

An analysis of cooperation between Turkish and Jordanian universities in the field of Islamic higher education

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Abstract: This study analyses current and potential collaborations between Turkish and Jordanian universities focusing on Islamic Studies. The article aims to identify collaborations within higher education, their gaps, and pathways to strengthen them. The research employed a qualitative design and collected data through interviews and focus group discussions with academics, policymakers, faculty members, and administrative staff from both countries. The findings show that, within administrative concerns, lengthy procedures, insufficient funding, and varying tuition rates are significant barriers to the free flow of students and staff. While a language barrier remains, Islamic culture, shared religion, and growing interest in Turkish and Arabic language studies positively influence partnerships. In addition, the geopolitical proximity of the two countries, their favorable diplomatic relations, and the relatively strong flow of people also foster academic collaboration. Moreover, due to the demands of global rankings and the growing number of partnerships and collaborations, universities are pressured to offer higher-quality education, thereby creating a need for international cooperation. Informed by these findings, the research suggests several collaboration-enhancing measures, including monitoring and implementing signed agreements, establishing joint academic programs, providing additional scholarships, facilitating faculty priority leave, and enhancing language centers. The results indicate that, with more simplified administrative, funding, and language framework, coupled with the cultural and educational synergies of the two countries, partnerships and collaborations will flourish.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, Turkey has achieved significant development success and taken major steps toward opening up to the outside world (Ministry of Development, 2016), as well as toward strengthening its cooperation with Arab countries. Political and economic goals have been among the foremost priorities in Turkey's collaboration with several Arab states. Although cultural and educational objectives have been included within the vision of this cooperation, they have, in practice, remained below the desired level.

Indicators of trade cooperation between Turkey and most Arab countries appear to be higher than those of cultural and educational cooperation. Accordingly, artistic and academic collaboration between Turkish higher education institutions and their Arab counterparts—particularly Jordanian universities—remains limited, given the number and quality of joint programs and activities.

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The advantages of cooperative work are much greater due to issues arising from geographical and cultural differences. However, in cooperation with Turkish and Arab universities, including Jordanian universities, there have been several disruptive issues which are somewhat attributable to cross-societal and cultural differences. It is also reasonable to say that there is no justification for these limitations, as all countries collaborating, even on an academic level, stand to gain much more. An example of this is the member countries of the European Union, which have unified educational programs, yet there are significant differences across countries in the political and cultural spheres (Leuffen et al., 2022).

The Friendship Treaty, signed in Amman in 1947, represented the first steps in Jordan's cooperation with Turkey. This treaty was sealed with the first reciprocal visits of the Heads of State, the most important of which was Jordan's King Abdullah I in 1947, who met with Turkey's İsmet İnönü and, at that time, was also in formal talks with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1937 (Ghatasha, 2012). Turkish-Jordanian relations at this time continue to maintain the same stability as in previous decades, and commemorative and bilateral meetings with Heads of State continue to this day. Jordan has shown its political allegiance to Turkey numerous times, like during 1967 Arab-Israeli War (Six-Day War), which resulted in King Hussein stopping in Turkey to express thanks. Most recently, Turkey and Jordan have taken the same stance in support of Jerusalem (Shneika, 2018).

Enhanced cooperation between Jordan and Türkiye, particularly at the university level, would generate substantial benefits for students in both countries. Such collaboration would enable students to develop advanced academic skills, acquire new knowledge, and gain diverse educational and intercultural experiences through shared programs and mobility opportunities offered by Jordanian and Turkish universities. In fact, a solid foundation for cultural and academic cooperation between the higher education institutions of the two countries already exists. This is evidenced by bilateral partnership agreements, academic exchanges conducted within the frameworks of Erasmus+, Mevlana, and Farabi programs, as well as various initiatives and scholarships supported by non-governmental and charitable organizations. The Yunus Emre Institute also works to promote Turkish cultural education in primary and secondary education, which is essential for the collaboration. Yet, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has little involvement. Nevertheless, it has the potential of being a great actor in the near future (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı, 2020).

This study is important because it seeks to present concrete strategies to enhance collaboration opportunities and alleviate current difficulties. Several motivating reasons can stimulate joint activities between the two countries' universities. Thus, the study tries to answer the following main research questions:

1. What is the current status of cooperation between Turkish and Jordanian universities, particularly in Islamic Studies?
2. What are the main opportunities and challenges in the areas of cooperation between these universities, specifically for Islamic scholarship and religious education?
3. What are the proposed visions, strategies, and plans for Turkish and Jordanian universities to enhance and develop their mutual collaboration in Islamic Studies?

This research aims to present a set of proposed frameworks that can serve as practical and applicable plans and strategies to enhance various dimensions of cooperation between Turkish and Jordanian universities, particularly focusing on Islamic Studies.

1. Literature

No prior study has exclusively addressed cooperation between Turkish and Jordanian universities—existing research has been specific to countries.

Numerous analysts and research articles have examined Turkey's academic collaborations and partnerships with other countries (Hausmann & Lundsgaarde, 2015; Kireçci et al., 2016). One such article analyzed the relations between the Kazakh and Turkish universities and noted some Turkish university initiatives that strengthened this bond, particularly the creation of a Kazakhstani Turkish university (Tlebaldiyeva et al., 2017).

Other works have focused on the cross-border university collaboration, particularly on student mobility programs. As an illustration, Özoglu et al. (2015) investigated the factors determining the selection of Turkish students into cultural exchange programs, along with the difficulties they encounter. Güzel (2014) studied the benefits of the students' mobility on the social and cultural levels. In the same way, Genç et al. (2020) identified weaknesses in the strategies of Turkish universities regarding their worldwide/global competitiveness and international openness.

In the case of Jordan, Al-Zuboon, and Radwan (2018) surveyed faculty members at Jordanian universities to gather their views and proposed ways to expand scientific research collaboration between Jordanian and foreign universities.

Many studies, conducted by Turkish scholars, examine various dimensions of religious and Islamic education in Jordanian universities, with a particular focus on fiqh, tafsir, hadith, and Arabic language instruction. Korkut (2007) examined the problems of postgraduate education at the University of Jordan through the case of postgraduate fiqh education. The study aimed to analyze the impact of economic conditions, academic perspectives, and library services on postgraduate studies. The findings emphasized that strengthening academic cooperation between Jordan and Turkey could help overcome structural weaknesses in higher education and contribute to addressing shared challenges in Islamic societies. Aydar (2003) aimed to identify and present scholarly works conducted in the field of Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) at Jordanian universities. The study reviewed institutional structures, course offerings, prominent scholars, and their academic contributions. It concluded that Jordanian universities possess a rich tafsir tradition that deserves greater recognition and academic exchange with Turkish universities. Bostancı (2003), drawing on his academic experience in Jordan, investigated methods of teaching Arabic to non-native speakers in Jordanian universities. The study aimed to evaluate existing instructional approaches and teaching materials. The findings revealed a continued search for effective methodologies and highlighted the importance of benefiting from comparative international experiences to improve Arabic language instruction. Aydinalı (2025) explored Hadith education at the University of Jordan and analyzed postgraduate theses produced between 2010 and 2024. The study aimed to document institutional development, course structures, and research output in Hadith studies. The findings showed a well-established academic tradition supported by structured postgraduate programs and a significant body of scholarly theses. Nazlıgül (2011) examined the status of Hadith education in Jordan across different educational levels. The study aimed to assess the prevalence and effectiveness of Hadith teaching within the Jordanian education system. The findings indicated that Jordan maintains a strong and systematic Hadith education tradition, supported by rigorous academic research and high-quality theses. Aydin (2019) analyzed higher religious education institutions in Jordan, focusing particularly on Sharia faculties and the Faculty of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Yarmuk University. The study aimed to examine historical development, institutional structures, curricula, and teaching methods using a mixed-methods approach. The results highlighted both the strengths of the Jordanian religious education model and the potential for alternative and innovative practices. Korkut (2024) investigated undergraduate fiqh education at the Faculty of Sharia at the University of Jordan. The study aimed to analyze educational objectives, curriculum content, and teaching methods. The findings demonstrated that the faculty provides a comprehensive and specialized fiqh education grounded in legal practice and contemporary societal needs, benefiting from Jordan's legal and financial context.

2. Methodology

The SWOT analysis served as the primary framework for the qualitative descriptive study evaluating the potential to enhance academic collaborations between universities in Turkey and Jordan. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted both face-to-face and online via Zoom. A total of 94 participants—academic leaders, faculty members, and administrative staff—were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of individuals directly involved in cooperation activities. The sample was selected using convenience sampling, through face-to-face interviews conducted with beneficiaries of academic exchange programs, as well as faculty members and students residing in Türkiye and Jordan who shared common academic and research interests in both countries.

At the time this research was initiated, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university had not yet been established, and therefore no formal institutional ethical approval could be obtained. Nevertheless, the study strictly adhered to internationally recognized ethical standards for social-science research. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and provided verbal informed consent prior to participation. No identifying information was collected, and all data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes.

With participants' consent, each interview, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, was recorded and subsequently transcribed for thematic analysis. The analysis proceeded in three steps. The first step was to identify the specific strengths and weaknesses of the institutions narrativized by the participants. The second step involved identifying and aligning external opportunities and threats (i.e., external comparative strengths and weaknesses). The third step involved summing the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) components for strategic proposals. Some quotes from the participants were included in the findings to corroborate and ensure transparency.

Table 1. Participants in Interviews Conducted to Collect Data from Jordanian Universities

University Name	Number of Participants
Yarmouk University	10
The University of Jordan	6
Al-Balqa Applied University	3
Jordan University of Science and Technology	2
Mutah University	3
Islamic Science University	1
Amman Al-Ahliyya University	1
Al-Zarqa University	2
Ajloun National University	1
Total	27

Table 2. Participants in Interviews Conducted to Collect Data from Turkish Universities

University Name	Number of Participants
Istanbul University	12
Sakarya University	13
Ahi Evran University	3
Dicle University	2
Çankırı University	13
Yıldırım Beyazıt University	3
Mustafa Kemal Atatürk University	1
Marmara University	1
Cumhuriyet University	12
İnönü University	8
Total	68

3. Education Indicators Related to the Republic of Turkey: General Education and Islamic Studies

This section presents educational indicators for both countries, including statistics on students enrolled in higher education, details regarding student and faculty exchange programs between the universities of the two nations, and opportunities for academic collaboration.

The higher education sector in Turkey has witnessed both quantitative and qualitative advancement over the past two decades. As of 2021, there were 207 universities, of which 78 were foundation or private universities (Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, 2021). Nine of these institutions ranked among the top 1,000 universities worldwide according to the *QS World University Rankings* for 2021. The remarkable development in Turkish higher education is clearly evident when compared over time: in 2002, there were 76 universities, a number that increased to 175 by 2013, including 104 public institutions (ESI, 2014, p. 3). According to data published from the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and related statistical reports, Türkiye had a total of 208 higher education institutions for the 2024–2025 academic year (Council of Higher Education, 2025). In 2023, Sharia and Islamic Studies faculties across public and private universities in Jordan enrolled a total of 9,870 students, including international students (Unit, 2023).

In support of various facets of international education, the Turkish government has implemented several interventions. The advancements made within the higher education sector have aligned with the education vision within the European Union (Pace et al., 2014). Many Turkish universities are now more accepting of members of the global academic community. Increasing numbers of international scholarship students are being placed in Turkish universities. In contrast, faculty members and students are being mobilized abroad using a variety of support mechanisms, including the Erasmus and Mevlana programs, as well as bilateral cooperative arrangements established by universities on their own.

For Arab countries, Turkish universities are attractive for their cultural closeness and geographic proximity, as well as for their diverse and high-quality academic programs. The higher education sector in Jordan, along with Turkey's geographic proximity, has undergone further development. At the same time, Jordanian universities have shown an apparent willingness to expand their academic and research collaborations with Turkish counterparts.

To facilitate further cooperation in culture and education, the two governments formally agreed to sign the Agreement on Cultural and Educational Cooperation in April 1968, and this agreement was published in the Turkish Official Gazette (Issue 13168) in 1969. As per Article 1 of the Cooperation Agreement, the universities in both countries would promote and extend studies in one another's history and literature. Article 2 allowed the establishment of educational centers in both countries. Article 3 encouraged and facilitated exchanges among teachers, students, and researchers between the two countries.

Jordan, under an official Turkish initiative, attended along with 36 other member states of the conference organized by the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YOK), which took place under the auspices of the Turkish Presidency, in 2017, in Ankara. The conference resulted in the adoption of the Ankara Declaration (2017) (Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yonetim Sistemi, 2021).

The Declaration urged all higher education institutions in the member countries of the Islamic World to develop and reinforce academic partnerships through the establishment of networked academic forums and organizations that are inclusive of educational decision-makers, educators, and learners. The Declaration also underlined the importance of formulating a higher education strategy for Islamic countries that incorporates the principles of international integration and globalization, quality assurance, and proper management. The Declaration also proposed the synchronization of credit hour systems, the facilitation of mobility of academics and students, the provision of a joint academic curriculum, the teaching of foreign

languages, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the promotion of distance education, and the enhancement of collaborative research (Council of Higher Education of Turkey, 2017).

Table 3. Statistics on the Number of Students by Educational Level in Turkish Higher Education (2020)

Category	Number of Students
Undergraduate Students	4,538,926
Master's Students	297,001
Doctoral Students	101,242

Note. Data retrieved from *Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi* (2021). <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

The number of international students enrolled in Turkish universities in 2019 exceeded 153,662 (Koçak & Günay, 2020). Funding for faculty, administrative, and student exchanges between Turkish universities and universities worldwide is officially supported through three government-backed programs: Farabi, Mevlana, and Erasmus.

For example, Turkish students began benefiting from the Erasmus student exchange program in 2004, and by 2013, the number of participating students had reached 14,412. When comparing the rate of international exchange opportunities available to Turkish students with those in European Union countries, it is clear that Turkish participation remained relatively low: only 3% of Turkish students had opportunities for study or training abroad in that year, compared with 21% of German students and an EU average of 14% (ESI, 2014, p. 6). Within the framework of Law No. 1416 on Students to Be Sent Abroad to Foreign Countries, students are sent overseas for master's and doctoral studies. In the field of Islamic studies, Jordan is among the preferred destinations for these students. Therefore, it is important for the author to also refer to students sent abroad by the Ministry of National Education under this law. According to official data, 811 students were sent abroad in 2025 under Law No. 1416 (Directorate of Legislation, 1929).

As for faculty involvement, 2,227 Turkish professors received benefits under the international mobility scheme in the 2018–2019 academic year. In Table 4, the total Turkish students who took part in all three exchange programmes, namely Farabi, Mevlana, and Erasmus, in the 2020–2021 academic year as outbound and inbound students have been illustrated.

Table 4. Total Number of Turkish Students Participating in Exchange Programs (2020–2021)

Program Type	Farabi Outbound	Farabi Inbound	Mevlana Outbound	Mevlana Inbound	Erasmus Outbound	Erasmus Inbound	Total
Number of Participants	5,888	5,899	33	93	3,812	2,204	17,929

Note. Data from *Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi* (2021). <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

It is worth noting that this figure reflects a slight decrease compared to the 2018–2019 academic year, when the total number of Turkish students participating in international exchange programs reached 19,556, while the total number of inbound students under these programs was 56,753 (Koçak & Günay, 2020).

An interesting development in this context is the significant increase in the number of Jordanian students studying in Turkish universities in recent years. As shown in Table 5, the total number of Jordanian students enrolled in Turkish universities exceeded 4,000 in 2020, up from only 306 in 2014, and rose notably to 1,006 in 2016.

Table 5. Number of Jordanian Students in Turkish Universities (as of 2020)

Male Students	Female Students	Total
3,060	983	4,043

Note. Data from *Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi* (2021). <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

When comparing the number of Jordanian students to those from other countries, their relative share is notably high. In the same year, there were 1,758 Moroccan, 506 Tunisian, 3,145 Palestinian, 41 Qatari, 1,149 Albanian, and 635 Georgian students enrolled in Turkish universities. The largest group of students, international students, came from Syria (37,236), followed by Azerbaijan, which ranked second in the number of international students.

Table 6 lists countries by the number of students sent to them, ranked from highest to lowest. It can be seen that the country that sends the most students to US universities is China, as it ranks highest among all countries sending students to the US and is the largest provider of students to US universities on this list. The largest countries sending students to the world's major educational destinations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, are China, India, and Saudi Arabia. These countries send their students to the world's leading educational institutions to gain degrees recognized globally and to gain admission to these countries because of the available scholarships and their reputable academic standing. On the other hand, Turkey is a preferred country for students from neighboring countries and those that are culturally linked with it, which are Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iraq, and Iran. This is probably due to Turkey's visibility as a regional education center, made possible through its bilateral academic relationships and scholarship programs.

Moreover, Turkey's top student-sending countries include Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Egypt, confirming Turkey's status as affordable and attainable for students from war and economically distressed countries. All in all, the combination of geographic proximity, cultural and linguistic connectivity, economic factors, and perceptions of quality of education influences students' choices.

Table 6. Preferred Study Destinations of Students from Various Countries (Including Turkey)

	United States	United Kingdom	France	Germany	Turkey
1	China	Malaysia	Morocco	China	Syria
2	India	Singapore	Algeria	Russia	Azerbaijan
3	South Korea	China	China	India	Turkmenistan
4	Saudi Arabia	Pakistan	Tunisia	Australia	Iraq
5	Canada	Nigeria	Senegal	Belgium	Iran
6	Taiwan	Hong Kong	Italy	Turkey	Afghanistan
7	Japan	Ghana	Germany	Ukraine	Somalia
8	Vietnam	Oman	Cameroon	France	Egypt
9	Mexico	United Arab Emirates	Vietnam	Poland	Yemen
10	Brazil	Egypt	Spain	Italy	Jordan

Note. Data from *Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi* (2021).

4. Education Indicators in Jordan and Areas of Collaboration in Islamic Studies

The higher education sector is a vital part of Jordan's economy. The governorates of the Kingdom include ten public universities and seventeen private universities, three of which were established under special laws. Enrollment rates in higher education in the Kingdom are among the highest in the Arab world.

Table 7 shows the number of students in higher education institutions by academic degree: Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate.

Table 7. Statistics on the Number of Students by Educational Level in Jordan for the Academic Year 2020–2021

Category	Number
1. Number of Bachelor's students	279,488
2. Number of Master's students	24,823
3. Number of Doctoral students	4,690

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, Jordan – <https://www.mohe.gov.jo/Ar>List>

Financial challenges and the quality of education are among the primary issues facing Jordanian universities (Al-Naqri & Al-Tarawneh, 2018). One key difference between Turkish and Jordanian public universities lies in the trend toward privatization in Jordanian public universities, which now rely heavily on student tuition to fund their budgets. Governmental financial support for these universities has been reduced after entering this privatization phase (Hatamleh, 2015).

Since the 1950s, Türkiye has been a destination for Jordanian students, especially in fields such as medicine and engineering, as Turkish universities were established earlier than their Jordanian counterparts and had a greater capacity to accommodate students. Over the years, several programs and joint academic initiatives have been implemented between Türkiye and Jordan. Several Turkish professors have contributed to teaching at Jordanian universities across various disciplines, including engineering and Turkish language instruction. Similarly, many Jordanian professors have taught at Turkish universities, particularly in Arabic language and Islamic studies.

The number of Turkish students enrolled in Jordanian universities remains relatively small compared to students from other Islamic countries. For example, during the academic year 2019–2020, there were 46 Turkish students enrolled in undergraduate programs and 69 in graduate programs (Master's and Doctoral). In 2018–2019, there were 35 undergraduate and 20 graduate students, while in 2017–2018, there were 49 undergraduate and 59 graduate students (Ministry of Higher Education, 2020). The total number of Turkish students enrolled in Jordanian universities in 2016 was 269, whereas the number of Malaysian students for the same year was 1,890.

In the field of student exchange, dozens of Turkish students come to Jordanian universities each year through Turkish and international exchange programs, matched by a similar number of Jordanian students who attend Turkish universities for one or two semesters. In addition, many Turkish students participate in Arabic-language summer courses organized by official and private Arabic language centers in Jordan, either with financial support from their universities or educational endowments, or at their own expense (Tülü, 2021).

5. Analysis of the Factors of Opportunities and Challenges in Cooperation between Turkish and Jordanian Universities

Information on cooperation opportunities between the two countries was collected through in-depth interviews. The domains of opportunity and challenge factors were divided into the following categories: administrative factors, cultural factors, political factors and bilateral relations, geographical factors, and factors related to quality and global competitiveness.

5.1. Administrative Factors

Opportunities in the administrative and financial domains are primarily related to universities' willingness in both countries to establish cooperation partnerships. Naturally, the strength of this willingness and the extent to which it translates into practical steps vary from one university to another. However, many positive outcomes have been achieved through meetings held at various universities in both countries, involving senior university administrations and administrative staff.

On the Turkish side, universities have established dedicated offices for international student affairs and international cooperation, as well as specific offices for the Mevlana Exchange Program and the Erasmus Program. From a financial perspective, specific budgets have been allocated to support scientific cooperation—either from universities' own budgets or from government institutions.

The global competitiveness factor serves as a key motivation for university leadership in both countries to increase the number of students exchanged between Türkiye and Jordan, to expand participation in local and international exchange programs for faculty and students, and to enhance engagement through bilateral university agreements. Several agreements have been signed between Turkish and Jordanian universities, and many have been implemented to varying degrees. However, the level of benefit derived from these agreements remains below expectations. For example, Yarmouk University in Jordan has signed 32 exchange and cooperation agreements with Turkish universities, yet only seven students participated in these programs at the beginning of the 2021–2022 academic year.

As for the administrative and financial challenges, they include the slow implementation process in universities in both countries—before and after the signing of agreements—and the limited effectiveness in activating these agreements. Moreover, universities' financial allocations are often insufficient to meet the needs of professors, administrative staff, and students, particularly given the austerity measures adopted by the Turkish government over the past four years.

“We want to send our students to partner universities, but the budget is simply not enough to support mobility programs.” (Participant 33, Jordan)

“Funding is the biggest obstacle. If scholarships or joint grants were available, cooperation would expand immediately.” (Participant 22, Türkiye)

On the other hand, public universities in Jordan charge relatively high tuition fees, whereas students at Turkish public universities study for free or for minimal costs. This creates a significant obstacle to establishing joint student exchange programs, as Jordanian universities would be expected to provide free education to incoming Turkish students. In contrast, their own students studying in Türkiye would not pay tuition there. Some Jordanian universities even require students to pay their tuition before going to Türkiye, which is considered unreasonable. Other administrative barriers include delays in signing agreements due to slow university bureaucratic procedures, the absence of specialized offices to follow up on external cooperation, or a lack of awareness of the importance and positive impacts of such agreements. Additionally, many academic departments and faculties are unfamiliar with the nature of exchange programs and the specific needs of incoming students.

“Sometimes a simple request for a joint activity can take months to be processed. By the time approval comes, the opportunity has already passed.” (Participant 12, Jordan).

“The administrative steps are not always clear. Each department has its own requirements, so coordination becomes very difficult.” (Participant 7, Türkiye).

Turkish charitable and endowment organizations have played a vital role in supporting students and facilitating their studies. However, in recent years, financial support for Turkish students participating in

short-term summer programs in Jordan for Arabic language learning has declined. One notable positive development, however, is the establishment of a comprehensive student residence in Amman by the Turkish Maarif Foundation, which accommodates 200 male students and provides hotel-like services. Yet, this residence is limited to male students, and there have been ongoing calls to establish similar housing facilities for female students.

5.2. Cultural Factors

The cultural factors related to cooperation between Turkish and Jordanian universities can be analyzed in terms of religion, language, customs, and traditions.

5.2.1. Religion

Religious education is considered a sensitive issue in Türkiye, as the relationship between religion and the state has directly influenced it. Throughout successive Turkish governments, the ruling elite's political vision has shaped Islamic education policies. During periods of strict secularist rule, religious education was negatively affected, while under governments that promoted democracy and freedom, the field experienced growth and openness.

It can be said that the political liberalization and expansion of civil freedoms witnessed in Türkiye since the early 21st century have had a positive impact on the freedom of religious practices and religious education in Turkish society (Thalji, 2018).

While secularism denotes the separation of religion from the affairs of life and the state, religion, by its very nature, seeks to shape and regulate life in all its dimensions—individual, social, and political. From this perspective, the nature of religion and that of secularism appear to be in structural tension. Secularism requires the state to refrain from intervening in religious matters; however, in the Turkish model of secularism, particularly in its strict forms, religion has historically been placed under state control in the last century, whereas religion inherently implies a guiding authority that transcends the state. In response to political and social transformations, Türkiye has taken necessary steps to curb manifestations of strict secularism by expanding religious freedoms and reaffirming its Islamic cultural identity.

Several intertwined factors have influenced Türkiye's educational policy, particularly concerning religious or Islamic education. These include the Islamic heritage and identity of Turkish society, the relationship between Islam and secular nationalism, Türkiye's aspiration to join the European Union, religious minority rights, and sectarian diversity within the country. Moreover, these dynamics have been linked to Türkiye's democratic transformations, especially in recent years (Thalji, 2018).

"The cultural and religious closeness between the two countries makes cooperation much easier. Our students feel at home in Türkiye." (Participant 16, Jordan).

"We share many values with Jordanian institutions, which helps build mutual trust." (Participant 10, Türkiye)

From a constitutional and legal viewpoint, there is a divergence between Jordan and Türkiye regarding the relationship between the state and religion. Türkiye has a secular political system, while Jordan has a constitution, as well as laws and public life that are all, to a certain extent, Islamic. However, this divergence has little impact on the universities' partnership, given that Türkiye has, to a certain extent, softened the rigidity of secularism in the educational system, such as the prohibition on veiled women attending universities (Thalji, 2018).

Turkish and Jordanian societies are primarily Sunni Muslim, which enhances both countries' ability to integrate their faculty and students culturally. The shared religious perspective is also beneficial to the

Islamic studies scholars and students engaged in cross-border academic collaboration and in Islamic scholarship.

Likewise, the two countries appear to share certain similarities in their academic focus within Islamic studies. However, some scholars have suggested that, in the context of Turkish theology faculties (İlahiyat), processes such as secularization and nationalist intellectual trends may have influenced a limited number of academics in ways that resemble orientalist perspectives (Kızıl, 2013). These claims remain largely interpretive and require systematic empirical investigation to be substantiated.

5.2.2. Language

There is growing interest in Arabic in Türkiye, as it is a fundamental tool for reading sources and references in Islamic sciences. Arabic is also increasingly valued for purposes of translation, tourism, and trade, making it an interesting and engaging subject for many academics and students in Türkiye. Consequently, many people desire to learn Arabic, either at Arab universities or in the social environment surrounding them.

"Many of our students want to go to Jordan specifically because it gives them real exposure to Arabic. They feel it's the best environment to improve their language skills." (Participant 21, Türkiye)

"Studying Arabic in Jordan is a major attraction. Students keep telling us they want more exchange programs so they can practice the language with native speakers." (Participant 36, Türkiye)

Particular attention is given to Arabic by students in the widespread Imam Hatip schools in Türkiye, which historically served as a means for conservative families to provide religiously appropriate education for their children. For example, in 2024–2025, the number of students enrolled in Anadolu İmam Hatip High Schools reached 487,263. For the 2023–2024 academic year, the number of students enrolled in İmam Hatip middle schools was 691,422 (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2025).

"Jordan offers a practical Arabic-speaking context that students can't get from classroom learning alone. That's why mobility programs to Jordan are highly requested." (Participant 44, Türkiye)

"Our university receives many inquiries from Turkish students who want immersion in Arabic. They believe Jordan provides the safest and most structured environment for language study." (Participant 17, Jordan)

The recommendation to adopt English as the common language of cooperation is not appropriate. Educational research consistently shows that individuals can internalize knowledge and benefit most effectively from instruction when it is delivered in their mother tongue. The limited proficiency of some Arab scholars in Turkish restricts their ability to teach effectively in Turkish universities and hinders the full transmission of their academic expertise; therefore, greater effort should be made to acquire spoken and written Turkish. At the same time, academics in Türkiye attach considerable importance to Arabic and, in many cases, teach in Arabic, although this practice cannot be uniformly generalized across all faculty members. For these reasons, rather than proposing English as a shared medium, a reciprocal educational model based on Turkish and Arabic—aimed at mutual language learning—would contribute more effectively to strengthening academic, economic, and political cooperation

Moreover, faculties of theology specializing in Islamic studies, and those recently renamed as faculties of Islamic sciences, place strong emphasis on Arabic. Following the AK Party's policy, established after 2006, of establishing a university in every province, the number of universities increased (Aşlamacı, 2019). The needs of students and faculty to learn Arabic serve as a key motivating factor for cultural and academic cooperation between Türkiye and Jordan. To better understand this factor, the following table presents the number of faculties established in Türkiye up to 2023:

Table 8. Summary of Updated Data on Undergraduate-Level Institutions/Programs in Faculties of Theology/Islamic Sciences

Category	Number
Number of Faculties by Name	
Theology Faculty/Program (İlahiyat)	68
Islamic Sciences Faculty (İslami İlimler)	32
Faculty Status	
Active	99
Inactive	6
Type of University	
Public (State)	100
Private (Foundation)	5
Instruction Type	
Day Program (I. Öğretim)	97
Evening Program (II. Öğretim)	59
Language of Instruction	
Turkish	93
Arabic	13
English	3
Location	
Domestic (Turkey)	100
Overseas	5

Note. Faculties that have been closed are not included in the totals presented in this summary table. Additionally, institutions located outside Turkey that offer instruction in multiple languages (including Turkish) are not included in the categories “Number of Faculties by Name” and “Language of Instruction.” (Altin, 2024).

In the 2022–2023 academic year, the total number of registered students in Faculties of Theology and Islamic Sciences in Türkiye reached 120,544, consisting of 75,166 female students and 45,378 male students. These figures include both formal (on-campus) programs and the İLİTAM distance education program. Compared to the previous academic year (2021–2022), student enrollment increased, indicating a renewed growth trend after a period of decline. İLİTAM students accounted for approximately 15.32% of the total registered student population in 2022–2023, reflecting the continued significance of distance education within higher religious education. Overall, the data demonstrate that faculties of theology and Islamic sciences remain among the largest and most dynamic fields in Turkish higher education, with sustained female majority participation (Altin, 2024).

Conversely, there has been growing interest among Jordanian faculty and students in learning Turkish across various disciplines. Learning Turkish provides Arab academics with a valuable opportunity to access a large volume of research and publications written in Turkish. English often serves as an intermediary for researchers who are not proficient in Arabic (for Turks) or Turkish (for Jordanians). While useful in the short term, this approach is limited in fostering strong scientific connections at the individual level between the two academic communities.

“Many students are interested in studying in Türkiye, but they hesitate because they feel their Turkish language skills are not strong enough.” (Participant 41, Jordan)

Language-related challenges include the fact that many Turkish academics and students do not know Arabic or even English. Similarly, many Jordanian academics and students lack proficiency in Turkish or English. This limitation has prevented many from fully benefiting from exchange programs, such as the Erasmus Program (ESI, 2014, p. 3).

“English is the working language in many programs, but not all staff members are comfortable using it for academic collaboration.” (Participant 55, Türkiye)

Additionally, incoming students from both countries may be surprised to find that programs that are assumed to be taught in English are instead conducted in Turkish in Türkiye or Arabic in Jordan. There have also been calls to establish language centers at Jordanian universities to provide more effective instruction, thereby improving both the quality of teaching and the number of beneficiaries.

5.2.3. Customs and Traditions

Middle Eastern societies, like Jordan and Turkey, share many traditions and customs. Students from Jordan may find the way university life is lived in Turkey to be a bit surprising. During the Ottoman Empire, the Turks and Arabs shared a complex and rich culture which was evident in the way people lived, the social customs and the traditions of the community. There was a common framework of culture in the whole empire which was due to the practices of coffee culture, hospitality, rituals of weddings and festivals, and culinary practices. It was a culture that was shared and transcended the empire through its various ethnic and linguistic diversities. Crafts, music, and architecture also showed the influence of the Ottoman Empire that was present in the Anatolian and Arab majority regions, which goes to show that the empire had a unifying set of social and cultural practices. These interconnected traditions formed relations that built local identities and also sparked cultural relations that would last even after the empire was gone (Karakoç & Yıldırım, 2021).

5.3. Political Factors and Bilateral Relations

The nature and extent of academic partnership is dictated by the nature of political relations between the two countries especially in relation to university partnerships and their implementation. While political relations between Jordan and Türkiye have had their chilly episodes, they have, on the whole, been positive, and as a result, cooperation has been maintained. There is a degree of freedom, with no barriers in place on the various forms of scientific and cultural cooperation.

There are also significant opportunities such as exemption of visas to both countries and 3 months stay which can be extended.

“The political relationship between the countries is generally positive, and this encourages cooperation between universities.” (Participant 4, Türkiye).

“When political ties are stable, academic partnerships grow naturally. It creates an atmosphere of trust.” (Participant 9, Jordan)

The fact that both countries are politically hosting a larger number of Syrian Refugees adds to the complications in higher education. Statistics suggest that 8% of the Syrian refugees of university age are in higher education, where in Türkiye it is 1% (Fincham, 2020)

5.4. Geographical Factor

Türkiye and Jordan are geographically close, with frequent, competitively priced flights between the countries. Direct flights connect Amman International Airport to various Turkish cities, including Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya, and Trabzon, facilitating the mobility of faculty and students.

“Travel between Türkiye and Jordan is easy and relatively affordable, which encourages student mobility.” (Participant 25, Jordan).

“Geography is on our side—short flights help make cooperation more practical.” (Participant 14, Türkiye)

Conversely, the Syrian crisis disrupted land transportation between Türkiye and Jordan. Previously, cross-border travel was less costly, and this disruption has significantly reduced student mobility between the two countries.

5.5. Quality and Global Competitiveness

The growing importance of inter-university scientific collaboration is an operational necessity for institutions of higher education. This is because specific data points under quality standards neglect the importance of collaboration-oriented metrics. The number of inter-university agreements, students and faculty exchanges, joint programs, and international faculty and student populations are critical metrics of quality. Turkish and Jordanian universities are working to improve their global rankings by fostering international collaboration through joint research and student and faculty mobility.

Maintaining its best academic standing, UJ has the best reputation and research impact of all Jordanian Universities according to the latest QS World Rankings; it is the highest-ranked university in Jordan. JUST is the second-highest-ranked university in Jordan and in the world; it is in the top 500. Other Jordanian Universities, such as Al Ahliyya Amman University, Applied Science Private University, German Jordanian University, Yarmouk University, and Princess Sumaya University for Technology, also participate in these rankings. Still, their position is not evident in the upper bands (generally in the 800s to 1400s), indicating their research impact is limited in terms of internet visibility (TopUniversities, 2026). METU and Istanbul Tech University are among the top 300 universities in the world. Koç University, Boğaziçi University, Sabancı University, and Bilkent are also in the top 500 of the world. Istanbul University and Atatürk University are further down the rankings, but their upper international visibility suggests the presence of research from these universities (QS, 2025).

“Universities now compete globally. To attract international students, we must cooperate with strong institutions like those in Türkiye.” (Participant 63, Jordan).

“International partnerships help us improve our rankings and visibility.” (Participant 29, Türkiye)

Thus, the overarching ambition for universities in both countries is to enhance cooperation with American and European universities. Nonetheless, disciplinary and linguistic factors may favor bilateral collaboration between Turkish and Jordanian universities.

6. Proposed Strategies for Enhancing Cooperation

A significant finding of this study is the need for a structured mechanism to monitor and activate existing agreements between Turkish and Jordanian universities. Although formal partnerships exist, many remain dormant. Participants emphasized that this gap results from the absence of a clear follow-up system. One Jordanian academic described the situation as follows:

“The agreements look impressive on paper, but without a joint mechanism to follow up, they remain inactive. Both sides need a system that ensures the agreements actually translate into action.” (Participant 3, Jordan)

This perspective highlights the need to strengthen coordination between the Turkish Higher Education Council and the Jordanian Ministry of Higher Education. Participants also underscored the importance of creating direct opportunities for universities to explore cooperation. Organizing joint academic exhibitions and networking events was repeatedly recommended as a catalyst for new initiatives. One interviewee explained the value of these encounters:

“When university leaders, faculty, and students meet in one place, ideas start flowing. Cooperation becomes easier because people understand each other’s needs and capabilities.” (Participant 7, Türkiye)

Such events were seen as essential in transforming abstract interest into concrete collaborative projects. Funding constraints were another key challenge mentioned by participants. Although there is a strong interest in expanding collaboration, limited budgets restrict the implementation of exchange programs, joint research, and shared initiatives. A Turkish faculty member highlighted this obstacle in a way that reflects the general sentiment across interviews:

“Our financial resources for international cooperation are minimal. Without new funding channels—governmental, private, or through endowed programs—student and faculty mobility will remain small.” (Participant 2, Türkiye)

Developing joint academic programs—primarily through distance learning—was identified as a promising direction for strengthening cooperation. Participants stressed that technological platforms can compensate for travel limitations and institutional constraints. One interviewee illustrated this point:

“Distance learning can solve many of our logistical problems. If we design joint programs using online platforms, we can cooperate even when physical mobility is difficult.” (Participant 5, Jordan)

In addition, many participants supported expanding student and faculty exchanges, particularly in Islamic studies, due to shared academic heritage.

Language development emerged as a foundational requirement for successful collaboration. Strengthening Turkish instruction in Jordan—and Arabic instruction in Turkey—was widely recommended. A participant specifically emphasized the role of language in enabling academic mobility:

“Language is the real bridge between us. Without Turkish or Arabic skills, students hesitate to participate in exchange programs, even if opportunities are available.” (Participant 1, Türkiye)

Accordingly, participants called for expanding language centers, improving curriculum quality, and increasing institutional cooperation with the Yunus Emre Institute.

Improving faculty mobility through streamlined sabbatical procedures was another recommendation. Participants stressed that faculty exchanges contribute to long-term institutional development. A Turkish professor captured this idea by stating:

“When a professor spends a semester or a year abroad, the benefits come back to the home university. It enriches teaching, research, and international networks.” (Participant 6, Türkiye)

Joint research also emerged as a central focus for future cooperation. Participants noted that while both countries have strong researchers, collaboration remains limited. One interviewee explained:

“We have excellent researchers on both sides, but there is no structured platform that brings them together. If such a mechanism existed, joint publications would increase immediately.” (Participant 4, Jordan)

Increasing scholarship opportunities was also seen as critical to enhancing student mobility and academic integration.

Finally, participants highlighted the roles of embassies, cultural attachés, and agencies such as TİKA in bridging institutional gaps. Diplomatic support can help remove procedural barriers and initiate partnerships that universities might struggle to create independently. As one administrator noted:

“Embassies can make introductions and support agreements in ways that universities cannot do alone. Their involvement gives cooperation a push.” (Participant 8, Jordan)

Participants added that expanding TİKA's engagement in higher education would provide meaningful support for joint initiatives.

Together, these quotations and insights reflect a shared optimism among academic leaders in both countries. The proposed strategies—including activating agreements, improving funding, strengthening language programs, and expanding faculty and student mobility—form a comprehensive roadmap for advancing sustainable Turkish–Jordanian academic cooperation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to establish a framework of perceptions to formulate actionable strategies to improve collaboration among Turkish and Jordanian universities. This particular field has not yet been explored academically. While several previous studies have addressed academic cooperation between Türkiye and Jordan from different perspectives—particularly in specific subfields such as Fiqh, Hadith, and Tafsir—these studies remain largely specialized in narrow academic domains, rely primarily on descriptive approaches, and do not sufficiently incorporate statistical data or provide a holistic and comprehensive analysis of the higher education systems in both countries. This research is descriptive, employs a qualitative methodology, and is based on the analysis of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and competitive benchmarking to determine the current state of collaboration, identify opportunities and challenges, and formulate strategies to overcome them, advancing cooperation on multiple fronts.

The analysis shows that collaboration between countries can be bolstered by several administrative and financial factors, including a collegial atmosphere in universities that encourages cooperation and a multitude of signed partnerships—many of which are only partially operational. Challenges remain, however, particularly in the areas of slow administrative processes preceding and following the signing of partnerships, Limited fiscal resources that hamper mobility funding, and the recent financial austerity measures being implemented in Türkiye. Differences in tuition fees—highly variable in Jordanian public universities and low or nominally charged in Turkish public institutions—also curtail the viability of bilateral student mobility.

Charitable endowment institutions in Türkiye have historically funded students in summer programs in Jordan; however, in recent years, this funding source has dried up. Cultural and linguistic considerations also come into play. The religious and cultural similarities are beneficial in aiding faculty members and students to work together in Islamic studies. Interest in Arabic is growing in Türkiye, particularly in Imam Hatip institutions and theology faculties. Unfortunately, many Turkish participants lack sufficient proficiency in Arabic and/or English, and many Jordanian participants also lack adequate proficiency in Turkish and/or English. The expectation is that programs are conducted in English, although this is not the case in Türkiye, where programs are conducted in Turkish, and in Jordan, where Arabic is used. These factors complicate the level of academic exchange and highlight the necessity of programs designed for effective, practical language training.

Political and geographical factors further complicate the situation. The bilateral relationship between Türkiye and Jordan has its ups and downs; however, it is stable enough to allow academic collaboration, which is further supported by visa exemptions and flexible tourist stay rules. Geographical proximity and the availability of reasonably priced direct flights further improve mobility and collaboration.

Yet regional factors, such as the Syrian refugee influx and its consequences for higher education enrollment, affect the scope of collaboration. Simultaneously, increasing global anticipation, including the range of multilateral education frameworks, collaborative programs, and staff exchanges, contextualizes academic collaborations as vital to institutional standing in the market, given the high global rankings of Turkish universities.

In line with the findings, the study outlines several initiatives to bolster collaboration between Turkish and Jordanian higher education institutions which involve the full activations of the existing

agreements, streamlining the improvement of the established cooperation frameworks, identifying new funding for mobility programs, development of joint academic programs, as well as the increased adoption of e-learning tools to enable cooperation that is seamless and sustainable. Overall, these initiatives will assist the two systems in global participation by fostering active international collaboration within regional academic networks.

Declarations

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