

Editorial

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah, his family, his companions, and those who follow him.

This special issue of the Journal of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University is a result of the International Symposium “The Islamic Culture Course in the Universities: Challenges and Development Prospects,” organised by the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University through the virtual platform “Teams” on 26 Jumada Al-Akhira 1443 AH, corresponding to 29 January 2022 CE. The symposium was part of the activities of “Doha, the Capital of Culture in the Islamic World 2021,” under the theme “Our Culture is Light,” in collaboration with the National Committee for Education, Culture, and Science in Qatar. The symposium featured diverse research papers that addressed the current status of the Islamic Culture course in our universities, the challenges of its development, and practical experiences in teaching and enhancing it.

This special issue includes research papers nominated for publication, selected from the papers presented at the symposium and subsequently subjected to preliminary peer review, followed by further study, assessment, and meeting all publication criteria for inclusion in this particular issue. Additionally, this issue documents “The Experience of Qatar University’s College of Sharia and Islamic Studies in Developing the Islamic Culture Course 2015-2021” from three perspectives: theoretical and experimental aspects, applied teaching aspects, and evaluation aspects. These aspects were all mentioned in the opening lecture of the mentioned symposium.

The total number of peer-reviewed research papers meeting the publication criteria in this issue is seven, and they are as follows:

The first research paper, titled “Islamic Culture in an Age of Religious Revival and Ideological Decline” by Professor Adnan Mohammad Zarzour, focuses on the “most significant threat” that Islamic culture has encountered historically and continues to confront in the contemporary era and which emanates from “internal adversaries.” According to Professor Zarzour, this internal challenge materialises as a form of “Bāṭiniyya,” a movement characterised by populism and heresy, collaborating with “all the enemies of Islam and its renegades.” Protecting future generations through proactive engagement with this challenge will avert the nation from initiating a “fresh chapter in the rise of the principles of the Bāṭiniyya,” thus hindering their ability to “advocate and disseminate their beliefs and lifestyle or prepare for its revival.”

Having scrutinised this grave challenge and how to respond to it, this study proposes educational modules to be incorporated into the Islamic Culture course to protect future generations from falling into the trap of counterfeit Islam or an “Islam of harm.” This protection involves “proper engagement with the Quran and the Sunna” and a comprehensive, correct understanding of these timeless sources. This approach is what distinguishes the “Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama’ah” (i.e. those who follow the Quran & the Prophet’s teachings) from “deviant sects,” the “Bāṭiniyya” being the most dangerous among them.

The second research paper, titled “The Educational Objective of the Islamic Culture Course,” by researchers Professor Abdul Majeed Al-Najjar and Dr Omar Benboudina, sheds light on the intended objective of the Islamic Culture course, viz. “intellectual growth and behaviour improvement.” The course does not aim to accumulate information on the foundations and values of Islam but to “shape

the student's thinking in a way that enables him to understand Islam in its institutions, values, and objectives, making it a yardstick for all the knowledge he acquires." The reason is that university students, regardless of their specialisation, need a "yardstick" to weigh the numerous cognitive concepts they study in alignment with those values and principles, which will allow them to "distinguish, among the knowledge they receive, between what aligns with these values and principles, integrating it into its context, and what contradicts them, critically assessing it." The methods of "dialogical learning" and "self-learning" will help them achieve this goal, providing them with an intellectual "yardstick" that aids the understanding and guides all behaviour based on that understanding. Such is the desired objective of the Islamic Culture course.

This study defines the educational content the Islamic Culture course must offer, considering its uniqueness in promoting "intellectual growth and behaviour-based self-improvement" through two prongs: planning the course content and outlining a systematic approach to achieving educational objectives.

The third research paper, titled "Doctrinal and Intellectual Challenges for the Islamic Culture Course in the Universities," by Professor Jamal Al-Kilani and Dr Amer Jod Allah, discusses "the most significant doctrinal and intellectual challenges," especially the challenges of contemporary atheism and the separation between belief and practice. It also addresses misconceptions about the "relationship between religion and the world in which we live and freedom in Islam," from which the Islamic Culture course should aim to "protect the student."

This study proposes how to "confront these challenges" and transform our culture's beliefs, values, and authentic customs "from a mere accumulation into a culture that directs the behaviour of young people."

The fourth research paper, titled: "Cleansing Islamic Culture Courses from Inauthentic Traditions and Clarifying the Problematic Ones" by Dr Mohammad Said Hawwa, calls for the "purification" of the content of Islamic Culture courses by removing certain "unauthentic or questionable traditions" they contain, which are the ones that have not been immune to criticism from hadith scholars. The study emphasises the importance of elucidating what may be problematic for students in traditions, using general rules and guidelines for critique and understanding as proposed in this study. The Islamic Culture course profoundly impacts "human awareness-building and behaviour, rectifying concepts and terminology, correcting many misconceptions, ideas and practices, and consolidating the culture of moderation and centrism."

The "Pilot of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University in Developing the Islamic Culture Course from 2015 to 2021" is documented by the following three studies:

The fifth research paper, titled "The Development of the Islamic Culture Course at Qatar University: Theory and Practice," was written by four professors from the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University. They are Dr Mohammad Abu Bakr Al-Musleh, Professor Abduljabbar Saeed, Dr Ibrahim Al-Ansari, and Dr Mohammad Iqbal Farhat. Their study focuses on the theoretical aspect of the Islamic Culture course at Qatar University. It traces its historical context before the development and experimental stages. It highlights the elements that distinguished the "development method" at the university from other prevalent experiences and the extent of its impact on developing the course and strengthening its elaboration during experimentation.

The sixth research paper, titled "The Teaching Reality of the Developed Islamic Culture Course

at Qatar University in 2017-2021. A descriptive-analytical study,” was completed by Dr Omar Ben Boudina, Dr Ali Al-Ashi, and Dr Abu Bakr Ibrahim. This research draws on a qualitative analysis of how professors at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University implemented the course development plan. It involves selecting some models of teachers’ practices in the Islamic Culture course, including “the philosophy of course planning and management” and the organisation of “student engagement with course activities.” The research also documents the challenges faced in teaching the course and the improvements introduced.

The seventh research paper, titled “Evaluation of the Experience of Qatar University’s College of Sharia and Islamic Studies in Developing the Islamic Culture Course in the Years 2017-2021,” was written by Professor Abdelkader Bekhouche, Professor Saleh Al-Zanki, Dr Zakaria Abdelhadi, and Ms Zainab Rahmatullah. Their study aims to measure “the extent to which the course attains projected learning outcomes” and its impact on “students’ lives and the college’s mission towards the university, society, and the job market.” The study used analytical and evaluative tools, including surveys and questionnaires distributed among random students, professors, parents, and peer educators. Subsequently, the collected data was analysed and evaluated.

We hope publishing these research papers will open new horizons for proposing Islamic Culture courses in our universities and contribute to finding the most robust methodologies for their development and the best ways to convey their message, achieve their desired objectives and reap their expected benefits. This is all based on the principle of scientific collaboration, the exchange of experiences, and the commitment to truth and cooperation in the service of knowledge and the reinforcement of Islamic culture.

Our success lies only with Allah, the Most High, the Almighty.

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