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Validation of the Model for Improving the Quality of Islamic Education Courses in Iraqi Universities

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to validate a model for improving the quality of Islamic education courses in Iraqi universities.

Methods: This study employed a descriptive–survey design. The statistical population consisted of all professors of Islamic education in Iraqi universities in 2025 (N = 1,517). Using proportional sampling, 375 professors were selected as participants. Data were collected through a researcher-developed questionnaire grounded in the theoretical framework of the study, consisting of 37 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. Content validity was confirmed by subject-matter experts, and face validity was verified by a group of respondents. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.812$). Data analysis was conducted using confirmatory factor analysis.

Results: The findings indicated that several factors significantly contributed to improving the quality of Islamic education courses in Iraqi universities. These included factors related to professors, macro-level higher education policies, university policies, the Islamic identity of the university, and the curriculum of Islamic education courses. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the proposed research model exhibited a satisfactory fit.

Conclusions: The validated model highlights the multidimensional nature of quality improvement in Islamic education courses and underscores the importance of faculty-related, policy-related, institutional, identity-based, and curricular factors. This model can serve as a useful framework for policymakers and university administrators seeking to enhance the quality of Islamic education in Iraqi higher education institutions.

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Introduction

In the contemporary world, characterized by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and profound cultural and social transformations, educational systems worldwide—particularly in Islamic countries such as Iraq—are facing serious challenges related to educational quality. Among the most significant of these challenges are prolonged wars, political instability, and severe shortages of financial resources, which have led to the widespread migration of qualified academic staff and a decline in the quality of instruction. As a result, curricula often rely on traditional, non-knowledge-based approaches and lack necessary updates aligned with contemporary scholarship, such as modern Qur'anic interpretations or comparative Islamic philosophy (Herb, 2008).

Moreover, deteriorated educational infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to well-equipped libraries or digital technologies have reduced learning to a superficial and memory-based process. Although many students are initially drawn to these courses due to ideological or religious motivations, graduates often lack the ability to address real societal challenges such as extremism or cultural coexistence (Issa & Jamil, 2010). This situation not only undermines the national and international credibility of Islamic studies disciplines but also restricts graduates' employment opportunities to low-income government positions. Consequently, the need for structural reforms—such as investing in faculty development and integrating research-oriented approaches—has become increasingly evident, in order to transform Islamic education courses from primarily ideological tools into platforms for critical thinking and cultural advancement (Mohammed Marzouk, 2012).

Improving the quality of Islamic education courses in Iraqi universities is not limited to strengthening the cultural and religious foundations of society; rather, it can play a crucial role in cultivating an informed, committed, and capable generation able to confront contemporary challenges (Zubair & Ali, 2021). One of the main problems in this field is the mismatch between course content and the evolving needs of society and students. Many existing texts and syllabi, which largely focus on traditional and theoretical topics, fail to respond effectively to the questions and concerns of today's youth (Nasser & Salem, 2023). For instance, issues such as engagement with global cultures, addressing religious doubts in digital spaces, and applying Islamic values in professional and social life receive limited attention. This has reduced the attractiveness and effectiveness of these courses, and in some cases has led students to perceive them as compulsory

and marginal. Furthermore, traditional teaching methods—largely based on one-way lecturing and rote memorization—have been ineffective in fostering student motivation and active participation (Malik & Ahmed, 2020).

A review of the relevant literature reveals several studies related to the present research. Sadeghi et al. (2023), in a quantitative study titled *“The Effectiveness of the Flipped Classroom on Interactive Learning in the Course of Religion and Life,”* found that the flipped classroom model significantly enhances interactive learning by encouraging students to study course materials independently prior to class and actively engage in practical and interactive activities during class sessions. Mahmoudi (2023), in a qualitative phenomenological study titled *“An Examination of the Challenges in Teaching Islamic Education Courses at Farhangian University,”* identified challenges related to course content, Islamic education instructors, and students’ learning experiences. Al-Abdulhadi and Al-Kandari (2024), in a qualitative study titled *“The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Promoting Values of Moderation among High School Students in Kuwait: Challenges and Barriers,”* concluded that teachers play a vital role in shaping learners’ personalities toward moderation and away from extremism; however, the lack of religious education and negative influences of technology, along with differences arising from teachers’ years of experience, resulted in significant disparities in promoting moderation values. Omar and Farooq (2023), in a quantitative study titled *“Active Learning in Islamic Education: Its Impact on Student Motivation,”* reported that active learning strategies such as case studies and role-playing significantly increased student motivation. Similarly, Suleiman and Karim (2022), in a quantitative study titled *“Student Engagement in Islamic Studies: The Role of Experiential Learning,”* demonstrated that experiential learning approaches, such as visits to Islamic historical sites, substantially improved students’ retention of course content.

In Iraqi universities, where students come from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, the need for dynamic and interactive teaching methods has become increasingly evident. Another factor negatively affecting the quality of Islamic education courses is the shortage of well-trained and specialized faculty members. Although some instructors possess deep religious knowledge, the lack of up-to-date training in modern pedagogical methods and limited awareness of contemporary issues have constrained their ability to communicate effectively with students. This challenge is particularly visible in institutions such as the University of Iraq in Baghdad, which was originally

established as a center for Islamic jurisprudence and later expanded to include diverse academic disciplines after 2003. Instructors of Islamic education courses must be able to present religious concepts in a clear, accessible manner that relates to students' everyday lives in order to achieve meaningful impact. Additionally, the absence of systematic professional development and retraining programs for faculty members constitutes another major obstacle to improving course quality (Hassan & Youssef, 2021).

Furthermore, infrastructural challenges represent significant barriers to enhancing the quality of Islamic education in Iraqi universities. After years of conflict and instability, Iraq's educational system continues to face shortages in financial resources, technological facilities, and adequate infrastructure. These limitations have adversely affected the delivery of Islamic education courses, particularly with respect to the use of digital tools and educational technologies. While many universities worldwide employ online learning platforms and multimedia tools to enhance course engagement, Iraqi universities—due to financial and infrastructural constraints—have been less able to utilize such resources. This is despite the fact that modern technologies can create more interactive and engaging learning environments and enable students to experience religious concepts in more practical and real-life contexts (Khan & Siddiq, 2022).

In light of the foregoing discussion, the present study seeks to answer the following question: Do the factors identified for improving the quality of Islamic education courses, derived from relevant theoretical foundations, demonstrate an acceptable model fit?

Material and Methods

The present study employed a descriptive survey research design. The statistical population consisted of all instructors teaching Islamic education courses at Iraqi universities in 2025 (N = 1,517). Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table, a total of 375 participants were selected using non-probability convenience sampling.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire derived from the relevant literature and prior studies. The questionnaire consisted of 37 items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Content validity was established through review and confirmation by subject-matter experts, while face validity was verified by a group of respondents. The reliability of the instrument was

assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.812, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to analyze the data and to examine the fit of the proposed research model.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the purpose of the study prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and they were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The collected data were used solely for academic research purposes, and no identifying personal information was recorded or disclosed. The study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards for educational and social science research.

Results

Table 1 presents the subcategories and conceptual indicators associated with the main construct of educational quality improvement, derived from theoretical foundations and operationalized through the questionnaire items.

Table 1. Subcategories and Related Concepts of the Main Category: Improving the Quality of Islamic Education Courses

Main Subcategory	Item No.	Conceptual Statement
Faculty-Related Factors	Q1	The ability of Islamic education instructors to organize and redefine course content based on students' learning needs, intellectual interests, and knowledge levels as a key factor in enhancing learning effectiveness
	Q2	Use of modern teaching methods such as active learning, group discussions, and educational technologies to increase the attractiveness of Islamic education courses
	Q3	Application of diverse assessment methods (e.g., group projects, analytical exams, and practical activities) to evaluate student learning
	Q4	Encouraging students' active participation in the learning process through dialogue-based environments and group activities
	Q5	Presenting Islamic education content with a focus on contemporary issues relevant to students' lives to enhance motivation
	Q6	Providing regular and constructive feedback to encourage progress and strengthen students' sense of academic achievement
	Q7	Designing group activities and team-based projects to foster collaboration and participation in class
	Q8	Creating diverse learning opportunities, including reflective discussions, applied projects, cultural-artistic activities, and interactive digital environments, to deepen students' understanding and application of Islamic teachings in daily life
	Q9	Offering incentives such as course credits, rewards, or recognition for active students to increase motivation

	Q10	Instructors' ability to create participatory and responsive classroom environments by using student feedback to adjust teaching methods and facilitate meaningful learning
	Q11	Designing cultural programs to promote respect and interaction in Islamic education classes
	Q12	Employing creative teaching methods such as storytelling, film screenings, and hands-on activities to capture students' attention
Macro-Level Higher Education Policy Factors	Q13	Developing a national curriculum for Islamic education through comprehensive educational policies aimed at standardizing and improving instructional quality
	Q14	Allocating financial resources and qualified human capital to implement Islamic education programs at the macro level
	Q15	Establishing monitoring systems to evaluate the effectiveness of educational policies and identify strengths and weaknesses
	Q16	Promoting collaboration among educational, cultural, and religious institutions to implement macro-level educational policies
	Q17	Providing training programs for educational administrators to enhance policymaking and management skills
	Q18	Incorporating contemporary social, ethical, and cultural issues—such as justice, identity, media, and secularism—into Islamic education curricula to create spaces for religious–social dialogue
	Q19	Supporting research projects, academic publications, and the establishment of research databases
	Q20	Involving stakeholders (students, faculty members, and social institutions) in the policymaking process to enhance acceptance and effectiveness
University-Level Policy Factors	Q21	Designing university-level policies to standardize Islamic education courses and align them with overarching educational objectives
	Q22	Implementing rigorous systems for the selection and continuous evaluation of Islamic education instructors based on academic and pedagogical competencies
	Q23	Providing necessary facilities and infrastructure, such as well-equipped classrooms and specialized libraries
	Q24	Establishing monitoring systems to evaluate the quality of Islamic education instruction and identify strengths and weaknesses
	Q25	Creating collaboration with religious and cultural institutions to enrich educational content and support Islamic education programs
Islamic Identity of the University	Q26	Creating a university environment that strengthens students' religious and cultural identity
	Q27	Linking Islamic education to the university's organizational values
	Q28	Accepting and supporting diversity of perspectives and cultural backgrounds among students
	Q29	Developing an organizational culture that fosters positive and constructive relationships between Islamic education instructors and students
	Q30	Institutionalizing ethical and religious values within the university culture to support Islamic education
Curriculum-Related Factors	Q31	Aligning Islamic education curricula with learning styles, existential questions, and the spiritual–intellectual needs of contemporary students
	Q32	Integrating Islamic teachings with other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and technology to enrich the curriculum
	Q33	Designing flexible curricula capable of adapting to social, cultural, and educational changes
	Q34	Developing curricula emphasizing active learning, problem-solving, and analytical classroom dialogue
	Q35	Designing curricula aimed at strengthening critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze religious doubts
	Q36	Ensuring curriculum alignment with national and university-level frameworks
	Q37	Collecting feedback from students and faculty members, analyzing learning outcomes, and revising curricula accordingly

Table 2 summarizes the results of the confirmatory factor analysis by reporting the relationships between the identified subcategories and the main construct. The factor loadings and significance levels demonstrate the strength and statistical validity of each dimension within the proposed model. As shown in Table 2, all subcategories exhibit statistically significant factor loadings at the $p < 0.001$ level, confirming their meaningful contribution to improving the quality of Islamic education courses and supporting the overall fit of the research model.

Table 2. Relationships Between Subcategories and the Main Category of Improving the Quality of Islamic Education Courses

Subcategory	Factor Loading	Significance Level (p)	Result
Faculty-related factors	0.86	0.000	Confirmed
Islamic identity of the university	0.82	0.000	Confirmed
University-level policy factors	0.78	0.000	Confirmed
Macro-level higher education policy factors	0.80	0.000	Confirmed
Curriculum-related factors	0.74	0.000	Confirmed

Figure 1 presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the factors influencing the improvement of Islamic education course quality. The CFA results indicate that all five latent variables demonstrated statistically significant factor loadings ($p < 0.001$), confirming their meaningful contribution to the proposed model.

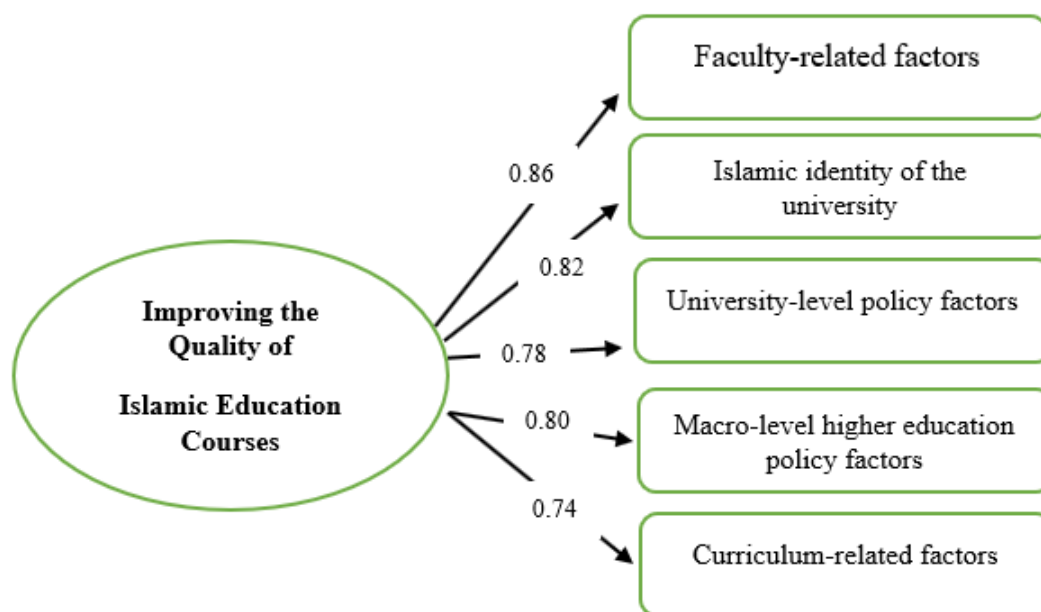


Figure 1. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

The findings reveal that improving the quality of Islamic education courses in Iraqi universities is a multidimensional construct influenced by faculty competencies, institutional and policy frameworks, the Islamic identity of universities, and curriculum design. Among these factors, faculty-related variables exhibited the highest factor loading, highlighting the central role of instructors in enhancing educational quality. The significant factor loadings across all dimensions indicate that the proposed conceptual model demonstrates an acceptable and robust fit. Overall, the results support the validity of the identified factors and confirm that they collectively form a coherent framework for improving the quality of Islamic education courses in Iraqi higher education institutions.

Discussion

Improving the quality of Islamic education courses, as one of the central objectives of higher education systems, requires a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the factors influencing this process. Such improvement not only enhances the effectiveness of educational content and the transmission of religious concepts to students but also plays a significant role in strengthening cultural and ethical values within society. The proposed model for improving the quality of Islamic education courses encompasses a set of interrelated dimensions, each contributing to this complex educational process. These dimensions include faculty-related factors, macro-level higher education policymaking, university-level policies, the Islamic identity of the university, and curriculum-related factors.

The findings highlight the pivotal role of faculty members in enhancing the quality of Islamic education courses. Instructors' academic competence, ethical commitment, and communication skills were identified as key determinants of instructional effectiveness. Faculty members must be capable of presenting religious concepts in ways that are engaging and comprehensible for contemporary students who are exposed to vast and sometimes conflicting sources of information. The use of modern pedagogical approaches—such as group discussions, real-world problem analysis, storytelling, and contextualized examples—can transform abstract religious concepts into meaningful and experiential learning. These results are consistent with earlier studies emphasizing the effectiveness of active and interactive teaching methods in Islamic education contexts (Omar & Farooq, 2023; Suleiman & Karim, 2022). Furthermore, the importance of in-service training for instructors, particularly in educational technologies and interactive methodologies, aligns with the findings of Mahmoudi (2023), who

underscored the role of professional development in addressing instructional challenges in Islamic education.

Macro-level policymaking also emerged as a critical factor in the proposed model. Educational policies formulated at the level of ministries and national institutions should balance the preservation of the authenticity and identity of Islamic education with flexibility in course delivery. These findings support previous research suggesting that rigid, uniform educational policies may reduce instructional effectiveness, particularly in culturally diverse contexts (Al-Abdulhadi & Al-Kandari, 2024). Policies grounded in systematic needs assessments of both students and instructors, and which avoid overly standardized approaches, can enhance relevance and effectiveness. Allowing universities to adapt curricula based on regional cultural and social characteristics may further strengthen learning outcomes. Additionally, the allocation of adequate financial resources for developing updated educational materials and digital platforms is consistent with earlier studies highlighting the role of infrastructure and technology in improving educational quality (Khan & Siddiq, 2022).

At the university level, internal management and policymaking play an equally important role in shaping the quality of Islamic education courses. Creating an institutional climate in which Islamic education is perceived as an integral part of the university's academic and cultural identity can enhance both faculty engagement and student motivation. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that organizational support and constructive feedback mechanisms contribute to improved teaching practices (Malik & Ahmed, 2020). The establishment of systematic evaluation systems, including anonymous student feedback, can help identify instructional strengths and weaknesses and support continuous improvement.

The Islamic identity of the university was also found to have a substantial influence on educational quality. A supportive learning environment that fosters respect, inclusion, and a sense of belonging enables students to engage more deeply with course content. Promoting a culture of dialogue, respect for diverse viewpoints, and non-judgmental classroom interactions can enhance students' participation and sense of ownership in the learning process. These findings are in line with Issa and Jamil (2010), who emphasized the importance of culturally sensitive and dialogical learning environments in addressing contemporary social challenges. Extracurricular activities, such as cultural programs and interfaith or intercultural dialogues, can further strengthen students' connection to the university and reinforce the educational impact of Islamic studies.

Curriculum design emerged as another foundational element in improving educational quality. Effective curricula should be up-to-date, flexible, and responsive to both academic standards and students' needs. Integrating topics such as professional ethics, environmental responsibility from an Islamic perspective, and the role of religion in globalization can increase curriculum relevance and student engagement. The adoption of interdisciplinary approaches—linking Islamic education with fields such as psychology, sociology, and technology—supports earlier findings that interdisciplinary learning enhances conceptual understanding and applicability (Sadeghi et al., 2023). Moreover, curricula that emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, and the analysis of contemporary religious questions can move Islamic education beyond rote learning toward deeper intellectual engagement.

Overall, the findings suggest that improving the quality of Islamic education courses requires coordinated interaction among all identified dimensions. Faculty innovation, informed policymaking, adequate technological infrastructure, motivated students, supportive learning environments, and relevant curricula must function synergistically. The proposed integrated model demonstrates that no single factor is sufficient in isolation; rather, sustainable improvement depends on continuous and dynamic interaction among these elements.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the use of non-probability convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings to all Islamic education instructors in Iraqi universities. Second, data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to response bias. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study restricts the ability to draw causal inferences regarding the relationships among the identified factors. Finally, the study focused exclusively on faculty perspectives and did not incorporate direct input from students or university administrators. Future studies are encouraged to employ probability sampling techniques to enhance generalizability and to include multiple stakeholder perspectives, particularly those of students and policymakers. Longitudinal research designs could provide deeper insight into how improvements in educational quality evolve over time. Additionally, qualitative or mixed-methods approaches may help capture richer, context-specific insights into the implementation of quality improvement strategies. Comparative studies across different Islamic and non-Islamic higher education contexts could further illuminate the transferability and adaptability of the proposed model.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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