discipline-based accreditation secures minimum standards and enhances institutional visibility and brand value.<sup>43</sup> For lasting impact, accreditation must be rooted in a process-oriented improvement culture, featuring measurable learning outcomes, stakeholder feedback, and regular self-evaluation reports. In theology, institutional diversity and

<sup>37</sup> İbrahim Turan, "Türkiye'de İlahiyat Eğitimi: İstihdam Alanı-Program İlişkisi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *İstanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 37 (2017), 59 - 77; Zeynep Kaya, "Yükseköğretimde Din Eğitimi", *Din Eğitimi*, ed. Fatih Genç (İstanbul: Lisans Yayıncılık, 2020), 230.

<sup>38</sup> Gül, "Açıköğretim İlahiyat Programları: Problemler ve Çözüm Önerileri", 1935-1936.

<sup>39</sup> Ali Kemal Acar, Türkiye'de Cumhuriyet Dönemi Düşüncesinde Din Eğitimi (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2020), 198-199.

<sup>40</sup> Mencet-Akar, "Kalite Aktörlerinin Yükseköğretimde Sürdürülebilir Kaliteye İlişkin Görüşleri Üzerine Bir Durum Çalışması", 119-120; Muhammet Damar vd., "Üniversitelerde Dönüşüm Süreci ve Araştırma Üniversitesi Yaklaşımı", *Uluslararası Medeniyet Çalışmaları Dergisi* 5/2 (2020), 135-159.

<sup>41</sup> Aydın, "Uluslararası Yükseköğretim Alanında Daha Görünür Olabilmek: Araştırma Performansı Faktörü", 61-62.

<sup>42</sup> Gül, "Yüksek Din Eğitimi Kurumlarında Değişim Ve Yenilenmenin Gereçekleri", 33-34.

<sup>43</sup> See. Süleyman Akyürek, "Yüksek Din Öğretiminde Kalite Güvence Sistemi: Akreditasyon (Yeterlik Tescil) Sorunu", *Yüksek Din Öğretimi*, ed. Z. Şeyma Altın (İstanbul: DEM Yayınları, 2023).

joint evaluation mechanisms for internships across mosque-school-hospital-civil society contexts can create a professional competency framework aligned with international best practices.<sup>44</sup>

Participation in international academic networks is strengthened through comparative studies and joint research projects. Joint research calls, data sharing, co-organized symposia, and summer schools with institutes in the West and the Islamic world enhance visibility and add methodological diversity.<sup>45</sup> To ensure the sustainability of these initiatives, faculties should establish internationalization offices, project development units, and seed funds. 'Visiting researcher' programs and digital collaborative workshops will expand academic collaboration while reducing costs.

In summary, aligning with international standards and strengthening academic networks constitutes a dual-pronged strategy that will enhance both the global visibility and local impact of theology faculties. This strategy requires the comprehensive implementation of Bologna principles, a robust foreign language policy, discipline-based accreditation, comparative research ecosystems, and inclusive mobility mechanisms. Otherwise, quantitative growth will not translate into international recognition and academic quality; the current issues of representation and language barriers will become permanent disadvantages in the realms of knowledge production and employment.

**A model of religious education integrated with society:** The primary aim of religious education in Turkey is to train graduates who can respond to societal needs on scientific and ethical grounds. However, the current situation reveals that religious personnel have deficiencies in competencies critical to the field, such as communication, psychological counseling, and oratory.<sup>46</sup> This necessitates the evolution of the curriculum from mere theoretical knowledge transmission to an integrated model based on field experience, community projects, and structured internships.<sup>47</sup>

As graduates' roles expand, from imam-hatip positions to preaching, spiritual counseling to teaching and research, it becomes impossible for a one-size-fits-all program to produce the same competency for every role.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the program should rest on two pillars: a common/core curriculum and a specialization track. In the early years, alongside Basic Islamic Sciences, courses in communication, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and pedagogy should be provided; in the later years, tracks such as 'Religious Services and Spiritual Counseling,' 'Teaching,' and 'Religion-Society Studies' should be offered.

Students should complete a minimum number of internship hours in diverse institutional settings such as mosques, schools, hospitals, and prisons, and be evaluated using competency and observation forms defined for each setting.<sup>49</sup> Diversifying internship placements and establishing formal protocols with stakeholder institutions, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of National Education, and NGOs, strengthens the connection between learning and real life.

**Pluralism:** Debates on religious education in Turkey have shifted to 'how it ought to be structured.' A pluralistic perspective requires rethinking the discussion at the levels of content, method, and institutional design. Systematically defining a supra-denominational approach and reorganizing non-formal religious education institutions to embrace intra-Islamic pluralism is a current necessity.<sup>50</sup> Intra-Islamic

<sup>44</sup> Mencet - Akar, "Kalite Aktörlerinin Yükseköğretimde Sürdürülebilir Kaliteye İlişkin Görüşleri Üzerine Bir Durum Çalışması", 119-120.

<sup>45</sup> Oya Tamtekin Aydın, "Uluslararası Yükseköğretim Alanında Daha Görünür Olabilmek: Araştırma Performansı Faktörü", *Turkish Studies* 16/1 (2020), 61 -62; Akyürek, "Yüksek Din Eğitiminde Kalite Güvence Sistemi: Akreditasyon (Yeterlik Tescil) Sorunu", 243-246.

<sup>46</sup> Ali Baltacı, "Yüksek Din Öğretiminde Okul Terki", *Marife Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi* 2 (2019), 595; Köylü, "Türkiye'de Yüksek Din Öğretimi: Nicelik Mi Nitelik Mi?", 24-25.

<sup>47</sup> See. Hasan Meydan vd., "Sürdürülebilir Çevre Eğitimi Açısından Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi: Din Kültürü ve Etik Bilgi Müfredatı ve Ders Kitaplarının Analizi", *Intersections of Religion, Education, and a Sustainable World*, ed. Sally Windsor - Olof Franck (Cham: Springer, 2025).

<sup>48</sup> Özdemir, "Yüksek Din Eğitiminin Geleceği ve İstihdam Alanlarına Yönelik Program Önerileri", 247.

<sup>49</sup> Mustafa Koç, "Yüksek Din Öğretiminde Yeni Bir Paradigma Olarak Bölümleşme: 'Manevi Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik Bölümü' Önerisi", *Balıkesir Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 10 (2019), 67-104.; İbrahim Turan, "Türkiye'de İlahiyat Eğitimi: İstihdam Alanı-Program İlişkisi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *İstanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 37 (2017), 59-77.

<sup>50</sup> Pınar Usta Doğan, "Mezhepler Üstü Bir Program Tasarımının Nitelikleri Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma", *Kırıkkale İslami İlimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2/3(2017), 128-131.



pluralism offers an ethical framework that prioritizes a conciliatory tone and respect instead of othering. Qualitative field findings indicate that the underrepresentation of the Shafi'i school in teaching materials creates a sense of exclusion.<sup>51</sup> The emphasis on peace-centered religious education should be built upon this foundation of pluralism.

A supra-denominational program design must concretize pluralism at both classroom and institutional levels. Although the Presidency of Religious Affairs has adopted these principles, their implementation remains debated; the inadequate representation of the Shāfi'ī school in educational materials leads to feelings of exclusion. Recommendations include incorporating alternative legitimate views, developing comparative inter-madhab training modules, and implementing locally tailored practices reflecting regional distributions.<sup>52</sup> The realization of Islam's "middle community" ideal depends on the promotion of peace education across all institutions. Pluralism forms the foundation of this process and serves as the most effective means of preventing the instrumentalization of religion.<sup>53</sup>

The future of higher religious education depends on making it compatible with modern educational dynamics while preserving traditional values. AI-assisted analyses can contribute to building a holistic model that incorporates both theoretical and practical components of higher religious education. When elements such as interdisciplinary approach, academic autonomy, technology integration, internationalization, and social engagement are considered, it will be possible to establish a more comprehensive and effective higher religious education model.

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## Declaration

- 1. Finance/Incentive:** The author declare that no financial/incentive was used in the study.
  - 2. Conflict of Interest:** The author declare that there is no conflict of interest in the study.
  - 3. Ethical Statement:** The author declare that research and publication ethics were followed in this article. In addition, ethics committee approval is not required for this research.
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<sup>51</sup> Mustafa Cabir Altıntaş, "Yaygın Din Eğitiminde İslam İçi Çoğulculuğun İmkânı: Şırnak Örneği", *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 35 (2024), 476-480.

<sup>52</sup> Usta Doğan, "Mezhepler Üstü Bir Program Tasarımının Nitelikleri Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma", 128-129, 141; Altıntaş, "Yaygın Din Eğitiminde İslam İçi Çoğulculuğun İmkânı: Şırnak Örneği", 476; Abdurrahman Hendek vd., "Higher Religious Education at Public Universities in Malaysia and Turkey: A Comparative Study", *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 26/3 (2022), 994.

<sup>53</sup> Hüzeyin Yılmaz, "Yaygın Din Eğitimi Kurumları ve Toplumsal Barış", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 5/2 (2001), 333-334.

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