



## THE FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC STUDIES EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IN KAZAKHSTAN THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF LOCAL CULTURE AND SECULAR PRINCIPLES

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**Abstract:** Kazakhstan, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the acquisition of independence, chose a secular path in religion after seventy years of atheism. The state adopted a secular direction, but society, consisting of a Muslim-majority population, began a natural process of cultural revival – language, history, religion, and traditions – restoring religious values. Islamic education became a way of religious revival, based not only on Islam but also on local culture and Kazakhstan's policy on religion. Higher Islamic education in Kazakhstan became part of bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral programs (PhD) in Islamic studies. This article examines the formation and development of higher Islamic education in Kazakhstan through the example of the only Islamic university. Quantitative and qualitative indicators from the analysis of the educational program, showing a balance between Islamic, secular, and Kazakh culture-related disciplines, emphasize the possibility of development in this direction, adhering to Islam, secularism, and culture.

**Keywords:** Islamic studies, higher education, Kazakhstani society, non-Islamic, secular, universities, educational programs.

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### Introduction

BEFORE GAINING INDEPENDENCE, Kazakhstan, like other Soviet republics, experienced an atheist system of governance for seventy years. This system affected all aspects of life, including Kazakh traditions with Islamic elements, leading to prohibitions on religious rituals and the closure of mosques. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent states,

including Kazakhstan, faced various political, economic, and social challenges related to nation-building. In terms of religion, the six Muslim-majority states – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – were generally less religiously oriented compared to their Christian-majority counterparts, Armenia and Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

On a constitutional level, these countries adopted a secular path, granting their citizens the right to freedom of religion and, specifically in Kazakhstan's case, the freedom to choose their faith. Compared to other Central Asian nations – Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan – Kazakhstan stands out as more religiously diverse. This is evidenced by the operation of 3,999 registered religious organizations representing 18 denominations (Islam, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Judaism, etc.) and 3,788 places of worship, including mosques, Orthodox churches, Catholic churches, Protestant prayer houses, synagogues, Buddhist temples, and others.<sup>2</sup> As Galym, Achilov, and Nagayeva point out, despite the deep prohibitions in atheistic Soviet society, religion did not wholly disappear or lose its importance<sup>3</sup>:

"Central Asian Muslim communities differ considerably from other Muslim societies because of a seventy-year-long transformative 'Homo Sovieticus' experience. Although religion has never disappeared in Soviet society, the impact of the systematic destruction of religious institutions and educational venues by the Soviet regime through comprehensive social engineering projects was substantial in Central Asia.

In contrast, Yemelianova argues that the resurgence of Islam in Kazakhstan during the Soviet Union's *perestroika* period, just

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<sup>1</sup> Svante E. Cornell, S. Frederick Starr, and Julian Tucker, *Religion and Secular State in Kazakhstan*, (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, 2017): 12, <http://isdp.eu/publication/religion-secular-state-kazakhstan/> (accessed December 23, 2024)

<sup>2</sup> Official Website of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Religions. <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/qogam/activities/141?lang=ru> (accessed February 14, 2025)

<sup>3</sup> Zhussipbek Galym, et al., "Some Common Patterns of Islamic Revival in Post-Soviet Central Asia and Challenges to Develop Human Rights and Inclusive Society", *Religions*, no. 11 (2020): 2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11110548>

before independence, was more symbolic than substantive. This, she claims, is evident in the newly opened but sparsely attended mosques and can be attributed to three main factors. Firstly, Kazakhs had already lost much of their Islamic heritage. Secondly, the high level of interfaith and interethnic diversity in Kazakhstan meant that Kazakhs made up only half of the population. Lastly, from a cultural and linguistic standpoint, Kazakhs experienced greater Russification than Islamic influence.<sup>4</sup> Although Mikhailov and Ternov argue that<sup>5</sup>:

"A natural consequence of the policy of ideological opposition to the Soviet legacy in post-Soviet republics was an interest in pre-revolutionary culture, the central theme of nation-building, whose roots can be traced back to the Perestroika era, became the idea of spiritual revival. Most often, this implied a return to traditional forms of culture, primarily religion".

Kemper, Motika, and Reichmuth, however, hold the view that the revival of Islam was primarily reflected in the establishment of Islamic schools and even universities. This process not only involved a return to pre-revolutionary traditions but also incorporated the influence of Western ideas.<sup>6</sup> Thus, along with gaining political independence and the resulting spiritual, more specifically Islamic revival in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the revival of Islamic education began, which penetrated various spheres of society: education, politics, and cultural expression.<sup>7</sup> These two interconnected processes – Islamic revival with elements of culture and Islamic education – began in the early 1990s and gradually gained widespread momentum by the early 21st century. Public interest in religion initially increased the

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<sup>4</sup> Galina Yemelianova, *Muslims of Central Asia: An Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 106, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcxf6> (accessed January 31, 2025)

<sup>5</sup> Mikhailov Dmitry, Ternov Nikolay, "Secular Religion: Islam in Kazakhstan's Nation-Building", *Political Science*, no. 4 (2020): 248. <https://doi.org/10.31249/poln/2020.04.12>

<sup>6</sup> Michael Kemper, Raoul Motika, Stefan Reichmuth (2009). *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States* (Routledge, 2009): 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203027929>

<sup>7</sup> Shakhkarim Sadvokassov, Rymbek Zhumashev, "Islamic Revival in Kazakhstan from the Historical Perspective (1991-2020)", *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 2 (2023): 264. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no2.18>

demand for education, which later extended to the need for professionally trained personnel, prompting the state to address this issue. The pressing needs of both the state and society shape the training of higher education specialists in Islamic studies. While at the end of the last century, the primary focus was on preparing specialists for practical work – mainly imams for mosques – the beginning of this century has seen a growing emphasis on theoretical work as well. A high level of religious literacy among the population helps mitigate the risks of radicalization and the influence of unorthodox and destructive groups.<sup>8</sup> In Kazakhstan, the training of Islamic studies specialists is currently one of the country's rapidly developing priorities and strategically significant areas of education. Islamic education presents for Kazakhstan's general education system one of the most complex components, as it intertwines religious thinking, knowledge about Islam, and Islamic scholarship itself.<sup>9</sup>

Historically, Islamic education among the Kazakh people dates back to the Middle Ages, when Islam was the traditional religion and boasted a rich history, much like in the broader Arab East. By the time Islamic education found its place in higher educational institutions in Kazakhstan, it was shaped by two main influences: on the one hand, the cultural values of the Kazakh people, and on the other, secular – or so-called post-secular – processes, seen either as a continuation of secularization or as part of new historical, sociocultural, and political developments.<sup>10</sup> As a result, unlike other educational programs, this type of education must not only align with the principles of a secular state but also consider local traditions, the rooted *madhhab* (school of thought), and the religious and folk-specific characteristics of the Kazakhs –

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<sup>8</sup> Akhan Bizhanov, ed., *Modeli islamskogo obrazovaniya v postsekulyarnom obshchestve: evrazijskie i evropejskie trendy* [Models of Islamic Education in a Postsecular Society: Eurasian and European Trends] (Almaty: IFPR KN MON RK, 2017), 88.

<sup>9</sup> Yelena Muzykina, Nurlykhan Aldzhanova, *Obrazy islamskogo obrazovaniya Kazakhstana: perspektivy budushhego v usloviyakh postprivychnogo vremeni* [Images of Islamic Education in Kazakhstan: Future Prospects in the Post-Familiar Era] <https://ikiacademy.org/uploads/0-1-202403181710738808.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2025)

<sup>10</sup> Bizhanov, ed., *Modeli islamskogo obrazovaniya v postsekulyarnom obshchestve: evrazijskie i evropejskie trendy*, 31.

the titular nation of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Even in Kazakhstan's *madrasahs*, where subjects such as Arabic language, Quranic recitation, and *hadith* interpretation have traditionally been taught, the curriculum now spans two years and ten months. Alongside professional disciplines (*Quran*, *Tajwid*, *Sharia*, *Hadith*, *Madhhabs*, etc.), there are also secular subjects – or more accurately, general education courses – such as physical education, Kazakh language, basics of law, and the history of Kazakhstan. Beisenbayev, Almukhametov, and Mukhametshin describe the trajectory of Islamic education through seven core disciplines: the history of Islam, Kazakh traditions, *Tajwid*, Arabic language, *fiqh* and methodology, *Aqidah*, and *Hadith* terminology. This parallel study of Kazakh traditions alongside strictly Islamic subjects highlights the distinctiveness of Kazakhstan's *madrasahs* compared to others.<sup>11</sup>

Islamic education in Kazakhstan is often viewed through the lens of the Soviet Union or the post-Soviet space.<sup>12,13</sup> Compared to the study of Islamic education in Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey, Arab countries, and others, the field in Kazakhstan continues to contribute to the 'literature gap', as there is still a lack of in-depth analysis in this area.<sup>14</sup> This is particularly true for Islamic and Islamic studies education within Kazakhstani universities.<sup>15</sup> On one hand, the number of Muslims in the country significantly surpasses the number of followers of other faiths; on the other hand, the Constitution defines the state as secular while simultaneously guaranteeing freedom of religion. Additionally,

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<sup>11</sup> Baktybay Beisenbayev, Aliy Almukhametov, and Rafik Mukhametshin, "The Dynamics of Islam in Kazakhstan from an Educational Perspective", *Religions* 15: 1243, (2024). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15101243>

<sup>12</sup> Kemper, Motika, Reichmuth, *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States*.

<sup>13</sup> Dilshod Achilov, "Islamic education in Central Asia: Evidence from Kazakhstan", *Asia Policy* 14 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2012.0024>

<sup>14</sup> Anar Mustafayeva, et. al., "Islamic Higher Education as a Part of Kazakhs' Cultural Revival", *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/1515>

<sup>15</sup> Murat Smagulov, et al., "Institutionalization of Islamic education in the Kazakhstani secular society", *European Journal of Science and Theology* 14, no. 2 (2018): 69.

modern Kazakhstani society represents a blend of traditional nomadic culture, elements of Islam, and the multiconfessional cultures residing in the country. As a result, recent years have seen a growing number of studies focused on selecting a model of religious and Islamic education that aligns with the needs, principles, and conditions of society as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

The article employs both empirical methods – observation and description, the comparative-historical method – and general scientific methods of theoretical cognition – analysis and synthesis, induction, and deduction. The principles of comprehensive examination of the studied objects, an integrated approach, and the principle of interconnection are observed, along with the principles of studying the educational process in its development, as well as historical and logical approaches. Moreover, the researchers drew on their extensive experience in higher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan, including observations, expert evaluations, international accreditation processes, and numerous discussions about the national education system (the second author). They also relied on their teaching experience in Islamic studies at two key universities – both secular and religious – namely al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU) and Nur-Mubarak University (NMU) (the majority of the authors). Curriculum analysis allowed for the review of syllabi for Islamic disciplines developed by the Department of Islamic Studies at NMU. This included familiarizing themselves with the course objectives, expected outcomes, and recommended literature. Primary content analysis, by obtaining copies of diplomas from one graduate per year from the first graduation in 2004 to 2024 from NMU's archives, provided a comprehensive view of the educational program, its content – specifically the types of disciplines – and its evolution over the past two decades. Data from the Unified Education Platform, official university websites – NMU, al-Farabi KazNU, and Ahmet Yassawi University – where students study Islamic studies, further showcased the educational programs and their content, offering a comparative view of the

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<sup>16</sup> Bizhanov, ed., *Modeli islamskogo obrazovaniya v postsekulyarnom obshchestve: evrazijskie i evropejskie trendy*

current academic curricula for students enrolled as of 2022. Through secondary content analysis, the study examined publications and materials relevant to the research topic, as well as government web pages, including those of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Ministry of Education and Enlightenment, the Committee on Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Ministry of Justice. Additionally, the research explored the online resources of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK; [www.muftyat.kz](http://www.muftyat.kz)), Nur-Mubarak University ([www.nmu.edu.kz](http://www.nmu.edu.kz)), al-Farabi KazNU ([www.kaznu.kz](http://www.kaznu.kz)), and Ahmet Yassawi University ([www.ayu.edu.kz](http://www.ayu.edu.kz)). Finally, using comparative analysis, the study compared undergraduate disciplines over the examined period within a single university, as well as across three universities at the bachelor's level and two universities at the master's and doctoral levels.

This article focuses on the formation and development of Islamic education using the example of a single Islamic university in Kazakhstan, where Islamic disciplines, secular subjects, and courses related to local culture have been successfully integrated. To achieve this goal, the following research objectives were set:

- Defining the goals, objectives, and characteristics of training specialists in Islamic studies in Kazakhstan;
- Examining the educational program's disciplines from their inception to the present day;
- Conducting a comparative analysis of existing Islamic studies programs at three levels of education (bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral) in Kazakhstani universities;
- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of Kazakhstan's model of higher Islamic education.

### **Challenges of the New Era: Foreign Influences in the Formation Process**

In the 1990s, the topic of Islamic education in Kazakhstan became particularly pressing, as this sphere saw an influx of hundreds of missionaries, preachers, and representatives of various Islamic charitable organizations and foundations from distant foreign countries aiming to establish a presence in the

country's spiritual landscape. Their emissary activities were primarily concentrated in South Kazakhstan, a region predominantly inhabited by ethnic Kazakhs. In the city of Shymkent – the regional center – private educational institutions emerged during the 1990s, including the Kazakh-Arab University and the South Kazakhstan Humanitarian Academy, initially known as the Kazakh-Kuwait University at the time of its establishment. The International Kazakh-Arab University was founded in 1992, based on the South Kazakhstan Institute of the Arabic Language. With support from foreign foundations, the university opened a Department of Religious Studies, staffed by instructors of Arabic language and Sharia law from Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, as well as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The department enrolled more than 800 students, many of whom already had basic religious education prior to admission. The aforementioned foundations essentially covered their tuition fees, living expenses, and scholarships. In 2005, following a state attestation conducted by a special commission from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (now the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, hereinafter referred to as MSHE), the university underwent reforms due to the discovery of religious studies courses being taught. The South Kazakhstan Humanitarian Academy, opened in 1999 and later reorganized, operated as a private secular higher education institution but was primarily managed by Arab representatives, with leaders and lecturers hailing from Jordan, Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. Local instructors were mainly involved in teaching secular subjects. The initial wariness toward the Academy, which eventually escalated to heightened scrutiny from law enforcement agencies, was influenced by several factors – most notably the restricted access to its premises (protected by a security checkpoint system) and the strict enforcement of Islamic practices, including mandatory religious attire for female students. These and other concerns prompted state authorities, particularly the MSHE, to conduct another state attestation of the Academy, ultimately leading to its closure. The results of the attestation revealed not only that the students' knowledge did not meet the national higher education



standards of the Republic of Kazakhstan but also exposed violations of those standards.<sup>17</sup>

At the dawn of independence, educational institutions that undertook the crucial mission of religious education emerged chaotically. Each of the aforementioned directions carried out the educational process independently of the others. Due to the absence of a central body responsible for coordinating the training of much-needed qualified specialists in Islamic studies, there was no state-approved educational program or standardized curriculum. Consequently, the newly established educational institutions operated without technical and methodological support on one hand, and without oversight on the other. Thus, Islamic education became both open – accessible to anyone wishing to receive religious instruction – and closed – shielded from public scrutiny. Every single institution involved in training personnel in Islamic theory and practice functioned autonomously, left to solve its own issues. The programs they designed at their discretion did not align with the requirements of state-approved regulatory documents. Meanwhile, in Islamic countries, Islamic education is integrated into the general educational process (as seen in universities such as Al-Azhar, Cairo, Tehran, etc.), combining both theoretical discourse and practical training. In post-secular states, however, it is presented as a general educational cultural course on Islam.<sup>18</sup>

### Seeking Solutions to Problems, Strategic Priorities

Since Kazakhstan is a secular state, religious education is not part of the general school curriculum. Nevertheless, over the years of independence, all necessary conditions have been established to

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<sup>17</sup> Dina Wilkowski, *Arabo-musul'manskie organizatsii v Kazahstane: vneshnee vozdeystvie na islamskoe obnovenie* [Arab-muslim organizations in Kazakhstan: external impact on Islamic renewal] (Moskva: "Islamskii faktor v istorii I sovremennosti", 2011, 496–510). <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/arabo-musul'manskie-organizatsii-v-kazahstane-vneshnee-vozdeystvie-na-islamskoe-obnovenie/viewer> (accessed February 8, 2025)

<sup>18</sup> Bizhanov, ed., *Modeli islamskogo obrazovaniya v postsekulyarnom obshchestve: evrazijskie i evropejskie trendy*, 5.

obtain religious education and ensure freedom of conscience and religion in the country. After a long hiatus in the post-Soviet era, the revival of Islamic education followed five stages:

- Religious literacy courses (primary education)
- Centres for the preparation of Quran reciters (primary vocational education)
- Madrasahs (secondary vocational education)
- Institutes for Advanced Studies (retraining courses)
- Universities (higher education: Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD programs)<sup>19</sup>.

The revival of Islamic education can be most accurately described in the following directions:

- a) With the participation of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (hereinafter SAMK), madrasahs and imam training institutes were established.
- b) Religious literacy courses for both adults and children were organized at mosques.
- c) Missionary educational institutions – madrasahs, colleges, and universities – were opened, often sponsored by foreign countries such as Turkey, Kuwait, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- d) Youth began traveling abroad for religious education, primarily to Arab countries, Turkey, Pakistan, and Malaysia. At the time, Kazakhstan had no formal agreements with these countries to regulate the process of obtaining spiritual education.
- e) In 2001, the foundation for training highly qualified Muslim clergy was laid with the establishment of the Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak (hereinafter NMU) through an intergovernmental agreement between Kazakhstan and Egypt. Prior to NMU, higher Islamic education for Kazakhstani youth was only available abroad, often free of charge, attracting hundreds of students. The revival of Islam and religious education gained momentum, showing rapid growth. However, the mass departure of young

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<sup>19</sup> Smagulov, et. al., "Institutionalization of Islamic education in the Kazakhstani secular society", 69

people to foreign countries for specialized qualifications in Islamic sciences did not always yield positive results.

The lack of precedent in this field has hindered progress for the following reasons:

- a) The selection process for youth traveling abroad to foreign universities was insufficiently rigorous on the part of the sending side.
- b) Weak briefing and career guidance efforts (stemming from the previous point);
- c) An almost complete absence of admission criteria for foreign universities (admission was largely contingent on the applicant's adherence to Islam).

As a result, the Islamic world abroad actively trained religious preachers from among Kazakh youth to be sent back to the country, imported corresponding literature in significant volumes, and generously funded various Islamic projects aimed at supporting spiritual communities that are not traditional for Kazakhstan. It is well known that numerous foreign foundations, competing among themselves, consider it an honor to finance the education and living expenses of international students converting to Islam, often without taking into account the students' abilities or the breadth and depth of the education they receive. As noted by Mikhailova and Ruchkin, "For Middle Eastern states, particularly Sunni monarchies (Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait), enlightenment, education, and charity are integral parts of Islam and inseparable from one another. The establishment of Kazakhstan's ties with the Arab-Muslim world in general, and the strengthening of interstate relations with the countries of the Middle East in particular, were driven not only by state interests but also by the need to seek and reinforce spiritual values."<sup>20</sup> In addition, during those years, although young people could travel abroad in large numbers, not all applicants received

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<sup>20</sup> Elena A. Mikhailova, Viktor A. Ruchkin, "Gumanitarnye initsiativy stran Arabskogo Vostoka v Respublike Kazahstan v sfere religioznogo obrazovaniya i prosveshheniya" [Humanitarian Initiatives of Arab Eastern Countries in the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Field of Religious Education and Enlightenment]. *Journal of Caspium Securitatis*, no 3 (2022): 55–66.

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an education or professional qualifications. Equally important was the fact that diplomas obtained in the field of religious education from foreign institutions were not re-certified by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan and were therefore considered illegitimate.

On the other hand, religious revival signified a return to Kazakh traditions that had been forgotten or partially eradicated during the Soviet era. While falling under the influence of external sources was both incorrect and somewhat expected, it further highlighted the urgent need to establish national spiritual educational institutions. These institutions aimed to protect Kazakh youth from the influence of foreign Islamic organizations and to develop an ideology rooted in national traditions. In a study on models of Islamic education using Kazakhstan as a case study, the authors suggest that the Islamic educational centers established in the country conveyed two versions of Islam to the public: the Turkish model, modernized with Pan-Turkic elements, and the Arab model, focused on fundamental origins. However, the traditional classical form of Islam, interwoven with elements of popular Muslim practices, also played a role<sup>21</sup>.

### **State Control and the Establishment of a Domestic Training Center**

All of these developments required appropriate attention from the state, particularly the introduction of a new law on religion and its swift implementation. Since 2011, religious education in Kazakhstan has been placed under state control<sup>22</sup>. In an effort to strengthen its presence in the training of imams and instructors for Islamic religious institutions, MSHE decided to introduce new academic programs and allocate additional government scholarships for future imams. Thus, the government took the

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<sup>21</sup> Bizhanov, ed., *Modeli islamskogo obrazovaniya v postsekulyarnom obshchestve: evrazijskie i evropejskie trendy*, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Legal Information System of Regulatory Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, On Religious Activities and Religious Associations. The law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated October 11, 2011, no. 483-IV <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1100000483> (accessed February 10, 2025)

initiative to create a viable alternative to religious education abroad by training qualified specialists domestically. As part of this effort, the Islamic Studies program was established at NMU. However, during its first decade, this program was not included in the official state classification of educational and scientific disciplines and, as a result, was only available on a tuition-based basis. Prior to 2011, training in Islamic studies – primarily for *imam-khatibs* – was relatively affordable but still required tuition fees. Afterward, the MSHE began participating in the process, allocating 100 state-funded grants annually. For comparison, during the 2022–2023 academic year, 170 students were admitted to the bachelor's program at HMY, 25 to the Master's program, and 8 to the doctoral program. In 2023–2024, these numbers increased to 216, 26, and 9, respectively. By 2024–2025, admissions reached 260 for the bachelor's program, 29 for the Master's, and 11 for the doctoral program. In contrast, no government grants are allocated for Orthodox and Catholic educational institutions.<sup>23</sup> This must be considered within the broader context of Kazakhstan's secular status – despite this, approximately 70% of the population identifies as Muslim, predominantly following the *Hanafi madhhab* within the *Sunni* tradition.<sup>24</sup> Since the inclusion of the educational program in the state register, the distance between religion and the state has begun to shrink. Initially, graduates of NMU were needed to work in mosques, the number of which increased from 46 in 1990<sup>25</sup>, to 2,888 by early 2024.<sup>26</sup> It should also

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<sup>23</sup> Tatyana A. Lipina, Yuliya V. Shapoval, "Religious Education in Kazakhstan: Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Journal of Saint Petersburg University. Philosophy and Conflictology* 37, no. 2 (2021): 357. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2021.213357>

<sup>24</sup> Yuliya Shapoval V., Tatyana Lipina A. "Islam in Kazakhstan under the Coronavirus Pandemic Conditions: Testing with Mediatization", *Journal of Adam Alemi* 95, no. 1 (2023): 144. <https://doi.org/10.48010/2023.1/1999-5849.13>

<sup>25</sup> Kulshat A. Medeuova, Meiram Kikimbayev, "Muzeifikaciya mecheti: kazaxstanskij diskurs obshhestvenny'x prostranstv" [Museumification of a mosque: Kazakhstani discourse of public spaces], *Journal of the L.N. Gumilyov ENU. Historical sciences. Philosophy. Religion Series* 140, no. 3 (2022): 151. <https://doi.org/10.32523/2616-7255-2022-140-3-149-164>

<sup>26</sup> News agency KazTag, Do 2888 vyroslo v 2024 godu chislo mechetej v Kazahstane [The number of mosques in Kazakhstan increased to 2888 in 2024],

be noted that Kazakhstani mosques, as one of the productive practices unique to Kazakhstan's experience, differ from mosques in other countries. In addition to their primary function as places of worship and religious rituals, they also serve as museums, where processes of 'museumification' take place – a reflection of state policy aimed at preserving and promoting cultural heritage branding.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, graduates with higher education in Islamic studies have become increasingly in demand, finding employment not only in mosques but also in other institutions requiring analytical and consultative work related to Islam. In 2012, master's and doctoral programs in Islamic studies were launched at the National University, with the first PhD graduates emerging in 2015. In collaboration with the SAMK, a Concept for the Development of Religious Education was adopted, marking the beginning of a targeted effort to enhance religious literacy among the population, particularly the youth, as well as serving as an effective method for preventing extremism and terrorism. Its implementation was planned in two stages, spanning until 2020: the first stage covered the period from 2016 to 2018, and the second from 2019 to 2020.<sup>28</sup>

Work has also been carried out to facilitate the return of Kazakhstani students who studied at foreign religious institutions to Kazakhstan. For instance, in 2011, about 500 students from Kazakhstan were pursuing theological studies abroad. As a result of the measures taken, 130 Kazakhstani citizens returned home in 2012. At this stage, an agreement has been reached with Saudi Arabia stipulating that students will not be admitted to the kingdom's universities without the approval of the Kazakhstani authorities. This demonstrates Kazakhstan's interest in training

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January 8, 2025 <https://kaztag.kz/ru/news/do-2888-vyroslo-v-2024-godu-chislo-mechetey-v-kazahstane> (accessed February 12, 2025)

<sup>27</sup> Medeuova, Kikimbayev, "Muzeifikaciya mecheti: kazaxstanskij diskurs obshhestvenny'x prostranstv", 151.

<sup>28</sup> News agency Zakon.kz, "Religioznoe obrazovanie v Kazahstane razvivaetsja neuklonno i posledovatel'no [Religious education in Kazakhstan is developing steadily and consistently], April 28, 2021 <https://www.zakon.kz/redaktsiia-zakonkz/5067022-religioznoe-obrazovanie-v-kazahstane.html> (accessed February 9, 2025)

imams locally. Consequently, favorable conditions have been created for future Islamic studies specialists. Kazakhstan's state bodies are actively working to protect the rights of citizens traveling abroad for education. For those who still choose to pursue religious education abroad, it is recommended that they do so only within the framework of the confessions traditionally recognized in the Republic of Kazakhstan and opt for countries and universities officially endorsed by these religious organizations. Typically, these are well-established universities with which cooperation agreements have been concluded regarding Islamic education and oversight of the educational and upbringing processes. Furthermore, to ensure the protection of students receiving education abroad, including religious education, the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan has developed a guidance document titled 'A Memo on Religious Matters for Citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan Traveling Abroad for Education', which has been in effect since 2014.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the leadership of NMU considers the Republic of Kazakhstan's initiative to restrict religious education abroad without prior basic religious education obtained in Kazakhstan to be necessary and justified. This measure aims to preserve national identity and religious stability, aligns with the educational standards of Kazakhstan, and helps prevent potential radicalism.<sup>30</sup>

## Legislation and Educational Institutions on Islam

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<sup>29</sup> "O nebezopasnosti obuchenija v zarubezhnyh teologicheskikh uchebnyh zavedenijah na neoficial'noj osnove" [On the insecurity of studying in foreign theological educational institutions on an unofficial basis], Department of Religious Affairs of Pavlodar Region, September 6, 2021 (<https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/pavlodar-din/press/article/details/60990?lang=ru>) (accessed February 21)

<sup>30</sup> Ainur Koskina, "How Imams Are Trained in Kazakhstan: An Insider's View Ershat Ongar, Vice-Rector of the Nur-Mubarak University of Islamic Culture, interview – Ershat Ongar, Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, December 25, 2024 <https://cabar.asia/en/how-imams-are-trained-in-kazakhstan-an-insider-s-view> (accessed February 16, 2025)

Currently, educational institutions engaged in this field in Kazakhstan operate under the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Civil Code, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated October 11, 2011, № 483-IV 'On Religious Activities and Religious Associations,' and the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated January 16, 2001, No. 142 "On Non-Profit Organizations.' University educational programs aimed at training specialists in Islamic studies are included in the official registry after passing a special state examination. The Law 'On Religious Activities and Religious Associations' is based on the premise that the Republic of Kazakhstan asserts itself as a democratic, secular state, upholding each individual's right to freedom of conscience and guaranteeing equality regardless of religious beliefs. It acknowledges the historical role of the *Hanafi* school of Islam in the cultural and spiritual development of the nation, respects other religions aligned with Kazakhstan's spiritual heritage, and emphasizes the importance of interfaith harmony, religious tolerance, and respect for the religious views of its citizens. According to the official website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (<https://www.muftyat.kz>), the country's Islamic educational institutions include one university (Nursultan Nazarbayev University), one institute (the Kh. as-Sy Khanaki Islamic Institute), and nine madrasas. For comparison, in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan reports the existence of 1 Islamic university, eight institutes, and 77 madrasahs.<sup>31</sup> Kemper, Motika, and Reichmuth highlight that Islamic education has influenced not only Islamic educational institutions but also secular universities and research centers.<sup>32</sup>

Bachelor's degree graduates or specialists in the Islamic Studies educational program in Kazakhstan are trained at the following universities:

1. Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak (NMU);

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<sup>31</sup> Official webpage of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan <https://muftiyat.kg/medreseler/> (accessed February 21, 2025)

<sup>32</sup> Kemper, Motika, Reichmuth, *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States*, 17.



2. Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Al-Farabi KazNU);
3. Khoja Ahmet Yasawi International Kazakh-Turkish University (Ahmet Yassawi University).

The first two universities offer programs at three academic levels: bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral studies, while the third only provides a bachelor's degree in the field. Among these institutions, NMU is regarded as the leading university in Islamic Studies, boasting the strongest theoretical and material foundation, extensive practical experience, international connections, and public recognition. The university aims to train qualified specialists capable of accurately conveying Islamic teachings in accordance with the school (*madhhab*) of Abu Hanifa and the creed (*'aqidah*) of Al-Maturidi. Additionally, it seeks to promote religious and educational activities among the population and contribute to the spiritual stability of Kazakhstan. NMU has two faculties: the Faculty of Islamic Studies and the Faculty of Languages and Humanities. Within the former, two departments operate: the Department of Islamic Studies and the Department of Religious Studies<sup>33</sup>. Initially, graduates of NMU's Islamic Studies Faculty were only eligible to work as imams in mosques, as their diplomas lacked official state recognition. However, after the university obtained a license to train specialists, this issue was fundamentally resolved. A graduate with a bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies can now conduct academic and practical research on religious matters, perform analysis, monitoring, consulting, teaching, communication, as well as cultural and educational work. They are also qualified to work in government institutions, private rehabilitation centers, and educational organizations. Potential career paths for Islamic Studies graduates include positions in the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan, Educational institutions, Research and analytical centers on religious affairs, *Akimats* (local government bodies), Publishing houses, and more. The total number of specialists with higher education – including Islamic studies scholars, religious studies experts, theologians,

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<sup>33</sup> NMU's webpage [https://www.nmu.edu.kz/kk/a\\_2/islamtanu-kafedrasyy-2/#](https://www.nmu.edu.kz/kk/a_2/islamtanu-kafedrasyy-2/#) (accessed February 19, 2025)

translators, and philologists – reached 2,800 in 2024. In contrast, at the time of the university's opening, the student body numbered fewer than 60.<sup>34</sup>

### **Development of the Kazakhstani Model of Religious Education and Its Distinct Features**

Islamic education, unlike the role of religion in society or state policies towards religion, varies from country to country. Educational institutions in the Muslim world offer different models of Islamic education: one model provides strictly Islamic education, another combines Islamic and general disciplines in equal measure, a third leans heavily towards religious studies, and a fourth emphasizes general subjects over Islamic ones. In Kazakhstan, the state's secular policies, the predominantly Sunni Muslim population, and other contributing factors have shaped the development of professional higher Islamic education. This system aims to balance the requirements of state policy and the standards set by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the educational needs of students. Even with the establishment of madrasas, the number of self-taught mullahs (known in Kazakh as *dümshe-molda*) began to decline as early as the second decade of the 21st century.<sup>35</sup> With the establishment of a dedicated university, such informal imams have virtually disappeared. In contemporary Kazakhstani society, a tolerant model of Islamic education has emerged, one that takes into account the country's unique religious landscape.<sup>36</sup>

In shaping Islamic education within Kazakhstan's higher education system, the introduction of an integrative Kazakh model

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<sup>34</sup> Koskina, "How Imams Are Trained in Kazakhstan: An Insider's View, Ershat Ongar, Vice-Rector of the Nur-Mubarak University of Islamic Culture".

<sup>35</sup> Mustafina Raushan M. "Mecheti i medrese v Severnom Kazaxstane v konce XX – nachale XXI vv." [Mosques and Madrasas in Northern Kazakhstan at the End of the 20th — Beginning of the 21st Century], *Journal of KazNU Bulletin. Series of Oriental Studies*, no. 2 (2012): 66–69.

<sup>36</sup> Seytahmetova Natalya L., Smagulov Murat N. "Rol' islamskogo obrazovaniya v kazahstanskom obshchestve" [The Role of Islamic Education in the Kazakh Society], *Journal of the National academy of sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Series of social and human sciences* 6, no. 305 (2016): 84.

of Islamic education was a justified approach. This model incorporates six key characteristics:

1. The coexistence of Islamic tradition and a secular societal framework.
2. The relationship between Islamic tradition and contemporary post-nonclassical science.
3. The complementarity of religion and secular disciplines.
4. A carefully balanced integration of secular and religious values.
5. A foundation rooted in the Hanafi tradition.
6. The unity of science and education.<sup>37</sup>

According to Muzykina and Aldzhanova, the integrative model is uniquely capable of merging religious and secular disciplines.<sup>38</sup> The distinctiveness of the Kazakh model of religious education stems from the fact that the form of Islam historically practiced by the majority of Kazakhs does not align with the Iranian model, the softer Turkish approach, or the Arab tradition. Furthermore, contemporary Kazakhstan lacks political parties associated with Islamic social policies.<sup>39</sup> Arar, Sawalhi, and Yilmaz, in their study on leadership in Islamic education, propose using the term *Islamic-based education* instead of *Islamic education*, arguing that the latter lacks clarity: "In this study ... introduce the new term, Islamic-based education, as there is no clear definition of Islamic education and there is no Islamic pedagogy in contemporary practices. Islamic-based education is an umbrella term that includes all educational opportunities offered to Muslim and non-Muslim learners that draw on Islamic principles".<sup>40</sup> Shah, Ghazi, Shahzad, and Ullah (2015), in their research on education in

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<sup>37</sup> Bizhanov, ed., *Modeli islamskogo obrazovaniya v postsekulyarnom obshchestve: evrazijskie i evropejskie trendy*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Muzykina, Aldzhanova, "Obrazy islamskogo obrazovaniya Kazakhstana: perspektivy budushhego v usloviyah postprivychnogo vremeni"

<sup>39</sup> Shakhkarim Sadvokassov, Rymbek Zhumashev, "Islamic Revival in Kazakhstan from the Historical Perspective (1991-2020)", *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 2 (2023): 266. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no2.18>

<sup>40</sup> Khalid Arar, Rania Sawalhi, Munube Yilmaz, "The Research on Islamic-Based Educational Leadership since 1990: An International Review of Empirical Evidence and a Future Research Agenda", *Journal of Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022): 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010042>

the Muslim world, assert that Islamic educational institutions in certain countries have become symbols of backwardness and are often associated with impoverished rural populations.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, in the West – and even among some elites in Islamic countries, particularly after September 11, 2001 – Islamic education is, at best, perceived as rote memorization of the Quran, and at worst, as shouting *jihad*. In reality, Islamic education is a form of education rooted in culture.<sup>42</sup>

### **Stages of Islamic Studies Education in Kazakhstani Universities: Program Content**

The Bachelor's program in Islamic Studies, as previously mentioned, is offered at three universities, each with its own educational program code: 6B02201 at NMU (first institution), 6B02202 at Al-Farabi KazNU (second institution), and 6B02266 at Yassawi University (third institution). The total number of credits required for graduation is 244 at each university, though the number of courses may vary depending on the allocated hours for each subject. The standard duration of study is four years. At NMU, courses are taught in Kazakh, Russian, Arabic, and English. At Al-Farabi KazNU, instruction is in Kazakh and Russian, while at Yassawi University, it is solely in Kazakh.

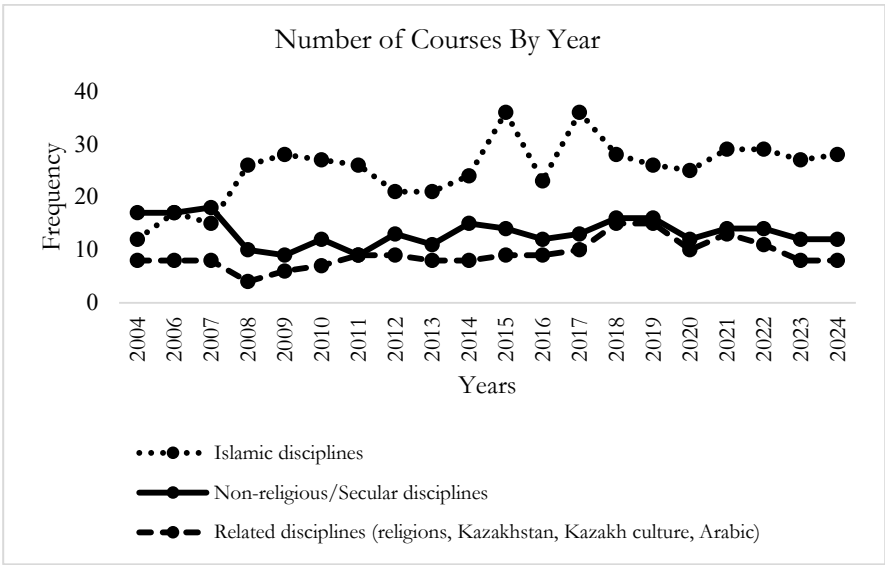
The subjects, similar to those in other universities and educational levels, are generally divided into three groups. The first group consists of Islamic disciplines, including *aqida*, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, *quran* studies, *dawah*, Islamic culture, and philosophy. The second group covers subjects related to and necessary to learn Islam, such as religious studies, Kazakh culture, Arabic, Kazakh thinkers about religion, and the Contemporary religious situation in Kazakhstan. The third group comprises general education

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<sup>41</sup> Sayyed Farooq Shah, Safdar Rehman Ghazi, Miraj-ud-Din, Saqib Shahzad, Irfan Ullah, "Quality and Features of Education in the Muslim World. Universal Journal of Educational Research", *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, no. 3(4) (2015): 243. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2015.030401

<sup>42</sup> Bizhanov, ed., *Modeli islamskogo obrazovaniya v postsekulyarnom obshchestve: evrazijskie i evropejskie trendy*, 247.

subjects that are non-Islamic or secular, like ecology, sociology, political science, English, and more.



Picture 1. Disciplines at NMU (2004-2024)

The graph (Picture 1) illustrates the number of courses offered per year from 2004 to 2024 across three categories: Islamic disciplines, non-religious/secular or general disciplines, and related disciplines (including religions or religious studies in general, Kazakhstan, Kazakh culture, and Arabic). Overall, the graph highlights the dynamic nature of Islamic Studies curricula, with Islamic disciplines consistently leading in frequency, while non-religious and related disciplines provide complementary educational content. Islamic disciplines consistently show the highest frequency throughout the years, with noticeable fluctuations. Peaks occur around 2014, 2016, and 2020, indicating periodic increases in Islamic studies offerings. Despite these fluctuations, the overall trend remains relatively stable, maintaining a higher frequency compared to the other categories. Non-religious or general (secular) disciplines maintain a steady pattern with minor variations. From 2004 to 2024, the frequency remains relatively consistent, indicating a stable inclusion of secular courses in the curriculum. Related disciplines exhibit the

lowest frequency but show a gradual increase from 2010 to 2018, followed by a slight decline after 2020. This trend suggests a growing interest in contextual and cultural subjects related to Islam and Kazakhstan, although their presence remains less prominent compared to Islamic and secular disciplines.

**Table 1. Distributions of courses from 2004 to 2024 at NMU**

Courses	Frequency	Percent
<b>Non-Islamic</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>27.61</b>
<b>Related disciplines</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>19.34</b>
<b>Islamic disciplines</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>53.05</b>
Fiqh issues	190	19.65
Ethics, Tasawuf	29	3.00
Aqida issues	89	9.20
Hadith studies	38	3.93
Islam and other fields	33	3.41
Quran studies	102	10.55
Dawah, culture, civilization	32	3.31

Table 1 presents the distribution of courses in Islamic Studies by frequency and percentage during the whole period from 2004 to 2024 at NMU. Islamic courses constitute the most significant proportion, accounting for 53.05% ( $n = 513$ ) of the total, where *Fiqh* issues at 19.65% ( $n = 190$ ), *Quran* studies represent 10.55% ( $n = 102$ ), while *Aqida* issues comprise 9.20% ( $n = 89$ ). *Hadith* studies are less frequent, making up 3.93% ( $n = 38$ ) of the courses. Ethics and *Tasawuf* courses (3.00%,  $n = 29$ ), Islam and other fields (3.41%,  $n = 33$ ), and *dawah*, culture, and civilization (3.31%,  $n = 32$ ) are the least represented. Non-Islamic courses account for 27.61% ( $n = 267$ ) of the total, and courses related to Islamic studies also make up a significant portion (19.34%,  $n = 187$ ). This distribution reflects a diverse curriculum structure, emphasizing both Islamic and non-Islamic subjects, with a notable focus on foundational Islamic sciences such as *Fiqh* and *Quran* studies.

At NMU, the current curriculum includes 54 courses in the first group, 12 in the second, and 2 in the third. Al-Farabi KazNU offers 26, 7, and 8 courses in each group, respectively, while Yassawi University has 23, 15, and 11 courses; some subjects at NMU span multiple semesters, indicated in parentheses. For

example, Islamic Worship and *Sharia* Decisions in Worship are taught over two semesters, while The Science of *Mahraj* also covers two semesters. Memorizing the *Quran* and the Arabic language spans six semesters, which equates to a three-year study period. In the second group, NMU offers four courses specifically focused on religion in Kazakhstan and Kazakh culture: Islam in Kazakhstan, Kazakh thinkers about religion, Kazakh customs and traditions, and Modern religious situation in Kazakhstan. Al-Farabi KazNU does not highlight courses spanning multiple semesters but tailors its Arabic language studies to different levels and specializations, breaking them down into Basic Arabic, Fundamentals of Arabic, Practical Arabic (text examination), Professionally oriented Arabic, Modern Arabic, Arabic of sacred texts, and Classical Arabic. Among the Kazakhstan-focused courses, Al-Farabi KazNU offers Islam in Kazakhstan and Islamic values in Kazakh spirituality. At Yassawi University, some subjects are also taught over multiple semesters – Islamic Law, *Kalam*, *Tasawwuf*, Arabic, and Turkish are each covered in two semesters, while Reading the *Quran* and *Tajweed* span four semesters. Given that Yassawi University is an international institution between Kazakhstan and Turkey, students also study the Turkish language, the principles of Atatürk, the history of Turkic states, and Turkic-Islamic history. At Al-Farabi KazNU, named after the Second Teacher after Aristotle, Abu Nasr Al-Farabi (870-950), there is also a course dedicated to Al-Farabi and modernity.

**Table 2. Disciplines by groups at three universities (Bachelor's degree)**

Islamic Studies Bachelor's degree at universities						
Courses	NMU		al-Farabi KazNU		Yassawi university	
	Freq.	Pct.	Freq.	Pct.	Freq.	Pct.
<i>Fiqh</i> issues	17	30.36	10	38.46	5	19.23
<i>Hadith</i> studies	7	12.50	3	11.54	2	7.69
<i>Aqida</i> , <i>mantiq</i> , and Islamic philosophy	6	10.71	3	11.54	3	11.54
<i>Quran</i> studies	17	30.36	5	19.23	4	15.38
Ethics	2	3.57	2	7.69	2	7.69
Islam and other fields	1	1.79	1	3.85	3	11.54
History, stories	1	1.79	0	0.00	1	3.85

<i>Dawat</i> , culture, civilization	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	3.85
Kazakh culture, Religion in Kazakhstan	5	8.93	2	7.69	5	19.23

Table 2 presents the distribution of courses in Islamic Studies bachelor's programs at NMU, Al-Farabi KazNU, and Yassawi University, showing both frequency and percentage for each course category. At NMU, Fiqh issues and Quran studies are the most frequently offered courses, each accounting for 30.36% (n = 17) of the curriculum. In contrast, at Al-Farabi KazNU, Fiqh issues are the most prominent (38.46%, n = 10), followed by Quran studies (19.23%, n = 5). At Yassawi University, Fiqh issues also constitute a significant portion (19.23%, n = 5), with Quran studies close behind (15.38%, n = 4). Hadith studies are offered at lower frequencies across all three universities: NMU (12.50%, n = 7), al-Farabi KazNU (11.54%, n = 3), and Yassawi University (7.69%, n = 2). Courses on Aqida, mantiq, and Islamic philosophy are consistently represented across the institutions, ranging from 10.71% (n = 6) at NMU to 11.54% (n = 3) at both al-Farabi KazNU and Yassawi University. Ethics courses are evenly distributed across all universities, with each university having 7.69% (n = 2) at Al-Farabi KazNU and Yassawi University, and 3.57% (n = 2) at NMU. Courses related to Islam and other fields show a varied distribution, with the highest proportion at Yassawi University (11.54%, n = 3). History and stories, as well as *Dawat* (or *dawah*), culture, and civilization courses, are rarely offered, except for one course at Yassawi University (3.85%). Kazakh culture and religion courses have notable representation at NMU (8.93%, n = 5) and Yassawi University (19.23%, n = 5), whereas they are less frequent at al-Farabi KazNU (7.69%, n = 2). Overall, the distribution highlights the curricular priorities of each university, reflecting their unique educational approaches and regional cultural contexts.

The Master's program in Islamic Studies is offered at two universities (Table 3): NMU, with the program code 7M02201 (taught in Kazakh), and al-Farabi KazNU, with the program code 7M02205 (taught in Kazakh and Russian). The total credit load is 120. In terms of secular disciplines, NMU's Master's students study subjects such as Professional Foreign Language, History of



Philosophy of Science, Secondary School Pedagogy, Management Psychology, Research Methodology, Fundamentals of Orientalism and Methodology, Principles and Theories of Jurisprudence, and one religion-related subject – Divine Languages. In contrast, Al-Farabi KazNU offers only two general disciplines – Higher Education Pedagogy and Organization and Planning of Research – along with one religion-focused course – The Problem of Faith in the Heritage of Kazakh and Central Asian Thinkers. Despite these differences, the number of Islamic studies courses at both universities is almost equal, with a ratio of 19:18. However, only one course is typical to both programs – Goals of Sharia.

**Table 3. Islamic and non-Islamic disciplines for the Master's degree at NMU and al-Farabi KazNU**

<b>Master's Degree in Islamic Studies</b>	
<b>Islamic disciplines</b>	
<b>NMU</b>	<b>al-Farabi KazNU</b>
System of Islamic economics	Classical Texts of Kalam
Issues of fiqh between madhabs	Classical Texts of Usul ad-Din
Rules of the methodology of fiqh	General Provisions in Sharia
Methodology of understanding the verses of the Quran	Goals of Sharia (Maqasid al-Sharia)
System of Islamic governance	Inheritance Issues in Sharia
Thematic studies of aqida	Legal Aspects of Islamic Economics
Modern issues of Islamic studies	Legal Foundations in the Quran
Priority issues of Islamic jurisprudence	Marital and Family Relations in Sharia
Ijtihad and fatwa (theological opinion)	Methodological Issues of Islamic Studies
Study of texts and points of continuity in the science of hadith studies	Methodology of Hadith
Methodology of the science of tafsir	Methods of Interpretation of Islamic Sources
The primary meaning of the Quran	Methods of Research in Islamic Studies
Goals of Sharia	Modern Current Issues of Islam
Judging and theological opinion	Modern Issues of Islamic Teachings
Islamic banking	Modern Research of Fiqh
Modern issues in Islamic Sharia	Problems of Muamalat in Islam
Interpretations of hadiths and rulings of hadiths	

Non-Islamic disciplines	
NMU	al-Farabi KazNU
Foreign language (professional)	Higher Education Pedagogy
History of philosophy of science	Organization and Planning of Scientific Research
NMU	al-Farabi KazNU
Pedagogy of secondary school	
Psychology of management	
Research issues	
Fundamentals of orientalism and methodology	
Principles and theories of jurisprudence	

At the doctoral level (PhD) in Kazakhstan, Islamic education at the university level is offered through educational programs totaling 180 credits. These include the 8D02201 Islamic Studies program at NMU (taught in Kazakh), the 8D02204 Islamic Studies program (taught in Russian and Kazakh) at Al-Farabi KazNU (Table 4), as well as the 8D02216 Modern Islamic Studies and 8D04109 Islamic Finance programs at Al-Farabi KazNU. Across the three programs – Islamic Studies, Modern Islamic Studies, and Islamic Finance – at the two universities, the subjects Academic Writing and Research Methods are identical and form part of the core curriculum. However, there are differences in other core and specialized subjects. In the doctoral program at NMU under 8D02201 Islamic Studies, courses include State Governance in Islam, Rules of Fiqh Methodology and Their Influence (elective), Comparative Fiqh (elective), and Rational Thinking in Islam. Meanwhile, at al-Farabi KazNU under the 8D02204 Islamic Studies program, courses offered are Fundamentals of Quranic Studies (elective), Formation and Development of Sunni Theology (elective), Muslim Law and the Objectives of *Sharia*, Key Texts of Islam, Sufism in Historical Perspective (elective), and The *Hanafi Madhhab* as a Dialogical Path in the Religious Tradition of Islam (elective).

**Table 4. Disciplines for PhD at NMU and Al-Farabi KazNU**

PhD degree in Islamic studies disciplines		
NMU	al-Farabi KazNU	General and common

		disciplines
Comparative Fiqh (Elec.)	Muslim Law and Sharia Goals	Research Methods
Government management in Islam	Fundamentals of Quranic Studies (elec.)	Academic Writing
NMU	al-Farabi KazNU	General and common disciplines
Rational Thinking in Islam	Main Texts of Islam	
Rules of Fiqh	Formation and	
Methodology and Their Impact (Elec.)	Development of Sunni Theology (elec.)	
	Sufism in Historical Perspective (elec.)	
	Hanafi Madhhab as a Dialogue Path in the Religious Tradition of Islam (elec.)	

The 8D02216 Modern Islamic Studies program (registered on July 8, 2021) covers Islamic Studies in Kazakhstan: History and Modernity, Interfaith Dialogue in Islamic Studies, Islamic Identity in Philosophical Discourse, Features of the Islamic Traditional Paradigm within Kazakh Culture, The Politicization of Islam and Political Islam, and Traditionalist and Non-Traditionalist Experiences in the Formation of Kazakhstani Islam. The 8D04109 Islamic Finance program includes courses such as Islamic Finance in European Countries, Islamic Finance and Economic Development, Investments in Islamic Funds, Islamic Securities Market, Investment Portfolios of *Takaful* Companies, and *Takaful* and Corporate Investments.

## Conclusion

Since gaining independence, Kazakh society has faced the crucial task of establishing and developing its own system of religious education. This system aims to satisfy the spiritual needs of learners effectively, uphold the traditional religious values of Kazakh society, and enhance the reputation of local religious institutions. Islamic higher education in Kazakhstan, like its secondary counterpart, is becoming both high-quality and in demand, provided that the unity of Islamic, religious, and secular

disciplines is maintained, taking into account the religious and cultural traditions of the Kazakh people. Thus, the development of structured Islamic education unfolds within a post-Soviet and post-secular society, reflecting local cultural and religious traditions. Islamic studies education in Kazakhstan's universities – primarily at the country's sole Islamic university – focuses on Islamic disciplines while maintaining a balance with secular subjects and courses related to the study of Islam in Kazakhstan.

An analysis of the formation of Islamic studies in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the current situation leads to the following conclusions:

Continuous updates to the curriculum will foster the development and improvement of Islamic knowledge dissemination, enhancing the competence of all participants – government representatives, educators, and students – regarding Islam and state-religion relations.

The intellectual capacity cultivated through Islamic studies education is expected to contribute to the overall cultural development of individuals and society, fostering political, moral, and aesthetic growth, along with a heightened sense of patriotism and respect for the rights and freedoms of fellow citizens of different faiths.

Optimizing the teaching of Islamic studies within higher education will stimulate the advancement of Islamic studies as a scientific discipline and the strengthening of ties between secular and religious institutions. The influence of Islamic education on Kazakhstan's social stability and cultural development is significant, as education in this field, like education in general, serves as a vital source and regulator of morality within society. Enrichment of the forms and content of interactions between the state and religious organizations, fostering dialogue between secular science and theology.

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