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Universiti Islam Selangor (UIS)**
Bandar Seri Putra, 43000, Bangi, Selangor (Darul Ehsan), Malaysia
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Shaping a Progressive Islamic Education in Uzbekistan: Balancing Tradition and Modernization, and the Influence of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi


Membentuk Pendidikan Islam Progresif di Uzbekistan: Mengimbangi Antara Tradisi dengan Pemodenan serta Pengaruh Mahmudkhoja Behbudi

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To cite this article:

Jamil, A. I. & Mukhammadiev, O. (2025). Shaping a progressive Islamic education in Uzbekistan: Balancing tradition and modernization, and the influence of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi. *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues*, 10(1), 1391-1407. <https://doi.org/10.53840/alirsyad.v10i1.488>

To link this article:

 <https://doi.org/10.53840/alirsyad.v10i1.488>

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 Published online: 24 March 2025

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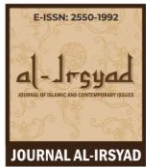


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Vol. 10, No. 1, (June, 2025)



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*[Membentuk Pendidikan Islam Progresif di Uzbekistan: Mengimbangi
Antara Tradisi dengan Pemodenan serta Pengaruh
Mahmudkhoja Behbudi]*

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Keywords:

Islamic Religious Education, Uzbekistan, Post-Soviet Societies, Educational Reforms, Secular.

ABSTRACT

Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of its profound historical, political, and cultural transformations. This study traces its evolution from the Soviet era—characterized by severe suppression and the dismantling of Islamic institutions—to its state-guided revival following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991. It highlights how traditional Islamic values have been preserved and integrated with modern pedagogical approaches to address contemporary societal needs. During the Soviet period, informal networks like the *Hujra* system continued its religious education, ensuring its continuity despite restrictions. Post-independence reforms, however, have sought to cultivate moderate, apolitical Islamic teachings aligned with national development goals. Drawing on 20 academic studies, this article synthesizes key themes, including historical development, comparative analyses, policy frameworks, and modern challenges. Methodologically, the research categorizes these studies to explore the interplay between religious and secular paradigms, interdisciplinary learning, and the incorporation of technology and ethics into curricula. The study also examines the contributions of influential figures like Mahmudkhoja Behbudi and the Jadidism movement in shaping a progressive Islamic education model. In spite of financial constraints, government oversight, and tensions between tradition and modernization, Uzbekistan's approach offers a unique framework for balancing heritage with modernity, fostering cultural cohesion and societal resilience. By placing Uzbekistan's experience within a global perspective, this study provides valuable insights for other Muslim-majority nations seeking to reform their Islamic

education systems—addressing contemporary complexities while preserving their cultural and spiritual identity.

Contribution: This study enhances the understanding of the evolution of Islamic religious education by highlighting its role in reconciling tradition and modernity while addressing global challenges. It aligns with the journal’s focus on contemporary Islamic issues, contributing to its multidisciplinary discussions on Islamic history, spirituality, and Quranic and Hadith studies.

Kata Kunci:

Pendidikan Islam, Uzbekistan, Masyarakat Pasca-Soviet, Reformasi Pendidikan, Sekular.

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan agama Islam di Uzbekistan telah menunjukkan ketahanan dan daya penyesuaian yang luar biasa dalam menghadapi transformasi sejarah, politik, dan budaya yang mendalam. Kajian ini menelusuri evolusinya dari era Soviet—yang dicirikan oleh penindasan yang ketara dan pembubaran institusi Islam—sehingga kebangkitannya yang dipandu oleh negara selepas kemerdekaan Uzbekistan pada tahun 1991. Kajian ini menyoroti bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam tradisional dipelihara dan diintegrasikan dengan pendekatan pedagogi moden bagi menangani keperluan masyarakat kontemporari. Semasa era Soviet, rangkaian tidak formal seperti sistem Hujra menjadi pemacu kesinambungan pendidikan agama, memastikan kelangsungan pengajaran Islam walaupun berdepan dengan sekatan. Namun, reformasi pasca-kemerdekaan telah memberi tumpuan kepada pembentukan ajaran Islam yang sederhana dan apolitik, selaras dengan matlamat pembangunan negara. Berasaskan analisis terhadap 20 kajian akademik, artikel ini mensintesis tema utama termasuk perkembangan sejarah, analisis perbandingan, kerangka dasar, serta cabaran semasa. Dari segi metodologi, kajian ini mengkategorikan kajian-kajian tersebut untuk meneroka hubungan antara paradigma agama dan sekular, pembelajaran antara disiplin, serta pengintegrasian teknologi dan etika dalam kurikulum. Kajian ini turut meneliti sumbangan tokoh berpengaruh seperti Mahmudkhoja Behbudi dan gerakan Jadidisme dalam membentuk model pendidikan Islam yang progresif. Meskipun berdepan dengan cabaran seperti kekangan kewangan, kawalan kerajaan, serta ketegangan antara tradisi dan pemodenan, pendekatan Uzbekistan menawarkan kerangka unik dalam mengimbangi warisan Islam dengan keperluan moden, sekali gus memperkukuhkan kohesi budaya dan ketahanan masyarakat. Dengan meletakkan pengalaman Uzbekistan dalam perspektif global, kajian ini menyediakan pandangan berharga bagi negara-negara majoriti Muslim lain yang ingin mereformasi sistem pendidikan Islam mereka—bagi menangani kompleksiti dunia moden sambil memelihara identiti budaya dan spiritual mereka.

Sumbangan: Kajian ini memperkaya pemahaman tentang evolusi pendidikan agama Islam dengan menekankan peranannya dalam mendamaikan tradisi dan kemodenan, di samping menangani cabaran global. Ia sejajar dengan fokus jurnal terhadap isu-isu Islam kontemporari serta menyumbang kepada perbincangan multidisiplin dalam sejarah Islam, spiritualiti, serta kajian al-Quran dan Hadis.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: December 05, 2024
 Revised: December 22, 2024
 Accepted: March 07, 2025
 Available Online: March 24, 2025
 Published: June 11, 2025

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To cite this article:

Jamil, A. I. & Mukhammadiev, O. (2025). Shaping a progressive Islamic education in Uzbekistan: Balancing tradition and modernization, and the influence of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi. *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues*, 10(1), 1391-1407. <https://doi.org/10.53840/alirsyad.v10i1.488>

I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan has been shaped by a dynamic interaction of political regulation, religious resurgence, and educational changes. Uzbekistan, with its profound Islamic tradition, holds a distinctive status in the wider Muslim world. The historical trajectory encompassing the Soviet period, post-Soviet autonomy, and current modernization has cultivated an educational milieu where religious and secular ideologies coexist, frequently in conflict. These dynamics illustrate wider societal conflicts regarding cultural identity, governance, and cohesion, rendering Uzbekistan an intriguing case study for analysing the development of Islamic religious education in a post-Soviet, mostly Muslim environment (Khalid, 2007).

Under Soviet rule, religious education in Uzbekistan faced severe repression as part of the state's broader campaign to eliminate religious influence and promote atheism. Islamic institutions, such as mosques and *madrassahs* (traditional Islamic religious schools), were closed or repurposed, and religious scholars were marginalized or persecuted. As formal avenues for Islamic religious education were dismantled, religious teachings were driven underground, surviving primarily through informal networks and familial transmission (Kamp, 2011). Despite this suppression, Uzbekistan's Islamic identity endured, sustained by the nation's cultural and historical ties to the faith. This resilience set the stage for a significant religious revival following independence in 1991 (HRW, 1999).

The post-independence era witnessed a revival of Islamic religious educational institutions, propelled by public desire for religious education and a reinvigorated national identity anchored on Islamic heritage. Historic *madrassahs* were reinstated, and new institutions for Islamic religious education were constructed. Nonetheless, this resurgence transpired under a government determined to exert stringent control over religious practices to avert the proliferation of extremism (Ro'i & Wainer, 2009). Thus, the state employed a twofold strategy: promoting the development of Islamic religious education while instituting regulatory frameworks to oversee its content and extent. Religious courses must conform to state-sanctioned narratives, prioritising moderate and non-political views of Islam (Spector, 2017).

The integration of secular and Islamic values in Uzbekistan's education system poses considerable obstacles and mirrors wider societal discussions on the role of religion in public life. Secular policies seek to foster modernisation and integration into the global society. Conversely, there exists significant public desire for educational systems that uphold and advance Islamic principles, presenting a nuanced challenge for policymakers. This duality defines the educational framework, affecting the structure, content, and aims of Islamic religious education in the nation (Peyrouse, 2018).

This article synthesizes findings from 20 academic literature to explore these complex dynamics. The extraction process involved a meticulous review of scholarly publications across diverse platforms such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories. Studies were selected based on their relevance to themes such as historical development, comparative analyses, policy implications, and modern challenges in Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan. Each study was carefully analysed to identify methodologies, key findings, and contextual insights, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
List of 20 Academic Studies

No.	Year	Title	Author	Publication	Index/Source
1.	2024	Religion and spirituality in public schools of post-Soviet Uzbekistan.	Khalilova, Z.	<i>The Political Economy of Education in Central Asia: Evidence from the Field</i> (pp. 57-77). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.	Scopus
2.	2024	The methodological approach in the formation of healthy religious beliefs in	Abdullaeva, S.	<i>Science and Innovation</i> , 3(B8), 114-121.	Google Scholar

No.	Year	Title	Author	Publication	Index/Source
3.	2024	pupils of 1-4 grades in general secondary education. The importance of education in Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's pedagogical activity.	Tursunboeva, K.	<i>Science and Innovation</i> , 3(B8), 4-11.	Google Scholar
4.	2023	Religious policy in Uzbekistan: Between liberalisation, state ideology and Islamisation.	Schmitz, A.	(No. 8/2023). <i>SWP Research Paper</i> .	Scopus
5.	2023	History of religious education in Uzbekistan and religious education institutions operating today.	Jankalo'g'lu, Y.	<i>Science and Innovation</i> , 2(B1), 5-9.	Google Scholar
6.	2023	Activity of religious educational institutions in Uzbekistan in the years of independence.	Komilo'g'li, M. S.	<i>European Journal of Interdisciplinary Research and Development</i> , 21, 229-235.	Google Scholar
7.	2022	Religion and reforms religious education in new Uzbekistan.	Rustamov, B.	<i>The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology</i> , 4(05), 49-53.	Google Scholar
8.	2021	A comparative analysis of the study of hadith science in the hadith schools of Mawarounnahr and al-Azhar.	Eshmatovich, K. A.	<i>Texas Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies</i> , 1, 178-180.	Google Scholar
9.	2021	Importance and role of financing of religious educational institutions in the development of religious enlightenment.	Mamarasulovich, D. S., & Abdullakh, M.	<i>SAARJ Journal on Banking & Insurance Research</i> , 10(4), 35-49.	Google Scholar
10.	2021	Organization and features of the education system of the Bukhara emirate during the reign of Emir Shakhmurad (1785-1800).	Utanova, U., Umarova, M., & Abdullahodjaev, G.	<i>Nveo-Natural Volatiles & Essential Oils Journal</i> , 8(4), 15326-15334.	Google Scholar
11.	2020	Historical studies in the pedagogical training and ways to improve vocational training.	Khalilovna, O. N., Lutfullayevna, B. L., Kosimovich, N. U., & Yusupovna, R. M.	<i>Journal of Critical Reviews</i> , 7(3), 274-277.	Google Scholar
12.	2020	Spiritual diagnostics of higher education students in Uzbekistan.	Tokhirovna, I. H.	<i>International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research</i> , 9(5), 90-93.	Google Scholar
13.	2018	Islam, morality and public education: Religious elements of ethics and etiquette in the Uzbek school curriculum.	Abdugafurova, D.	<i>Central Asian Affairs</i> , 5(3), 213-232.	Scopus
14.	2016	The official madrasas of Soviet Uzbekistan.	Tasar, E.	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i> , 59(1-2), 265-302.	Scopus
15.	2015	Education and change in religious practices in Uzbekistan.	Mushtaq, S.	<i>Research Journal of Educational Sciences</i> , 3(3), 1-5.	Google Scholar
16.	2015	Religious education in Uzbekistan under Soviet imperialism: A secular based approach.	Sheikh, R. A.	<i>International Journal of Education (IJE)</i> , 3(3), 37-43.	Google Scholar
17.	2014	Teaching Islam at a home school: Muslim women and critical thinking in Uzbekistan.	Peshkova, S.	<i>Central Asian Survey</i> , 33(1), 80-94.	Scopus
18.	2012	Role of traditions in the religious education in Uzbekistan.	Yovkochev, S.	<i>Himalayan & Central Asian Studies</i> , 16(3-4), 24-30.	Google Scholar
19.	2009	Islamic education in Soviet and post-Soviet Uzbekistan.	Muminov, A., Gafurov, U., & Shigabdinov, R.	<i>In Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States</i> (pp. 223-279). London: Routledge.	Scopus
20.	2008	Islam in Uzbekistan: Religious education and state ideology.	Olcott, M. & Ziyaeva, D.	<i>CEIP: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace</i> . United States of America.	Institutional Repositories

Source: Scopus, Google Scholar and Institutional Repositories

The analysis process involved categorizing the studies based on their primary focus areas, such as historical documentation, comparative frameworks, and policy evaluations. This categorization allowed for thematic synthesis, connecting findings across different contexts to draw broader conclusions about the interplay between secular and Islamic education in Uzbekistan. For instance, historical and documentary analysis, as seen in the works of [Sheikh \(2015\)](#) and [Muminov, Gafurov and Shigabdinov \(2009\)](#), has been

instrumental in documenting the evolution of Islamic religious education under Soviet and post-Soviet rule. Comparative studies, such as Eshmamatovich's (2021) research, provide valuable insights by examining Islamic religious education practices across different cultural and institutional contexts. Policy analysis, exemplified by Schmitz (2023) and Rustamov (2022), offers a critical lens to assess how government reforms influence the content, accessibility, and purpose of Islamic religious education.

This research examines how the government and religious communities in Uzbekistan navigate the integration of secular and Islamic values in education through diverse strategies. By focusing on critical themes such as political control, religious identity, and societal stability, it highlights the broader implications for cultural cohesion and national development. Additionally, the study seeks to develop a comprehensive framework that contextualizes Uzbekistan's experience with Islamic religious education reforms, offering valuable insights for similar efforts in other post-Soviet and predominantly Muslim nations.

To enhance the relevance of these findings, the article also explores the applicability of Uzbekistan's strategies to other Muslim-majority countries facing comparable challenges, such as reconciling secular governance with religious education and addressing contemporary issues like technology integration and the prevention of extremism. A visual timeline summarizing key milestones in Uzbekistan's Islamic religious education further aids in providing a clear contextual understanding of these dynamics.

2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

During Soviet governance, Uzbekistan's religious education system for all religions faced deliberate suppression as part of a comprehensive drive to eliminate religious influence and substitute it with secular socialist beliefs. This campaign, influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology, perceived religion as a hindrance to modernisation and social advancement. Specifically, the Soviet authorities enacted strategies to dismantle Islamic organisations that had historically been essential to Uzbek society. Notable *madrasahs*, mosques, and centres of Islamic scholarship were shuttered, repurposed, or obliterated. Religious instruction, hitherto a fundamental aspect of community life, was rendered illegal (Keller, 2001; Pospelovsky, 1987). Table shows the historical development of Islamic religious education.

Table 2
Historical Development of Islamic Religious Education

Year/Period	Event/Development
Soviet Era (1920s-1991)	Suppression of religious education; closure of madrasahs and mosques.
1991	Uzbekistan gains independence; revival of Islamic identity begins.
1992-2000	Reopening of historic madrasahs; establishment of new Islamic religious educational institutions.
2000s-Present	Introduction of state-regulated curricula to balance secular and religious education.

Source: Summary of the section of Historical Development of Islamic Religious Education in Uzbekistan

In reaction to these limitations, Islamic religious education became clandestine, persisting via informal networks. A prominent illustration of this resiliency is the *Hujra* system (informal method of teaching and learning Islamic religious education), wherein small cohorts of students clandestinely convened in residences or private venues to acquire Islamic tenets and study the Qur'an under the tutelage of trustworthy educators (Sheikh, 2015; Tasar, 2016). These covert endeavours included significant dangers, as participants frequently encountered persecution, incarceration, or worse upon detection. Nonetheless, the *Hujra* system was crucial in safeguarding Islamic knowledge and customs during a period when formal institutions were lacking (Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008).

The influence of Soviet persecution on Islamic religious education was significant. It interrupted the intergenerational transfer of religious knowledge and disconnected numerous communities from their profound Islamic traditions. This resulted in what several scholars refer to as an "educational void" (Sheikh, 2015), wherein younger generations were raised with restricted access to formal religious education. The decline of Islamic learning diminished the intellectual underpinnings of Uzbekistan's religious identity. Furthermore, the curtailment of religious education engendered feelings of alienation and defiance throughout the Uzbek populace, as numerous individuals perceived these measures as an affront to their cultural and spiritual legacy (Akbarov & Abdurashidov, 2022).

The legacy of this suppression persisted even after the Soviet Union's collapse, as Uzbekistan's leaders faced the challenge of rebuilding Islamic religious education within a society that had undergone decades of

secularization. The Soviet era thus serves as a critical backdrop for understanding the dynamics of religious education in post-independence Uzbekistan (Akbarov & Abdurashidov, 2022; Pottenger, 2004).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 signified a pivotal moment for Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan. The attainment of independence stimulated a renewed interest in religious identity, coupled with a need for the reinstatement of Islamic religious educational institutions. This era witnessed the revival of old *madrassahs*, the founding of new Islamic religious educational institutions, and the integration of Islamic subjects into secular university programs. Nonetheless, the resurgence of Islamic religious education was considerably constrained. The Uzbek government, led by President Islam Karimov, implemented a prudent strategy, reconciling public demand for religious education with apprehensions regarding political stability and the emergence of extremism (Pottenger, 2004).

The state institutionalised control over religious education by establishing entities like the Committee on Religious Affairs, which supervised the content and framework of Islamic curriculum. This commission guaranteed that religious doctrines conformed to state-sanctioned interpretations of Islam, prioritising moderate, apolitical, and nationally cohesive forms of religious instruction (Rustamov, 2022). Moreover, imams and religious educators were frequently mandated to participate in state training programs, therefore strengthening the government's supervision over religious speech.

A significant advancement during this period was the incorporation of Islamic studies into secular educational institutions. Universities established departments or courses in Islamic history, philosophy, and theology. This methodology facilitated the distribution of Islamic knowledge within a secular framework, harmonising religious education with national objectives and secular ideals (Jankalo'g'lu, 2023; Komilo'g'li, 2023). This integration embodies the government's intention to modernise Islamic religious education while safeguarding it from serving as a conduit for political opposition or radicalisation.

Notwithstanding these precautions, difficulties persist. The state's stringent regulation occasionally hinders the natural evolution of religious education, constraining its capacity to adequately fulfil the spiritual demands of the populace (Rustamov, 2022). The conflict between public demand for increased religious freedom and the government's regulatory measures persists in influencing the educational environment.

The post-Soviet comeback of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan illustrates the state's efforts to regulate the resurrection of religious identity while fostering social cohesion and political stability. The government seeks to mitigate extremism and connect religious practices with national objectives by regulating the content and structures of Islamic religious education. This meticulously regulated rebirth prompts enquiries on the validity and efficacy of religious education in meeting the demands of a community that is profoundly entrenched in Islamic traditions but also influenced by decades of secularisation (Clark & Vovk, 2022).

The twin legacy of suppression and resurgence provides significant insights into the intricate relationship between religion, education, and administration in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. It underscores the overarching issues encountered by governments in largely Muslim cultures as they reconcile the conflicting demands of secularism, tradition, and modernity (Pottenger, 2004).

3. THE ROLE OF TRADITIONS IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The persistent presence of traditional values in Uzbekistan's Islamic religious education underscores the resilience of its communities in maintaining their cultural and spiritual identity despite substantial political transformations and periods of intense repression. These traditions, rooted in centuries-old Islamic scholarship, were essential in preserving religious education during the Soviet era and continue to influence modern reforms. Conventional values impact more than merely formal institutions. Non-institutional religious education, such as home educating for Muslim women, fosters critical thinking and social transformation, as demonstrated by ethnographic research. These scenarios exemplify the function of informal education in promoting individual empowerment and societal change, especially under constrained conditions (Peshkova, 2014). These enduring traditions not only endured the obstacles of Soviet secularisation but also adapted to align with contemporary educational goals, illustrating their importance and flexibility in changing circumstances.

Historically, Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan was intricately connected to the cultural fabric of society. Esteemed educational institutions, like the *madrassahs* of Bukhara and Samarkand, functioned not only as centres for religious education but also as focal points for scientific and intellectual exploration. These schools prioritised a comprehensive educational approach, merging the examination of religious texts with fields such as mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. This comprehensive educational program embodied a wider Islamic tradition that esteemed both spiritual and secular knowledge (Akbarov & Abdurashidov, 2022).

Despite the systematic dismantling of Islamic organisations throughout the Soviet era, traditional techniques of religious teaching endured through informal channels. The *Hujra* system facilitated clandestine assemblies of small student groups under the guidance of famous religious scholars. This covert method guaranteed the persistence of Islamic religious education, albeit in a constrained and limited capacity. These informal networks have been essential in safeguarding Uzbekistan's Islamic traditions, functioning as a conduit between the pre-Soviet and post-Soviet periods (Sheikh, 2015; Tasar, 2016).

Subsequent to independence, the nation has revitalised its esteemed educational traditions, incorporating them into the contemporary educational framework. These traditions provide crucial cultural and religious continuity, hence reinforcing the legitimacy and importance of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan. Presently, *madrasahs* incorporate classical Islamic texts and traditional pedagogical approaches in their curricula, fostering a deep connection to heritage while equipping students to tackle contemporary societal issues (Yovkochev, 2012).

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi (1875-1919), a pioneering Uzbek intellectual and key figure of the *Jadid* movement, played a transformative role in modernizing Islamic religious education in Central Asia. As part of the *Jadid* movement, a consortium of progressive Muslim intellectuals emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Behbudi sought to reform traditional *madrasah* education by integrating secular sciences with Islamic teachings. Challenging the prevailing notion that religious and secular knowledge were inherently separate, he advocated for a dynamic and integrative educational paradigm that aligned Islamic education with the demands of a rapidly changing society. His revolutionary methodology laid the foundation for a progressive model of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan, blending traditional Islamic principles with modern scientific and pedagogical approaches, a legacy that continues to shape the region's educational landscape today (Nizomjon Qizi, 2024; Tursunboeva, 2024).

Hence, the key contributions of Behbudi and the *Jadid* movement can be summarized as follows (Abdirashidov, 2014; Abdullaeva, 2022; Bazarbayevich, 2024; Jamshid, 2022; Nizomjon Qizi, 2024; Sadullayev, 2024; Tursunboeva, 2024):

i. Educational reforms:

Behbudi advocated for the reform of traditional *madrasahs* by introducing modern subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, history, and geography alongside religious studies. This approach aimed to create a well-rounded education system that could compete with Western models. The *Jadids* promoted the "new method" of *Usul-i Jadid* of teaching, which emphasized critical thinking, literacy, and the use of modern pedagogical techniques. This was a departure from the rote memorization and rigid curricula of traditional *madrasahs*.

ii. Promotion of literacy and vernacular language:

Behbudi and the *Jadids* emphasized the importance of literacy in the native languages of Central Asia, including Uzbek. They believed that education in the mother tongue would make learning more accessible and effective for the local population. They published newspapers, textbooks, and literary works in Uzbek and other Turkic languages, which helped to standardize and modernize these languages.

iii. Integration of Islamic and modern values:

The *Jadids* sought to reconcile Islamic teachings with modern values such as rationalism, scientific inquiry, and social justice. They argued that Islam was compatible with progress and that Muslims could adopt modern ideas without losing their religious identity. Behbudi's writings often emphasized the need for Muslims to engage with contemporary issues and to reinterpret Islamic teachings in light of new challenges.

iv. Social and cultural reforms:

Beyond education, the *Jadids* advocated for broader social reforms, including the empowerment of women, the promotion of economic development, and the fight against superstition and ignorance. Behbudi was particularly vocal about the need for women's education, arguing that an educated female population was essential for the progress of society.

v. Political engagement:

The *Jadids* were not only educators but also political activists. They sought to create a sense of national identity among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia and to resist the colonial policies of the Russian Empire. Behbudi's political activities included efforts to promote unity among Central Asian Muslims and to advocate for greater autonomy within the Russian Empire. Moreover, the legacy of Behbudi and *Jadidism* in Uzbekistan including of (but not limited to):

- i. Influence on modern education: The ideas of Behbudi and the *Jadids* laid the groundwork for the development of a modern education system in Uzbekistan. After the establishment of Soviet rule, many of the *Jadid* principles were incorporated into the Soviet educational model, albeit in a secularized form.
- ii. Cultural renaissance: The *Jadid* movement contributed to a cultural renaissance in Uzbekistan, fostering a sense of national identity and pride in Uzbek language and heritage.
- iii. Continued relevance: In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, there has been a renewed interest in the *Jadid* legacy as the country seeks to balance its Islamic heritage with the demands of a modern, globalized world. Behbudi's vision of a progressive Islamic education continues to inspire contemporary reformers.

Hence, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi and the *Jadid* movement played a pivotal role in shaping a progressive model of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan. Their efforts to modernize education, promote literacy, and integrate Islamic values with modern ideas have left a lasting impact on the region's cultural and intellectual landscape.

Behbudi's contributions to Islamic religious education were transformative, especially in their focus on critical thinking and flexibility. He championed a curriculum that integrated classical Islamic studies with disciplines such as geography, history, and contemporary languages. Behbudi's reforms established the foundation for modern Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan, where the amalgamation of traditional and contemporary educational paradigms remains a significant issue. His concepts continue to exert influence today, exemplifying the equilibrium between religious legacy and the exigencies of modernity (Tursunboeva, 2024).

The legacy of Behbudi and the *Jadid* movement highlights the flexibility of Islamic religious instruction in response to changing sociological circumstances. Behbudi advocated for reforms that reconciled tradition with modernity, illustrating that Islamic religious education could function as a vehicle for preserving religious identity while also facilitating greater intellectual and social advancement. The simultaneous emphasis on tradition and innovation persists in shaping educational policies in Uzbekistan, especially in the development of curriculum that aim to reconcile Islamic values with secular goals (Akbarov & Abdurashidov, 2022; Kaldybekovich, Hazret, & Raikhan, 2013).

4. CURRENT APPROACHES IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan is experiencing a transitional period characterised by the incorporation of pedagogical innovations, interdisciplinary approaches, and a fusion of traditional and contemporary educational frameworks. These initiatives demonstrate the nation's dedication to safeguarding its Islamic history while accommodating the changing demands of contemporary society. Educators seek to improve the quality, relevance, and inclusiveness of Islamic religious education through the implementation of organised reforms and the adoption of global educational models (Akbarov & Abdurashidov, 2022).

4.1 Integrating Spiritual and Ethical Development

One of the trademarks of current Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan is the emphasis on spiritual and moral instruction throughout all levels of the educational system. Recent studies emphasise the integration of diagnostic techniques to evaluate students' spirituality and moral growth, matching educational results with national ideals. In primary school, Islamic moral teachings are incorporated into the *Odobnoma* (Adab Studies) curriculum. This topic integrates Islamic principles within a secular context, demonstrating the compatibility of ethical education with national identity and governmental policy (Abdugafurova, 2018). Islamic education in Uzbekistan not only preserves religious knowledge but also fosters ethical development, emphasizing moral values such as honesty, humility, and justice. According to Jaiyeoba, Ushama, and Amuda (2024), the Quran

remains a primary source for ethical and moral guidance, providing a foundation for values that resonate within contemporary educational frameworks.

In higher education, empirical methods such as pedagogical experiments and statistical analysis are applied to track students' moral evolution. These techniques ensure that educational programs maintain cultural relevance while tackling modern socioeconomic concerns. Such techniques reflect a balanced strategy, tackling the degradation of traditional values amid progress (Arthur & Davison, 2000; Halstead & Taylor, 2000).

4.2 Cutting-edge Educational Instruments

Modern teaching strategies, such as role-playing and participatory historical case studies, are transforming Islamic religious education. Role-playing encourages students to learn Islamic history and teachings from many perspectives, encouraging empathy, critical thinking, and moral reasoning (Abdullaeva, 2024). Likewise, interactive case studies prompt students to examine the lives and accomplishments of historical Islamic personalities, extracting moral and ethical lessons from their experiences. These dynamic strategies not only improve the learning process but also assist students in cultivating a socially aware and balanced perspective. Technology integration is an area of growing interest, with emerging tools such as AI-powered Quranic analysis software and online ethics courses offering new ways to engage students. Countries like Malaysia have adopted similar technologies, suggesting a path for Uzbekistan to expand these innovations further (Azman, Hamzah, & Razak, 2024; Hashim & Langgulung, 2008).

4.3 Historical Foundations and Modern Significance

The foundations of these changes can be traced back to earlier initiatives in Islamic religious education, such as those undertaken during the Bukhara Emirate under Emir Shakhmurad (1785–1800). Historical assessments indicate that these initial reforms sought to amalgamate religious and secular knowledge, establishing a basis for cultural and educational resilience (Utanova, Umarova, & Abdullahodjaev, 2021). This perseverance was essential in helping Islamic religious education endure Soviet repression and revive in the post-independence era.

4.4 Interdisciplinary and Comparative Methodologies

Interdisciplinary approaches have been a cornerstone of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan. Comparative studies enable students to examine various interpretations of Islamic teachings across civilisations, fostering critical thinking and tolerance. For instance, there was a study that draws parallels between hadith studies in Mawarounnahr and teaching methods at al-Azhar University in Egypt, pushing for the adaptation of student-centred and multidisciplinary techniques to strengthen Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan (Eshmatovich, 2021). These techniques expand students' intellectual perspectives, allowing them to engage with the intricacies of contemporary religious discourse while enhancing their comprehension of Islamic traditions.

4.5 Balancing Tradition with Modernity

Uzbekistan's approach to Islamic religious education consistently incorporates traditional Islamic values into contemporary educational frameworks. Traditional Islamic studies, including theology, jurisprudence, and Quranic exegesis, have been included into the curricula of secular universities, alongside courses on Islamic history, culture, and thinking (Tursunboeva, 2024; Yovkochev, 2012). This comprehensive approach offers kids a thorough comprehension of their heritage.

Teaching approaches also embody this equilibrium. Traditional techniques like rote memorisation and oral recitation are enhanced by contemporary practices, including digital tools, collaborative projects, and interactive lectures. This dual system prepares students to navigate both religious and secular domains, ensuring their readiness for modern societal duties (Rohman, Muhtamiroh, Imron, & Miyono, 2023).

4.6 Tackling Contemporary Issues

Uzbekistan's educational reforms also address contemporary difficulties by integrating ancient Islamic concepts with modern challenges. Islamic studies courses today encompass talks on subjects such as technological ethics, economic fairness, and environmental stewardship. This adaptation guarantees the relevance of Islamic religious

education in a swiftly globalising world, enabling students to make significant contributions to their communities (Yovkochev, 2012).

5. CHALLENGES AND POLICY RESPONSES IN MODERNIZING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan has undergone significant transformation as the country seeks to balance its Islamic heritage with its secular governance framework. Despite efforts to modernize and integrate traditional values with contemporary pedagogical practices, numerous challenges persist. These challenges are deeply rooted in historical, financial, and political contexts and have significant implications for the future of Islamic religious education in the country.

5.1 *Balancing Islamic Religious Education within a Secular Framework*

One of the challenges of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan is balancing religious instruction with the state's commitment to secular governance. Usman, Abdullah, and Azwar (2023) highlights those Islamic teachings advocate for religious tolerance, suggesting that misconceptions often arise from misinterpretations rather than doctrinal rigidity. The Uzbek government's approach to Islamic religious education reflects its dual priorities of promoting moderate Islamic teachings and maintaining national security and political stability. This strategy involves aligning religious education with broader political objectives to foster a cohesive national identity while preventing radicalization. The government's emphasis on moderate interpretations of Islam demonstrates its efforts to balance these goals (Schmitz, 2023).

However, this approach presents significant challenges. The state's strict control over religious institutions, while ensuring stability, often hinders the organic development of religious scholarship. This limits the ability of educators and institutions to meet the spiritual and intellectual needs of the population (Rustamov, 2022). Furthermore, tensions arise from the coexistence of secular and religious principles within the educational system. Public demand for a stronger Islamic identity frequently conflicts with the government's secular agenda, creating friction in the formulation and implementation of educational policies.

One key element of this balancing act is the establishment of strict state regulatory frameworks. Entities such as the Committee on Religious Affairs oversee the content and delivery of Islamic religious education, ensuring that curricula align with state-sanctioned interpretations of Islam. This includes prioritizing apolitical and moderate teachings to foster national cohesion. Additionally, religious educators, including imams, are required to participate in state training programs to ensure alignment with government objectives and national values (Schmitz, 2023).

The integration of Islamic studies into secular educational institutions further demonstrates this balance. By incorporating Islamic history, philosophy, and theology into university programs, the state promotes cultural literacy and religious understanding within a secular framework. This approach allows students to explore Islamic values and principles while remaining grounded in modern societal and global contexts (Jankalo'g'lu, 2023; Komilo'g'li, 2023).

Despite these efforts, tensions persist. Public demand for greater religious engagement sometimes clashes with the state's emphasis on secular governance. For instance, while many communities advocate for deeper integration of Islamic teachings into education, the government remains cautious to avoid potential radicalization or the politicization of religion. Balancing these competing interests continues to shape Uzbekistan's policies and reforms in Islamic religious education (Peyrouse, 2018).

Uzbekistan's experience offers valuable lessons for other nations navigating similar challenges. For example, its emphasis on regulatory oversight and the promotion of moderate Islamic teachings can serve as a model for countries seeking to address extremism while maintaining religious freedom. By integrating Islamic studies into secular educational frameworks, Uzbekistan demonstrates a pathway for fostering cultural preservation alongside modernization (Schmitz, 2023).

5.2 *Financial Constraints and Resource Disparities*

A significant challenge in modernizing Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan is addressing financial constraints. Limited funding poses a major barrier to improving the quality and accessibility of Islamic religious education, especially in under-resourced regions. Many Islamic schools and *madrasahs* face difficulties in

providing adequate facilities, educational materials, and teacher training, which undermines their ability to deliver high-quality education that meets students' needs (Mamarasulovich & Abdullakh, 2021).

Addressing these financial challenges requires increased government support and financial reforms. Greater investment in Islamic religious education could improve infrastructure, enhance teacher training, and expand access for students in rural areas. Without such reforms, disparities in educational quality are likely to persist, perpetuating regional inequalities and limiting the potential of Islamic religious education to contribute to Uzbekistan's intellectual and cultural development (Akbarov & Abdurashidov, 2022; Clark & Vovk, 2022; Cornell & Zenn, 2018; Rashidov, 2022).

The intersection of economic development and religious education is evident in state-led reforms that incorporate Islamic principles into modern industries. As Azwar and Nasir (2024) highlight in their study of Indonesia's halal industry, aligning Islamic education with economic opportunities ensures sustainability and global competitiveness.

5.3 Legacy of Soviet Repression

The legacy of Soviet repression continues to significantly impact Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan. During the Soviet era, religious institutions faced severe restrictions, and Islamic scholarship was systematically suppressed. This period dismantled many traditional structures and practices, creating a gap in the continuity of Islamic religious education (Muminov et al., 2009).

This historical disruption presents a unique challenge for contemporary efforts to revitalize Islamic religious education. Although the Uzbek government has made efforts to restore and preserve its religious heritage, progress has been slow and often hindered by competing political and societal priorities. Rebuilding a robust system of Islamic religious education requires not only substantial material resources but also a renewed focus on cultivating scholars who can effectively bridge traditional Islamic values with modern educational demands (Akbarov & Abdurashidov, 2022).

5.4 Tensions Between Tradition and Modernization

One of the most pressing challenges in modernizing Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan lies in balancing the preservation of traditional methods with the demands of contemporary pedagogy. Traditional teaching practices, such as rote memorization and teacher-centred instruction, have long been central to Islamic religious education, ensuring the authenticity of religious teachings. However, these methods often lack alignment with modern educational approaches, which prioritize critical thinking, creativity, and student engagement (Akbarov & Abdurashidov, 2022). To see the comparing of Islamic religious education across periods, kindly refer Table 3.

Table 3
Comparing Islamic Religious Education Across Periods

Aspect	Soviet Era	Post-Independence (1991)	Modern Era
Institutional Support	Suppressed; informal Hujra system	Reopening of historic madrasahs	Integration into secular universities
Curriculum	Restricted, secular-only	Focus on Islamic heritage	Balanced, moderate, state-regulated
Access	Limited, underground	Public demand increases	Wider access with state oversight

Source: Muminov, Gafurov, and Shigabdinov (2009), Rustamov (2022), Jankalo'g'lu (2023), and Komilo'g'li (2023)

A key aspect of addressing this challenge is improving vocational training for educators while preserving historical and cultural values. For instance, there are potentials of incorporating the teachings of historical figures like Al-Farabi and Alisher Navoi into teacher training programs to enhance professionalism and pedagogical skills (Khalilovna, Lutfullayevna, Kosimovich, & Yusupovna., 2020). This approach not only bridges spiritual ethics with practical teaching strategies but also equips educators to navigate the complexities of modern classrooms while maintaining the cultural integrity of Islamic religious education.

Another significant challenge is the state's strict oversight of religious education, which often results in curricula that prioritize government objectives over the needs of local communities. While such oversight aims to ensure national cohesion and prevent extremism, it can inadvertently hinder the organic development of traditional scholarship. This top-down approach limits educators' ability to address the diverse spiritual and intellectual needs of their students, creating a disconnect between state-driven modernization efforts and the aspirations of religious communities (Rustamov, 2022).

6. IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The evolution of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan reflects a journey from Soviet-era repression to a post-independence revival under state oversight. As Uzbekistan continues to modernize, its approach to Islamic religious education stands at a crossroads, balancing the preservation of traditional values with the demands of contemporary society. This dual focus on tradition and innovation highlights both opportunities and challenges for the future of Islamic religious education in the country (Aijaz, 2015).

6.1 Aligning Islamic Religious Education with Secular National Values

A pivotal element of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan is its congruence with the nation's secular structure. Reforms initiated by the state have played a crucial role in aligning religious education with national secular principles, with the objective of fostering social unity and curbing the emergence of religious extremism. The reforms also respond to the growing public demand for religious instruction, illustrating the government's endeavour to harmonise the cultivation of religious identity with the maintenance of political stability (Rustamov, 2022).

Islamic religious education is also utilized as a strategic tool to promote social harmony and counter extremist ideologies. By integrating moderate Islamic teachings into educational frameworks, the government seeks to safeguard societal stability. However, this approach requires careful management to prevent state oversight from stifling the organic development of religious scholarship or alienating communities seeking deeper spiritual engagement (Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008; Schmitz, 2023).

For instance, post-Soviet reforms have reintroduced Islamic values into public education through updated curricula and textbooks. This shift demonstrates a strategic effort to foster national identity within a secular framework while maintaining social cohesion (Khalilova, 2023). Historical instances, like the educational reforms of the Bukhara Emirate, exemplify how the effective amalgamation of secular and religious education in earlier times can provide valuable insights for current approaches to harmonising Islamic principles with modern teaching methodologies (Utanova et al., 2021).

6.2 Interdisciplinary Learning and Global Pedagogical Practices

The future of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan relies heavily on the adoption of interdisciplinary and innovative pedagogical approaches. Integrating global educational practices into Islamic religious education can offer valuable insights and enhance the system's adaptability. Through interdisciplinary learning, students are exposed to a broader range of subjects, enabling them to connect Islamic teachings with contemporary fields such as ethics, economics, and technology. This approach deepens their understanding of Islamic principles while equipping them with skills to address modern challenges (Eshmatovich, 2021).

For instance, combining traditional Islamic studies with subjects like environmental science or digital literacy allows students to see the practical relevance of Islamic teachings in tackling global issues (Setianingrum, Hadiati, & Setiyo, 2025). By incorporating such methodologies, Uzbekistan can position its Islamic religious education system as a progressive model for other Muslim-majority countries seeking to modernize their educational frameworks.

6.3 Preserving Cultural Identity Through Religious Education

Islamic religious education holds a crucial role in preserving Uzbekistan's cultural and religious identity. Its integration into the broader educational system helps ensure that the country's youth remain connected to their cultural heritage while acquiring the skills needed to navigate a pluralistic world. This approach serves as a safeguard against the erosion of traditional values amid the forces of globalization and modernization (Mushtaq, 2015; Yovkochev, 2012).

The significance of Islamic religious education in cultural preservation is heightened by Uzbekistan's history of Soviet repression, which sought to suppress religious practices and institutions. The revival of Islamic religious education following independence represents both a reclamation of lost heritage and a reaffirmation of religion's central role in shaping national identity. To sustain this progress, policymakers and educators must continue prioritizing Islamic religious education as a fundamental pillar of Uzbekistan's cultural and intellectual framework (Sheikh, 2015).

6.4 Challenges and Opportunities in Modernizing Islamic Religious Education

Despite its progress, the modernization of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan faces significant challenges. Financial limitations remain a major barrier to improving the quality and accessibility of Islamic religious education, particularly in under-resourced regions. Without adequate funding, schools and *madrassahs* struggle to provide the infrastructure, materials, and training necessary to deliver high-quality education (Mamarasulovich & Abdullakh, 2021).

Moreover, the state's stringent oversight of religious education can sometimes hinder innovation and the organic development of traditional scholarship. While state control ensures alignment with secular values, it may also limit the responsiveness of Islamic religious education to the diverse needs of communities. Addressing these challenges will require collaborative efforts between the government, educators, and religious institutions, as well as increased investment in educational infrastructure and teacher training (Rustamov, 2022).

6.5 Suggestions for Future Research

The future development of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan would benefit from targeted research in the following areas:

- i. Gender roles in Islamic religious education: Investigating the impact and challenges faced by women in religious education, particularly in post-Soviet contexts.
- ii. Comparative analyses: Examining how reforms in Uzbekistan align or differ from other Muslim-majority nations like Indonesia, Turkiye, or Malaysia.
- iii. Blended learning: Exploring the effectiveness of integrating traditional and digital pedagogies in Islamic studies.
- iv. Long-term impacts of reforms: Conducting longitudinal studies to assess how current policies influence the identity formation and societal roles of students.
- v. Ethnographic perspectives: Including voices of educators and students to provide deeper insights into the lived experiences within Uzbekistan's religious education framework.

Additionally, this study acknowledges its reliance on secondary data and the absence of primary empirical research. While secondary sources provide a broad historical and comparative perspective, they may omit nuances such as local variations in implementation or the lived experiences of educators and students. Addressing these gaps through field studies and surveys would enrich future analyses. By addressing these areas, Uzbekistan can build a robust, forward-thinking framework for Islamic religious education that not only preserves its rich heritage but also equips students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

7. CONCLUSION

The development of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan reflects a dynamic interaction among tradition, modernisation, and government, illustrating a unique method of safeguarding Islamic legacy among the challenges of a swiftly changing world. Uzbekistan's Islamic religious education system demonstrates adaptability, having endured Soviet-era repression and subsequently revived and regulated in the post-independence period. However, it confronts urgent issues, including as budgetary constraints, the reconciliation of secular and religious beliefs, and the execution of new changes that align historic values with modern requirements.

The future of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan depends on its ability to incorporate multidisciplinary approaches, international teaching practices, and modern topics alongside its established Islamic traditions. Uzbekistan may prepare its students to address contemporary problems by establishing a comprehensive educational framework that integrates classical teachings, including Islamic law and theology, with modern fields such as technology, economics, and environmental studies. Realising this vision necessitates inclusive policies, financial sustainability, and strong community engagement to maintain the relevance and accessibility of Islamic religious education in many situations.

Notwithstanding obstacles like governmental supervision and the persistent influence of Soviet repression, tradition continues to be a fundamental aspect of Islamic religious education in Uzbekistan. Historical individuals such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudi and the *Jadid* movement exemplify the durability and

adaptation of Islamic scholarship. These legacies furnish a basis for educators to develop curricula that meet both spiritual and societal requirements, connecting legacy with modern advancement.

Uzbekistan's strategy for modernising Islamic religious education, while maintaining its fundamental values, exemplifies a forward-thinking paradigm that balances reverence for tradition with readiness for the future. Uzbekistan is positioned to lead the worldwide dialogue on reforming Islamic religious education by adopting creative reforms, tackling systemic obstacles, and leveraging its profound Islamic legacy. This equitable approach guarantees the integrity of Islamic teachings while cultivating a generation of ethically accountable, socially conscious, and intellectually adaptable individuals prepared to make significant contributions to a diverse and globalised society.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no personal or financial relationships that could have inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is based on research conducted in Uzbekistan, generously supported by the Imam Bukhari International Scientific Research Center in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, where the second author serves as a representative. The research was also financially supported by Universiti Malaya through the first author's Research Maintenance Fee (RMF) Account. The authors sincerely acknowledge both institutions for their invaluable support in facilitating this study and contributing to its successful completion.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

This article is solely authored by Asyraf Isyraqi bin Jamil and Otabek Mukhammadiev, who were responsible for all aspects of the research, including conceptualization, data collection, analysis, writing, and manuscript revision. No other individuals contributed to this work.

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