

'ISLAMIC STUDIES' IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES – AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL TRAINING OF ĪMĀMŪS

1. Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf

PhD Research Scholar, Curtin University, Australia

Email: nabeel.musharraf@gmail.com

ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9987-5290>

2. Jabeen Bhutto

Assistant Professor, Department of Comparative Religion & Islamic Culture, Sindh University, Jamshoro

Email: drbhuttojabeen@gmail.com

ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8155-482X>

3. Hadi Bux

Assistant Professor, MUET, SZAB Campus Khairpur Mir's.

Email: hadibukhsh@gmail.com

ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3390-0975>

To cite this article:

Musharraf, Muhammad Nabeel, Jabeen Bhutto, and Hadi Bux. "ENGLISH: 'ISLAMIC STUDIES' IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES – AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL TRAINING OF IMAMS." *The Scholar-Islamic Academic Research Journal* 5, No. 1 (February 25, 2019): 49–92.

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.29370/siarj/issue8ar11>

Journal	The Scholar Islamic Academic Research Journal
	Vol. 4, No. 1 January -June 2019 P. 49-92
Publisher	Research Gateway Society
DOI:	10.29370/siarj/issue6ar11
URL:	https://doi.org/10.29370/siarj/issue8ar11
License:	Copyright c 2017 NC-SA 4.0
Journal homepage	www.siarj.com
Published online:	19-02-28



**'ISLAMIC STUDIES' IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES – AN ANALYSIS
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL TRAINING OF ĪMĀMŞ**

Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf, Jabeen Bhutto, Hadi Bux

ABSTRACT:

Imams have an important role in community leadership and development and they accordingly need appropriate education and training to enable them to effectively perform their role. This is not only required to prepare them in providing leadership in religious matters but also in terms of positively impacting the overall direction of community in accordance with broader national interests. This literature review paper reviews the various perspectives related to Islamic studies tertiary education options for Australian Imams in local universities. The study notes that 'Islamic studies' as a discipline has evolved over the decades in Australia and internationally and there are a number of different approaches towards Islamic studies education. While reviewing the course structures and scopes of courses, it is identified that most of the current courses are not suitable to meet the needs of training the Imams. Accordingly, students go to other avenues for meeting their educational needs. In order to ensure better integration with local culture, values, and national priorities, existing university programs need to be explored and other options, including supplementary courses for foreign qualified Imams, may need to be explored. The paper concludes with suggestions regarding future research which can evolve the current body of knowledge on 'Islamic studies' education and local training options for Imams.

KEYWORDS: Islamic Studies, Australian Universities, Local, Training, Imam

1. INTRODUCTION:

Imams have an important role to play within Muslim communities, in Australia and around the world, in terms of providing Muslims with religious leadership, facilitation in complying with religious obligations, assistance in social matters and teaching in various capacities, as evident from relevant research literature¹.

Education and training prepare individuals to acquire relevant knowledge and skills which enable them to competently meet requirements of their role². Accordingly, Imams need appropriate qualifications and training as well which has to be in alignment with their roles and responsibilities. This need has been recognized by a number of governments around the world, including Australia³. Such training, in “Islamic Studies” and “local cultures and values”, can be delivered through universities, government departments, various community

¹ Abuelezz, “A SURVEY OF AMERICAN IMAMS”; Akbarzadeh and Saeed, *Muslim Communities in Australia*, 38, 43, 59; Albayrak, “Friday Sermons and the Question of Home-Trained Imams in Australia”; Ali, Milstein, and Marzuk, “The Imam’s Role in Meeting the Counseling Needs of Muslim Communities in the United States”; Aslan, *Islamic Education in Europe*, 53; Birt, “Good Imam, Bad Imam”; Bunyan, “National Imams Consultative Forum”; Halafoff, “Civic Integration for Religious Community Leaders New to Australia”; Jones, “Islamic Schools in Australia.”

² Andries, “AN ASSESSMENT OF CHALLENGES IN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN THE CAPE WINELANDS DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY – A MANAGEMENT PERCEPTION,” 6.

³ Albayrak, “Friday Sermons and the Question of Home-Trained Imams in Australia”; Geaves, “Drawing on the Past to Transform the Present”; Halafoff, “Civic Integration for Religious Community Leaders New to Australia”; Peter, “Training Imams and the Future of Islam in France.”

organizations and traditional Islamic seminaries. Considering the broad range of skills required by Imams to be able to effectively perform their roles, tertiary education is considered as an appropriate educational level by communities and government, as explained in this article. Ad-hoc supplementary short courses can also serve well as a short-term measure⁴.

Review of literature and course details shows that tertiary level courses in Australia, offered by various universities and traditional seminaries, vary significantly in their objectives, curriculum, and educational approaches. As explained in this paper, researchers have reviewed this aspect in detail and pointed out that current courses offerings from universities do not adequately meet the requirements for local training of Imams⁵. This is consistent with findings from the UK⁶ and US⁷. Reasons for this similar outcome and potential solutions can be explored in future research and are considered out-of-scope for current research.

2. AIM AND SCOPE:

The aim of this paper is to present a synthesis of literature review on Islamic Studies higher education in Australia in terms of its historical background, its ability to meet community needs with regards to training of Imams and mix of courses being offered. Analysis of delivery mechanisms, units' contents, curriculum and textbooks are considered to

⁴ Albayrak, "Friday Sermons and the Question of Home-Trained Imams in Australia."

⁵ Akbarzadeh, "Investing in Mentoring and Educational Initiatives: The Limits of DeRadicalisation Programmes in Australia"; Albayrak, "Friday Sermons and the Question of Home-Trained Imams in Australia."

⁶ Mumisa and Kessler, *POLICY PAPER ON THE TRAINING OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE UK*.

⁷ Ahmad, Bukhari, and Nyang, *The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*.

be out of scope. Moreover, this review only focuses on higher education, though ‘Islamic Studies’ as an educational discipline is spread over various levels.

In alignment with above, Figure 1 defines the scope of this paper.

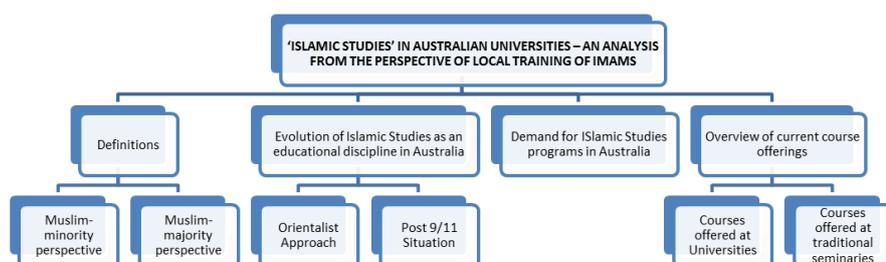


Figure 1: Scope of literature review

In accordance with research findings, recommendations for future research are also included in this paper.

3. ISLAMIC STUDIES AS AN EDUCATIONAL DISCIPLINE – DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ABOUT ITS DEFINITIONS:

Definition of ‘Islamic Studies’ varies depending on what perspective it is viewed from⁸ and accordingly, there is no generally accepted definition available for this discipline⁹. Following is an overview from the perspective of Muslim-minority and Muslim-majority countries.

⁸ Nanji, *Mapping Islamic Studies*, 19.

⁹ Dien, “Islamic Studies or the Study of Islam?: From Parker to Rammell”; Waardenburg, “The Study of Islam in German Scholarship,” 15.

3.1 Muslim-Minority countries:

The concept of Islamic studies in Muslim-minority countries has evolved over time and moved from ‘the studies of past’ approach under the banner of orientalism, to ‘the exploration of modern Islam’¹⁰. Dien (2007) presents an analysis of the prevalent definitions of Islamic studies in western context and explains that they can be categorized as follows:

One group of scholars believes that ‘Islamic Studies’ comprises of the study of Islam as a ‘religio-intellectual discipline and its traditions’ that is separate from humanities and social sciences as they can dilute the core faith-based education of Islam as a religion.

The second group of scholars believes that Islam has to be studied with the perspective of evolution towards ‘modern Islam’. They believe that by confining ‘Islamic Studies’ to textual studies alone would give incorrect expressions of uniformity about the discipline which, by its nature, is heterogeneous. These scholars recommend that the core of Islamic Studies, which should comprise of classical Islamic sciences, should be surrounded by the other areas such as anthropology, social sciences and evolution towards ‘modern Islam’.

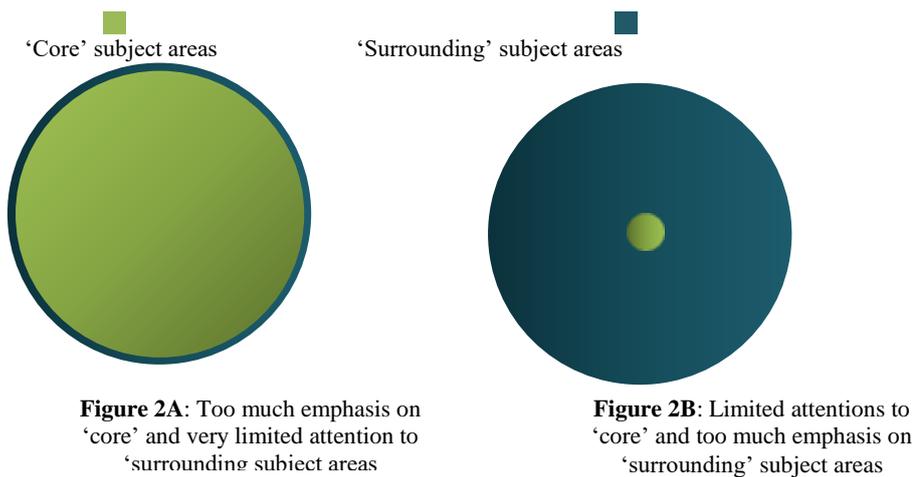
The second definition appears to be a more contextual and relevant for today’s times, however, its implementation gives rise to a lot of difference in approaches, methodologies, and key focus areas.

As highlighted in section 5 of this paper, one of the two (‘core’ or the

¹⁰ Khir, “Islamic Studies within Islam.”

‘surrounding’ subject) grow too thick or too thin causing an imbalance, as represented in figure 2A and 2B.

Accordingly, an element of balance has to be maintained depending on particular courses objectives in given scenario, in order to effectively implement the approach advocated in the second definition (Ashaari et al., 2012).



3.2 Muslim-Majority countries:

The study of ‘Islam’ as a religion among Muslims, with its well-known disciplines and classifications of branches of knowledge form the foundation of Islamic educational system¹¹. According to this view, Khir explains, ‘transmitted knowledge’ – also known as ‘Ulum An-Naqaliyyah’ (that which is believed to be communicated by God and informed by His Messenger ﷺ) and its interpretation is believed by Muslim scholars as the real Islamic Studies knowledge (referred to as Uloom al-Din).

¹¹ Khir.

‘Islamic Studies’ in Australian Universities – An Analysis from The Perspective of Local Training Of Imams

Khair (2007) also provides a list of key sciences that fall within the scope of ‘Islamic Studies’ as mentioned by a number of Islamic scholars with slight differences. This includes the sciences of Quran (reading, interpretation, exegesis, reasons for the revelation of its verses etc.), sciences of hadith (collection, authentication, compilation, translation and interpretation of prophetic traditions), Islamic Jurisprudence, creed and theology, Sufism, history, sciences related to Arabic language and logic.

3.3 Recommended definition:

It would not be appropriate to consider any of the above definitions as incorrect as they can be relevant in certain situations and circumstances. In our opinion, the ‘core’ of Islamic studies has to be based on branches of Islamic sciences mentioned in the third definition. However, this core needs to be surrounded by relevant contextual subjects, as explained in definition 2 so that a broader understanding can be acquired by those undertaking Islamic studies. Course structures prepared on this definition will still need to be tailored according to ‘needs’ of specific learners, organizational policies and other relevant factors ¹².

An example of this recommendation can be adaptation in the thickness of the core and surrounding subjects based on who is required to be taught or trained, e.g. those who are undertaking Islamic studies from the policy point of view (as opposed to Imams)

¹² Diamond, *Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula*, 64–67.

‘Islamic Studies’ in Australian Universities – An Analysis from the Perspective of Local Training of Imams

may need more thickness in surrounding subjects and only a broad overview of the ‘core’ (and vice versa).

In summary, the definition of ‘Islamic studies’ as a discipline is fluid, as explained previously in this section, and it has to be adapted to meet the needs of specific intended audience while adhering to certain broad aspects related to the Islamic studies discipline.

4. EVOLUTION OF ‘ISLAMIC STUDIES’ AS AN EDUCATIONAL DISCIPLINE IN AUSTRALIA:

‘Islamic studies’, as an educational discipline, has evolved over the centuries. Following is an overview of its two major phases within Australian universities.

4.1 Early Studies on Islam - the ‘Orientalist’ Approach:

Study of Islam in Australian universities dates back to 1960 – the ‘white Australia’ time when Islam was studied and taught as something ‘external’, ‘different’ or ‘outside’¹³. Professor Abdullah Saeed explains that these studies were mainly structured around the “orientalist” approach which seeks to study Islam from the perspective of its rich and complex “civilization” presenting it as something fixed, finished and unchanging.

Orientalism and Orientalists’ approaches of that time had a significant impact on ‘Islamic Studies’ at that time¹⁴ and have some engrained

¹³ Saeed, “Islamic Studies in Australia - Establishing the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies,” 85.

¹⁴ Waardenburg, “The Study of Islam in German Scholarship,” 3.

‘Islamic Studies’ in Australian Universities – An Analysis from the Perspective of Local Training of Imams

remains from that time still in the system. It is, therefore, important to present a brief overview of ‘orientalism’ and its role in education.

The roots of the oriental study of Arabic in Europe go back to the 16th century. This study of language later evolved into other related studies focussing on linguistics, cultures and history by the 19th century¹⁵. The only part of the ‘orient’ with which early Europeans could claim acquaintance was middle-east¹⁶ and accordingly the ‘orientalist’ studies were, in essence, ‘middle eastern’ studies. As historical events occurred, the scope of this field extended to Persia, India, and China, extending the scope of orientalism and leading to newer terms being coined to refer to orientalist researcher in particular areas [e.g. Iranist, Arabist, Sinologists etc.]¹⁷. This approach towards study and teaching of Islam was commonly found in Europe and colonized countries in 19th and the first half of 20th century¹⁸. Hasbullah¹⁹ states that according to many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, orientalist approach towards Islamic studies has created an ‘intellectual pollution’ in Islamic thought due to their underlying motives and inadequacy to correctly understand and interpret Islam. With the exception of a few, most orientalists in 19th and the first half of 20th century held negative views about Islam²⁰ which resulted in bias in their works. Criticism for this bias toward Islam and its inappropriateness by

¹⁵ Waardenburg, 1.

¹⁶ Lewis, *Islam and the West*, 102; Saif, “Muslim Response to Orientalism.”

¹⁷ Lewis, *Islam and the West*, 102.

¹⁸ Ahmad, Bukhari, and Nyang, *The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*, 6; Saeed, “Islamic Studies in Australia - Establishing the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies,” 85; Scott-Baumann and Cheruvallil-Contractor, *Islamic Education in Britain*.

¹⁹ Hasbullah, “Assessment on Orientalist Contributions to the Islamic World.”

²⁰ Varisco, “Orientalism and Islam,” 2009.

‘Islamic Studies’ in Australian Universities – An Analysis from the Perspective of Local Training of Imams

academics and scholars can be observed in significant body of literature²¹.

It is to be noted, however, that not all the orientalist belonged to this ‘we are superior’ school of thought and there were many who were sincere and honest to the academic discipline²².

4.2 Post 9/11 Situation:

Interest in Islamic studies courses arose exponentially after the unfortunate incidents of 9/11²³. Accordingly, many universities started to offer courses in Islamic studies and related disciplines. However, according to some researchers, little thought has been given to the structure of these programs and assumptions that underlie such study²⁴.

In Australia, like rest of the world, approach towards Islamic Studies shifted from being considered something ‘external’ to something considered more ‘relevant’ at home²⁵.

²¹ Ahmad, Bukhari, and Nyang, *The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*; Akbarzadeh and Smith, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media”; Hasbullah, “Assessment on Orientalist Contributions to the Islamic World”; Jameelah, *Islam and Orientalism*; Khagga and Hussain, “ASSESSING THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORIENTALISTIC SCHOLARSHIP OF ISLAM”; Rafiq, “ORIENTALISM AND WESTERN ACADEMIA”; Said, *Orientalism*; Varisco, “Orientalism and Islam,” 2009; Varisco, *Orientalism and Islam*, 2010, 18.

²² Green and Searle-Chatterjee, *Religion, Language, and Power*, 65; Hasbullah, “Assessment on Orientalist Contributions to the Islamic World”; Salama, *Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History*, 36.

²³ Morris et al., *The Teaching and Study of Islam in Western Universities*, 1.

²⁴ Morris et al., 1.

²⁵ Saeed, “Islamic Studies in Australia - Establishing the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies,” 85.

This study, however, is not focussed on ‘Islam as a religion’ alone and deals with a diverse range of issues which span over politics, anthropology, post-colonial theory, gender, culture, society, plurality and other related aspects ²⁶.

Professor Abdullah Saeed also explains that in post-9/11, academic collaboration and dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars has increased which is an important mechanism to clear the tensions created by traditional orientalist approach. A significant percentage of research is focussed on plurality, clearing up misperceptions about Islam and removing the ‘foreignness’ of Islam and Muslims in The West ²⁷.

Collaboration between universities and communities has also increased in recent years. This aspect is further explained in section 4.1 in relation to the creation of NCEIS (National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies) in 2007.

5. DEMAND FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES PROGRAMS:

Demand for courses in Islamic Studies in Australia has rapidly grown in recent years ²⁸ with some institutions claiming a growth rate of 200% ²⁹. This increased interest is from the greater community, Muslims as well as non-Muslim. Many young Muslims desire to learn their religion locally. Interest is also seen from those who have worked with Muslims in different capacities e.g. the war veterans who have served in the Middle

²⁶ Saeed, 85.

²⁷ Saeed, 85.

²⁸ Auda et al., *International Approaches to Islamic Studies in Higher Education*, 46.

²⁹ Adie, “Islamic Studies on the Rise.”

East and intend to know more about Islam, Adie explains. There have been different opinions and concerns within community and government with regards to utilization of local Islamic studies programs for the training of Imams. Following is an overview:

5.1 Community Interest in Local Training of Imams and Response from

Government:

Akbarzadeh ³⁰, has pointed out towards a wide-spread community support for local training of Imams based on findings from community engagement programs. This finding is also highlighted by other researchers ³¹. Akbarzadeh explains that young Muslims do not consider the practice of importing Imams to be appropriate as these Imams cannot relate to their problems and social interactions. In the absence of appropriate training, young Australian-born Muslims who have received overseas training (as opposed to Imams born and trained overseas) are serving as an important link between the youth and traditional Islamic knowledge in the current situation³². This, however, restricts the possibility of acquiring extensive religious education due requirement for staying overseas for many years and other relevant factors. Jones ³³ also points out training of Imams locally as a priority for Muslim communities, “although this training can still be supplemented by travel to the great centres of learning in other countries, like Al-Azhar in Cairo”.

³⁰ *ISS 5 Challenging Identities*.

³¹ Auda et al., *International Approaches to Islamic Studies in Higher Education*, 46.

³² Jones, “Islamic Schools in Australia: Muslims in Australia or Australian Muslims?,” 24.

³³ “Islamic Schools in Australia.”

Australian Government convened a Muslim community reference group (MCRG) in 2005 to assist with the formation of *national action plan* to build on social cohesion, harmony and security (NAP)³⁴. MCRG, after a comprehensive consultation process spread over 12 months presented its recommendations which became the basis for NAP³⁵. Akbarzadeh³⁶ and Aly³⁷ has pointed out that one of the key focus areas suggested by MCRG was to make provisions for the Islamic Education for local Imams. Akbarzadeh further mentions that one of the first demands from MCRG was to request an overview of Islamic studies at Australian universities. According to stock-taking conducted at Australian universities, it was identified that though Islamic studies was offered in universities as a field of study, however, were no courses related to training of leaders, teachers and Imams³⁸. Moreover, the courses lacked cohesion³⁹ which was considered to be a pedagogical drawback. It can, therefore, be said that there were no university-based training options were available to training Muslims Imams and leader locally. This shortcoming accordingly led to the assumption that Australia, like other Muslim-minority countries, required local arrangements for preparing Muslim Imams and hence the

³⁴ Saeed, "Islamic Studies in Australia - Establishing the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies," 85.

³⁵ Lewis, "A National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security"; "National Action Plan."

³⁶ "Investing in Mentoring and Educational Initiatives: The Limits of DeRadicalisation Programmes in Australia."

³⁷ "The Policy Response to Home-Grown Terrorism."

³⁸ Saeed, "Islamic Studies in Australia - Establishing the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies," 89.

³⁹ "Investing in Mentoring and Educational Initiatives: The Limits of DeRadicalisation Programmes in Australia."

establishment of a national centre was considered⁴⁰.

We see similar findings from many European countries. Governments, accordingly, invested in Islamic studies programs in their local universities to train Imams⁴¹. Akbarzadeh points out that Australian government closely observed these European initiatives as it shares the same concerns with them regarding training of Imams.

Based on the recommendations from NAP regarding local training for Imams, Australian government allocated necessary funds to establish a world-class Islamic studies centre. Akbarzadeh (2014) and Saeed (2014) highlight that after an open competition, among leading Australian public universities, The University of Melbourne, in consortium with the Griffith University and the University of Western Sydney, was selected to host the new National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies (NCEIS). It was expected from NCEIS that it would contribute to the effective training of local Imams as its inception originated from the need to train Muslim Imams and leaders within Australia. However, the overview of current Islamic studies related courses (section 5) highlights that a lot of work still needs to be done in this regard and most of the existing courses do not provide enough depth and breadth in core Islamic sciences. This finding is also endorsed from research by Professor Akberzadeh. Due to the very nature of the courses offered by NCEIS consortium, most of the student population is non-Muslims which results in the originally intended group,

⁴⁰ [NO_PRINTED_FORM]

⁴¹ Akbarzadeh; Aslan and Windisch, *The Training of Imams and Teachers for Islamic Education in Europe. Wiener Islamstudien. Volume 1*; Johansen, *Islam at the European Universities. Report 2*.

i.e. the future Imams and community leaders, to remain outside the scope (Akbarzadeh, 2014). Saeed (2014, p. 94) points out that NCEIS communicated its point of view in its early phases that traditional Islamic seminary style training for Imams would not be possible at secular universities and focus would accordingly be to educate Muslims and non-Muslims interested in learning about Islam.

6. OVERVIEW OF COURSE OFFERINGS:

The dominant form of Islamic studies education in Australia is related to ‘area studies’ focussed on Asia and middle-east⁴². Many Australian Universities have started to offer courses in Islamic studies, Arabic Language and middle-eastern studies in the last decade. In recent time, Universities have also started to engage scholars with ‘traditional’ Islamic knowledge in development and delivery of Islamic studies programs⁴³. In addition to formal university-based education, there are some non-accredited traditional seminaries as well.

In this section, we have presented an overview of the university and traditional courses in Islamic studies.

6.1 University Courses:

The range of programs being offered is wide and diverse and includes courses from Bachelors to Doctorate levels⁴⁴. NCEIS, a commonwealth initiative, assists three Australian universities (the University of

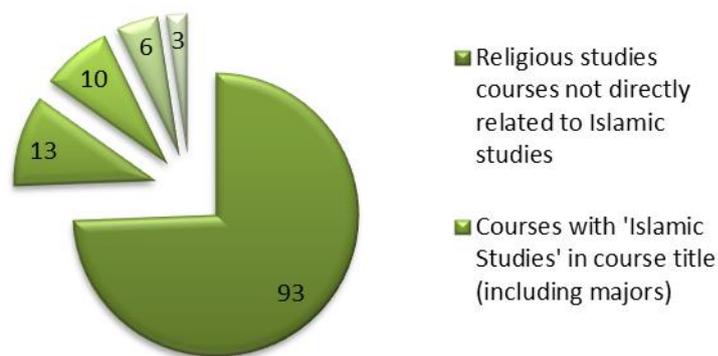
⁴² Auda et al., *International Approaches to Islamic Studies in Higher Education*, 46.

⁴³ Auda et al., 46.

⁴⁴ *National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies Australia - Brochure*.

Melbourne, University of Western Sydney and The Griffith University) in research, teaching and community engagement ⁴⁵.

In the data collection process for this paper, universities websites have been surveyed for availability of Islamic studies related courses. All 40 public universities in Australia have been included in the review. The following figure summarizes the available courses (by ‘coursework’ only - research Masters and Ph.D. are not included in the scope of current analysis)



⁴⁵ Auda et al., *International Approaches to Islamic Studies in Higher Education*, 51.

Figure 3: Overview of relevant courses

The ‘Islamic studies’ related courses (the second category in above figure) are explained below with a broad overview of contents. This overview will form the basis of further analysis presented in subsequent sections of this paper).

Table 1: Description of ‘Islamic Studies’ related Courses

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
UNE - University of New England	BA (Islamic Studies Major)	A key focus of these courses is 'Understanding Muslim Societies in Asia'. Units offered include: Note: ‘MA - Studies in Religion’ is also offered at UNE which offers options to select Islamic	46
		- ‘Aspects of Islam’ (Option1: Islamic Economics, Option2: The Sharia), - Individual Research Project, - Islam and the Creation of the Muslim World,	

⁴⁶ “Course Import - UNE - Course and Unit Catalogue 2016 - The University of New England”; UNE, “Islamic Studies.”

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
	studies related units.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Islam and the Modern World Order, - Islam and the West: the Clash of Civilisations?, - Islam in Central Asia, - Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia, - Islam in South Asia, - Islam in the Modern World, - Women in Islam. 	

UWS - University of Western Sydney	Bachelor of Arts – Islamic Studies Major	Four compulsory units include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hadith: The Prophetic Tradition, - Islamic Law in a Changing World, 	⁴⁷
------------------------------------	--	---	---------------

⁴⁷ Leggo, “Admission and Unit Information - Bachelor of Arts (Islamic Studies)”;
Leggo, “Bachelor of Arts - Islamic Studies Major.”

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
------------	---------	---------------------------	------------

- The Qur'an: An Introduction,
- Understanding Islam and Muslim Societies.

Remaining four units, in accordance with university rules and regulations, can be selected from below:

- Islam in the Modern World,
- Women with Muslim Identity,
- Applied Critical Methods,
- Ethical Traditions in Islam,
- History of Muslim Civilisations and Ideas,
- Islam in the West,
- Islam in Southeast Asia,
- Islamic Law in a Changing World,

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Islam, Media, and Conflict,- Islamic Revivalism in the Globalised World,- Multicultural Studies,- Sociology of Religion,- The International Relations of the Middle East Since 1945.	
CSU - Charles Sturt University	Bachelor of Islamic Studies And Bachelor of Islamic Studies (Hons.)	Core and electives units for bachelor level studies comprise of following units: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Islamic Worldview and Faith Essentials,- Mantiq (Logic) and Critical Reasoning,- Fiqh (Islamic Law) of the Five Pillars,	48

⁴⁸ "Bachelor of Islamic Studies."

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Islam in the Modern World,- Ihsan (Spirituality) Essentials,- Akhlaq (Morality) and Adab (Manners) in Islam,- Sirah (Life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ),- Usul al-Din (Foundational Islamic Theology),- Usul al-Fiqh (Methodology of Islamic Law),- Usul al-Tafsir (Methodology of Qur'anic Exegesis),- Usul al-Hadith (Methodology of Prophetic Traditions),- Introduction to Arabic Reading,	

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Beginner Arabic Language 1,- Beginner Arabic Language 2,- Intermediate Arabic Grammar 1,- Purification of the Heart,- History of Prophets: Adam to Jesus,- Religious Service and Community Leadership,- Islamic Family Law,- Advanced Study of Tafsir (Qur'anic Exegesis) Literature,- Advanced Study of Hadith Literature,- World Religions in Australia,- Women in Islam and	

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		Islamic Cultures, - Intermediate Arabic Grammar 2, - Advanced Arabic Grammar, - Islamic History: 632 to Present, - Guided Research. For honours, 3 additional units need to be completed (2 core and 1 elective) as explained below: Core Subjects: - Social Research Methods for Islamic Studies, - Islamic Studies Honours Project/Dissertation. Restricted Electives: - Interpreting Islamic Sacred Texts, - Islamic History, Law and	

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		Society.	
CSU - Charles Sturt University	Master in Islamic Studies	Core units include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Islamic Worldview and Theology,- Islamic Jurisprudence of Five Pillars,- Methodology of Islamic Law (Usul al-Fiqh),- Methodology of Qur'anic Exegesis (Usul al-Tafsir),- Essentials of Islamic Spirituality,- Philosophy of Prophet Muhammad's Life (Sirah),- Interpreting Islamic Sacred Texts,- Islamic Theology: Classical to Contemporary	49

⁴⁹ "Master of Islamic Studies."

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		Thought, - Islamic Studies: Methodology and Sources.	
		2 electives can be chosen from below:	
		- Religious and Communal Leadership in Modern Society, - Islamic Family Law and Society, - Islam in the Modern World, - Women in Islam, Civilisations and Cultures, - Islam: Morality and Etiquette in Daily Life, - History of Islam: From Tribe to World Civilisation, - Introduction to Arabic	

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		Reading, <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Beginner Arabic Language 1,- Beginner Arabic Language 2,- Intermediate Arabic Grammar 1,- Intermediate Arabic Grammar 2,- Advanced Arabic Grammar.	
		1 elective has to be chosen from below: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Islamic Worldview and Theology,- Essentials of Islamic Spirituality.	
CSU -	Graduate	Graduate diploma and certificate	⁵⁰

⁵⁰ "Graduate Diploma of Islamic Studies - Charles Sturt University."

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
Charles Sturt University	Diploma in Islamic Studies Graduate Diploma in Islamic Studies	comprise of 10 and 4 units respectively. All units (core and electives) for both these programs are also included in the list of units above for Master degree.	51
UniMelb - University of Melbourne	Bachelor of Arts (Islamic Studies major)	8 units need to be completed for Islamic studies major in accordance with relevant course rules. Units that can be studied under this course include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Islam in the Modern World, - Understanding Islam and Muslim Societies, - Crisis Zone: Middle Eastern Politics, - Islam, Media, and 	52

⁵¹ "Graduate Certificate in Islamic Studies - Charles Sturt University."

⁵² "Handbook - Islamic Studies"; "Islamic Studies — Courses at The University of Melbourne, Australia"; Sangwine, "Islamic Studies."

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		Conflict,	
		- Islamic Law in a Changing World,	
		- Israelis & Palestinians: Conflict, Peace,	
		- Sufism: The Spiritual Dimension of Islam,	
		- The First Centuries of Islam,	
		- The Qur'an: An Introduction,	
		- Ethical Traditions in Islam,	
		- Islam and the Making of Europe,	
		- Islam in Southeast Asia,	
		- Islam in the West,	
		- Oman Intensive Seminar,	
		- Sociology of Religion,	
		- The Modern Middle East.	

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
UniMelb - University of Melbourne	Graduate Certificate in Arts – Islamic Studies	4 units are required to be completed for this course. Coe unit is: ‘Topics in Arabic & Islamic Studies’. 3 electives can be chosen from below: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The Qur'an: An Introduction,- Islam, Media, and Conflict,- Islamic Law in a Changing World,- Crisis Zone: Middle Eastern Politics,- Islam in the West,- Ethical Traditions in Islam,- Islam and the Making of Europe.	⁵³

⁵³ “Handbook - Islamic Studies (Graduate Certificate in Arts).”

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
UniMelb - University of Melbourne	Graduate Diploma in Arts – Islamic Studies	8 units are required to be completed for this course. Core units include: - Islam in the West, - Topics in Arabic & Islamic Studies, - Supervised Reading. Elective units can be selected from the following: - Understanding Islam and Muslim Societies, - Islam in the Modern World, - The First Centuries of Islam, - The Qur'an: An Introduction,	54

⁵⁴ "Graduate Diploma in Arts."

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Islam and the State in Indonesia,- Islam, Media, and Conflict,- Islamic Law in a Changing World,- Crisis Zone: Middle Eastern Politics,- The Modern Middle East,- The History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,- Ethical Traditions in Islam,- Islam and the Making of Europe,- Islam in Southeast Asia,- Islamic Banking and Finance,	

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		- Sociology of Religion.	
UniMelb - University of Melbourne	Graduate Diploma in Arts (Advanced) - Islamic Studies	This course requires 5 units to be completed, including a thesis. 4 units (apart from thesis) can be chosen from the following in accordance with course requirements from university: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Critical Asian Perspectives,- Islam and Politics,- Reason and Revelation in Islam,- Human Rights and Islam,- Middle Eastern Wars: Jihad & Resistance,- Topics in Arabic & Islamic Studies,- Contemporary the Middle	⁵⁵

⁵⁵ "Graduate Diploma in Arts (Advanced) - Islamic Studies - 2016."

University	Degrees	Broad overview of content	References
		East & Central Asia, - Supervised Reading (Asia Institute), - Justice, Democracy, and Difference.	
Monash University	Bachelor of Arts/ Letters (Islamic Studies Minor)	4 units related to Islamic Studies are available as minor: - World religions, - Conflict and coexistence: Jews, Christians and Muslims from antiquity through the middle ages, - Islam: Principles, civilizations, influences, - Islamic responses to the post-colonial age.	⁵⁶

6.2 Analysis of the course offerings with regards to suitability for training of Imams:

Review of units mentioned in table 2 highlights the following:

⁵⁶ "UG166."

We see that the courses which deal with Islam in terms of geographical origins and existence, language and interactions outnumber the courses which focus on ‘Islamic Studies’ as core area of study (13 of 30 contain ‘Islamic Studies’ in their titled). Knowing Arabic language or understanding the geographical aspects and political, social, ethnographic or other aspects related to it would not be suitable for the role of Imams. Accordingly, in further discussion, focus is on courses related to ‘Islamic studies’ as a holistic discipline.

Within the 13 courses related to Islamic studies, the ones at ‘Bachelors’ or ‘Masters’ level are 7. Graduate certificates and graduate diploma are usually stepping stones toward higher degrees and do not offer adequate depth and breadth at their own as required for training the Imams. They can, however, be used as effective add-on’s to existing formal or informal qualifications in Islamic studies.

Examination of the courses’ contents suggests that all the courses, barring Bachelor and Master Program in Islamic studies at CSU, offer limited depth in competencies related to ‘core’ Islamic sciences. Review of units suggest that the main focus of most courses is to look at Islam from an external perspective in terms of its interactions, cultures, history, social issues and other aspects. However, CSU courses at bachelors and masters level stand-out from other courses in terms of their contents and structure. Core Islamic sciences (such as Tafsir, Usul Al-Din, Usul al-Fiqh, Adaab, Usul al-Hadith and others) are adequately represented in their bachelors and masters courses in combination with units that aim to develop cultural integration of religious leaders and Imams with Australian values – a unique combination that we have not found in any other course.

Based on above, we can clearly see that majority of the courses do not cover essential Islamic science in reasonable depth, if at all. Therefore, it is clear that these courses are not adequate for training Imams (however, courses at CSU are an exception and need to be examined in further detail to ascertain their suitability for training the Imams locally). This finding is consistent with previous research which also shows the inadequacy of existing courses with regards to training of Imams. Albayrak ⁵⁷ identified in his research that local university courses are not appropriately fulfilling the need to train Imams locally, as none of the current university courses are designed to train imams and are accordingly not suitable for this purpose (we, however, are not convinced that courses at CSU also fall under this analysis without further investigation). Akbarzadeh (2014) has explained that though NCEIS is making valuable contributions to Australian society through its courses, it is not serving the needs of its initially intended audience i.e. Australian Imams. This is evident from the review of units included in programs offered by three universities working under NCEIS and opinions expressed by other researchers, as explained in previous sections. These findings are also observed by other international researchers e.g. Dr. Hashim Kamali and Ms. Zarina Nalla, who have suggested reforms in the way Islamic studies are taught in western universities ⁵⁸. According to them, in the current form, Islamic studies is either offered in a specialized sense or under the political banner to attract those students who are interested to study Islam from the 'war on terror' or policy perspective. They recommend that basic questions such as what courses need to be taught, how should they be structured, how would those courses be relevant to needs of students, what is the appropriateness and quality of text books etc. have to be

⁵⁷ "Friday Sermons and the Question of Home-Trained Imams in Australia."

⁵⁸ Morris et al., *The Teaching and Study of Islam in Western Universities*, 65.

critically evaluated.

With the conclusion that most of the local university courses are currently not able to be used to train local Imams, this is expected that most of the Imams would receive education either from overseas or from traditional Islamic seminaries available locally. Analysis of the current level of local qualifications among the Imams is presented in next section.

Another important finding from literature review is the structure and units in courses aimed to train Christian Ministers and priests. These courses provide detailed insights into the role of ministers and essential knowledge required for performing their job and engaging with relevant stakeholders⁵⁹. One of the potential areas for future research can be mutual benchmarking between these and Islamic studies related courses in terms of structure, units, contents, depth and breadth of knowledge.

6.3 Utilization status of Local University Courses in Training Imams:

As discussed in the previous section in light of current literature review and previous research findings, current courses at local universities are not adequately meeting the need to train the Imams locally. In this section we will present the literature review regarding the uptake of these courses to identify if a relationship exists.

According to a survey of Imams conducted by Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh, 93.3% of NSW Imams in his study, which included a representative sample from a range of national backgrounds and school of

⁵⁹ “Master of Theological Studies.”

thought, had overseas qualifications⁶⁰. Nine of the 15 Imams received no training at all in Australia. Another finding from Akbarzadeh's study was a lack of almost any Australian tertiary education among the Imams. Other researchers have also explored this aspect and come to the same conclusion that majority of Imams have overseas qualifications⁶¹. This highlights that the uptake of university courses at the moment is limited in terms of training the Imams locally. This is also consistent with findings from European studies as pointed out by Johansen⁶² and Akbarzadeh (2014). However, in European universities, researchers have pointed out that low uptake was mainly due to issues of legitimacy, as pointed out by Johansen. One of the potential reasons for this could be looking at Islam and Muslims from an external perspective (as explained in the previous section).

In this situation, following points need to remain under consideration.

In the absence of local training options, it is expected that overseas courses will continue to be utilized unless local courses are adapted according to the local training of Imams (according to community expressed requirement explained previously in this paper) and community is engaged in the development, modifications and roll-out of courses. Saeed⁶³, Albayrak (2012) and Jones (2012) consider this as a potential

⁶⁰ Akbarzadeh, *ISS 5 Challenging Identities*, 18–19.

⁶¹ Akbarzadeh, "Investing in Mentoring and Educational Initiatives: The Limits of DeRadicalisation Programmes in Australia"; Halafoff, "Civic Integration for Religious Community Leaders New to Australia"; Albayrak, "Friday Sermons and the Question of Home-Trained Imams in Australia"; Jones, "Islamic Schools in Australia."

⁶² *Islam at the European Universities. Report 2.*

⁶³ Saeed, "Islamic Studies in Australia - Establishing the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies," 94.

option for training Imams, considering that local courses are not in a position to accomplish this purpose. As highlighted by Albayrak (2012), short-term courses to compliment overseas and training outside the universities may also be a viable option.

Utilization of traditional seminaries, as explained below, could also continue to expand due to easier affordability and flexibility usually offered by such institutes. Also, analysis of the units included in their curriculum shows close alignment with traditional Islamic studies courses offered in Muslim-majority countries.

In the absence of locally trained Imams, it is also a given that fatwa's would be issued by externally trained Imams. Therefore, it may therefore be useful for relevant stakeholders to critically review the points highlighted from this literature review, compliment it with further research and utilize in policy-making and provision of relevant educational options in order to ensure better integration of foreign qualified Imams with Australian society and their ability to understand the '*urf*. Urf in Islamic terminology refers to local customs which need to be considered while giving religious rulings as long as they are not in contradiction to any explicit Islamic ruling⁶⁴.

6.4 Dars-i-Nizami Style Courses:

Traditional seminaries are run according to the famous Dars-i-Nizami style curriculum and are found in major cities⁶⁵. This curriculum almost

⁶⁴ Musharraf, *Explanation of Al-Waraqat of Imam Al-Juvaini*.

⁶⁵ "Aalim"; "About Us | Darul Ulum Sydney"; "Tayiba Institute - Courses."

solely focuses on traditional Islamic sciences including fiqh, tafsir, hadith, history, Arabic language and others ⁶⁶.

The presence of such institutes (usually referred to as ‘*Dar ul Uloom*’ and ‘*Madaris*’) is quite common in many western countries ⁶⁷. Their extent in Australia as compared to other countries (e.g. UK, US, South Africa etc.), however, seems limited considering the lack of availability of relevant literature. This is also evident from the fact that many young Muslims go abroad to obtain traditional Islamic knowledge⁶⁸. This finding, and the lack of traditional seminaries in Australia, points out the general acceptance of certain international programs within the Muslim community ⁶⁹. According to author’s personal observation, young learners mainly prefer institutions in Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Egypt, and Malaysia. In his study related to Islamic schools in Australia, Jones (2012) found that most of the Imams were trained in middle-east and south Africa. This is an area which is not significantly explored in previous research and can be taken up in future research. A key benefit of this exercise would be the first-hand information about the traditional institutions in countries from where future Imams are receiving their qualifications, their practices and educational approaches which can be analysed from an Australian perspective and used in analysis of local

⁶⁶ Chothia, “Study the ALIM Course in Perth, WA.”

⁶⁷ Geaves, “Drawing on the Past to Transform the Present”; Geaves, “The Symbolic Construction of the Walls of Deoband”; Grewal and Coolidge, “Islamic Education in the United States”; Mukadam et al., *The Training and Development of Muslim Faith Leaders - Current Practice and Future Possibilities*; Mumisa and Kessler, *POLICY PAPER ON THE TRAINING OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE UK*.

⁶⁸ Akbarzadeh, *ISS 5 Challenging Identities*.

⁶⁹ Jones, “Islamic Schools in Australia: Muslims in Australia or Australian Muslims?,” 23; Jones, “Islamic Schools in Australia.”

programs.

7. Recommendations for future research in the light of relevant research findings:

Based on gaps in current research and findings highlighted through this literature review study in relation to higher education for Islamic studies, the following requires further research.

7.1 Community Engagement:

Professor Ismail Albayrak ⁷⁰ has comprehensively analyzed important aspects related to course offering and explained that initiatives which are implemented at top-down approaches could potentially be unacceptable in certain communities. He points out that “imposition of top-down projects without consultation will do more harm than good to the religious affairs of the communities they seek to serve”. Accordingly, efforts to initiate new courses or re-designing existing courses can only be successful if they involve broader community and relevant stakeholders at appropriate stages of program development and implementation. Future researchers can explore this aspect and explore preferences and opinions of relevant stakeholders with regards to proposed programs and come up with a suitable course model.

7.2 Comprehensive Review of current courses:

In addition to this, there is a need for detailed examination of the current portfolio of Islamic studies related courses and how they serve (or

⁷⁰ “Friday Sermons and the Question of Home-Trained Imams in Australia.”

don't serve) their intended audience. Identifying the learning needs of the intended audience and designing course in accordance with them is one of the critical factors for program success⁷¹. In this paper, we have presented a broad analysis of course offerings and key content areas, which can serve as a starting point for future research aimed at exploring this and other, related aspect from different perspectives.

Previous research findings highlight the need for a comprehensive research to identify pros and cons of current Islamic Studies course offerings at Australian and international universities ⁷² identifying the SWOT and to come up with an effective framework for Islamic studies courses that can serve as a guide during course design, redesign, analysis and evaluation phases . Such a framework should adequately consider national objectives, community requirements, lessons learnt from local and international experience, findings from previous research on faith education and other relevant aspects in accordance. This recommendation is in accordance with curriculum analysis model proposed by ⁷³.

7.3 Supplementary training options:

Considering the current state, Albayrak (2012) suggests that:

In the short term, instead of focusing on the unrealistic goal of training our own imams in Australia (though this may be possible at some future date), current

⁷¹ Maribel G. Valdez, "How Learners' Needs Affect Syllabus Design"; Paradowski, Michał B., "NEEDS ANALYSIS AS THE FIRST STEP IN SYLLABUS DESIGN."

⁷² Morris et al., *The Teaching and Study of Islam in Western Universities*, 65.

⁷³ Diamond, *Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula*, 64–67.

departments of Islamic Studies, together with various NGOs, should organise regular workshops and courses to facilitate the integration and adaptation of new imams from overseas.

One relevant practical example in alignment with this recommendation is “Introducing Australia: A Course for Clergy New to Australia” which was initiated by Monash University in order to “impart knowledge and understanding of Australia’s multicultural and multifaith history, politics, laws and values to religious community leaders new to Australia utilising a multifaith peace building approach”⁷⁴. Possibility and impacts of such supplementary training need to be explored in further details to ascertain its effectiveness and utilize relevant findings in shaping the future portfolio of Islamic studies related courses

7.4 Do we really need local training of Imams?

Another important aspect to consider is an analysis of pros and cons of decision to train the Imams locally. Critical factors to be examined in this regard include the heterogeneous nature of Muslim community in Australia, availability of suitable scholarly resources and teaching staff, investment required to modify existing programs and offer new programs, provision of training for other stakeholders who do not require in-depth knowledge of Islamic core sciences (e.g. policy makers) and their varied learning needs. Professor Albayrak’s recommendation for considering a careful approach toward the training of Imams locally, is in sync with

⁷⁴ Bouma et al., *Introducing Australia*; Halafoff, “Civic Integration for Religious Community Leaders New to Australia.”

some studies conducted in French ⁷⁵, American ⁷⁶ and Dutch (Landman, ⁷⁷ contexts. Future researchers can dig deep into this issue and present pros and cons of both approaches which can assist decision-makers in making relevant decisions. International collaborations can also be an important consideration.

8. CONCLUSION:

In this paper, we have reviewed various definitions and perspective related to Islamic studies and how they impact the shaping of Islamic studies programs. In Australia, over the decades, the education of Islamic studies has evolved from orientalist approach to a broader approach focusing on the ‘present’. However, it is found through the literature review that most of the courses still focus on ‘area’ studies or ‘language’ aspects. This also includes most of those courses which are offered under the title of ‘Islamic studies’. Recent developments in one of the universities are, however, present a different set of units and structure with significant percentage of traditional Islamic science represented in the courses. On the other hand, traditional seminaries operating in Australia, focusing mainly on traditional science, are also delivering courses to aspiring future Imams and community leaders in accordance with curriculum practiced in most of the traditional seminaries across the Muslim world. The number of these local Islamic seminaries is estimated to be small as the research highlights that most of the Imams obtain their

⁷⁵ Peter, “Training Imams and the Future of Islam in France.”

⁷⁶ Mumisa and Kessler, *POLICY PAPER ON THE TRAINING OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE UK*.

⁷⁷ “Imams in the Netherlands Home-Made Better than Import?”

religious qualifications from overseas. There are a number of potential research areas that still need to be explored in local context to ascertain the effectiveness of these different educational approaches and their broader implications for Australian society and its communities. Future research can potentially focus on coming up with a suitable framework for Islamic studies programs based on good practices and learnings from local and international programs which can then be utilized in design, analysis and re-design of local courses.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)
