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# An examination of teachers' views on the assessment and evaluation tools in the Century of Türkiye Education Model Secondary Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge Teaching Program

**Teceli Karasu, Fatma Bildirici\* & Aslan Ali Demirkol**

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine teachers' views on the assessment and evaluation tools in the Century of Türkiye Education Model (CTEM) Secondary Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge (RCEK) Teaching Program. The research was conducted using a case study design. The research study group consists of 13 RCEK teachers working in secondary education institutions in Muş province during the 2024-2025 academic year. The study group was selected using criterion sampling, a purposive sampling method. In selecting the participants, the following criteria were taken into account: their prior review of the CTEM Secondary RCEK Teaching Program, their participation in the in-service training seminars provided to teachers at the beginning of the academic year regarding the CTEM RCEK Teaching Program, and their current instruction of the 9th-grade RCEK course in secondary education. A semi-structured interview form consisting of 4 demographic questions and 5 open-ended questions was used as a data collection tool. The study data were transferred to the MAXQDA 2020 program and analyzed using descriptive methods. Based on the data obtained in the study, it was concluded that teachers generally saw the assessment and evaluation practices stipulated in the teaching program positively, found themselves partially competent in using assessment and evaluation tools, preferred traditional assessment and evaluation tools more, and had difficulties in the implementation of assessment and evaluation tools due to students, teachers, teaching environment, teaching program and textbooks. Also, this implementation makes significant contributions to both students and teachers in the educational process.

## Article History

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Religious Education, the Century of Türkiye Education Model, Teaching Programs, Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge Course, Assessment and Evaluation Tools.

## Introduction

Assessment and evaluation are among the most important elements of the educational process. It plays a critical role in evaluating the program, monitoring student development, understanding the effectiveness of the learning and teaching process, improving the teaching process, and encouraging teachers

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to reflect on their own practice (Çüm, 2021, pp. 4–5; Yiğit, 2024, pp. 9–15). On the other hand, differences may be observed in assessment and evaluation tools depending on the educational approach paradigm. Moreover, an approach that ignores the requirements of our era and focuses solely on results or products cannot achieve the desired efficiency. Therefore, it is necessary to use contemporary assessment tools that evaluate the processes that contribute to the development of students' various qualities (Bahar et al., 2025, p. 49; Bilmez, 2024, pp. 33–38). Indeed, the Century of Türkiye Education Model (CTEM) recommends the use of process-centered contemporary assessment tools alongside traditional outcome-centered assessment tools and adopts an approach that encourages deepening the learning process in instructional design and implementation. The approach, which is based on the teacher's systematic observation of the student's development of any skill in the process, supports the teacher in providing effective feedback (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2024b, pp. 59–61).

Assessment and evaluation are integral parts of Religious Culture and Ethics Knowledge (RCEK) teaching. In the CTEM Secondary RCEK Teaching Program (also known as the Curriculum), when assessment and evaluation practices are implemented, it is observed that importance is placed on ensuring these practices align with all elements of the program and on diversifying assessment and evaluation tools. Students must be actively engaged in the educational process. To this end, teachers should use a variety of assessment methods, including short-answer, open-ended, matching, true-false, multiple-choice, observation forms, rating scales, checklists, rubrics, structured grids, worksheets, comparison tables, T-charts, exit tickets, performance tasks, projects, written and oral exams, as well as self, peer, and group assessment forms (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2024a, p. 9).

Teachers are one of the most important pillars in achieving the objectives of teaching programs. Teachers must understand the philosophy and requirements of the program (Karasu, 2018, pp. 249–255). The CTEM, described as a major paradigm shift in the country's history, has brought about significant transformations in many respects. One of these transformations is evident in the assessment and evaluation tools. Since assessment and evaluation tools vary according to the target and the nature of the subject, achieving the desired success from the CTEM is possible by understanding the philosophy underlying the model (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2024b, pp. 4–10, 2024a, pp. 4–5). However, teachers continue to perform their duties based on certain habits. The Ministry is employing various methods, including presentations, projects, in-service training, television programs, and conferences, to transform teachers in line with the new model. However, it is important to receive feedback on how all these services are reflected in the implementation of the model in question. In this sense, it is necessary to explore whether teachers have achieved transformation in terms of assessment and evaluation, as well as other dimensions of the program, in line with the model's paradigm.

A review of the relevant literature reveals studies conducted in different teaching fields, with particular emphasis on RCEK teachers' views on the teaching program (Ceylan, 2025; Karataş & Tabak, 2010), their preferred assessment tools (Gündoğdu, 2013), their opinions on constructivist assessment and evaluation methods (İşikdoğan, 2014), their level of proficiency in using assessment and evaluation techniques (Çakmak, 2011; Yıldız & Genç, 2016; Karbeyaz, 2018; Cingöz & Akyürek, 2021), their general perceptions of assessment and evaluation competence (E. Şimşek, 2018), and their attitudes towards assessment and evaluation (V. Şimşek, 2022). There are also studies comparing teaching programs (Köseoğlu, 2025) and the theoretical structure of the CTEM RCEK course teaching program (Kaya & Köseoğlu, 2024; Turan & Naziroğlu, 2024; Üzümçü & Abanoz, 2024; Yaşar, 2024). However, no research has been found that explores teachers' views on the assessment and evaluation tools envisaged in the CTEM Secondary Education RCEK Course Teaching Program.

This study aims to explore RCEK teachers' perspectives on the assessment and evaluation tools included in the CTEM Secondary Education RCEK Course Teaching Program. To this end, the following questions were addressed:

1. How do teachers assess the assessment and evaluation practices outlined in the teaching program?
2. What is the status of teachers' self-perceived competence in using the assessment and evaluation tools specified in the teaching program?
3. How often do teachers use the assessment and evaluation tools specified in the teaching program? Which assessment and evaluation tools do they prefer?
4. What difficulties do teachers encounter when implementing the assessment and evaluation tools specified in the teaching program?
5. What are the benefits of implementing the assessment and evaluation tools specified in the teaching program, according to teachers?

## **1. Research Method**

This section includes information about the research model, study group, data collection tool, data collection process, and data analysis.

### **1.1. Research Model**

The research was conducted using a case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. A case study is a research design in which the researcher conducts an in-depth analysis of a situation, action, event, program, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2017, p. 14). It is a research approach in which the researcher collects detailed information through observation, interviews, documents, or audiovisual materials based on the questions "why," "how," and "for what purpose" regarding a defined situation, and then describes the problem (Yeşilbaş Özenc, 2022, pp. 58–59; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 276). In this study, a case study design was chosen because the aim was to examine teachers' views on the assessment and evaluation tools in the CTEM Secondary Education RCEK Course Teaching Program in detail and depth.

### **1.2. Study Group**

The study group consists of 13 RCEK teachers working in secondary education institutions in Muş province during the 2024-2025 academic year. The study group was selected using criterion sampling, a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a method in which the researcher selects a sample based on specific characteristics that they believe are appropriate for the research problem, based on their own personal observations (Aksoy et al., 2018, p. 154; A. Şimşek, 2018, p. 121). Criterion sampling is the examination of all cases that meet a set of criteria determined in advance. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 112). In this regard, it has been decided that teachers in the working group should review the CTEM Secondary Education RCEK Course Teaching Program, participate in the training seminars provided to teachers at the beginning of the year regarding the CTEM RCEK, and teach the RCEK course in the 9th grade of secondary education. This is because the CTEM teaching programs have been implemented starting from the 2024-2025 academic year for 1st-grade elementary school, 5th-grade middle school, and 9th-grade secondary school levels. Since the study aimed to examine teachers' opinions regarding the assessment and evaluation tools in the CTEM Secondary Education RCEK Course Teaching Program, the study group consisted of teachers teaching the 9th-grade RCEK course. When the number of interviewees reached 13, it was observed that teachers' responses became repetitive, and no new data were generated. Therefore, the interviews were terminated. The demographic characteristics of the study group are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group**

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Seniority	School Type
K1	Female	29	4	Science High School
K2	Female	34	10	Anatolian High School
K3	Female	36	11	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School
K4	Male	30	4	Anatolian High School
K5	Female	38	15	Anatolian High School
K6	Male	31	8	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School
K7	Male	31	8	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School
K8	Female	36	11	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School
K9	Male	35	11	Anatolian High School
K10	Female	30	4	Multi-Program Anatolian High School
K11	Male	29	4	Anatolian High School
K12	Female	30	5	Anatolian High School
K13	Female	34	10	High School of Visual Arts

Table 1 shows that 8 of the teachers in the study group are female and 5 are male. The teachers' ages range from 29 to 38, and their professional seniority ranges from 4 to 15 years. Six of the teachers work at Anatolian High Schools, 4 at Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools, 1 at a Science High School, 1 at a Multi-Program Anatolian High School, and 1 at a High School of Visual Arts. In accordance with the ethics of the study, the participants' personal information was kept confidential, and they were coded K1, K2, K3, etc., in the order in which they were interviewed.

### 1.3. Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Process

In the study, a semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool. A semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which participants are asked predetermined questions directly about the topic to be examined (Balaban Salı, 2012, p. 145; Çapçıoğlu & Kalkan Açıkgöz, 2018, p. 210). After conducting a literature review, the researchers prepared the interview form by consulting two experts in religious education and one expert in scientific research to ensure the scope and structural validity of the questions. At the beginning of the research process, ethical commission approval dated 03.06.2025 and numbered 197094 was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board of Muş Alparslan University. In addition, a research application permit dated 25.04.2025 and numbered MEB.TT.2025.023883 was obtained through the Ministry of National Education Research Application Permits Application System. After the permits were obtained, two RCEK teachers were interviewed for the pilot study. As a result of the interview, it was decided that the questions were sufficiently clear and understandable. Thus, within the scope of the study, in addition to the information text, four demographic questions and five open-ended questions were asked of the participants. The teachers who participated in the pilot study were excluded from the study group, and data collection began.

The interviews were conducted in June 2025. The interviews were completed in an environment where participants felt comfortable, with individual, face-to-face audio recordings. Participant consent was obtained before audio recording. The audio recordings were then transcribed and presented to the participants for verification. Data analysis proceeded after the participants verified the transcriptions. However, some participants (K1, K2, and K9) who did not wish to be audio recorded wrote their views by hand on the interview form.

### 1.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data in the study. In descriptive analysis, data is interpreted according to predetermined dimensions or categories. In this analysis method, a framework is

created for analysis. In other words, the themes or concepts under which the data will be organized are determined at the outset. Then, the data are read, organized, and processed according to this prepared thematic framework (Akbulut, 2012, p. 186). In this regard, a data analysis framework was first established based on the research questions, and each interview question was treated as a theme. The data was then read and organized according to these thematic frameworks. Separate files were created for each question in the interview form in the computer environment, and all participants' views were coded and organized as K1, K2, K3.....K13, keeping their personal information confidential. The teachers' answers to the interview questions were examined separately by each researcher. To ensure the reliability of the research, inter-coder consistency was examined. The formula developed by Miles and Huberman was used for this analysis. It is generally accepted that reliability calculations above 70% are considered reliable for a study. According to the formula, the reliability of this study was calculated as 75%. This result indicates that the study's data are reliable.

The research data were transferred to the MAXQDA 2020 software package, which is often preferred for analyzing qualitative data, and descriptive analysis was performed. The obtained data were presented in tables in the findings section of the study, including categories, codes, and subcodes within the themes, along with their frequencies. To ensure the internal validity of the research data, participants' views were included in the findings section in the form of direct quotations.

## 2. Findings

The study sought answers to five research questions. The findings obtained in this regard are presented under a heading related to each research question.

### 2.1. Opinions on How Assessment and Evaluation Practices Are Assessed

The responses provided by teachers to the first interview question of the study, "How do you evaluate the assessment and evaluation practices envisaged in the teaching program?", were analyzed, and the findings are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Teachers' Opinions on How They Evaluate Assessment and Evaluation Practices**

Theme	Category	Code	F
How assessment and evaluation practices are assessed	Positive	Process-oriented	8
		Contributes to the development of students' higher-order thinking skills	6
		Provides individualized feedback	5
		Being Student-centered	5
		Enables the identification of learning gaps	5
		Facilitates access to assessment tools by scanning QR codes in the book	4
		Inclusion of both traditional and contemporary assessment and evaluation tools	4
		Providing opportunities for students to participate in the assessment process	4
	Negative	Inclusion of assessment and evaluation tools for almost every learning outcome	3
		Providing the opportunity for multifaceted assessment	2
		Providing examples of assessment and evaluation applications	2
		Insufficient in-service training	4
		Lack of sample classroom videos for RCEK lessons	1

Table 2 shows teachers' opinions on how they evaluate assessment and evaluation practices, grouped under the categories of "positive" and "negative." The teachers participating in the study assessed their assessment and evaluation practices as: "process-oriented (K1, K4, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10, K11)", "contributing to the development of students' higher-order thinking skills (K3, K5, K6, K9, K12, K13)", "providing individualized feedback (K1, K2, K4, K6, K11)", "being student-centered (K1, K5, K8, K12, K13)", "enabling the identification of learning gaps (K1, K2, K6, K10, K12)", "Facilitating access to assessment tools by scanning QR codes in the book (K1, K2, K10, K12)", "Inclusion of both traditional and contemporary assessment and evaluation tools (K2, K4, K11, K12)", "Providing opportunities for student participation in the assessment process (K2, K11, K12, K13)", "Including assessment and evaluation tools for almost every learning outcome (K2, K7, K9)", "Providing the opportunity for multi-faceted evaluation (K4, K10)", and "Providing examples of assessment and evaluation applications (K9, K12)" were found to be positive. Below are some direct quotes from teachers' views regarding the positive evaluation of assessment and evaluation practices.

*K8: "Previously, we measured students' knowledge solely through written exams and formed a general opinion. But now, with a process-oriented approach, many factors such as the student's effort in the learning process, their relationships with their peers, and their level of responsibility are also included in the assessment and evaluation process."*

*K12: "With assessment and evaluation practices, students no longer just learn information; they analyze, critique, and interpret it. Therefore, it is very encouraging that assessment and evaluation practices are aimed at developing students' higher-order thinking skills."*

*K2: "With the assessment and evaluation practices in the new model, students become individuals who research, question, express their opinions, and make decisions as part of the process. The 'teacher feedback' section in the evaluation forms at the end of the activities also provides students with personalized feedback."*

*K5: "The new program's assessment and evaluation practices are based on a student-centered approach that aims to enable students to become individuals who gather, analyze, relate, draw conclusions, determine content, develop designs, and effectively present their products."*

*K10: "I find the assessment and evaluation practices included in the teaching program to be highly successful in terms of being process-oriented, providing students with the opportunity for multi-faceted evaluation, and revealing students' learning deficiencies."*

*K1: "Providing easy access to assessment tools by scanning the QR codes in the book is a very appropriate practice."*

*K11: "In the previous teaching program, the number and variety of tools for assessment and evaluation of students' critical thinking and analysis skills were insufficient. It is perfect that the new teaching programs give ample space to alternative assessment and evaluation tools alongside traditional ones to develop these skills."*

*K9: "Textbooks contain a wide variety of assessment and evaluation practices, which motivates students to engage more actively in the course. I can say that there is an assessment and evaluation tool for almost every learning outcome. This prevents the course from becoming monotonous and encourages students to participate actively."*

Some participants in the survey expressed a negative view of assessment and evaluation practices, citing codes such as "insufficient in-service training (K3, K6, K8, K10)" and "lack of sample classroom videos for RCEK lessons (K3)." Below are some direct quotes from teachers regarding their negative view of assessment and evaluation practices.

*K3: "Frankly, I can't say I have a lot of knowledge. I'm trying to learn by experimenting and researching as I go along. At the beginning of the year, I attended three days of in-service training. Unfortunately, I didn't get anything out of it. I looked online to see if there were any sample lesson videos; there were for other subjects, but I couldn't find any for ours."*

*K8: "The in-service training we received at the beginning of the year was very ineffective. A program that took so many years of effort to prepare should not have been limited to three days of training. Furthermore, this training should have been delivered by experts in the field. Unfortunately, we teachers were included in the process too late."*

## 2.2. Opinions on Competencies Related to the Use of Assessment and Evaluation Tools

The responses provided by teachers to the second interview question of the study, "How competent are you in your ability to use the assessment and evaluation tools specified in the teaching program?" were analyzed, and the findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Teachers' Opinions on How Competent They Consider Themselves in Using Assessment and Evaluation Tools**

Theme	Code	Subcode	F
Competencies in the Use of Assessment and Evaluation Tools	Somewhat competent (10)	The existence of assessment and evaluation tools that have not been used in class before	10
		Lack of technological competence	2
		Failure to receive in-service training on the use of assessment and evaluation tools	1
		Being prepared for class	2
	Quite competent (3)	Examination of the advantages and disadvantages of assessment and evaluation tools	2
		Receiving adequate training on assessment and evaluation tools	1
		Attending training seminars on assessment and evaluation tools	1

Table 3 shows that teachers' views on their competence in using assessment and evaluation tools were coded as "somewhat competent (K2, K3, K4, K6, K7, K8, K10, K11, K12, K13)" and "quite competent (K1, K5, K9)". Teachers participating in the study found themselves partially competent in using assessment and evaluation tools with the subcodes "The existence of assessment and evaluation tools that have not been used in class before (K2, K3, K4, K6, K7, K8, K10, K11, K12, K13)", "lack of technological competence (K3, K8)", and "Failure to receive in-service training on the use of assessment and evaluation tools (K6)". Below are some direct quotes from teachers regarding their views on finding themselves partially competent in using assessment and evaluation tools.

*K11: "I can easily use traditional assessment and evaluation tools. However, I encounter difficulties when applying some alternative assessment and evaluation tools because I have not used them before. Therefore, I feel the need to improve myself."*

*K8: "I consider myself partially competent. This is because I do not have sufficient knowledge and skills in the field of technology. Much of the course content is in a digital environment, which tires me greatly."*

*K6: "I consider myself partially competent. I experienced assessment and evaluation tools for the first time in a classroom setting. I have not received any in-service training on using assessment and evaluation tools before."*

Teachers participating in the study rated themselves as quite competent in using assessment and evaluation tools with the subcodes "going to class prepared (K1, K5)", "examining the advantages and disadvantages of assessment and evaluation tools (K1, K5)", "receiving good training on assessment and evaluation tools (K1)", and "attending training seminars on assessment and evaluation tools (K9)". Below are some direct quotes from teachers expressing their views on their high level of competence in using assessment and evaluation tools.

*K1: "Since I am proficient in the assessment and evaluation course, I already know the assessment and evaluation tools very well. To avoid any problems during implementation, I always review the advantages and disadvantages of the assessment and evaluation tools before the course. I take care to prepare for the courses."*

*K9: "I find myself quite competent. My professional experience of over ten years has given me this vision. I can also say that I have developed myself considerably by following developments in this field and attending numerous seminars."*

### 2.3. Opinions on the Frequency of Use of Assessment and Evaluation Tools and Preferred Assessment and Evaluation Tools

The responses provided by teachers to the third interview question of the study, "How often do you use the assessment and evaluation tools specified in the teaching program? Which assessment and evaluation tools do you prefer?" were analyzed, and the findings are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Teachers' Opinions Regarding the Frequency of Use of Assessment and Evaluation Tools and Their Preferred Assessment and Evaluation Tools**

Theme	Code	F	
Frequency of Use of Assessment and Evaluation Tools	I use them frequently	8	
Theme	I use them occasionally	5	
Preferred Assessment and Evaluation Tools	Category	Code	
	Traditional assessment and evaluation tools	Open-ended questions Multiple-choice questions True/false items Matching Short-answer questions Fill-in-the-blank Written-oral exams Performance task Self-group assessment Rated scoring scale (rubric)	13 10 9 9 6 5 1 8 7 6
	Contemporary assessment and evaluation tools	Grading scale 3-2-1 card Concept map Exit card Checklist Project Diagnostic branching tree Structured grid Information card Portfolio assessment	5 4 4 3 3 2 2 1 1 1

Table 4 shows that teachers' opinions regarding the frequency of using assessment and evaluation tools were coded as "I use them frequently (K1, K2, K5, K6, K7, K8, K9, K12)" and "I use them occasionally (K3, K4, K10, K11, K13)." The teachers' views regarding their preferred assessment and evaluation tools were grouped into the categories of "traditional assessment and evaluation tools" and "contemporary assessment and evaluation tools." The teachers' opinions in the category of traditional assessment and evaluation tools they preferred were coded as "open-ended questions (F=13)", "multiple-choice questions (K1, K2, K3, K4, K7, K8, K10, K11, K12, K13)", "true/false item types (K2, K3, K4, K5, K6, K8, K10, K12, K13)", "matching (K1, K4, K5, K6, K7, K8, K10, K12, K13)", "short-answer questions (K1, K3, K5, K6, K9, K11)", "fill-in-the-blank (K1, K3, K5, K7, K8)", and "written-oral exams (K11)".

Teachers' views on the preferred assessment and evaluation tools category were coded as: "performance task (K1, K2, K6, K7, K9, K11, K12, K13)" "self-group assessment (K1, K2, K5, K7, K8, K9, K12)", "graded scoring scale (rubric) (K1, K2, K4, K5, K8, K13)", "rating scale (K2, K5, K7, K9, K12)", "3-2-1 card (K1, K5, K7, K9)", "concept map (K1, K2, K6, K9)", "exit card (K5, K8, K9)", "checklist (K1, K2, K12)", "project (K2, K5)", "diagnostic branching tree (K1, K2)", "structured grid (K1)", "information card (K5)", and "portfolio assessment (K1)". Below are some direct quotations from teachers regarding their frequency of use of assessment and evaluation tools and their views on the traditional and contemporary assessment and evaluation tools they prefer:

*K5: "I use them frequently. I often include open-ended questions to assess students' knowledge of learning outcomes and to reinforce that knowledge, thereby increasing retention. I also prefer alternative assessment and evaluation tools such as 3-2-1 cards, projects, exit cards, self and group assessments, rating scales, graded scoring scales, and knowledge cards, in addition to traditional assessment and evaluation tools such as short-answer questions, true-false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank questions."*

*K12: "I use them frequently. I often use open-ended, multiple-choice, and matching questions from traditional assessment and evaluation tools. I also prefer to use true-false questions that gain a new dimension with the addition of the phrase 'because...'. I also value using self-assessment forms, performance tasks, rating scales, and checklists from alternative assessment and evaluation tools. Structured grids are also among the tools I use."*

*K1: "I use them frequently. In traditional assessments and assessment tools, I use open-ended questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, matching questions, multiple-choice questions, and short-answer questions. From formative assessment and evaluation tools, I use performance tasks, portfolio assessment, 3-2-1 cards, diagnostic branching trees, concept maps, checklists, self-assessment, and rubrics."*

*K4: "I use them occasionally. I especially prefer open-ended, true/false, matching, and multiple-choice questions in the end-of-unit assessment and evaluation section. I have only used a graded scoring scale once. Because the teaching program is very intense, I worry that if I apply these tools in class, I won't be able to cover all the topics."*

*K11: "I use them occasionally. I prefer open-ended, multiple-choice, written, and oral exams, as well as short-answer questions. I also give students one performance task per semester."*

*K13: "I use them occasionally, especially when extracurricular activities coincide with class time, or when situations such as official holidays or snow days prevent the lesson from being taught on time. In my classes, I include open-ended questions, matching exercises, true/false questions, multiple-choice questions, rubrics, and performance tasks."*

#### 2.4. Views on the Challenges Experienced During the Implementation of Assessment and Evaluation Tools

The responses provided by teachers to the fourth interview question of the study, "What difficulties did you encounter during the implementation phase of the assessment and evaluation tools specified in the teaching program?", were analyzed, and the findings are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Teachers' Views on the Difficulties They Face in Implementing Assessment and Evaluation Tools**

Theme	Category	Code	F
Challenges Encountered During the Implementation of Assessment and Evaluation Tools	Student-related challenges	Students are not behaving objectively Students' low level of preparedness Students' lack of interest Students' lack of awareness that they are being assessed based on the process Students' lack of knowledge about using assessment and assessment tools	7 6 5 3 2
	Teacher-related challenges	Evaluating students individually takes too much time. Printing out evaluation forms for each student is quite costly. It increases the teacher's workload. Being unable to break out of the routine	7 6 6 2
	Learning environment-related challenges	Classes are too crowded. The applications cause too much noise in the classroom. There is no internet connection. Malfunctioning smart boards	8 6 3 2
	Teaching program and textbook-related challenges	The constant redirection of assessment and evaluation practices to the Education Information Network (EBA) Insufficient class time Some QR codes in the book are not opening The teaching program is being too intensive Assessment scales are not being recorded on EBA No difficulties encountered	5 2 2 2 1 2
	-		

Table 5 shows that teachers' views on the challenges they encounter in the implementation phase of assessment and evaluation tools are grouped under the categories of "student-related difficulties," "learning environment-related difficulties," "teacher-related difficulties," and "teaching program and textbook-related difficulties." The opinions of the teachers participating in the study in the student-related difficulties category are: "students not behaving objectively (K2, K3, K4, K5, K7, K8, K10)", "students' low level of preparedness (K3, K4, K6, K7, K8, K10)", "students' lack of interest (K3, K4, K8, K11, K13)", "Students' lack of awareness that they are being assessed based on the process (K3, K7, K10)", and "students' lack of knowledge about using

assessment and evaluation tools (K5, K6)". Below are direct quotations from some of the teachers' views on student-related difficulties during the implementation phase of assessment and evaluation tools.

*K2: "Unfortunately, students are not objective when filling out self-assessment and group assessment forms and may give answers that do not reflect reality. Therefore, the forms remain merely a formality."*

*K3: "The assessment and assessment tools in the Maarif Model are very important in terms of developing students' thinking, interpretation, and self-expression skills. However, during implementation, I observe that students have difficulty expressing their thoughts. The students' insufficient level of preparedness is a major factor in this."*

*K8: "Students are extremely reluctant to participate in classroom activities. This leads to negative behavior during class."*

*K7: "Students are unaware that they are being assessed throughout the process, so they fill out the assessment tools provided at the end of the activities carelessly."*

*K6: "Students have gaps in their knowledge regarding the use of assessment and evaluation tools. Specifically, they do not know what to pay attention to when filling out evaluation forms."*

The views of teachers participating in the study regarding teacher-related challenges were: "evaluating students individually takes too much time (K2, K4, K5, K8, K10, K11, K13)", "printing out evaluation forms for each student is quite costly (K2, K4, K5, K8, K11, K13)", "increases the teacher's workload (K2, K4, K5, K10, K11, K13)", and "being unable to break out of the routine (K12, K13)". Below are direct quotations from some teachers' views on teacher-related difficulties in the implementation phase of assessment and evaluation tools.

*K4: "Evaluating all students is both laborious and time-consuming, as well as quite costly. I teach RCEK to five different 9th-grade classes at school. There is an average of 25 students in each class. Therefore, printing evaluation forms for approximately 125 students every two weeks, reviewing them one by one, and writing feedback takes up a lot of my time. This increases our workload."*

*K13: "The new teaching program contains many innovations, so not being able to break out of my comfort zone brought various difficulties. Unfortunately, due to the novelty of the program, I was unable to fully adapt. During this process, we should have undergone comprehensive in-service training."*

The teachers' views on challenges related to the learning environment category were: "classes being too crowded (K2, K3, K4, K6, K7, K8, K10, K11)", "activities causing too much noise in the classroom (K2, K3, K4, K5, K7, K8)", "lack of internet connection (K7, K8, K10)", and "malfunctioning smart boards (K7, K8)". Below are direct quotes from some of the teachers' views regarding difficulties related to the learning environment during the implementation of assessment and evaluation tools.

*K6: "Some classes at our school are crowded, which causes difficulties during implementation."*

*K5: "There is too much noise in the classroom when using assessment and evaluation tools. Students are literally out of control during activity implementation."*

*K8: "We are experiencing serious problems with internet access in some of our classrooms."*

*K7: "The smartboards are constantly malfunctioning because students use them without permission during breaks. The boards are opened with an application assigned to us on our phones. However, IT class students disable these applications and use the boards."*

The views of teachers participating in the study regarding challenges related to the teaching program and textbooks were as follows: "The constant redirection of assessment and evaluation practices to EBA (K3, K7, K8, K10, K12)", "Insufficient class time (K2, K11)", "some QR codes in the book not opening (K8, K10)", "the teaching program being too intensive (K4, K13)", and "assessment scales are not being recorded on EBA (K8)". Below are direct quotations from some teachers' views on difficulties arising from the teaching program and textbooks during the implementation of assessment and evaluation tools.

*K8: "At the beginning of the year, I had trouble accessing the QR codes in the section of the book with activities. These QR codes constantly redirected me to EBA, and I was asked for my e-government and MEBBIS passwords to log in. Naturally, I didn't want to log in. Later, I learned how to log in by creating an EBA code. These issues should have been addressed in the seminars."*

*K3: "Accessing the content in the activities in the textbook via QR codes that redirect to EBA is very time-consuming. Sometimes EBA doesn't even open. Previously, the Directorate of Religious Education had a separate page that was very useful. We could easily access the content there without needing a password. This page was moved to EBA, and the problems began."*

*K2: "The most significant difficulty I encountered during implementation was insufficient time. Having only two class hours per week poses problems in preparing learning outcomes and applying assessment and evaluation tools."*

*K4: "The teaching program is very intense, and the students' level of preparedness is low. This creates serious difficulties in the education process and can reduce student motivation."*

The two teachers who participated in the study reported no difficulties during the implementation phase of the assessment and evaluation tools (K1, K9).

*K1: "I didn't experience any difficulties."*

## 2.5. Opinions on the Contributions Provided by the Application of Assessment and Evaluation Tools

The responses provided by teachers to the fifth interview question of the study, "What are the contributions provided by the implementation of the assessment and evaluation tools envisaged in the teaching program?", were analyzed, and the findings are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Teachers' Views on the Contributions Provided by the Implementation of Assessment and Evaluation Tools**

Theme	Category	Code	F
Contributions Provided by the Implementation of Assessment and Evaluation Tools	Contributions to the student	Ensuring the student's active participation in the process	10
		Contributing to students' lasting learning	6
		Contributing to the development of the student's higher-order thinking skills	6
		Increasing students' motivation	5
		Revealing students' different talents	3
	Contributions to the teacher	Ensuring the development of competent individuals in every sense	2
		Providing the opportunity for objective evaluation	5
		Providing an opportunity to get to know the student better	5
		Enabling the teacher to see the student's level	4

	Providing clear and understandable feedback to 3 students
	Contributing to the identification of students' 3 interests and needs
	Reducing the teacher's workload by incorporating 1 various tools for assessment and evaluation

Table 6 shows teachers' views on the contributions of applying assessment and evaluation tools, grouped under the categories: "contributions to students" and "contributions to teachers." The opinions of the teachers participating in the research regarding the contributions of the implementation of assessment and evaluation tools to the student are coded as "ensuring the student's active participation in the process (K1, K2, K4, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10, K11, K12)" and "contributing to students' lasting learning (K1, K5, K6, K7, K10, K11)", "contributing to the development of students' higher-order thinking skills (K1, K3, K4, K5, K11, K12)", "increasing student motivation (K2, K8, K9, K12, K13)", "revealing students' different talents (K1, K8, K13)", and "ensuring the development of competent individuals in every sense (K2, K12)". Below are some direct quotes from teachers regarding the contributions that the implementation of assessment and evaluation tools provides to students.

*K1: "With assessment and evaluation tools, students participate much more actively in class. This prevents me from being a teacher who just lectures all the time. I can involve students in the process. This interaction allows me to create a more active, effective, and efficient learning environment in the classroom."*

*K3: "The implementation of the assessment and evaluation tools proposed by the model contributes to the development of students' higher-order thinking skills. However, without sufficient infrastructure, achieving the desired outcome remains a pipe dream."*

*K8: "The implementation of various assessment and evaluation tools in class allows students' different talents to be revealed."*

*K4: "The effective use of assessment and evaluation tools increases students' interest in the course and their active participation. The opportunity for students to evaluate their own learning processes develops their self-awareness and responsibility skills."*

The opinions of teachers participating in the study regarding the contributions that the application of assessment and evaluation tools coded as: "providing the opportunity for objective evaluation (K2, K8, K10, K12, K13)", "Providing an opportunity to get to know the student better (K1, K2, K8, K9, K10)", "enabling the teacher to see the student's level (K1, K5, K11, K13)", "providing clear and understandable feedback to students (K1, K2, K8)", contributing to the identification of the student's interests and needs (K5, K9, K13)", and "reducing the teacher's workload by incorporating various assessment and evaluation tools (K8)". Below are some direct quotes from teachers regarding the contributions of implementing assessment and evaluation tools.

*K2: "I believe I conduct more objective assessments by using evaluation tools such as checklists and rubrics in class. These tools enable me to provide clear and understandable feedback to students."*

*K9: "It provides an opportunity to get to know students better throughout the process and contributes to identifying students' interests and needs."*

*K5: "The implementation of the assessment and evaluation tools outlined in the teaching program contributes to students' holistic development. These tools are of great importance in determining the level at which students acquire different skills."*

*K8: "Frankly, since previous textbooks did not include such a variety of assessment and evaluation tools, I did not use alternative assessment and evaluation tools in my lessons. This is because preparing alternative assessment and evaluation tools is both difficult and requires considerable effort. Including these tools in textbooks has partially lightened our load."*

### **Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

In this study, which examined teachers' opinions on assessment and evaluation tools in the CTEM Secondary Education RCEK Course Teaching Program, five open-ended questions were posed to RCEK teachers within the scope of the study, and their responses were examined.

In the study, when teachers' opinions on how they evaluated assessment and evaluation practices were examined, it was determined that they gave positive evaluations for their process-oriented nature, their contribution to the development of students' higher-order thinking skills, their individualized feedback, their student-centered nature, their ability to identify learning deficiencies, their ease of access to assessment tools by scanning QR codes in the textbook, their inclusion of both traditional and contemporary assessment and evaluation tools, their opportunity for student participation in the assessment process, their inclusion of assessment and evaluation tools for almost every learning outcome, their provision of multifaceted assessment opportunities, and their provision of examples of assessment and evaluation practices. However, teachers evaluated assessment and evaluation practices as negative due to inadequate in-service training and the lack of a sample classroom lesson video for the RCEK course. A review of the literature reveals that there are studies supporting the research findings. A study by Üredi (2024, p. 22) stated that although a process-oriented assessment and evaluation approach was adopted in the 2018 teaching program, it was noted that in practice, a result-oriented approach prevailed due to the predominant use of standardized assessment tools and the lack of diversification of assessment tools. In contrast, the CTEM teaching program clearly emphasizes the adoption of a process-oriented approach; it emphasizes the importance of students deepening their learning through a continuous assessment approach and the inclusion of diverse assessment tools, which prioritize multifaceted assessment within the framework of holistic development. Teachers participating in the study appear to have positively viewed this change in assessment and evaluation practices within the new teaching program. A review of studies conducted by Ak and Köse (2024, pp. 132–169), Baz (2024, pp. 106–123), and Üredi (2024, p. 23) on the CTEM teaching program in various teaching fields reveals that teachers evaluated the assessment and evaluation practices positively for their process-oriented nature, the provision of diversity in assessment and evaluation, the inclusion of scales in the textbook's QR codes, student-centeredness, support for multifaceted development, and process-based evaluation. However, they also evaluated them as negative for their inadequate in-service training. These studies in the literature support the research findings. Furthermore, one-third of the teachers participating stated that in-service training was insufficient. Therefore, teachers' inadequate in-service training for program implementation raises concerns that it may hinder their adaptation to the new program and be inefficient in responding to student needs (Baz, 2024, p. 118). Teachers, who are primarily responsible for these practices, play a significant role in maximizing the benefits of assessment and evaluation practices (Bahar et al., 2025, p. 11). Therefore, the importance of training to improve teachers' knowledge and skills in assessment and evaluation tools should not be overlooked.

When the teachers' opinions regarding their level of competence in using assessment and evaluation tools were examined in the study, it was determined that most of them considered themselves partially competent due to the availability of previously unused assessment and evaluation tools, a lack of technological competence, and a lack of in-service training on how to use the new assessment and evaluation tools. However, some teachers considered themselves quite competent because they came to class prepared, examined the advantages and disadvantages of assessment and evaluation tools, received adequate training on these tools, and attended training seminars on them. Based on teachers' opinions, assessments must be objective and error-free for accurate evaluation to yield sound decisions. For accurate assessment to be performed, it is crucial to be well-versed in assessment and evaluation tools, understand their features, and

be aware of their advantages and limitations (Güler, 2025, p. 62). It was concluded that most participating teachers were only partially competent in using assessment and evaluation tools. Based on the research results, it can be said that teachers are particularly concerned about using contemporary (developmental) assessment and evaluation tools. Some participants (K11 and K12) stated that they were comfortable using traditional assessment and evaluation tools, but had not used contemporary tools in class before and considered themselves partially competent with these tools. In a study conducted by Çakmak (2011, pp. 124–127), which determined the proficiency levels of RCEK teachers' knowledge of assessment and evaluation tools, it was found that 76.3% of teachers were competent, 18.9% were partially competent, and 4.8% were incompetent in traditional assessment and evaluation techniques. In alternative assessment and evaluation techniques, 40.7% were partially competent, 46% were competent, and 13.3% were incompetent. Similarly, in a study conducted by Gelbal and Kelecioğlu (2007, pp. 135–145) on teachers' self-efficacy in using assessment methods, 60.9% of teachers were at a "moderate" level, 20.1% were at a "very" level, and 19% were at a "not at all" level. These studies in the literature support the research findings.

When teachers' frequency of using assessment and evaluation tools and their opinions on preferred assessment and evaluation tools were examined, it was concluded that most teachers used these tools frequently. It was determined that teachers most frequently used traditional assessment and evaluation tools, including open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, true/false items, matching, short-answer questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, and written and oral exams. It was also concluded that they preferred contemporary assessment and evaluation tools such as performance tasks, self-group assessments, rubrics, 3-2-1 cards, rating scales, concept maps, exit cards, checklists, projects, diagnostic tree, structured grids, flashcards, and portfolio assessments, less than traditional assessment and evaluation tools. Furthermore, it was notable that teachers did not mention observation forms, worksheets, comparison tables, T-charts, and peer assessment forms. All of these can be attributed to a variety of factors. First, traditional assessment and evaluation tools have been present in our education system for years, offering teachers familiarity, greater time efficiency, and ease of implementation. In contrast, the increased time, planning, and effort required for contemporary assessment and evaluation tools (performance tasks, projects, portfolios, self-, peer-, and group assessments, etc.) not only limits their applicability but also increases teachers' workload. These factors can be interpreted as leading teachers to use traditional assessment and evaluation tools more frequently. They also indicate that teachers lack sufficient knowledge and skills regarding contemporary assessment and evaluation tools. A review of the literature reveals that studies other than Uygun's (2020, pp. 29–45) are consistent with the research findings. The studies conducted by Gündoğdu (2013, p. 93) and Çakmak (2011, pp. 128–131) found that RCEK teachers use traditional assessment tools more frequently than alternative assessment tools: among traditional assessment and evaluation tools, they most frequently use multiple-choice tests, while among alternative assessment and evaluation tools, they most frequently use performance tasks. A study by Ceylan (2025, p. 10) that evaluated the CTEM RCEK teaching program based on teacher opinions found that teachers preferred traditional assessment and evaluation tools more often than contemporary ones, and that they most frequently preferred open-ended and multiple-choice questions. Similarly, a study by Karbeyaz (2018, p. 216) found that open-ended questions were the most frequently used assessment and evaluation tool by RCEK teachers. A review of studies (Sönmez Ektem et al., 2016, pp. 661–680; Tokur Üner & Aşılıoğlu, 2022, pp. 25–50) conducted in different teaching fields revealed that teachers frequently preferred traditional assessment and evaluation tools. These findings support our research's findings.

In the study, when teachers' opinions about the challenges they experienced during the implementation of assessment and evaluation tools were examined, it was determined that they experienced student-related challenges due to students' lack of objectivity, low preparedness, disinterest, unawareness that they were being assessed, process-oriented, and lack of knowledge in using assessment and evaluation tools. They also experienced teacher-related challenges due to the excessive time required to assess students individually, the high cost of printing evaluation forms for each student, increased teacher workload, and the inability to deviate from established routines. Furthermore, they experienced learning environment-related challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, applications that caused excessive noise, a lack of internet

connection, and broken smart boards. They also experienced challenges related to the teaching program and textbook, including the assessment and evaluation applications constantly redirecting students to EBA, insufficient class time, some QR codes in the textbook not opening, the teaching program being dense, and the failure to register evaluation scales on EBA. However, it was concluded that two of the teachers experienced no challenges during the implementation of the assessment and evaluation tools. The CTEM teaching program began to be implemented in the 1st grade of primary school, the 5th grade of middle school, and the 9th grade of secondary school in the 2024-2025 academic year, without any pilot implementation. If the teaching program had been piloted, challenges in the educational process could have been identified and necessary measures taken by authorities. On the other hand, the challenges expressed by teachers can be considered significant factors that can make it difficult to achieve the teaching program's objectives and cause various disruptions in the implementation process. At this point, it is crucial to take the necessary measures. Studies supporting the research findings have been found in the literature. In studies conducted by Ceylan (2025, p. 10), Karbeyaz (2018, pp. 217-218), Yıldız and Genç (2016, pp. 61-75), Karataş, and Tabak (2010, pp. 60-61), RCEK teachers stated that they experienced challenges in assessment and evaluation practices due to student levels, crowded classes, time-consuming and labor-intensive practices, stationery costs, and insufficient lesson time. When examining the study by Ak and Köse (2024, pp. 147-148) on the CTEM across different teaching fields, teachers reported experiencing challenges due to insufficient time and crowded classes. In a study conducted by Duyul et al. (2025, pp. 1-19), teachers reported challenges stemming from the intensity of the teaching program, inadequate infrastructure and equipment, and the teacher adaptation process. In a study conducted by Baz (2024, p. 114), teachers reported challenges stemming from both teachers' and students' inability to adapt to innovations and a lack of infrastructure (lack of internet access and smart boards). In a study conducted by Bayat and Şentürk (2015, pp. 118-135), teachers reported challenges stemming from students' lack of prior knowledge, excessive class sizes, student disinterest, students' lack of impartiality in assessment, insufficient lesson hours, and their own lack of knowledge. These findings support the research findings. Indeed, when studies conducted across different teaching fields and changing curricula, particularly on the RCEK, are examined, it is observed that the challenges encountered largely stem from insufficient physical infrastructure in educational environments and overcrowded classrooms. This situation can be interpreted as significantly complicating the effective implementation of curricula.

In the study, teachers' views on the contributions of implementing assessment and evaluation tools were examined, and it was determined that they contribute to students by ensuring active student participation in the process, contributing to students' lasting learning, contributing to the development of students' higher-order thinking skills, increasing student motivation, revealing students' diverse talents, and fostering the development of competent individuals in every sense. Furthermore, it was concluded that they contribute to teachers by providing objective assessment opportunities, providing the opportunity to understand students better, enabling students to assess their level, providing clear and understandable feedback to students, contributing to the identification of students' interests and needs, and easing teacher burden by including a variety of assessment and evaluation tools. Based on the teachers' views, it can be interpreted that the assessment and evaluation tools used within the CTEM serve the overall objectives of the model (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2024b, p. 5) by supporting not only academic achievement but also the development of individuals in terms of values, attitudes, and skills. Thus, they contribute to the development of competent and virtuous individuals. It is anticipated that the tangible impact of these contributions will become more evident over time during the teaching process and as students progress. A review of the literature reveals studies that support the research findings. Regarding the contributions of the implementation of assessment and evaluation tools, teachers emphasized that in the study conducted by Karataş and Tabak (2010, p. 60), it increased student motivation towards the lesson; in the study conducted by Duyul et al. (2025, p. 13), it increased student achievement through individualized instructional methods and was aimed at equipping students with analytical thinking and problem-solving skills; in the study conducted by Ak and Köse (2024, pp. 145-151), it enabled students to be active; in the study conducted by Sönmez Ektem et al. (2016, p. 667), it provided the opportunity to evaluate students in all aspects, ensured student participation in the evaluation process, and provided the opportunity to monitor student development; and in the study conducted by Bayat and Şentürk (2015, p. 125), it was highlighted that it

contributed by revealing students' different talents, increasing student achievement, providing the opportunity to know students better, and providing the opportunity for objective evaluation. These findings support the research findings. Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations can be developed:

- In-service training can be provided to teachers by experts to promote the use of contemporary assessment and evaluation tools prescribed in the teaching program.
- The technological and physical infrastructure of schools can be improved to facilitate the implementation of the assessment and evaluation activities prescribed in the teaching program.
- All the contemporary assessment and evaluation tools, accessible through QR codes at the end of the activities, can be directly included in textbooks.
- Students can be trained in the assessment and evaluation practices included in the CTEM teaching program and on the use of assessment and evaluation tools.
- Studies can be conducted to examine students' opinions on the assessment and evaluation practices included in the teaching program.

## Declarations

**Authors' contributions:** Designing the Study: TK (40%), FB (30%), AAD (30%), Data Collection: TK (35%), FB (40%), AAD (25%), Data Analysis: TK (40%), FB (40%), AAD (20%), Submission and Revision: TK (40%), FB (40%), AAD (20%)

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# Factors influencing high school preferences of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates

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**Abstract:** Established under the Law on the Unification of Education enacted on March 3, 1924, Imam Hatip Schools initially began providing education at the lower secondary level in 29 provinces. However, they were officially closed in 1930 and completely ceased functioning by 1932. Reopened in 1951 as four-year lower secondary schools, high sections were added in 1954. With the introduction of "uninterrupted eight-year compulsory education" in the 1997-1998 academic year, the lower secondary sections were once again closed. Later, the "4+4+4 education system" implemented in 2012 reestablished lower secondary sections. This reform separated the lower secondary and high levels into independent institutions, thereby diversifying the high school preferences of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates. The aim of this study is to examine the factors influencing the high school preferences of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates. The research was conducted with 729 Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates enrolled in a total of 14 schools in Sakarya province during the 2022-2023 academic year, including 4 Imam Hatip High Schools and 10 other types of high schools. Designed according to a quantitative survey model, the study collected data through questionnaires and analyzed them using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings indicate that family influence is the primary factor affecting students' choice of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School after primary school. While family guidance played a decisive role among students who preferred Imam Hatip High School, those who opted for other types of high schools tended to do so due to concerns about vocational (religious) courses. Furthermore, the majority of students reported that if they had the opportunity to choose again, their likelihood of selecting Imam Hatip High Schools would be low. This tendency appears to be shaped particularly by students' career plans and their negative perceptions of vocational religious courses.

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Religious Education, Imam Hatip School, School Preference, Türkiye.

## Introduction

Established under the Law on the Unification of Education enacted on March 3, 1924, Imam Hatip Schools began operating as educational institutions where religious and modern sciences were taught together. Throughout their history, these schools have been shaped by various political and ideological influences—both positive and negative—and have continued to exist to the present day (Koyuncu, 2023). In the early years following their establishment, the number of these schools gradually declined due to the

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prevailing political policies and they were eventually closed in 1930 (Ünsür, 1995, pp. 87–88). Imam Hatip Schools resumed their educational activities in the 1951–1952 academic year as four-year lower secondary schools (Dinçer, 1974, p. 65), and were later expanded with the addition of an high school level in 1954–1955 (Sakaoğlu, 1992, p. 118). Until 1973, these institutions functioned as vocational schools. However, under Article 32 of the Basic Law of National Education (Law No. 1739), they were granted the status of general high schools and began to be officially referred to as Imam Hatip High Schools (*İmam Hatip Lisesi*) (Öcal, 2015, pp. 83–85). Up until the 1997–1998 academic year, Imam Hatip Schools operated as institutions comprising a three-year lower secondary section and a four-year high section. The introduction of “uninterrupted eight-year compulsory education” in that year led to the closure of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools (Öcal, 2015, pp. 98–99). In 1998, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM) introduced a change in the university entrance system, applying a coefficient of 0.5 to the Secondary Education Achievement Score (OBP) of general high school graduates, and 0.2 for vocational high school graduates. This policy placed Imam Hatip and other vocational school graduates at a disadvantage of approximately 25 points (Doğan & Yuret, 2015, pp. 199–200), and in 2002, this coefficient difference was increased to about 50 points (Öcal, 2015, p. 298). As a result of both the closure of the lower secondary sections and the coefficient regulation, Imam Hatip Schools experienced a significant decline in student enrollment.

In 2010, the Ministry of National Education abolished the “field specialization” practice in high schools, and in 2011 decided to calculate the Secondary Education Achievement Scores (OBP) of all students using a uniform coefficient of 0.12, thereby ending both the field and coefficient regulations. With the introduction of the 4+4+4 compulsory education system in 2012, Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools (*İmam Hatip Ortaokulu* in Turkish) were reestablished. According to 2023–2024 academic year statistics, a total of 3,404 Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools are operating in Turkey, with 691,422 students enrolled. This figure corresponds to approximately 13.39% of all lower secondary school students (excluding open education) (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2025). In comparison, during the 1996–1997 academic year, the proportion of students attending Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools was 12.1% (Aşlamacı, 2024, p. 37).

In the 2023–2024 academic year, a total of 446,190 students were enrolled in Imam Hatip High Schools (*İmam Hatip Lisesi* in Turkish) across Türkiye. This figure represents approximately 9.45% of all high school students (excluding open education) (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2025). Although this proportion had risen to 15.41% in the 2015–2016 academic year, it has since shown a downward trend (Aşlamacı, 2024, p. 62). In the 1996–1997 academic year, the proportion of Imam Hatip High School students among all high school students was recorded as 8.98% (Aşlamacı, 2024, p. 42). The total number of students enrolled in both Imam Hatip Lower Secondary and High in the 2023–2024 academic year was 1,137,612. During the same period, the total number of lower and high school students in Türkiye (excluding open education) was 9,881,675 (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2025). Based on these data, the overall proportion of students attending Imam Hatip Schools nationwide is 11.51%. In the province of Sakarya, 9,702 students were enrolled in 48 Imam Hatip Lower Secondary and 5,240 students in 24 Imam Hatip High Schools in the 2023–2024 academic year, amounting to a total of 14,942 students. Out of the 114,161 lower and high school students in Sakarya, the share of Imam Hatip students was calculated as 13.08% (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2025). Considering the public claims suggesting that the number of Imam Hatip schools and students has been steadily increasing (Çepni, n.d.), these statistics indicate that there may be exaggerated perceptions regarding this issue in public discourse.

Imam Hatip Schools constitute one of the most frequently researched topics in Türkiye (Aşlamacı & Kaymakcan, 2017; Öcal, 2007; Ozgur, 2012; Zengin & Hendek, 2023), with numerous studies examining various aspects such as curricula, students, teachers, and parents. Among these, several studies are directly related to the present research. Tüysüz et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study with 20 Imam Hatip Lower Secondary students in the Kartal district of Istanbul, exploring the factors influencing their high preferences. Similarly, Aslan (2022) investigated the reasons why students who completed their lower secondary education in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools chose not to continue in Imam Hatip High Schools, based

on field research involving 350 students and 30 parents in the city center of Karaman. Aşlamacı (2017c) conducted a nationwide field study with 3,738 Imam Hatip Lower Secondary students, while Ünalı (2019) examined the same issue with 459 students in Erzincan, both focusing on the reasons behind students' choice of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools. Kara (2016) explored the reasons for students' enrollment in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools in Konya based on parental perspectives. In another comprehensive study, Aşlamacı (2017b) analyzed the factors influencing Imam Hatip High students' school preferences. Likewise, Çınar (2018) investigated Imam Hatip High students' expectations of their schools in Isparta, including findings related to their school choice. Öztürk (2023), in a large-scale study involving 6,779 students across Türkiye, and Erikoğlu (2019), in a study conducted in Istanbul, both explored the reasons behind Imam Hatip High students' school preferences. Zengin and Karaman (2020), through a nationwide field study with 4,802 students, analyzed students' reasons for preferring project-based Imam Hatip High Schools and their vocational orientations, while Özdemir and Karateke (2018) examined similar factors among students in Elazığ. Sarı (2019) explored the expectations of students and parents from Imam Hatip High Schools in Pendik, Istanbul, providing additional insights into students' school preferences. Unlike the previous studies in the literature, the present research analyzes the reasons behind the preferences of two distinct groups—students who completed their lower secondary education in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools and continued either in Imam Hatip High Schools or in other types of high schools. In this respect, the study offers a broader perspective by examining the factors influencing both groups' decisions regarding Imam Hatip High Schools.

Accordingly, the main purpose of this research is to examine the factors influencing the high school preferences of students who graduated from Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools. This purpose was analyzed within the framework of the following sub-questions:

1. What are the factors influencing students' decisions to enroll in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools?
2. What are the factors influencing students' preferences for Imam Hatip High Schools or other types of high schools after completing Imam Hatip Lower Secondary education?
3. What are students' opinions regarding their likelihood of choosing Imam Hatip High Schools if they were given the opportunity to make their school choice again?

## 1. Method

### 1.1. Research Model

This study was designed according to the quantitative survey model. The survey model aims to describe the phenomenon, individual, or object of interest as it exists within its natural conditions, without attempting to manipulate or influence it. It seeks to identify participants' characteristics such as opinions, interests, and attitudes (Neuman & Özge, 2008, p. 400). In this context, a questionnaire was administered to gather students' opinions on the subject.

### 1.2. Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of all high school students in the province of Sakarya, while the sample includes 729 students from different types of high schools located in three central districts of Sakarya (Adapazarı, Erenler, and Serdivan) during the second semester of the 2022–2023 academic year. The types of schools and the number of participating students are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Types of Schools and Number of Students Included in the Study*

School Types		Number of Schools		N	%
<b>Imam Hatip High Schools</b>	Anatolian Imam Hatip High School	2		161	22,1
	Project-Based Anatolian Imam Hatip High School	2		205	28,1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>366</b>	<b>50,2</b>
<b>Other High School Types</b>	Anatolian High School	4		208	28,5
	Anatolian High School (Central Exam Placement – LGS)	2		54	7,4
	Science High School	2		53	7,3
	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School	2		48	6,6
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>363</b>	<b>49,8</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>729</b>	<b>100</b>

Research data were collected from 14 schools representing different types of high schools. In total, 729 students who had completed their lower secondary education in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools and subsequently enrolled in various high schools were reached. Among them, 366 students (50.2%) were attending Imam Hatip High Schools, while 363 students (49.8%) were studying in other types of high schools. In Sakarya's central districts, there are ten Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools, five for girls and five for boys. To ensure a sample size comparable to that of students from other high school types, four of these schools—two girls' and two boys' Imam Hatip High Schools—were selected. Two of these schools admit students through the central exam placement (LGS), while the other two accept students based on residential address. In addition, ten schools representing other types of high schools were included in the study: four Anatolian High Schools, two Science High Schools, two Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools, and two Anatolian High Schools admitting students through the LGS exam. The selection of these schools was based on the distribution of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary graduates across different high school types. Fine Arts High Schools, Sports High Schools, and Private Schools were excluded due to the insufficient number of Imam Hatip graduates enrolled in these institutions.

**Table 2.** *Distribution of Students by Gender and Grade Level*

	Gender and Grade Level	Imam Hatip High Schools		Other High Schools		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Gender</b>	Female	191	52,2	214	59	405	55,6
	Male	175	47,8	149	41	324	44,4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Grade Level</b>	9th Grade	163	44,5	101	27,8	264	36,2
	10th Grade	111	30,3	106	29,2	217	29,8
	11th Grade	90	24,6	133	36,6	223	30,6
	12th Grade	2	0,5	23	6,3	25	3,4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of gender, 55.6% of the students participating in the study were female, while 44.4% were male. Regarding grade levels, 36.2% of the students were in the 9th grade, 29.8% in the 10th grade, 30.6% in the 11th grade, and 3.4% in the 12th grade. Since there was no direct data source regarding the high schools

preferred by graduates of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools, announcements were made by school administrations in the selected institutions to identify students who had graduated from an Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School. Therefore, achieving a homogeneous distribution of participants in terms of grade level and gender proved difficult. In addition, due to factors such as preparation for the university entrance examination and transfer to open high education, the number of 12th-grade students was relatively low.

### **1.3. Data Collection and Analysis**

The research data were collected in person by the researchers during the second semester of the 2022–2023 academic year through school visits. Data from Imam Hatip High Schools were obtained from students in classes determined jointly with the school administration. In the case of non-Imam Hatip high schools, since the number of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates was relatively low compared to the total student body, students from different classes were gathered in venues designated by the school administration (such as the library, conference hall, or classroom). In line with the purpose of the study, and considering the need to ask different questions depending on whether the students continued their education in an Imam Hatip or a non-Imam Hatip high school, two separate questionnaire forms were prepared by taking expert opinions into account. Accordingly, one questionnaire was administered to Imam Hatip graduates studying at Imam Hatip High Schools, and another to Imam Hatip graduates enrolled in other types of high schools.

For data analysis, the SPSS 22.0 statistical software package was used. Initially, descriptive analyses were performed, followed by chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) analyses examining the relationships between variables such as gender, school type, grade level, parental education level, and family income. In chi-square analysis, if the frequency in any observation cell is less than five and such cells exceed 20% of the total, the reliability of the test results is negatively affected. In such cases, it is recommended either to merge certain rows or columns in a logically consistent manner or to treat observations with frequencies below five as missing data (Büyüköztürk, 2014, pp. 158–159). Accordingly, to ensure the reliability of findings in this study, data from 11th and 12th grades were combined due to the low participation rate in the 12th grade. Similarly, in the family income variable, the “0–5,500 TL” and “5,500–10,000 TL” categories were merged and reclassified as “less than 10,000 TL.” In analyses based on variables, the “No response” category was treated as missing data and excluded when the cell frequency was below five. For all chi-square tests, the significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ . In order to maintain the analytical focus and avoid unnecessary volume, only findings showing statistically significant differences between variables were reported.

## **2. Findings**

### **2.1. Factors Influencing Students' Preferences for Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools**

Students were asked to select the statement that best described the reason they attended an Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School and to mark only one option. The findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Reasons Influencing Students' Preferences for Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools

	Imam Hatip High School		Other High School	
	N	%	N	%
I attended upon my family's guidance.	193	52,7	155	42,7
I attended of my own choice.	105	28,7	123	33,9
I chose it because it offered both academic and religious education.	35	9,6	50	13,8
I attended for other reasons (relatives' advice, peer influence, recommendation of the primary school Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge teacher, proximity to home).	28	7,7	34	9,4
No response.	5	1,4	1	0,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>100</b>

According to the findings, the most influential factor in students' decision to pursue their lower secondary education at an Imam Hatip was family guidance. Among students attending Imam Hatip High Schools, this rate (52.7%) was higher than that of students attending other types of high schools (42.7%). The proportion of Imam Hatip High School students who stated that they attended Imam Hatip Lower Secondary of their own choice was 28.7%, whereas this rate was 33.9% among students in other high school types. The factor of combining academic and religious education was found to be more significant among students in non-Imam Hatip high schools (13.8%) compared to Imam Hatip students (9.6%). Apart from these, a smaller proportion of students reported other reasons—such as relatives' advice, peer influence, or school proximity—as influencing factors. In both groups, the predominance of family influence in the decision to attend an Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School can be regarded as an expected finding. Given that students complete primary school around the age of ten, family influence and guidance in choosing the next educational level are quite natural. In Man's (2024, pp. 147–148) qualitative study, it was observed that most students who reported attending Imam Hatip Lower Secondary due to family guidance expressed similar views, indicating little divergence between student and parent perspectives in this regard. However, Aşlamacı's (2017c) findings differ from the present study: in that research, 51.9% of students reported choosing Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School of their own will, while 31.7% indicated that it was due to family preference. On the other hand, the findings of Ünalı (2019) and Kara (2016) are consistent with those of the present study, emphasizing the significant role of family influence in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary school choice.

When Imam Hatip highSchool students' attendance at Imam Hatip Lower Secondary was examined in relation to various variables, a significant difference was observed only with respect to grade level ( $p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ). The proportion of students stating "I attended of my own choice" was 36.4% among 9th graders, 21.8% among 10th graders, and 24.1% among 11th–12th graders. Accordingly, 9th-grade students appeared to have made their decision to attend Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School more independently than those in higher grades. Conversely, the proportion of students agreeing with "I attended upon my family's guidance" was 49.4% in 9th grade, 59.1% in 10th grade, and 54% in 11th–12th grades. These results indicate that family influence was significantly lower among 9th graders, suggesting a trend toward greater student autonomy in school choice decisions over time. Regarding the statement "I chose it because it offered both academic and religious education," the rate was 7.4% among 9th graders, 14.5% among 10th graders, and 8% among 11th–12th graders, indicating that 10th graders were relatively more influenced by the school's dual academic–religious education structure. For the statement "I attended for other reasons," the rate among 11th–12th graders (13.8%) was higher than that among 9th (6.8%) and 10th (4.5%) graders.

When the same analysis was conducted for students attending non-İHL high schools, no statistically significant differences were found in relation to any of the examined variables.

## 2.2. Factors Influencing Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School Graduates' Preference for Imam Hatip High Schools

Multiple factors may influence students' school choices. Considering this, fourteen items were identified to determine the factors affecting the preferences of students who continued their education at Imam Hatip High Schools. Students were asked to mark "yes" if they agreed with each item and "no" if they did not. Nonresponses were also indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4. Factors Influencing Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School Graduates' Preference for Imam Hatip High Schools**

	Yes		No		No Response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I preferred to study at an Imam Hatip High School because my family directed me to do so.	241	65,8	12	32,8	5	1,4
I personally wanted to study at an Imam Hatip High School.	187	51,7	173	47,3	6	1,6
I preferred it because both academic and religious education are provided together.	167	45,6	188	51,4	11	3
Although my LGS score was sufficient for admission to another school, I still chose the Imam Hatip High School.	142	38,8	214	58,5	10	2,7
I preferred the Imam Hatip High School because my LGS score was not sufficient for another school.	138	37,7	217	59,3	11	3
The encouragement and guidance of my lower secondary school teachers were influential.	125	34,2	233	63,7	8	2,2
I chose it because, as a graduate of an Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School, it was a continuation of that education.	120	32,8	237	64,8	9	2,5
I preferred it because I wanted to have the Imam Hatip identity.	110	30,1	242	66,1	14	3,8
I preferred it because the Imam Hatip High School does not offer co-educational (mixed-gender) learning.	94	25,7	263	71,6	9	2,5
I preferred it because the school's physical facilities (building, laboratories, gym, etc.) were good.	68	18,6	288	78,7	10	2,7
I chose it under the influence of my relatives.	66	18	293	79,8	7	1,9
I chose it because my friends studied at an Imam Hatip High School.	56	15,3	305	83,3	5	1,4
I preferred it because it was close to my home.	50	13,7	308	84,2	8	2,2
I preferred it because it offered dormitory opportunities.	50	13,7	306	83,6	10	2,7

When the responses regarding the factors influencing Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates' preference for Imam Hatip High Schools were examined, it was found that 65.8% of the students made this choice under family influence, while 32.8% reported no such influence. Accordingly, about two-thirds of students studying at Imam Hatip High Schools were directed by their families in making this decision. A statistically significant difference was found only in relation to the grade level variable ( $p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ). Family influence was the highest among 10th-grade students (75.7%) and the lowest among 9th-grade students (60.8%). Comparing these findings with previous studies reveals both similarities and differences. For example, in Aşlamacı's (2017b, p. 31) study, the most frequent reason for preference was "my own choice" (40.3%), followed by "family influence" (36.8%). Similarly, Çınar (2018, p. 1248) found that 32.1% of participants chose "at my family's request," while 28.8% said "a joint decision between me and my family." Zengin and Karaman (2020, pp. 360–361) concluded that family guidance was the most important factor in choosing project-based Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools. Comparable results were reported by Erikoğlu

(2019) and by Öznel and Aydemir (2014, pp. 52–54), who emphasized the father's influence, as well as by Özdemir and Karateke (2018, pp. 16–25), who found that family was the primary determinant.

51.7% of the students indicated that they chose to study at an Imam Hatip High School of their own will, while 47.3% said otherwise. When combined with the family influence factor, it is evident that families have a strong role in students' school choices. No significant difference was found between variables for this item.

Regarding the preference for schools offering both academic and religious education, 45.6% of students answered "yes," and 51.4% answered "no." This indicates that the school's integrated program affected the preferences of only about half of the students. Given that Imam Hatip High Schools differ from other institutions mainly in their curriculum and school culture, the fact that this feature was not a major factor for most students is noteworthy. A significant difference was found only for gender ( $p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ): male students (54.1%) were more likely than female students (40.5%) to select the school for its combined academic and religious education. Öztürk (2023, pp. 57–58) emphasizes in his study that students primarily choose Imam Hatip High Schools to receive a qualified religious education. However, in the case of Project Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools, it is observed that students also select these institutions in line with their academic career goals. When preference reasons are examined by gender, it is observed that male students' educational expectations are more career-oriented than those of female students. Furthermore, the study reveals that students perceive Imam Hatip High Schools not as vocational institutions, but rather as academic secondary education institutions. Similarly, Sarı (2019, p. 107) found that although most students and parents do not plan a career in the field of religious services, they prefer Imam Hatip High Schools with the aim of receiving religious education. In Çınar's (2018, p. 1248) study as well, students were found to perceive these schools not merely as institutions preparing individuals for religious professions, but as schools where they can pursue academic education while also receiving religious education.

While 38.8% of the students stated that they chose an Imam Hatip High School even though their LGS score was sufficient to enroll in a different type of high school, 58.5% answered "no" to this question. This finding indicates that slightly more than one-third of the students preferred an Imam Hatip High School out of an idealistic motivation, despite having the opportunity to attend another type of school. Similarly, 37.7% of the students stated that they chose an Imam Hatip High School because their LGS score was not sufficient to be admitted to another school, while 59.3% answered "no." This suggests that about one-third of the students selected an Imam Hatip High School due to limited exam results. When both findings are considered together, it can be suggested that roughly one-third of the students demonstrated an idealistic orientation in choosing an Imam Hatip High Schools, while another one-third attended these schools because their LGS scores restricted other options. No statistically significant differences were found between these two variables and other related factors.

The proportion of students who stated that the encouragement and guidance of their lower secondary school teachers influenced their decision to choose an Imam Hatip High School was 34.2%. Since two-thirds of the students reported that their teachers had no influence on this decision, it can be said that teachers had only a partial impact on Imam Hatip High School preferences. In terms of variables, there were significant differences regarding gender and type of high school. With respect to gender ( $p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ), teacher encouragement and guidance were influential for 40.6% of male students and 29.8% of female students, indicating that lower secondary school teachers had a greater influence on male students. In terms of high school type ( $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ ), the influence of teachers was higher among students attending project-based Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools (41.9%) compared to those in regular Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools. This finding suggests that lower secondary school teachers tended to encourage students more strongly to apply to selective, project-based schools that admit students based on their LGS scores.

A total of 32.8% of the students stated that they chose an Imam Hatip High School as a continuation of their education after graduating from an Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School, while 64.8% disagreed with this view. The fact that only about one-third of the students perceived Imam Hatip High School as a natural continuation of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School, whereas two-thirds did not see any continuity between these two institutions—despite their similar characteristics and school culture—is a rather noteworthy finding. Considering that Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates constitute the primary source of students for Imam Hatip High Schools, the low tendency among students to view Imam Hatip High Schools as a continuation of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School education is an issue that warrants further examination. When analyzed by variables, a significant difference was found only in terms of gender. According to gender ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ), 45.3% of male students and 23% of female students reported that they preferred Imam Hatip High Schools because they regarded them as a continuation of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School. This indicates that male students are more likely than female students to view and choose Imam Hatip High Schools as a natural continuation of their previous Imam Hatip education.

It was found that the sense of “Imam Hatip identity” played a role in the Imam Hatip High School preferences of 30.1% of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates, while it was not influential for 66.1% of them. This indicates that the identity-forming function—one of the distinctive features of Imam Hatip Schools—has resonated with only about one-third of the students. In terms of variables, a significant difference was observed only with respect to the type of Imam Hatip attended. According to the Imam Hatip type ( $p = 0.02 < 0.05$ ), there was a significant difference in favor of the project-based Imam Hatips, which admit students based on their LGS scores. The sense of Imam Hatip identity influenced 36.4% of students in project-based Imam Hatips, compared to 24.8% of students in address-based regular Imam Hatip High Schools. Accordingly, the perception of the Imam Hatip identity appears to be relatively stronger among students in project-based Imam Hatip High Schools.

Coeducation is a phenomenon debated worldwide from religious, political, ideological, and educational perspectives. In Türkiye, the fact that boys and girls are educated separately in Imam Hatip schools is considered important by many parents, who therefore direct their children to these institutions. In the research, only 25.7% of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates who chose Imam Hatip High Schools agreed with the statement “I preferred it because the Imam Hatip High School does not offer co-educational (mixed-gender) learning,” while 71.6% disagreed. This indicates that for three-quarters of the students, the absence of coeducation was not a determining factor in their preference for Imam Hatip High Schools. However, when analyzed by variables, a significant difference was found in terms of gender ( $p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ). Although the absence of coeducation was not a primary reason for either gender, 31.9% of female students and 20.2% of male students stated that they chose Imam Hatip High School for this reason. Conversely, 68.1% of females and 79.8% of males responded negatively. These results suggest that female students tend to prefer single-sex education more than male students.

Among Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates who continued their education in Imam Hatip High Schools, only 18.6% stated that the physical conditions of the schools influenced their choice, while 78.7% indicated that they were not influenced by this factor. This finding suggests that the physical environment of the schools did not play a major role in students’ decisions to choose Imam Hatip High Schools. When analyzed by variables, significant differences were found in terms of gender ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ) and grade level ( $p = 0.04 < 0.05$ ). In this context, 26.3% of female students and 11.2% of male students agreed with the statement “I preferred it because the school’s physical facilities were good.” Conversely, 73.7% of female students and 88.8% of male students disagreed. This indicates that good physical conditions are a more influential factor for female students than for males when choosing a school. Regarding grade level, 15.9% of 9th graders, 16.7% of 10th graders, and 28.1% of 11th and 12th graders stated that they preferred

the school due to its good physical conditions. This suggests that upper-grade students (11th and 12th) tend to attach greater importance to physical facilities compared to those in lower grades.

The influence of relatives on Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates' decisions to choose an Imam Hatip High School was found to be limited. Only 18% of the students stated that they chose an Imam Hatip High School due to the influence of relatives, while 79.8% reported no such influence. This finding indicates that family relatives have a minimal impact on students' school choices, and that other factors play a more significant role in their decision-making process. No significant differences were found across variables.

Similarly, the effect of peer influence —that is, friends choosing to attend an Imam Hatip High School — also appeared to be low. Only 15.3% of students reported that their friends' attendance influenced their own choice, while 83.3% said it had no effect. A significant difference, however, was found by grade level ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). Specifically, 8.9% of 9th-grade, 22.5% of 10th-grade, and 18.9% of 11th–12th-grade students agreed with the statement "I chose it because my friends studied at an Imam Hatip High School." This suggests that peer influence is lowest among 9th graders and relatively higher among students in upper grades.

The proximity of the Imam Hatip High School to students' homes was also found not to be a significant factor in their school choices. Only 13.7% of students agreed with the statement "I preferred it because it was close to my home." while 84.2% disagreed. A significant difference was found only by grade level ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). Specifically, 8.9% of 9th-grade, 13.8% of 10th-grade, and 23.3% of 11th–12th-grade students reported choosing Imam Hatip High Schools because of its proximity to their homes.

Similarly, the availability of dormitory or boarding facilities at Imam Hatip High Schools did not appear to play a major role in students' choices. Only 13.7% stated that they chose these schools for its dormitory/boarding opportunities, while 83.6% said this was not a factor. However, significant differences were found by school type, grade level, and father's education level. By school type ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ), only 0.6% of students from neighborhood-based Imam Hatips cited dormitory facilities as influential, compared to 24.7% of students from project-based Imam Hatips. This can be explained by the fact that project-based Imam Hatips, which admit students based on LGS scores, offer dormitory facilities and attract students from different regions. By grade level ( $p = 0.02 < 0.05$ ), 19.7% of 9th graders, 10.2% of 10th graders, and 9% of 11th–12th graders stated that the availability of dormitories influenced their choice. Thus, dormitory opportunities appear to be more influential for 9th graders than for students in higher grades. Finally, by father's education level ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ), 8.2% of students whose fathers were primary or lower secondary graduates, 11% of those whose fathers were high school graduates, and 23.1% of those whose fathers had a university or postgraduate degree stated that dormitory/boarding opportunities affected their decision to attend an Imam Hatip High School.

### **2.3. Factors Influencing Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School Graduates' Decision Not to Choose Imam Hatip High Schools**

For students who completed their education at Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools but chose to continue their education in non-Imam Hatip high schools, eleven possible reasons were identified. Students were asked to mark "yes" for the statements they agreed with and "no" for those they did not. Responses from participants who did not answer some statements were also indicated in Table 5.

**Table 5. Factors Influencing Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School Graduates' Decision Not to Choose Imam Hatip High Schools**

	Yes		No		No Response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because I was not interested in the vocational/religious courses offered there.	249	68,6	111	30,6	3	0,8
I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because I did not find it academically successful.	199	54,8	160	44,1	4	1,1
I chose another type of high school because my LGS score was high.	142	39,1	219	60,3	2	0,6
I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because coeducation is not provided there.	137	37,7	223	61,4	3	0,8
I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because I thought Imam Hatip High School graduates might face problems again when entering university in the future.	123	33,9	236	65	4	1,1
Although my family wanted me to attend an Imam Hatip High School, I chose another type of high school based on my own preference.	118	32,5	243	66,9	2	0,6
I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because I did not want to adopt the Imam Hatip identity.	85	23,4	274	75,5	4	1,1
I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because its physical facilities (building, laboratories, sports hall, etc.) were inadequate.	80	22	280	77,1	3	0,8
During the high school preference period, my lower secondary school guidance service directed me toward non-Imam Hatip schools.	77	21,2	283	78	3	0,8
I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because my family wanted me to attend another type of high school.	47	12,9	312	86	4	1,1
I could not choose Imam Hatip High School because there was not one close to my home.	29	8	332	91,5	2	0,6

When examining the factors influencing students' decisions not to choose an Imam Hatip High School, it was found that lack of interest in vocational/religious courses and perception of low academic success were among the most frequently stated reasons. Specifically, 68.6% of students agreed with the statement "I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because I was not interested in the vocational/religious courses offered there," while 30.6% disagreed. This finding indicates that two-thirds of the students' decisions not to choose Imam Hatip High School were strongly influenced by their lack of interest in vocational courses. No significant differences were found between variables. Man's (2024, pp. 61–62) study, which surveyed students who attended Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School and then continued either in Imam Hatip or non-Imam Hatip high schools, revealed high satisfaction levels with vocational courses other than Arabic at the Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School level. However, it is noteworthy that Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates—who were already familiar with and generally satisfied with vocational courses—reported not choosing Imam Hatip High School because they found its vocational courses uninteresting. This contrast suggests the need for further, in-depth research to understand the underlying causes. Similarly, in Aslan's (2022, p. 41) study, 71.7% of students disagreed with the statement "The Qur'an course at the Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School was too difficult, so it affected my decision not to choose Imam Hatip High School." Likewise, Aşlamacı's (2017a, p. 215) research found that students' attitudes toward vocational courses at Imam Hatip High Schools were at a moderate level.

Among the students who graduated from Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools but chose to continue their education in schools other than Imam Hatip High Schools, 54.8% agreed with the statement "I did not

choose Imam Hatip High School because I did not find it academically successful," while 44.1% disagreed. In the 2022–2023 academic year, graduates of Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools achieved 57 rankings within the top 100, 436 within the top 1,000, 3,567 within the top 10,000, 6,997 within the top 20,000, and 37,887 within the top 100,000 in the Higher Education Institutions Exam (YKS 2022) (Din Öğretimi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2022). However, the fact that Project Imam Hatip Schools in Sakarya admit students with lower minimum LGS scores compared to Science High Schools, Social Sciences High Schools, and Anatolian High Schools may have contributed to the perception that these schools are academically less successful. Qualitative interviews conducted with Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates studying at Science High Schools in Sakarya support this interpretation; some students stated that they might have preferred Imam Hatips if there had been one with an admission threshold close to that of Science High Schools (Man, 2024). The diversification of programs and the implementation of the "project school" model in Imam Hatip Schools are considered important steps toward enabling these schools to compete with other types of high schools and to raise their academic standards. According to the variables, significant differences were found in terms of father's education level ( $p=0.04<0.05$ ) and family income ( $p=0.00<0.05$ ). Among students whose fathers held a bachelor's or postgraduate degree, 64.2% stated that they did not choose Imam Hatip High School because they did not find it academically successful, compared to 58.6% of those whose fathers were high school graduates and 47.7% of those whose fathers had completed only primary or lower secondary education. This finding indicates that as the father's education level increases, the perception of Imam Hatip Schools as academically successful decreases, which in turn affects the decision not to choose these schools. Similarly, 62.9% of students from families with an income of 20,000 TL or more, 60.6% of those with an income between 10,000–20,000 TL, and 42.3% of those with an income below 10,000 TL reported that they did not choose Imam Hatip High School because they did not consider it academically successful. This shows that higher family income is associated with a lower perception of Imam Hatip Schools' academic success. In Aslan's (2022, p. 41) study, 12.6% of the students disagreed and 57.4% agreed with the statement, "I believe the quality of education at my current school is better than that of non-project Imam Hatip Schools." In the same study, 48.6% of the participants agreed with the statement, "The fact that questions from vocational/religious courses (Qur'an, Arabic, Tafsir, Hadith, Kalam, etc.) will not appear in the university entrance exam influenced my preference." Likewise, in Man's (2024, p. 144) research, among graduates of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools who did not choose Imam Hatip High School, 27.4% cited negative attitudes toward the academic education in Imam Hatip Schools as the second most common reason for not choosing them again. Taken together, these findings suggest that perceptions regarding the academic quality of Imam Hatip Schools play a significant role in shaping students' school preferences.

When examining the impact of students' High School Entrance Exam (LGS) scores on their decision to choose or not choose Imam Hatip High Schools, 39.1% of students agreed with the statement "I chose another type of high school because my LGS score was high," while 60.3% disagreed. This indicates that only about one-third of students refrained from choosing Imam Hatip High Schools due to their high LGS scores, suggesting that factors other than exam performance also play a decisive role in school selection. Significant differences were found based on school type ( $p=0.00<0.05$ ) and father's education level ( $p=0.00<0.05$ ). Among graduates of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools who preferred Science High Schools, 86.8% stated that they did not choose Imam Hatip High Schools because their LGS scores were high. Similarly, 88.7% of students attending Anatolian High Schools that admit students based on LGS scores gave the same response. In contrast, the rate was 18.4% among students attending address-based Anatolian High Schools and 22.9% among those in Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools. Regarding the father's education variable, 29.2% of students whose fathers had completed primary or lower secondary school, 42.2% of those whose fathers were high school graduates, and 50.6% of those whose fathers held a bachelor's or postgraduate degree indicated that they did not choose Imam Hatip High School because their LGS scores were high. Accordingly, as the father's education level increases, the influence of high LGS scores on choosing a non-Imam Hatip school becomes more pronounced.

Regarding the statement "I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because coeducation is not provided there," 37.7% of students answered "yes," while 61.4% answered "no." This finding indicates that the absence of coeducation was a reason for not choosing Imam Hatip High School for only about one-third of the students. A significant difference was found only in terms of gender ( $p=0.02 < 0.05$ ). Among male students, 45.6% stated that they did not choose Imam Hatip because coeducation was not offered, whereas 33% of female students gave the same response. This suggests that the absence of coeducation was a more influential factor for male students than for female students in their decision not to choose Imam Hatip High Schools.

Regarding the statement "I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because I thought Imam Hatip High School graduates might face problems again when entering university in the future," 33.9% of the students agreed, while 65% disagreed. During the February 28 process, policies such as the coefficient inequality in university entrance exams and the headscarf ban had negative consequences for Imam Hatip Schools. For instance, while Imam Hatip High Schools constituted 15.39% of the total number of secondary schools in the 1996/97 academic year, this ratio dropped to 2.37% by 2003/04. Although the number of these schools has statistically increased since the removal of the coefficient restriction, it appears that the developments experienced during the February 28 process still influence some parents and students today. Consequently, concerns that similar restrictions might reoccur may lead some students to prefer other types of high schools. No significant differences were found across the variables. In Erikoğlu's (2019, p. 174) study, 75% of the Imam Hatip students stated that they would not have chosen Imam Hatip if the coefficient system were still applied in university entrance exams. This finding is noteworthy as it highlights how restrictive policies associated with Imam Hatip Schools continue to affect students' preferences.

In response to the statement "Although my family wanted me to attend an Imam Hatip High School, I chose another type of high school based on my own preference," 32.5% of students answered yes, while 66.9% answered no. This finding indicates that two-thirds of the students shared a common tendency with their families regarding their high school preferences. However, one-third of the students stated that, despite their families' wishes, they chose an high school other than an Imam Hatip. It can be considered natural that parents whose children studied at an Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School would want them to continue their education at an Imam Hatip High School. However, when the possibility of parental pressure on students is taken into account, this finding suggests that such pressure was not evident. Indeed, even though families preferred their children to study at Imam Hatip High Schools, students reported being able to choose other types of high schools. Similarly, in Erikoğlu's (2019, p. 59) study, some parents who had sent their children to Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School stated that they were not opposed to their children choosing a different type of high school and that they viewed positively their children's decision to pursue their preferred field after acquiring basic religious knowledge in lower secondary school. These findings indicate that families and students largely tend to make joint decisions regarding high school preferences. When examined by variables, a significant difference was found only in terms of high school type ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). Among students who attended Anatolian High Schools based on their residential address, 37% stated that they preferred a non-Imam Hatip school despite their families' wishes. This rate was 14.8% among students attending Anatolian High Schools admitting students based on LGS scores, 18.9% among those in Science High Schools, and 47.9% among those in Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools. Accordingly, it appears that students attending Science High Schools and LGS-based Anatolian High Schools experienced lower rates of conflict with their families, whereas those choosing address-based Anatolian High Schools or Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools had higher rates of disagreement. This suggests that families tend to have a stronger inclination for their children to attend Imam Hatip High Schools rather than these two types of schools.

In response to the statement "I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because I did not want to adopt the Imam Hatip identity," 23.4% of the students agreed, while 75.5% disagreed. This indicates that the

reluctance to identify as an Imam Hatip student did not resonate with three-quarters of the students and did not have a significant influence on their high school preferences. Considering that among students who attended Imam Hatip High Schools, the "Imam Hatip identity" was effective in their decision at a rate of 30.1%, it can be understood that this identity plays a relatively limited role in determining whether students continue their education at an Imam Hatip or another type of high school. It is noteworthy that the "Imam Hatip identity," which constitutes one of the core claims of these schools, did not emerge as a highly determining factor in the high school preferences of students who attended Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools. No significant differences were found across variables. Similarly, in a study by Türköz (2021, p. 1211), it was stated that although a general "Imam Hatip identity" has formed among Imam Hatip students, earlier graduates believed that this identity has weakened among more recent cohorts. This also suggests that the Imam Hatip identity is not a prominent variable influencing students' decisions to choose an Imam Hatip School.

Among the factors influencing students' preference for non-Imam Hatip high schools, 22% of the students stated that the inadequate physical conditions of Imam Hatip High Schools (such as buildings, laboratories, or sports facilities) affected their decision, while 77.1% said it did not. This indicates that the physical conditions of Imam Hatip schools were considered by only about one-fifth of the students when making their school choices. No statistically significant differences were found across variables.

Regarding the statement "During the high school preference period, my lower secondary school guidance service directed me toward non-Imam Hatip schools," 21.2% of the students agreed, while 78% disagreed. This finding suggests that guidance services influenced approximately one-fifth of the students in their preference for non-Imam Hatip schools. Considering that various parameters—such as LGS exam scores, students' aspirations, parental expectations, and ideological orientations—play a role in high school choices, it may be assumed that guidance counselors provided advice based on these factors. A statistically significant difference was found by gender ( $p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ). While 17.1% of female students and 27.5% of male students stated that they did not choose an Imam Hatip because their lower secondary school guidance counselors directed them toward other types of schools, this suggests that guidance services tended to direct male students toward non-Imam Hatip schools at a higher rate than female students.

Regarding the statement "I did not choose Imam Hatip High School because my family wanted me to attend another type of high school," 12.9% of the students agreed, while 86% disagreed. This finding indicates that the rate of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates choosing non-Imam Hatip High Schools due to family influence is relatively low. A statistically significant difference was found by gender ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). While 19.6% of male students and 8.5% of female students stated that they did not choose an Imam Hatip because their families wanted them to prefer other types of high schools, this suggests that families tended to direct male students toward non-Imam Hatip schools more frequently than female students. A similar result was reported in Aslan's (2022, p. 38) study, where only 18% of the students agreed with the statement, "My family influenced my decision to attend an high school other than an Imam Hatip High School."

Concerning the statement "I could not choose Imam Hatip High School because there was not one close to my home," 8% of the students responded "yes," while 91.5% said "no." The very low rate of students citing the lack of a nearby Imam Hatip as a reason for choosing other types of schools indicates that accessibility to Imam Hatip Schools does not constitute a significant problem. No statistically significant differences were found across variables.

## 2.4. Students' Opinions Regarding Choosing an Imam Hatip High School Again If Given Another Chance

Students who attended Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools and subsequently either chose or did not choose an Imam Hatip High School were asked the following question: "If you had the chance to choose your high school again, would you choose an Imam Hatip High School?" The students' responses are presented in Table 6 below.

**Table 6. Students' Opinions Regarding Choosing an Imam Hatip High School Again**

Would you choose an Imam Hatip High School again if you had another chance to choose your high school?	Students studying at Imam Hatip High Schools		Students studying at non-Imam Hatip High Schools	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	153	41,8	29	8
No	194	53	318	87,6
Undecided	3	0,8	4	1,1
No response	16	4,4	12	3,3
<i>Total</i>	<i>366</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>363</i>	<i>100</i>

Among the students who continued their education at Imam Hatip High Schools, 41.8% stated that they would choose an Imam Hatip again if they had the opportunity, while only 8% of those studying in other types of high schools expressed the same opinion. Conversely, 53% of Imam Hatip students and 87.6% of students in non-Imam Hatip schools answered "no" to this question. Additionally, 0.8% of Imam Hatip students reported being undecided and 4.4% left the question unanswered; among students in other high schools, these rates were 1.1% and 3.3%, respectively. These findings are quite striking, as more than half of the students currently attending Imam Hatip High Schools indicated that they would not choose the same school again if given another chance. The fact that the majority of students in non-Imam Hatip schools stated they would not choose Imam Hatips again suggests that they are generally satisfied with their current schools, whereas Imam Hatip High School students appear to have relatively lower satisfaction levels.

When examined by variables, a statistically significant difference was found among Imam Hatip students in terms of school type ( $p=0.00 < 0.05$ ). Among students studying at Project Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools, 51.6% stated that they would again choose an Imam Hatip if they had another opportunity, whereas this rate was 34.8% among students in local placement Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools. This indicates that students admitted to Imam Hatip Schools through the national exam (LGS) are more satisfied with their schools compared to those placed through local enrollment. Although no statistically significant difference was found regarding grade level, the rate of choosing Imam Hatip Schools again decreased as the grade level increased. Specifically, 49% of 9th graders, 44.7% of 10th graders, and 34.8% of 11th–12th graders stated that they would choose an Imam Hatip again if given another chance. This finding suggests that the longer students stay in Imam Hatip Schools, the less likely they are to prefer these schools again. Among students studying in non-Imam Hatip schools, no statistically significant difference was detected according to the variables; however, Anatolian High School and Science High School students were found to have higher rates of stating that they would not choose Imam Hatip compared to students in other school types. In Aslamaci's (2017b, p. 48) nationwide study, 50.7% of Imam Hatip students stated that they would again prefer to study at an Imam Hatip if given another chance, while 30.3% disagreed and 19% were undecided. This result also highlights that half of the Imam Hatip students hold negative or uncertain views about re-choosing their schools. Similarly, in Aslan's (2022, p. 41) study, only 2.6% of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School graduates studying in non-Imam Hatip schools agreed with the statement, "I regret not choosing an Imam Hatip High School." This finding supports the present study's results, indicating that students in other

high schools are generally not inclined to study at Imam Hatip High Schools even if given another opportunity. These results suggest that the factors influencing students' attitudes toward re-choosing Imam Hatip Schools should be examined in more depth through further research.

## Conclusion

Imam Hatip schools are among the most debated institutions within the Turkish education system. The place of these schools within the secular education structure, their curriculum design, student profile, university preferences, and employment fields of their graduates have long been regarded by secular segments of society as a matter of legitimacy. Conversely, conservative and religious groups view these schools as educational institutions compatible with their own beliefs and values, and therefore support them. It is known that secular circles generally prefer non-Imam Hatip schools. However, in recent years, a decline has been observed in the tendency of students who completed their lower secondary education in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools to continue their education in Imam Hatip High Schools, which are the natural continuation of these schools. Statistical data also confirm this downward trend. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the reasons behind Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School students' preferences for Imam Hatip High Schools or other types of high schools, as well as the factors influencing these choices.

The research findings indicate that family influence is the most significant factor in students' choice to attend Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools. Among Imam Hatip High School students, the effect of family on the decision to attend Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School was found to be higher compared to students who later enrolled in other types of high schools. Conversely, the rate of Imam Hatip High School students attending Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools by their own choice was lower than that of students attending other high schools. This suggests that family influence is relatively more dominant in the Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School choices of future Imam Hatip High School students. One of the most distinctive features that sets Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools apart from other lower secondary schools is their program structure, which combines academic education with religious instruction—a factor that can play a significant role in school selection. Interestingly, students who continue their education outside of Imam Hatip reported this aspect as more influential in their Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School choice than those who later attended Imam Hatip High Schools. This indicates that, even if they did not choose Imam Hatip High Schools for high school, these students still valued their school experience in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary Schools. Other factors, such as relatives' recommendations or peer influence, were found to have a minimal effect on Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School choices. Given that children typically complete primary school around the age of ten, it is expected that family guidance plays a strong role in lower secondary school selection. However, presenting family influence as a form of pressure in public discourse, particularly regarding Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School and Imam Hatip High School attendance, does not reflect an objective perspective. Notably, approximately 50% of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School students' Imam Hatip High School choices were influenced by factors other than family guidance, and this proportion was even higher among students who later attended other high schools.

The reasons behind the high school choices of students who completed their lower secondary school education at Imam Hatip and subsequently enrolled in either Imam Hatip High Schools or other types of high schools were analyzed based on their responses to various statements provided to them. Accordingly, the three statements with which Imam Hatip students most frequently agreed in choosing these schools were family guidance, personal preference, and the provision of religious education alongside academic instruction. As observed in Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School choices, family guidance also emerged as the most influential factor in selecting Imam Hatip High School. In addition, slightly more than half of the students responded positively to the statement indicating that they chose to attend Imam Hatip High School based on their own desire. The fact that Imam Hatip High Schools provide religious education alongside academic

instruction, due to their program structure, was also found to be an important factor in students' school preferences. As is well known, LGS scores significantly influence high school selection. The proportion of students who stated that they chose Imam Hatip High School despite having an LGS score sufficient for another high school (38.8%) was lower than those who disagreed with this statement (58.5%). The relatively low percentage of students who reported choosing Imam Hatip High School because they viewed it as a continuation of Imam Hatip Lower Secondary School (32.8%) or because they desired an "Imam Hatip identity" (30.1%) is noteworthy in terms of the distinguishing characteristics of Imam Hatip Schools. Furthermore, approximately one-third of Imam Hatip High School students indicated that they chose the school because their LGS scores did not allow them to select another high school, suggesting that certain aspects of these schools do not fully meet students' expectations in other respects.

When examining the reasons why students who chose other types of secondary schools did not select Imam Hatip High Schools, it is evident that a lack of interest in the vocational/religious courses and the perception that Imam Hatip Schools are not academically successful are more prominent factors compared to others. Approximately one-third of the students reported that they chose a non-Imam Hatip School because their LGS score was high and because Imam Hatip Schools do not provide coeducational settings. Concerns about the possibility of previous coefficient-based university entrance regulations being re-applied in the future also resonated with about one-third of the students. Various studies have highlighted that due to students' academic inclinations toward different university fields, vocational courses in Imam Hatip Schools are perceived to increase the academic workload in university preparation, making this an important consideration. Consequently, the identity-building and religious-education components of Imam Hatip programs have relatively little influence on school choice, as both students and parents tend to prioritize academic expectations (Zengin & Karaman, 2020). Indeed, although there are successful project-based Imam Hatip Schools, the high tendency of students to perceive Imam Hatip Schools as academically less successful supports this assessment.

When examining students' likelihood of choosing an Imam Hatip High School if given the opportunity to select again, notable results emerge. More than half of the students currently attending Imam Hatip Schools indicated that they would not choose the school again, suggesting a significant issue with school satisfaction. This tendency to avoid re-selection is even higher in non-project Imam Hatip Schools, reflecting greater dissatisfaction. Conversely, students attending non-Imam Hatip Schools overwhelmingly stated that they would not choose Imam Hatip if given a second chance, indicating a high level of satisfaction with their current schools.

Although the research findings provide insight into the factors influencing students' secondary school preferences, certain aspects require more detailed examination. Considering that family guidance is a highly significant factor in both lower and high school choices, the underlying reasons for families' inclinations should be explored more thoroughly. In terms of Imam Hatip preference tendencies, it is particularly important to investigate negative perceptions and attitudes toward vocational/religious courses, taking into account both the structure and workload of the school programs as well as the quality of these courses.

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# The foundations of hifz education in Türkiye

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**Abstract:** The Qur'an has been read and memorized by Muslims from the period of the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) proclamation until today. The tradition of hifz (memorization of Qur'an), which emerged with motivations such as the prevalence of oral culture in the early periods and the necessity of preserving knowledge in memories, has evolved into different paradigms as time and conditions have changed. The adoption of a Qur'an-centered understanding of education in the history of Islamic education has also influenced the approach to hifz. Many Islamic scholars have regarded becoming a hafiz (hāfiẓ, a person who has memorized the Qur'an) as a necessity for themselves. In this respect, hifz has been defined as a basic qualification for engaging with Islamic sciences. With the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, hifz education carried out within the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA) has been affected by general educational policies. The demand for this education and the number of students has also varied in this context. Field studies that began in the 1990s regarding teaching activities in Qur'an courses became widespread over time, and since 2006, studies specifically focused on hifz education have begun to be conducted. At the present point, dozens of scientific studies are published each year on the subject of hifz education. In order to better understand the ongoing phenomenon of hifz in contemporary Türkiye, this article attempts to provide a theoretical foundation for it. Evaluations were carried out by prioritizing what hifz is, what kind of historical background it has, what effects it leaves on the target audience, and what contributions it provides to religious education. In this context, the focus has been placed on the grounding of hifz education from historical, psycho-social, sociocultural, and cognitive perspectives. In the historical grounding, evaluations were made by following the sources of Religious Education, History of Islamic Education, Sirah, and Islamic History.

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## Introduction

*Hifz* is a concept related to the memorization of the Qur'an from beginning to end. Individuals who manage to complete their memorization are called *hafiz* in Türkiye (Bozkurt, 1997). However, in different countries, those who memorize certain chapters or sections of the Qur'an are also referred to as *hafiz* (Akdemir, 2010). *Hifz* came to the agenda with the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In the early periods of Islam when the religion was proclaimed, the Qur'anic text was memorized primarily to comprehend its meaning and to act in accordance with its rulings, and in later periods, it preserved its meaning and importance for Muslims. However, the sources of motivation supporting the tradition of *hifz* have continued diversely throughout every era (Cebeci & Ünsal, 2006).

When the history of Islamic education is examined, it is not possible to reach direct information about *hifz* education although there are some *hadiths* that emphasize the importance of memorising the Qur'an (al-Bukhārī, 1995, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 23). Therefore, it is necessary to look for the traces of the tradition of *hifz* in

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sources related to the history and teaching of the Qur'an. In this regard, it can be stated that the data about Qur'an teaching, carried out since the earliest period beginning with *Dar'al-Arqam* and continuing in institutions such as *suffah*, *kuttāb*, *maktab*, *dār'al-qurrā'*, and *dār'al-huffāz*, also provide information about the tradition of *hifz*.

When we look at the Republic of Türkiye, it is possible to say that *hifz* education has been conducted under the supervision and control of the state, in Qur'an courses affiliated with the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA). Besides this official practice, there are also those who complete their *hifz* through the initiatives of some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or through individual efforts. Moreover, within the scope of the cooperation made between the Ministry of National Education (MNE) (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı) and the PRA in 2014, *hifz* education has been provided along with formal education in some İmam Hatip secondary and high schools.

Developments in the education system during the Republican period have also been reflected in the practices of Qur'an teaching and *hifz* education. In the early Republican period, Qur'an teaching and *hifz* education were carried out only with special permission; after the transition to the multi-party period, they became widespread. Although there were significant decreases in the number of Qur'an courses providing *hifz* education and the number of students receiving such education during the period of eight-year compulsory and uninterrupted education, over time the inclination toward *hifz* education increased again with the reforms made in the education system (Öcal, 2015, pp. 472-484). At present, there does not appear to be a quantitative problem regarding *hifz* education. Indeed, according to the latest statistical data shared by the PRA, there are a total of 83,510 individuals receiving *hifz* education in Turkey, including 46,917 men and 36,593 women (DİB, 2025).

The main problem of the research is to make the theoretical grounding of the phenomenon of *hifz* education in the context of Turkey. In this framework, first, a historical grounding was made by summarizing the historical course of the phenomenon of *hifz* within the context of certain important periods. Then, various scientific studies written with the theme of *hifz* were examined, and attempts were made to make groundings from psycho-social, societal, and cognitive perspectives. During the grounding phase, studies conducted on *hifz* in Türkiye over the past 20 years were analyzed through document analysis, and the findings were synthesized to form a holistic framework.

## 1. The Historical Foundations of Hifz Education

### 1.1. The Period of the Prophet and the Four Caliphs

The primary aim of the first educational activities in Islamic history was to learn and teach the Qur'an (al-Bukhārī, 1995, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 21), in accordance with the advice of the Prophet (pbuh) (Çelebi, 1998, p. 185). The main expectation from other sciences that were learned was also to prepare the ground for a better understanding of the Qur'an (Atay, 1983). In this context, the first teachers of Islam were mostly Qur'an reciters (*qurrā'*) and *huffaz* who knew how to read the Qur'an (Atay, 1983, p. 73). In this regard, Companions such as 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Ubayy b. Ka'b, Zayd b. Thābit, Ibn Mas'ūd, Abū al-Dardā', and Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī can be given as examples (Suyūṭī, 1987).

The prevalence of oral culture in early Arab society was reflected in Qur'an teaching as well. In this context, Qur'an education was mostly based on oral repetition and *hifz* (Dağ & Öymen, 1974, p. 3). The statement of the Companions that they would first learn ten verses, and would not move on to the next ten until they had internalized the knowledge and practice contained in those, shows that they adopted a gradual (*tadrījī*) approach in their Qur'an learning process (Kettānī, 2003, vol. II, p. 249). It can be said that the gradual revelation of the Qur'an itself also played a role in this pedagogical approach (Keskioğlu, 2014).

The first *hafiz* of the Qur'an was the Prophet himself (Çetin, 2014, p. 57; Keskioğlu, 2014, p. 71). He memorized the revealed verses, had them written by the scribes of revelation, and recited them in prayers

and gatherings (Cerrahoğlu, İsmail, 2015, p. 63). The Prophet (pbuh) explained the need to make an effort to retain the memorized verses through the metaphor of the camel: just as a person who constantly watches over his camel can keep it in his possession, but if he releases its rope the camel wanders off, so too, knowledge learned and verses memorized will be forgotten if not preserved through effort (al-Bukhārī, 1995, *Fadā'il al-Qur'ān*, 23).

In the history of Islamic education, the starting place of educational activities is known as *Dār' al-Arqam* in Mecca. *Dār' al-Arqam* was the house of Arqam b. Abī al-Arqam al-Qurashī al-Makhzūmī, who had become Muslim at a young age. After the migration to Medina, the center of educational activities became the *Masjid al-Nabawī* (the Prophet's Mosque) (Şulul, 2011, p. 413). The special section of the *Masjid al-Nabawī* allocated for educational activities was called *suffa*. There, poor and orphaned Muslims without shelter were both housed and educated. The Muslims residing in the *suffa*, known as the *Aṣḥāb al-Suffa*, played an important role in memorizing the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh), transmitting them to those who were not present, and conveying the principles and rules of Islam to later generations (Şulul, 2011, p. 438). In this respect, the *suffa* can be said to have held a significant position in the tradition of *hifz*. Defined by some thinkers as the first university of Islam (Hamidullah, 2004, p. 158), the *Suffa* served as a model for later educational institutions (Baktır, 1990, p. 43).

As the number of Muslims increased, the *suffa* became unable to meet the growing need. Therefore, elementary-level educational institutions were established in various parts of Medina (Hamidullah, 2004, p. 637). The *kuttāb* schools, which were established to teach reading, writing, Qur'an education, and basic religious knowledge to young children—so as not to disturb the tranquility of worship in the mosques—can be cited as examples in this context. The *kuttāb* schools, which began operating during the Prophet's lifetime, were divided into two types: those that taught reading and writing, and those that taught the Qur'an (Qur'an *kuttāb*). The instruction in the *kuttāb* began with the Qur'an, and during the three-year educational process, students were expected to memorize the Qur'an. Whether the student memorized the entire Qur'an or not depended on the wishes of the student's guardian (Çelebi, 1998, pp. 23–27; Dağ & Öymen, 1974, p. 65).

Among the educational institutions that attracted attention in the early history of Islam were the *dār' al-qurrā'*. In these institutions, the Qur'an was taught, either partially or entirely memorized, and instruction in recitation (*qirā'a*) was also given (Bozkurt, 1993, pp. 543–545).

Educational activities during the period of the Four Caliphs developed compared to the Prophet's time and continued in mosques and *kuttāb* schools. Over time, the number of Qur'an manuscripts and *huffaz* increased (Hamidullah, 2004, p. 581; Kazıcı, 2014). The Qur'anic verses were compiled (*jam'*) between two covers during the caliphate of Abū Bakr (Suyūtī, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 137–143). The process of compilation, headed by Zayd b. Thābit, who himself was a *hafiz* of the Qur'an and a scribe of revelation, began six months after the death of the Prophet (pbuh) and was completed in one year. During the compilation of the Qur'an, great care was taken, considering not only the written texts but also the recitations of *huffaz* (Keskioğlu, 2014, pp. 92–96; Şulul, 2011, pp. 579–580). Written texts were accepted only when two witnesses testified that they had been directly received from the Prophet (pbuh) (Hamidullah, 2004, p. 48). The fact that memorization continued after the compilation of the Qur'an and that memorizing did not necessitate being distant from the written copies shows how accurate Abū Bakr's decision was (Sezgin, 2012). 'Umar distributed the spoils of war according to the measure of Qur'an *hifz*, which is important as an indication of the value attributed to memorizing the Qur'an in the early period (Kettānī, 2003, vol. II, p. 362).

## 1.2. The Umayyad, Abbasid, and Seljuk Periods

Until the 11th century AD, when *madrasas* were established, mosques had been significant educational institutions in the history of Islamic education. This was also the case during the Umayyad–Abbasid period, and the unity of mosque and education continued (Gül, 1997; Tuğ, 1969, p. 428). During the Umayyad period, when no formal school system was yet established, educational activities were maintained

through individual efforts (Dağ & Öymen, 1974, p. 69). Because an education system had not yet been developed, teachers who taught in the *kuttāb* (elementary schools) were not highly esteemed by society. Teachers who demanded payment for their lessons were criticized (Çelebi, 1998, pp. 59–77; Hitti, 2011, p. 557). On the other hand, since *maktab* teachers (school instructors) were given payments by each child and also received gifts upon the completion of certain memorization goals, such as memorizing a specific *sūra* or completing the *hifz* of the Qur'an, they were criticized by some circles. They were accused of having no knowledge other than memorizing the Qur'an, of turning *hifz* into a source of income, and of diminishing the value of teaching itself (Çelebi, 1998, pp. 172–196).

Tutors (*mu'addibs*) who taught in the palaces, upon the request of the caliphs, instructed the children primarily in the Qur'an but also in moral and daily matters. Given the limited knowledge regarding the curriculum of *kuttāb* during this period, it can be understood that some *kuttāb* taught only reading and writing, while others also offered instruction in the Qur'an and the essential principles of Islam. The curricula of the *kuttāb* where the Qur'an and the principles of Islam were taught were determined according to the Qur'an (Çelebi, 1998, pp. 37, 58, 185; Söylemez, 2002, 61–64). Under the leadership of teachers known as *qurrā'*, it is stated that in these institutions the *hifz* of the Qur'an was left to the end, and that before it, subjects such as *fiqh* and *tafsīr* were taught (Çelebi, 1998, pp. 23–24; Baltacı, 2005, vol. I, p. 76).

The Abbasids (750–1517 CE) attempted to develop a school system, increasing the number of *kuttāb* and *maktab* schools so that they could serve the broader society (Dağ & Öymen, 1974, pp. 69–70). The Anatolian Seljuks placed great importance on Qur'an *huffaz*. Assigning *huffaz* to various cities, forming a unit called "royal memorizer" (*hāssâ hafiz*) who accompanied the sultan at the palace or on journeys, and appointing *huffaz* to read the Qur'an in the tombs of notable persons and in *madrasas* can be given as examples of this (Kara, 2006). Another institution of note within Qur'an education during the Seljuk period was the *dār' al-huffāz*, where the science of recitation (*qirā'a*) was taught. The educational activities in these institutions partly continued during the Ottoman period as well (Bozkurt, 1993, p. 544; Kazıcı, 2003, p. 366).

The views of Islamic scholars who lived during the Seljuk period also provide information about the nature of Qur'an teaching activities carried out at that time. In this context, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) defined teaching as an act of worship and stated that children should be taught the Qur'an in the *maktab* schools (al-Ghazālī, 2011, pp. 3, 166). Zarnūjī (d. 591/1194) stated that knowledge could be attained according to three principles, one of which was "*hifz* and repetition." In addition to this view, he also emphasized the priority of understanding and comprehension (Dağ & Öymen, 1974, pp. 53–53; Zarnūjī, 2015, pp. 126–127). Ibn Khaldūn stated that Qur'an teaching, which he regarded as an essential carrier of religion, was adopted by all Muslims. According to him, Qur'an instruction is important for developing the capacity for learning that will serve as a foundation for later education. Ibn Khaldūn emphasized, through examples from various regions of Africa, that the methods of Qur'an education differed according to geography (Ibn Khaldūn, 2004, p. 790).

### 1.3. The Ottoman Period

In the Ottoman Empire, which gave importance to science and education, Qur'an teaching was provided in educational institutions such as *sibyan mektebi*, *dāru'l-qurrā*, and *madrasah*. The *kuttāb* schools, which were among the early Islamic educational institutions, continued their function in the Ottoman period under the names *sibyan mektebi*, *taş mektep*, or *mahalle mektebi*. The primary priority of these schools was to ensure that Muslim children reached religious knowledge and that they read and understood the Qur'an (Dağ & Öymen, 1974, p. 206; Kazıcı, 2014, pp. 57–78). Although there were occasional changes in their curricula, courses related to Qur'an recitation (*tilāwah*) and *tajwīd* were always included in the *sibyan mektebi* (Ergin, 1977, vol. I, pp. 82–96; Kazıcı, 2014, pp. 88–90).

In the *madrasahs* and mosques where Qur'an teaching was conducted, special sections where the science of recitation (*qirā'a*) was taught were called *dāru'l-qurrā* in the Ottoman period. In the *dāru'l-qurrā*, the Qur'an was taught, partially or completely memorized, and education was provided on recitation (Kazıcı,

2014, p. 55). The first *dāru'l-qurrā* in the Ottoman period was built next to the Süleyman Paşa *madrasah* during the time of Orhan Gazi (Bozkurt, 1993, p. 545; Ergin, 1977, vol. I, pp. 169–172). Many *dāru'l-qurrā* operated in the Ottoman Empire, but only a few have survived to the present day. The İstanbul Süleymaniye, Hüsrev Kethüdā, Sokullu Mehmet Paşa, Atik Vālide, The Edirne Selimiye, and Kütahya *dāru'l-qurrā* are among these few (Bozkurt, 1993, p. 544). Authors such as Evliya Çelebi and Hüseyin Hüsameddin provided detailed information in their works about the *dāru'l-qurrā* where *hifz* and Qur'an education were conducted during the Ottoman period (Baltacı, 2005, pp. 863–867; Bozkurt, 1993, p. 544; Evliya Çelebi, n.d., vols. 3, 412; 1, 537; 9, 101; 10, 223; 2, 89; Hüsameddin, 1986).

In the Ottoman period, students would attend the *dāru'l-qurrā* after completing the *sibyan mektebi*. First, Qur'an *hifz* would be completed in a lower-level *dāru'l-qurrā*, and then advanced education would be received in a higher-level *dāru'l-qurrā*. In the Qur'an *hifz* and teaching of sciences conducted in the *dāru'l-qurrā*, repetition strategy and practice were frequently preferred (Baltacı, 2005, vol. I, p. 82; Kazıcı, 2000, p. 37; 2003, pp. 383–385). The memorization-based learning and teaching strategy had an important place in the Ottoman education system. In addition to the *hifz* of the Qur'an, memorization was also utilized in language learning and in the texts of other sciences that were studied (Dağ & Öymen, 1974, p. 231).

When the curriculum of the Ottoman *madrasahs*, which were renamed *Dāru'l-Hilāfeti'l-Āliye* after 1914, is examined, it is seen that the course "Qur'an Lesson" (*Kur'an-ı Kerim dersi*) was included with six hours per week in the preparatory class and with the note "to be taught at an appropriate time in each class" in the secondary section (*tālī kism*). In the *mutaḥaṣṣisīn* section, in the departments of *Tafsīr* and *Hadīth*, there was the course "Generations of Reciters and Commentators" (*Tabaqāt al-Qurrā' wa'l-Mufassirīn*), two hours in the first year and three hours in the second year. In the curricula of provincial *madrasahs*, although there was no "Qur'an Lesson," Qur'an education continued through the course "Morality of the Qur'an" (*Kur'an Ahlaki*) (Öcal, 2015, pp. 66–68; Uzunçarşılı, 2014, p. 26).

#### 1.4. The Republican Period

With the proclamation of the Republic of Türkiye on October 29, 1923, some arrangements were made concerning education. In this context, the determining legal text was the *Law on the Unification of Education* (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*, TTK) dated March 3, 1924, and numbered 430 (Official Gazette (Republic of Türkiye Official Journal)), 1924). Article 4 of the TTK was related to religious education. Pursuant to this article, 29 *imam-hatip* schools were opened in 1924, and the *Faculty of Theology of Dārūlfunūn* was established. However, these educational institutions could not ensure continuity for various reasons, and the *imam-hatip* schools were closed in 1932, followed by the *Faculty of Theology of Dārūlfunūn* in 1933 (Ayhan, 1999, pp. 31–49; Öcal, 2015, pp. 127–135). In the 1930s, religious education was completely removed from formal education (Ayhan, 1999, p. 6; Öcal, 2015, p. 411).

The *dāru'l-qurrā*, where Qur'an teaching was conducted during the Ottoman period, was also intended to be affiliated with the *Ministry of Education* (*Maarif Vekâleti*) under Article 2 of the TTK (Official Gazette, 1924). However, under the leadership of the then PRA, Rifat Börekçi, it was accepted that these institutions were specialized schools, and they continued their instruction under the *Presidency of Religious Affairs* (*Diyanet İşleri Reisliği*) with the name "Qur'an Course" (*Kur'an Kursu*) (Bozkurt, 1993, p. 545; Kazıcı, 2014, p. 121).

The *Qur'an Courses* continue their activities under the framework of the PRA in the Republican period. The PRA was established in 1924 following the abolition of the *Ministry of Sharia and Foundations and the Ministry of General Staff* (*Ser'iye ve Evkaf ve Erkan-ı Harbiye-i Umûmiye Vekâleti*). The first organizational law of the PRA was enacted in 1935, and with the law numbered 5634, which came into force in 1950, the name was changed to "Presidency of Religious Affairs" (Öcal, 2015, pp. 461–464).

The number of *Qur'an Courses* remained quite limited in the early years of the Republic. In fact, they were completely closed following the Alphabet Reform (*Harf İnkilabı*) of 1929, and upon recognizing this deficiency, they were reopened in 1930. Although their number did not increase significantly until 1950, they continued to exist. While there were 9 courses across the country in 1932, this number rose to 19 in 1934, 56 in the 1940–41 academic year, and 127 in the 1949–50 academic year. Between 1924 and 1950, a limited number of *Qur'an Course* instructors were granted special permission to teach the Qur'an. However, such restrictions paved the way for the establishment of unofficial courses outside state supervision (Baltacı, 1999, p. 183; Öcal, 2015, pp. 472–475).

In addition to official *Qur'an Courses* affiliated with the PRA in Turkey, there were also unofficial ones. Jaschke, in his work discussing institutions providing religious education in the early Republican period, stated that after 1933, only *Qur'an Courses* remained for the training of religious officials. He noted that these *Qur'an Courses* were conducted in foundation buildings that had previously served as *dārū'l-huffāz*, *dārū'l-qur'ān*, or *dārū'l-qurrā*, and in places where such buildings were not available, in mosques, old *madrasahs*, or private houses (Jaschke, 1972, p. 74).

The practices of religious education were influenced by political developments in the country's administration. Besides political factors, socio-economic elements and various social disturbances that affected public peace also influenced the public preference for *Qur'an Courses*; in response to the increasing demand, governments facilitated the opening of these courses (Akgün, 2000, p. 188). After the transition to a multi-party system in 1950, the number of *Qur'an Courses* increased. The activities of unofficial courses were also tolerated. Between 1950 and 1960, the number of *Qur'an Courses* rose from 127 to 301; in the 1964–65 academic year to 434; in 1971 to 786; and in the 1978–79 academic year to 1,538 (Öcal, 2015, pp. 476–477).

In 1971, the *Regulation on Qur'an Courses* was enacted to determine the procedures for opening, managing, supervising, and operating *Qur'an Courses*. According to this regulation, reading (*tilāwah*) and *hifz* education was provided in *Qur'an Courses*. The task of supervising *Qur'an Courses* was assigned to both the MNE and the PRA. In the 1990 revision of the *Regulation on Qur'an Courses*, "providing *hifz* education to willing citizens" was listed among the duties of *Qur'an Courses*. By fulfilling this duty, *Qur'an Courses* gained public appreciation and played an important role in preserving the tradition of *hifz* education (Akgün, 2000, p. 191; Ayhan, 1999, pp. 484–485; Koç, 2010, p. 501).

Between 1980 and 1982, several significant developments occurred concerning religious education. These include the 1982 Constitution's Article 24 making the *Religious Culture and Ethics* (*Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi*) course compulsory, the conversion of *Higher Islamic Institutes* into *Faculties of Theology* on July 20, 1982, and the preservation of the rights granted to *İmam-Hatip High Schools* by the 1973 *National Education Basic Law* (*Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu*). These developments were significant in the history of religious education in the Republican era. However, in areas concerning *Qur'an Courses* and the PRA's scope of work, no parallel progress occurred (Ayhan, 1999, p. 246).

Between 1980 and 1998, the number of those receiving *hifz* certificates (*hafızlık belgesi*) followed an increasing trend, but after 1998, due to changes in the political context, a sharp decline occurred, which continued for many years. It was observed that the numbers began to rise again after 2010. From the 2002–2003 academic year onward, the number of female students receiving *hifz* certificates surpassed that of male students. Since the 2008–2009 academic year, the number of students completing their *hifz* outside formal institutions and included in the statistics has also been notable.

After the military coup of 1980, the number of *Qur'an Courses* did not decrease; rather, it continued to increase. In the 1990–91 academic year, there were 4,998 *Qur'an Courses*, in which 6,555 female and 11,206 male students, a total of 17,761, received *hifz* education. The total number of students receiving *hifz* education continued to range between 17,000 and 20,000 until the 2000–2001 academic year, but from the 2001–2002 academic year onward, due to the *February 28 process* and the implementation of eight years of compulsory

education, this number rapidly declined. In the 2001–2002 academic year, 4,713 girls and 3,161 boys, a total of 7,874 students, received *hifz* education; in 2002–2003, 5,834 girls and 3,573 boys, a total of 9,407 students; and in 2003–2004, 5,843 girls and 3,595 boys, a total of 9,438 students. Until the 1999–2000 academic year, the number of male students memorizing the Qur'an was higher than that of female students; however, after that date, the number of female students exceeded that of males (Koç, 2010, p. 502; Öcal, 2015, pp. 477–484).

During the *February 28, 1997* process, referred to as the postmodern coup in public discourse, negative developments occurred in the field of religious education. The closure of the middle school sections of *İmam-Hatip* schools and the deferral of Qur'an course eligibility to the post-eight-year compulsory education period can be cited as examples. During this period, *Qur'an Courses* suffered a significant loss of students, and the number of *hifz* students declined accordingly (Öcal, 2015, p. 288). With the change in political power in 2003, the effects of the *February 28* process diminished, and in subsequent years, the number of students pursuing *hifz* increased.

On September 17, 2011, permission was granted for attending *Qur'an Courses* while continuing compulsory education. This development occurred with the *Decree Law No. 653* (Official Gazette, 2011), which abolished the additional Article 3 of the *Law No. 633 on the Establishment and Duties of the PRA* (Official Gazette, 1965), which had imposed an age restriction on Qur'an courses. With Law No. 6002, published in the *Official Gazette* on July 13, 2010 (No. 27640), seven general directorates were established within the PRA. Among them, the *General Directorate of Educational Services* (*Eğitim Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü*) was tasked with matters such as *Qur'an Courses* and *hifz* education (Official Gazette, 2010).

From the 2014–2015 academic year onward, the “*Formal Education-Based hifz Project in Cooperation between School and Qur'an Course*” (*Okul-Kur'an Kursu İşbirliğine Dayalı Öğrenimle Birlikte Hafızlık Projesi*) began to be implemented jointly by the MNE and PRA. This initiative provided an opportunity for parents who wanted their children to become *hafiz* but did not wish them to be disconnected from formal education. Thanks to this opportunity, many parents sent their children to these institutions to receive *hifz* education. Within this project, two types of schools can be identified: the first allows students to receive both formal and *hifz* education simultaneously (*İmam-Hatip* schools); the second comprises schools opened exclusively for students who have completed *hifz* education, where only *hafiz* students can attend. The number of schools implementing the *hifz* project has been steadily increasing. The number of schools conducting the *Formal Education with hifz Project* and the number of *İmam-Hatip* high schools educating *hafiz* students have exceeded 60 (Başkonak, 2022, pp. 68–70; Çoştu, 2017).

Since the 2008–2009 academic year, the PRA has begun granting “*hifz* certificates” to individuals who, even without attending any official *Qur'an Course*, completed *hifz* either independently or in unregistered courses not affiliated with the PRA, provided they succeeded in the *hifz* assessment exam. The number of such individuals has also been included in official statistics. Although it is impossible to determine the number of unofficial courses providing *hifz* education in Türkiye, it is known that between 2008 and 2015, a total of 13,944 individuals completed their *hifz* outside official *Qur'an Courses* and received official *hifz* certificates (Öcal, 2015, p. 488). When examining the current landscape of *hifz* education in Türkiye, 2023–2024 PRA statistics reveal that a total of 83,510 individuals are continuing their memorization training, with 46,917 males and 36,593 females (DİB, 2025).

## 2. The Psycho-Social Foundations of Hifz Education

The attitudes, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals who wish to become *hafiz* regarding the *hifz* education process are closely related to their psycho-social conditions. The formation of the idea of receiving *hifz* education requires possessing the perseverance and determination necessary for the successful completion of the process. At this point, associating many variables such as motivation, attitude, anxiety, stress, and awareness with *hifz* education is decisive in terms of psycho-social grounding.

The first field studies on *hifz* education drew attention through studies conducted specifically on *Qur'an Courses* (Ay, 2005; M. F. Bayraktar, 1992; Buyrukçu, 2001; Koç, 2005). Studies that examined the psycho-social aspects of individuals receiving *hifz* education began to appear from the 2000s onward. Among the earliest of these were master's theses prepared by Çaylı (2005) and Ünsal (2006). In his research, Çaylı offered suggestions and findings regarding many variables important to *hifz* education. Among the issues evaluated in his thesis were: lowering the starting age for *hifz* education to the 13–15 range; beginning the program upon the student's own volition; communication problems with instructors and course administrations; students' motivation; and post-course employment opportunities. Conducted in the same period, Ünsal's study made similar findings but additionally emphasized students' dissatisfaction with the education they received and the fact that *hifz* was pursued mostly for religious reasons.

One of the determining factors on psycho-social status is the personality traits of the individual. In a study examining the effect of *hifz* education on personality, the fact that *hifz* education is a difficult and patience-requiring form of learning, that students generally stay in boarding *Qur'an Courses*, and that they remain distant from their families and social environments, was defined as having negative effects on the individual. It was determined, however, that overcoming these challenges not only increases the individual's psycho-social well-being and level of motivation but also allows maturation and desired development of personality traits (Algur, 2021, p. 643).

As in the decision-making process for *hifz* education, the views of individuals who cannot continue and are forced to drop out are also valuable. Research conducted in this context reveals that individual factors such as stress, unwilling initiation, and underestimating the difficulty of *hifz* show the importance of psycho-social conditions during the education process. Findings that course instructors discriminate among students, act with excessive authority, apply psychological or physical violence, or that students become bored due to inadequate physical conditions of the course environment also indicate negative effects on students' psycho-social well-being (Çiftçi & Ay, 2024, pp. 509–513; Şekerci & Çakmak, 2023, pp. 387–389; Doğan & Osmanoğlu, 2023, pp. 153–162).

In a study on the project combining formal education with memorization, Güneş (2020, p. 281) stated that students who could not sustain the *hifz* process either failed to internalize *hifz* and its culture sufficiently or abandoned it due to the perception of lagging behind academically. Emphasizing also the decisive role of parents, the author stated that being either overly social or indifferent has an impact on the child, and stressed that a student undertaking *hifz* requires his or her family to concentrate on the education alongside the child and contribute to it.

Karagöz (2023, p. 63) categorized the strategies that students prefer to cope with problems encountered during *hifz* education under two themes. The first is the frequent use of social support mechanisms in coping with the difficulties of the *hifz* process, and the identification of the desire to become a *hafiz* itself as a strong coping resource. The second is that *hifz*, in later years, transforms into an independent coping strategy for dealing with problems. Another noteworthy point emphasized is that the struggle exhibited during *hifz* can later serve as a model and source of strength for the individual.

Guidance activities play a highly important role in overcoming the problems encountered during the *hifz* education process. In this context, techniques for recognizing the individual should first be employed (Korkmaz, 2019), and developmental guidance activities should be carried out for all students, not only those experiencing difficulties. Addressing students' developmental problems, providing motivational and methodological support during the *hifz* process, and offering guidance concerning post-memorization phases can all be considered within this scope. Research in the field has identified the existence of personal guidance activities for students, yet it is stated that these are often presented in a problem-centered manner and without a scientific approach. The necessity of institutionalizing the guidance activities carried out in courses and maintaining them at educational, personal, and vocational levels with reference to scientific research has been emphasized (Uğur & Osmanoğlu, 2020, pp. 947–948).

In a field study examining instructors' opinions regarding guidance activities carried out in *Qur'an Courses*, it was determined that students needed personal-social guidance on issues such as adaptation to *hifz* education, difficulties in memorization, motivation and exam anxiety, family and social problems, study awareness and time management, age-specific challenges, and deficiencies in institutional and individual guidance. According to the findings, students require guidance services to cope with the negative psychological states arising from the difficulty of memorization, to overcome identified problems, and to resolve personal-social issues related to family and friendship (Kocaman & Özkaplan, 2023, p. 221).

It is appropriate to discuss the factors influencing the psycho-social states of individuals receiving *hifz* education under distinct sub-sections.

## 2.1. Attitude and Awareness in Hifz

As in many educational activities, in *hifz* education, the prerequisite for efficiency is a high level of awareness regarding the process one engages in. Awareness prior to *hifz* refers to asking questions such as "Why should I become a *hafiz*?", "What is *hifz*?", "What awaits me when I begin *hifz* education?" and being able to form responses to them. During the ongoing process of *hifz* education, awareness represents having knowledge about the process—such as making and implementing daily study plans, preventing forgetfulness, and performing memorization more easily and permanently. Measures to be taken to prevent forgetting the memorized material after becoming a *hafiz* can be referred to as post- *hifz* awareness.

When the relevant literature is examined, studies that address the psycho-social condition in *hifz* education directly or indirectly (Başkonak, 2022; Şenat, 2022) draw attention. The doctoral dissertation completed in 2018, titled "*The Evaluation of the Motivation and Psycho-Social Conditions of Individuals Receiving Hifz Education in terms of Religious Education*", is among the first works to address the subject directly. In the study, the *Hifz Education Psycho-Social Status Scale* (HEPSÖ) was developed to determine the psycho-social conditions of students. By applying the developed scale in the field, findings related to the psycho-social processes of *hifz* were obtained. When the sub-dimensions of HEPSÖ are examined, it is seen that under the main theme of psycho-social status, sub-themes were named as "justification and attitude," "awareness," "communication with instructor," and "course environment." Among the scale items were elements such as happiness, determination, and feeling good about the attitudes that individuals receiving *hifz* education developed toward this training. The fact that students know what *hifz* is and what they must do for effective *hifz* education was addressed under the theme of awareness. In addition to items indicating the necessity of effective communication with the instructor for achieving success in *hifz* education, the adequacy of the physical conditions of the educational course was also included as a sub-dimension in the scale (Algur, 2018, p. 26).

In Algur's (2018, p. 279) research, it was determined that the awareness level of individuals receiving *hifz* education regarding their training was quite high (93.6%). The same study included findings that the individual's level of awareness in *hifz* increased or decreased in direct proportion to age. In this context, if a high level of awareness is desired in *hifz* education, students should receive this education at older ages. On the other hand, it was found that females had higher levels of awareness than males; that those who wanted to pursue education in the field of religious studies after *hifz* had high levels of awareness; that those who considered themselves deprived of their peers' social lives had lower levels of awareness; and that those who said they could recommend *hifz* education to others, who stated that they had a goal during the *hifz* process, and who were satisfied with the facilities of their course, had high levels of awareness—these are among the findings obtained in the aforementioned study.

For *hifz* education to be completed qualitatively, it is expected that students have a high level of cognitive readiness. Indeed, before *hifz*, the student must have a clear interest in *hifz*, the reading knowledge and skills necessary to read the Qur'anic text effectively, auditory perception sufficient to correctly understand messages and instructions from the instructor or written/oral sources, a logical and applicable

memorization strategy organized in a sequential order to memorize specific texts, sufficient memory capacity to prevent forgetting and recall when necessary, the ability to concentrate and maintain focus during memorization, and a certain problem-solving ability to compensate when unable to recite the lesson (Osmanoğlu, 2022, p. 2073).

With the increasingly common implementation of *hifz* in conjunction with formal education in recent years, the starting age for *hifz* has decreased to 10–11, following the completion of the 5th grade. This situation has enabled Qur'anic verses to be memorized more easily. However, based on scientific studies proving that the level of awareness decreases with age, it can be said that children of these ages cannot begin *hifz* education with real awareness of the process. During the developmental stages when children cannot make their own decisions, responsibility lies with parents. They must also be supported by the programs and guidance of the institutions providing *hifz* education (Algur, 2018, p. 279; Başkonak, 2022, p. 41). During the preparatory stage before *hifz*, activities should not only be carried out to improve the ability to read the Qur'an in accordance with *tajwīd* rules and to enhance memorization skills, but also to ensure mental readiness for *hifz*, awareness of the process, and the understanding that *hifz* is a lifelong achievement that must be preserved (Başkonak, 2022, p. 171).

At various times, individuals who received *hifz* education were asked about their level of satisfaction with the training they received and whether they would recommend it. In most studies, results were obtained showing that participants were satisfied with the process and would recommend it to others (Algur, 2018, p. 269; M. F. Bayraktar, 1992, p. 28; Çimen, 2007, p. 149; Koç, 2005, p. 60; Öztürk, 2007, pp. 67–77). These data can be interpreted as indicating that the *hifz* education activities carried out have left positive effects on the target group and contributed to developing positive attitudes. Moreover, findings that *hifz* education has positive effects on the individual's attitudes and behaviors, self-confidence, sense of responsibility, discipline, patience, and moral character can also be evaluated within this scope (Demir, 2019, p. 313).

In Türkiye, the *Hifz Education Attitude Scale* (HEAS) was developed to measure the attitudes of individuals receiving *hifz* education. The scale consists of 13 items and three sub-dimensions named Cognitive, Social, and Affective (Osmanoğlu & Algur, 2023). In a study using HEAS on the attitudes and social anxieties of students receiving *hifz* education, students' *hifz* attitude scores ranged between 84% and 92% of the maximum possible score. This data shows that students receiving *hifz* education have highly positive approaches toward the training they receive. Developing a positive attitude toward *hifz* in a process that can only be completed through personal effort, dedication, determination, and motivation is important. The same study found that students' social anxiety levels were around 50%, which was considered not to hinder success (Algur et al., 2024, p. 658). Similar results were also found in other studies (Çoban, 2018, p. 362).

Developing negative attitudes toward different elements of the education received by individuals in *hifz* education can lead to failure. In the *hifz* process, which begins with various motivations, decreases in motivation and the development of negative attitudes toward education may occur due to problems arising from the instructor, student, parent, or environment (Aybey, 2020, pp. 399–400; Özdemir & Çaylı, 2021, pp. 42–43). If such negative approaches are not identified and addressed, depressive conditions may develop over time (Öztürk, 2007, p. 138). Negative approaches and attitudes formed by the individual toward *hifz* education lead to problems in course attendance, lesson study, and timely completion of page repetitions. If these problems persist, failure and dropping out of education often come to the agenda. At this point, monitoring students' affective responses at certain intervals may allow timely measures to be taken to prevent loss of interest and motivation (Osmanoğlu & Algur, 2023, pp. 6–7).

## 2.2. Motivation in Hifz

Subjects such as an individual's preferences regarding a task they wish to perform, their activities concerning the responsibility they have undertaken, their commitment to that task, and their willingness to overcome the work they desire to accomplish fall within the scope of motivation (Pintrich et al., 1993, p. 168).

Motivation is an internal state that arouses, directs, and sustains behavior (Hoy, 2015, p. 757). Sources of motivation may be internal or external. Internal motivation refers to the individual's attachment to an activity with intrinsic interest and desire. Being motivated by an external factor such as reward or punishment is defined as external motivation. Since intrinsic motivation is formed by considering the natural interests and basic needs of the individual during the learning process, it guides learning that provides continuous benefit (Balkış Baymur, 2014, pp. 202-203). The individual who gives meaning to *hifz* education within his or her inner world for different reasons can struggle much more strongly with the difficulties that may be encountered during the education process.

In the *hifz* education process, which requires sustained effort over a long period, maintaining strong motivation is crucial for achieving the goal. For everything to proceed smoothly during *hifz*, a daily, regular, and planned process must be followed. Any disruption that may occur in this process affects the entire educational sequence. In the *hifz* process, which lasts on average two years including the preparation period, maintaining high motivation is important to overcome possible setbacks (Osmanoğlu & Göksun, 2019, p. 121). Starting *hifz* education by the student's own will may enable stronger concentration, attention, dedication, perseverance, preparedness, participation, determination, and persistence during the process (Başkonak, 2022, p. 49). Although the age at which an individual makes such a decision is also decisive, it is important that parents, teachers, course instructors, and relatives or friends who have completed *hifz* provide guidance in the decision-making process.

The motivations and reasons underlying *hifz* education are significant in terms of the quality of the education itself. When the relevant literature is examined, research findings in this regard can be found. In a study conducted by Algur (2019, p. 100), the *Hifz Education Motivation Scale* (HEMÖ) was developed and applied in the field. According to the data from this scale, motivation sources in *hifz* education are grouped under three factors: "professional and social," "education-based," and "intrinsic." Participants who indicated professional motivation sources stated that they preferred *hifz* because they would make it a profession, that it would contribute to their future career, increase their prestige in society, and provide them with a *hafiz* certificate. In education-based motivation sources, issues such as the instructor, peers, the education received, or the individual's memorization ability were emphasized. Within the scope of intrinsic motivation, attention was drawn to factors such as the pleasure derived from memorizing Qur'anic verses, the increase in self-respect, and contributing to humanity.

In another study, among the reasons students gave for engaging in *hifz* were attaining the pleasure of Allah, individual inclinations, and environmental factors. In the same study, intrinsic factors such as perseverance, determination, experiencing success, and study approaches were mentioned as motivation sources, as well as external factors such as gaining prestige, the influence of parents and instructors, and peer environment. The study also expressed that affective barriers such as difficulty, stress, and anxiety; physical barriers such as the quality of the study environment and the presence of noise; and social barriers such as communication problems with friends all hinder motivation. The same study offered suggestions such as enabling self-discipline and self-control, changing or improving the environment when necessary, and seeking support from instructors, parents, or peers to increase or maintain motivation (Osmanoğlu & Göksun, 2019, pp. 127-190).

The decision-making process for engaging in *hifz* education is an important variable in terms of success in this education. When the results of various studies in the field are examined, it is seen that participants are mostly influenced by their social environment in choosing this education. At this point, the abundance of *hafiz* individuals in one's family, neighborhood, school, or city fosters the idea of engaging in *hifz* among students (Algur, 2018, p. 270; Buyrukçu, 2001, p. 93; Çaylı, 2005, p. 81; Çimen, 2007, p. 145; Çoban, 2018, p. 363; Gürel & Kaya, 2019, p. 270; ÖzTÜRK, 2007, p. 67; Ünsal, 2006, p. 32).

Studies conducted in the field indicate that some problems experienced by students stem from deficiencies in psycho-social processes. In a study conducted specifically on *hifz* in conjunction with formal

education, it was pointed out that due to disruptions in the student selection process for *hifz* projects, students who had high academic success but insufficient readiness for *hifz* encountered difficulties. The same study determined that motivational problems occasionally occurred because certain traits highly needed in *hifz* education—such as patience, responsibility, and continuity—were not sufficiently present in some students. When these student-related problems were combined with the low awareness of parents regarding *hifz*, their lack of support for their children, and the high expectations of some parents, it was emphasized that serious qualitative issues arose (Şengül & Şimşek, 2024, pp. 1128–1134; Bakaç & Ulu, 2023; Karagöz, 2023).

### 2.3. The Age of Beginning Hifz

There are various opinions regarding the age at which *hifz* education should begin (F. Bayraktar, 2008, pp. 120–121; Cebeci & Ünsal, 2006, p. 44; Çimen, 2007, p. 108). The knowledge and experience that *hifz* is easier at younger ages have led to the characterization of the *hifz* process as something that should be completed in post primary school period'. The project of *hifz* education in conjunction with formal education, implemented in 2014, enabled students to begin *hifz* at an early age. In this way, an environment was created in which students were more willing and capable (Koç, 2024, p. 363).

Algur (2019, pp. 263–265) determined that there is a significant relationship between age and motivation in *hifz*. According to this finding, as the individual's age increases, the level of motivation decreases. Accordingly, it was shared that starting *hifz* education at an early age contributes to the easier completion of this education. However, the same study, which also found that there is a direct proportional relationship between the individual's psycho-social state and age, notes that as the individual's age increases, awareness also increases; while a decrease in age causes problematic conditions in terms of awareness. According to the results of the mentioned research, it can also be said that there is a direct proportional relationship between the perceived level of stress and age in *hifz* education. As the individual's age decreases, the level of stress also decreases, while the increase in age raises the level of stress. Similar findings have been identified regarding attitude scores toward *hifz* education and social anxiety levels (Algur et al., 2024, p. 659). Field research also revealed that with increasing age, there are negative emotional changes (increased anxiety, depression, and hopelessness) (Bakaç & Ulu, 2023, p. 1718).

In the planning of *hifz* education processes, the relationships between the age variable and motivation, awareness, stress, and anxiety should be considered. If the designed *hifz* education model aims for easier completion of *hifz*, increased awareness afterward, and minimal impact from affective factors during the process, it is beneficial for *hifz* education to be carried out at younger ages. In cases where a *hifz* process with a high level of awareness is targeted, *hifz* should be undertaken at later ages. However, it should be known that in such cases, the individual's stress and anxiety levels will be high, and strong awareness and motivation should be utilized to overcome them. In education processes carried out at younger ages, instead of individual awareness, it may be appropriate to establish awareness on a programmatic basis.

## 3. The Social Foundations of Hifz Education

Some of the possible answers to the question "*Why does a person want to become a hafiz?*" can be said to have a social nature. Indeed, in an environment where technological means have advanced, strong motivations are expected to lie behind the *hifz* of a voluminous book like the Qur'an. This motivation manifested itself in the early periods, dominated by oral culture, as an effort to preserve the wording (*lafz*). However, over time, these sources of motivation diversified—being seen as a means for learning religious sciences, as a form of dedication to attain Allah's pleasure alone, as an effort to sustain a tradition, or as a way to increase employment opportunities. On the other hand, the fact that memorizing individuals are respected and valued in society is an undeniable reality.

It is necessary to inform not only individuals who receive this education but also society about what *hifz* is. The misconception of *hifz* within society affects both the quality of education and increases the

responsibilities of those who are undergoing *hifz* education or who have become *huffâz*. Aydın (2019, pp. 20–21) made several observations in this regard, mentioning exaggerated perceptions such as considering the *hafiz* as a “walking Qur'an,” showing the same respect to the memorizer as to the Qur'an itself, and viewing *huffâz* as sources of religious knowledge or as religious scholars. He noted that this process of misunderstanding prevents *huffâz* from developing themselves, as they stay away from formal education and thus cannot improve. Similar findings can be found in other studies as well (Başkonak, 2022, p. 172).

When an individual decides to pursue *hifz* education, this situation necessitates certain changes in their social life. The individual's communication with their environment, their worship life, the duties and responsibilities they assume in society, and the change in society's perception of them can be given as examples in this context. The religious representation capacity of the *hafiz*, their involvement in mosque duties, and their recitation of the Qur'an in public settings provide them with social prestige. On the other hand, the fact that most *hifz* courses are boarding institutions creates a distinct environment in terms of students' socialization (Algur, 2018, pp. 282–283; Dartma, 2013, p. 187; Koç, 2005, p. 106; Oruç, 2009, p. 57; Ünsal, 2006, p. 41). Algur (2018, p. 283) found that individuals who considered themselves deprived of social life had higher levels of stress, whereas those who did not feel such deprivation were better motivated in the *hifz* process and had higher psycho-social status scores.

The *hifz* education process requires the individual to work in a determined, willing, long-term, and disciplined manner. The contribution from the social environment is highly important in ensuring this effort and continuity. In this sense, the quality of communication that the individual establishes with their family, friends, and course instructors is highly decisive. Various studies indicate that the quality of communication with family, peers, and instructors has a determining effect on the quality of education received (Algur, 2018, pp. 286–296; Ay, 2005, p. 98; Çaylı, 2005, p. 77; Öztürk, 2007, p. 74; Ünsal, 2006, pp. 46–47).

The *hifz* education process, which continues to develop dynamically under the influence of various factors, should be examined from multiple dimensions. The individual's decision-making process regarding *hifz* education, the period of studying, and the stage after completing the education all have a determining influence on their communication with their social environment, especially with family and friends. Therefore, *hifz* education should not be seen merely as a process of memorizing the Qur'an from beginning to end, but as a holistic element that gives meaning to the individual, matures their personality, and encompasses all dimensions—from the curriculum and the learning environment to communication and the time spent in this education (Algur, 2021, p. 644).

In a study conducted on individuals pursuing *hifz* education while receiving undergraduate education, the effects of *hifz* on their lives were examined. In this context, it was found that *hifz* education strengthened the worship life of 83.3% of participants, enhanced the religious life of 87.7%, and enabled 86% to develop a more sensitive and sincere attitude toward spiritual values. In the same study, participants stated that *huffâz* hold a respected position among the public at a rate of 89.5% (Gürel & Kaya, 2019, pp. 280–281).

It has been determined that *hifz* students whose families reside in villages are better motivated toward the education process compared to those whose families live in city centers. The same study identified a negative correlation between income level and motivation. As income levels rise, students' motivation levels decrease, while motivation increases as income levels decrease (Algur, 2019, p. 266). On the other hand, it has also been found that interest in Qur'an courses decreases as income levels increase (Naziroğlu & Vahapoğlu, 2015, p. 133).

In a study conducted by Algur (2018, p. 269), it was determined that individuals who saw themselves as deprived of the social lives of their peers had difficulty being motivated for *hifz* education and had low psycho-social readiness. Similar findings have been identified regarding attitudes toward *hifz* education and social anxiety levels (Algur et al., 2024, p. 662). In another study, it was stated that due to the inherently difficult nature of *hifz* education, it does not provide much opportunity for socialization and does not develop

the individual's self-expression skills (Demir, 2019, p. 313). Regardless of the setting or project within which *hifz* is carried out, it should not necessitate ignoring or overlooking the child's need for social communication and development. In this regard, studies have shown that individuals who engage in *hifz* alongside formal education have more opportunities for social communication and development due to their presence in school environments (Güneş, 2020, p. 273).

#### 4. The Cognitive Foundations of Hifz Education

There are studies stating that *hifz* education contributes positively to the academic success of the individual by raising the level of understanding, comprehension, and perception of the mind and by increasing attention (Aybey, 2020, p. 391). In a field study, the interaction between the *hifz* performance of students receiving *hifz* education and cognitive abilities such as reasoning, memory, and attention—which constitute the functional and structural infrastructure of the brain—and emotional state was investigated. In the study, it was determined that in individuals who completed *hifz* education, the speed and quality of response under stress after the education, reasoning ability, attention, and memory increased (Kutlu et al., 2019, p. 361).

Referring to various studies investigating the effects of *hifz* on the individual's mental health, Şalgamci (2019, pp. 301–305) determined that memorizing the Qur'an affects mental health positively. In the study, reference was made to the positive effects of *hifz* in reducing the negative effects of disorders such as dementia and Alzheimer's. It was pointed out that memorizing the Qur'an significantly slows typical cognitive decline. On the other hand, it was noted that *hafiz* individuals are more resilient against elements that reduce the quality of life, such as anxiety, stress, depression, and sleep disorders. By pointing to the positive effects of *hifz* on the individual's cognitive and psycho-social development, the study provided a cognitive grounding for this education. There are also different studies in the relevant literature that have reached findings in this direction (Demir, 2019, p. 312).

The reason for memorizing the Qur'an can be associated with cognitive awareness concerning this education. Qur'an memorization has been practiced to be recited in prayers as a requirement of worship and as an expression of devotion to the Word of Allah, and to increase familiarity with the Qur'an (Cerrahoğlu, İsmail, 2015, p. 66). In the first period when the Qur'an began to be revealed, *hifz* for the purpose of preserving the wording (*lafz*) is also an important reason expressed in the sources (Keskioğlu, 2014, pp. 93–95). The thought of preserving the Qur'anic text in memories also has an effect on Qur'an memorization. In addition, research on the history of the Qur'an states that the Qur'an has been preserved to the present day thanks to the triple measure of writing, memorization, and studying alongside a master (*ustād*) (Hamidullah, 2000, pp. 52–87).

Being aware of with what kind of goal one sets out in the decision-making process for *hifz* education also allows this education process to be grounded at a cognitive level. In this context, when individuals receiving *hifz* education are asked what they aim for with the education they receive, their giving short-term and result-oriented answers such as "To finish *hifz*.", "To receive a *hifz* certificate." strengthens the impression that they do not make a cognitive grounding regarding the education they receive. In Algur's (2018, pp. 265–266) study, it was found that seven out of every ten participants had a goal. The stated goals are to complete *hifz* education, to become religious services personnel, to attain the pleasure of Allah, to preserve one's memorization throughout life, to increase professional qualification, to obtain a job, to be beneficial to people, and to act in accordance with *hifz*. In the same study, it was determined that individuals who adopted a goal were better motivated for the education process and had higher psycho-social readiness.

The meaning attributed to the phenomenon of *hifz* by individuals receiving this education is also highly important. In one study, *hifz* education was defined as becoming intimate with the Qur'an in order to attain Allah's pleasure; as an expression of love and devotion to Allah and religion by acting in accordance with its rulings alongside memorizing its wording; as a process that gives peace and happiness to the person; as a process that is very difficult and requires patience and determination; as a situation that changes a

person's way of life and gives a different identity in social life; and as an experience that cannot be explained but must be lived (Algur, 2018, p. 309).

### Conclusion

In this article, a grounding has been attempted for a better understanding and making sense of *hifz* education. The *hifz* of the Qur'an has been on the agenda since the period when it began to be revealed. The Qur'an, which was first memorized by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), has established order and added meaning to the lives of Muslims with its rulings. The practices during the time of the Prophet, the four caliphs, the Umayyads, and the Abbasids in the process of memorizing, learning, and teaching the Qur'an set an example for Islamic societies in later years. The teaching and *hifz* of the Qur'an gained greater importance with each passing period and became systematic. Activities of Qur'an teaching and *hifz* education, which were initially conducted in homes and mosques, continued over time in independent institutions such as *madrasah*, *dāru'l-qurrā*, *dāru'l-huffāz*, and *Qur'an Course*, depending on the level of social/political development.

Today, *hifz* education, which can be received individually, within *Qur'an Courses* and non-governmental organizations, is officially provided only in *Qur'an Courses* affiliated with the PRA under the supervision and oversight of the state. In this context, many *Qur'an Courses* within non-governmental organizations also carry an official identity as being affiliated with the PRA. In 2014, the integration of *hifz* education into the formal education system was institutionalized through a collaborative initiative undertaken by the MNE and the PRA. Qur'an teaching and *hifz* education have continued to exist in line with the state's religious education policies (although their aims have differed in each period) since the early period.

It is considered beneficial that *hifz* education, whose historical foundations are known, be grounded from psycho-social, social, and cognitive perspectives in order to be better understood and made sense of today. Many elements such as with what kind of psychology and under whose influence the individual decides to pursue *hifz* education, the attitudes developed toward *hifz* education, interests, needs and expectations, anxiety and stress fall within the frame of psycho-social grounding. When examining the relationship between psychological, affective and social functions and *hifz* education, it can be better explained whether these are the cause or the result of memorization training (Avçilar, 2021; Bilgin, 2021; Faiza & Butt, 2022; Güneş & Avçilar, 2021). As understood from the research results examined in the article, psycho-social processes are being examined with an increasing number of scientific studies each passing day in order to increase the quality of *hifz* education, and data are being produced for students, parents, instructors, and policy-makers. Many variables such as the awareness, attitudes, modes of communication, motivations of *hifz* candidates, and the age of beginning *hifz* are determinative on the outcomes of the *hifz* education process.

Although *hifz* education is an experience completed through individual effort and will, it also affects society and sociality in various dimensions. While the respect and value shown to *hafiz* individuals in society crowns the rank obtained at the end of a difficult process, setting social prestige as the primary goal or society's attributing meanings to *hifz* beyond what it is can lead to the misunderstanding of the phenomenon of *hifz* and to placing an excessive burden on the shoulders of individuals receiving this education. For this reason, knowing what *hifz* education represents socially is valuable both for the more qualified continuation of the process and for the psychological well-being of *hifz* candidates.

The fact that *hifz* education is also a cognitive activity necessitates addressing this education process from a cognitive perspective as well. It is a reality identified in different studies that memorizing the Qur'anic text and the constant repetition of *hifz* to prevent forgetting have positive effects on the individual's cognitive development. In addition, findings that *hifz* is beneficial in reducing the negative effects of some brain disorders that appear with advancing age draw attention to the *hifz* process, not only because it is a religious necessity but also due to the concrete physical contributions it provides to the individual.

Although it is possible to increase the dimensions of the grounding made under four headings specifically for *hifz*, the focus has been on themes considered primary, with the consideration that it would increase the size of the article. When all the themes highlighted within the scope of grounding are considered together, it is necessary to investigate thoroughly before starting *hifz* education and to address the process in a multi-dimensional manner. The contributions and additional responsibilities that the education process to be undertaken will bring to the individual should be examined in multiple dimensions. At the end of all these processes, the individual performing *hifz*, the parent whose child is receiving *hifz* education, the institution providing *hifz* education, and the PRA organizing these educational processes should have clear and concrete answers to the question "Why should *hifz* be done?". This education should not be started without thoroughly investigating how success or failure in Quran memorization will affect the student's psychology, emotions, and relationships with his/her social environment.

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# 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>

**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
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>

### 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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**Ethics approval and consent to participate:** 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.

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# Bibliometric analysis of religious education articles affiliated with Türkiye indexed in Web of Science

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**Abstract:** This study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of religious education research affiliated with Türkiye and published in journals indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) databases (SSCI, AHCI, ESCI). The dataset consists of 302 articles identified through a systematic search using the keyword "religious education" in May 2025. After screening for relevance and data integrity, publications were examined in terms of annual distribution, author productivity, institutional contributions, journal sources, keyword patterns, and citation structures. Descriptive statistics, co-authorship networks, institutional collaboration maps, co-citation analyses, and keyword co-occurrence patterns were generated using VOSviewer. Findings reveal a remarkable increase in publication volume, particularly after 2016, coinciding with the inclusion of numerous Türkiye-based theology journals in the ESCI. Most articles were published in Türkiye-based journals, with Cumhuriyet Theology Journal, Hıtit Theology Journal, and Journal of Academic Researches in Religious Sciences emerging as the most productive sources. Sakarya University, Erciyes University, and Ankara University were the leading institutions in terms of publication output and citation influence. Co-authorship analysis shows that research in this field remains predominantly single-authored, though a limited group of scholars form central nodes in collaboration networks. Keyword analysis highlights "religious education," "higher religious education," and "values education" as dominant thematic clusters. Co-citation findings indicate that foundational works in religious education, national curricula, thesis literature, and methodological sources constitute the backbone of the field. Overall, the study demonstrates that WoS-indexed religious education publications from Türkiye exhibit growing international visibility, shaped by institutional developments and increased emphasis on indexed publishing. Future studies may further investigate thematic evolutions, methodological trends, and cross-national collaborations in the discipline.

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## Introduction

In contemporary usage, religious education is employed predominantly in two different contexts. The first refers to educational activities in which religion constitutes the primary subject matter. The second denotes an academic discipline in which religious education practices and their related topics and dimensions are examined within the framework of scientific criteria. In this respect, religious education is situated as a sub-department within faculties of theology. The process through which religious education became an academic subfield is grounded in structural changes that began with the establishment of the Faculty of Theology at Ankara University in 1949. At the time of its establishment, no course specifically devoted to religious education was included in the curriculum. In 1953, the course "Pedagogy" was added, and by the

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1955–56 academic year, the course titled “Methods of Education and Instruction” had also been introduced. From the 1973–74 academic year onwards, elective teacher-training formation courses such as Introduction to Education, History of Turkish Education, Turkish National Education System, Comparative Education, Educational Psychology, Educational Sociology, General Instructional Knowledge, and Teaching Practice began to be offered. Considering the process as a whole, it is noteworthy that no independent course or institutional structure specific to religious education existed; rather, the curriculum consisted primarily of general educational sciences courses. Nonetheless, the fact that these courses were affiliated with specific chairs within the faculty played a significant role in the formation of religious education as an academic discipline (Tosun, 2019).

The Pedagogy course, which entered the curriculum in 1953, was initially affiliated with the Chair of Psychology of Religion due to the lack of academic staff specialized in this field, and thus the name of the chair was changed to “Chair of Psychology of Religion and Pedagogy.” Following a restructuring in 1962, the course was transferred to the Chair of Systematic Philosophy, but in 1974 it was reassigned to the Chair of Psychology of Religion. Such structural changes were typically carried out depending on the availability of faculty members capable of conducting academic work in the relevant field. Indeed, when qualified academic personnel were absent, the continuation of the chair became impossible. Therefore, the presence of experts in the field emerges as a decisive factor in the institutionalization of an academic discipline. In this context, it is noteworthy that Beyza Düşünge (Bilgin), who began working as a Pedagogy assistant in 1965, later became the first professor in the field of religious education and assumed the foundational role in establishing the Department of Religious Education in Türkiye. Bilgin’s research focused on religious education under the Chairs of Psychology and Philosophy, making significant contributions to the academic institutionalization of the field (Tosun, 2019).

After Beyza Bilgin received the title of associate professor in 1979, the Faculty of Theology prepared a report requesting the establishment of a Chair of Religious Education and submitted it to the university senate. The report emphasized that graduates of the faculty were employed in various positions within both the Ministry of National Education and the Presidency of Religious Affairs, and that teacher-training courses were already being offered to students, thereby underscoring the need for such a structure. As a result of this application, the senate approved the establishment of the Chair of Religious Education on 13 May 1980 by decision no. 5203. Thus, prior to the founding of the Council of Higher Education in 1982 and the transition from the chair system to the department system, the last chair established at the Ankara University Faculty of Theology was the Chair of Religious Education (Tosun, 2019).

The institutionalization of religious education within the academic structure of the faculty developed simultaneously with the process through which Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (RCMK) courses became compulsory, and these two processes mutually reinforced each other. In subsequent years, new faculties of theology were established, particularly after 2010, when their number increased substantially. The employment of numerous faculty members in these institutions, the expansion of graduate programs, the proliferation of master’s and doctoral theses, publications produced for academic promotion, and ongoing political debates on religious education all contributed to the annual increase in academic studies in the field. Additionally, scholars from various disciplines have conducted research related to religious education, and such works are also included within the broader religious education literature.

Alongside numerous developments specific to the field of religious education, significant changes have taken place within the Turkish higher education system. One of these is the process of writing and publishing academic articles, which constitutes a major component of university activity. In recent years, regulations aimed at increasing both the quantity and quality of scientific articles have been introduced. Among these is the emphasis on publishing in journals indexed in widely recognized international databases that apply specific academic criteria. Such publications affect the position of a country within the global scientific community and enable the dissemination of produced knowledge internationally. As a result, both scholars and their universities gain visibility at the international level. One of the widely used indexing

systems in this regard is the Web of Science (WoS). However, it should be noted that criticisms have been made concerning the reliability of such indices, as they are operated by private companies and may not always meet all methodological expectations.

The reason for choosing the WoS index in this study is that it is a widely accepted database and one that is regarded by universities in Türkiye as an indicator of academic quality. In a sense, the academic agenda of the international scientific community is shaped by the articles published in journals indexed in such databases. In recent years, many journals, particularly those in the field of theology, have sought to be indexed in WoS. Compared with many other social science fields, theology journals are indexed in WoS at a relatively high rate. Although the inclusion of Türkiye-based journals in WoS has increased the number of Türkiye-affiliated articles indexed in the database, numerous Türkiye-affiliated religious education articles are also published in journals based in other countries.

In this study, a bibliometric analysis of Türkiye-affiliated articles published in journals indexed in WoS—an important platform for international academic visibility—is conducted in order to present both an overview of religious education research in Türkiye and a comprehensive bibliometric profile of Türkiye-affiliated publications within these indexed journals.

Bibliometrics is an analytical approach that enables the simultaneous examination of a large number of articles. Frequently used to analyze research trends in theses across various fields, this method has become more functional and practical with technological advancements. Accordingly, bibliometric analyses have been conducted on articles in numerous fields, including religious education. The first such study in this field was conducted by Kaymakcan and Unsal, who examined articles on religious education published in the journals of faculties of theology. Their study, aimed at facilitating easier access to scientific research in the field, analyzed 17 different theology faculty journals published between 1952 and 2003 and identified a total of 213 articles on religious education. Lists of articles, authors, and keywords were also provided (Kaymakcan & Unsal, 2004).

Other studies on the topic were conducted by Güneş, who examined religious education articles published in Türkiye across three separate studies. In one study, Güneş analyzed articles published in theology journals between 1925 and 2017 (Güneş, 2018a), while another examined articles published in non-theology journals (Güneş, 2018b). A further study analyzed religious education articles published in academic journals between 1925 and 2020 (Güneş, 2021). All three studies cover a comprehensive and extensive historical period. Güneş examined various dimensions of the articles, including the journals in which they were published, author information, subject areas, and research methods used. Another bibliometric study focused specifically on Türkiye-based theology journals indexed in WoS, analyzing all articles in these journals from multiple perspectives (Balıkçı et al., 2024).

In the present study, the aim is to identify various network structures through bibliometric analysis using the VOSviewer program. Accordingly, the research questions are as follows:

- Which authors collaborate, and how are co-authorship relationships distributed?
- What key concepts emerge in the bibliometric analysis, and how do these concepts reflect developmental trends in the field?
- Who are the most productive and most cited authors, and what forms of interaction and collaboration exist among them?
- Which institutional affiliations receive the highest number of citations, and what forms of cooperation and interaction are observed at the institutional level?

## 1. Method

This research was conducted based on a bibliometric analysis approach. Bibliometric analysis is a method that enables the evaluation of scientific output within a specific field through quantitative indicators and allows for the systematic examination of relationships among publications (Lee et al., 2020). It is well established that bibliometric analysis is widely used to investigate the developmental trajectory of scientific fields, levels of productivity, and academic impact (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). In this regard, the present study constitutes a descriptive research design grounded in bibliometric analysis. The population of the study consists of articles thematically related to "religious education," published in journals indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) databases (SSCI, AHCI, ESCI) and having at least one author affiliation indicating "Türkiye." A search was conducted in the Web of Science database in May 2025 using the keyword "religious education" in the Topic (TS) field, which yielded 340 articles. After removing irrelevant, duplicate, or incomplete records, a total of 302 articles were included in the analysis.

The data were classified according to authors, institutions, countries, journals, citation counts, and keywords; subsequently, the distribution of publications by year, citation performance, and collaboration networks were examined. In addition to descriptive statistics, author collaboration, institutional collaboration, co-citation analyses, and keyword co-occurrence analyses were conducted. VOSviewer software was used for network-based visualizations (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

## 2. Findings

### 2.1. Descriptive Statistics for Articles and Authors

A total of 302 articles were identified as a result of the search conducted within the scope of the determined criteria in the Web of Science database.

**Table 1.** *Distribution of Publications by Year*

Publication Years	Count
2025	7
2024	43
2023	34
2022	33
2021	32
2020	32
2019	29
2018	15
2017	14
2016	7
2015	5
2014	8
2013	10
2012	8
2011	4
2010	5
2009	5

2008	1
2007	6
2006	1
2005	1
2004	1
1999	1

When the numbers of articles published by year are examined, an overall increase is observed. In particular, a notable rise is visible after 2016, when Türkiye-based journals began to be indexed in the Web of Science ESCI database. This trend is also reflected in the indexes in which the articles appear. Among the 302 studies included in the analysis, 265 are indexed in ESCI, 30 in AHCI, 18 in SSCI, 2 in the Book Citation Index (BKCI), and 1 in SCI-E (the number exceeds 302 because some journals are indexed in more than one category).

Regarding the publication languages of the articles, 177 are in Turkish, 123 in English, and 2 in German. Since only Türkiye-based journals publish articles in Turkish, this indicates that more than half of the articles were published in journals based in Türkiye.

**Table 2.** *Researchers with the Most Publications on Religious Education and their Publication Numbers*

Researcher Profiles	Count
Zengin, Mahmut	10
Hendek, Abdurrahman	9
Genç, Muhammet Fatih	9
Osmanoğlu, Cemil	8
Koç, Ahmet	7
Oruç, Cemil	6
Meydan, Hasan	6
Öz, Ayhan	6
Ay, Mustafa Fatih	5
Çakmak, Ahmet	5
Kurttekin, Fatma	5
Kaymakcan, Recep	5
Akyürek, Süleyman	4
Selçuk, Mualla	4
Tosun, Cemal	4
Çinemre, Semra	4
Karasu, Teceli	4

The most prolific researcher in the dataset is Mahmut Zengin, with 10 articles, followed by Abdurrahman Hendek and Muhammet Fatih Genç with 9 articles each, Cemil Osmanoğlu with 8 articles, and Ahmet Koç with 7 articles. Cemil Oruç, Hasan Meydan, and Ayhan Öz each have 6 articles. Mustafa Fatih Ay, Ahmet Çakmak, Fatma Kurttekin, and Recep Kaymakcan have 5 publications each. Additionally, Süleyman Akyürek, Mualla Selçuk, Cemal Tosun, Semra Çinemre, and Teceli Karasu appear in the list with four articles each. The prevalence of WoS-indexed journals as a primary publication target is a recent phenomenon. Therefore, researchers with pioneering work predating this shift may exhibit relatively low WoS publication

metrics. The list, therefore, does not reflect the most productive or influential scholars in religious education overall, but solely the number of publications indexed in WoS. Moreover, as the search criterion was “religious education,” the list does not cover all publications authored by these researchers.

**Table 3.** *Number of Articles by Affiliation*

Affiliations	Count
Sakarya University	31
Erciyes University	18
Ankara University	17
Cumhuriyet University	17
Necmettin Erbakan University	13
Ministry of National Education Türkiye	11
Akdeniz University	10
İstanbul University	10
Muş Alparslan University	10
Ataturk University	9
Hittit University	8
Marmara University	8
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University	8
Trabzon University	7
Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University	7
Ondokuz Mayıs University	6
Selçuk University	6
Şırnak University	6

The table presents the institutional distribution of Web of Science–indexed publications in the field of religious education. Sakarya University makes the largest contribution with 31 articles, playing a leading role in publication activity in this area. It is followed by Erciyes University (18), Ankara University (17), and Cumhuriyet University (17). Necmettin Erbakan University (13), the Ministry of National Education (11), as well as Akdeniz University, İstanbul University, and Muş Alparslan University (each with 10 articles) are also noteworthy. This distribution indicates that academic production in the field of religious education is spread across various universities, although some institutions pursue a more intensive and systematic publication policy. It should be noted that factors such as the number of faculty members and their academic career stage may influence publication output.

**Table 4.** *Number of Articles Published by Journal*

Publication Titles	Count
Cumhuriyet Theology Journal / Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi	51
Hittit Theology Journal / Hittit İlahiyat Dergisi	40
Journal of Academic Research in Religious Sciences / Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi	36
Bilimname	32
Eskiyeni	21
Journal of İlahiyat Researches / İlahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi	18

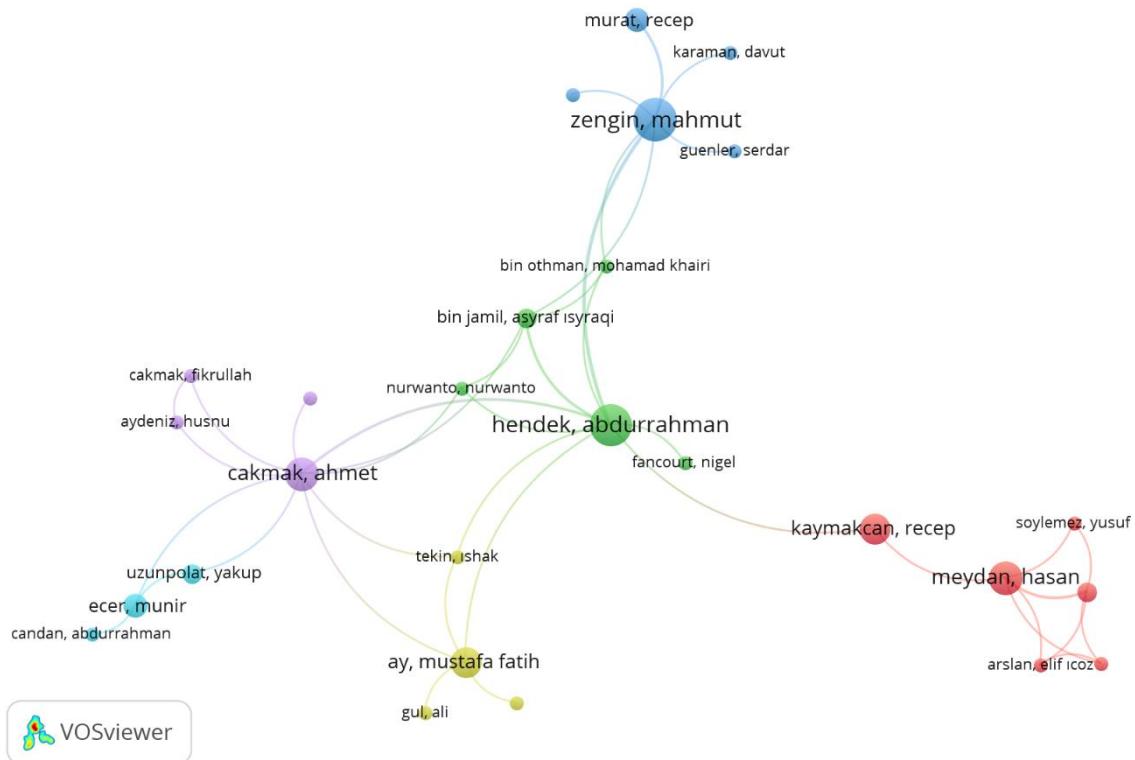
Journal of Sakarya University Faculty of Theology / Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi	17
Journal of Şırnak University Faculty of Theology / Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi	13
Kocatepe İslami İlimler Dergisi / Journal of Kocatepe Islamic Sciences	10
British Journal of Religious Education	7
Religions	7
Religious Education	6
Journal of Beliefs Values	5
İlahiyat Studies	4
Religion Education	3
Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri / Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice	2
Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum	2
Pegem Eğitim ve Öğretim Dergisi / Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction	2

This table presents the distribution of Web of Science-indexed publications in religious education by journals. The highest number of publications appears in Cumhuriyet Theology Journal with 51 articles. It is followed by Hıtit Theology Journal (40 articles), Journal of Academic Research in Religious Sciences (36), Bilimname (32), and Eskiyyeni (21). The predominance of Türkiye-based theology faculty journals indicates that the majority of academic output in the field is concentrated in national journals.

On the other hand, there is also a noteworthy number of publications in international journals such as the British Journal of Religious Education (7), Religions (7), Religious Education (6), and the Journal of Beliefs & Values (5). Publications in these journals highlight the increasing visibility of Turkish scholars in international academic platforms. Overall, the table reveals that while most publications are clustered in local academic journals, there is a growing presence in international outlets.

## 2.2. Co-Authorship Analysis

The analysis shows that there are 296 authors in the dataset, of whom 27 are connected to each other through co-authorship networks.

**Figure 1. Co-Authorship Analysis**

Based on the co-authorship analysis, it is observed that most studies in the field of religious education are single-authored, with only a small number of academics collaborating on publications. Mahmut Zengin and Abdurrahman Hendek, who stand out as the two most prolific authors within the WoS scope in the field of religious education, also appear prominently in terms of co-authorship.

### 2.3. Distribution of Publications by Country

Although all studies included in the research contain at least one Türkiye-affiliated author, contributions from authors in other countries are also present. When the distribution of authors by country is examined, it is seen that researchers from eight different countries outside Türkiye have contributed. These countries and their respective article counts are as follows: United Kingdom (3), Malaysia (2), Indonesia (2), Canada (1), France (1), Kyrgyzstan (1), the Netherlands (1), and Ireland (1).

### 2.4. Keyword Analysis

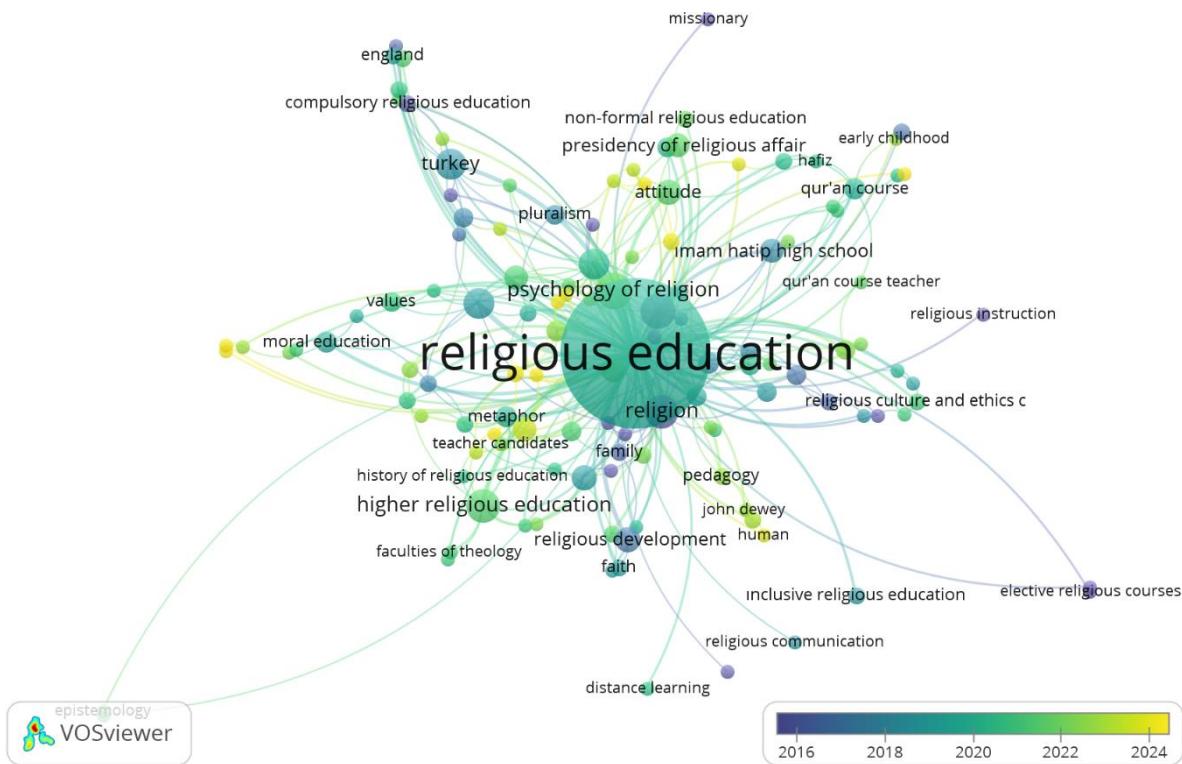
A total of 906 keywords were used across the publications included in the study, of which 128 were used at least twice. Among these, 126 keywords were found to be interconnected. The most frequently used keyword is “religious education,” appearing in 231 studies. Although this is expected given that the study focuses on religious education publications, it is also evident that the editorial practices of many journals in Türkiye—specifically the requirement that authors select a primary keyword directly aligned with the journal’s main field—significantly influence this outcome. While this practice increases consistency, it does not always accurately reflect the specific topic classification of the study. This situation is also related to the fact that Türkiye has not yet developed more specialized, narrowly focused academic journals.

Other frequently used keywords include: higher religious education, psychology of religion, religion, education, Islam, values education, Turkey (Türkiye), attitude, imam hatip high school, metaphor, Qur'an course, scale, theology, curriculum, faculty of theology, Germany, Presidency of Religious Affairs, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge, religious development. A noteworthy point here is the use of keywords such as scale, attitude, and metaphor. None of these terms directly correspond to a specific topic within religious education. Because these terms do not represent a field-specific concept, their use as keywords is not always appropriate. The frequency of keyword usage by year is presented in the figure.

**Table 5. Keyword Analysis**

Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
religious education	231	327
higher religious education	12	25
psychology of religion	14	24
religion	12	24
education	13	22
Islam	10	22
values education	10	20
Turkey (Türkiye)	10	19
attitude	7	17
imam hatip high school	6	13
metaphor	5	12
Qur'an course	5	12
scale	6	12
theology	7	12
curriculum	5	11
faculty of theology	4	11
Germany	6	11
Presidency of Religious Affairs	6	11
Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge	6	11
religious development	7	11

The concept of "religious education" is centrally positioned, forming the main theme of the entire body of literature. The structure of the figure and the node placements illustrate how the scholarly focus has shifted over time: Core concepts located centrally and represented by larger nodes, such as Religious Education, Psychology of Religion, Pluralism, Turkey, and Moral Education, represent the foundational topics heavily addressed in the early stages of the study period. In contrast, concepts positioned further from the center and represented by relatively smaller nodes, such as Distance Learning, Inclusive Religious Education, Elective Religious Courses, and Early Childhood, indicate current trends that have been introduced or gained importance in the literature in recent years. This shift clearly demonstrates that religious education research has expanded from its initial focus on theoretical foundations and country-specific contexts to encompass contemporary pedagogical applications centered on technology utilization, curriculum flexibility, and diverse student groups in recent years.

**Figure 2. Bibliometric Network of most used Keyword Analysis**

## 2.5. Author Citation Analysis

A total of 296 different researchers appeared as authors in the 302 studies included in the analysis. Based on the criterion of at least one publication and one citation, 146 authors met these conditions, of whom 63 were found to be interconnected.

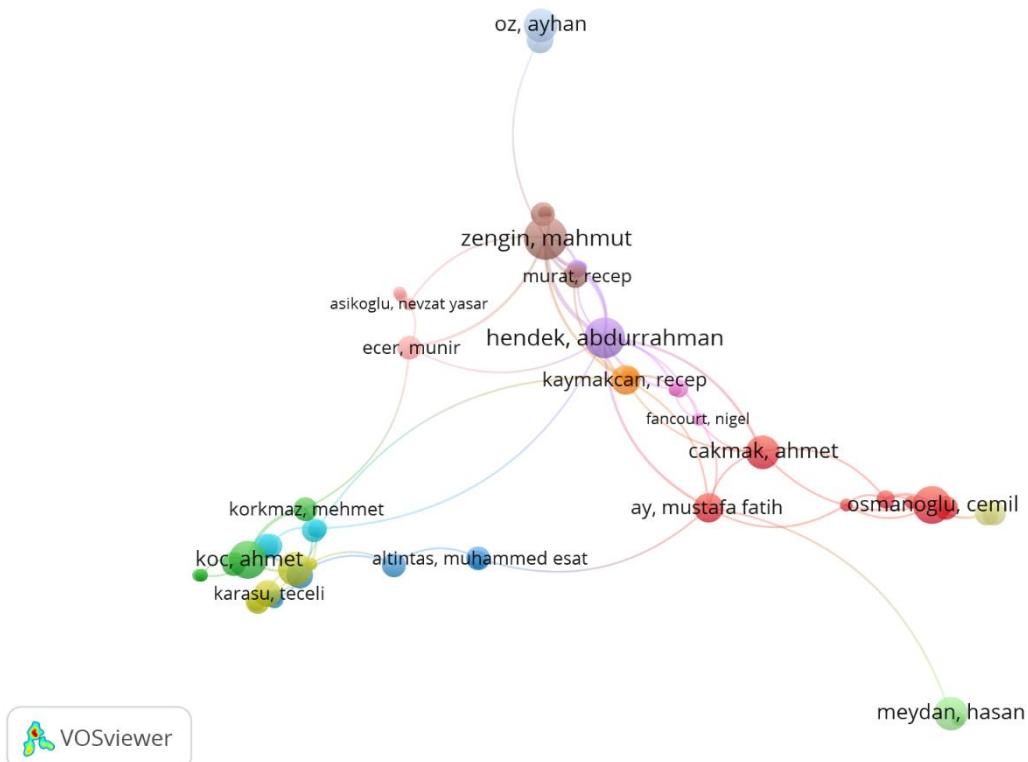
**Table 6. Author Citation Analysis**

Author	Documents	Cites	Total Link Strength
Hendek, Abdurrahman	9	16	24
Zengin, Mahmut	10	25	23
Kaymakcan, Recep	5	12	14
Koç, Ahmet	8	14	11
Osmanoğlu, Cemil	8	14	11
Ay, Mustafa Fatih	5	4	8
Çakmak, Ahmet	6	1	7
Meydan, Hasan	6	6	7
Tosun, Cemal	4	8	7
Algur, Hüseyin	2	1	6
Çapçıoğlu, Fatma	1	7	6
Furat, Ayşe Zişan	2	2	6
Karasu, Teceli	4	6	6
Korkmaz, Mehmet	3	1	6
Akbulut, Olgun	1	16	5

Ecer, Münim	3	1	5
Fancourt, Nigel	1	4	5
Uşal, Zeynep Oya	1	16	5
Bin Othman, Mohamad Khairi	1	3	4
Genç, M. Fatih	6	4	4

An examination of the author citation network reveals that the central nodes with the highest link strength are Abdurrahman Hendek and Mahmut Zengin. These two scholars constitute the primary reference points of the field, forming the most intensive citation relationships with other researchers. They are followed by Recep Kaymakcan, Ahmet Koç, and Cemil Osmanoğlu, who establish strong connections with the core and thus occupy the second tier of the network. Researchers such as Mustafa Fatih Ay, Ahmet Çakmak, Hasan Meydan, and Cemal Tosun are positioned in the third tier with more limited link strengths, functioning as nodes that reinforce the influence of the core but do not independently shape the overall network structure.

**Figure 3. Bibliometric Network of Author Citation Analysis**



## 2.6. Institutional Citation and Collaboration Network Analysis

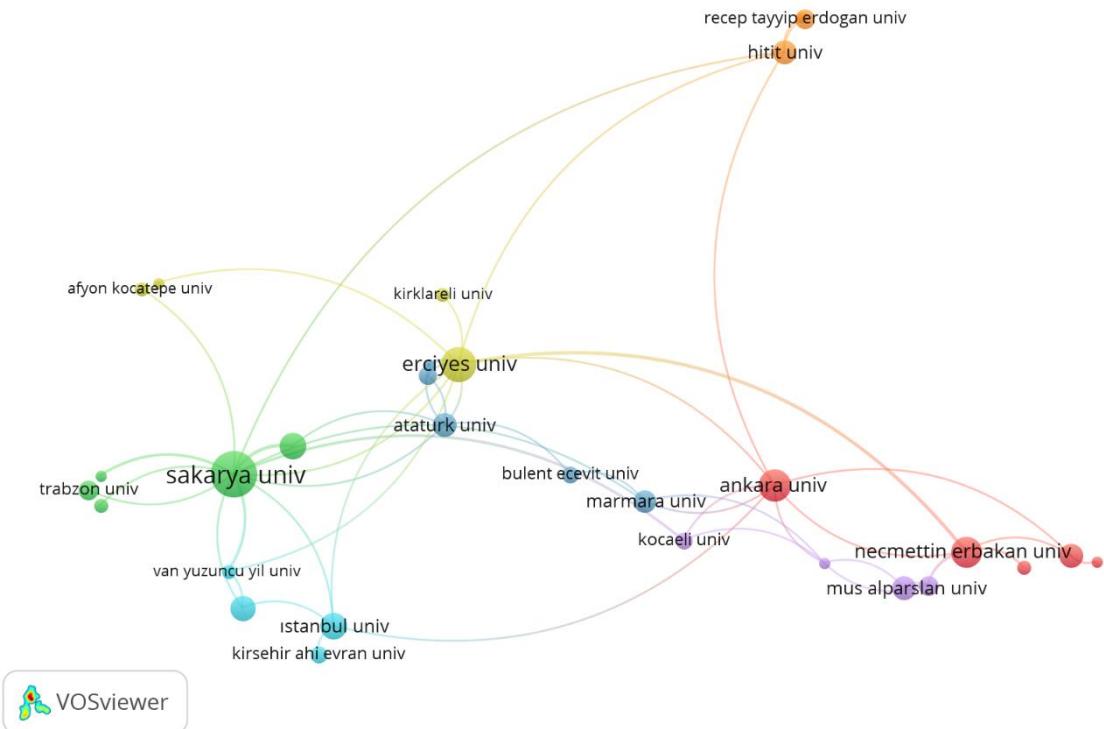
It was identified that the articles included in the study were affiliated with 146 different institutions. When the criteria of at least two publications and one citation were applied, 47 institutions met these conditions, and 30 of these demonstrated institutional citation connections. An examination of the institutional citation network shows that the most productive institution is Sakarya University, with 30 publications; it also occupies a central position in the network with 48 citations and a total link strength of 18. Sakarya is followed by Erciyes University, which, despite having 18 publications and a relatively lower citation count, holds a strong position in the collaboration network with a link strength of 15.

**Table 8. Institutional Citation Analysis**

Affiliations	Documents	Cites	Total Link Strength
Sakarya University	30	48	18
Erciyes University	18	17	15
Ankara University	15	46	8
Necmettin Erbakan University	13	9	8
Muş Alparslan University	10	12	7
Cumhuriyet University	17	25	6
Atatürk University	8	2	6
Giresun University	2	1	5
Hittit University	8	5	5
İstanbul University	10	2	5
Akdeniz University	10	5	4
Kocaeli University	4	9	4
Marmara University	7	16	4
Selçuk University	6	13	4
Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	3	2	4
Presidency of Religious Affairs	5	1	3
Afyon Kocatepe University	3	1	2
Bülent Ecevit University	4	2	2

Ankara University ranks third in productivity with 15 publications and has a notably high citation count of 46. However, its total link strength of 8 suggests that it is more prominently represented by single-authored works rather than collaborative outputs. Institutions such as Necmettin Erbakan University, Atatürk University, and Hittit University form the second tier with comparatively fewer citations and moderate link strengths. Universities such as Giresun University and Muş Alparslan University, though producing a smaller number of publications, maintain visibility on the periphery of the network with a link strength of 5.

İstanbul University, Akdeniz University, Kocaeli University, Marmara University, and Selçuk University serve as supportive elements in the network with moderate levels of productivity and citation counts. Cumhuriyet University similarly demonstrates a medium-level impact, whereas institutional actors such as the Presidency of Religious Affairs play a more limited role due to lower citation and connection levels.

**Figure 4.** Institutional Citation and Collaboration Network Analysis

Overall, the network displays a clear core-periphery structure in which Sakarya University and Erciyes University occupy the central positions, Ankara University stands out with high citation impact but lower connectivity, and the peripheral universities contribute in a limited yet diversifying manner.

## 2.7. Co-Cited References Analysis

A total of 11,227 references were identified as sources cited by the articles included in the study. It should be noted that this number is not absolutely precise due to issues arising from citation formatting inconsistencies. As citation systems become more standardized in future years, such figures will be determined more accurately. When the references are examined based on the criterion that a source must have received at least four citations, 104 publications meet this requirement, and 103 of them are interconnected.

**Table 9.** Co-Cited References Analysis

References	Cites	Total Link Strength
[anonymous], thesis	62	155
[anonymous], Tebliğler Dergisi	9	63
Zengin, M. (2013). Öğrencilerin Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersine Yönelik Tutumlarının Çeşitli Değişkenler Açısından İncelenmesi. <i>Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi</i> , 11(25), 271-301	6	49

Kaya, M. (2001) İlköğretim ve Ortaöğretim Öğrencilerinin Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersine Karşı Tutumları. Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, 12/12-13 (Nisan 2001), 43-78.	5	46
[anonymous], İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi	4	41
Karasar, N. (2012). <i>Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemi: Kavramlar, İlkeler, Teknikler</i> . Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık.	8	40
Altaş, N. Türkiye'de Zorunlu Din Eğitimini Yapılandıran Süreç, Hedefler ve Yeni Yöntem Anlayışları 1980-2001. <i>Dini Araştırmalar</i> 4/12 (2002).	6	38
Arıcı, İ. Öğrencilerin İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretmenine Yönelik Tutumları. Fırat Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi 13/1 (2008).	4	38
Aydın, M. Ş. (2017). <i>Din eğitimi bilimi</i> . Kayseri: Kimlik Yayıncıları	11	37
Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2008). <i>Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri</i> . Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık.	16	36
Tabachnick, B. G. & Fidell, L. S. (2007). <i>Using Multivariate Statistics</i> (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.	8	35
Yaşlıoğlu, M. M. (2017). Sosyal Bilimlerde Faktör Analizi ve Geçerlilik: Keşfedici ve Doğrulayıcı Faktör Analizlerinin Kullanılması. İstanbul Üniversitesi İşletme Fakültesi Dergisi, 46, 74-85.	6	35
[anonymous], 2011, thesis	5	34
Peker, H. (2003). <i>Din Psikolojisi</i> . Çamlıca Yayıncılık.	4	34
Çokluk, Ö., Şekercioğlu, G., & Büyüköztürk, Ş. (2021). <i>Sosyal Bilimler İçin Çok Değişkenli İstatistiksel Analiz Teknikleri: STATA, SPSS ve R Uygulamaları</i> . Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık.	4	33
Yapıcı, A. (2020). <i>Şüphe ve İnanç Kıcısında Gençlerin Din ve Dindarlık Algıları</i> . İlahiyat Akademi Dergisi, 12, 1-44.	4	33
[anonymous], Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi	8	31
Büyüköztürk, Ş., Çokluk, Ö. & Köklü, N. (2020). <i>Sosyal Bilimler için İstatistik</i> (24. baskı). Ankara: Pegem Akademi.	5	31
Tosun, Cemal (2005). <i>Din Eğitimi Bilimine Giriş</i> . Ankara: Pegem Akademi.	8	31
Büyüköztürk, Ş., Kılıç Çakmak, E., Akgün, Ö. E., Karadeniz, Ş. ve Demirel, F. (2020). <i>Eğitimde Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri</i> (27. Baskı). Ankara: Pegem Akademi Yayıncılık.	4	30

In terms of cited sources, the reference with the highest impact is “[anonymous], thesis,” which received 62 citations and a total link strength of 155, indicating that theses constitute a foundational body of work frequently utilized in the field. This is followed by “[anonymous], Tebliğler Dergisi,” with 9 citations and 63 link strength, suggesting the widespread use of sources grounded in educational regulations and official instructional guidelines. An important point here is that the lack of standardization in citation styles makes it difficult to distinguish between theses and citations to Tebliğler Dergisi. Therefore, this data is best interpreted not as individual references but as evidence that theses and educational regulatory documents collectively receive a substantial number of citations.

Among individual authored works, Zengin's 2013 article in Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi (6 citations, 49 link strength) and Kaya's 2001 publication (5 citations, 46 link strength) stand out, illustrating their frequent use within the local literature on values education and religious education. Methodological sources such as Karasar's *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (8 citations, 40 link strength), Yıldırım and Şimşek's *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (16 citations, 36 link strength), Tabachnick and Fidell's *Using Multivariate Statistics* (8 citations, 35 link strength), and Büyüköztürk's methodology books highlight the predominance of methodological foundations in the referenced works. Additionally, foundational field

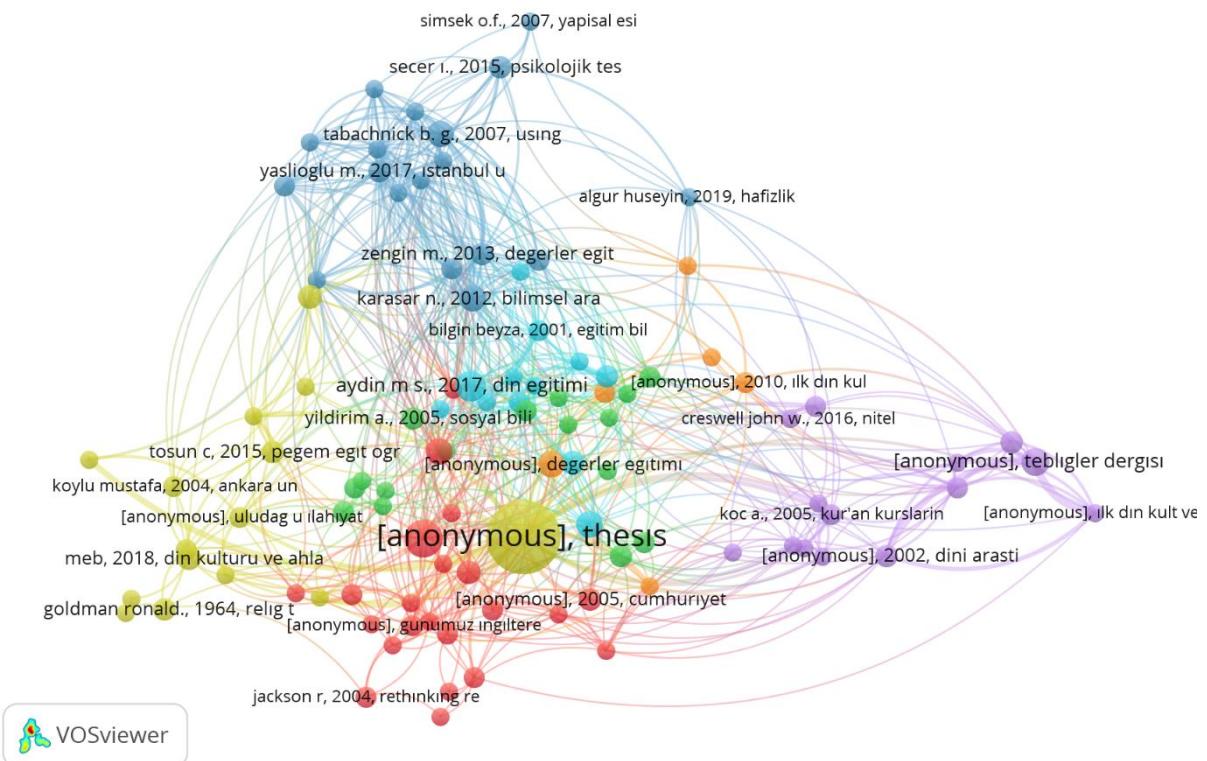
sources such as Aydin's Din Eğitimi Bilimi (11 citations, 37 link strength), Tosun's Din Eğitimi Bilimine Giriş (8 citations, 31 link strength), and Peker's Din Psikolojisi (4 citations, 34 link strength) are also frequently cited.

Overall, the citation network points to three main clusters:

- (1) original local works such as theses and journal articles,
- (2) methodological literature including Karasar, Yıldırım & Şimşek, and Büyüköztürk,
- (3) core religious education and religious psychology sources including Aydin, Tosun, and Peker.

This structure indicates that the studies draw simultaneously on both local literature and methodological frameworks.

**Figure 5. Co-Cited References Network Analysis**



## 2.8 Co-Cited Authors

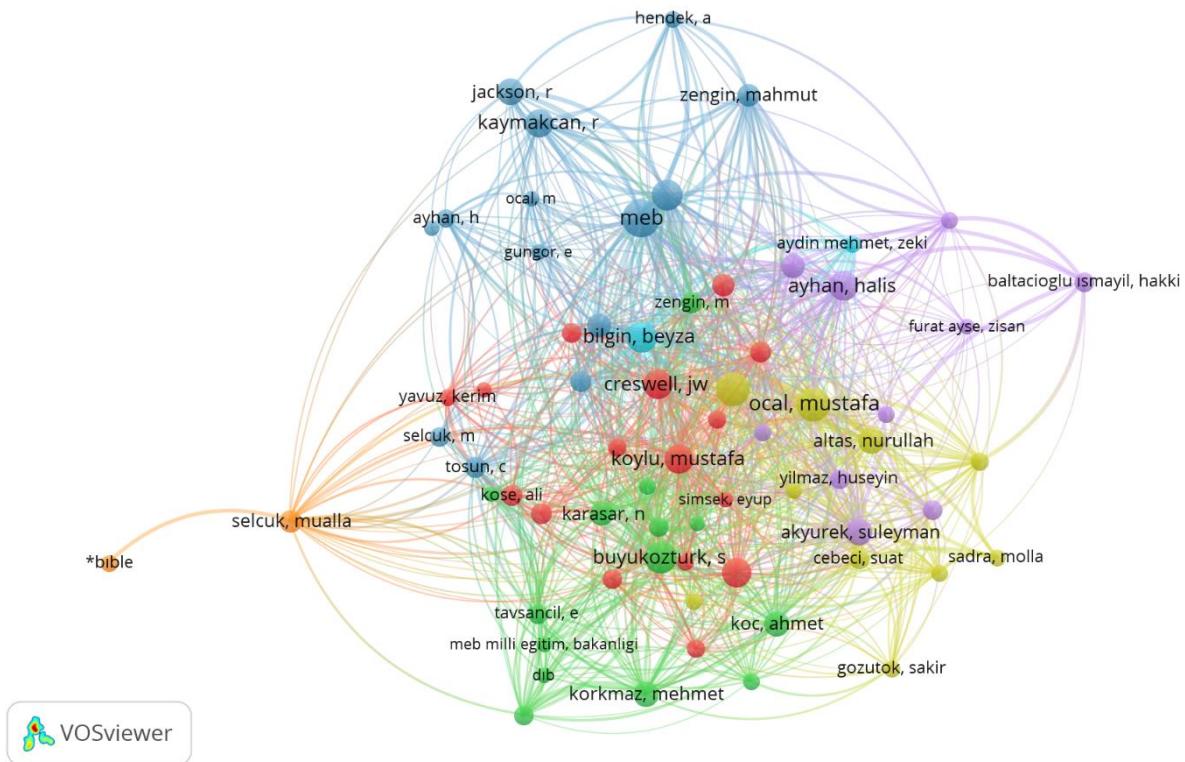
When the authors of the publications cited by the articles included in the study are examined, a total of 7,495 authors were identified. Based on the criterion that an author must be cited in at least 10 different articles, 69 authors met this requirement, and 68 of them were found to be connected to one another.

**Table 9. Co-Cited Authors**

Author	Cites	Total Link Strength
Zengin, Mahmut	38	335
Bilgin, Beyza	38	333
Öcal, Mustafa	45	327
Ministry of National Education	56	315
Tosun, Cemal	45	296
Kaymakcan, Recep	69	438
Ayhan, Halis	34	254
Büyüköztürk, Şener	42	236
Korkmaz, Mehmet	26	210
Köylü, Mustafa	36	199
Akyürek, Süleyman	28	197
Altaş, Nurullah	29	194
Creswell, J.W.	33	174
Koç, Ahmet	26	169
Zengin, Zeki Salih	22	154
Presidency of Religious Affairs	15	150
Karasar, Niyazi	23	147
Selçuk, Mualla	20	132

An examination of the co-cited authors reveals that the central nodes with the highest link strength in the network are Mahmut Zengin (38 citations, 338 link strength), Beyza Bilgin (38 citations, 333 link strength), and Mustafa Öcal (45 citations, 327 link strength). In addition to these, the Ministry of National Education (56 citations, 315 link strength) and Cemal Tosun (45 citations, 296 link strength) also stand out. This indicates that these authors and institutions constitute the most frequently co-referenced sources in the research, forming the core structure of the literature. Recep Kaymakcan (69 citations, 438 link strength), Halis Ayhan (34 citations, 254 link strength), Şener Büyüköztürk (42 citations, 236 link strength), and Mehmet Korkmaz (26 citations, 210 link strength) occupy the second tier of the network, demonstrating strong visibility through their methodological and theoretical contributions. Mustafa Köylü (36 citations, 199 link strength) and Süleyman Akyürek (28 citations, 197 link strength) are likewise frequently co-cited researchers.

**Figure 6. Co-Cited Authors Network Analysis**



At the more peripheral level are names such as Nurullah Altaş (29 citations, 194 link strength), J.W. Creswell (33 citations, 174 link strength), and Ahmet Koç (26 citations, 169 link strength). Although their link strength is relatively lower, they nonetheless make influential contributions to the field. The presence of Niyazi Karasar (23 citations, 147 link strength) and Creswell further demonstrates that methodological sources constitute an important common point of reference within the literature. Overall, the network exhibits a distinct core-periphery structure in which Bilgin, Öcal, the Ministry of National Education, and Tosun are situated at the center, surrounded by a second tier including Kaymakcan, Ayhan, and Büyüköztürk, while figures such as Zengin, Koç, and Karasar serve supportive roles in the peripheral layer.

## Conclusion

This article presents a bibliometric analysis of religious education-related studies published in journals indexed in the Web of Science (WoS). The analysis includes a total of 302 articles, most of which were authored by faculty members working in departments of religious education. It should be noted that the study does not encompass all publications produced by scholars in the field of religious education; rather, it covers only those articles that fall specifically under the category of religious education.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of religious education articles published in WoS-indexed journals. While this development indicates that Turkish scholars in the field of religious education have begun to publish more frequently at the international level, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the inclusion of many theology journals in Türkiye in the ESCI has contributed substantially to this increase. Several findings support this conclusion. One such finding is that the journals with the highest number of publications are theology journals based in Türkiye. Another supporting indicator is that the most productive universities in the dataset are those whose faculty journals are indexed within the ESCI.

It may be asserted that the majority of religious education articles published in WoS journals are authored by a new generation of religious education scholars. The increasing emphasis on indexed publication, coupled with institutional encouragement in recent years, has led academics to intentionally target WoS-indexed journals. However, when citation patterns are examined, it is evident that foundational works and pioneering scholars in the field of religious education continue to be frequently referenced.

In conclusion, the incentives encouraging publication in WoS-indexed journals appear to have initiated a new transformation in the field. Future research would benefit from examining the details of this transformation. In particular, more detailed analyses focusing on the topics studied, methods employed, and samples or participant groups used in field research are recommended.

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