



Integrating Turath and Modern Knowledge in Islamic Higher Education

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Article Information:

Received January 15, 2026

Revised February 20, 2026

Accepted March 16, 2026

Keywords: *Turath, Islamic education, curriculum integration, higher education, maqasid al-shari'ah*

Abstract

Islamic higher education encounters a continuous challenge in integrating classical Islamic heritage (Turath) with modern knowledge in a consistent and meaningful way. This study examines to which extent Islamic education programs balance Turath (classical Islamic heritage) and modern knowledge in the Faculties of Sharia and Islamic Studies at the University of Zawia, Libya. Using a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, quantitative data were collected from 350 students through a structured questionnaire, followed by qualitative interviews with 20 lecturers to provide deep insights. The findings indicate that students demonstrate a high appreciation for both Turath ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.79$) and modern knowledge ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.96$), reflecting strong support for an integrative model of Islamic education. However, curriculum balance was rated at a moderate level ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.07$), suggesting that integration between the two domains remains insufficient. Teaching practices were also perceived as moderately effective ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.96$), with limitations in fostering critical engagement and application. Furthermore, students identified significant challenges ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.90$), particularly the overreliance on memorization, weak linkage between theory and practice, and limited institutional coordination. Qualitative findings confirm that these challenges rooted in structural fragmentation, lack of a unified curriculum framework, and insufficient pedagogical training. The study concludes that while the conceptual foundation for integration exists, effective implementation requires systematic curriculum reform, pedagogical innovation, and institutional integration.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education systems were challenged to balance the preservation of intellectual traditions with the demands of rapidly changing social, economic, and technological contexts. In Islamic higher education, this challenge has a distinctive form where institutions are expected not only to transmit Turath (classical Islamic heritage) but also to engage with contemporary knowledge in ways that remain faithful to Islamic epistemological foundations. The tension between continuity and change has long been recognized in the literature on Islamic education, where scholars have emphasized that the strength of the tradition lies in its ability to sustain a living connection between inherited knowledge and present realities (Halstead, 2004). At the same time, global educational trends increasingly call for the development of critical thinking, interdisciplinary knowledge, and practical competencies that enable graduates to respond effectively to modern challenges

How to cite:

Barkah, S., Masoud, M., Aladi, S., Ayad, N., Alrumayh, S., Albshkar, H., Masuwd, M. (2026). Integrating Turath and Modern Knowledge in Islamic Higher Education. *Khalifa: Journal of Islamic Education*, 10(1), 1-15.

E-ISSN:

2549-4783

Published by:

Islamic Studies and Development Center Universitas Negeri Padang

(Aladi & Barkah, 2026; Alouzi et al., 2026). Within this broader context, Islamic higher education institutions face the complex task of integrating classical scholarship with contemporary academic and professional demands.

In the Libyan context, this challenge is particularly significant. Universities, including the University of Zawia, operate within a socio-cultural environment where Islamic identity plays a central role in shaping educational priorities, while at the same time confronting the pressures of modernization, labor market expectations, and national development needs (Abraham & Baroud, 2025; Almajri et al., 2025; Alsaeh et al., 2026). Previous studies in Muslim educational contexts have identified a persistent duality between traditional religious sciences and modern disciplines, often resulting in fragmented curricula and limited integration between the two domains (Sahin, 2018; Alouzi, 2024). In Libya, however, empirical research on how this duality is experienced within faculties of Sharia and Islamic Studies remains limited (Alrumayh et al., 2025; Kasheem et al., 2025; Maati et al., 2025). While there is a general assumption that Islamic education should both preserve Turath and engage contemporary knowledge, there is insufficient evidence on whether this balance is actually achieved at the level of curriculum design, teaching practices, and student learning experiences (Abdulghani et al., 2025; Masoud et al., 2025; Abdullaha et al., 2026). This lack of context-specific research represents a critical gap, particularly in light of ongoing efforts to reform higher education and enhance its relevance to societal needs.

Accordingly, this study investigates the problem of how Turath and modern knowledge are integrated within Islamic education programs at the University of Zawia. Specifically, It focuses on students' perceptions of both knowledge domains, the extent of curriculum integration, and the pedagogical and institutional challenges affecting this process. The study is guided by the following main research question: To what extent do Islamic education programs in the Faculties of Sharia and Islamic Studies achieve a meaningful balance between classical heritage and modern knowledge? To address this question, the study assesses the perceived importance of Turath and modern knowledge, evaluates curriculum balance and teaching practices, and identifies the key challenges affecting integration from both student and lecturer perspectives.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it advances the ongoing discourse on the integration of revealed and acquired knowledge, a central concern in Islamic educational thought since the work of Al-Attas (1991). Empirically, it offers context-sensitive evidence from Libya, a setting that remains underrepresented in the international literature on Islamic education (Yahya et al., 2025; Masuwd et al., 2026; Ayad et al., 2026). Practically, the findings have implications for curriculum development, pedagogical reform, and institutional policy within faculties of Sharia and Islamic Studies. By identifying the gap between conceptual acceptance and practical implementation, the study provides a foundation for developing more coherent, integrative, and context-responsive models of Islamic higher education. Ultimately, it contributes to the broader goal of ensuring that Islamic education remains both authentically rooted in its tradition and effectively engaged with contemporary realities.

METHODS

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, specifically an explanatory sequential approach, in order to investigate the balance between Turath (classical Islamic heritage) and modern knowledge in the Faculties of Sharia and Islamic

Studies at the University of Zawia. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to first obtain a broad quantitative understanding of students' perceptions and then deepen and explain these findings through qualitative insights from lecturers (Clark, 2017). The quantitative phase focuses on measuring key dimensions such as the importance of Turath, the role of modern knowledge, curriculum balance, teaching practices, and perceived challenges. The qualitative phase complements this by exploring how lecturers interpret these issues in practice, thereby providing a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of the phenomenon (Elkhaira et al., 2020; Engkizar et al., 2018; Engkizar et al., 2025; Soicher et al., 2024). To clarify the research stages, the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design is illustrated in the diagram below.

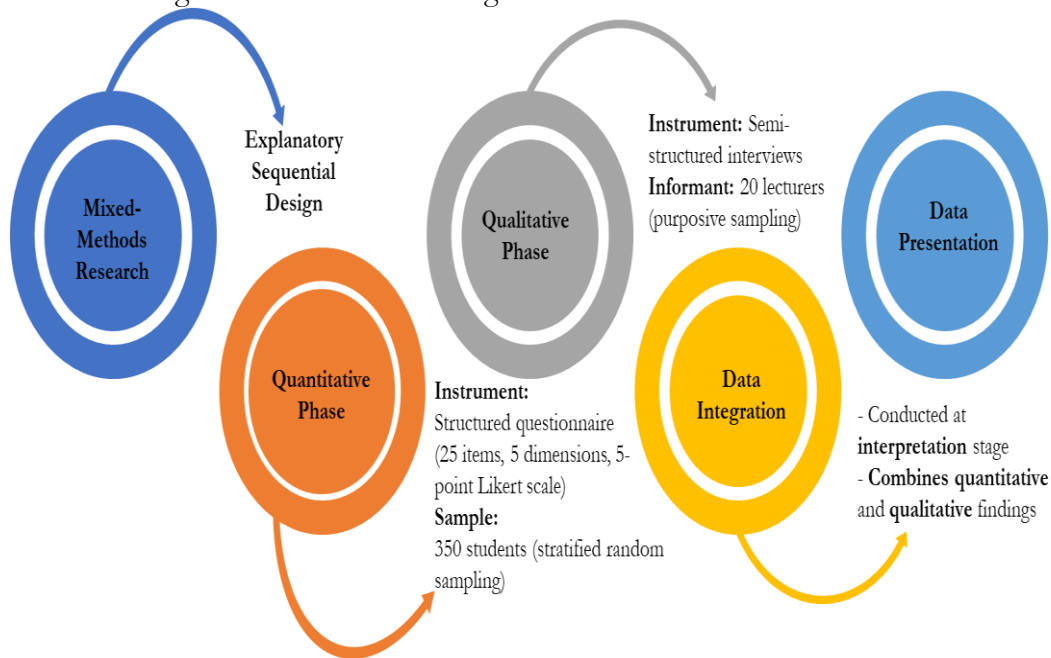


Fig 1. Research methodology flowchart mixed-methods design

The quantitative component of the study is based on a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 350 students, selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across departments and academic levels. The instrument consists of 25 items organized into five dimensions and measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The purpose of the quantitative data was to measure students' perceptions of the importance of Turath and modern knowledge, assess the perceived level of curriculum integration, and identify the main patterns in teaching practices and challenges. The validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review in Islamic education and research methodology, as expert judgment is commonly used to strengthen content validity in survey-based educational research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ritonga et al., 2024).

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to determine the level of agreement for each dimension. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded acceptable internal consistency coefficients above 0.70, a threshold widely considered acceptable for social science research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to determine the level of agreement for each dimension, as these measures are

appropriate for summarizing Likert-scale responses and identifying general response trends (Boone & Boone, 2012).

The qualitative component involves semi-structured interviews with 20 lecturers, selected purposively based on their teaching experience in both classical Islamic sciences and contemporary subjects. The purpose of the qualitative data is to provide in-depth insights into how lecturers interpret curriculum integration, teaching practices, and the challenges identified in the quantitative results. The data consist of narrative responses collected through open-ended interview questions, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives.

The interviews were designed to explore lecturers' perspectives on curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and challenges in integrating Turath with modern knowledge. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding responses, identifying recurring patterns, and developing interpretive themes that explain and enrich the quantitative findings. The analysis was conducted through systematic coding procedures to organize and categorize the data (Eltoukhi et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2026). The integration of both datasets occurred at the interpretation stage, where qualitative insights were used to contextualize statistical results and provide a deeper explanation of the observed trends. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Together, this mixed-methods approach enhances the validity and depth of the research by combining measurable trends with lived academic experience (Dawadi et al., 2021; Seyfried & Reith, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Importance of Turath in Islamic Education

As shown in Table 1, students reported a high overall perception of the importance of Turath in Islamic education ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.79$). The highest-rated statement was that studying classical Islamic heritage is essential for students of Sharia and Islamic Studies ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.75$), followed closely by the view that Turath helps students understand the foundations of Islamic sciences and strengthens their Islamic identity and scholarly authenticity (both $M = 4.39$). Even the lowest-rated item, concerning the continued relevance of classical texts to contemporary issues, remained firmly in the high range ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.90$). Statistically, this pattern indicates not only strong endorsement of Turath across the sample, but also relative consistency in students' responses, since all item means cluster above 4.00 and the standard deviations remain below 1.00. This suggests that attachment to classical heritage is not a marginal or contested tendency among respondents, but rather a widely shared orientation.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Turath in Islamic Education (n = 350)

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Studying classical Islamic heritage is essential for students of Sharia and Islamic Studies	4.46	0.75	High
Turath helps students understand the foundations of Islamic sciences	4.39	0.79	High
Classical texts remain relevant for contemporary issues	4.16	0.90	High
The curriculum should preserve strong attention to traditional sources	4.29	0.84	High

Turath strengthens students' Islamic identity and scholarly authenticity	4.39	0.78	High
Overall Mean	4.34	0.79	High

These findings show that students view Turath not as an obsolete legacy but as the intellectual foundation of disciplines such as *fiqh*, *usul al-fiqh*, *tafsir*, and *hadith*. Their strong endorsement reflects confidence in the epistemological legitimacy of the classical Islamic sciences and in the role of Turath in preserving methodological discipline, scholarly authenticity, and Islamic identity. The interview data reinforce this interpretation. One lecturer stated, “*Turath is not optional; it is the foundation upon which all Islamic sciences are built. Without it, students lose methodological depth*” (Lecturer 7). Another emphasized that Turath connects students to the scholarly tradition and strengthens their sense of belonging (Lecturer 12), while a third stressed that renewal must remain connected to inherited authority rather than replace it (Lecturer 3).

Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that both students and lecturers locate the legitimacy of Islamic higher education in sustained engagement with Turath. This supports the view that Islamic education remains strongly shaped by a Turath-centered epistemology in which authoritative texts, scholarly lineage, and *adab* remain central to learning (Boyle, 2004; Alrumayh, 2025; Achmadin et al., 2025). The results also reflect the continuing significance of *ta'sil*, or grounding learning in recognized foundational sources. In this sense, Turath functions not only as a body of knowledge but also as a framework for continuity and coherence (Abraham et al., 2025; Abouzied et al., 2025). The findings suggest that any reform in Islamic higher education will need to proceed through Turath rather than around it. The main issue, therefore, is not whether Turath matters, but how it can be preserved while enabling students to engage contemporary realities rigorously (Masuwd, 2024; Primarni et al., 2025; Asmalidi et al., 2022).

Importance of Modern Knowledge in Islamic Studies Programs

As shown in Table 2, students reported a high overall perception of the importance of modern knowledge in Islamic education ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.96$). The highest-rated item was the statement that Islamic education programs should include modern topics related to current challenges ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.91$), followed closely by the belief that modern knowledge is necessary for students of Sharia and Islamic Studies ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.95$) and that combining Islamic sciences with modern knowledge enhances employability ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.94$). Although the item concerning the value of modern educational and social theories received the lowest mean in this dimension ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.02$), it still fell within the high range. Statistically, this pattern indicates broad student support for incorporating contemporary forms of knowledge into Islamic higher education; although the slightly higher standard deviations compared with the Turath dimension suggest greater variation in how students evaluate specific aspects of modern knowledge. This variation is understandable, since modern knowledge is a broader and more heterogeneous category than the more clearly defined domain of classical Islamic heritage.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Modern Knowledge (n = 350)

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Modern knowledge is necessary for students of Sharia and Islamic Studies	4.11	0.95	High
Contemporary disciplines help students understand present-day realities	4.09	0.97	High

Islamic education programs should include modern topics related to current challenges	4.16	0.91	High
Knowledge of modern educational and social theories benefits students	3.93	1.02	High
Combining Islamic sciences with modern knowledge enhances employability	4.10	0.94	High
Overall Mean	4.08	0.96	High

The results indicate that students do not see modern knowledge as contradictory to Islamic education. Rather, they regard it as a necessary complement that enhances curriculum relevance, social understanding, and employability. This interpretation is reinforced by lecturer interviews. One lecturer explained that *modern knowledge helps students interpret society and contemporary issues more effectively* (Lecturer 5). Another stressed that *the problem is not any contradiction between Turath and modern sciences, but how the two are integrated* (Lecturer 14). A third lecturer highlighted that *graduates need modern knowledge to function in education, law, and society* (Lecturer 9).

These findings suggest that the intellectual climate of the faculties is not defined by rejection of modernity, but by selective openness to contemporary knowledge within an Islamic framework. This aligns with broader scholarship calling for overcoming the dichotomy between revealed and acquired knowledge (Solihah et al., 2025; Shalghoum et al., 2025; Muttaqin et al., 2026). At the same time, the lower mean compared with Turath suggests that modern knowledge is accepted more as a support for relevance and application than as the core source of educational legitimacy (Albshkar et al., 2025; Husin et al., 2025; Alriteemi al., 2025). Thus, students are not calling for a shift away from classical foundations, but for an expanded model in which modern knowledge serves Islamic educational aims without displacing Turath.

Curriculum Balance between Turath and Modern Knowledge

As shown in Table 3, students evaluated curriculum balance at a moderate level overall ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.07$), making this the lowest-rated dimension in the study. The highest item mean in this section was for the statement that the curriculum enables understanding of both heritage and modern developments ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.00$), while the lowest mean was recorded for the statement that there is sufficient integration between Turath-based and modern subjects ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.12$). These values are statistically meaningful in two ways. First, the means remain near the midpoint of the scale rather than approaching the upper range seen in Sections 4.1 and 4.2, indicating that students do not view the curriculum as strongly successful in achieving integration. Second, the standard deviations in this section are the highest among the study dimensions, ranging from 1.00 to 1.12, which suggests a noticeable spread in student responses. This implies that students' experiences of curriculum integration are uneven and may vary by course, lecturer, or level of study.

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of Curriculum Balance (n = 350)

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
The curriculum provides an appropriate balance between classical and modern knowledge	3.31	1.10	Moderate
Courses connect traditional Islamic sciences with contemporary issues	3.41	1.05	Moderate
The curriculum enables understanding of both heritage and modern developments	3.47	1.00	Moderate
The program reflects societal needs without	3.35	1.07	Moderate

neglecting Islamic heritage			
There is sufficient integration between Turath-based and modern subjects	3.21	1.12	Moderate
Overall Mean	3.35	1.07	Moderate

This result reveals one of the most important paradoxes in the study. Although students strongly value both Turath and modern knowledge, they are much less convinced that the curriculum balances them effectively. This suggests that the problem lies not in epistemological acceptance, but in curriculum design and implementation. Lecturers interviews help explain this gap. One lecturer noted *that Turath and modern subjects are often taught separately, with little meaningful connection between them* (Lecturer 2). Another stressed that *there is no unified institutional vision for combining the two, leaving integration to individual lecturers* (Lecturer 11). *A third pointed to time, training, and resource constraints that make curriculum redesign difficult without institutional support* (Lecturer 18).

Together, the findings show that curriculum balance is the central weakness in the current educational model. Students and lecturers both support the presence of Turath and modern knowledge, but both groups indicate that the curriculum does not yet integrate them systematically. This supports earlier research describing persistent educational dualism in Muslim educational contexts (Islahuddin et al., 2023; Aini et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2025). The findings therefore suggest that the University of Zawia is not facing a crisis of educational identity, but rather a crisis of curricular integration. What is needed is not simply the inclusion of both knowledge domains, but a more coherent curricular framework that relates them conceptually and pedagogically (Abouzied, 2026a; Hmouma & Benarose, 2026).

Teaching and Learning Practices

As shown in Table 4, students evaluated teaching and learning practices at a moderate to high level overall ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.96$). The highest-rated item was the statement that lecturers use real-life examples to explain classical concepts ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.92$), followed by the perception that teaching supports openness while preserving Islamic values ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.94$) and that lecturers explain classical texts in relation to modern contexts ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.96$). By contrast, the comparatively lower means were associated with the items measuring whether teaching methods help students compare traditional and modern perspectives ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.98$) and whether classroom discussion encourages critical engagement ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.00$). These statistics are internally coherent and substantively revealing. They suggest that students generally perceive lecturers as making visible efforts to contextualize classical knowledge, but they are less convinced that classroom pedagogy consistently moves beyond explanation toward structured comparison, dialogue, and critical inquiry. The standard deviations, which range from 0.92 to 1.00, also point to moderate variability in students' experiences, implying that pedagogical quality and integrative effectiveness are not uniform across courses.

Table 4. Students' Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Practices (n = 350)

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Lecturers explain classical texts in relation to modern contexts	3.77	0.96	High
Teaching methods help compare traditional and modern perspectives	3.65	0.98	Moderate
Classroom discussion encourages critical engagement	3.59	1.00	Moderate
Lecturers use real-life examples to explain	3.86	0.92	High

classical concepts						
Teaching supports openness while preserving Islamic values				3.80	0.94	High
Overall Mean				3.73	0.96	Moderate–High

The interviews support this interpretation. Several lecturers acknowledged the continuing dominance of lecture-based methods, *noting that explanation and content delivery still prevail and that there is limited time for discussion* (Lecturer 6). At the same time, *some lecturers described individual efforts to connect fiqh and other classical subjects with real-life cases* (Lecturer 10). However, *these efforts were described as personal rather than institutionalized*. Another lecturer emphasized *the need for training in modern teaching methods, arguing that subject expertise alone is not sufficient for effective teaching* (Lecturer 15).

These findings indicate that pedagogy in the Faculties of Sharia and Islamic Studies is in a transitional stage. On the one hand, lecturers are increasingly aware of the need to relate Turath to contemporary contexts, and students recognize those efforts. On the other hand, the prevailing instructional model remains closer to content transmission than to student-centered, dialogic learning (Iskandar et al., 2024; Pratama et al., 2024; Masuwd, 2025; Mohamed et al., 2026). This pattern is consistent with scholarship showing that Islamic education has traditionally emphasized authoritative transmission, while contemporary reform requires greater interpretive agency, critical reflection, and applied reasoning (Memon, 2011; Taufikin et al., 2025; Baroud et al., 2025). Thus, pedagogy emerges as a key site of reform if meaningful integration is to be achieved.

Challenges in Balancing Turath and Modern Knowledge

As shown in Table 5, students perceived the challenges associated with balancing Turath and modern knowledge at a high level overall ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.90$). The highest-rated item was the statement that students need more training in applying Turath to modern issues ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.85$), followed by the perception that the curriculum requires further development to achieve balance ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.88$) and that greater coordination among lecturers is needed ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.89$). Even the lowest mean in this section, relating to the gap between traditional course content and societal needs ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.95$), remained within the high range. These values are statistically important because they demonstrate that students' awareness of the problem is not limited to one isolated dimension of the educational process. Rather, concern is consistently distributed across curriculum design, pedagogy, practical application, and institutional coordination. The relatively moderate standard deviations, all below 1.00, also indicate that these concerns are broadly shared across the sample and do not reflect only the views of a small subgroup of dissatisfied students.

Table 5. Students' Perceptions of Challenges in Balancing Turath and Modern Knowledge (n = 350)

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
There is a gap between traditional course content and societal needs	4.00	0.95	High
Courses rely too much on memorization rather than application	4.05	0.92	High
Students need more training in applying Turath to modern issues	4.18	0.85	High
The curriculum requires further development to achieve balance	4.12	0.88	High

Greater coordination among lecturers is needed	4.10	0.89	High
Overall Mean	4.09	0.90	High

The results show that the strongest area of concern is not the existence of Turath or modern knowledge themselves, but the limited ability of the program to help students apply inherited knowledge to present realities. Students appear to feel that they are exposed to important content, but not sufficiently trained to use it in response to legal, educational, and social issues. This interpretation is reinforced by the high mean for overreliance on memorization rather than application ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.92$).

Lecturer interviews confirm this diagnosis;

One lecturer observed that students are good at recalling information but struggle to apply it in real-life situations (Lecturer 4). Another noted that classical rulings are taught, but students are not always trained to use them in modern contexts (Lecturer 13). Lecturers also pointed to structural constraints, including overloaded curricula and limited flexibility for interdisciplinary or applied components (Lecturer 1), as well as weak coordination and the absence of a shared institutional strategy for integration (Lecturer 16).

Together, these findings demonstrate that the challenge of balancing Turath and modern knowledge is operational rather than conceptual. Both students and lecturers support the principle of integration, but the realization of that principle is constrained by pedagogical, curricular, and institutional barriers (Abouzieed, 2026; Alkarkhi & Hmouma, 2025; Barkah & Aladi, 2026; Baroud et al., 2025; Engkizar, et al., 2026). This aligns with broader literature emphasizing that reform in Islamic education requires moving beyond content-heavy instruction toward more competency-based, context-sensitive, and application-oriented models (Paisun et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Omran et al., 2025; Numan & Toure, 2025). Overall, the pattern of findings suggests that Islamic higher education at the University of Zawia is in a transitional phase. It recognizes the need for integration, but has not yet developed the structures and practices necessary to make that integration coherent and sustainable.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how Islamic higher education at the University of Zawia negotiates the relationship between Turath and modern knowledge, and the findings reveal a clear and coherent pattern. Students demonstrate a strong commitment to classical Islamic heritage alongside a high appreciation for contemporary knowledge, indicating that the conceptual foundation for integration is firmly established. However, this dual recognition is not fully reflected in curriculum design or teaching practices, which remain only moderately effective in achieving meaningful balance. The results show that the primary challenge lies not in epistemological acceptance, but in the practical implementation of integration across curricular, pedagogical, and institutional levels.

The study further demonstrates that teaching practices are in a transitional phase, combining elements of traditional transmission with emerging efforts toward contextualization, yet still lacking consistent emphasis on critical thinking and application. At the same time, the high level of perceived challenges highlights systemic issues, including overreliance on memorization, insufficient linkage between theory and practice, and weak coordination among lecturers. These findings suggest that Islamic higher education in this context is moving toward an integrative model but has not yet fully achieved it.

The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that the gap in Islamic higher

education is not between tradition and modernity themselves, but between their recognized importance and their practical integration within curriculum and pedagogy. In light of these results, the study concludes that meaningful reform requires a shift toward a more coherent and application-oriented educational framework. This includes adopting integrative curriculum models grounded in *maqasid al-shari'ah*, strengthening pedagogical capacity, and promoting institutional coordination. Such efforts are essential to ensure that Islamic education remains both authentically rooted in its tradition and responsive to contemporary realities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of this research.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contribution

Sami Barkah, Mohieddin Masoud: Writing-Preparation of original manuscript, Conceptualization, **Salem Aladi, Mowafg Masuwd:** Methodology, Data accuracy, **Nahid Ayad, Hajer Albshkar:** Investigation, Improve Content, **Safa Alrumayh:** Visualization, Improve Language.

AI Statement

The data and language usage in this article have been validated and verified by English language experts and no AI-generated sentences are included in this article.

Funding Statement

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this research was conducted without any conflict of interest in the research.

Ethical Clearance

The place or location studied has agreed to conduct research and is willing if the results of this study are published.

Publisher's and Journal's Note

Islamic Studies and Development Center Universitas Negeri Padang as the publisher and Editor of *Khalifa: Journal of Islamic Education* that there is no conflict of interest towards this article publication.

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Khalifa: Journal of Islamic Education

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