Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam
p-ISSN: 2339-1413 | e-ISSN: 2621-8275
Vol. 14, No. 1, 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.36667/jppi.v14i1.2349

Internationalization and the Expansion of Islamic Higher Education in Turkiye: Historical Legacies, Policy Shifts, and Mobility Challenges in Theology Programs

Kerem Alp Demir
Faculty of Theology, Sakarya University
Email: kalpdemir26@sakarya.edu.tr

Selim Efe Aydın
Faculty of Theology, Sakarya University
Email: aydinefesemir26@sakarya.edu.tr

Received: 8-12-2025 | Revised: 18-4-2026 | Accepted: 26-5-2026

Abstract

This article examines the internationalization and expansion of Islamic higher education and theology programs in Turkiye. It argues that Turkiye represents an important case because its theology education has been shaped by the transformation from Ottoman medrese traditions to modern university-based faculties, secular republican reforms, political Islam, state regulation, and changing geopolitical aspirations. Using a qualitative literature-based method with a thematic and conceptual-critical approach, this study synthesizes scholarly works on Turkish Islamic higher education, curriculum reform, English-medium instruction, scholarship programs, educational diplomacy, governance, and academic mobility. The findings show that internationalization in Turkish theology programs is not merely a technical process of increasing international students, adopting English-medium instruction, or expanding global partnerships. It is also an institutional and epistemological process involving religious identity, curriculum integrity, linguistic plurality, quality assurance, stakeholder participation, and soft power. The article concludes that Islamic higher education requires a context-sensitive model of internationalization that combines academic excellence, religious and ethical identity, intercultural competence, educational diplomacy, and participatory governance.

Keywords

Islamic higher education, theology programs, internationalization, Turkiye, educational diplomacy, curriculum reform

Introduction

Islamic higher education in Turkiye offers one of the most revealing cases for understanding how religious knowledge, state power, modern university governance, and global academic competition intersect within a Muslim-majority society. Its development cannot be read simply as a linear movement from tradition to modernity. Rather, it is marked by interruption, reconstruction, negotiation, and sometimes by tension that has never fully disappeared. Özduman et al. (2013) and Yorulmaz (2019) help us see that the transformation from medrese-based religious learning to modern university-based theology faculties was deeply connected to the early Republican project of secularization and educational modernization. This transformation moved Islamic learning from its older institutional location into a new academic framework shaped by the modern university, state regulation, and disciplinary specialization.

At first glance, this shift may appear to be a technical institutional reform. Yet it was much more than that. Guven (2005) shows that religious education in Turkiye has long been

shaped by political contestation, while Kaplan (2002) reminds us that the relationship between state authority, military secularism, and religious discourse became especially visible after the 1980 coup. In this sense, Turkish Islamic higher education has never existed outside the broader politics of national identity. It has been asked, again and again, to answer a difficult question. How can religious knowledge be preserved, modernized, regulated, and made socially useful within a formally secular republic? This question remains important today, even when the institutional landscape has changed considerably.

The contemporary expansion of Islamic higher education in Turkiye should therefore be understood against this longer historical background. Özolu et al. (2016) describe the rapid expansion of Turkish higher education after 2006, while Soyşekerci and Erturgut (2010) show that the Turkish higher education system had already undergone significant structural transformation between 1981 and 2009. Theology faculties became part of this wider massification process. Their growth reflected increasing social demand for religious higher education, but also created new questions about academic quality, institutional capacity, and the sustainability of expansion. It is reasonable to say that expansion brought visibility and access, but not always equal depth. A larger number of institutions does not automatically mean stronger scholarly traditions, more qualified faculty, or more coherent international engagement.

The political and cultural meaning of religious education in Turkiye also cannot be separated from the rise of political Islam and the recurring responses of secularist actors. Genç (2018) argues that religious education in Turkiye has often been debated through the language of values education, while Hermann (2003), Mecham (2004), and Cizre (2007) demonstrate how Islamic political movements gradually adapted to the conditions of secular democratic politics. The expansion of Imam-Hatip schools, discussed by Engin (1998), Akboga (2016), and Bayhan and Gök (2017), became one of the clearest examples of how religious education could function simultaneously as an educational institution, a cultural symbol, and a political issue. For theology programs at the university level, this background matters because curriculum, institutional identity, and public legitimacy are never purely academic matters. They are also embedded in wider debates about what kind of nation Turkiye imagines itself to be.

In recent decades, the internationalization of Turkish higher education has added another layer to this already complex picture. Selvitopu and Aydin (2018) explain that internationalization strategies in Turkish higher education involve curriculum development, institutional planning, and global engagement, while Efe and Ozer (2023) show that internationalization is also constructed through official and institutional discourse. For theology programs, however, internationalization is not merely a matter of attracting foreign students or increasing international visibility. It also raises more delicate issues related to religious authority, language, intellectual tradition, and intercultural formation. When a theology faculty internationalizes, what exactly is being internationalized? Its curriculum, its students, its language of instruction, its institutional identity, or its interpretation of Islamic knowledge itself? The answer is not simple, and perhaps it should not be made too simple.

English-medium instruction has become one important strategy within this internationalization process. Toprak Yıldız (2022) identifies English-medium instruction and mobility as central elements in the Turkish higher education context, while Gülle et al. (2025) draw attention to cultural and linguistic diversity in English-medium universities. In theology programs, this strategy may increase accessibility for international students and strengthen global academic communication. At the same time, it may create new tensions. Islamic theology has historically relied on Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, and other scholarly languages. The growing use of English may support internationalization, but it

may also reshape how religious concepts are translated, taught, and understood. This is not necessarily a problem, but it is certainly a matter that deserves careful scholarly attention.

Scholarship programs and educational diplomacy have also become central to Turkiye's international higher education agenda. Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2022) show that student mobility from the Middle East to Turkiye is shaped by representation, identity, and regional connection, while Almassri (2024) frames scholarship impact through broader questions of peace, theory, and long-term social contribution. Çötok et al. (2025) further indicate that Türkiye Scholarships support not only educational access but also adaptation processes among international students. These programs allow Turkiye to position itself as an educational destination for students from Muslim-majority societies, neighboring regions, and culturally proximate communities. Here, internationalization is not driven only by economic motives. It is also connected to soft power, cultural diplomacy, religious affinity, and geopolitical imagination.

This geopolitical dimension has become increasingly visible. Aydinli and Mathews (2021) argue that Turkiye's internationalization of higher education is linked to the search for larger status in global politics. Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2026) similarly show that Turkish higher education internationalization must be read critically as a policy project shaped by broader political narratives. Ünal Gezer (2025) adds that Turkiye's internationalization steps in language education reflect wider shifts in educational orientation and global positioning. These studies suggest that Turkiye does not internationalize its higher education system in a neutral vacuum. It does so while negotiating between Western academic models, Islamic regional solidarities, neo-Ottoman cultural memory, pan-Turkic connections, and contemporary state ambitions.

Nevertheless, the internationalization of Islamic higher education in Turkiye continues to face serious unresolved challenges. Gök and Gümüş (2018) note that international student recruitment in Turkish universities is shaped by specific rationales and institutional strategies, yet recruitment alone does not guarantee meaningful academic integration. Gokturk et al. (2018) show that Turkish higher education has had to experiment with internationalization during politically troubled times, while Sahin and Brooks (2023) describe internationalization in peripheral contexts as often nation-bounded rather than fully global. These insights are important because they prevent us from treating internationalization as a purely progressive or automatically beneficial process. Internationalization may open doors, but it may also reproduce hierarchy, inconsistency, and symbolic policy language when institutional conditions are weak.

Governance is one of the most persistent issues. Onursal-Beşgül (2017) shows that Turkiye's engagement with the Bologna Process involved the translation of European norms into a national context, but such translation did not always produce deep institutional participation. Özaydınlı (2023) similarly indicates that curriculum development in Türkiye has often been shaped by centralized expert and policy structures. This matters for theology programs because curriculum reform requires not only administrative decision-making but also serious participation from scholars, students, practitioners, religious communities, and international stakeholders. Without such participation, internationalization may become a formal label rather than a lived academic transformation.

Quality assurance also deserves careful consideration. Gül (2017), in discussing open education theology programs, highlights practical problems of equivalence, preparation, and training. Koç (2025) compares religious and pedagogical education in theology faculties in Türkiye with similar programs globally and points to the need for stronger academic and pedagogical alignment. While studies from other Islamic higher education contexts, such as Iskarim et al. (2025), Sibawaihi et al. (2025), and Khoir et al. (2025), focus more directly on Indonesia, they are still useful for comparative reflection because they show that Islamic

higher education institutions across Muslim-majority societies face similar pressures related to quality assurance, international standards, institutional identity, and the narrowing or expansion of Islamic knowledge. Turkiye's experience, then, is specific, but not isolated.

Mobility presents another major challenge. Gök (2016) explains the Turkish higher education system through the lens of massification, while Seggie and Çalıkoğlu (2023) examine the changing patterns of international academic mobility among Western-origin faculty members in Turkiye. Eriçok (2025) shows how brain-drain discourses shape perceptions of educated mobility, and Şentürk (2025) reminds us that immobility may be shaped by family attachment, national identity, and political context. In other words, mobility is not only a matter of opportunity. It is also a matter of belonging, risk, economic security, institutional culture, and personal life. For theology programs, where religious identity and social responsibility are often deeply felt, these factors may be even more complicated.

Against this background, this article examines the internationalization and expansion of Islamic higher education and theology programs in Turkiye. The central argument is that Turkiye's experience cannot be adequately understood through conventional models of higher education internationalization alone. Those models often emphasize mobility, language policy, institutional partnerships, and global rankings. These aspects are relevant, of course. Yet in the Turkish case, and particularly in theology programs, internationalization is also shaped by secular-religious negotiation, state governance, curriculum politics, Islamic intellectual identity, scholarship diplomacy, and geopolitical repositioning. This is why a more context-sensitive and critically reflective analysis is needed.

The article is guided by several interrelated questions. It asks how Islamic higher education in Turkiye evolved from traditional religious institutions into modern theology faculties. It also examines how political, historical, and geopolitical factors shape the internationalization of theology programs. In addition, it explores the strategies used to internationalize Turkish Islamic higher education, including curriculum reform, English-medium instruction, scholarship programs, and student recruitment. The article further investigates the institutional, cultural, and mobility-related challenges that limit the effectiveness of these strategies. Finally, it considers what Turkiye's experience may contribute to the broader study of Islamic higher education in Muslim-majority societies.

By addressing these questions, the article seeks to contribute to the literature in two main ways. First, it situates Turkish theology programs within the broader history of Islamic higher education, state secularism, political Islam, and global higher education reform. Second, it argues that internationalization in Islamic higher education should not be reduced to technical indicators of global engagement. It must also be understood as an intellectual, institutional, cultural, and ethical process. This point may seem modest, but it is not insignificant. If Islamic higher education is to engage the world without losing its scholarly depth and religious meaning, then internationalization must be discussed not only as policy, but also as formation, interpretation, and responsibility.

Literature Review

Islamic Higher Education in Turkiye From Medrese to Modern Theology Faculties

The historical development of Islamic higher education in Turkiye cannot be separated from the long intellectual legacy of the Ottoman medrese. For centuries, the medrese functioned not only as a place for transmitting religious knowledge, but also as an institution that shaped scholarly authority, legal reasoning, moral discipline, and public religious leadership. It would be too narrow to see it merely as a traditional school. In the Ottoman context, the medrese formed part of a wider civilizational structure in which knowledge, law,

governance, and religious legitimacy were interconnected. This is why the later transformation of Islamic education in Turkiye was not simply a change of institutional label. It involved a deeper reorganization of religious knowledge itself.

Özduman et al. (2013) show that the modernization of Turkish higher education was closely related to early Republican reform and the integration of modern academic structures into the national system. In this context, the establishment of theology faculties within universities marked a significant departure from the older medrese model. Yorulmaz (2019), in discussing the movement from the methodology of hadith to the history of hadith within Dar al-Funun theology courses, provides an important illustration of how Islamic disciplines were gradually reframed through modern academic categories. The shift was not only from one building to another, so to speak. It was also a shift from inherited scholarly transmission toward disciplinary organization, historical inquiry, and university-based academic regulation.

The early Republican period brought a more radical restructuring of religious education. Secular reforms sought to reduce the autonomous authority of religious institutions and bring religious learning under the supervision of the modern state. Guven (2005) indicates that religious education in Turkiye was repeatedly reshaped by state policy and political ideology, while Kaplan (2002) demonstrates how military secularism after the 1980 coup influenced the place of religion in public education. These reforms created a paradox that still matters today. Islamic knowledge did not disappear from public education, but it was reconfigured within a secular state framework. It was preserved, yet regulated. It was modernized, yet also constrained.

This duality helps explain why Turkish Islamic higher education has always carried a double legacy. On one side, it reflects the secular modernization project of the Republic, with its emphasis on state control, national identity, scientific rationality, and institutional centralization. On the other side, it reflects the continuing social demand for religious knowledge, Islamic identity, moral formation, and public religious leadership. Hendek et al. (2022), through a comparative study of higher religious education in Malaysia and Turkiye, suggest that Turkiye's model remains distinctive because religious higher education is embedded within public universities and shaped by national secular arrangements. This makes Turkish theology faculties different from both classical medreses and many contemporary Islamic universities elsewhere.

The rapid expansion of higher education after 2006 further complicated this historical trajectory. Özolu et al. (2016) describe how newly established public universities expanded access but also faced challenges of resources, staffing, quality, and institutional maturity. Soyşekerci and Erturgut (2010) similarly show that Turkish higher education had already experienced structural transformation between 1981 and 2009, preparing the ground for wider massification. Theology faculties became part of this expansion. Their growth signaled the rising visibility of religious higher education, but it also raised practical questions about whether institutional expansion was matched by scholarly depth, pedagogical quality, and adequate academic infrastructure.

This issue is not unique to Turkiye. In a comparative sense, Iskarim et al. (2025) and Sibawaihi et al. (2025) show that Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia also face pressures to align with future quality assurance and internationalization demands. Khoir et al. (2025) add another important concern by showing how Islamic knowledge may experience narrowing spaces when higher education institutions become increasingly shaped by market expectations and bureaucratic standards. These comparative studies do not replace the Turkish case, but they help clarify a broader pattern. Islamic higher education across different Muslim societies is often asked to modernize, expand, internationalize, and preserve its intellectual identity at the same time. That is a heavy burden, and it cannot be solved only through administrative reform.

In Turkiye, therefore, the movement from medrese to theology faculty should be read as an unfinished historical process. The modern theology faculty is neither a simple continuation of the Ottoman medrese nor a complete break from it. It is a hybrid institution. It inherits religious expectations, but it operates under modern academic norms. It carries Islamic scholarly memory, but it is evaluated through state policy, university regulations, and increasingly global standards. This hybridity is precisely what makes Turkish Islamic higher education such an important object of study.

Secularism, Political Islam, and Religious Education Policy

The relationship between secularism, political Islam, and religious education in Turkiye is often presented as a binary conflict. Yet this interpretation is too simple. Turkish religious education has developed through negotiation, contestation, accommodation, and reversal. It has been shaped by secularist concerns about the role of religion in public life, but also by persistent social demand for Islamic education. It has also been influenced by political actors who used religious education as part of broader projects of national identity, moral formation, and social legitimacy.

Guven (2005) argues that political Islam had a significant impact on the revitalization of Islamic education in Turkiye. This influence did not appear suddenly. It developed through the gradual expansion of religious schooling, public debates on national identity, and the changing role of Islam in electoral politics. Kaplan (2002), by examining the politics of military secularism and religious militarism after the 1980 coup, helps explain why religious education became entangled with state ideology rather than simply opposing it. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which sought to combine nationalism, moral conservatism, and Sunni Islamic values, became one of the most important ideological frameworks for understanding this period.

The expansion of Imam-Hatip schools became a central issue in this policy landscape. Engin (1998) describes Imam-Hatip schools as politically sensitive institutions because they were perceived by secularist actors as potential threats to the Kemalist order. Akboga (2016) shows that the expansion of compulsory education in Turkiye was shaped by both local dynamics and world culture influences, while Bayhan and Gök (2017) reveal how education policy in Istanbul was also affected by neoliberal urban transformation. These studies suggest that religious education policy was never only about theology or curriculum. It was also about class, urban space, national identity, and the distribution of cultural authority.

Genç (2018) offers a useful way to understand the debate by asking whether religious education in Turkiye should be seen as values education or religious education. This distinction matters because religious education in secular states is often justified not only through confessional aims, but also through moral, civic, and cultural arguments. Sarapli and Şarapli (2021) further show that Turkish state ideology and education between 1980 and 2015 were deeply intertwined. Their analysis suggests that curriculum reform often reflected broader ideological projects, even when expressed in the neutral language of educational modernization.

Political Islam also changed over time. Hermann (2003), Mecham (2004), and Cizre (2007) show that Islamic political movements in Turkiye did not remain static. They adapted to secular democracy, electoral competition, public legitimacy, and international pressure. This adaptation affected education policy as well. Religious education was no longer framed only as opposition to secularism. It became part of mainstream political negotiation. The Justice and Development Party, in particular, contributed to the expansion of religious educational institutions while also operating within the formal structures of the secular state. Here again, the picture is complicated. Political Islam did not simply replace secularism. It worked through, against, and sometimes within secular institutions.

This complexity also appears in higher religious education. Hendek et al. (2022) show that public university-based higher religious education in Turkiye operates within a secular institutional framework, even as it serves religious and social purposes. Genç et al. (2025), in examining secularization and the perception of religious influence among individuals receiving higher religious education, indicate that religious identity among theology students cannot be assumed as uniform or static. Theology students may be religiously committed, but they are also shaped by modernity, secularization, urbanization, and changing social expectations. This is an important point. Theology faculties are not isolated islands of tradition. They are embedded in contemporary Turkish society.

Curriculum policy is one of the clearest sites where these tensions become visible. Özaydınlı (2023) shows that curriculum development in Türkiye is often shaped by the perspectives of curriculum specialists and centralized policy processes. İmrol et al. (2021), in evaluating the 2018 Turkish curriculum, also demonstrate that curriculum reform involves questions of coherence, implementation, and stakeholder interpretation. Başaran and Aykaç (2020), although focusing on early childhood teacher education, provide a useful parallel by showing that curriculum reform must be evaluated through the perceptions of those who implement it. The same principle applies to theology programs. Curriculum reform imposed from above may change documents, but it does not necessarily transform learning culture.

Karaevli et al. (2024) and KELEŞ and CIRIK (2025) deepen this point by highlighting the importance of policy implementation and the experiences of curriculum development experts. Their work suggests that educational reform depends not only on policy design, but also on street-level interpretation, expert mediation, and institutional practice. In the context of Turkish religious education, this means that secularism and political Islam should not be treated only as abstract ideologies. They become real in curriculum committees, classroom interactions, textbook choices, teacher preparation, and the everyday management of educational institutions.

Thus, Turkish religious education has developed through an unstable but productive tension. Secularism has regulated religion, but it has not eliminated it. Political Islam has expanded religious education, but it has also had to adapt to modern institutions. State ideology has shaped curriculum, but social demand has repeatedly pushed religious education back into public visibility. This negotiated character is essential for understanding why internationalization in Turkish theology programs cannot be understood merely as a technical higher education policy. It is built upon a long domestic history of ideological negotiation.

Internationalization of Higher Education and Theology Programs

Internationalization in higher education is often associated with student mobility, academic partnerships, international rankings, and the use of English. These elements are important, but they do not fully capture the complexity of the concept. Selvitopu and Aydin (2018) define internationalization in Turkish higher education through a process-oriented perspective, emphasizing institutional strategies, curriculum development, and global engagement. Efe and Ozer (2023), through discourse analysis, show that internationalization is also a narrative constructed by institutions and policymakers. In other words, internationalization is not only something universities do. It is also something they say about themselves.

Aydinli and Mathews (2021) argue that Turkiye's internationalization of higher education is linked to the search for larger status in global politics. This argument is useful because it situates internationalization beyond campuses and classrooms. Internationalization becomes part of national ambition, diplomatic positioning, and symbolic recognition. Gokturk et al. (2018), however, remind us that internationalization in Turkiye

has also unfolded during politically troubled times. This means that global engagement is pursued under conditions of uncertainty, tension, and sometimes institutional vulnerability. Internationalization is therefore both aspiration and risk.

The broader literature also suggests that internationalization cannot be reduced to Westernization. Sahin and Brooks (2023) describe the internationalization of higher education in peripheral countries as nation-bounded, showing that global engagement is often filtered through national priorities and political narratives. Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2026) similarly provide a critical analysis of Turkish higher education internationalization as a policy field shaped by cultural, political, and geopolitical considerations. These studies are especially important for theology programs, because Islamic higher education cannot simply import internationalization models designed for business, engineering, or general liberal arts education.

Language policy is a key part of this discussion. Toprak Yıldız (2022) shows that English-medium instruction and mobility are central to Turkish higher education internationalization. Gülle et al. (2025) explore cultural and linguistic diversity in English-medium instruction universities, showing that language is never just a neutral tool of communication. In theology programs, this issue becomes even more sensitive. English may support global academic access, publication, and international recruitment. Yet theology has its own linguistic inheritance. Arabic remains central for Qur'anic studies, hadith, jurisprudence, and classical Islamic thought. Ottoman Turkish and Persian also matter for historical scholarship. The growing role of English, therefore, raises a quiet but serious question. Can theology become globally accessible without weakening its connection to Islamic scholarly languages?

This question becomes more complex when we consider curriculum internationalization. Koç (2025), in a comparative analysis of religious and pedagogical education in theology faculties in Türkiye, emphasizes the need to evaluate theology programs in relation to similar programs worldwide. Gül (2017), in discussing open education theology programs, points to problems of Arabic preparation, practical training, and educational equivalence. These issues show that curriculum internationalization cannot mean merely adding international content or translating courses into English. It must also address the internal structure of theological knowledge, pedagogical competence, and the relationship between classical Islamic disciplines and contemporary academic expectations.

Intercultural competence is another important dimension. Demirtaş et al. (2023), in examining cognitive flexibility and critical thinking tendencies among religious education teacher candidates, suggest that future religious educators need intellectual openness, analytical capacity, and reflective judgment. This is highly relevant to internationalized theology programs. Students who study theology in an international environment do not merely encounter different accents or nationalities. They encounter different religious experiences, legal traditions, sectarian histories, and ethical questions. Internationalization, in this sense, becomes a process of intellectual and moral formation.

The global role of English in religious education also needs careful reading. Sofi and Jenks (2025), in studying EFL learning, religious faith, and globalization in Indonesian pesantren, show that English language learning can be negotiated within religious environments rather than simply imposed upon them. Qoyyimah and Bargallie (2026), although focusing on Indonesian EFL teaching, help us think about student-centered pedagogy and power relations in language education. These studies are not about Turkiye directly, but they offer comparative insight. They remind us that language internationalization in Islamic education always involves power, identity, pedagogy, and faith.

For theology programs, then, internationalization has a special meaning. It is not only about attracting international students, signing memoranda of understanding, or improving

global visibility. It is about asking how Islamic knowledge can travel across borders without becoming shallow, how religious identity can engage plural academic spaces without becoming defensive, and how theology can participate in global scholarship without losing its own epistemic grammar. According to us, this is where the discussion becomes most interesting. Internationalization in theology is not merely administrative expansion. It is a test of intellectual translation.

Educational Diplomacy, Soft Power, and International Student Mobility

Turkiye's internationalization of higher education has been closely linked to educational diplomacy. This is especially visible in scholarship programs, regional partnerships, and international student recruitment. Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2022), in their study of student mobility from the Middle East to Turkiye, show that international students are not only individual academic migrants. They are also represented within broader narratives of cultural proximity, regional connection, and institutional aspiration. Türkiye Scholarships have become one of the most visible instruments in this process, offering financial support while also building long-term relations between Turkiye and students from different regions.

Çötok et al. (2025) show that international students participating in the Türkiye Scholarships Program experience adaptation processes that are academic, cultural, and social. Their study helps us understand that scholarship programs do more than open access to higher education. They create a structured encounter between students and Turkish society. Almassri (2024), by discussing scholarship impact through the lens of peace and theory, further suggests that scholarships may generate long-term social, professional, and identity-related effects. In this sense, scholarships operate as soft-power instruments. They produce not only graduates, but also networks, memories, loyalties, and cultural familiarity.

The soft-power dimension of Turkish higher education is also linked to broader geopolitical shifts. Aydinli and Mathews (2021) argue that Turkiye uses higher education internationalization as part of its search for global status. Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2026) read Turkish internationalization policy critically, showing how it reflects national ambitions and changing geopolitical narratives. Ünal Gezer (2025), in discussing Turkiye's internationalization steps at primary levels and implications for early English education, also points to the wider reorientation of educational policy within Turkiye's global positioning. These studies make it clear that internationalization is not just an academic project. It is also part of how Turkiye imagines its place in the world.

International student mobility to Turkiye is often driven by socio-cultural factors as much as by economic or academic considerations. Kondakçı et al. (2016), in examining regional internationalization between Turkiye and the Balkans, show that regional proximity and historical ties shape student flows. Yılmaz and Temizkan (2022) indicate that educational service quality and socio-cultural adaptation difficulties affect international students' higher education satisfaction. These findings are important because they challenge a purely market-based view of internationalization. Many students do not choose Turkiye only because of cost, ranking, or employment prospects. They may also choose it because of cultural familiarity, religious affinity, historical imagination, and the possibility of living in a Muslim-majority environment that still participates in global higher education.

Najimdeen and Amzat (2023) use dynamic systems theory and push-pull theory to explain internationalization best practices in higher education. Their framework helps clarify why students move. Push factors may include limited educational opportunities, political instability, or restricted academic pathways in home countries. Pull factors may include scholarships, cultural affinity, perceived religious safety, institutional reputation, or future career possibilities. In the Turkish case, the pull factors are often layered. Turkiye may be

seen as modern but culturally familiar, international but not entirely Western, religiously resonant but institutionally secular. This combination is not easy to find elsewhere.

Student mobility from Central Asia is another important part of this picture. Aslan (2026) examines education outmigration from Central Asia to Turkiye and shows that Turkiye's universities attract students through regional, linguistic, cultural, and educational connections. This mobility is not simply movement from one country to another. It reflects historical memory, pan-Turkic ties, economic calculation, and the desire for academic advancement. In theology and Islamic studies, such mobility may also involve religious learning, identity formation, and exposure to Turkiye's model of state-regulated Islamic education.

Yet student mobility does not automatically produce integration. International students may face language barriers, cultural adaptation challenges, bureaucratic difficulties, and uneven academic support. Yılmaz and Temizkan (2022) remind us that satisfaction depends on both educational service quality and socio-cultural adaptation. Çötok et al. (2025) similarly show that adaptation within scholarship programs requires institutional attention. For theology students, adaptation may include additional layers, such as differences in religious practice, sectarian background, gender norms, and expectations about religious authority. These issues are rarely visible in recruitment brochures, but they matter in everyday academic life.

Educational diplomacy therefore gives Turkiye a strong platform for international engagement, but it also brings responsibility. If scholarship programs are to function as more than symbolic soft power, they must be supported by strong academic mentoring, language preparation, intercultural services, and meaningful inclusion within university life. Otherwise, internationalization may remain attractive at the level of policy discourse while becoming fragile in the lived experience of students. This, perhaps, is one of the quiet tests of Turkiye's internationalization project.

Governance, Quality Assurance, and Mobility Barriers

The literature on Turkish higher education repeatedly identifies governance as a central challenge. Gök (2016), using Martin Trow's framework, describes the Turkish higher education system in relation to massification and institutional expansion. Massification increases access, but it also produces pressure on governance, quality, faculty capacity, and institutional differentiation. In the case of theology programs, this pressure becomes even more visible because expansion requires not only classrooms and administrative units, but also qualified scholars, language preparation, practical training, and a coherent vision of Islamic intellectual formation.

Centralized governance has often shaped the Turkish higher education system. Onursal-Beşgül (2017), in discussing Turkiye and the Bologna Process, shows that European norms were translated into the Turkish context through national policy mechanisms. Translation, however, does not always mean deep internalization. Selvitopu and Aydin (2018) also suggest that internationalization strategies require institutional planning and stakeholder engagement, but centralized structures can limit local creativity and participation. In theology programs, this raises a practical concern. Can curriculum internationalization become meaningful if lecturers, students, religious scholars, and international stakeholders are not sufficiently involved in shaping it?

Özaydınlı (2023) shows that curriculum development in Türkiye has often been viewed through the expertise of curriculum specialists, while KELEŞ and CIRIK (2025) emphasize the experiences of curriculum development experts within the Century of Türkiye Education Model. Karaevli et al. (2024), by focusing on the reflections of street-level bureaucrats in education policy implementation, remind us that policy is transformed when it enters real

institutional life. This insight is highly relevant. A curriculum may look international on paper, but its actual meaning depends on teachers, students, assessment practices, institutional culture, and available resources.

Quality assurance is another unresolved issue. Gül (2017) points to concrete problems in open education theology programs, including practical training and preparation gaps. Koç (2025) suggests that theology faculties in Türkiye need comparative reflection with similar programs in the world in order to strengthen both religious and pedagogical education. Aksoydan and Mizikaci (2015), although writing about nutrition and dietetic programs in Turkiye, show the importance of stakeholder perception in evaluating academic programs. Their point can be transferred carefully to theology education. Program quality cannot be judged only by formal compliance. It must also be evaluated through the experiences of students, lecturers, graduates, and professional communities.

Comparative work on Islamic higher education also helps frame the problem. Iskarim et al. (2025) show that Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia are preparing for future quality assurance demands, while Huriyah and Hsucheng Chiang (2025) discuss performance-based remuneration systems in Islamic higher education as public service agencies. Asy'Ari et al. (2025), through the CIPP evaluation model, analyze the impact of remuneration policies on lecturer performance in Indonesian state Islamic universities. Although these studies are not centered on Turkiye, they help illuminate a broader issue faced by Islamic higher education institutions. Quality assurance cannot be limited to accreditation documents. It must include faculty development, performance systems, institutional planning, and a culture of continuous improvement.

Mobility barriers further complicate internationalization. Seggie and Çalıkoğlu (2023) examine Western-origin faculty members in Turkiye and show that international academic mobility is shaped by changing patterns, expectations, and institutional conditions. Eriçok (2025), by analyzing brain-drain discourses among pre-service teachers in Türkiye, reveals how mobility is often framed through anxiety about national loss and professional uncertainty. Şentürk (2025), in studying immobility in authoritarian contexts among Azerbaijani undergraduate students, shows that family ties, national identity, and political conditions may shape decisions not to move. Mobility, then, is not merely a technical indicator. It is also emotional, cultural, political, and familial.

Faculty mobility is particularly important for theology programs. Internationalization requires scholars who can teach across cultures, publish internationally, collaborate with global networks, and still maintain competence in Islamic intellectual traditions. Yet structural barriers such as centralized governance, limited incentives, economic insecurity, administrative rigidity, and lack of meritocratic pathways may weaken faculty engagement. Cultural barriers also matter. Resistance to change, hierarchical academic culture, and uncertainty about the value of international experience may reduce the willingness of faculty members to participate in mobility programs.

Student mobility faces related but distinct challenges. International students may be attracted by scholarships, religious affinity, and Turkiye's geopolitical position, but they still need academic integration, language support, and inclusive campus environments. Gök and Gümüş (2018) show that Turkish universities have developed rationales and strategies for international student recruitment, but recruitment is only the first stage. Retention, academic success, belonging, and post-graduation networks are equally important. It is not enough to bring students into the system. The system must also be ready to receive them meaningfully.

The literature therefore suggests that the main question is not whether Turkiye has internationalized Islamic higher education. Clearly, it has. The more important question is how deep, inclusive, sustainable, and academically meaningful that internationalization has

become. Internationalization may be visible through English-medium instruction, scholarship programs, and international student recruitment. But its deeper quality depends on governance, curriculum integrity, faculty capacity, student experience, quality assurance, and the ability to negotiate religious identity within global academic spaces. This is the bridge to the next section of the article, where these themes can be examined more analytically as findings and discussion.

Method

This study employed a qualitative literature-based research design to examine the internationalization and expansion of Islamic higher education and theology programs in Turkiye. More specifically, it was framed as a thematic and conceptual-critical review, since the article does not seek to measure institutional performance statistically, but to interpret and synthesize patterns found in existing scholarship. Erdem and Polat (2023) provide an important basis for mapping research trends on the internationalization of Turkish higher education, while Selvitopu and Aydin (2018) help clarify how internationalization strategies have been studied through institutional and process-oriented perspectives. This approach is appropriate because the topic itself is historically layered and conceptually complex. It involves not only higher education policy, but also religious identity, state secularism, curriculum reform, educational diplomacy, and academic mobility. In this sense, the method allows the article to read Turkiye's theology programs as part of a broader intellectual and institutional transformation rather than as isolated academic units.

The data used in this study consisted of scholarly publications, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic book chapters, policy-oriented studies, and relevant comparative works on Islamic higher education, Turkish higher education policy, theology faculties, internationalization, curriculum reform, scholarship programs, and mobility. Özduman et al. (2013) and Yorulmaz (2019) were used to understand the historical movement from traditional religious learning to modern university-based theological education, while Guven (2005), Kaplan (2002), Genç (2018), and Cizre (2007) were used to situate religious education within the politics of secularism and political Islam. Studies by Aydinli and Mathews (2021), Efe and Ozer (2023), Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2026), and Sahin and Brooks (2023) helped frame internationalization as a policy discourse connected to geopolitical positioning and national aspiration. Meanwhile, works by Çötok et al. (2025), Almassri (2024), Kondakçı et al. (2016), and Yılmaz and Temizkan (2022) were used to examine scholarship-based mobility, socio-cultural adaptation, and Turkiye's educational diplomacy. The inclusion of comparative studies on Islamic higher education in other Muslim-majority contexts was not intended to shift the focus away from Turkiye, but to sharpen the analytical lens.

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, meaning that the selected literature was read, compared, grouped, and interpreted according to recurring conceptual patterns. Braun and Clarke's widely used understanding of thematic analysis may be helpful here, although the present article applies it in a literature-based rather than interview-based form. The themes were organized around the historical transformation of Islamic higher education in Turkiye, secularism and political Islam in religious education policy, internationalization strategies in theology programs, educational diplomacy and scholarship-based mobility, governance and quality assurance challenges, and future research gaps. Gök and Gümüş (2018), Gök (2016), Seggie and Çalıkoğlu (2023), Eriçok (2025), and Şentürk (2025) were especially useful for identifying mobility-related constraints, while Koç (2025), Gül (2017), Özaydınlı (2023), and Onursal-Beşgül (2017) informed the discussion on curriculum, governance, and institutional quality. This study is limited because it relies on secondary literature and does not directly capture the lived experiences of students, lecturers, policymakers, or international office administrators. Even so, the literature-based approach

remains valuable because it enables a broader mapping of historical, policy, cultural, and academic patterns that would be difficult to capture through a single fieldwork site alone.

Results and Discussion

Historical Legacies and the Institutional Transformation of Islamic Higher Education in Turkiye

The first major finding of this study is that Islamic higher education in Turkiye has been shaped by a long and unfinished historical transformation. It moved from the Ottoman medrese tradition into modern university-based theology faculties, but this movement was never merely administrative. Özduman et al. (2013) show that the modernization of higher education in Turkiye was closely connected to the broader Republican project of institutional reform, while Yorulmaz (2019) demonstrates how Islamic scholarly subjects, including hadith studies, were gradually reframed within modern academic categories. What changed, therefore, was not only the location of religious education. The very mode of organizing, legitimizing, and transmitting Islamic knowledge was also transformed.

The Ottoman medrese had historically functioned as a key institution for the formation of religious scholars, judges, teachers, and moral authorities. It was not simply a school in the modern sense. It was part of a larger religious, legal, and intellectual order. When the early Republican state reorganized religious education, it did so through a secular framework that sought to regulate religion while also preventing its complete disappearance from public life. Guven (2005) helps clarify this paradox by showing that Islamic education in Turkiye has repeatedly been shaped by state intervention and political ideology. In this sense, the modern theology faculty emerged from a tension that has never fully been resolved. It was expected to be academic, modern, and nationally regulated, while at the same time remaining connected to Islamic learning, public religiosity, and moral formation.

This historical legacy gives Turkish theology faculties a distinctive institutional character. They are part of the modern university system, but they also carry religious and civilizational expectations that ordinary academic departments do not usually bear. Hendek et al. (2022), in comparing higher religious education in Malaysia and Turkiye, show that Turkish higher religious education has a particular relationship with the secular state and public university structures. This position creates both opportunity and ambiguity. Theology faculties gain academic legitimacy by being located within universities, but they also face questions about how far religious knowledge can be translated into modern disciplinary language without losing its inherited depth.

The expansion of Turkish higher education after 2006 intensified this complexity. Özolu et al. (2016) indicate that the rapid establishment of new public universities expanded access but also created problems of institutional maturity, staffing, resources, and quality. Soyşekerci and Erturgut (2010) similarly show that the Turkish higher education system had already undergone extensive structural transformation before this period. Theology faculties were carried into this wider process of massification. Their expansion reflected the growing public demand for higher religious education, but it also raised a difficult question. Can the expansion of institutions keep pace with the formation of scholarly authority, pedagogical quality, and intellectual depth?

This question becomes even more serious when theology faculties are asked to internationalize. Internationalization requires global communication, international student services, cross-border partnerships, and often English-medium programs. Yet Turkish theology faculties are not neutral professional schools. They are institutions that deal with revelation, tradition, ethics, religious authority, and identity. Koç (2025) suggests that religious and pedagogical education in Turkish theology faculties should be compared with similar programs in the world in order to strengthen their academic and professional relevance. This comparison is important, but it also reminds us that theology cannot be

internationalized in exactly the same way as business, engineering, or medical education. Its knowledge traditions are different. Its social functions are different as well.

The historical transformation of Islamic higher education in Turkiye, therefore, should be read as a layered process. It includes secular reform, institutional modernization, religious revival, university expansion, and global academic pressure. None of these elements can explain the whole picture alone. According to our reading, the distinctive feature of Turkish Islamic higher education lies precisely in this layered identity. It is modern but historically burdened, secularly regulated but religiously meaningful, nationally governed but increasingly international in aspiration. This is why its internationalization must be analyzed with greater sensitivity than standard higher education models usually allow.

Political Islam, Secularist Responses, and Curriculum Reconfiguration

The second major finding is that curriculum and institutional identity in Turkish religious education have been deeply shaped by the interaction between political Islam and secularist responses. This interaction should not be reduced to a simple conflict between religion and secularism. The Turkish case is more complex than that. Kaplan (2002) shows that after the 1980 coup, state secularism and religious discourse were entangled through the politics of military authority and national ideology. Guven (2005) also demonstrates that Islamic education was revitalized not outside the state, but through changing political conditions and state educational structures. This means that religious education in Turkiye has developed through negotiation, control, resistance, and adaptation.

The Turkish-Islamic synthesis became one of the most influential ideological formations in this process. It attempted to reconcile nationalism, Sunni Islamic values, moral conservatism, and state-centered social order. Rather than excluding religion from public education, this framework allowed religion to be included as a source of moral and national cohesion. Sarapli and Şarapli (2021) show that state ideology and education in Turkiye between 1980 and 2015 were closely connected, and this connection shaped curriculum content, educational aims, and the public meaning of religion. In theology programs, such ideological background matters because curriculum is never merely a list of courses. It expresses what kind of religious citizen, scholar, teacher, or public intellectual the institution seeks to form.

The expansion of Imam-Hatip schools illustrates this connection between education, politics, and identity very clearly. Engin (1998) describes Imam-Hatip schools as politically sensitive institutions in the Turkish secular order, while Akboga (2016) shows that compulsory education reforms were shaped by both local and global cultural dynamics. Bayhan and Gök (2017) add that education policy in Istanbul was also affected by neoliberal urbanization, showing that religious education policy is not only ideological but also spatial, economic, and social. The expansion of Imam-Hatip schools and theology faculties, then, should be understood as part of a broader struggle over Turkish modernity. It reflects different answers to the question of how religion should appear in public life.

Political Islam also evolved over time. Hermann (2003), Mecham (2004), and Cizre (2007) show that Islamic political actors in Turkiye gradually adapted to secular democratic institutions, electoral politics, and mainstream public discourse. This adaptation affected religious education policy. Religious education was no longer only a symbol of opposition to secularism. It became part of national policy, public morality, and institutional expansion. Genç (2018) captures this ambiguity well through the debate over whether religious education should be understood as values education or religious education. This distinction is not merely semantic. It reveals how religious content may be justified through moral, civic, cultural, or explicitly theological purposes.

Curriculum reconfiguration in theology faculties must be read in this broader setting. Özaydınlı (2023) indicates that curriculum development in Türkiye has often been shaped by

centralized policy and expert-driven processes, while İmrol et al. (2021) show that curriculum reform requires careful evaluation of coherence, implementation, and classroom meaning. Başaran and Aykaç (2020), although studying early childhood teacher education, remind us that curriculum reform cannot be assessed only through official documents. It must also be understood through the perceptions of those who implement it. In theology programs, this means that curriculum reform should be evaluated not only by its formal alignment with national standards, but also by how lecturers, students, and religious communities experience its intellectual and moral relevance.

There is also a generational dimension. Genç et al. (2025) show that individuals receiving higher religious education may experience complex relationships between secularization and perceived religious influence. Theology students are not simply passive recipients of inherited religious knowledge. They are young people living in a modern, digital, urban, and politically contested society. They may value religious tradition, but they are also exposed to plural identities, secular environments, and global intellectual currents. This makes curriculum design more challenging. A theology curriculum that only repeats inherited content may fail to engage contemporary questions. Yet a curriculum that only imitates secular academic models may lose its religious depth.

Karaevli et al. (2024) and KELEŞ and CIRIK (2025) help us understand that policy implementation depends on actors who interpret, negotiate, and sometimes reshape reforms in practice. This is especially relevant in religious education, where teachers and lecturers mediate between state policy, scholarly tradition, and student expectation. The curriculum of Turkish theology education, therefore, is best understood as a site of continuous reconfiguration. It carries traces of secular state regulation, political Islamic aspiration, pedagogical modernization, and social demand for religious meaning. It is not fully secular, not simply Islamist, and not merely traditional. It is something more unsettled, and perhaps this unsettled quality is exactly what makes it analytically important.

Internationalization Strategies, English-Medium Instruction, Curriculum Modernization, and Scholarship Programs

The third finding concerns the strategies used to internationalize Turkish Islamic higher education. Selvitopu and Aydin (2018) show that internationalization strategies in Turkish higher education include institutional planning, curriculum development, and efforts to enhance global engagement. Efe and Ozer (2023) further demonstrate that internationalization is also constructed through discourse, meaning that universities and policymakers create narratives about global visibility, academic competitiveness, and international attractiveness. In theology programs, these strategies are visible through English-medium instruction, curriculum modernization, international student recruitment, scholarship programs, and institutional efforts to participate more actively in global academic networks.

English-medium instruction has become one of the most prominent instruments of internationalization. Toprak Yıldız (2022) identifies English-medium instruction and mobility as central elements in the Turkish higher education context, while Gülle et al. (2025) show that English-medium universities are shaped by cultural and linguistic diversity. In many fields, the use of English is often treated as a practical necessity for international communication. In theology, however, the issue is more delicate. English may increase access for international students and improve global academic publication, but it may also reshape the way Islamic concepts are translated, interpreted, and taught. This is not a small matter. A theological concept is not always easily transferable from Arabic or Ottoman Turkish into English without losing part of its semantic and historical density.

Gül (2017), in discussing open education theology programs, points to problems related to Arabic preparation and practical training. This insight is highly relevant to the internationalization of theology programs because language policy cannot focus only on English. Arabic remains central to Qur'anic studies, hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, kalām, tafsīr, and classical Islamic scholarship. If English becomes the dominant language of internationalization while Arabic competence remains weak, theology programs may gain global accessibility but lose part of their epistemic foundation. It is possible, of course, to use English strategically. But according to our reading, English should complement rather than displace the linguistic ecology of Islamic knowledge.

Curriculum modernization is another important strategy. Koç (2025) argues that theology faculties in Türkiye need comparative analysis with similar programs in the world, especially in relation to religious and pedagogical education. This suggests that modernization should not only mean adding new courses or updating course titles. It should involve deeper reflection on the relationship between classical Islamic disciplines, contemporary social sciences, teacher education, ethics, interreligious understanding, and global religious studies. Demirtaş et al. (2023), by examining cognitive flexibility and critical thinking tendencies among religious education teacher candidates, also show the importance of reflective and analytical capacities in religious teacher formation. This is crucial because internationalized theology programs must prepare students not only to know religious texts, but also to think across cultural, intellectual, and ethical boundaries.

Scholarship programs have also become a major component of Turkiye's internationalization strategy. Çötok et al. (2025) show that Türkiye Scholarships support the adaptation processes of international students, while Almassri (2024) frames scholarship impact as a matter of long-term social contribution, peace, and theory-informed practice. Scholarship programs attract students from various regions and help create transnational networks. In Islamic higher education, these programs may also strengthen religious and cultural connections between Turkiye and Muslim-majority societies. They make Turkiye visible not only as a country that receives students, but as an educational center with cultural and religious meaning.

International student recruitment operates within this broader strategy. Gök and Gümüş (2018) explain that Turkish universities pursue international student recruitment through particular rationales and strategies, while Kondakçı et al. (2016) show that regional internationalization between Turkiye and the Balkans is shaped by historical and cultural ties. Aslan (2026) adds that education outmigration from Central Asia to Turkiye reflects regional, linguistic, and cultural connections. These studies show that Turkiye's internationalization is not geographically neutral. It often draws strength from regions that feel culturally, historically, religiously, or linguistically connected to Turkiye.

However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on their depth. Internationalization cannot be reduced to the number of international students, the presence of English-medium courses, or the availability of scholarships. Sofi and Jenks (2025) show that English learning within religious environments may involve negotiation between faith and globalization, while Qoyyimah and Bargallie (2026) remind us that student-centered pedagogy and power relations shape language education. These comparative insights are useful for Turkiye because they suggest that internationalization should not be treated as a neutral technical policy. It affects the structure of learning, classroom authority, religious identity, and student voice.

Thus, the internationalization strategies used in Turkish theology programs are significant but not without tension. English-medium instruction may broaden access, but it must be balanced with Arabic and Islamic scholarly languages. Curriculum modernization may improve relevance, but it must avoid weakening the internal coherence of theology.

Scholarship programs may strengthen educational diplomacy, but they require serious support for student adaptation and academic success. This is why internationalization should be understood as a qualitative transformation, not merely as an institutional performance indicator.

Educational Diplomacy and Turkiye's Soft Power in Islamic Higher Education

The fourth finding is that internationalization in Turkiye is closely linked to educational diplomacy and soft power. It is not a purely academic project. Aydinli and Mathews (2021) argue that Turkiye's internationalization of higher education is connected to its search for larger status in global politics, while Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2026) show that internationalization policy reflects broader political and geopolitical narratives. These arguments help explain why scholarships, student recruitment, and international partnerships are not merely university-level initiatives. They are part of Turkiye's wider attempt to build influence, recognition, and long-term relationships across regions.

Türkiye Scholarships are one of the clearest examples of this educational diplomacy. Çötok et al. (2025) show that students participating in the Türkiye Scholarships Program undergo academic, cultural, and social adaptation processes. Almassri (2024) further suggests that scholarship programs can generate long-term effects beyond individual educational achievement. They may shape identity, career trajectories, social networks, and even peace-related outcomes. In the context of Islamic higher education, scholarship programs may also create intellectual and emotional ties between Turkiye and students from Muslim-majority societies. This does not mean that every student becomes an agent of Turkish soft power. That would be too simplistic. But it does mean that education becomes one medium through which durable cultural relationships are formed.

Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2022) show that student mobility from the Middle East to Turkiye is shaped by representation, identity, and regional imagination. This is important because international students often choose Turkiye not only for academic reasons, but also because Turkiye appears culturally familiar and religiously meaningful while still offering access to modern higher education. Yılmaz and Temizkan (2022) indicate that educational service quality and socio-cultural adaptation difficulties affect international student satisfaction, suggesting that the promise of educational diplomacy must be supported by everyday institutional care. In other words, soft power begins in policy, but it is tested in classrooms, dormitories, language centers, academic advising offices, and informal student life.

Turkiye's approach differs in some respects from market-driven internationalization models. In many countries, internationalization is heavily tied to tuition revenue, global rankings, and competition for high-paying students. In Turkiye, economic considerations exist, of course, but socio-cultural and geopolitical motives often appear more prominent. Kondakçı et al. (2016) show that regional internationalization between Turkiye and the Balkans reflects historical and cultural proximity, while Aslan (2026) demonstrates that Central Asian student mobility to Turkiye is shaped by regional connection and educational aspiration. These patterns suggest that Turkiye's internationalization is partly built on shared histories, religious affinities, linguistic ties, and imagined cultural belonging.

The religious dimension of this soft power is especially relevant for theology programs. International students who come to Turkiye for Islamic studies or theology may encounter a model of religious education that is distinct from both classical seminary systems and Western religious studies departments. They study Islam within public universities that are shaped by secular state structures, national policy, and modern academic requirements. This experience may influence how they understand the relationship between Islam, state, university, and society. It may also shape their future roles as teachers, religious leaders, scholars, or public intellectuals in their home countries.

Yet educational diplomacy contains risks as well. Gokturk et al. (2018) remind us that internationalization in Turkish higher education has unfolded during politically troubled times, while Sahin and Brooks (2023) describe the internationalization of higher education in peripheral countries as often nation-bounded. These studies suggest that soft power may become fragile when it is too closely tied to shifting political agendas or national branding. International students may appreciate scholarships and cultural familiarity, but they may also experience bureaucratic limitations, language difficulties, political uncertainty, or academic inconsistency. This should not be ignored.

Educational diplomacy, therefore, should be understood as both opportunity and responsibility. Turkiye has the capacity to attract students through cultural proximity, religious identity, scholarships, and regional influence. But the long-term success of this strategy depends on whether universities can provide high-quality academic formation, inclusive environments, credible degrees, and sustained alumni networks. In Islamic higher education, soft power will remain shallow if it is not accompanied by intellectual seriousness. A scholarship may bring a student to Turkiye, but only meaningful academic and human experience can turn that mobility into lasting educational influence.

Governance, Stakeholder Participation, and Quality Assurance Challenges

The fifth finding is that governance remains one of the most serious challenges in the internationalization of Turkish Islamic higher education. Onursal-Beşgül (2017) shows that Turkiye's engagement with the Bologna Process involved the translation of European norms into national policy structures. However, translating norms into policy does not automatically produce deep institutional change. Selvitopu and Aydin (2018) also indicate that effective internationalization requires a process-oriented approach involving institutional planning, implementation, evaluation, and stakeholder participation. In practice, Turkish higher education has often been shaped by centralized decision-making, which may accelerate reform but also limit local creativity and feedback.

Centralized governance can create coherence, especially in a large national higher education system. But it can also produce a technocratic version of internationalization. Policies may be adopted quickly, strategic plans may be written, and programs may be branded as international. Yet the real academic culture may remain unchanged. Özaydınlı (2023) shows that curriculum development in Türkiye has often been shaped by specialists and formal policy mechanisms, while Karaevli et al. (2024) remind us that policy implementation depends on how actors at the institutional level interpret and enact reform. This is a crucial point. A policy becomes real only when people inside institutions understand, negotiate, and practice it.

Stakeholder participation is especially important in theology programs. Curriculum internationalization should involve lecturers, students, religious scholars, international students, alumni, and institutional leaders. It should also include voices from professional religious education settings, since many graduates of theology faculties become teachers, religious educators, or public religious actors. Aksoydan and Mizikaci (2015), in evaluating academic programs through stakeholder perceptions, provide a useful reminder that program quality cannot be assessed only from above. Başaran and Aykaç (2020) and İmrol et al. (2021), through curriculum evaluation studies, also show that curriculum reform must be understood through implementation, perception, and lived educational practice.

Quality assurance is another area where formal structures may not be enough. Gül (2017) identifies problems in open education theology programs related to practical training and academic equivalence. Koç (2025) suggests that theology faculties in Türkiye should be assessed comparatively in relation to similar programs globally. These studies indicate that theology programs need more than administrative compliance. They need strong academic

standards, adequate language preparation, pedagogical formation, faculty development, and mechanisms for continuous improvement. Quality assurance should not be a ritual of documentation. It should become a culture of reflection and improvement.

Comparative studies from Islamic higher education in Indonesia provide additional insight. Iskarim et al. (2025) show that Islamic higher education institutions are preparing for future quality assurance demands, while Asy'Ari et al. (2025) use the CIPP model to evaluate remuneration policies and lecturer performance in Indonesian state Islamic universities. Huriyah and Hsucheng Chiang (2025) also examine performance-based remuneration in Islamic higher education institutions operating as public service agencies. Although these studies are not focused on Turkiye, they help illuminate a shared challenge across Islamic higher education systems. Internationalization and quality assurance require not only policy declarations, but also institutional capacity, fair performance systems, and support for lecturers.

The question of Islamic intellectual identity also appears in quality assurance debates. Khoir et al. (2025) warn that spaces for Islamic knowledge in Islamic higher education may narrow when institutions are pressured by market demands, bureaucratic standards, or external models of academic success. This warning is relevant to Turkish theology faculties. If internationalization is measured only through rankings, English-medium courses, mobility numbers, and publication metrics, theology programs may gradually lose sight of their deeper mission. They need to be internationally credible, yes. But they also need to remain intellectually rooted in Islamic scholarly traditions.

Thus, governance and quality assurance challenges reveal a deeper issue. The problem is not simply that Turkiye needs more internationalization. It already has many internationalization initiatives. The real question is whether these initiatives are participatory, sustainable, and academically meaningful. Without stakeholder participation, internationalization risks becoming administrative branding. Without quality assurance rooted in the real life of institutions, it risks becoming documentation. Without attention to Islamic intellectual identity, it risks becoming imitation. These are not reasons to reject internationalization, but they are reasons to rethink it more carefully.

Faculty and Student Mobility Between Global Aspirations and Local Constraints

The sixth finding concerns the gap between global aspirations and local constraints in faculty and student mobility. Mobility is often treated as one of the clearest indicators of internationalization. The more students and academics cross borders, the more international a university appears to be. Yet the literature suggests that mobility is far more complex. Gök (2016) explains that the Turkish higher education system has undergone massification, and massification often creates uneven institutional capacity. Some universities may be ready to host international scholars and students, while others may struggle with resources, language support, housing, administration, or academic integration.

Faculty mobility is shaped by structural and cultural barriers. Seggie and Çalıkoğlu (2023), in examining Western-origin faculty members in Turkiye, show that international academic mobility is influenced by institutional conditions, career expectations, and changing academic environments. Eriçok (2025) shows that brain-drain discourses among pre-service teachers in Türkiye reveal anxieties about educated mobility, national loss, and professional uncertainty. These findings suggest that mobility is never only an individual decision. It is shaped by how institutions reward international experience, how career paths are structured, and how national narratives interpret leaving, returning, or staying.

Economic insecurity also matters. Faculty members may want to participate in international collaboration, but limited funding, administrative burden, unclear promotion benefits, or unstable institutional support may reduce their ability to do so. In theology programs, additional factors may appear. Scholars may need competence in Arabic, Turkish,

English, and sometimes other Islamic scholarly languages. They may also need to navigate different expectations regarding religious authority, sectarian sensitivity, and public theology. International mobility for theology faculty, therefore, requires not only travel funding but also intellectual, linguistic, and institutional preparation.

Student mobility presents its own difficulties. Gök and Gümüş (2018) show that Turkish universities have developed strategies for recruiting international students, while Najimdeen and Amzat (2023) explain internationalization through push-pull dynamics and dynamic systems theory. Students may be pushed by limited opportunities in their home countries and pulled by Turkiye's scholarships, cultural proximity, religious environment, and academic offerings. Yet recruitment is only the beginning. Once students arrive, they must adapt to academic expectations, language requirements, social norms, and institutional bureaucracy.

Şentürk (2025) provides a useful conceptual insight by showing that immobility may be shaped by family ties, national identity, and political context. Although the study focuses on Azerbaijani students, the argument has broader relevance. Not moving is not always a sign of passivity or lack of ambition. It may reflect responsibility to family, attachment to homeland, financial caution, political uncertainty, or emotional belonging. For students and faculty in Islamic higher education, these factors may be even more pronounced because religious education is often connected to community responsibility and moral obligation.

Yılmaz and Temizkan (2022) show that international student satisfaction depends on educational service quality and socio-cultural adaptation, while Çötok et al. (2025) demonstrate that scholarship students need support in navigating academic and cultural life. This matters because internationalization is often celebrated at the moment of arrival, but its real quality appears over time. Do students feel intellectually included? Are they able to participate fully in class discussions? Do they receive adequate language support? Do they experience cultural belonging without being forced into cultural conformity? These questions are ordinary, but they are not minor.

Mobility also has non-physical dimensions. Şentürk (2025) suggests that local networks and attachments may shape how students engage with international opportunities without necessarily relocating. In the digital age, academic collaboration, online courses, joint seminars, and virtual scholarly networks can support internationalization without full physical mobility. This point is relevant for theology programs because some students or scholars may have strong reasons to remain locally rooted while still engaging globally. Internationalization should therefore not be measured only by physical movement. It should also include intellectual circulation, collaborative research, multilingual publication, and transnational scholarly conversation.

The gap between global aspiration and local constraint should not be read as failure. It is more accurate to see it as a condition that requires thoughtful policy. Turkish Islamic higher education has strong international ambitions, but mobility depends on resources, trust, language, recognition, family life, political context, and institutional culture. If these conditions are ignored, mobility will benefit only a limited group. If they are addressed carefully, mobility can become part of a more inclusive and meaningful internationalization process.

Rethinking Internationalization in Islamic Higher Education

The final finding is that the Turkish case invites a broader rethinking of internationalization in Islamic higher education. Conventional models of higher education internationalization often emphasize mobility, global rankings, English-medium instruction, international partnerships, and institutional competitiveness. These elements are not irrelevant. Selvitopu and Aydin (2018), Efe and Ozer (2023), and Aydinli and Mathews (2021)

show that such dimensions are clearly present in Turkiye's higher education policy and discourse. Yet theology programs require a more context-sensitive framework because they deal with religious knowledge, ethical formation, spiritual identity, and public religious responsibility.

Islamic higher education cannot simply imitate Western models of internationalization. This does not mean rejecting global academic standards. Rather, it means asking what kind of internationalization is appropriate for institutions whose knowledge traditions are rooted in revelation, jurisprudence, theology, ethics, and inherited scholarly languages. Sirojuddin and Ghoni (2025), in discussing curriculum integration between higher education and Islamic boarding schools from the perspective of multicultural Islamic education, offer a comparative reminder that Islamic education needs models capable of connecting tradition, plurality, and contemporary educational demands. Turkiye's theology faculties face a similar challenge, although within a different national and institutional setting.

A more adequate model of internationalization in Islamic higher education should begin with academic excellence. Theology programs need rigorous scholarship, strong research culture, qualified faculty, and credible quality assurance. Koç (2025) and Gül (2017) show that theology education in Turkiye still needs attention to pedagogical preparation, program equivalence, and comparative academic standards. Academic excellence, however, should not be defined only by external metrics. It should also include mastery of Islamic disciplines, methodological depth, linguistic competence, and the ability to address contemporary questions with intellectual seriousness.

The second dimension is religious and ethical identity. Khoir et al. (2025) warn that Islamic knowledge may be narrowed under the pressure of market-oriented higher education. This warning should be taken seriously. Internationalization should not make theology programs less theological. It should help them communicate their intellectual traditions more effectively across cultures. Religious identity here does not mean isolation or defensiveness. It means having enough clarity about one's epistemic foundations to engage others without becoming intellectually dependent or conceptually diluted.

The third dimension is intercultural competence. Demirtaş et al. (2023) show the importance of cognitive flexibility and critical thinking among religious education teacher candidates. In internationalized theology programs, students need the ability to encounter different cultures, schools of thought, religious practices, and ethical questions with maturity. Intercultural competence is not simply politeness toward foreign students. It involves the ability to listen, interpret, compare, and critically reflect without abandoning one's own commitments too quickly. This is a difficult capacity, but it is essential for theology in a global age.

The fourth dimension is educational diplomacy. Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2022), Caliskan and Buyukgoze (2026), and Almassri (2024) show that scholarships, student mobility, and internationalization policy may contribute to soft power and long-term social relations. Turkiye's experience demonstrates that Islamic higher education can become a space of regional connection and cultural diplomacy. Yet this diplomacy must be supported by academic integrity. Soft power without scholarly depth can become symbolic. Scholarship without student support can become fragile. Educational diplomacy in Islamic higher education should therefore be ethical, reciprocal, and intellectually serious.

The fifth dimension is participatory and quality-oriented governance. Onursal-Beşgül (2017), Özaydınlı (2023), Karaevli et al. (2024), and KELEŞ and CIRIK (2025) all point, in different ways, to the importance of policy translation, curriculum expertise, implementation, and stakeholder experience. Theology programs cannot be meaningfully internationalized through top-down policy alone. They require participation from lecturers, students, alumni,

religious scholars, policymakers, and international partners. Participation does not guarantee perfection, but it reduces the risk that internationalization becomes a bureaucratic slogan.

Taken together, these five dimensions suggest that internationalization in Islamic higher education should be understood as a process of intellectual formation, institutional transformation, and ethical engagement. Turkiye's experience shows both the promise and the difficulty of this process. It has expanded theology faculties, attracted international students, developed scholarship programs, and positioned higher education within broader geopolitical aspirations. At the same time, it continues to face challenges of governance, quality assurance, language policy, mobility, and religious identity. The lesson is not that internationalization should be abandoned. The lesson is that it must be reimagined with greater depth. For Islamic higher education, becoming international should not mean becoming less rooted. Ideally, it should mean becoming more capable of carrying its intellectual tradition into wider, more complex, and more demanding global conversations.

Conclusion

The internationalization and expansion of Islamic higher education in Turkiye cannot be understood as a simple institutional success story or as a purely technical policy agenda. It is better read as a layered process shaped by historical legacies, secular-religious tensions, political Islam, state regulation, curriculum reform, geopolitical aspiration, and the changing demands of global higher education. The movement from Ottoman medrese traditions to modern university-based theology faculties has created a distinctive institutional formation. Turkish theology faculties operate within modern public universities, yet they continue to carry religious, moral, and civilizational expectations. This dual position makes their internationalization more complex than that of many other academic fields, because what is at stake is not only academic visibility, but also the meaning, transmission, and public role of Islamic knowledge.

This article has argued that internationalization in Turkish Islamic higher education should not be reduced to the use of English-medium instruction, the recruitment of international students, the establishment of scholarship programs, or the expansion of institutional partnerships. These strategies are important, and they have clearly strengthened Turkiye's global educational presence. However, they do not fully explain the deeper transformation taking place. Internationalization also involves questions of identity, language, governance, curriculum integrity, religious authority, intercultural formation, and educational diplomacy. In this sense, Turkiye's experience shows that Islamic higher education needs a more context-sensitive model of internationalization, one that is academically credible but still rooted in Islamic intellectual traditions. International engagement should not require theology programs to become less theological. Ideally, it should enable them to communicate their scholarly heritage more confidently within wider global conversations.

Future research should move beyond literature-based analysis and examine the lived experiences of those directly involved in this process. Empirical studies involving international students, theology lecturers, curriculum developers, policymakers, international office administrators, and alumni would provide a more grounded understanding of how internationalization is experienced in daily academic life. Comparative studies between Turkiye, Indonesia, Malaysia, and other Muslim-majority countries would also enrich the discussion, especially in relation to curriculum models, scholarship diplomacy, faculty mobility, quality assurance, and the preservation of Islamic scholarly identity. Such research is important because the internationalization of Islamic higher education is not yet a settled project. It remains an evolving field, full of promise, but also full of questions that deserve careful and honest scholarly attention.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the colleagues for sharing, discussing, and providing their very useful comments to improve the manuscript.

Conflict of Interests

There are no disclosed conflicts of interest for the authors. We attest that the submission is unique and is not already being considered by another publisher.

Ethical Considerations

The sources of this research—articles, books, research papers, and scientific forum proceedings—are all free of copyright violations.

Disclaimer

The views and assumptions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

REFERENCES

Akboga, S. (2016). The expansion of compulsory education in Turkiye: local and world culture dynamics. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *46*(5), 789–810. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2015.1106306

Aksoydan, E., & Mizikaci, F. (2015). Evaluation of Nutrition and Dietetic programs in Turkiye as perceived by stakeholders. *Nutrition and Dietetics*, *72*(2), 176–182. https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12161

Almassri, A. N. (2024). Scaling research and practice of scholarships impact for peace: The role of theory. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *128*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102467

Aslan, H. K. (2026). Education outmigration from Central Asia to Turkiye: Central Asian students in Turkiye's universities. *Central Asian Survey*. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2025.2601098

Asy'Ari, H., Komariah, A., Yuliana, L., Silviani, A., & Vebrianto, R. (2025). CIPP model evaluation of the impact of remuneration policies on lecturer performance in Indonesian state Islamic universities. *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, *44*(3), 740–756. https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v44i3.90018

Aydinli, E., & Mathews, J. (2021). Searching for Larger Status in Global Politics: Internationalization of Higher Education in Turkiye. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *25*(3), 247–265. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315320932325

Başaran, S. T., & Aykaç, N. (2020). Evaluation of 2018 Turkish Early Childhood Teacher Education Curriculum. *Pegem Egitim ve Ogretim Dergisi*, *10*(3), 889–928. https://doi.org/10.14527/pegegog.2020.028

Bayhan, S., & Gök, F. (2017). Education policy in an era of neoliberal urbanisation: a case study of Istanbul's school relocations. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *38*(4), 581–595. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1113858

Bulut-Sahin, B., & Kondakci, Y. (2023). Conflicting Perspectives on the Internationalization of Higher Education: Evidence from the Turkish Case. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *27*(5), 834–852. https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153221126245

Caliskan, O., & Buyukgoze, H. (2026). The internationalisation of Turkish higher education: a critical analysis of policy. *Comparative Education*, *62*(1), 103–123. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2025.2520721

Caliskan, O., & Buyukgoze, H. (2022). The Representation of International Students: Student Mobility from the Middle East to Turkiye. In *International Student Mobility to and from the Middle East: Theorising Public, Institutional, and Self-Constructions of Cross-Border Students* (pp. 74–95). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003138457-6

Cizre, Ü. (2007). Secular and Islamic politics in Turkiye: The making of the Justice and Development Party. In *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkiye: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203937334

Çötok, N. A., Çötok, T., & Erol, D. (2025). Evaluation of the Adaptation Processes of International Students Participating in Educational Mobility Through the Türkiye Scholarships Program. *Participatory Educational Research*, *12*(4), 134–150. https://doi.org/10.17275/per.25.53.12.4

Demirtaş, Z., Takunyacı, M., & Yeşil, R. (2023). Investigation of Religious Education Teacher Candidates' Cognitive Flexibility Levels and Critical Thinking Tendencies. *Hitit Theology Journal*, *22*(2), 723–744. https://doi.org/10.14395/hid.1334350

Efe, I., & Ozer, O. (2023). Understanding the Internationalization of Turkish Higher Education through Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *27*(3), 483–500. https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153221093118

Engin, I. (1998). Imam Hatip Okullari (schools with religious instruction) in Turkiye: explosive material for the regime? *Orient*, *39*(1), 85–101. https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-0031790473&partnerID=40&md5=624cb0e5694a793bdfc0de8e3b4846c2

Erdem, C., & Polat, M. (2023). Tracking the Research on the Internationalization of Higher Education in Turkiye: A Bibliometric Analysis. In *International Perspectives on Education and Society* (Vol. 46B, pp. 135–161). https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-367920230000046B009

Eriçok, B. (2026). Framing the mobility of the educated: Brain-drain discourses among pre-service teachers in Türkiye. *British Educational Research Journal*, *52*(2), 1111–1133. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.70055

Genç, M. F. (2018). Values education or religious education? An alternative view of religious education in the secular age, the case of Turkiye. *Education Sciences*, *8*(4). https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci8040220

Genç, M. F., Okur, H., & Vurgun, L. (2025). Relationship Between Secularization and the Level of Perceiving Religious Influence Among Individuals Receiving Higher Religious Education. *Religions*, *16*(7). https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16070934

Gök, E. (2016). The Turkish higher education system from the kaleidoscope of Martin Trow. *Egitim ve Bilim*, *41*(184), 147–168. https://doi.org/10.15390/EB.2016.3193

Gök, E., & Gümüş, S. (2018). International student recruitment efforts of Turkish Universities: Rationales and strategies. In *International Perspectives on Education and Society* (Vol. 34, pp. 231–255). https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-367920180000034019

Gokturk, S., Kaymaz, O. S., & Bozoglu, O. (2018). Experimenting with internationalisation in troubled times: the critical case of Turkish higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *40*(6), 566–582. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2018.1530418

Gül, A. R. (2017). Open Education Theology Programs: Problems and suggested solutions. *Cumhuriyet Ilahiyat Dergisi*, *21*(3), 1905–1940. https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.349060

Gülle, T., Kurt, Y., & Bayyurt, Y. (2025). Exploring cultural and linguistic diversity in the English-medium instruction university. *World Englishes*, *44*(4), 667–685. https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12707

Gunluk-Senesen, G. (2009). Glass ceiling in academic administration in Turkiye: 1990s versus 2000s. *Tertiary Education and Management*, *15*(4), 305–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/13583880903335480

Guven, I. (2005). The impact of Political Islam on education: "The revitalization of Islamic education in the Turkish educational setting." *International Journal of Educational Development*, *25*(3), 193–208. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2004.08.001

Hendek, A., Bin Jamil, A. İ., ZengİN, M., & Haji Othman, M. K. B. (2022). Higher Religious Education at Public Universities in Malaysia and Turkiye: A Comparative Study. *Cumhuriyet Ilahiyat Dergisi*, *26*(3), 987–1002. https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.1079483

Hermann, R. (2003). Political islam in secular Turkiye. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, *14*(3), 265–276. https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410305266

Huda, M. Q., & Hussin, H. (2010). ICT implementation barriers and organizational issues in Islamic-based Higher Education Institution: The case of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta. *Proceeding of the 3rd International Conference on Information and Communication Technology for the Moslem World: ICT Connecting Cultures, ICT4M 2010*, A18–A25. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICT4M.2010.5971877

Huriyah, L., & Hsucheng Chiang, T. (2025). Management of Remuneration System Based on Performance for Lecturers and Employees at Islamic Higher Education as Public Service Agency. *Munaddhomah*, *6*(4), 555–574. https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v6i4.1894

İmrol, M. H., Dinçer, A., Güldenoğlu, B. N. D., & Babadoğan, M. C. (2021). Evaluation of the 2018 Turkish Curriculum. *Egitim ve Bilim*, *46*(207), 403–437. https://doi.org/10.15390/EB.2021.9625

Iskarim, M., Aenurofik, M., & Junaeti, M. (2025). Readiness of Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia for future quality assurance. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *33*(1), 80–92. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-03-2024-0046

Johnson, C. H., Sabean, D. W., Teuscher, S., & Trivellato, F. (2011). Transregional and transnational families in Europe and beyond: Experiences since the middle ages. In *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond: Experiences Since the Middle Ages*. https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84917483014&partnerID=40&md5=2d56dae0882bc5bf2b7ad28aaa4edb6f

Kaplan, S. (2002). Din-u devlet all over again? The politics of military secularism and religious militarism in Turkiye following the 1980 coup. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *34*(1), 113–127. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020743802001058

Karaevli, Ö., Çeven, G., & Korumaz, M. (2024). Implementing education policy: reflections of street-level bureaucrats. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *44*(2), 488–502. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2022.2118670

KELEŞ, F., & CIRIK, İ. (2025). The Experiences of Curriculum Development Experts in the Framework of the Century of Türkiye Education Model. *Milli Egitim*, *54*(1), 11–60. https://doi.org/10.37669/milliegitim.1707179

Khoir, T., Ma'arif, S., Elizabeth, M. Z., & Permata, K. I. (2025). The narrowing spaces for Islamic knowledge at Islamic higher education in Indonesia: opportunity and challenge. *Higher Education*, *90*(4), 1145–1173. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01370-3

Koç, A. (2025). Religious and Pedagogical Education in Theology Faculties in Türkiye in Their 100th Year: A Comparative Analysis with Similar Programs in the World. *Religions*, *16*(1). https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16010049

Kondakçı, Y., Çalışkan, Ö., Şahin, B. B., Yılık, M. A., & Demir, C. E. (2016). Regional internationalization in higher education between Turkiye and the Balkans. *Bilig*, *78*, 287–308. https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84983000160&partnerID=40&md5=28377b4e7336963226df061fc7264cf9

Mecham, R. Q. (2004). From the ashes of virtue, a promise of light: The transformation of political Islam in Turkiye. *Third World Quarterly*, *25*(2), 339–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000174842

Najimdeen, H. A., & Amzat, I. H. (2023). Establishing DST and push-pull theory for internationalization best practices in higher education. In *Global Perspectives on the Internationalization of Higher Education* (pp. 16–32). https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-5929-4.ch002

Onursal-Beşgül, Ö. (2017). Translating norms from Europe to Turkiye: Turkiye in the Bologna Process. *Compare*, *47*(5), 742–755. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2016.1273094

Özaydınlı, B. (2023). Curriculum Development in Türkiye from the Perspective of Curriculum Specialists. *Egitim ve Bilim*, *48*(214), 177–218. https://doi.org/10.15390/EB.2023.11186

Özduman, K., Güdük, M., Elmac, I., & Pamir, M. N. (2013). The impact of german-speaking academicians on higher education in Turkiye. *World Neurosurgery*, *79*(1), 25–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wneu.2012.11.049

Özolu, M., Gür, B. S., & Gümüs, S. (2016). Rapid Expansion of Higher Education in Turkiye: The Challenges of Recently Established Public Universities (2006-2013). *Higher Education Policy*, *29*(1), 21–39. https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2015.7

Puspitasari, I. N. N., Zuhri, H. H., Yani, A., Jasmine, A. N., & Kurniasari, A. (2025). Cultural Barriers and Challenges of Ma'had Aly: The Path towards a Competitive Islamic Higher Education Institution. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *8*(2), 464–479. https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i2.216

Qoyyimah, U., & Bargallie, D. (2026). Student-centered pedagogy and power relations in Indonesian EFL teaching. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2026.2642142

Roos Breines, M., Raghuram, P., & Gunter, A. (2019). Infrastructures of immobility: enabling international distance education students in Africa to not move. *Mobilities*, *14*(4), 484–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2019.1618565

Saeed, S., Rana, O., & Dhanaraj, R. K. (2024). Higher education and quality assurance practices. In *Higher Education and Quality Assurance Practices*. https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-6765-0

Sahin, B. B., & Brooks, R. (2023). Nation-bounded internationalization of higher education: a comparative analysis of two periphery countries. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *42*(5), 1071–1085. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2193723

Sarapli, O. (2021). State ideology and education in Turkiye, 1980-2015. In *State Ideology and Education in Turkiye, 1980-2015*. https://doi.org/10.3726/b17350

Seggie, F. N., & Çalıkoğlu, A. (2023). Changing patterns of international academic mobility: the experiences of Western-origin faculty members in Turkiye. *Compare*, *53*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1868975

Selvitopu, A., & Aydin, A. (2018). Internationalization strategies in turkish higher education: A qualitative inquiry in the process approach context. *Hacettepe Egitim Dergisi*, *33*(4), 803–823. https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85066845578&partnerID=40&md5=4e6538f70190c2a295790666adfe96a4

Şentürk, S. (2025). Exploring (im)mobility in authoritarian contexts: The insights of Azerbaijani undergraduate students. *Migration Studies*, *13*(4). https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnaf051

Sibawaihi, S., Ratnasari, D., Purnami, S., & Brooks, M. (2025). Internationalizing Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia: A Lesson Learned From Australia. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *11*(1), 90–100. https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v11i1.43950

Sirojuddin, A., & Ghoni, J. (2025). Integration of Higher Education Curriculum with Islamic Boarding Schools in the Perspective of Multicultural Islamic Education. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *8*(2), 265–281. https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i2.163

Sofi, M. J., & Jenks, C. J. (2025). EFL learning, religious faith and globalization in Indonesia's pesantren. *World Englishes*. https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.70005

Soyşekerci, S., & Erturgut, R. (2010). Anatomy of a period: Structural transformation in the Turkish higher education system between 1981 and 2009. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *2*(2), 3477–3482. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.538

Toprak Yıldız, T. E. (2022). Internationalization, Mobility and English-Medium Instruction in the Context of Turkish Higher Education. In *Multilingual Education* (Vol. 40, pp. 69–85). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88597-7_4

Ünal Gezer, M. (2025). Turkiye's Internationalization Steps at Primary Levels: Implications for Early English Education. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Internationalization of Language Education* (pp. 169–188). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-00887-9_10

Yılmaz, K., & Temizkan, V. (2022). The Effects of Educational Service Quality and Socio-Cultural Adaptation Difficulties on International Students' Higher Education Satisfaction. *SAGE Open*, *12*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221078316

Yorulmaz, N. K. (2019). From the methodology of hadith to the history of hadith: The courses of the history of hadith in dar al-funun theology. *Cumhuriyet Dental Journal*, *23*(2), 651–671. https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.616504