Islamic Education in Egypt: An Overview, System Structure, and Government Policies

Hidayati Suhaili^{1*}, Muhammad Zalnur², Dede Rosyada³, Arwansyah Bin Kirin⁴, Nini⁵, Titi Sartini⁶

¹Pancasila Education and Citizenship, Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan Ilmu Pendidikan Yayasan Abdi Pendidikan Payakumbuh, Indonesia

 ²Islamic Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia
³Islamic Religious Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia
⁴Department of Islamic Studies Centre for General and Co-Curricular Studies, University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Johor, Malaysia

⁵Islamic Religious Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia ⁶Islamic Religious Education, Institut Agama Islam Yasni Bungo, Indonesia

¹hidayatisuhaili01@gmail.com[™]*, ²muhammadzalnur@uinib.ac.id [™], ³dede.rosyada@uinjkt.ac.id [™], ⁴arwansyah@uthm.edu.my [™], ⁵nini.ihsan6599@gmail.com [™], ⁶sartinititi15299@gmail.com [™]

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Al-Azhar University, Egypt, presents a model of Islamic education that is moderate and holistic, relevant in addressing the challenges of modernity, radicalism, and the integration of Islamic tradition with scientific progress. This study identifies a gap in the previous literature, which generally partially discusses Islamic education in Egypt, focusing on the history of Al-Azhar or primary education, without comprehensively analysing the integration of traditional and modern values, system structure, and state policies. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilising data collection techniques through literature review and document analysis of scholarly journals, academic books, and official reports from the Ministry of Education and Al-Azhar University. Data analysis is conducted using qualitative content analysis methods, which include stages of categorisation, filtering, coding, synthesis, triangulation. The results show that the Islamic education system in Egypt has successfully integrated religious and general knowledge through a moderate and inclusive curriculum, supported by government policies such as the Al-Azhar Law of 1961 and the 2014 curriculum reform. However, educational access inequality, limited technological infrastructure, and conservative resistance continue to hinder comprehensive reform efforts. In conclusion, these findings offer important lessons for developing Islamic education in Indonesia and other Muslim countries.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation in the formation of human civilisation. In Islam, education is not only oriented towards acquiring knowledge but also aims at forming character, noble morals, and spiritual integrity (Harun, 2015). The values of Islamic education are derived from the Qur'an and hadith, which emphasise the importance of knowledge as a means to human perfection. In the modern era, the challenges of Islamic education are becoming increasingly complex, such as the rise of secularism, radicalisation, and the need for globally competitive Muslim human resources (Hamid, 2024; Surono & Ifendi, 2021). The Islamic education system must be adaptive to global dynamics while retaining the substance of traditional values (Bouzenita & Wood, 2018). Therefore, the development of Islamic education requires curriculum reform, integrating Islamic knowledge with the sciences, and strengthening teacher training to educate a moderate and competitive Muslim generation (Muqowim & Lessy, 2021; Ainissyifa & Nurseha, 2022).

Islamic education in various Muslim countries demonstrates diverse approaches reflecting local social, cultural, and political contexts. In Indonesia, the Sasak Muslim community in Lombok combines oral traditions with formal education to understand the Qur'an, creating an educational model responsive to local culture (Taufiq & Said, 2025). Meanwhile, Mahmud Yunus's concept, applied at Madrasah Aliyah Miftahul Huda, emphasises the integration of curriculum and moral education (Ainissyifa & Nurseha, 2022). In the Philippines, the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education Program (ALIVE) serves to preserve Islamic identity and prevent radicalism among the Muslim minority (Kawangit et al., 2019). In Germany, Islamic education is being integrated into public schools through cooperation with Muslim communities to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Schneider, 2020). A multicultural education approach in regions like Pamekasan is important for building a tolerant Islamic society (Sahibudin et al., 2020).

Egypt, with Al-Azhar University as the oldest Islamic educational institution founded in 970 CE, strategically addresses contemporary challenges in Islamic education. The Islamic education system in Egypt aims to form a generation that preserves Islamic identity, promotes moderation, and contributes to national and global social-political stability (Hamid, 2024). Its curriculum integrates Islamic studies such as the Qur'an, tafsir, hadith, and figh, as well as rational sciences such as logic, philosophy, and the sciences, demonstrating a holistic approach that is relevant to facing modernity (AbdelMinem, 2024; Cahyono, 2023; Zulkifli & Fahri, 2024). Islamic education in Egypt encompasses formal systems in public schools, private schools, and Al-Azhar University, as well as non-formal systems such as madrasah and majelis taklim (religious gatherings). Through the Ministry of Education and Al-Azhar, the Egyptian government has implemented moderate policies to combat extremism. However, it still faces challenges such as unequal access to education and resistance to reforms (AbdelMinem, 2024). Previous studies by Supradi (2020), Qolbiyah and Rajab (2022), and Rahman and Muwafiq (2024) have examined various aspects of Islamic education in Egypt. However, they have not integrated tradition and modernity comprehensively. This study aims to fill that gap by analysing the Islamic education system in Egypt in its entirety, including the strategic role of Al-Azhar University in the global context. The study aims to provide an overview of the condition of Islamic education in Egypt, analyse the structure and dynamics of the Islamic education system, and evaluate the Egyptian government's policies in managing this education. The urgency of this study lies in the relevance of Egypt's experience as a model for Islamic education that balances Islamic tradition with the demands of modernity. The findings of this research are expected to provide inspiration and valuable lessons for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia and other Muslim countries, particularly in facing the challenges of radicalism and the increasingly complex effects of globalisation.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, aiming to provide a deep and comprehensive understanding of Islamic education in Egypt, particularly regarding its general overview, system structure, and government policies (Safarudin et al., 2023). The qualitative approach was chosen as it can explore complex phenomena by analysing texts and historical-social contexts. Data collection techniques include literature review and document analysis, academic journals, books, policy reports from the Ministry of Education of Egypt, and official documents from Al-Azhar University. The data sources consist of primary sources, such as Islamic education policies and government regulations, and secondary sources from scholarly articles from databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and JSTOR. Data analysis was carried out using qualitative content analysis, following four stages: (1) data collection using specific keywords; (2) filtering based on relevance; (3) coding and categorising data into themes such as the role of Al-Azhar and educational reform; and (4) synthesis and triangulation to integrate and verify findings from multiple sources. The process was carried out systematically to ensure validity, from formulating research questions, data collection and analysis, to validation through triangulation. The final results are presented as a descriptive narrative that comprehensively and contextually illustrates the dynamics of Islamic education in Egypt (Rukin, 2019; Salam, 2023).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. General Overview of Islamic Education in Egypt

Egypt, strategically located at the crossroads of Africa and Asia, holds a geographically significant position, particularly in the context of the history and development of Islamic civilisation. Bordered by the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, Egypt has not only been a significant trade route but also a cultural and political bridge between the East and the West. From the era of ancient Egyptian civilisation to the Islamic conquest in the 7th century, Egypt played a central role in the region's dynamics. Following the advent of Islam, the country evolved into a centre of Islamic knowledge and spirituality, with Cairo serving as the epicentre of intellectual and religious activity, particularly through the establishment of Al-Azhar University in the 10th century, which continues to be one of the most influential Islamic institutions in the world. Moreover, Egypt is known for its significant religious diversity; despite the Sunni Muslim majority, the presence of the Coptic Christian community reflects the social pluralism that has existed for centuries (Asari, 2019). This diversity underscores Egypt's role as a key actor in the political, cultural, and religious landscape of the Arab and Islamic world. The geographic map of Egypt helps further understand the strategic position of this country in global history.

Egypt holds a strategically important geographic position at the intersection of three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. This location makes Egypt geopolitically important and

has historically been a significant trade route since ancient times (Saputra & Azmi, 2022). Egypt's territory spans the Nile Delta north to the Sahara Desert south, covering 1,001,450 km². Although 96% of its land is desert, more than 112 million people in Egypt, as of 2024, are concentrated around the Nile Valley and Delta, which make up only 4% of the country's total land area (Mariyono, 2024). This phenomenon highlights the close relationship between Egypt's geographical and demographic conditions. The Nile River is a source of life and the cultural, economic, and historical heart of Egyptian civilisation. This region is essential in sustaining life, agriculture, and spreading culture and religion. Egypt's unique geographic position also contributes to its role as a nexus of civilisation and a cultural powerhouse that connects various traditions from the Middle East, Africa, and the Mediterranean.

Politically, Egypt operates under a semi-presidential republic system, with the president playing a dominant role in government. The country has undergone significant transformations since the 1952 revolution that overthrew the monarchy. Under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt stood out as a driving force behind Pan-Arabism and implemented industrial nationalisation policies (Alhakim, 2024). Egypt's political journey became even more complex after the 2011 Arab Spring ousted President Hosni Mubarak and brought Mohamed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood to power. However, Morsi's tenure was short-lived after a military coup 2013 led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The government of el-Sisi emphasises national stability, economic development, and combating extremism. Efforts at modernisation are also visible in reforms in education and infrastructure. However, various critics point to the limited space for civil freedoms and the military's dominance in state affairs. The current Egyptian government attempts to balance political stability with democratic demands, yet faces challenges in building an inclusive and transparent governance system.

Egypt has a highly influential Islamic education system, particularly through the Al-Azhar institution, which has existed since the 10th century AD. This institution is known as a centre for moderate Sunni Islam and has become a reference point for global Islamic scholarship. The Egyptian government exerts significant control over the education and religious sectors through the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Al-Azhar University. Supervision of preaching content and the Islamic curriculum represents an ideological control mechanism and an effort to maintain moderation. Despite this, challenges such as bureaucratic rigidity and a lack of transparency remain serious issues. In terms of education, Egypt has managed to maintain continuity between classical Islamic values and modern needs. The relatively stable political environment supports the existence of Islamic educational institutions, allowing Al-Azhar to play an active role at the national and global levels. Al-Azhar graduates are spread across various parts of the world and contribute to disseminating peaceful and tolerant Islamic teachings. Therefore, Islamic education in Egypt involves religious instruction and developing inclusive and contextual thinking.

Egypt's long history as a centre of Islamic intellectualism dates back to the Islamic conquest by Amr ibn al-As in the 7th century. The intellectual flourishing peaked during the Fatimid and Ayyubid dynasties, with Al-Azhar as the centre of learning (Liasari, 2023). The 19th and 20th centuries saw the rise of Islamic modernist thought through figures such as Rifa'ah al-Tahtawi, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, and Muhammad Abduh, who advocated for the integration of religious and modern sciences (Suzani, 2017). Their reformist ideas

strengthened the discourse on ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) in Islamic education and influenced Islamic discourse worldwide, including in Southeast Asia. Today, Egypt plays a significant role in Islamic diplomacy through education. Thousands of international students, including those from Indonesia and Malaysia, study at Al-Azhar, making Egypt the epicentre of Islamic cultural exchange. Furthermore, Egypt excels in spreading Islamic literacy through the book publishing industry and digital preaching media (Tabrani et al., 2023; Kurniawan et al., 2019). This success has made Egypt a key intellectual hub in the Muslim world, significantly shaping contemporary Islamic thought globally.

The religiosity of Egyptian society reflects a blend of tradition, moderation, and contemporary Islamic thought. Islam is daily life's moral, social, and cultural foundation, from worship to social ethics (Shidiq, 2021). Al-Azhar plays a central role in shaping how the community thinks through its moderate interpretation of Islamic law (Supradi, 2020b). Egyptian society firmly attaches to religious activities such as congregational prayers, study circles, and pilgrimage. The influence of religion is also evident in social interactions, work ethics, and family and dress norms. In addition to the Sunni Muslim majority, Egypt is also home to a significant Shia minority and the Coptic Christian community, both of which have made historically significant contributions. Interfaith relations are generally harmonious, though occasional social-political tensions arise. Since the 2011 revolution, new dynamics have emerged, such as the increasing role of Islamist groups and debates between secularism and the integration of religion in politics (Ariastuti, 2020). Nevertheless, Egypt remains an example of how Islamic traditions can coexist with modernity and internal differences within the Muslim community. The religiosity of Egyptian society demonstrates the complexity of applying Islamic values amidst ongoing social and political changes.

2. The Islamic Education System in Egypt

The Islamic education system in Egypt has undergone significant development since the Fatimid Dynasty, where the state strongly supported the establishment of educational institutions such as mosques, libraries, and universities (Daud, 2022). However, there has been a separation between Muslim and non-Muslim students, which may hinder social integration in society (Ha, 2016). Reforms at Al-Azhar University, especially after the January 25 Revolution, emphasised curriculum renewal to adopt democratic principles and meet the demands of modern education, ensuring that religious education aligns with contemporary social values (Hassan, 2016). State-managed Islamic education, particularly through Al-Azhar, is often associated with ideologies supporting Islamic thought, reflecting an ideological connection that strengthens religion's role in the public sphere (Mohamed, 2024). Therefore, the Islamic education system in Egypt functions as a religious educational institution and a tool for shaping the social identity and ideology of a complex and dynamic society.

The Islamic education system in Egypt combines formal and non-formal approaches designed to address contemporary challenges while preserving classical Islamic values. As a country with a long history in the development of Islamic sciences, Egypt has developed an educational model that serves local needs and attracts the global Muslim community's attention. The centrepiece of this system is Al-Azhar University, the oldest Islamic educational institution, founded in 970 AD, which continues to serve as a symbol of Islamic

intellectual authority. The combination of traditional and contemporary curricula enables Al-Azhar graduates to become intellectual Muslims who are competent in religious fields and capable of confronting globalisation challenges (AbdelMinem, 2024; Cahyono, 2023). Besides Al-Azhar, Egypt's Islamic education system also includes madrasahs, state schools, and community-based education, adopting a transdisciplinary approach. Egypt's strategic geographic location at the crossroads of three continents makes it a melting pot of Islamic thought and culture from diverse backgrounds, creating a cosmopolitan educational environment that supports the global spread of moderate Islam.

In Egypt's Islamic education system, students are the key element that determines the success of the learning process. Not only do students come from Egypt, but thousands of international students from Indonesia, Malaysia, Africa, and Central Asia also study at the country's Islamic institutions, particularly at Al-Azhar (Ariatman, 2024). This diversity creates an inclusive learning dynamic, rich in cross-cultural dialogue. However, there are significant challenges related to educational access, especially for students from rural areas in Egypt, who face logistical, economic, and informational barriers. The gap between educational centres in major cities like Cairo and rural areas highlights the need for more responsive affirmative policies for marginalised groups. Equal access to prestigious institutions like Al-Azhar remains challenging for the government, particularly in terms of providing scholarships, housing facilities, and adequate academic guidance. If left unaddressed, this inequality will impact the balance of graduate quality between urban and rural students. Therefore, Egypt's Islamic education system requires reforms focusing on social justice and inclusivity.

Teachers play a strategic role in Egypt's Islamic education system. Educators, including scholars, lecturers, and teachers, are generally graduates of Al-Azhar University, specialising in religious sciences such as tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and hadith (sayings of the Prophet), as well as general sciences such as physics, mathematics, and the humanities. Through the Ministry of Education and Al-Azhar, the Egyptian government regularly conducts training programs to improve teachers' capacities to teach moderation values and encourage critical thinking (Qolbiyah & Rajab, 2022). The curriculum they teach reflects a synthesis of religious knowledge and worldly sciences. Al-Azhar, for instance, integrated subjects like technology, citizenship, and science in the 2015 reforms to address contemporary needs (AbdelMinem, 2024). Despite this, the availability of qualified teachers remains challenging in remote areas. The lack of facilities and training for teachers in rural areas means that educational quality is uneven. This challenge calls for a fairer distribution of human resources and ongoing training systems for educators across Egypt to ensure equal educational quality.

The learning process in Islamic education in Egypt is carried out through formal and non-formal approaches that complement each other. Institutions like Al-Azhar and public schools use lectures, discussions, memorisation, and scientific practice to develop students' intellectual and moral capacities in the formal system. The formal curriculum combines classical Islamic studies with modern subjects like information technology and citizenship studies to produce graduates who are adaptable to the times (Rahman & Muwafiq, 2024). On the other hand, the non-formal system, including traditional madrasahs, majelis taklim (religious study groups), and halaqahs (study circles), plays an essential role in intensive

religious character building. This non-formal education is widespread in rural areas and reinforces spiritual values and social engagement through community activities. However, the quality of non-formal education tends to vary and depends on the capacity of the teachers and the support infrastructure. The government and Al-Azhar have begun paying more attention to this sector through teacher training programs and infrastructure assistance, but these efforts still need to be expanded. Integrating formal and non-formal systems is key to creating a generation of well-educated and morally upright Muslims.

The output of Egypt's Islamic education system is characterised by graduates who possess not only academic capabilities but also a strong moral commitment to social contribution. Many Al-Azhar graduates become scholars, academics, and community leaders who promote moderate Islam locally and internationally. They are also often involved in social mediation processes and public education, acting as agents of change who carry the messages of tolerance and peace (Cahyono, 2023). On the national level, the contributions of Islamic education graduates are crucial in supporting political and social stability after the Arab Spring. As a centre of moderate Islamic education, Egypt has produced alumni from various countries, including Indonesia, who spread Al-Azhar's values in their home countries. However, disparities in education quality between urban and rural areas could affect the global competitiveness of graduates. Nevertheless, the strength of this system lies in its ability to combine religious teachings with humanitarian principles and modern science, making it one of the most respected models of Islamic education in the Muslim world (Hamid, 2024; AbdelMinem, 2024).

Although Egypt's Islamic education system enjoys a global reputation, structural challenges still limit the effectiveness of its implementation. One of the main challenges is the imbalance in resource distribution between urban and rural areas. The centralisation of policies by Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Education, based in Cairo, causes educational institutions in provinces like Asyut and Minya to lack facilities, qualified teachers, and access to learning technology (AbdelMinem, 2024). Furthermore, resistance from conservative groups to curriculum reforms that introduce subjects like science and technology hinders modernisation efforts. Some groups view these measures as secularisation threatening traditional Islamic values (Rahman & Muwafiq, 2024). The hierarchical structure within Al-Azhar's bureaucracy also slows decision-making, creating administrative obstacles in curriculum adaptation. Policies for decentralising education, redistributing the budget more equitably, and adopting a dialogical strategy to build consensus between reform supporters and traditionalist groups are needed to address these challenges. With these measures, Egypt's Islamic education system will remain conceptually relevant and be effective and equitable in its implementation across all layers of society.

3. Government Policies on Islamic Education in Egypt

The Egyptian government has consistently worked through various policies to maintain the significant role of Islamic educational institutions, particularly Al-Azhar University, in the national education system. Graduates from Al-Azhar, known as Azharites, are often associated with Islamist ideologies due to the ideological alignment within the institution (Mohamed, 2024). Historically, the Fatimid Dynasty made significant contributions to the development of Islamic education by establishing various educational

institutions and encouraging the translation of foreign literature into Arabic (Daud, 2022). Additionally, educational reforms under various regimes, such as the economic liberalisation "open door" policy during the eras of Anwar El Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, transformed the educational landscape and contributed to social inequalities and political tensions (Afridi & Berrwin, 2017). However, the frequent changes in education policy, influenced heavily by foreign models, have resulted in a misalignment between policies and actual practices, affecting the quality of Islamic education in Egypt (Farag & Yacoub, 2023).

Government policies on Islamic education reflect a strategic effort to preserve the intellectual heritage of Islam while accommodating modern needs. Through collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Endowments (Wakaf), and Al-Azhar University, these policies emphasise a moderate, inclusive Islamic education that remains relevant to contemporary developments. Formal regulations, such as national education laws, ministerial decrees, and curriculum guidelines from Al-Azhar, underline this commitment. The government positions Al-Azhar as the primary educational authority and the guardian of Islamic values within the national education system. This approach aims to produce graduates who are not only academically excellent but also possess strong moral character and tolerant attitudes, enabling them to face global challenges without compromising their Islamic identity (AbdelMinem, 2024).

One of the key pillars of these policies is strengthening Al-Azhar's position as an independent institution through the *Al-Azhar Law No. 103 of 1961*. This law regulates the educational structure from primary to higher education and grants Al-Azhar full authority to develop the Islamic education curriculum. In addition, Al-Azhar is responsible for training religious teachers and overseeing madrasahs (Islamic schools) throughout Egypt to ensure that teachings align with moderate Islamic values. Periodic ministerial decrees update the standards for teaching and facilities in Islamic educational institutions, emphasising Al-Azhar's influential role in education and religion (Abrar et al., 2025).

Curriculum reform is another focus of policy, particularly under the *Ministerial Decree No. 183 of 2014*, which integrates religious subjects such as tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and hadith with general sciences like science and technology. This reform aims to create a curriculum suitable for the 21st century. Topics such as tolerance, pluralism, and interfaith dialogue were introduced to address the challenges of extremism following the Arab Spring. National teacher training ensures consistency in delivering this curriculum across schools. This reform has been implemented in public schools, private schools, and madrasahs under Al-Azhar to produce a moderate Muslim generation adaptable to global changes (Rahman & Muwafiq, 2024).

In the non-formal education sector, government policy through the Ministry of Wakaf includes the 2017 Madrasah Management Guidelines, which establish standards for facilities, teacher qualifications, and curricula based on teaching the Qur'an, hadith, and moral values. This initiative seeks to improve the quality of madrasahs as an alternative form of education, especially in rural areas with limited access to quality formal education. However, limitations in funding and infrastructure in remote areas remain significant challenges to implementing this policy. The government has responded by allocating additional funds for madrasahs, but the gap in educational quality between urban and rural areas still requires further attention (Qolbiyah & Rajab, 2022).

Recent policies also include *Presidential Decree No. 12 of 2018*, which established the National *Committee for Islamic Education Reform*, led by the Sheikh of Al-Azhar and involving the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Wakaf. This committee is tasked with modernising Islamic education by digitalising learning and enhancing teacher training. One of the results of this initiative has been the development of an online learning platform to spread moderate Islamic teachings across Egypt and the broader Muslim world, as well as a scholarship program for international students. On the other hand, the government has also regulated the teaching of anti-extremism materials through *Ministerial Decree No. 45 of 2016* to counter radicalism. While these initiatives have succeeded in increasing access to education and reducing extremist narratives, challenges such as resistance from conservative groups and limited technology in rural areas continue to hinder the full implementation of these policies (Cahyono, 2023; AbdelMinem, 2024).

D. CONCLUSION

Islamic Education in Egypt has successfully integrated Islamic scholarly traditions with the demands of modernity, making it a globally relevant education model. Al-Azhar University, as the oldest institution since 970 AD, has played a significant role in spreading values of moderate, tolerant, and inclusive Islam through a curriculum that combines religious sciences such as tafsir, figh, and hadith with general sciences like science and the humanities. The Egyptian Islamic education system, which includes formal education (state, private, and Al-Azhar schools) and non-formal education (madrasahs, majelis taklim), has been able to produce competent and morally upright graduates, contributing to social-political stability and the spread of Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin (a mercy to the worlds). Through regulations such as the Al-Azhar Law of 1961, the 2014 curriculum reforms, and the 2016 deradicalisation program, government policies strengthen an education system that is adaptive to globalisation and extremism. However, challenges such as the access gap between urban and rural areas, limited technology, and resistance from conservative groups still need to be addressed. Egypt's experience provides important lessons for Muslim countries, including Indonesia, in developing contextual, inclusive, and future-oriented Islamic education that balances tradition, modernity, and national values. Recommendations for Indonesia include strengthening the synergy between Islamic educational institutions and the state, more equitable budget distribution to remote areas, participatory curriculum reforms involving scholars and academics, and enhancing teachers' capacity through digital training and modern pedagogy. Thus, Egypt's experience can serve as a strategic model for building an inclusive, adaptive, and globally competitive Islamic education system without abandoning Islamic roots.

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and practical benefits.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- Author 1: Designed the overall research framework and formulated the main research questions. Coordinated the research implementation and led the synthesis and triangulation stages for data validation.
- Author 2 : Managed data collection from literature studies and document analysis. Ensured that primary and secondary data were gathered accurately using databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and JSTOR.
- Author 3 : Analysed qualitative data by identifying relevant themes and patterns. Conducted coding and categorisation of data to explore the dynamics of Islamic education in Egypt in depth
- Author 4 : Verified and validated findings through triangulation, integrating data from various sources to ensure accuracy and consistency of the analysis in the broader research context.
- Author 5 : Compiled the literature review and formulated relevant theoretical frameworks. Assisted in developing analytical categories based on existing Islamic education literature and theory.
- Author 6 : Compiled and edited the final research report, ensuring the findings were presented systematically and clearly. Crafted a descriptive narrative depicting the dynamics of Islamic education in Egypt.

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