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The Role of Institutionalized Sanad Conferment and Ijaza Titles in Reshaping Islamic Higher Education in Malabar

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Abstract

This study examines the traditional Islamic higher education system in Malabar, focusing on the peculiarities of granting religious titles and sanad conferment as a mechanism for preserving scholarly authenticity and intellectual lineage. It explores how personalized religious titles such as *Musliyar*, Mudarris, transformed into institutionalized degree systems influenced by external institutions, such as Al Azhar, Cairo, Darul Uloom Deoband, and Baqiyatussalihat, Vellore. The research highlights formalized ijaza titles such as Faizy, Darimi, Rahmani, and Hudawi, reflecting a synthesis of tradition and modernity within Malabar's Islamic pedagogy. Methodologically, the study employs a historical and contextual analysis of educational practices, degree nomenclature, and conferment ceremonies. Findings reveal that the ijaza-sanad system plays a pivotal role in linguistic modernization, pedagogical expansion and community engagement, ensuring the vitality of Islamic educating amid contemporary challenges. These insights contribute to understanding how traditional education systems sustain relevance through integration with modern academic frameworks.

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INTRODUCTION

It is evident that the traditional religious education system of the Islamic world has significant peculiarities and features that differ from its counterparts, which opens new horizons of research studies in the contemporary educational discourses. One of the important features of the traditional Islamic higher education system, which is unique from secular education, is the *ijaza* and *Sanad* conferment custom, in which a graduate is granted a formal spiritual certification that ensures the continuity of the teacher–student relationship and long-lasting integrity of religious knowledge. The culture of conferring *ijazah* and *Sanad* within Islamic higher education represents a historically rich and pedagogically innovative system of knowledge transmission that predates and fundamentally differs from modern institutional accreditation models and practices (Idriz, 2022). Although the *ijaza* and *Sanad* conferment has its own definition, both terms are simultaneously used in the traditional Islamic world as a tool of scholarly mapping in the field of Islamic higher education (Idriz, 2007). The spirit of the *ijaza* and *Sanad* conferment lies in preserving the authenticity, integrity, and continuity of Islamic knowledge, which embodies *Amana* between teacher and student, where knowledge is transmitted via an unbroken chain of authorized scholars linking directly back to original sources, Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), and his companions and

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classical scholarship (Cheerakkolil, 2023; Susanto et al., 2025). Nowadays, the studies on *ijazah* and *Sanad* are significant because they address the drawbacks of prioritized, standardized, bureaucratic materialistic educational practices by emphasizing personalized, trust-based transmission of knowledge. It highlights the continuity of intellectual lineages through *nisba, ijazah,* and *Sanad*, ensuring authenticity and legitimacy (Siregar, 2025).

The tradition of Islamic higher education in Malabar is distinguished by the practice of ijaza and sanad conferment. Interestingly, the present study is important because it not only answers the significance of mapping scholarship in the Malabar region but also illuminates how traditional personalized knowledge transmission systems have been adapted into formal institutional frameworks without losing their heritage through *ijaza* and *Sanad* conferment. The region's Islamic educational evolution, from *Pallidars* to formal religious degree-awarding institutions, demonstrates how Malabar serves as a critical case in understanding the dynamic synthesis of tradition and modernity, showcasing alternative models of intellectual authenticity and social capital formation within localized Islamic pedagogy (Shareef Kp, 2025).

Previous research has broadly examined the evolution of Islamic education (Parakkallil, 2025), Islamic higher education system (S. Al-Hudawi, 2013), and its curricular aspects (Kp & P, 2025). However, focused studies on institutional religious degree titles specific to the Malabar region of India remain limited. This gap is significant given the region's spread of over a hundred institutionalized Islamic degrees within a localized context reflecting a dynamic synthesis of tradition and modernity. The study primarily focuses on three research questions: (1) How does the culture of conferring religious titles in Malabar reflect the early system of personalized religious scholarship within the region's Islamic educational tradition? (2) In what ways have external Islamic institutions influenced the nomenclature, conferment practices, and institutionalization of *ijazah* and *sanad* titles in Malabar's evolving religious education system? (3) How do emerging trends in institutionalizing *ijazah* and *sanad* conferment in Malabar balance the preservation of traditional scholarly authority with the demands of modern academic validation?

METHOD

The study employs a qualitative historical research design to investigate the evolution and institutionalization of the sanad-conferment system in Islamic higher education in the Malabar region. The research covers the period from the second half of the 20th century to the early decades of the 21st century, focusing geographically on Malabar, the Southern strip of modern India.

Islamic higher education is operationally defined as formal and informal educational institutions and systems that confer religious and academic certifications based on Islamic scholarly traditions, including the ijāza-sanād system.

Data collection involved purposive sampling to select 15 degree-granting institutions that met the criteria of popularity, tradition, and active sanad conferment. Interviews were conducted with 20 informants, including institutional leaders, faculty members, and ceremony participants. Primary sources include institutional records, transcripts, certificates of sanad-conferment ceremonies, and transcripts. Source criticism techniques, such as crop verification and contextual evaluation, were applied to assess authenticity and reliability. The second author's background as a student and teacher of an Ijaza-granting institution ensured. Secondary sources comprise relevant scholarly studies on the emergence of Islamic education in the region and the emergence of modernized centers.

Data analysis followed thematic coding, enabling the identification of key themes related to the transformation from informal personalized ijaza titles to formal institutional

degrees, external influences, and sociocultural implications in linguistic modernization, pedagogical expansion, and community engagement. Triangulation was employed by cross-validating data from interviews, documents, and literature to enhance credibility.

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all interview participants. Due to the transparency of the institutions, there were no confidentiality issues. All institutions uphold clearness in their daily operations, including public access to syllabi, curricular and co-curricular activities, as well as inclusivity, and openness to the state system of democracy and media, there was no issue of confidentiality or the need for permission to access ijaza conferment ceremonies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal four principal transformations that characterize the evolution of Islamic higher education in Malabar. First, the transformation from personalized titles to institutionalized authorizations reflects a shift from traditional religious titles, such as *Musliyar* and *Mudarris*, which were based on community recognition and spiritual authority, toward formal institutional credentials, such as *Faizy* and *Darimi*. This transition indicates a movement from informal mentorship to structured curricula and formal graduation systems, contributing to the professionalization of religious scholarship while preserving its traditional authority. Second, the transition from local authority to transregional affiliation is reflected in titles such as *Baqawi*, *Qasimi*, *Nadwi*, and *Azhari*, which signify scholars' connections to prominent Islamic institutions beyond Malabar. These affiliations integrate local religious education into broader intellectual networks, enhance scholarly legitimacy, and connect Malabar's Islamic educational traditions with wider Islamic scholarly communities. Third, the transformation from a single religious curriculum to integrated or dual-degree systems is demonstrated by emerging educational programs associated with titles such as *Hudawi*, *Rahmani*, *Wafy*, and *Noorani*. These programs combine classical Islamic sciences with secular subjects, responding to modern academic standards and evolving societal needs while preparing graduates to navigate both traditional and contemporary educational contexts. Fourth, the transition from male-dominated religious education to more inclusive opportunities for women is reflected in the emergence of female-specific titles such as *Zahrawiya*, *Hadiya*, *Wafiya*, and *Mahdiya*. These credentials represent expanded educational access and recognition for women through programs that integrate traditional Islamic studies with modern disciplines, thereby encouraging greater female participation and leadership in Islamic scholarship. Taken together, these four transformative patterns highlight the dynamic socio-educational changes shaping Islamic higher education in Malabar, demonstrating how its institutions adapt to internal community needs and external influences while maintaining continuity with established traditions of religious scholarship.

Historical Development of Islamic Higher Education in Malabar

Islamic higher education in Malabar traces its origins to the early introduction of Islam in the region, where religious instruction was primarily informal and mosque-centred (Parakkallil, 2025, p. 217). The earliest educational framework consisted of mosque lectures and the *Othupalli* system, where a single teacher imparted knowledge in traditional Islamic sciences (Kp & P, 2025b, p. 28). This system emphasized memorization, oral transmission, and close teacher–student mentorship, mirroring classical Islamic pedagogical models such as the *Ahlus-Sufa* tradition originating from Medina (Kp & Paramboor, 2025, p. 18). The *Pallidars* system in Malabar reflected this model, focusing on Quranic studies, Hadith, jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), and related religious sciences (Kp & P, 2025c, p. 29). Until the early 20th century, Islamic education in Malabar remained largely decentralized and informal, relying on community mosques and individual scholars (Kp & P, 2025c, pp. 23–24). The

educational process was deeply embedded in spiritual and communal life, with scholars gaining recognition through personal mentorship and community endorsement rather than institutional certification.

The mid-twentieth century marked a pivotal transformation as Malabar witnessed the establishment of madrasas for elementary religious education and colleges for higher Islamic studies (Koduvayakkal, 2021). This institutionalization was influenced by broader educational reforms in India and a desire to align religious education with contemporary academic standards (Çikili, 2025, p. 589). Key institutions such as Jamia Nooriyya Arabiyya, Jamia Darussalam Al-Islamiyya, and Darul Huda Islamic University emerged, integrating traditional Islamic sciences with modern curricula, including languages and secular subjects (M. J. A. Al-Hudawi & Ahmad, 2026). This development signified Malabar's adaptation to changing educational paradigms while maintaining its unique religious and cultural identity (Kunnummal, 2025, p. 24). The historical trajectory of Islamic higher education in Malabar thus reflects a gradual shift from informal, mosque-based learning to formalized, institution-centered education. This evolution enabled the region's scholars to engage with wider Islamic intellectual networks and modern academic frameworks, ensuring the continuity and relevance of Islamic scholarship in a changing socio-political context.

Roots of Granting Titles in Traditional Islamic Higher Education in Malabar

The roots of bestowing, or the practice of affixing titles with scholars' personal names in Islamic higher education in Malabar are deeply embedded in the traditional system of personalized religious scholarship and mentorship. Historically, the culture of assigning titles to scholars by the community of Malabar, such as *Musliyar, Mudaris*, Khatib, and *Imam,* was not merely a formal recognition but a reflection of a scholar's spiritual authority, community endorsement, and mastery over traditional Islamic sciences. Each title carries distinct religious and educational significance from the perspective of the region, which differs from its counterparts. The title '*Musliyar* is a common affixation for all most all religious scholars of Malabar (Hameed, 2024a, p. 7873), referring to an advanced Islamic scholar authorized by *ijaza* and *sanad* to teach and lead religious institutions. The term *Musliyar* not only reflects a scholar's deep knowledge of Shaf'i' jurisprudence but also their role as a community leader and moral responsibility. It is said that the word '*Musliyar'* originates from the Arabic word '*Muslih*," meaning a reformer with a Persian-influenced respectful suffix '*Yar*'. However, it is certain that the word evolved organically as a localized respectful honorific dignifying a reformer or peace-bringer who holds social and religious authority. In early times, the title was naturally conferred upon individuals who completed advanced multi-year curricula in Islamic jurisprudence, theology, Quran and Hadith studies under traditionally recognized master scholars within the traditional *Pallidars* education system of Malabar (Kp & P, 2025, p. 28). Studies of Ponnani *Pallidars* underline that the *'Musliyar' title is* assigned to those who are selected for ceremonial practices of '*vilakkathirikkal'* (Vazhathodi, n.d.-a, p. 59) under the eminent scholars of the Ponnani Makhadoom family (Kp & Mp, 2026; Kp & P, 2025). The awarding of *sanads* (certificates) at centers like the Ponnani Great Mosque exemplified this tradition, where scholars were honoured for their mastery and contribution to religious knowledge.

Before the adoption of institutional *ijaza* titles in Malabar, several traditional terms other than '*Musliyar*' were used as titles to represent religious scholars within the community. Another commonly used title was *Mudaris*, meaning "instructor" or "teacher"; this title was given to head teachers or teachers responsible for delivering advanced religious lectures and overseeing educational activities in the mosque-based religious education system, known as *Pallidars*. Additionally, *Khatib*, referring to one who delivers the Friday sermon (*khutbah*), requires both religious knowledge and oratorical skill (Rahman et al., 2025). Historically, the

term *Makhdoom* was associated with spiritual and educational leadership, often linked to the Zainuddin Makhdoom lineage of Ponnani(Kp & Mp, 2026, p. 74). The term means "one who served" or "Master," indicating a high religious status(Kp & Mp, 2026, p. 74) (ibid). The title *Qazi* (M. J. A. Al-Hudawi & Ahmad, 2026, p. 66), literally meaning "judge," was given to specialist scholars who adjudicated legal and social matters within the Muslim community based on Islamic jurisprudence in the region (Karimov, 2025, pp. 79–80). *Imam* (Koduvayakkal, 2021), meaning "leader" or "guide," who led congregational prayers in mosques and often provided basic religious instruction (Abbasi, 2026). *Shiekh*, literally "elder" or "expert," used respectfully for senior teachers or instructors at various higher educational institutions of Malabar. *Faqih*, a jurist specialized in Islamic law (*Fiqh*), responsible for interpreting and applying religious legal rulings (Al-Hijazi, 2026). Interestingly, the title *Wa'iz,* meaning 'one who admonishes or advises', was granted for preachers or religious exhorters delivering moral guidance.

Earlier, institutionalized degree titles emerged in Malabar, and common religious titles were prevalent. These general titles identified scholars by their religious roles, reflecting traditional recognition without formal institutional affiliation or specialized degree names. The traditional titles also functioned as social markers, delineating roles within the religious hierarchy and guiding community expectations (Hameed, 2024b, p. 7873). Their usage persisted into the twentieth century but gradually gave way to institutionally conferred degree titles as Islamic education modernized (T, 2022, p. 118).

Emergence of Institutionalized *Ijaza* Titles: Role of External Institutions

In the early 20th century, Malabar witnessed a significant shift in the region's Islamic educational culture (T, 2022, p. 119), and a new culture of nomenclature of titles of *Ijazah* emerged. Unlike common titles, *Musliyar* and *Mudarris*, new titles *Qasmi, Azhari, Baqawi, and Nadwi* emerged. This shift indicates that the emergence of an institutional degree system in Malabar was not an isolated indigenous development but a response to broader socio-cultural dynamics and the desire to align with external Islamic scholarship networks. *Baqawi, Azhari, Qasimi, Nizami,* and *Nadwi* are prominent *Nisbah* titles in Islamic higher education, each denoting a scholar's affiliation with a specific Islamic seminary or university, reflecting distinct intellectual lineages, jurisprudential orientations, and regional influences. The transition toward institutionalized degrees in Malabar was catalyzed by scholars who studied at renowned external centers such as Darul Uloom Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama, Al-Azhar University, and Madrasa Al-Baqiyat-us-Salihat (Cheerakkolil, 2023). Returning graduates introduced their institutional degree titles, such as *Qasmi* (Aquil, 2025, pp. 150–151), Nadwi (Ahmad, n.d., p. 1)*, Azhari,* and *Baqawi* (Vazhathodi, n.d.-b, p. 49)*,* carrying academic recognition and symbolic capital linked to these prestigious institutions. These external influences spurred the formalization of Islamic education locally, prompting Malabar to create its own region-specific degree titles that balanced global Islamic educational standards with indigenous traditions.

The title *Baqawi* (Koduvayakkal, 2021), which was more popular among others, is attributed to graduates of madrasa al-Baqiyat-us-Salihat, established in 1857 in Vellore, Tamil Nadu. The institution is the oldest among the *madaris* in south India. The institute is known as "*mother of madaris*" in south India (Vazhathodi, n.d.-b, p. 49), a central hub for Islamic scholarship and serves as a foundation seminary for scholars in Kerala and neighboring regions. The *Baqawi Nisbah* signifies comprehensive training primarily in jurisprudence studies. The curriculum emphasizes classical Islamic sciences within a framework that integrates regional jurisprudential traditions, making *Baqawi* graduates key religious authorities in their communities. The title carries social and scholarly prestige, linking the

bearer to a lineage committed to preserving and disseminating Islamic knowledge adapted to local contexts.

Second, the *Nizami Ijaza* is one of the religious titles in Malabar, which is awarded by Jamia Nizamia Hyderabad, founded in 1876. This certification represents authority in traditional Islamic subjects, focusing on *Fiqh*, *Aqida*, Hadith, and Arabic language. Another influenced external title, Qasimi, denotes graduates of Darul Uloom Deoband in Uttar Pradesh, India, a seminal institution founded in 1866 that shaped the Deobandi movement (Momen et al., 2023, p. 67). *The Qasimi tit*le signals rigorous training in the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, emphasizing hadith studies, Hanafi jurisprudence, and scholastic theology. *Qasimi* represents a scholarly identity rooted in traditionalist Hanafi jurisprudence, with strong social and political implications in South Asia. Another title, *Nadwi* (Alam & Azeem, 2024, p. 192), is linked to graduates of Darul Uloom Nadwathul Ulama in Lucknow, established in 1898 as a reformist seminary aiming to bridge traditional Islamic scholarship and modern educational innovations. The influence of external religious graduations played a pivotal role in shaping the Islamic higher education graduation system in Kerala, specifically the Malabar model exemplified by titles like *Faizy, Darimi, Thaqafi, and Anwari.*

An external and rarely found *ijaza* title in Malabar was *Azhari.* The title refers to alumni of al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, one of the oldest and most prestigious Sunni Islamic universities globally, founded circa 970 CE. al-Azhar represents mainstream Sunni theology, teaching all four major Sunni *madhhabs* (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali) and emphasizing Ash'ari and Maturidi theological traditions. The Azhari ijaza embodies a broad, pluralistic scholarly identity with global recognition. Graduates are associated with a rich intellectual heritage that balances classical Islamic sciences with contemporary issues, reflecting al-Azhar's role as a transitional center of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and interfaith dialogue. Holding the *Azhari* title confers substantial religious authority and scholarly legitimacy across diverse Muslim communities worldwide. Qualified scholars from al-Azhar University returned to Malabar and reformed the Malabar education system, creating a standardized Ponnani syllabus influenced by the Azhari syllabus of Egypt. Scholars like Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdoom played a key role in standardizing the localized education system in Malabar to the standardized Ponnani syllabus. Early curriculum focused strictly on classical texts, and students read line by line from early medieval manuscripts. Early period of *Azhari* methodology served as the bridge between Egypt and Malabar. In which it took decentralised mosque based *Pallidars* system into a structured format of education system in Malabar.

Institutionalized *Ijaza* Titles in Malabar: Early Models

The history of evolving Islamic religious graduations in the form of institutionalized *Ijaza* titles can be traced back to the second half of the 20th century. One key reason for establishing religious institutions in Malabar was the difficulty faced by local scholars in travelling to distant, prestigious Islamic centers outside the region for higher religious education, such as Deoband, Lucknow, and Vellore (Faizy, 2010).Factors such as financial constraints, long travel distances, health challenges, and the remoteness of foreign institutions made it inaccessible for many aspiring scholars to pursue advanced studies abroad. This necessity motivated the creation of local Islamic colleges. Interestingly, these Institution established Kerala model institutionalized *Ijaza* titles such as *Faizy, Sa'adi, Darimi, Anwari, Yamani.*

The *ijaza* title *Faizy* is one of the earliest religious degree titles conferred upon graduates of Jamia Nooriya Arabiya, a distinguished institution for higher Islamic learning located in Pattikkad, Malappuram (Koduvayakkal, 2021). Established in 1963 by the Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulema, this institution upholds the Sunni Shafi'i scholarly

tradition in Kerala. The title '*Faizy'* derives from the Arabic term '*Faiz*' meaning beneficence, linked to the name of the institution's campus, Faizabad 'place of blessings (Savad Faizy, personal communication, June 30, 2026). The curriculum integrates a modified Nizami syllabus emphasizing classical Islamic studies, and graduates receive both a *Sanad* and a formal degree certificate. This program produces scholars proficient in both traditional Islamic sciences and contemporary academic disciplines.

Significantly, the *Darimi* degree is awarded by Jamia Darussalam Al Islamiyah, a reputable center for Islamic and secular education established in 1976 in the Kozhikode district. The title *Darimi* evolves from the institutional name Darussalam, as a graduate of Darussalam, and is also connected to the famous scholar Imam Abdallah ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Darimi (797–869 CE), the author of *Sunan al-Darimi* (TH Muhammed Darimi, personal communication, June 28, 2026). The *Darimi* program offers comprehensive instruction in Quranic studies, theology, Islamic jurisprudence and cultural subjects. Under the leadership of eminent scholars such as Nandiyil Muhammad Musliyar and Shamsul Ulama EK Aboobacker Musliyar, the institution has gained high esteem in the Islamic community. The *Darimi* curriculum reflects the integration of spiritual and academic education, contributing to the dissemination of Islamic knowledge both regionally and globally. Another earlier *Ijaza title,* the *Saadi*, is a religious degree conferred by Jamia Sadiya, a prominent religious and socio-cultural organization founded in 1971 in North Kerala. The institution emphasizes a dual focus on Islamic education and community development, offering a broad spectrum of programs ranging from Quran memorization to arts and sciences degrees. The *Saadi* curriculum bridges traditional madrasa education and modern academic frameworks, fostering ethical and intellectual growth. Saadi graduates often engage in religious leadership and social service within and beyond Kerala.

The *Thaqafi* degree, introduced in 1978, conferred by Markazu Thaqafati Ssunniiyya, Calicut. The institution emphasizes a curriculum rooted in the traditional Nizami system while promoting cultural refinement and intellectual development. The title '*Thaqafi'* derived from the title of the institution itself, which means cultured or intellectual, reflects the graduates' role as refined scholars equipped to navigate contemporary religious and social contexts (TC Muhammed Thaqafi, personal communication, June 29, 2026). Another early key *ijaza* title is the *Anwari degree,* which is offered by Jamia Anwariyya Arabiya in Pottachira, Palakkad, recognized for preserving Malabar's classical *Pallidars* methodology through a rigorous ten-year program (Koduvayakkal, 2021). The curriculum emphasizes deep mastery of classical texts, including key works in *Aqidah*, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, and *Tafsir*, following a line-by-line analytical approach. The title *'Anwari'* meaning bearer of radiance, symbolizes the intellectual illumination achieved by graduates through sustained scholarly effort within a mosque-based educational framework adapted to an institutional setting.

In addition, the *Bukhari* degree, offered by Bukhari D'awa College, Kondotty, established in 1988, is grounded in traditional Islamic scholarship with a focus on Hadith studies. Named after Imam al-Bukhari, the renowned 9th-century *muhaddith*, this residential academy emphasizes mastery of Sahih al-Bukhari and related classical texts. In addition, the *Yamani* degree conferred by Yamaniyya Arabic College in Kuttikkattoor, Kozhikode, reflects a scholarly tradition influenced by the ancient centers of Hadhramaut and Zabid in Yemen. Established in the late 20th century, the program focuses on preserving classical theological and jurisprudential knowledge, with an emphasis on training advanced teachers and jurists within the Sunni tradition (Amali et al., 2025).

Interestingly, this localized institutionalized framework of *ijaza* granting system significantly shaped the trajectory of Islamic higher education, which not only preserved traditional *Pallidar* methodology but also fostered the influence of educational practices and

relevant religious scholarship within the community. Moreover, this title culture attracted students to the traditional field of Islamic higher education, which gave them more popularity and recognition than its pre-modern systems. Fascinatingly, the culture of *ijaza* system gradually updated as an integrated *ijaza* degree titles like *Hudawi, Rahmani, Wafy, Noorani.*

Emergence of Dual Degree-Integrated *Ijaza* Programmes

The evolution of institutionalized religious degree titles in Islamic higher education in Malabar is exemplified from a single curriculum of Islamic studies to dual degree programmes that blend classical Islamic sciences with circular subjects and confer formal academic credentials alongside traditional scholarly identities (Kp & P, 2025e, p. 22). The culture of dual degree ijazah granting was a major novelty in the field of Islamic education in the region, which created a new paradigm of balancing intellectual lineage and spiritual authority with contemporary educational structures, offering a new model of Islamic higher education that maintains historical continuity while addressing modern social and professional needs. The programmes offered by integrated Islamic higher education institutions produced new models of *ijaza titles,* which affected the old tradition of the single-degree *ijaza* system of Islamic education.

1. ***Rahmani:*** The ijaza title '*Rahmani'* offered by Jamia Rahmaniya Islamiyah Katameri, Kozhikode, affiliated with Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama, founded in 1972 at the Katameri mosque, with a curriculum blending religious study with general subjects (Koduvayakkal, 2021). It takes 8 years integrated course overall, with government approved secular subjects along with religious one. Graduates given the title Moulavi Fazil Rahmani. Alongside Moulavi Fazil Rahmani Rahmaniya college offer Afzal ul Ulama and B.A Arabic course under University of Calicut setup in 2002. During first phase students builds Arabic, English, and Urdu combined with Kerala state school subjects. The second stage covers the undergraduate recognized B.A along with Qur'anic studies, hadith, Fiqh, and related Islamic sciences. Phase three is the recognized M.A were students become complete Islamic scholar. This how Moulavi Fazil Rahmani title acquired.
2. ***Hudawi:****'Hudawi'* is a title given to the graduates of Darul Huda Islamic university, Malappuram, established in 1986, aimed to integrate Islamic education with the national education system (S. H. V. Al-Hudawi, 2013, p. 7). The title '*hudawi'* derives from Darul Huda, meaning 'Abode of Guidance', epistemologically, it signifies a worldview rooted in divine guidance, *Huda* (Dr. Mansoor Hudawi, Pathiramanna, personal communication, September 8, 2026). The *hudawi* course lasted for total 12 year, splitting secondary education for 5-year, higher secondary education of 2 years, undergraduate of 3 years and postgraduate of 2 years. The religious education covers the Quran and tajwid, Hadith and *Usul al hadith*, *Fiqh* and *Usul al Fiqh*, *Aqedah*, *tasawwuf*, and Arabic grammar, including *nahv* and *sarf*, logic (*mantiq*), rhetoric, and comparative religion, alongside secular subjects such as maths, physics, chemistry, biology, history, and social science. Arabic, English, Urdu, and Malayalam are the four common languages used for the whole 12 years. At the post graduate stage, ten specialized departments, such as Qur'anic studies, hadith and related sciences, *Fiqh* and *Usul Fiqh*, Islamic economics and finance, *Aqidah* and philosophy, comparative religion, civilizational studies, societal development, Arabic language and literature, and translation and comparative literature, are covered with dissertation and teacher training.
3. ***Wafy:*** *Wafy* title, translates to 'loyal', 'trustworthy', or 'perfect', offered by the Coordination of Islamic Colleges (CIC) a Kerala based Islamic academy associated with an academic coordinating committee of Islamic colleges focused a standardized

curriculum and mission and vision (Koduvayakkal, 2021). *Wafy* is for boys who are occupied with 8 years in academia of CIC programme. The first two years are for primary, next four years are for undergraduate, and two-year postgraduate combined with of recognized universities in a secular discipline offered for residential only. The curriculum is designed by reforming and adding new topics in traditional version of *nizamiya* syllabus, which is long time practiced by the Islamic colleges in India, by Preserving its long-term spirit and value. Also modelled the al Azhar University of Cairo. UGC approved science, commerce, and humanities courses are integrated alongside religious syllabus, blending a model of secular and moral or sacred theme.

4. ***Noorani:*** The '*Noorani' Ijazah* title is awarded by Madeenatunur College of Islamic Sciences (MNC), established in 2000, located at Markaz Garden, Poonoor, Kozhikode. . The MNC was mainly founded to provide contemporary Islamic studies combined with modern liberal arts. The program is designed from junior school to graduate school along with one-year postgraduate finishing diploma in Islamic theology and *Rabbani* finishing diploma in leadership, management, and Islamic scholarship. Students can pursue high school education parallelly with foundational Islamic studies. Higher secondary subjects like science, commerce, and humanities are provided. After this foundational course, they opened bachelor integrated Islamic sciences along with secular modern science, law, commerce, history, sociology, phycology Arabic literature, English literature, and permaculture are available and are approved by UGC.
5. ***Ghazali:*** The *ijazah* title '*Ghazali'* awarded by Imam Ghazali Academy, established in 1999,in Koolivayal, Wayanad, is named deliberately after Abu Hamid al Ghazali (1058–1111), the renowned Islamic scholar and theologian known for integrating the philosophy of spirituality and theology with intellectual philosophy. The institution mirrors the historical Islamic educational system of the Cordoba model of medieval Cordoba, Spain, where Islamic and secular knowledge systems were synthesized under a unified vision of learning. The program trains postgraduates in both Islamic and academic disciplines, and the academy purely pursues an integrated methodology where religious scholarship in Islamic sciences includes Quranic studies, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, Islamic philosophy, and theology. Secular academy comes humanities, languages, and social sciences.
6. ***Jalali:*** *Jalali* is a postgraduate Islamic degree offered by Jamia Jalaliyya, a prominent Islamic educational institute situated in Mundakkulam, Malappuram, established in 2008, which runs by Shamsul Ulema memorial Islamic complex (SMIC) and is managed by principal Sayyid Muhammad Jifri Muthu Koya Thangal & Sayyid Abbas Ali Shihab Thangal. The Jalali curriculum includes a wide range of subjects, including Qur'anic studies, hadith studies, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic history, and Arabic language. It is designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of Islamic principles and traditions by combining theological knowledge with practical skills for critical thinking, research, and communication in Islamic scholarship. The course has multiple programs: junior secondary course for five years, secondary course for three years, *jalali mutawal* course for two years, *tahfeezul Quran course for* four years, *tajliyathul huffaz for* three years, and the pre-research program for one year. Under Jamia Jalalaiyya, a notable initiative was launched for *tafsir al-Quran* in 2020 called IRITAQ (International Research Institute for Tafsir al-Quran), highlighting Jamia Jalaliya's advanced Qur'anic research and scholarship. Institutions focus on nurturing flexible talent capable of conducting deep research on the Quran and developing well-educated preachers committed to Islamic traditions. *Jalali* recognized

one of the Islamic credentials in Kerala, standing within the traditional Muslim community. The integration of traditional Islamic sciences with modern research methodologies is evident in IRITAQ, where Jalali graduates are qualified for both scholarly and applied Islamic work.

7. ***Hadi:*** The *Ijazah* title *Hadi* awarded to the graduates of the traditional integrated curriculum of Jamiatul Hind Al Islamiyya. for the successful completion of its programme combined classical Islamic scholarship with modern secular education, spanning from secondary education to degree level. The *Hadi* course uniquely integrates advanced theological disciplines such as *Fiqh, Hadith, Tafsir,* and *Aqedah* alongside contemporary university-level studies. This certification underscores both deep mastery of Islamic sciences and competence in modern academic skills, including research, writing, and public speaking, reflecting the nurturing of scholars capable of bridging tradition and modernity. Other titles such as 'Hasani' by Ainul Huda, Kappad, Ash'ari by Jamia Ash'ariyya Islamic & Arts College, Madavoor, *Sanai* by Samastha National Education Council are notable among the integrated programmes. Moreover, unlike its early system of curriculum, junior colleges or affiliated colleges of single degree-awarding institutions in Islamic higher education, such as Jamia Nooriyya, Darussalam Nandi, also offer both Islamic and secular degrees for their graduates recently.

Emerging Titles for Women Graduates

Interestingly, following the above religious titles, some institutions initiated the offering of religious titles for girls, which opened new horizons in the field of Islamic higher education in Malabar, such as zaharawiya, *wafiya*, *fadhila*, *fadheela*, *sanaiyya*, *hadiya*, *and daiya.* These programmes uniquely integrate traditional Islamic theology and Arabic literature with modern disciplines, such as humanities, commerce, science, and finance. Throughout this programme, students acquire academic knowledge and practical social experiments to blend the contemporary world.

1. ***Zahrawiya:*** *Zahrawiya* is an Islamic integrated title of Fathima Zahra Women's College under the Darul Huda Islamic University (Koduvayakkal, 2021). The institute, established in 1922, focuses on Islamic knowledge with contemporary education and molds them in a way that is spiritual and rigorous. The programs run through a 6 years compulsory phase, which goes through matriculation plus one and plus two through NIOS open school, followed by a three-year optional specialization course. Specialization is optional but deeper to Islamic studies, similar to the male *Hudawi* graduates, who pursue postgraduate specialization. Students study diverse subjects blending Islamic and modern sciences; Quran, Hadith, *Fiqh*, *tafsir*, *tasawwuf*, science and technology, mathematics, social science, computer and information technology. Applied four languages English, Arabic, Malayalam, and Hindi. Beyond academics, the institution provides professional training for designing, tailoring, and embroidery.
2. ***Hadiya: The*** *Hadiya* program was launched by Markaz Academy of Women for Islamic Studies (AWIS) in 2013, offers the higher secondary *alimiyya* programme lasting for four semesters, by combining advanced Islamic studies with higher secondary education (*Home | Markaz Academy of Women for Islamic Studies*, n.d.). The program is set at the secondary level for girls who have qualified for 10th standard school education. The curriculum is designed for both Islamic and secular sciences, aiming to mold good women in the community through Islamic tradition. Subjects include classical Islamic texts, such as Islamic jurisprudence, essentials of theology,

history, Sufism, extracts from Hadith literature, and Qur'anic hermeneutics, and combined secular subjects, such as humanities, commerce, and science.

3. **Wafiya:** *Wafiya* is the female version of the *wafy* program, an integrated academic program that combines advanced Islamic studies with state university secular degrees (Koduvayakkal, 2021). It is a five-year course in Islamic studies. The first two years are for higher secondary and three years for undergraduate courses connected with recognized university degree programs in secular disciplines, with an optional two-year postgraduate program that can be completed either regularly or remotely. The program is categorized as *tamheedіya for the* first two years of basic knowledge, and the rest is named aliya for advanced Islamic learning. *Tahmeedіya* focuses mainly on language improvement, in the form of LSRW (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) of both Arabic and English, moral and ethical studies of Islam, and Arabic grammar and morphology along with secular discipline of state covers arts and humanities, commerce, science, and home science. *Aliya* phase is designed for advanced studies of traditional Islamic knowledge, which is refined from *nizamiya* tradition along with recognized university degree programs. Alongside curricular subjects, they have cultural programs of fine arts; like conducting *samajam* to improve public talks and erase public fear through different language speeches, and songs, sports, and literature fests, which molding and nurturing skills in every field. Moreover, Coordination of Islamic Colleges (cic) designed various modes of integrated courses, besides *Wafiyya* residential, such as *Wafiyya* day course and *Wafiyya arts,* exclusively for women.
4. ***Mahdiya:*** *Mahdiya* is an educational initiative under the center for public education and training (CPET) of Darul Huda Islamic university. CPET started in 2012 to serve in the field of public education and design and create various courses for the public. The program emerged as a result of the deliberate expansion and growth of DHIU's mission beyond campus-based scholarly training system into a community-level educational initiative. It began as a two-year certificate program in 2016 under the name CMS (certificates in moral studies), later named *Mahdiya course,* and quickly expanded into a full degree structure level in 2019. Thus, *Mahdiya* is a five-year course on Islamic moral studies designed for women after the 10th standard, and is provided through higher secondary education. The course has three formats: a two-year diploma for foundational training, a three-year certificate course, and a five-year full degree course. The curriculum is designed to completely focus on moral and spiritual formation for women and blends Islamic ethical education with practical life skills and community engagement.
5. ***Dai'ya:*** *Dai'ya* is a title offered to graduates of the Dai'ya Islamic Academy for women, representatives of female preachers to Islam established by the Akkode Islamic Centre, Malappuram. The academy provides comprehensive faith-based education that combines Islamic studies as an integrated sharia and material educational system for girls after the 10th standard. Over five years, students complete their regular academic excellence and focus on personal growth, character development, and fostering strong sisterhood among students. The curriculum is designed with Islamic content, including Islamic sciences such as Quran, hadith, jurisprudence, theology, Islamic history, and related disciplines, from traditional Islamic pedagogical methods. In material academic content shared humanities, commerce, or science, aligned with Kerala educational standards. In addition, they have practical and skill-based training programs in various fields such as speech or sermons, teaching like '*Marhama*' a certified course offered to the women of its

society by students of *Dai'ya*, who conduct and teach them the basic *tajwid*, recitation of Quran, health awareness, and funeral care. There are other programs of *dai'ya* students like '*Habeeba*' online moral teaching for 11 days.

6. *Fadhila* and *Fadheela* (*CSWC*, n.d.) courses are introduced by the council of Samatha women's college and were established in 2019 and are headquartered in Chelari under the leaders of Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulema (Koduvayakkal, 2021). The system has multiple tracks, such as *Fadhila, a* two-year program offered to Muslim girls who have passed the SSLC examination (matriculation), which provides comprehensive religious education, including the Quran, Hadith, jurisprudence, theology, grammar, and Islamic History, alongside subjects such as science, commerce, and humanities. Graduated students receive a recognized certificate from the education board. *Fadheela* is the other three-year program for students who successfully completed and passed with distinction witnessed university recognized degree and *Fadheela* title from samastha board. *Fadheela Shariah* is an advanced track focused on jurisprudence. *Fadheela* PG is a postgraduate program for *Fadheela* graduates. Religious studies cover Qur'anic studies, hadith sciences, Islamic theology, Arabic grammar, and Islamic history. Secular subjects depend on the student's choices, such as science, commerce, or humanities, which are connected with state schools or UGC-accredited university degree programs.
7. ***Sana'iya:*** The *sana'iya ijazah* programme run by the Samastha National Education Council (SNEC) is exclusively for female students. Thus, this academy is known as SHE Plus (*SNEC*, n.d.) to nurture female Islamic scholars fit for traditional Sunna along with modern perspectives. A highly reputed and accepted within the Muslim community, for its structured Islamic scholarship. The system works on dual certification, that students can secure bachelor degree like BCom, BA from UGC recognized universities alongside religious scholarship, compromising one over other. Beyond classical text and academics, their curriculum is designed for the language improvisation covers English, Arabic, and Urdu languages alongside media exposures to each field handle perfectly. There're levels of phases which starts from 8th standard to 10th standard equivalent to regular state school belong to secondary 3year stage, following senior secondary level align with higher secondary standard, subjects include commerce and humanities, which is followed by three-year degree phase where students earn secular bachelor's degree alongside advanced Islamic studies. Then the additional postgraduates for specialized master's level. The first three years of SHE Plus taught religious studies, and students engaged in foundational studies such as Qur'anic recitation, Islamic jurisprudence, prophetic tradition, and creed along with materialistic study. The two-year senior secondary religious studies include jurisprudence, Qur'anic recitation, creed, tasawwuf, Arabic morphology, grammar, and language studies like English, Arabic, Urdu along with plus two commerce and humanities. In three-year, undergraduate program, students will deliver an advanced level of Islamic studies covers the Qur'anic sciences, hadith sciences, principles of jurisprudence, Sufism, logic, rhetoric, Islamic history along with language studies, research methodology and Islamic home sciences, besides degrees in social science, language and commerce, from recognized universities. At postgraduate level, offers faculty of Islamic fundamental sciences and research, along with masters in language and commerce.

Consequences of the Emergence of the Institutionalized Ijaza Culture

The evolution of Islamic higher education in Malabar, marked by the emergence of institutionalized degrees, reflects profound socio-educational transformations with

multifaceted implications for authority, legitimacy, curriculum, professionalization, social mobility, and the educational set-up.

Authority and Legitimacy: The transition from personalized titles such as *Musliyar* and *Mudarris* represents a significant reconfiguration of religious authority. Traditional legitimacy grounded in the sanad system's personal transmission of knowledge faces both reinforcement and challenge through institutionalization. On one hand, standardized curricula and formal certification enhance legitimacy by aligning with recognized academic norms developed by the ulema of the region. On the other hand, this shift risks diluting the intimate ethical single mentorship and single teacher spiritual authority, potentially creating tensions between personalized and institutional sources of legitimacy. When single teacher focuses lose due to multiple teacher involvement in the traditional system, students gradually lack wholistic mentoring and spiritual guidance.

Curriculum and Professionalization: The integration of secular subjects with classical Islamic science in dual degree programmes exemplifies curricular innovation that responds to contemporary academic standards and social demands. This blended curriculum produces graduates equipped to operate within religious and secular spheres, expanding the professional identity of young graduates. Professionalization aligns the region's Islamic education with global trends, fostering versatility. However, it also raises concerns about maintaining spiritual and theological depth amid broader academic demands.

Social Mobility and Educational Structure: Institutional degrees create standardized, accessible pathways for scholarly advancement, contributing to democratization and notably expanding female participation through female-specific titles such as zahrawiya and Hadiya. This inclusivity challenges historically male-dominated hierarchies, promoting gender equity and reshaping social structures within Islamic scholarship. However, credentialization simultaneously establishes new hierarchies based on institutional affiliation and formal qualification, which may marginalize scholars adhering to traditional sanad-based systems. This stratification introduces complexities in authority distribution and community dynamics, reflecting the nuanced trade-offs of institutionalization documented in other Islamic educational contexts.

Trade-offs of Institutionalization

While standardization through formal curricula, assessments, and graduation ceremonies strengthens the perceived legitimacy and social recognition of Islamic degrees, it may reduce the personalized mentorship and ethical transmission integral to the sanad tradition. Credentialization shifts ulama authority from spiritual mastery toward academic achievement, altering religious leadership's nature and community perception. Institutional degrees may also create stratified hierarchies, privileging graduates prestigious institutions and influencing intra-community power relations. the integration of modern university framework with traditional sanad systems redefines in ijaza's function from a certification of direct knowledge transmission and spiritual authority to an academic credential-raising critical questions about preserving spiritual and ethical dimensions within cotemporary educational models.

CONCLUSION

The impact of institutionalization of sanad-conferment and ijaza in the evolution of Islamic higher education catalyzed the integration of global Islamic standards with local traditions that facilitated curricular modernization, pedagogical expansion, and linguistic divergence, blending classical Islamic science with the national higher education system. The conferment ceremonies reinforce communal identity, scholarly authenticity, and ethical responsibility. Logically, these developments due to the institutionalization of the ijaza

system contribute to advancing the avenue of Islamic higher education in Malabar by providing a replicable model that harmonizes tradition with modernity. The study's limitations include its qualitative historical design relying on purposive sampling of only 15 institutions with 20 informants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The exclusion of smaller Islamic learning centers is another limitation. Future research could explore comparative analyses of institutionalized ijaza systems across regions, the impact of female religious titles on community leadership, and longitudinal studies on graduates' roles in socio-religious transformations. Investigating digital integration and curriculum innovation within Malabar's Islamic education could also offer valuable insights for contemporary pedagogy.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the preparation of this manuscript, the author (s) utilized Paperpal.AI to assist with content polishing. All outputs were subsequently reviewed and revised by the author (s), who assume full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Nidha Fathima contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, data curation, formal analysis, and writing of the original manuscript. Hassan Shareef KP contributed to conceptualization, methodological guidance, supervision, validation, historical and contextual analysis, and manuscript review and editing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to take responsibility for its content.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study were obtained through interviews, institutional documents, historical records, and materials related to *ijaza* and *sanad* conferment practices in Islamic educational institutions in Malabar. Publicly accessible institutional and historical sources are available through their respective repositories or institutions. Interview transcripts and other non-public research materials are not publicly available due to confidentiality and ethical considerations but may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to participant consent and applicable institutional requirements.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial competing interests that could have influenced the conduct, analysis, or reporting of this research.

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