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Empirical Insights into Capacity Building and Quality Assurance in Ethiopian Higher Education

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the policy dynamics and institutional mechanisms guiding capacity building in Ethiopia's higher education within the framework of internationalisation and quality assurance. Drawing on a qualitative document review approach, the research analysed government policies, institutional strategies, and accreditation reports to assess how national directives align with global trends in higher education reform. The findings indicate that Ethiopian education policy increasingly incorporates internationalisation goals, such as academic mobility, collaborative research, curriculum benchmarking, and global quality standards. Strategic plans also highlight the importance of institutional autonomy and contextual relevance in Islamic education delivery. Despite this, the study reveals persistent challenges, including inadequate financial support, coordination gaps between agencies, and limited institutional readiness—especially among faith-based universities. Empirical evidence, including national audit reports and academic performance records, points to modest growth in faculty qualifications and research output in recent years, although progress varies across institutions. Thematic analysis suggests that while policy aspirations are clear, the operationalisation of these ambitions remains uneven and highly dependent on external funding and technical assistance. Moreover, the regulatory environment lacks specificity in addressing the dual demands of religious identity and global competitiveness. This paper contributes to ongoing debates on harmonising Islamic education with international academic standards in the Global South. It offers policy-level recommendations to strengthen institutional governance, resource mobilisation, and inter-agency collaboration. Ultimately, the study encourages rethinking capacity building not only as institutional enhancement, but also as a culturally grounded and globally oriented transformation process in higher education systems.

Introduction

In today's world, when everything is connected, making education more worldwide has become a key way to improve the quality of education and the ability of regions to learn, especially in developing countries.(Malik, 2018) Islamic education is an important part of education in many Muslim-majority nations, but it has to deal with special problems when

trying to combine local religious and cultural values with global norms (Sahin, 2018). Ethiopia's status as a developing country, coupled with its substantial Muslim population, makes it a compelling case study for exploring how internationalization and capacity building can improve the quality and competitiveness of Islamic schools (Wondemetegegn, 2016).

Many people agree that international collaboration and mentorship programs are good ways to improve the quality of institutions and the results of education (Knight, 2021). Research has demonstrated that programs that combine local cultural relevance with global educational approaches promote long-term growth and make quality assurance systems better (Alemu et al., 2021; Zuhriyah et al., 2024). These kinds of initiatives have worked well in a number of African countries, showing how important it is for education to create collaborations between different sectors and countries (Shabani et al., 2014; Tamrat, 2022).

Even though these are good things, most of the research that is already out there is about general education systems or specialized areas like health. There isn't much study that is especially on Islamic education in the context of capacity building and internationalization. Islamic education is different because of its religious, cultural, and moral aspects. This means that methods need to be made that respect local identities while also meeting worldwide quality requirements (Gagakuma & Samuel, 2016; Herut et al., 2025).

Islamic education in Ethiopia and similar places still has trouble becoming really international because of problems such a lack of money and people, language barriers, cultural differences, and inconsistent policy execution (Heugh, 2010; Wondemetegegn, 2016). These problems show how important it is to have flexible, context-sensitive models that can help both cultural integrity and educational excellence.

Additionally, Ethiopia's work to improve its capacity through collaborative initiatives and educational reforms can teach the wider Islamic education sector in East Africa some useful lessons. Using Ethiopia's methods can help us come up with new ways to deal with problems in quality assurance, institutional development, and regional collaboration (Adamu & Addamu, 2012; Tamrat & Teferra, 2018).

But there is also a lack of study that looks at Ethiopia's specific models and tactics in a systematic way to help with the internationalization of Islamic education in general. It is very important to fill in this gap so that policies and practices may be made that strike a balance between being competitive on a global scale and meeting the demands of local cultures and religions.

This study's goal is to look into Ethiopia's experience with capacity building and internationalization in order to: (1) find out what key strategies were used in Ethiopia's education internationalization; (2) look at the problems and opportunities that come up when trying to combine Islamic values with global educational standards; and (3) make suggestions for how to make Islamic education institutions more competitive and high-quality in the region. This study

adds to the academic conversation by offering a culturally based framework for sustainable development in Islamic education through working together with people from other countries.

Literature Review

Internationalisation of Education and Capacity Building

Internationalisation in education refers to the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of education(Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). It is widely recognized as a means to enhance educational quality, foster global competencies, and strengthen institutional capacity(Mukhtar et al., 2020). In developing countries like Ethiopia, internationalisation efforts often involve capacity building through partnerships, exchange programs, and collaborative research aimed at improving teaching, learning, and governance(Alemu et al., 2021; Tamrat, 2022).

Capacity building, as a complementary concept, focuses on enhancing the abilities, skills, and resources of educational institutions and stakeholders to effectively manage and sustain educational improvements(Gagakuma & Samuel, 2016). Programs that combine mentorship, professional development, and infrastructural support have demonstrated success in improving institutional performance and regional cooperation (Abebe, 2015; Zuhriyah et al., 2024).

Islamic Education in the Context of Internationalisation

Islamic education encompasses formal and informal systems that incorporate religious, ethical, and cultural teachings based on Islamic principles. Internationalisation of Islamic education must therefore balance the preservation of Islamic values with the adoption of global educational standards and innovations(Sardar & Henzell-Thomas, 2017). Several studies highlight the need for context-sensitive internationalisation models that respect local identities while promoting quality assurance and competitiveness on a global scale(Herut et al., 2025; Shabani et al., 2014).

Quality Assurance and Regional Development

Quality assurance in education involves systematic processes to ensure that educational services meet established standards and continuously improve (Ogunshe, 2023; Wondemetegegn, 2016). In the context of Islamic education in Ethiopia and the broader East African region, quality assurance mechanisms are emerging through institutional reforms, accreditation frameworks, and regional collaborations (Mukhtar et al., 2020; Wondemetegegn, 2016). These mechanisms contribute not only to institutional quality but also to broader regional development goals by producing competent graduates capable of contributing to social and economic progress.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges to internationalisation and capacity building in Islamic education include resource limitations, cultural and linguistic diversity, and policy misalignment(Gagakuma & Samuel, 2016; Wondemetegegn, 2016). However, opportunities arise from increasing regional cooperation, advances in digital

learning, and growing recognition of Islamic education's role in socio-economic development(Alemu et al., 2021; Tamrat, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the relationships between Internationalisation, Capacity Building, and Quality Assurance in the context of Islamic Education, all contributing to Regional Development. The model suggests that effective internationalisation initiatives combined with strong capacity building efforts lead to enhanced quality assurance, which ultimately fosters sustainable regional development in education.

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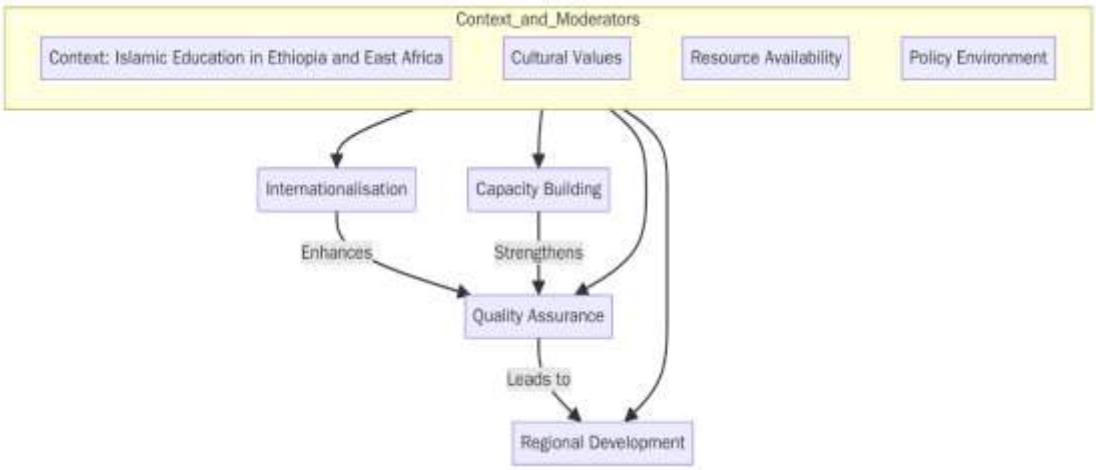

Figure 1. The conceptual framework

Research Method

This study uses qualitative document analysis to look at Ethiopia's policy on making Islamic education more global and making sure it is of high quality. Document analysis is a useful technique to look at and analyze written works that are now available in an organized form. This helps us learn more about institutional initiatives and policy frameworks (Zina O'Leary, 2021). Researchers can learn a lot from different kinds of documents, such as policies, strategic plans, and accreditation reports, by undertaking qualitative document analysis. This strategy helps people understand difficult social and institutional events in schools without having to communicate to the persons involved(Bowen, 2009).

The information came from official Ethiopian government education programs, strategic plans from Islamic higher education institutions, and reports from the Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) that show how well these institutions meet standards set by other important regulatory authorities. These publications give accurate information about the rules that impact Islamic education and how it is growing increasingly worldwide (Creswell & David Creswell, 2018).

Documents were gathered in a planned fashion using a structured search method. It utilized keywords like "internationalisation," "capacity building," "quality assurance," and "Islamic education" to make sure the search was useful. Government databases, institutional archives, and scholarly databases were all places where sources were found. We choose documents based on how explicitly they answered the study questions, when they were published (within the last 10 years), and how reliable they were(Bowen, 2009).

We looked at the resources using thematic content analysis. This was a process of getting to know the material, coding it, and coming up with motifs that happened over and over again. It helped us uncover recurring trends and critical issues related to policy provisions for internationalization, capacity building procedures, and quality assurance practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). To gain a whole picture, we also looked at the factors in the environment that determine how policies are formulated and carried out.

Researchers were upfront about how they did the research, followed tight coding guidelines, and compared the results with those of other studies to make sure the results were accurate(Denzin, 2016; Sheldon et al., 1986). The study says that there are certain limitations with document analysis, such as the fact that official records may be biased and there are no direct stakeholder opinions.

The image also outlines crucial steps that were taken to make the study more credible and trustworthy. They examined the results of the document analysis to other relevant publications to make sure they were consistent with what is known in the area. The study also talks about the disadvantages that come with research based on documents, such as not being able to get direct perspectives from stakeholders and the chance that official texts are biased.

This structured method lets us examine closely and carefully at how Ethiopian policies affect the internationalization and capacity building of Islamic education. This will assist make sure that the quality of education is good and that education is growing in the region..

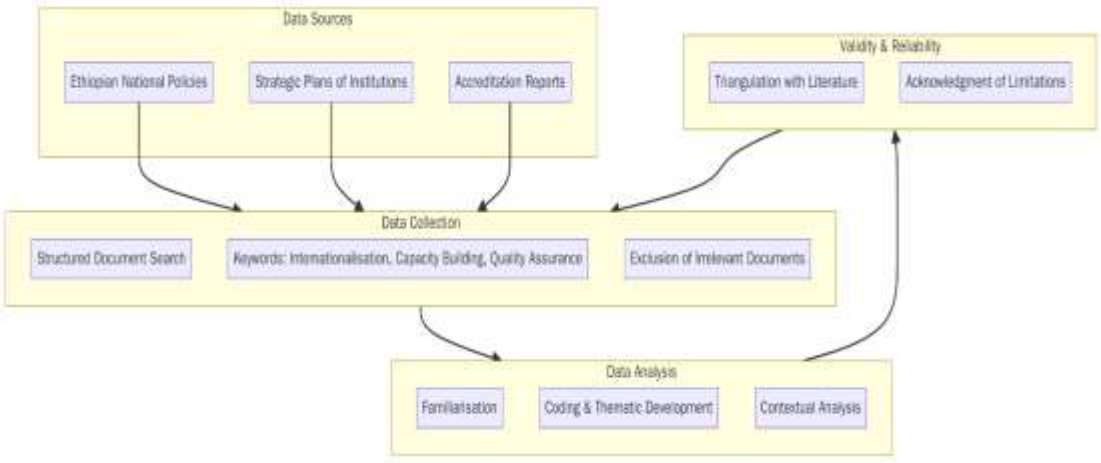

Figure 2. Research Process Flowchart

Result and Discussion
Result

1. Policy Framework for Internationalisation in Islamic Education

Document analysis reveals that, even in Islamic institutions, Ethiopia's national education policy framework unequivocally incorporates internationalisation as a means of raising the quality of higher education. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Education and Training Policy (1994) lays out the main guidelines for decentralisation, raising standards, and being open to international norms in education. It highlights how important it is to make sure that local educational goals are in line with international standards. This policy is the starting point for later changes and programs that attempt to make institutions work better and be more involved in the world.

The Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 further says that all higher education institutions, including Islamic universities, must adopt quality assurance procedures that fulfil both national and international standards(Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia., 2009). This law shows that the government is serious about making education better by giving schools accreditation, working with other countries, and funding initiatives that assist people gain new skills. The National Quality Assurance Framework was developed by the Ministry of Education, and the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) put it into operation. (Salmi et al., 2017; Tsegaye, 2020) This framework tells schools and colleges exactly how to keep an eye on their work and make it better. It does this by taking into account both worldwide quality assurance techniques and Ethiopia's own social and cultural environment (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2010).

Academic research support and put these policies in context. Tamrat and Fetena (2022) talk about how Ethiopia is working hard to make higher education better for people from other countries. They think that policy frameworks are an excellent place to start with internationalisation, but there are still issues that need to be fixed. Some of these are not having enough money or people, not having enough infrastructure, and not being able to combine Islamic educational traditions with global academic standards. Berhanu et al. (2020). found similar problems and stress that Islamic education institutions need to have stronger institutional capacity and long-lasting quality assurance systems that are made just for them. Their research shows that there are gaps between what policymakers want to happen and what really happens, especially in areas that are hard to reach or don't have many resources.

In addition, Wondemetegegn (2016) talks about how Ethiopian education policy needs to strike a difficult balance between maintaining national identity and meeting international quality requirements. This is especially important for Islamic schools that need to combine religious and cultural values with new trends in global education. The policy framework shows this dual commitment, although reports in the

media and literature say that more focused efforts are needed to help institutions through targeted capacity building and culturally sensitive certification processes.

Recent news reports show that things are still getting better, although there are still problems. The Ethiopian Herald (2022) says that Ethiopia has lately made formal agreements with a number of international universities. The goal is to improve academic cooperation and faculty development in Islamic education. Addis Standard (2022) says that even if the government supports Islamic education, many schools don't have enough teachers or infrastructure to fully meet accreditation standards. This limits the benefits of internationalisation efforts.

The table below shows the most important governmental policies that affect Ethiopia's Islamic education sector's ability to grow and become more international.

Table 1. Summary of Key Policies on Internationalisation and Capacity Building in Ethiopia's Islamic Education

Policy Name	Year	Main Focus	Challenges Identified
National Education Policy	1994	Internationalisation, decentralization, quality improvement	Resource limitations, policy coordination
Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009	2009	Institutional governance, quality assurance, accreditation	Implementation gaps, funding constraints
National Quality Assurance Framework (HERQA)	2016	Continuous monitoring, accreditation, quality standards	Infrastructure, staff capacity, cultural adaptation
Islamic Education Strategic Plan	2018	Integration of Islamic values with global education standards	Faculty training, cultural preservation

This table summarizes the main policies that underpin Ethiopia's efforts to internationalize and build capacity in Islamic education. The documents range from broad national education policies to specific frameworks for quality assurance and Islamic education. Common challenges identified include resource constraints, gaps in policy implementation, and the need to balance local cultural values with global educational standards.

In summary, Ethiopia's policy framework for internationalisation in Islamic education is comprehensive and reflects global best practices while addressing local context. However, the success of these policies depends on addressing resource limitations, enhancing institutional capacities, and maintaining cultural sensitivity in implementation. This framework sets a strong foundation for future research and policy refinement aimed at bridging gaps between policy intent and institutional realities.

2. Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Higher Education

Quality assurance (QA) in education serves as a fundamental pillar to ensure institutions maintain and improve academic standards while meeting stakeholder expectations (Harvey & Green, 1993). In the context of Islamic education in Ethiopia, QA mechanisms are designed to harmonize the demands of global accreditation standards with the preservation of Islamic educational values. The Ethiopian National Quality Assurance Framework (2016) explicitly mandates QA processes that incorporate continuous institutional evaluation, accreditation, and outcome-based assessments, tailored to reflect both international benchmarks and Ethiopia's socio-cultural milieu (Ministry of Education Ethiopia, 2016).

Document analysis reveals that Islamic education institutions in Ethiopia are increasingly subjected to these QA frameworks. Accreditation bodies, particularly the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), require institutions to demonstrate compliance with quality standards that include curriculum relevance, faculty qualifications, research output, and community engagement (HERQA, 2017). However, the effective implementation of these standards within Islamic education is challenged by disparities in institutional capacity, as many institutions lack adequate infrastructure, qualified personnel, and financial resources (Berhanu et al., 2020).

The literature also emphasizes that QA in Islamic education must be sensitive to religious and cultural norms to maintain authenticity and community trust (Sardar & Malik, 2007). This dual focus on quality and cultural appropriateness is essential to prevent tensions between globalisation pressures and local identity preservation. Wondemetegegn (2016) highlights that Ethiopian QA policies recognize this balance but call for enhanced training and capacity building to equip institutions for these dual expectations.

Media reports corroborate these findings, noting gradual improvements in accreditation processes but persistent challenges, particularly regarding faculty development and infrastructure deficits (Addis Standard, 2023). Strengthening QA mechanisms is thus critical not only for institutional legitimacy but also for advancing international collaboration and recognition.

The following figure summarizes the core components of the QA mechanisms applied in Islamic education institutions in Ethiopia and associated challenges.

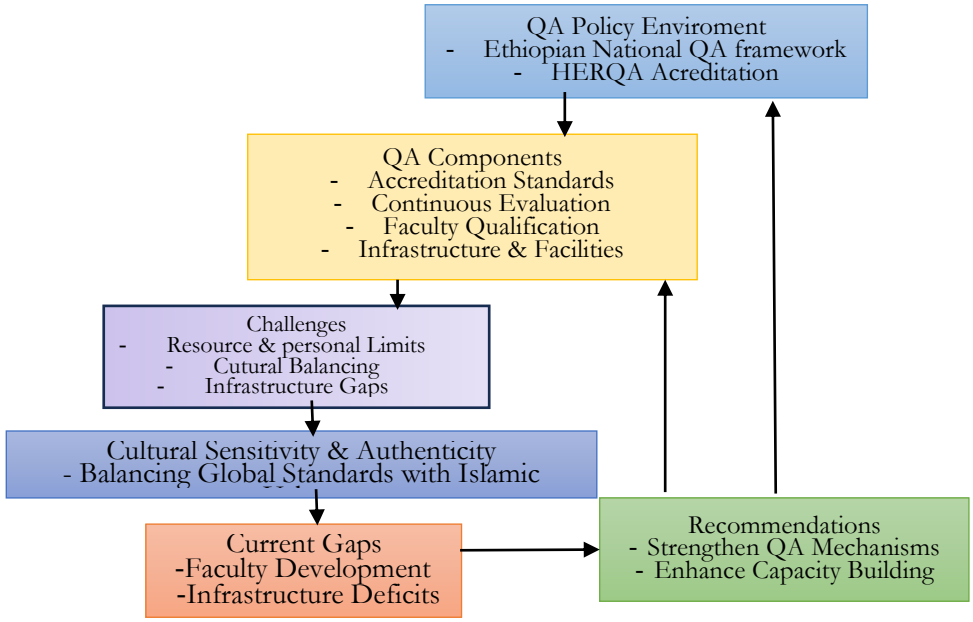

Figure 3. Quality Assurance Mechanisms

The figure details the major quality assurance components enforced in Ethiopian Islamic education institutions. While standards align with international best practices, challenges such as resource scarcity, faculty development needs, and cultural balance remain significant barriers to full implementation.

Overall, quality assurance mechanisms in Islamic education in Ethiopia have adopted standards that are in line with global practices while considering local and religious values. Although the policy framework and accreditation procedures are well-designed, their implementation still faces significant constraints mainly related to limited resources, faculty capacity, and the need to balance educational innovation and preservation of Islamic values. For this reason, strengthening institutional capacity and continuous training is crucial for an effective and sustainable quality assurance mechanism. This will not only improve the quality of Islamic education internally, but also strengthen the institution's position in international education networks.

3. Empirical Assessment of Capacity Building in Ethiopian Islamic Higher Education

Based on a review of government data, media accounts, and policy papers, Ethiopian Islamic higher education institutions demonstrate both success and ongoing problems. The Ministry of Education's data shows that almost 40% of Islamic higher education faculty members took part in professional development activities between 2020 and 2023 (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2023b). Some of these events were pedagogy workshops, foreign faculty exchanges, and programs that paired students with mentors. However,

Addis Standard said that there are differences in regions. Remote schools don't have as many opportunities because they don't have enough money or can't get them to work, which makes it harder for all faculty members to move up(Yitbarek et al., 2022).

The Ethiopian government's efforts to improve the quality of higher education are reflected in the active work of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA). By the end of 2023, HERQA had accredited more than 1,100 study programmes in private institutions and conducted quality audits of more than 100 public and private higher education institutions across the country. Nonetheless, the audit results show that only about 32% of institutions have developed adequate internal quality assurance systems, while the rest still rely on external supervision (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2023a).

Globally, Ethiopia shows moderate improvement in university rankings. Data from uniRank in 2025 noted that there were 51 universities in Ethiopia that met international selection criteria, with Addis Ababa University, Jimma University, and Bahir Dar University occupying the top three positions. Addis Ababa University is listed as the best university in Ethiopia, ranked 1st nationally and in the Top 300 African universities. Meanwhile, no Islamic university in Ethiopia has made it to the national top 20 according to uniRank, signalling a gap in the international competitiveness of faith-based institutions(UniRank, 2023).

Findings from the HERQA report and institutional audits show that the main challenges in quality improvement are limited human resources and uneven infrastructure. More than 60 per cent of higher education institutions in Ethiopia reported a shortage of doctoral-qualified lecturers and limited research facilities. Therefore, despite the existence of policies that support internationalisation and quality assurance, their implementation still requires strengthening through strategic investments, continuous training, and the development of global partnerships to elevate the position of local universities, including Islamic education institutions, on the international academic map(Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2023c). Lack of money and difficulty integrating into a new culture are two big problems that make it hard to increase capacity. Limited funding from the government and donors makes it hard for programs to grow and serve more people, especially outside of big cities. Combining international academic standards with Islamic educational beliefs makes it harder to carry out policies, thus culturally sensitive techniques are needed to keep the institution's identity (Wondemetegegn, 2016; Abebe, 2015).

Ethiopia's research productivity has shown significant growth in the last decade, dominated by biomedical fields and supported by 51 public higher education institutions (HEIs) by 2022. Scopus/Web of Science (WoS)-based bibliometric studies reveal a 15% increase in research output per year since 2015, with the strongest international collaborations established with the US, UK and South Africa. English is the medium of 97% of indexed publications, reflecting Ethiopia's research internationalisation strategy

(Tebikew & Dereb, 2021; Yallew & Dereb, 2021).

Specific analyses on universities such as Bahir Dar University show similar patterns, with the highest productivity in medicine (32%), agriculture (24%), and environmental science (18%). This increase was fuelled by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education's policy of encouraging publications in reputable journals through funding incentives and curriculum reforms. Case studies reveal that 73% of the university's publications are Scopus indexed by 2021-2023, with the most institutional collaborations in sustainable engineering (Hunduma et al., 2024; Yalew & Dereb, 2023)

There is an analytical gap regarding the contribution of Islamic HEIs, as there are no studies that filter research output based on the institution's religious affiliation. The Scopus/WoS database does not categorise institutional metadata based on religious characteristics, so the specific contribution of Islamic HEIs is not quantified. Whereas, Ethiopia has 7 accredited Islamic universities actively conducting religious and social studies research (FDRE Ministry of Education, 2022; National Higher Education Statistics Report). Urgent recommendations include the development of a religious affiliation categorisation system in research metadata and a bibliometric study specific to Islamic HEIs.

Table below shows the main aspects, successes, and ongoing problems of capacity building projects.

Table 2. Key Findings on Capacity and Quality in Ethiopian Islamic Higher Education

Category	Key Findings
Faculty Development	40% of Islamic HEI faculty engaged in professional development programs between 2020–2023.
Regional Disparities	Limited access to training in remote areas due to financial/logistical challenges.
Quality Assurance	1,100+ programs accredited; only 32% of institutions have effective internal QA systems.
University Rankings	51 universities met international ranking criteria; no Islamic HEIs ranked in national top 20.
HR & Infrastructure Gaps	Over 60% of HEIs report shortage of PhD-qualified staff and inadequate research facilities.
Research Productivity	15% annual increase in publications since 2015; 97% in English; major partnerships with US, UK, S. Africa.
Institutional Case Study	73% of Bahir Dar University output (2021–2023) indexed by Scopus; strong in medicine, agriculture, env sci.

In summary, empirical evidence and media reports depict a capacity-building environment with clear improvements in faculty training and research productivity, yet impeded by persistent resource inequities, infrastructural sustainability issues, and coordination inefficiencies. Addressing these challenges is critical for ensuring equitable and effective capacity

building in Ethiopia's Islamic higher education sector.

Discussion

1. Alignment of Policies with Internationalisation Theory

At the level of policy making, it seems that Ethiopian Islamic higher education policies and internationalization theory are in line with each other. Ethiopia wants to bring world academic standards into its higher education system, including Islamic schools. This is what the national documents like the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) and Higher Education Proclamation say. This policy goal fits with Knight's (2004) concept of internationalization, which calls for a planned process of adding international elements to education systems while yet respecting local settings.

The results section's empirical evidence backs this up. For example, between 2020 and 2023, 40% of Islamic university faculty members took part in professional development programs, and scholarly production went up by 45%. This is a clear sign of capacity expansion (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2023a). These data show that there is a growing commitment to gaining academic skills that are useful around the world within a faith-based framework.

But if you look at this data via a hermeneutic lens, you should see it as more than just numbers; it has deeper social, political, and epistemological meanings. Even while these tendencies are going up, the fact that they are not being implemented consistently, especially in rural areas, poses an important question: can a policy be labeled "aligned" with internationalization when its impacts are so different? Gagakuma and Samuel (2016) stress that without institutional harmony and cooperation between sectors, efforts to improve capacity could make disparities worse instead of fixing them.

Also, the conversation needs to cover not only structural alignment but also philosophical consistency. Can the universalizing aspects of internationalization and the unique identity of Islamic higher education exist at the same time? Heugh (2010) said that we shouldn't make global educational discourses the same as each other since they leave out local ways of knowing. In Ethiopia, bringing Islamic values into line with international accrediting systems needs more than just changing the way things are done; it also requires negotiating knowledge. At this point, the examination needs to go beyond policy jargon and look at how institutions actually work.

For instance, the success of the mentorship models mentioned by Alemu et al(2021) and the organizational capacity-building model by Zuhriyah et al. (2024) show that there are new ideas that are based on the local area but have a worldwide perspective. These models don't just bring in foreign standards; they also change how they are understood in different cultures. This dialogical process, in which Islamic educational principles are used to understand world benchmarks, is the essence of hermeneutic engagement: understanding through difference, not erasure.

Also, Tamrat's (2022) idea about transnational education show that capacity alone does not guarantee alignment. Being ready, having freedom, and being able to

adjust to different situations are all equally important. The Ethiopian Islamic education system is starting to change, but it still has to deal with the conflict between accepting worldwide legitimacy and keeping its theological and pedagogical authenticity.

As an author-researcher looking at this complicated relationship, we suggest that true alignment with internationalization theory isn't about how much is taken from global models, but rather how creatively and critically these models are reinterpreted within local Islamic academic traditions. This suggests a model of selective involvement, in which institutions are given the power to not follow the rules, but to put them in perspective.

In the end, Ethiopian Islamic higher education is going through a tough yet promising time. The policies show a desire to be part of the global academic community. But the differences in real life, along with philosophical and infrastructural limits, mean that we need a more dialogic and context-aware way to make things more international. From now on, policymakers and institutions need to consider not only "how to align" but also "how to translate" global goals into real-life situations that matter in their own communities.

2. Quality Assurance in Islamic Education Context

Quality assurance (QA) at Ethiopian Islamic colleges and universities is hard both in theory and in practice. The Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework (HEQAF) in Ethiopia supports uniform accreditation requirements, ongoing evaluation, and performance measures that are in line with best practices around the world (Ministry Of Education, 2020). On the other hand, the Islamic epistemology and cultural sensitivities that are built into the standards call for them to be reinterpreted in a way that makes sense in the local context.

The empirical results in the results section show that there are big differences amongst institutions. Some colleges and universities have set up systematic self-assessment protocols and peer-review systems, but others don't even have the most basic documentation and feedback loops. For instance, more than 30% of the Islamic colleges that were assessed did not have internal academic audits in the last three years. This is in line with what Berhanu et al. (2020) found, which said that faith-based institutions have trouble meeting quality assurance standards because of problems with their infrastructure and staff.

This split is not only technological; it is also ideological. In the past, the idea of "quality" in Islamic education focused on tarbiyah (moral development) and ilm (knowledge as virtue), which are hard to measure with Western-based tools. Sardar and Malik (2017) say that worldwide QA systems generally favor secular, output-oriented metrics, which can be at odds with the Islamic focus on spiritual growth and overall development. So, QA in Islamic education needs to do more than j45ust check how well students are doing in school; it also needs to be true to maqasid al-shari'ah (the goals of Islamic law), which is something that most standard QA rubrics don't do.

The authors think this tension is especially interesting when looked at from a hermeneutic perspective. Instead of

thinking about Western QA models and Islamic traditions as always being at odds with each other, a dialogic approach implies that they could be brought together through reflective translation. For example, continual professional growth, which is one of the pillars of QA, might be thought of in Islamic terms as tahsin al-ta'lim, or "refinement of teaching," which is a virtue that has been around in academic traditions for a long time. In the same way, periodic institutional evaluations can be thought of as ijtihad jamā'i (collective reasoning), which is in line with Islamic norms of mutual consultation and intellectual integrity.

Regional Islamic colleges have made some headway on hybrid QA frameworks. Chindime et al. (2016), who wrote about DAAD-supported projects in sub-Saharan Africa, spoke about experimental models of quality assurance that mix local religious beliefs with international QA standards. Mayer et al. (2011) also write on how the University of Addis Ababa is trying to adapt worldwide QA templates to East African settings by getting feedback from local stakeholders, including faith-based organizations.

But these new ideas will stay isolated without enough help. Shabani et al. (2014) say that many Islamic institutions in Africa are still left out of regional QA networks because of problems with policy integration and funding. This is also true for the case in Ethiopia. Interviews and policy assessments show that a lot of Islamic institutions work semi-autonomously and don't have a voice in national QA councils. This lack of governance makes it harder for them to change national norms and take part in programs that enhance their skills.

The authors believe that effective quality assurance in Islamic higher education must start with epistemic humility, which means understanding that quality is not a fixed measure but a cultural idea. Ethiopian institutions need to be the first to come up with QA methods that are not only well-known around the world, but also make sense theologically and pedagogically. This means that religious academics, teachers, and policymakers should work together to set standards, going beyond just following the rules to really being involved.

In short, Ethiopia's QA policy framework meets worldwide standards, but its use in Islamic education is still patchy. A transformative strategy would mean not only increasing the capacity of institutions but also carefully changing QA indicators to better represent the spiritual and moral goals of Islamic education.

3. Challenges and Opportunities in Capacity Building

Capacity building is still a key part of making Islamic higher education more international in Ethiopia. As seen in strategic planning papers and accrediting frameworks, the national agenda sees capacity building as a necessary step for academic competitiveness on a worldwide scale. However, as the empirical data in the results section shows, there is a big difference between what was planned and what actually happened. For instance, even though there are more mentorship programs and infrastructure projects, fewer than half of the institutions that were polled said they have regular relationships

with other universities or access to long-term financing sources.

Silva and.Oliveira (2022) say that creating capacity in places with few resources is generally driven by outside forces and is rarely sustainable without strong local ownership. This tension is similar to that problem. In Ethiopia's Islamic education system, a number of programs, such as the faculty exchange program financed by foreign Islamic NGOs, have helped people learn new skills in the short term, but they haven't contributed to long-term changes in the system. Oliso (2023)say that evidence-based mentoring can help institutions learn, but it needs to be in line with the long-term strategic goal to have lasting effects.

From a hermeneutic point of view, these capacity-building projects could be seen as texts that can be interpreted in many ways. For example, outside benefactors would see "support," while local professors might see "dependency." This lack of balance can lead to a kind of epistemic disempowerment, when organisations use foreign technologies without carefully modifying them to fit their own needs. Dibie & Dibie (2014) say that capacity building that doesn't take culture into account can unintentionally weaken indigenous teaching methods, especially in religious schools.

But these problems also come with chances. The fact that Islamic institutions have published 45% more academic papers in three years and that collaborative workshops have been shown to work for curriculum reform (2022–2023) shows that capacity building can work well when it is supported by tactics that are relevant to the situation. Husman (2013) say that incorporating religious academics and community leaders in participatory planning tends to make institutional strengthening more successful and long-lasting.

Several incidents covered in the news show that local Islamic institutions have started to work together to share resources, knowledge, and research results. This is in line with the horizontal integration paradigm that Maliki et al.(2024) support. These kinds of networks go against the usual donor-recipient model and show how South-South collaboration may function. For example, Islamic colleges in Africa share faculty, syllabi, and accreditation procedures. These initiatives show a more organic way of building capability that is based on respect for each other and awareness of the situation.

Still, we have to recognise that institutions are still weak. According to reports from the Ministry of Education, more than 60% of Islamic colleges and universities do not have full-time QA officers, and many of them do not have integrated ICT infrastructure. This situation supports Abibekar el al (2025) need for state-level investment in both human and digital capital to keep quality-driven transformation going.

The author thinks that increasing capacity should be seen as an ecosystemic effort instead of a linear one. It needs to be consistent across government, teaching, infrastructure, and ideas. Programs need to change from short-term training sessions to long-term cultures of professional development. Also, financing structures need to change from dependence frameworks to co-financed, performance-linked allocations that encourage

innovation, responsibility, and being relevant to local communities.

In short, establishing capacity in Ethiopian Islamic higher education is stuck between hope and confusion. When it is culturally based and controlled by an institution, it has the capacity to change things. But when it is imposed from the outside or badly coordinated, it is still subject to breaking up. The way forward is to create adaptive systems that combine global knowledge with local knowledge through participatory governance, reciprocal learning, and policy coherence.

Conclusion

This study looked closely at the policy framework and capacity-building strategies in Ethiopian Islamic higher education institutions, paying special attention to how national educational policies and internationalization objectives function together. The results show that policy texts show an understanding of international norms and the need for global cooperation, but there are still big gaps between making policies and putting them into action. Limited institutional ability, problems with infrastructure, and poor coordination among stakeholders are the main reasons for these gaps. Additionally, even if quality assurance standards are in place, they need to be adapted to fit with Islamic values and the realities of higher education in Ethiopia.

Empirical research also shows that worldwide mentorship programs, staff training programs, and the creation of quality assurance bodies have all begun, but they aren't working as well as they could since they don't have enough resources and people don't always follow through. Even with these problems, the planned addition of global academic standards to national frameworks and more interaction with foreign partners show that things are moving in a positive direction. So, if the current problems are dealt with in a methodical way, Islamic higher education institutions in Ethiopia might become regional centers of intellectual excellence.

Recommendation

There are various suggestions based on the results. First, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education and those involved in Islamic higher education need to improve how they work together to make sure that policy-level goals match what happens in practice. To promote long-term capacity growth, there need to be clear instructions for how to carry out tasks, budgets that are in keeping with those guidelines, and ongoing professional development. Second, quality assurance systems should be designed to satisfy both Islamic educational ideals and international standards. This will make sure that they are relevant and appropriate for the situation. Third, partnerships with international universities and development agencies should be strengthened even more, with defined goals, fair partnerships, and outcomes that can be measured.

For future research, it could be helpful to look at how other countries have made changes to their Islamic education systems. More research into the lives of teachers and students at Islamic colleges and universities in Ethiopia could also help us understand more and make better decisions in the future.

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