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# ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM OF THE ISLAMIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM AT NINGXIA ISLAMIC INSTITUTE



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DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTER'S IN  
(ISLAMIC EDUCATION) (RESEARCH AND  
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FACULTY OF HUMAN SCIENCES  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2026



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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the current state of the curriculum at Ningxia Islamic College and identify ways for its reform and optimization. Through methods such as literature analysis, data surveys, and expert interviews, the research summarizes the curriculum structure, basic conditions of teachers and students, and examines the teaching practices of core subjects, including Arabic grammar, Chinese language, and general courses. The findings reveal that the breadth and depth of the curriculum need enhancement, and the integration of traditional and modern disciplines requires further improvement. Additionally, students face challenges such as weak language foundations, high course difficulty, and outdated content in some textbooks. Based on the experiences of other Islamic institutions in China, this study proposes specific suggestions for optimizing the curriculum at Ningxia Islamic College, including adjustments to course proportions, the introduction of internship and practical training programs, updates to teaching materials, and improvements in teacher training. This research not only provides practical guidance for the development of Ningxia Islamic College but also offers valuable insights for the reform and development of other Islamic educational institutions, contributing to the advancement of the modern Islamic education system in China.

## **ANALISIS PEMBANGUNAN DAN PEMBAHARUAN KURIKULUM PENDIDIKAN ISLAM DI MAAHAD ISLAM NINGXIA**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka keadaan semasa kurikulum di Kolej Islam Ningxia dan mengenal pasti cara untuk pembaharuan serta pengoptimumannya. Melalui kaedah seperti analisis literatur, tinjauan data, dan temu bual pakar, penyelidikan ini merumuskan struktur kurikulum, keadaan asas tenaga pengajar dan pelajar, serta mengkaji amalan pengajaran subjek teras, termasuk tatabahasa Arab, bahasa Cina, dan kursus umum. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa keluasan dan kedalaman kurikulum perlu dipertingkatkan, dan integrasi antara disiplin tradisional dan moden memerlukan penambahbaikan yang lebih lanjut. Selain itu, pelajar menghadapi cabaran seperti penguasaan bahasa yang lemah, tahap kesukaran kursus yang tinggi, dan kandungan beberapa buku teks yang sudah lapuk. Berdasarkan pengalaman institusi Islam lain di China, kajian ini mencadangkan penambahbaikan khusus untuk mengoptimumkan kurikulum di Maahad Islam Ningxia, termasuk pelarasan nisbah kursus, pengenalan program latihan amali dan praktikal, pengemaskinian bahan pengajaran, serta penambahbaikan dalam latihan tenaga pengajar. Penyelidikan ini bukan sahaja memberikan panduan praktikal untuk pembangunan Kolej Islam Ningxia, malah menawarkan manfaat berguna untuk pembaharuan dan pembangunan institusi pendidikan Islam yang lain, sekaligus menyumbang kepada kemajuan sistem pendidikan Islam moden di China.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction

Islam has had a presence in China for over 1,300 years, contributing significantly to the cultural and religious diversity of the country. However, the development of Islamic education in China has faced numerous challenges and limitations throughout its long history. Traditional Islamic education has primarily focused on the transmission of religious knowledge, often struggling to adapt to the demands of modern society. With the increasing pace of globalization and modernization, Islamic education in China faces a dual challenge: it must preserve its religious heritage while simultaneously addressing the expectations of contemporary education systems and aligning with national policies. These dynamics have created both opportunities for reform and significant challenges in implementation (Shen, G. P., 2017).



In China, Islamic education not only serves as a medium for preserving religious teachings but has also integrated elements of Chinese national culture, history, and politics. This integration has resulted in a unique educational system that reflects the complex interplay between religion and state. Ningxia Islamic College, located in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, is one of the most prominent Islamic educational institutions in western China. It has become a key platform for cultivating religious professionals, including imams, educators, and religious leaders, who play important roles in their communities (Armijo, J., 2008). The college also serves as a focal point for exploring and addressing the broader challenges faced by Islamic education in modern China.

As a continuation of traditional Islamic education, the curriculum at Ningxia Islamic College embodies the deep cultural and religious heritage of the Muslim community. At the same time, it seeks to respond to the growing demands of modern education. The college takes on the important responsibility of producing graduates who not only possess profound religious knowledge but are also equipped with modern academic skills, critical thinking abilities, and an understanding of global perspectives. However, the college faces significant challenges in several areas, such as balancing religious and secular knowledge, meeting the national requirements for religious affairs management, and preparing students to meet the expectations of an increasingly interconnected world.

In particular, the integration of traditional subjects including Arabic grammar, Islamic jurisprudence, and cultural history with modern courses such as Chinese language, social sciences, and legal studies remains a key challenge. The existing

curriculum requires improvements in both comprehensiveness and depth to better prepare students for the demands of modern society. Additionally, students at the college face several challenges, such as weak foundational skills in language learning, difficulties in mastering complex subjects, and reliance on outdated teaching materials. These issues highlight the need for comprehensive curriculum reform and optimization to improve the quality and relevance of Islamic education at the institution.

This research aims to explore the current curriculum design of Ningxia Islamic College in detail, analyzing its strengths and weaknesses and identifying areas that require urgent reform. The study employs a combination of methods, including literature review, data collection through surveys, and interviews with experts and stakeholders. By presenting a detailed evaluation of the college's curriculum structure, teaching methods, and educational outcomes, this research seeks to provide practical solutions for curriculum reform and optimization.

The findings of this study will not only benefit Ningxia Islamic College by offering practical guidance for its curriculum development but will also provide valuable insights for other Islamic educational institutions in China.

## 1.2 Background

The renowned American educator John Dewey (1859-1952) wrote in his book *My Educational Creed*: "I believe that all education occurs through an individual's participation in the social consciousness of humanity. This process begins almost

unconsciously at birth. It continuously develops an individual's abilities, shapes their awareness, forms their habits, exercises their thinking, and stimulates their emotions and feelings. Through this unconscious education, individuals gradually share the accumulated wisdom and moral wealth of humanity. They become inheritors of inherent cultural capital. The most formal and specialized education in the world cannot be separated from this universal process; education can only be organized or distinguished in a certain direction in accordance with this process."

Although Dewey did not mention school education here and certainly did not refer to religious education in general, let alone specifically address Islamic education, what he discusses is social and family education. However, education can never be detached from the social environment in which individuals live. It is this environment, including political, economic, cultural, ethnic, and religious factors, that directly shapes education. To study a specific form of education, it is essential to conduct a historical and comprehensive examination of the social context in which this education exists.

The academic field of education research has a long history, with many distinguished educators proposing profound and illuminating educational ideas. Internationally, thinkers like Bertrand Russell's philosophy of "free" education, Dewey's pragmatic educational ideas, Bagley's essentialist educational thought, Piero's philosophy of educational analysis, Sukhomlinsky's ideas on the harmonious development of personality, and Foucault's concepts of general educational development have all contributed significantly to the field. Domestically, there are also influential figures such as Cai Yuanpei's liberal democratic educational thoughts and Chen Heqin's family education theories. The specific research areas in education today



span all aspects known in the field, including studies on fundamental educational theories and systems, surveys on the current state of education in various countries, research on specific categories of education such as family, school, and social education, case studies on the educational characteristics of different ethnic groups, and comparative studies of domestic and foreign educational systems.

Today, the world's total population is about 6.5 billion, and roughly four-fifths of the global population adheres to various religions. Religion is always carried out through specific ethnic groups (or races). As such, the methods and contents of religious education differ significantly between countries, ethnicities, and religions. This thesis focuses on the current state and changes in the curriculum design of Ningxia Islamic College, through which we can understand the development of modern Islamic education in China and the issues it faces. It aims to clarify the internal connections within the arrangement of Islamic educational curricula, explore the modernization of Islamic education itself, and examine the relationship between Islamic education and local educational modernization. The goal is to explore how Islamic education can harmoniously coexist with and contribute to the modern society, in pursuit of religious and social harmony.

"Education is a very complex yet universally present social phenomenon." The complexity and universality of educational phenomena determine that education is inevitably intertwined with other sectors of society. When we focus on studying education within a particular region or ethnic group, it requires us to relate the education in that region to local political, economic, cultural, ethnic, and religious issues.







Due to the unique characteristics of the Hui ethnic group, Hui education exhibits a combination of religious education and general national education. Hui education contains elements of both ordinary national education and religious education, creating an integrated form of education that blends these two. Currently, after long-term development, Hui education is facing the "choice of modernization." A correct understanding of the relationship between religious education and national education is the foundation for realizing the modernization of Hui education. Today, China is making significant strides toward modernization, and the modernization of Islamic education also profoundly influences the modernization of China's education system. The further development of the market economy, the increasing differentiation of interests, the diversification of social classes, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor are all fundamentally challenging the traditional cultural values of the Hui community. The inherent market-driven, profit-oriented, and rational thinking of the market economy poses a severe impact on traditional Islamic cultural values. "Modernization challenges both the concepts and methods of traditional Islamic religious education." This requires us to deeply analyze the discrepancies and gaps between traditional Islamic religious education and modernization, find common ground between the two, and use this as a foundation to construct a coordinated development of Islamic religious education and modern national education. This would be the key pathway for the modernization of Islamic education. It is a necessary precondition for properly adjusting the relationship between Islamic religious education and national education.

In conclusion, the modernization of Islamic religious education is not merely an academic or technical issue; it involves a broader cultural and social transformation.





Future research must seek to bridge the gap between traditional Islamic religious education and the changing dynamics of modern society and education, aiming for an integrated, harmonized approach that respects both religious traditions and modern educational goals. This is the necessary groundwork for achieving a balanced, harmonious educational system that serves both the Hui community's cultural heritage and the broader national and global context.

The Hui people are the largest Muslim ethnic group in China, primarily residing in the northwest regions of the country. The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region has the largest Hui population in China. According to statistics from 2020, Hui people account for 36.6% of Ningxia's total population, approximately 2.505 million people. Compared to other regions in China, the proportion of Hui people in Ningxia is significantly higher.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2020 indicates that the total Hui population nationwide is approximately 10.965 million, accounting for 0.78% of the total population. In contrast, the proportion of Hui people in Ningxia is 35.82 percentage points higher (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020). After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government approved the establishment of 10 Islamic institutes in regions such as Ningxia, Xinjiang, Gansu, and Yunnan. Ningxia Islamic Institute is one of them. Its purpose is to cultivate patriotic and religious professionals and religious service personnel for Islamic education in China (Sun, P. 2018). Currently, research on Islamic education in Ningxia is limited, with most studies focusing on *Jintang* education in the northwest regions. Modern Islamic education remains underexplored. This study aims to examine Ningxia Islamic Institute to provide insights into the development and existing challenges of modern Islamic education in China. During my internship at the institute, I observed that some



students struggled with low academic performance in subjects such as Arabic grammar, Chinese language, and public courses. This research seeks to analyze the reasons behind these issues and offers valuable insights for improving the institute's curriculum planning and implementation. The findings will not only benefit the institute itself but also serve as a reference for other Islamic education institutes.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Since its establishment 38 years ago, Ningxia Islamic College has made outstanding contributions to the development of Islamic education in China (Li, 2022), having trained over 5,000 students with specialized knowledge in Islam. As the largest Islamic institution in Ningxia, the rationality of its course structure is critical to both the college's teaching quality and student development (Ma, 2018).

The main objective of this study is to analyze and summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the college's course arrangements through an overview of the college's teaching situation, student demographics, faculty conditions, curriculum design, and textbook selection (Wang, 2019). By doing so, the study aims to identify the challenges and difficulties students face when studying certain courses and to provide a clearer understanding of areas that require improvement.

In recent years, with the ongoing curriculum reforms, this research seeks to evaluate the current course arrangements, identify the root causes of the issues, and assess their impacts on students' learning experiences (Ma, 2018). Through interviews and surveys,



the study will explore these challenges and provide valuable insights to support the future development and optimization of the college's educational programs.

## 1.4 Object of Research

The aim of this study is to analyze and summarize the rationality of the college's course arrangements, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and to offer suggestions for the college's future development. The main objectives are as follows:

1. To provide an overview of the college's teaching situation, student demographics, faculty conditions, curriculum design, and textbook selection, summarizing the college's key characteristics.
2. To identify the challenges and difficulties students face in their studies, determine the sources of these issues, and assess their impact.
3. To compare the course arrangements of other Islamic institutes, based on the previous two points, and offer reasonable suggestions.

This research aims to increase understanding of the current state of Ningxia Islamic College and contribute ideas for the development of Islamic education in the future.

## 1.5 Research Question

1. What are the key characteristics of the college?



2. What difficulties and challenges do students face in their studies?
3. Are the college's course arrangements, teaching methods, and textbook selection rational and effective?

## 1.6 Limitations

This study focuses solely on Ningxia Islamic College, which limits its applicability to other Islamic educational institutions in different regions, and may not fully represent the broader landscape of Islamic education in China. The availability of comprehensive and up-to-date data regarding the college's curriculum, student experiences, and faculty qualifications could present challenges. Incomplete or outdated data may affect the accuracy and reliability of the research findings.

The study may also be influenced by the researcher's own subjectivity and biases, potentially impacting the interpretation of data and the formulation of recommendations. Efforts will be made to minimize bias through rigorous data analysis and methods. The research will primarily focus on the perspectives of students, faculty, and administrators at Ningxia Islamic College. Other viewpoints, such as those from parents or members of the community, may not be fully represented, which could limit valuable insights.

Despite these limitations, this study will strive to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the curriculum structure at Ningxia Islamic College, highlighting its strengths and areas for improvement, and contributing valuable knowledge to the field of Islamic education. ◦

## 1.7 Importance of Research

The benefit of this study lies in its potential to significantly improve the educational experience at the college. By addressing the identified issues, the college can enhance student performance and the overall quality of education. Furthermore, the insights gained from this study can be shared with other Islamic educational institutions, providing valuable references for addressing similar challenges they may face. This approach can foster widespread improvements in Islamic education, benefiting a larger group of learners and contributing to efforts for educational reform in the modern era.

## 1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter primarily introduces the characteristics of Islamic education in China and highlights some issues within the course arrangement at Ningxia Islamic College, along with the purpose of the study.

Islamic education in China can generally be divided into three categories: family education, mosque education, and modern education. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, modern Islamic education began to emerge in the country. Ningxia Islamic College itself has a history of only 38 years. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the curriculum and teaching situation at Ningxia Islamic College, identify and address the problems students encounter in their studies, and provide constructive suggestions for the college's future development. The following chapters will detail the methods of data collection and analysis to ensure the scientific rigor and objectivity of the study.