

*International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*  
Vol. 22, No. 11, pp. 303-320, November 2023  
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.11.16>  
Received Sep 23, 2023; Revised Nov 22, 2023; Accepted Nov 26, 2023

## Promoting Multicultural Education in the Middle East: Perception and Practice

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**Abstract.** In the current era, human diversity is constantly changing due to the exponential spread of information and communication technologies, which promotes human interaction. Cultural overlap between different societies, as well as increasing rates of migration across borders strengthen multiculturalism. The education system is often influenced by the cultural reformation in society, which shapes the way education is structured, teaching styles, curriculum development and education objectives. Given that Islamic culture is the dominant one in the Middle East, it is assumed that its ideals and principles will uphold multiculturalism and inclusion, as with any other great religions. This study aims to explore the role of Islamic culture in promoting multicultural education in the Middle East, to examine the application of the concepts of multicultural education, and to reflect on the idea of multiculturalism. A sample of 37 college instructors and 312 higher education students participated in the study by answering the questionnaire, which was conducted using a mixed-method approach. The results of the study showed that Islamic values and beliefs have a remarkable influence on the adoption of multiculturalism in education without compromising Islamic beliefs and values. Furthermore, multiculturalism ideas are incorporated into instruction and student communications. According to the research report, employing a

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multicultural education platform effectively will require curricular adaptation.

**Keywords:** multicultural education; Middle East; Islamic culture

## 1. Background of the Study

Multiculturalism or cultural pluralism is one of the outcomes of social changes and cultural transformations that have occurred in societies due to globalisation (Smits, 2011). Multiculturalism's explosive increase has made it easier for diverse groups with different languages, cultures and religions to interact and communicate without physical limitations. Today, within a changeable world and with the prevalence of diversity, multiculturalism has become a recognisable tendency that provides more opportunities for further interaction that facilitate blending with other cultures irrespective of geographical constraints. As a result, a cultural transformation has been taking place in many Islamic countries in the Middle East. Islamic culture is the most embraced context in the Middle East region. Islamic culture is impressed by the values and beliefs of the monotheistic Islam. One of the valuable principles is that Islamic culture encourages the spread of peace and love among people, which can be achieved by accepting people from other religions and cultures and treating them well (Halstead, 2007). Modood and Ahmad (2007) explored the concept of multiculturalism among moderate Muslims in Britain. Muslim participants were found to be pro multiculturalism given that they believe in the existence of faith as a dimension of 'difference'. The findings revealed that aspects of a multicultural model such as the distinction between tolerance and mutual respect, and the need for transformative adjustment for minorities and the majority, are regarded in similar ways by Muslim and non-Muslim British multiculturalists.

Furthermore, the Islamic culture is a powerful source of multiculturalism compared to many other sources that have been developed elsewhere (Warsah et al., 2019). This view was common among the experts in delivering contemporary Western discourses rather than those who are experts in interpreting Islamic cultural texts (Sahib & Demirel, 2010). As the education system is influenced by societal and cultural aspects, adapting to multicultural education in the Middle East requires the alteration of the education structure to a multicultural education approach. The past two decades have witnessed a remarkable focus on studying multicultural education by various researchers (Gay, 2013; Jay & Jones, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2003, 2006; Ozturgut, 2011). A recent study by Nganga (2020) recommends the development of institutional policies to support the clear implementation of multicultural education in early childhood education programmes. According to Madrid Akpovo et al. (2018), the present globalised era requires educators to consider various demographics inside the classroom, which increases the demand for studying multicultural education. Today, Middle Eastern countries welcome multiculturalism in many paradigms. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of the Middle Eastern countries that broadly fosters multiculturalism. As the education system in the UAE historically used an Islamic-structured approach, now it is a challenge to alter it and embrace multiculturalism. The challenge underlies different perspectives, such as understanding the concept of multiculturalism, ensuring the preservation of

Islamic beliefs and values, and protecting non-Muslim students' rights, and understanding diverse characteristics, in addition to examining teachers' capacities to implement multiculturalism. Since the UAE is a leader in spreading tolerance internationally and internally from the political domestic and foreign policy and humanitarian perspectives, there is a need to discuss multicultural education implementation and its relation to Islamic culture and beliefs (Lootah, 2021).

### **1.1 Study Objectives and Significance**

This research study intends to explore the perception/concept of multicultural education as perceived by higher education Muslim and non-Muslim instructors and discuss the role of Islamic culture in supporting the multicultural teaching approach. Moreover, the study examines the implementation of multicultural education in a Middle Eastern educational environment within a higher education setting in the UAE. As the country is a nation that embraces people from more than 200 cultures and ethnicities, it is crucial to focus on providing a multicultural education environment and ensuring the preservation of Islamic culture. This research study will contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on multicultural education in an Islamic culture-responsive environment. From a global perspective, the findings of this study will enrich the international view of the education system and the continuous initiatives that the UAE as an Islamic nation implements to adopt multiculturalism, moreover, presenting recommendations for practice to enhance multicultural education in the Middle East.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

The following three research questions were asked to achieve the purpose of this research paper.

- (1) What is the concept of multicultural education as perceived by Muslim and non-Muslim higher education professors in the UAE?
- (2) What is the role of Islamic beliefs in implementing multicultural education perceived by Muslim and non-Muslim higher education professors in the UAE?
- (3) To what extent do college professors implement multicultural education principles as viewed by the students?

## **2. Related Literature**

### **2.1 Islamic Culture and Multiculturalism**

The Holy Qur'an is the main source of Islamic legislation and policies in Islamic countries. The Qur'an is a Muslim book that deals with the welfare of individuals, groups, communities and societies and provides the policies that manage and preserve the relationships between individuals. Moreover, the Holy Qur'an manages the interaction with other communities and societies to ensure the well-being and prosperity of everyone. Multiculturalism, from the perspective of diversity management, can be found in many Islamic principles. Henzell-Thomas (2001) demonstrated that although multiculturalism is a Western idea, its beliefs and foundations are found in and supported by Islam. Pluralism is the fruit of

Islam that is connected to the message of Islam and exemplified in its civilisation. The World Population Review (2023) revealed that there were more than two billion Muslims worldwide in 2023, which makes Islam the second-largest religion in the world. The perspective of blending Islamic education with a multicultural context has increased across Islamic countries. According to Nugroho (2019), blending Islamic education with multiculturalism is a key solution that enables Muslims to live and mix closely with people from different ethnicities, beliefs, behaviours, traditions and habits. With the increasing growth of multiculturalism in education, educators need to understand students' cultural diversities and pay attention to any emerging biases. As per Taylor (1999), the role of educators is to comprehend multicultural education in instruction design. Educators should adopt multicultural practices such as (1) treating all students fairly while teaching and assessing them; (2) avoiding any discriminatory words or concepts in all educational aspects; (3) developing acceptance of certain concerns and events related to different religions, (4) encouraging students' mixing and pluralism by working in diverse groups, and (5) helping students to cope with any challenges resulting from multiculturalism through resolving any culturally based conflicts. Moreover, educators need to adopt a variety of teaching methods by including multicultural issues in class discussions and assignments.

## **2.2 Islamic Education in the UAE**

Islamic education refers to embracing the Islamic values and beliefs that are derived from the Qur'an (the holy book) and Hadith (the Islam prophet's speeches and narratives) into teaching methods where students are taught the core values of Islamic teachings. Islamic education can be explained in the context of the considerable endeavour that is done to adopt and represent Islamic values and beliefs through learning activities inside classrooms. Halstead (2004) explained that the objective of Islamic education is determined by revealed religion, hence, it has an objective value. Therefore, these objectives are constant and do not fluctuate according to individual beliefs or experiences. Consequently, the curriculum should be developed to agree with the Islamic insight about the type of knowledge and human nature, notably their spiritual nature.

Early in the 1950s, the UAE started offering educational services before the actual presence of the country, which depended on substitute types of education. The UAE educational system relied heavily on religious instruction and knowledge attainment via interaction with people from other cultures and ethnicities (Alhebsi et al., 2015). Furthermore, the education system included "Mutawa" which refers to the Imam of the mosque (Shaikh of the Masjed/Mosque). In the earlier period, the Mutawa's main role was teaching Qur'an, Islamic Hadith and Islamic beliefs and issues to young children. The Mutawa has a moral commitment to transfer the message that emphasises following the right path without deviation from the religion's principles and beliefs. As the Mutawa is a wise man, he is highly respected and appreciated (Alnabah, 1996). History has shown that the education system in the Emirates was based on the traditions of Islamic law following a social constructivist style. Constructivist teaching depends on developing critical thinking ability about course content (Jackson, 2015). The frequent attempts of the UAE to bring its education to a level of excellence require a focus on an updated teaching methodology and a move to the

student-centred approach to facilitate the learning process. The UAE has developed its postcolonial orientation to education to change the Western countries' perception of the Islamic education system in Arabic countries (Litz et al., 2020). Multicultural education has developed in the UAE to meet the demands of diversity in the country. Given the societal advantages of collaborating with multiple ethnic groups, it was revealed that Islam is distinguished by embracing a diversity of people from several races and encouraging mutual feelings of brotherhood among Muslims and diverse communities compared to other great religions (Milem, 2003).

The education system in the UAE welcomes all learners from different ethnicities, which mandates fostering multiculturalism aspects in all education sectors. The UAE makes a noticeable effort to support diversity and adhere to multiculturalism and equity in education in the education sector from K - 12 and in higher education settings. One of the prominent initiatives that the UAE started is a Moral Education programme. According to the OECD (2020), in January 2017, the Ministry of Education in the UAE launched the *Moral Education Pilot Programme* at 19 schools across the Emirates. The Moral Education programme is an inclusive framework that comprehends a well-structured curriculum that aims to achieve the UAE National Vision by developing youngsters from all cultures and ages in terms of a universal standard. In addition, the aim is to build on the happiness, tolerance, personal and social well-being of the people in the UAE. The purpose of moral education is to preserve the nation's unique traditions, heritage, culture, Islamic values, beliefs and moralities, which can promote learners' character to become the next generation of role models and leaders. To implement the Moral Education programme in K - 12, the Ministry of Education developed appropriate content for different grades and ages and started offering Moral Education courses to develop a positive personality of the younger generation and help them accept living in a multicultural environment, which reflects the application of Islamic beliefs and values to adopt multiculturalism in education.

### **2.3 Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education**

The notion of multiculturalism in modern societies suggests an argument about the way to understand and respond to the encounters related to cultural diversity based on traditional, racial and religious differences. The descriptive term "multiculturalism" is frequently used to shed light on the existence of diversity in society. Kymlicka (2007) explained multiculturalism as an umbrella term that covers multiple approaches aimed at providing a certain level of recognition and support for marginalised ethnocultural groups, whether they are immigrants and refugees (new minorities), or old minorities. A review of the history of multicultural education shows that it emerged in the 1950s, in concurrence with the minority civil rights movement in the US where many minority groups such as African Americans were discriminated against and faced discriminatory practices in many public places and education institutes (Banks, 1989; Petrasová, 2013). According to Banks (1989), the multiculturalism movement was initiated at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, when the feminist movement was ignited. It required a speedy response in education reformation to cope with inequities in educational opportunities and employment, political and human rights, as well as income. Consequently, many schools and higher educational

institutions responded to address the concern, mainly to provide educational equity and a multicultural education opportunity to include marginalised and minority groups. Thus, the concept of multicultural education has been well-defined and is generally understood. Since the 1980s, a significant change in educational policies had been witnessed which has resulted in the development of new programmes and practices, which motivated scholars to focus on multicultural education characteristics and implementation.

As research continued, Banks (1981) as an innovative scholar advocated multicultural education analysed schools as a social system and formed the concept of “educational equality”. Banks (1981, 1989) stated that many educational features should be investigated to implement and sustain a multicultural education environment. Investigating schools is expected to entail transformation focusing on teachers’ approaches, pedagogies, assessment tools, counselling, instructional material, policies and legislation. Today, the term multicultural education has been used in the education area to address the concept of inclusive education; correlated with the values, beliefs and perspectives of diverse students from various cultural backgrounds. Multicultural education can be understood as an inclusive learning environment where a diverse group of learners interact and learn regardless of any cultural limitations. Multicultural or intercultural competence as a concept refers to developing a dual perspective and being able to adjust behaviour to comply with the duality of thoughts and beliefs (Byram & Zarate, 1997). Based on that, the students in the UAE are required to adopt the concept of a “set of cultural behaviours” which is defined by Austin (2006) as the capacity to be engaged, interact and develop intercultural communication and intellectual skills.

#### **2.4 The Significance of Multiculturalism**

Multicultural education is a useful teaching approach that allows educators to respond quickly to changing demographics and meet students’ various needs. . In the current age of globalisation, embracing multiculturalism in education is one of the effective solutions for resolving the cross-cultural problems that may emerge in classrooms. Petrova (2016) suggested that multicultural education enables instructors to integrate a variety of teaching styles to support diversity and improve sociocultural understanding. Mena and Rogers (2017) explained the role of multicultural education in providing a helpful tool for supporting the fundamental factors for a successful society, such as philosophies of diversity, principles of democracy, the value of thoughts and self-reflection. Rose et al. (2018) indicated that multicultural education is beneficial for the education system from the perspective of providing educational and teaching opportunities that promote students’ skills and capacities. Moreover, multicultural education facilitates communication between cross-cultural students to ensure moral and civic community development. Multicultural education was found to preserve the culture of minority groups by expanding immigrant students’ self-esteem (Aragona-Young & Sawyer, 2018).

One of the evident benefits of multicultural education is minimising the challenges of cross-cultural issues by addressing the concept of a dominant group. As noted by Maltseva (2020), the setting of multicultural education improves

students' awareness and acceptance of other ethnicities and cultural traditions which support social justice. Based on a study by Uzunboylu and Altay (2021), the structure of multiculturalism in education relies on a cross-curricular approach, which supports cultural expansion and provides more learning opportunities. Multicultural education positively impacts the environment and society, which can empower students to participate in social change. According to recent research by Maltseva (2020), incorporating multicultural education content benefits both teachers and students by assisting them in illuminating important ideas and easing cross-cultural difficulties. Additionally, multicultural education can positively impact society and the environment, as well as give students the confidence to change the world. While pursuing academic degrees, students' ethnic awareness is increased through the context of multicultural education, which promotes and strengthens their cultural identity and heritage.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Study Approach

To achieve the goal of this research paper, a mixed-method design was chosen. For the mixed-method approach, convergent design was applied by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data independently and then analysing it to answer the research questions and draw a conclusion. Qualitative design was used to explore the perception of multicultural education as understood by higher education professors, in addition, to discussing the role of Islamic beliefs in implementing multicultural education. Moreover, the study examined the actual implementation of multicultural education quantitatively, as viewed by higher education students in the UAE. To address the qualitative approach, structured interviews were conducted to enable the data collection and analysis related to cultural groups. Structured interviews were chosen to study a cultural group of Muslim instructors and a subgroup of non-Muslim instructors in a multicultural environment. The use of interviews aimed to reveal the interactions between instructors and students, and how they communicated with each other.

Views on the implementation of multicultural education principles were obtained from students' responses to the *Integrated Multicultural Instructional Design* (IMID) model (Schultz & Higbee, 2011). The IMID model was chosen for this study as it takes account of the dynamics of the education system of the UAE and other cultures that adopt the notion of multicultural education. The mixed-method approach was used to determine any differences between professors' conceptualisation and the methods they use to implement multicultural education and students' views of implementing multicultural principles in teaching and learning.

#### 3.2 *Integrated Multicultural Instructional Design* (IMID) in Teaching

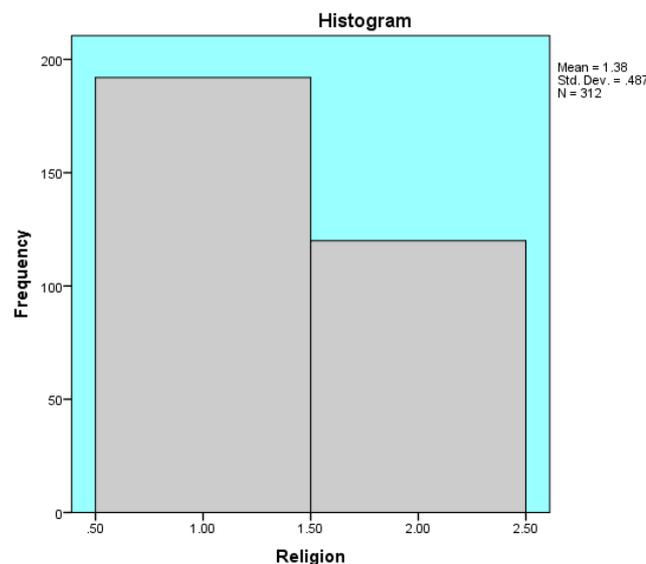
IMID is a new approach to instruction and assessment that focuses on the authentic implementation of multicultural principles and supports teaching approaches and assessments that include a diverse group of learners in post-secondary programmes. The IMID model is designed in a pyramid that focuses on the post-secondary community, including students, educators and practitioners who show essential consideration of diversity and multiculturalism. The four domains of IMID are structured as follows: (a) teaching method, (b)

course content, (c) learning assessment, and (d) commitment to diversity. These four domains are explained by Duranczyk and Higbee (2012) and adopted from Schultz and Higbee (2011, p. 16 -17), as discussed here.

- (1) *Teaching Methods*: This domain discusses the dynamics of teaching; and how the process starts and continues focusing on a clear presentation of the learning objective and the engaging activities.
- (2) *Course Content*: This domain heavily focuses on the course content, the knowledge that is presented to students, and how it could be mapped to multicultural education.
- (3) *Learning Assessment*: This domain stresses integrating multicultural aspects of students' assessment. Assessment of student learning should consistently follow the criteria of multiculturalism and protect students' rights.
- (4) *Commitment to Diversity*: This is a critical domain that should be implemented authentically. All students should be treated and respected equally, and this implementation should be acknowledged by students.

### **3.3 Study Population and Sample**

This empirical study was implemented in four higher education institutions, private and public institutions that were chosen as a representative sample of the higher education population in the UAE. The institutions were randomly selected to include the American University in the Emirates, the American University of Sharjah, the University of Sharjah and Ajman University. Regarding the student sample, many professors from the selected institutions were approached to send the study link to their students. Achieving the study aims depended on getting a large enough sample of undergraduate students from various backgrounds. Around 580 students were invited to take part in the study and respond to the IMID survey (Schultz & Higbee, 2011). A total of 312 accepted the invitation and provided valid data. The sample comprised 125 (40.1%) men and 187 (59.9%) women. A mixed sample of 192 (61.5%) Muslim students and 120 (38.5%) non-Muslim as shown in (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Student distribution by religion**

According to the descriptive analysis, participants' age was categorised into three different groups. Most of the participants' age ranged from 18 to 24 (62.4%), followed by the age range from 25 to 31 (27.7%) and a few for the age category 32 to 28 (9.9%). As this study discusses multicultural education adoption, a diverse group from different ethnicities and backgrounds was asked to take part and represent their culture and background. Many professors were invited to participate in the study. Professors were selected to represent a diverse culture to include Muslim and non-Muslim participants. For the college professors' sample (informants), 37 faculty members were interviewed. The sample contains 21 (56.8%) female professors and 16 (43.2%) males, 27 (73%) Muslim, and 10 (27%) non-Muslim instructors. Informants' academic ranks varied from instructors to assistant professors and associate professors. The professors' sample represents multicultural ethnicities from Western countries, the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

### 3.4 Study Instrumentation

For this study, the IMID (Schultz & Higbee, 2011) was chosen to quantitatively assess the implementation of multicultural education at the selected universities. The IMID model has four domains: teaching methods, course content, evaluation of student learning and commitment to diversity and multiculturalism. Each of these domains is measured by a question presented on a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 = "not at all" and 10 = "outstanding". Students were required to select the number that most closely represented their perceptions of the instructors' implementation of the multicultural aspects in the four domains. A higher score "closer to 10" indicates a high level of implementing multicultural education.

### 3.5 Instrument Reliability and Validity

According to the study of Schultz and Higbee (2011), the IMID measurement scale revealed high reliability. To measure the IMID reliability, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to examine the instrument reliability or the internal consistency between the items of the IMID and assess the scale consistency. Statistical analysis of data showed that the scale items have high reliability, characterised by  $\alpha = .913$ . For scale validity, Schultz and Higbee (2011), the originators of AMID, confirmed the construct validity. A panel of experts was contacted to get confirmation regarding the validity of the scale for the UAE population. The panel's reply confirmed the effectiveness and the accuracy of the scale to measure the underlying construct of multiculturalism in education, which confirms its validity to achieve the purpose for which it is designed.

### 3.6 Data Collection

Structured interviews entail obtaining data from college instructors and professors (interviewees). A 50-minute structured interview (one-on-one) was held individually and physically in the informants' offices. A total of 37 interviews started with a clear explanation of the study's purpose and nature. The interviewees/informants were asked five questions, and the researcher was taking notes from their answers. The researcher showed the interview draft to the interviewee before starting the analysis to avoid any conflict between what the participant meant and what the researcher perceived from their answers. Interviews began in the fall of 2022 and continued for 14 weeks. Five interview questions were presented to informants (See Appendix 1).

For the quantitative data, the researcher started the data collection process in the middle of the fall of 2022 and continued for 7 weeks until enough samples were obtained. An invitation was sent to students to join a virtual meeting on the *Zoom* application and respond to the survey. The IMID questions were modelled on *Google forms* including the demographic questions and the consent form. The researcher started the meeting with a short presentation about the study objectives and explained the technique to answer the IMID questions (See Appendix 1). Each meeting was assigned for 30 minutes; the researchers conducted one meeting per week until data collection was completed. The meeting time and date were announced on the students' portal. All data was coded for anonymity and transferred to the SPSS version 24.0 for conducting the analysis and identifying the conclusion.

## 4. Data Analysis and Results

The researcher analysed the obtained data via systematic examination and explanation of qualitative data. During the data familiarisation phase, the researcher started data analysis to understand the content provided by participants. Coding or categorising and labelling data was the next step toward identifying themes. Answering *RQ 1* and *RQ 2* was achieved by generating two themes from the qualitative data that were collected through a series of structured interviews with 37 college professors and instructors. Two themes were produced to answer the first two research questions of the study.

#### 4.1. Implementing Multiculturalism

As revealed by the Muslim and non-Muslim informants, multicultural education has many interpretations such as *“applying a set of educational approaches which were created to help instructors overcome any challenges they might face when teaching students from diverse cultures”*. Multicultural education is *“the education style that combines a wide-ranging cultural perspective to include students from different backgrounds regardless of their language, race, religion and gender”*. One of the most revealed concepts of multicultural education that were revealed by most of the participants is *“Multicultural education is an education trend that describes several patterns of teaching that incorporate the values, perspectives and beliefs of learners from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds”*. Moreover, the content analysis suggests that *“multicultural education is an educational reform to spread and implement the concept of education equity and equality for all students, regardless of their gender or cultural backgrounds religion or any other variables”*. Another concept of multicultural education generated from the content analysis was *“multicultural education is a restructuring of the teaching process to adopt a culturally responsive pedagogy that embraces the philosophy of educational justice, freedom, equality, equity, inclusion and human rights in classrooms”*.

The thematic analysis demonstrated that most instructors, regardless of their religion, advocate implementing multiculturalism principles inside the classroom. It was found that instructors used multiple teaching techniques that focus on the cultural background of learners, including class discussion, reading assignments, cultural videos, diverse group activities, student-centred activities and practical projects. Embracing these teaching techniques signifies the importance of keeping diverse students engaged. Furthermore, participants declared that one of the most applicable strategies that professors used to implement multicultural education principles was integrating multicultural perspectives, such as using current cultural events and issues that focus on ethnicity, religion, gender and inclusive education regionally and internationally. One professor stated,

*“I look at the recent events that are closely related to my students’ cultural background, traditions and beliefs and consider it for the class weekly discussion on the course page. I post a question or statement about a recent event and ask everyone to comment on my post and comment on the comment of one of the students from a different ethnicity and then summarise the discussion verbally in class and allow students to compare between students’ comments to identify cultural differences and similarities”*.

Moreover, instructors and professors showed their commitment to diversity by applying the principles of multiculturalism in teaching, assessment, course content adaptation, evaluating techniques and assessing student learning that provided equal opportunities for success and academic achievement. As revealed in the data, all Muslim and non-Muslim instructors support multicultural education and the inclusion of all students. Since the majority of the informants were Muslims, it was noted that Muslim instructors accepted multicultural education and strived to include all students from other religions and ethnic cultures.

### **Islamic Beliefs and Multicultural Education**

At the beginning of each interview, most participants expressed their appreciation and showed a high level of satisfaction with teaching in an Islamic country that encourages multicultural education. The satisfaction was found in their agreement to participate in a study about Islamic beliefs and multicultural education and their openness and warm welcome to discuss the topic of the study. Regarding the relationship between Islamic beliefs and multicultural education, content analysis confirmed an existing harmony between multiculturalism principles and Islamic beliefs. Muslim professors explained the strong tie between Islamic beliefs and multiculturalism, which was found in the practices inside classrooms such as acceptance of all learners from other ethnicities, positive communication among students from different religions and cultures, and including all students in teaching and assessment. In addition, encouraging group work projects and showing acceptance to all cultures through sharing common concerns and issues related to students and instructors from other cultures and religions, promoted cultural pluralism. The analysis of the responses of Muslim participants demonstrated that Islamic beliefs are genuinely connected to multiculturalism which encourages people to embrace multiculturalism as it was narrated in the Holy Qur'an (49: 13) "O people, verily we created you from a man and woman and made you nationals and tribes so that you might know one another. Indeed, the noblest among you by Allah is the most pious among you. Surely Allah knows best, knows all the more ". (Surat al-Hujurat: 13). This verse emphasises gender equality and encourages people to communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds. These are the main principles and components of multiculturalism that were found in the higher education practices in the UAE. Furthermore, the content analysis uncovered the professors' positive perceptions of multicultural education and acceptance to live, teach and interact with diverse groups. Muslim professors believe that cultural diversity is a main component of the human structure because including diversity is an asset for the Islamic society as it is assured in the Islamic book (Holy Qur'an) that Allah created people of different groups, races, and ethnicities and encourages all of them to mix and interact and live in peace with other cultural groups. Islam promotes cultural conversations and harmony to ensure the existence of peace. When Muslim people communicate with diverse groups, they implement Islamic beliefs and show their acceptance of multiculturalism which indicates implementing the Islamic beliefs. Muslim informants revealed that the actual implementation of Islamic beliefs through daily practice not just discussions or debates transfers a positive message about Islamic beliefs and supports preserving them. As was stated by one Muslim respondent,

*"If I want to preserve the Islamic beliefs, I should practise them in my daily life aspects. They should be reflected in my characteristics, and this is the best way to send a message to the world indicating my acceptance for multicultural education and inclusion to all learners from various ethnicities and in the meantime, preserving my Islamic beliefs and values".*

Another declaration by a Muslim participant was:

*“Teaching and communicating with diversity does not mean releasing our Islamic beliefs; it means accepting others while keeping our values and expressing them to others in an encouraging aspect. When we embrace other students’ cultures in our course content or assessment, we transfer a positive message about the values of our beliefs that supports inclusion without losing our beliefs”.*

As it indicated, professors believed that multicultural education encourages communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, but it does not indicate following other cultures and imitating any traditions of the people they interact with in their learning environments or workplace. It is all about adaptation and conformity with others to live in a friendly environment, which was emphasised by the Islamic beliefs. Muslim informants shed light on practising their Islamic faith in a context that will help preserve Islamic beliefs and values. They confirmed that mixing with other people should help people find the positive aspects of other cultures and implement them without breaching any of the Islamic values. Islamic beliefs and values encourage multiculturalism which maintains unity, and advocates justice and equality among people which is sufficient for Muslims and non-Muslims alike across the world.

The sample included many non-Muslim participants (11 out of 37 participants) who stated that they read about Islamic beliefs before relocating to the UAE to understand the culture and the nature of the social orientation. The non-Muslim professors declared that because of the implementation of cultural pluralism, they did not find any difference between working in their home country and working in a multicultural environment or Islamic country. Hence, Islamic beliefs welcome and support multiculturalism. The non-Muslim professors expressed their appreciation for the inclusion that the UAE provides for all residents in the country.

Non-Muslim professors found Islamic beliefs to be a supportive tool for multicultural education principles which was reflected in accepting and showing positive attitudes toward other non-Muslim people. Thus is a clear indicator of the role of Islamic orientation in promoting multicultural education and preserving Islamic beliefs inherited in Muslim people.

The thematic analysis demonstrated that multiculturalism principles and values are deeply rooted in Islamic beliefs. Islam is found in society to teach people to live together in diverse communities with mutual respect. As people in the UAE follow Islamic beliefs, they developed a multicultural society in which lifestyle is very dynamic because of the collaboration among people who do their best to encourage progress and mutual benefits. Implementing Islamic beliefs could be achieved through understanding and respecting the differences between cultures, which can minimise the occurrence of conflicts such as disputes and groupings based on races, cultures, genders and religions.

To answer *Research Question 3*, the descriptive data analysis disclosed that higher education students in the UAE have a positive perception of fostering multicultural education by their instructors as measured by the scores of the IMID model as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive of the four items of the IMID model**

Domain of IMID	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Teaching Methods</i>	8.19	1.73
<i>Course Content</i>	8.20	1.77
<i>Evaluation of Student Learning</i>	8.10	1.75
<i>Commitment to Diversity and Multiculturalism</i>	8.32	1.57

## 5. Discussion

This research paper discusses the role of Islamic beliefs in supporting the adoption of multicultural education. The study also looks at how higher education professors evaluate the application of multicultural elements in teaching and learning and the idea of multicultural education. The results of the data analysis demonstrated the close connection between multiculturalism and Islamic beliefs. Muslim informants made this point very evident in their responses, highlighting how the tenets of multiculturalism are ingrained in Islamic beliefs and supported by scriptures from the Holy Qur'an. These results concur with Ali (2016), who defined Islam's kindness as encompassing all individuals.

This finding is expected because the education system in the UAE was an Islamic-structured platform and transformed into a multicultural approach which was demonstrated in the obtained data. This can be interpreted as the Islamic roots of the education system supporting the acceptance of other cultural learners inside the learning environment in the UAE. As was demonstrated in the thematic analysis, Islamic beliefs are consistent with multiculturalism and encourage blending with other religious communities and groups, which can be explained as Islamic beliefs creating a friendly multicultural environment. One essential finding is the distinction between implementing multiculturalism and preserving Islamic beliefs. Adapting to other cultures does not mean releasing Islamic values; on the contrary, it means keeping Islamic beliefs and following them to show an authentic implementation of accepting others from different ethnicities. These findings are coherent with Milem (2003) who revealed that Islam is characterised by embracing a diversity of people from various races and communal feelings of brotherhood among Muslims and diverse groups.

It was revealed that in the UAE, higher education instructors' and professors' perceptions of multicultural education are consistent with the well-known concepts of multiculturalism, which facilitates the implementation process. The concepts of multicultural education that were generated from professors' perceptions align with the explanation of Austin (2006), which entails involving other people from different cultures. Thus, the professors' knowledge and conceptualisation of multicultural education are sufficient to enable them to implement multiculturalism principles in teaching and learning.

The findings demonstrated that students in the UAE have a positive perception of the way multicultural education principles are implemented in the learning process as was shown by the findings of the sum of *IMID* scores, with the four different domains of multicultural education achieving higher than 80%. As described by Schultz and Higbee (2011), the average scores on the *IMID* show that the students exhibited significantly high positive perceptions with a mean

score higher than 8 out of 10 on the IMID measurement scale. These findings indicate that the UAE is a multicultural environment and embraces multiculturalism aspects in many domains of education, which enhances the education system. These results are also supported by the outcomes of Moore-Jones (2015), who found that faculty and students in higher education settings acknowledged the UAE provides a multicultural educational environment. In addition, the consistency between informants' responses regarding the way they implement multicultural education and students' responses to the IMID model confirms the coherence between the perception and implementation of multiculturalism. Thus, the findings of the consistency between professors' and students' perceptions agree with the findings of Byram and Zarate (1997), which suggested the existence of a dual process to implement multiculturalism.

Living in a multicultural environment like the UAE requires intercultural competence for students and instructors to function properly and prosper educationally from culture to culture. Furthermore, the findings of this study are consistent with the output of research steered by the Dubai Statistics Centre, which found that the foreign populations in UAE scored 7.9 out of 10 on the measurement scale of subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Libo, 2012), which confirms that the UAE as an Islamic country includes all people from different cultures and supports multiculturalism in all life aspects. This also confirms the important role of Islamic beliefs in supporting multiculturalism and multicultural education. The findings suggest that the instructors in the higher education settings in the UAE are devoted to multicultural education in their teaching and assessment which is closely related to and supported by Islamic beliefs. The limitations of this study are instructors' level of awareness and implementation methods of multiculturalism which differs between professors based on their cultural background.

## 6. Conclusion

This study was conducted to achieve some objectives including finding the conception of multicultural education, describing how multiculturalism is perceived, and discussing the implementation of multicultural approaches in teaching and assessment within higher education settings in the UAE. Moreover, the paper aimed at discussing the role of Islamic beliefs in embracing multicultural education. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the study outcomes revealed that higher education professors believed that multicultural education can be explained as an education trend that embraces several patterns of teaching practice that incorporate the values, perspectives and beliefs of learners from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Professors and instructors acknowledged the existence of a remarkable tie between Islamic beliefs and multiculturalism and the prominent role those Islamic beliefs play in adopting multicultural education. Higher education learners confirmed the implementation of multicultural education principles in teaching, learning and assessment in college learning environments. It was revealed that students are included regardless of their cultural background, gender or ethnicity. The UAE higher education system was found to encourage and support multicultural education aspects to include the numerous ethnic communities living in the UAE without giving up their Islamic beliefs and values.

### 6.1 Implications for Practice

Based on the outcomes of this study, the following are some recommendations to be implemented in the higher education sectors:

- Embracing adaptive curriculum to implement an effective multicultural education model.
- Include multicultural aspects in students' annual orientation to familiarise students with the multicultural learning environments.
- Emphasise the importance of multiculturalism in college counselling sessions to foster student development from all cultures.
- Engage students in cross-cultural sessions and forums to enable cultural exchange.
- Offer more elective courses that focus on diversity and multiculturalism.

### 6.2 Future Research

Future research should focus on examining the role of Islamic beliefs in students' engagement and personal development.

### 6.3 Acknowledgments

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest or funding for this research study.

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