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# CHARTING ACADEMIC EVOLUTION: A BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY OF ISTAC-IIUM'S THESIS CATALOG<sup>1</sup>

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and Abdelaziz Berghout<sup>4</sup>

## Abstract

*This paper presents a bibliometric analysis of ISTAC-IIUM's thesis catalog (1993–2024), highlighting thematic trends and epistemological insights. It offers critical reflections on ISTAC's scholarly trajectory, emphasizing its evolution from a foundational institute to a hub for interdisciplinary Islamic scholarship. This study underscores ISTAC's commitment to addressing contemporary global and regional challenges through its academic output while staying rooted in its intellectual foundations. It also identifies thematic gaps, particularly in interdisciplinary research and emerging fields such as sustainability, gender studies, and digital transformation. Recommendations include developing integrated academic pathways, expanding underrepresented specializations, and fostering global collaborations to enhance ISTAC's visibility and impact. The research contributes to understanding ISTAC's academic trajectory, offering actionable insights to guide its future strategic direction in Islamic scholarship and its relevance in global academic discourse. This study demonstrates ISTAC's evolution from a foundational institute of Islamic thought to a dynamic and adaptive*

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<sup>1</sup> This is part of a project funded under the ISTAC grant research funds (ISTAC24-016-0018), entitled "Charting Academic Evolution: A Comprehensive Trend Analysis of ISTAC Catalogue Theses" and is a continuation of the ISTAC Theses Catalog project, led by Professor Dr. Waleed Fekry Faris.

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*institution addressing the complexities of modern society while aligning with IIUM's Tawhidic and Ummatic framework to advance holistic and impactful scholarship.*

**Keywords:** Islamic scholarship, thesis trend analysis, academic evolution, ISTAC-IIUM, interdisciplinary research

## Introduction

Since its establishment in 1987 by the visionary scholar Royal Professor Tan Sri Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has emerged as a beacon of excellence in Islamic studies, earning its place among the world's most prestigious academic institutions. With a foundation rooted in al-Attas' groundbreaking philosophy of *adab* and the Islamization of knowledge,<sup>5</sup> ISTAC is not merely a center for research but a unique intellectual powerhouse shaping the global discourse on Islamic thought, civilization, and human development. Esteemed for its interdisciplinary approach, ISTAC stands alongside other international institutions of renown, such as the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies and Harvard's Program in Islamic Law, positioning itself as a thought leader in bridging Islamic scholarship with contemporary challenges.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to Mohd Hilmi Ramli, al-Attas's philosophy, particularly his concept of *Adab*, is central to many of his essential writings, including *The Beacon on the Crest of a Hill*, *The Culture of Knowledge: An Elaboration*, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (1998), and *Development in Malaysia: Towards a Better Understanding* (2001, 2005). See M H. Ramli, *Analysis and Translation of Kitab Al-Mudarabah of Mabsut by Al-Sarakhsi (d. 483/1090)* (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2016). See also: S.M.N. al-Attas, *The Beacon on the Crest of a Hill: A Brief History and Philosophy of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991); *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991, 1995, 2007); *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998; *Development in Malaysia: Towards a Better Understanding*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit UTM Press, 2001, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM) website. <https://institute.iium.edu.my/istac/>.

At ISTAC's core is its mission to embody and disseminate the principles of *ḥaqq*—truth, wisdom, justice, and reality—concepts that resonate deeply with the universal values of Islamic philosophy.<sup>7</sup> This alignment with the principles of perfection and justice, inherent in divine governance, reflects ISTAC's aim to cultivate scholars of extraordinary intellectual and moral caliber who can engage with and address the complexities of modern society. al-Attas' vision of an Islamic university, founded on the ideal of the *Insān Kāmil* (the universal man)<sup>8</sup>, is brought to life through ISTAC's scholarly endeavors, making it a global model for integrating classical Islamic knowledge with the intellectual challenges of the modern era.

In its current phase under IIUM, ISTAC has expanded its focus through strategic initiatives that align with its foundational vision while addressing contemporary global challenges. The recent activities organized in ISTAC underscore the institute's growing role as a hub for interdisciplinary and intercultural scholarship. Its identity is deeply rooted in the vision of its founder, whose enduring legacy continues to inspire ISTAC's mission. Building on this foundation, ISTAC's integration into IIUM has broadened its scope, ensuring its relevance in a rapidly changing world while honoring the principles so profoundly articulated by Royal Professor Tan Sri Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.

Charting ISTAC's academic evolution through a bibliometric analysis of its thesis catalog is essential for understanding its contributions to knowledge production and its ability to adapt to emerging intellectual trends. With its expansive library and diverse faculty, ISTAC has consistently produced theses that reflect the scholarly rigor of its researchers and address the most pressing global and regional issues, such as sustainable development, interfaith relations, and cultural preservation. A study of this nature sheds light

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<sup>7</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Nabila Huringiin, "Ideas and Realization of Islamic University by al-Attas (Case Study: ISTAC-IIU Malaysia)," *HUNafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 18:1, (2021): 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.24239/jsi.v18i1.623.17-31>.

on ISTAC's capacity to remain at the forefront of Islamic scholarship while staying aligned with the academic trajectories of other prestigious institutions worldwide.

The need for this comprehensive trend analysis is twofold. First, it provides valuable insights into ISTAC's scholarly trajectory, identifying shifts in thematic and methodological priorities that reflect broader societal and intellectual movements. Second, it offers a roadmap for future research directions, ensuring ISTAC's continued relevance and leadership in addressing global challenges.<sup>9</sup> By examining ISTAC's extensive thesis catalog, this study seeks to uncover key themes, methodologies, and areas of emerging interest. The findings will deepen our understanding of ISTAC's role as a global leader in Islamic scholarship and demonstrate why institutions worldwide look to it as an intellectual partner in shaping the future of knowledge.

## Background

The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has long been a cornerstone of Islamic intellectual inquiry, embodying the vision of its founder, Royal Professor Tan Sri Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. Established on February 27, 1987, and officially launched by Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed on October 4, 1991, ISTAC was conceived as a research and postgraduate institution dedicated to advancing Islamic civilization and science. Its foundational ethos was to revive and expand Islamic intellectual thought, positioning the institute as a

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<sup>9</sup> As highlighted by Hafiz and Suryadi, ISTAC's interdisciplinary approach to exploring the intersections of Islamic and Malay civilizations makes it a model for academic innovation, and its evolution deserves systematic study to fully appreciate its impact and future potential (Hafiz Zakariya and Suryadi, "The Experiences of the International Institute of Islamic Civilization & Malay World (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia in Empowering the Malay World & Islamic civilization." *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage* 6, 2 (2021): 221–236. <https://doi.org/10.31291/hn.v6i2.444>.)

global leader in scholarship on Islamic philosophy, history, and civilization.<sup>10</sup>

Over the years, ISTAC has contributed significantly to academic development, as demonstrated by the work of Mohd. Zain Abd. Rahman who analyzed the trends in master's and doctoral dissertations from 1991 to 2004. The study documented 20 doctoral dissertations and 58 master's theses during this period, covering a wide array of disciplines such as Quranic studies, Hadith, comparative religion, theology, Sufism, and Islamic law. Notably, ISTAC's theses often employed philosophical and interdisciplinary approaches, reflecting its commitment to integrating classical Islamic knowledge with modern intellectual frameworks.<sup>11</sup> The work also highlighted the diversity of ISTAC's graduates, hailing from countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Bosnia Herzegovina, Uganda, and Gambia, thus emphasizing its global reach. Gender analysis showed that while males predominated in submissions, ISTAC awarded its first doctoral degree to a female scholar, marking an early milestone in fostering inclusivity.<sup>12</sup>

Nuramirahshahrin notes that ISTAC initially operated autonomously under IIUM with a small team but became a Kulliyah of IIUM in 2002. This transition marked a shift in its administrative and academic structure, enabling ISTAC to broaden its interdisciplinary focus while continuing to uphold its foundational values.<sup>13</sup> Dinobeano's 2018 essay critiques ISTAC's trajectory, suggesting that political interference and shifting goals have sometimes hindered the institute's potential to address the broader socio-economic needs of Malaysia's Bumiputera and Malay communities. Despite these challenges, ISTAC's contributions to Islamic philosophy and intellectual revival remain significant,

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<sup>10</sup> Nuramirahshahrin, "International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)," *Daripenasiswi*, December 1, 2010, Powered by Blogger. <https://nuramirahshahrin.blogspot.com/2010/12/international-institute-of-islamic.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Mohd Zain Abd. Rahman, "Postgraduate Research in Islamic Thought and Civilization at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)," *Malaysian Journal of Library & Information Science* 10,1 (2001): 49–64.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Nuramirahshahrin, "International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)".

particularly in the study of figures such as Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and its emphasis on addressing global intellectual challenges.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of revisiting ISTAC's academic evolution is further underscored by its role in addressing contemporary global challenges. From 1991 to 2002, ISTAC functioned as a leading autonomous academic institution, producing scholarly works of high caliber. However, as it transitioned into IIUM's structure, ISTAC's focus expanded to include interdisciplinary collaborations and modern research objectives. Recent scholarly critiques emphasize the need to adapt ISTAC's intellectual framework to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving world, particularly in areas such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and economic competitiveness.<sup>15</sup> This dynamic evolution of ISTAC underscores the necessity of conducting a comprehensive trend analysis of its academic output, ensuring its legacy and contributions remain aligned with current and future scholarly needs.

This study builds upon the works of previous scholars to chart the evolving trends in ISTAC's academic output. By analyzing its thesis catalog, this research aims to identify thematic, methodological, and geographical patterns in its scholarly works, offering insights into ISTAC's academic trajectory and its alignment with global intellectual currents.

## Objectives and Methodology

The primary aim of this study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the trends within ISTAC-IIUM's thesis catalog, focusing on thematic shifts and emerging patterns from 1993 to 2024. This dual approach seeks to understand ISTAC's academic evolution while providing

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<sup>14</sup> Dinobeano, "ISTAC and the Closing of the Malay Mind." *Din Merican: The Malaysian DJ Blogger*, September 6, 2018, Blog at WordPress.com. <https://dinmerican.wordpress.com/2018/09/06/istac-and-the-closing-of-the-malay-mind/>.

<sup>15</sup> Dinobeano argues that ISTAC's current structure may need to be revised to drive economic competitiveness among the larger Bumiputera population, emphasizing the need for a broader, more inclusive approach to educational and economic reform (Dinobeano, "ISTAC and the Closing of the Malay Mind.").

actionable recommendations for future research.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- To analyze thematic trends in ISTAC's theses catalog over the past decades.
- To recommend future research directions based on the findings.

To achieve these objectives, a mixed-methods approach<sup>16</sup> was adopted. The quantitative analysis involved categorizing theses into ISTAC's six research areas, highlighting growth and thematic shifts. The qualitative analysis employed thematic coding of thesis titles and abstracts using NVivo software to identify patterns and research priorities.<sup>17</sup> Secondary data sources included ISTAC's library catalog, administrative records, and scholarly articles.<sup>18</sup>

The study also draws on Royal Professor Tan Sri Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' theoretical framework, incorporating his principles of *adab* and the 'Islamization of knowledge' to guide thematic categorization. This integrated methodology ensures ISTAC's research trajectory aligns with its intellectual heritage while addressing contemporary global challenges.

### **Charting Academic Trends in Islamic Studies**

Academic institutions play a critical role in advancing the frontiers of knowledge, and analyzing the trends within their scholarly outputs

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<sup>16</sup> Sami Almalki, "Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data in Mixed Methods Research—Challenges and Benefits," *Journal of Education and Learning* 5, 3 (2016): 288. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v5n3p288>.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Bazeley and Kristi Jackson, *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo* (SAGE Publications, 2013), 30-35; Dwivedi, Y.K., Anuj, S., Nripendra P.R., Mihalis, G., Pooja, G., and Vincent, D., "Evolution of Artificial Intelligence Research in Technological Forecasting and Social Change: Research Topics, Trends, and Future Directions," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 192, (December 2022) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2023.122579>; John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2014), 184; John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2018), 87.

<sup>18</sup> Mohd Zain Abd. Rahman, "Postgraduate Research in Islamic Thought".

provides valuable insights into their intellectual trajectories. Charting academic trends, particularly in thesis and dissertation production, has emerged as a vital method for understanding how institutions like ISTAC-IIUM contribute to the evolving field of Islamic studies. Analyzing theses enables scholars to identify thematic priorities, methodological preferences, and areas of growing interest, offering a roadmap for future academic endeavors.

Thematic analyses of thesis trends are not unique to ISTAC. Similar studies conducted at institutions like Al-Azhar University and the Center for Islamic Studies at the University of Oxford have highlighted a growing interest in areas such as Islam and environmental ethics, Islamic finance, and interfaith dialogue.<sup>19</sup>

Charting the trends in ISTAC-IIUM's thesis catalog is critical for understanding how the institution has adapted to the intellectual demands of a rapidly evolving world. By identifying shifts in research focus—from foundational Islamic philosophy to contemporary global challenges, where the analysis provides a framework for aligning ISTAC's academic output with pressing societal needs. Such studies are essential for guiding future research directions.<sup>20</sup> As El-Sharnouby observed, institutions that regularly analyze their academic outputs are better positioned to innovate and address emerging global challenges.<sup>21</sup> ISTAC, with its legacy of scholarly excellence and a commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry, stands to benefit greatly from this reflective approach.

### **ISTAC's Evolving Academic Contributions**

The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has consistently positioned itself as a beacon of Islamic scholarship, bridging classical traditions with contemporary academic challenges. Central to this mission is the Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Library (SMNAL), named after ISTAC's visionary founder. Housing over 150,000 volumes, including rare manuscripts

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<sup>19</sup> Dina El-Sharnouby. "Islamic Studies in the Modern Era: Trends and Challenges." *Journal of Comparative Religion Studies* (2019): 60–70.

<sup>20</sup> Dinobeano. "ISTAC".

<sup>21</sup> Dina El-Sharnouby, "Islamic Studies".

and artifacts, the library stands as a cornerstone of Islamic thought and civilization. Its meticulously organized theses catalog reflects ISTAC's commitment to a multidisciplinary approach, enabling scholars to access diverse intellectual traditions and engage with both historical and contemporary issues effectively.<sup>22</sup>

ISTAC's evolving academic priorities are vividly captured in its theses catalogue, which offers a microcosm of the institution's intellectual trajectory. Early works predominantly focused on classical Islamic thought and civilization, while more recent contributions address pressing global issues such as ethics, technology, and intercultural dialogue. Studies within ISTAC have explored the intersection of Islamic thought with advancements in digital technology, showcasing the institution's ability to adapt its academic inquiries to contemporary challenges. For example, ISTAC's commitment to exploring contemporary ethical challenges is evident in events like the *Islam and Biomedicine* forum, officiated by Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah at ISTAC on August 10, 2023. This forum supported global efforts to integrate Islamic perspectives into fields like biomedicine, underscoring ISTAC's relevance in bridging traditional Islamic scholarship with modern technological and ethical inquiries. The forum reflects the institution's broader academic ethos rather than a specific thesis. This work exemplifies ISTAC's capacity to bridge traditional Islamic scholarship with emerging fields of inquiry, reinforcing its relevance in a rapidly changing world.<sup>23</sup>

Global collaborations have further underscored ISTAC's interdisciplinary ethos. The workshop *Islam and Science: An Educational Approach*, held from November 29 to December 2, 2013, co-organized with the American University of Sharjah and the

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<sup>22</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Library Catalogue. *Internal ISTAC Resources* (2024).

<sup>23</sup> "Book Launch of Dato' Dr. Afifi al-Akiti's *Islam and Biomedicine*," officiated by Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah at ISTAC on August 10, 2023, <https://sultannazrinshah.com/book-launch-of-dato-dr-afifi-al-akitits-islam-and-biomedicine/>.

*Université Interdisciplinaire de Paris*, exemplified this focus.<sup>24</sup> By addressing themes such as the history and philosophy of Islamic science and modern cosmology, the workshop positioned ISTAC as a global hub for advanced discourse on the interplay between science and religion. These efforts highlight ISTAC's role in fostering meaningful academic exchanges across diverse disciplines.

The Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Library also houses unique academic treasures, such as its Ottoman manuscript collection, highlighted by Mehmet Özay.<sup>25</sup> This repository serves as a vital resource for researchers in Islamic and Ottoman studies. However, its underutilization presents an opportunity for ISTAC to amplify its academic impact through curated research initiatives and exhibitions, further cementing its status as a leader in Islamic scholarship.

Wan Ali Wan Mamat has significantly advanced the study of Malay manuscripts and civilization at SMNAL Library. His meticulous research encompasses the preservation, cataloging, and analysis of traditional Malay manuscripts, offering critical insights into the intellectual heritage of the Malay world. Wan Ali's co-edited work, *Colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters*, explores the profound impact of colonialism on regional civilizations, while his book *An Introduction to Malay Manuscripts* serves as a seminal resource on traditional Malay bookmaking practices.<sup>26</sup> These efforts align with ISTAC's broader mission to preserve and advance knowledge of Malay civilization, fostering a deeper understanding of the region's rich intellectual traditions.

In sum, ISTAC's evolving academic contributions reflect its dual commitment to preserving the intellectual heritage of Islamic

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<sup>24</sup> "Next Islam & Science Workshop in Malaysia," Islam & Science Network, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://islam-science.net/next-islamscience-workshop-in-malaysia-1376/>.

<sup>25</sup> Mehmet Özay, "The Ottoman Manuscripts in ISTAC's Collection: A Resource for Islamic Studies," *Journal of Islamic Civilizational Research* 10, no. 2 (2022): 45–55.

<sup>26</sup> Wan Ali Wan Mamat, *An Introduction to Malay Manuscripts* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC Press, 2015).

civilization and addressing the complexities of contemporary scholarship. Through its unparalleled library resources, innovative research, and global collaborations, ISTAC continues to shape the discourse on Islamic thought and its relevance in the modern world.

### **Theses Classification According to ISTAC Six Niche Areas and Specializations**

The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has consistently positioned itself as a premier institution for Islamic scholarship, focusing on developing a new generation of scholars equipped to engage with the complexities of the modern world. According to Gary Dargan, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas envisioned ISTAC as an institution dedicated to nurturing multilingual and multidisciplinary scholars who possess a profound understanding of Islamic civilization and its universal principles. These scholars are expected to contribute meaningfully to advancing knowledge for the benefit of the Muslim ummah and humanity at large.<sup>27</sup>

One of ISTAC's foundational objectives is to reframe modern knowledge within an Islamic worldview, offering a counterbalance to the dominance of secular Western perspectives. To achieve this, ISTAC established the Al-Ghazali Chair of Islamic Civilization in 1992, with al-Attas as its inaugural holder. This position was later held by Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr. Osman Bakar, a prominent Islamic philosopher renowned for his contributions to Islamic science and philosophy. These efforts underscore ISTAC's commitment to advancing scholarship that integrates Islamic values into contemporary academic discourse.<sup>28</sup>

ISTAC's graduate programs reflect its interdisciplinary and

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<sup>27</sup> Gary Dargan, "ISTAC: A Unique Islamic Research Center of Excellence," *Amust (Australasian Muslim Times)*, (March 2, 2020). <https://www.amust.com.au/2020/03/istac-a-unique-islamic-research-center-of-excellence/>.

International Education Media. 2024, "International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)," *International Education Media*, v. 15, London: Ealing House, (2024). [https://www.internationalschoolguide.com/malaysia/iium\\_istac.htm](https://www.internationalschoolguide.com/malaysia/iium_istac.htm).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

international character. The institution offers master's and doctoral degrees in Islamic Thought, Islamic Civilization, and Islamic Science, rooted in an Islamic epistemological framework and centuries of scholarly tradition. The academic structure preserves the master-disciple approach, ensuring deep, personal engagement in knowledge transmission. From 1987 to 2015, its academic program emphasizes three core areas<sup>29</sup>:

1. Islamic Thought: Encompassing theology, philosophy, and metaphysics.
2. Islamic Civilization: Covering culture, history, and the social sciences.
3. Islamic Science: Exploring its philosophy, methodology, and historical dimensions.

In 2015, ISTAC underwent significant restructuring. The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) established the Ibn Khaldun International Institute of Advanced Research (ISLAH) to continue ISTAC's mission of integrating Islamic perspectives into contemporary scholarship. Following its integration with IIUM, ISTAC expanded its niche areas to include:

1. Islamic Thought
2. Malay-Islamic Civilization
3. Comparative Religion and Intercultural Dialogue
4. Islam and Gender Equity
5. Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization
6. Peace and Security Studies
7. Reform (*Islah*) and Renewal (*Tajdid*) in Islamic History
8. Comparative Civilizational Studies
9. Islam and Futures Studies
10. Ottoman Civilization and the Modern World

These areas reflect ISTAC's commitment to addressing contemporary challenges through an Islamic scholarly framework. The institute also experienced substantial organizational changes in 2017 when it was renamed the Institute of Malay Civilization and Ottoman Studies,

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<sup>29</sup> "Ibn Khaldun International Institute of Advanced Research," DBpedia, accessed May 29, 2024. [https://dbpedia.org/page/Ibn\\_Khaldun\\_International\\_Institute\\_of\\_Advanced\\_Research](https://dbpedia.org/page/Ibn_Khaldun_International_Institute_of_Advanced_Research).

located at the original ISTAC campus in Damansara. This change reflected its emphasis on regional and global historical legacies, particularly Malay and Ottoman civilizations. Later, the institution reverted to its foundational focus on Islamic Thought and Civilization in 2019 while maintaining its multidisciplinary approach. The institute also delves into art, literature, and gender equity within an Islamic framework, supported by an extensive collection of manuscripts and artifacts. Developing areas of interest, such as Ottoman civilization and Malay-Islamic history, offer new opportunities for research connecting Islamic scholarship with global and regional issues, including topics like peace and security, multiculturalism, and interfaith dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

ISTAC has reinforced its standing as a globally recognized hub for Islamic research and scholarly exchange. In addition to collaborations with the University of Maryland and the *Université Interdisciplinaire de Paris*, ISTAC has engaged with institutions such as the International Institute for Muslim Unity (IIMU), Rabdan Academy in Abu Dhabi, and Universiti Malaya. These partnerships have enabled ISTAC to tackle complex societal issues, blending Islamic principles with contemporary frameworks to address global challenges.

Key initiatives include the *REBUILD Project* in collaboration with Universiti Malaya and the Department of Psychology, IIUM. Funded by the Commonwealth of Australia, this project focuses on preventing radicalization through family empowerment and resilience-building strategies. Another significant undertaking is the curriculum review of Islamic Civilization programs in Malaysian universities, incorporating the Madani Civilizational Approach to address modern educational needs.<sup>31,32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization," *Wikipedia*, last modified May 30, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Institute\\_of\\_Islamic\\_Thought\\_and\\_Civilization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Institute_of_Islamic_Thought_and_Civilization).

<sup>31</sup> *ISTAC Annual Report 2023*, Section on Research and Publications, pp. 51–53.

<sup>32</sup> International Islamic University Malaysia. "Professor Datuk Dr. Abdelaziz Berghout, Professor Dato' Dr. Ahmad Murad Merican and Dr. Nurul Ain Norman's Project on Review of the Curriculum and Delivery of Islamic Civilisation Programmes in Universities and Institutions of Higher Education in Malaysia: Civilisational Madani Approach." Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://www.iium.edu>.

ISTAC's engagement with security studies is exemplified by its collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia, and IPSOM on the Malaysian Safety Perception Index, a critical resource for assessing national security concerns. Similarly, research projects on radicalization, terror financing, and cyberterrorism highlight ISTAC's proactive approach to countering violent extremism. Through these efforts, ISTAC not only contributes to policymaking but also develops practical tools for community engagement and public awareness.<sup>33</sup>

On the cultural front, ISTAC has bolstered its focus on Malay civilization and Ottoman studies through lecture series, manuscript cataloging, art exhibitions. For instance, the *Malay Manuscripts Lecture Series*, convened by Dr. Wan Ali Wan Mamat and the *Tanah Air: Malay Maritime Civilization Project*, led by Prof. Dato' Dr. Ahmad Murad Merican, underscore ISTAC's dedication to preserving regional heritage while fostering scholarly dialogue. ISTAC have also initiated the ISTAC-World Professorial Lecture Series (IWPL) in January 2023 and the ISTAC-IIUM Distinguished Scholar Lecture Series (IDSL) from 2023, exemplifying ISTAC's dedication to fostering global academic collaboration and enriching scholarly discourse. Under Comparative Religion and Interfaith Dialogue, ISTAC's collaboration with Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) exemplifies its dedication to fostering intercultural harmony. On January 2, 2024, ISTAC hosted a memorial lecture honoring Daisaku Ikeda, highlighting his contributions to cross-cultural dialogue.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the Science and Spirituality niche is exemplified by ISTAC's collaboration with Harvard Law School and the University of St. Andrews on the January 2024 conference *Islamic Theology: Uniting Diverse Voices*. Topics such as *Kalam*, *Tafsir*, and *Falsafah*

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[my/directory/show/MUV4NGpEWmhVUGI2YIBoQ3lhd29mQT09;](https://www.iium.edu.my/directory/show/MUV4NGpEWmhVUGI2YIBoQ3lhd29mQT09;)  
<https://www.iium.edu.my/directory/show/VkdsNkhZK1hSZWNDazBiRkJP0Jdz09>.

<sup>33</sup> *ISTAC Annual Report 2023*, Section on Special Partnership Programs, pp. 68–70.

<sup>34</sup> Soka Gakkai Malaysia. "Daisaku Ikeda Memorial Lecture at ISTAC-IIUM, January 2024." Accessed December 29, 2024. <https://www.sgm.org.my/events/daisaku-ikeda-memorial-lecture>.

were discussed, showcasing ISTAC's ability to integrate classical Islamic scholarship with modern challenges.<sup>35</sup>

In sum, ISTAC's strategic collaborations and targeted programs underscore its adaptability and relevance in addressing both local and global challenges. By engaging with diverse academic fields and societal issues, ISTAC continues to position itself as a leader in Islamic scholarship and a vital contributor to global discourse and through its theses and research outputs, ISTAC continues to uphold its vision of integrating Islamic values with contemporary academic and societal demands, ensuring its relevance as a leading center of Islamic scholarship in the modern world.

## **Discussion and Findings**

### **Thematic Trends of ISTAC Catalog Theses**

The ISTAC catalog of theses is a testament to the institute's academic prowess and scholarly output. This comprehensive compilation is divided into two parts, covering various research topics and disciplines within Islamic studies. The first part provides essential details such as the year of publication, call number, authorship, level of study, supervisor information, thesis title, and abstract. While adherence to ISTAC's transliteration rules is generally maintained, some variations may occur due to individual author styles. Including abstracts enhances accessibility and understanding of each thesis's scope and objectives. The second part of the collection organizes the theses according to ISTAC's current niche areas.

The data in Table 1.0 reflects ISTAC's initial academic priorities between the years 1993 to 2002 and highlights its focus on areas central to its mission of integrating Islamic scholarship with modern intellectual challenges. It provides an organized breakdown of the distribution of theses across ISTAC's core niche areas.

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<sup>35</sup> Islamic Theology: Uniting Diverse Voices." *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Accessed December 29, 2024. <https://itc.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/>.

**Table 1.0: Theses Thematic Trends Produced by Graduated ISTAC Students 1993 – 2002**

Niche Area	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic Thought, Civilization and Sustainable Development	M: 1 P: -	-	M: 2 P: -	M: 2 P: -	M: - P: 1	M: 7 P: 3	M: 7 P: 2	M: 7 P: 3	M: 3 P: -	M: 6 P: 3	M: 36 P: 24	57.14 %
Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M: 1 P: -	M: 1 P: -	-	M: 2 P: -	3.17 %
Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization	-	M: 1 P: -	M: 1 P: -	M: 1 P: -	M: 2 P: -	M: 3 P: -	M: 6 P: -	M: 2 P: -	-	M: 2 P: -	M: 18 P: -	28.57 %
Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies	M: 1 P: -	-	-	M: - P: 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	M: 2 P: 1	3.17 %
Islam, Family, and Gender Studies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M: 2 P: 1	M: 2 P: 1	3.17 %
Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M: 2 P: 1	-	M: 1 P: 1	M: 3 P: 2	4.76 %
Total											M: 63 P: 47	P: 16

Explanation: M: MA Thesis, P: PhD Thesis

The most prominent niche area during this period was “Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development,” with 36 theses (24 MA and 12 PhD), constituting 57.14% of the total. The second most popular area was “Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic civilization,” with 18 theses (all MA) making up 28.57%. Other niche areas included “Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World” (3.17%), “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” (3.17%), “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies” (3.17%), and “Peace and Security Studies from a

Civilizational Perspective” (4.76%). In total, 63 theses were produced, with a majority being MA theses.

Table 2.0 depicts the thematic trends in theses produced by ISTAC graduates from 2003 to 2012, marking a period of expansion and diversification in the institute’s academic output. By analyzing thesis titles, abstracts, and administrative records, the data highlights the shift in focus and the growing engagement with interdisciplinary research.

**Table 2.0: Theses Thematic Trends Produced by Graduated ISTAC Students 2003 – 2012**

Niche Area	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic Thought, Civilization and Sustainable Development	8 M: 6 P: 2	2 M: 1 P: 1	5 M: - P: 5	6 M: 2 P: 4	8 M: 3 P: 5	4 M: 2 P: 2	7 M: 4 P: 3	6 M: 3 P: 3	5 M: 3 P: 2	7 M: 3 P: 4	58 M: 26 P: 31	53.21 %
Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World	-	2 M: 2 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	2 M: - P: 2	3 M: 1 P: 2	2 M: 2 P: -	2 M: 1 P: 1	-	2 M: 1 P: 1	2 M: 2 P: -	16 M: 9 P: 7	14.67 %
Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization	2 M: 2 P: -	-	2 M: - P: 2	1 M: - P: 1	-	3 M: 2 P: 1	-	4 M: 2 P: 2	3 M: 3 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	16 M: 9 P: 7	14.67 %
Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies	-	1 M: - P: 1	1 M: - P: 1	-	-	1 M: 1 P: -	2 M: 1 P: 1	-	1 M: 1 P: -	2 M: 1 P: 1	8 M: 4 P: 4	7.33 %
Islam, Family, and Gender Studies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 M: 1 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	1 M: - P: 1	3 M: 1 P: 2	2.75 %
Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective	-	-	1 M: 1 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	1 M: - P: 1	1 M: 1 P: -	-	1 M: 1 P: -	-	3 M: 1 P: 2	8 M: 4 P: 4	7.33 %
Total											109 M: 53 P: 55	

Explanation: M: MA Thesis, P: PhD Thesis

“Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” continued to be the dominant area with 58 theses (26 MA and 31 PhD), representing 53.21% of the total. There was an increased focus on “Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World” and “Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization,” each contributing 14.67% with 16 theses each (split between MA and PhD). “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” had eight theses (7.33%), while “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies” and “Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective” had fewer contributions, each accounting for 2.75% and 7.33%, respectively. Overall, 109 theses were completed in this decade, with a nearly even split between MA (53) and PhD (55) theses.

Table 3.0 provides a detailed breakdown of these trends between 2013 and 2022, reflecting the institute’s efforts to align its academic contributions with contemporary global and regional challenges while staying true to its foundational mission.

**Table 3.0: Theses Thematic Trends Produced by Graduated ISTAC Students 2013 – 2022**

Niche Area	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic Thought, Civilization and Sustainable Development	M: 2 P: 1	M: 4 P: 3	M: 6 P: 4	-	-	M: 1 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	M: 2 P: 2	-	M: 3 P: 1	28 M: 15 P: 13	32.55 %
Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World	M: 5 P: -	M: 5 P: 3	M: 1 P: -	-	M: 1 P: -	M: 1 P: 2	M: 3 P: 2	-	M: 5 P: -	M: 3 P: 1	30 M: 22 P: 8	34.88 %
Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization	M: 2 P: -	M: 3 P: 2	M: 1 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	-	-	M: 1 P: 1	-	-	-	11 M: 6 P: 5	12.79 %

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A BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY OF ISTAC-IIUM'S THESIS CATALOG

Niche Area	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Frequency	Percentage
Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies	-	M: 2 P: -	M: 1 P: 1	-	-	M: 1 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	-	M: 7 P: 2	8.13%
Islam, Family, and Gender Studies	-	M: 2 P: -	M: 1 P: -	-	-	M: 1 P: 1	M: 1 P: -	-	M: 1 P: -	-	M: 6 P: 5	6.97 %
Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective	M: 1 P: -		M: 1 P: 1	-	-	M: 1 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	-	-	-	M: 4 P: 1	4.65 %
Total											M: 86 P: 51	

Explanation: M: MA Thesis, P: PhD Thesis

During this period, “Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” remained significant but with a slightly reduced share, comprising 28 theses (15 MA and 13 PhD), making up 32.55% of the total. “Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World” saw a notable increase, contributing the largest share at 34.88% with 30 theses (22 MA and 8 PhD). “Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization” produced 11 theses (12.79%), and “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” had seven theses (8.13%).

Contributions in “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies” and “Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective” remained modest at 6.97% and 4.65%, respectively. A total of 86 theses were completed during this decade, with a majority being MA theses (51).

Over the past decade, the research focus at ISTAC has evolved significantly. The thematic trends strongly emphasize “Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World”, constituting 34.88% of the theses, reflecting a growing interest in this area. “Islamic

Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” follow closely at 32.55%, highlighting the integration of Islamic principles with contemporary issues. Emerging research interests include increased attention to “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies,” which have grown to 6.97%, reflecting a heightened focus on gender dynamics and family structures.

Additionally, the impact of external socio-political factors is evident in the increased focus on “Peace and Security Studies” and the rise in “Islam, Family and Gender Studies,” indicating a response to contemporary global and societal challenges. Future research directions are recommended to deepen the exploration of these themes, address contemporary issues such as climate change and technological advancements, and encourage cross-disciplinary studies to provide comprehensive insights into Islamic civilization’s role in the modern world.

Table 4.0 offers a comprehensive breakdown of these trends, illustrating ISTAC’s commitment to addressing contemporary challenges while maintaining its intellectual and philosophical foundations between 2023 and 2024.

**Table 4.0:** Theses Thematic Trends Produced by Graduated ISTAC Students 2023 – 2024

Niche Area	2023	2024	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic Thought, Civilization and Sustainable Development	M: 3 P: 1	M: 2 P: 2	10	25.00%
Malay-Islamic Civilization and The Modern World	M: 4 P: 2	M: 3 P: 3	15	37.50%
Epistemology, Spirituality and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization	M: 2 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	6	15.00%
Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies	M: 1 P: 1	M: 0 P: 1	4	10.00%
Islam, Family, and Gender Studies	M: 0 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	3	7.50%
Peace and Security Studies from A Civilizational Perspective	M: 1 P: 2	M: 2 P: 3	9	22.50%

Explanation: M: MA Thesis, P: PhD Thesis

“Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World” emerged as the most significant focus area, contributing 15 theses (7 MA and 8 PhD), representing 37.5% of the total. This underscores ISTAC’s sustained emphasis on exploring the nexus between Malay heritage and contemporary global issues.

“Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” maintained a strong presence with ten theses (5 MA and 5 PhD), accounting for 25% of the total. “Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective” demonstrated growing scholarly interest,

with nine theses (3 MA and 6 PhD) representing 22.5%, reflecting ISTAC's alignment with global concerns over conflict resolution and civilizational harmony. "Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization" contributed six theses (3 MA and 3 PhD), reflecting 15% of the total. At the same time, "Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies and Islam," "Family, and Gender Studies" remained niche areas, contributing 4 (10%) and three theses (7.5%), respectively.

In total, 40 theses were produced during this period, with a balance between MA (15) and PhD (25) theses. The distribution demonstrates ISTAC's adaptability to emerging intellectual demands while maintaining its foundational strengths in Islamic thought and civilization. This trend highlights ISTAC's commitment to bridging traditional Islamic scholarship with pressing contemporary issues, ensuring its continued relevance and influence in global academic discourse.

### **Professional Contextualization of ISTAC's Six Niche Areas and Specializations: An Evaluation of 374 Master's and PhD Dissertations**

Evaluating 374 master's and doctoral theses offers a comprehensive perspective on ISTAC's academic priorities and intellectual trajectory. The dominant focus areas—"Peace and Security Studies" (23%) and "Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World" (22.7%)—demonstrate the institution's commitment to addressing contemporary issues within the Islamic world, with particular attention to Southeast Asia. These areas reflect regional and civilizational challenges, underscoring ISTAC's role in contributing to scholarly discourse on governance, security, and preserving Islamic heritage in a rapidly changing modern context.

"Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development" (21.1%) also feature prominently, signifying ISTAC's emphasis on harmonizing Islamic values with the exigencies of modernity and sustainability. Conversely, "Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization" (16%) and "Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies" (13.9%) have received comparatively less focus, though they remain central to ISTAC's academic mission. "Islam, Family, and Gender Studies" (3%),

however, reflects a significant gap, suggesting potential for growth in this critical area. With the global rise in gender discourse, ISTAC has an opportunity to lead discussions on the intersection of Islamic principles with contemporary family and gender issues, thus addressing an emerging global priority.

Between 2000 and 2024, ISTAC's research output reveals a clear trend of institutional growth and academic expansion. A nearly tenfold increase in theses during this period underscores ISTAC's maturity and alignment with global shifts in Islamic studies and civilizational scholarship. Doctoral research accounts for 54.8% of the total theses, highlighting ISTAC's emphasis on producing advanced scholarly contributions. This preference for doctoral studies reflects ISTAC's success in fostering rigorous research, driving innovation in Islamic thought, and generating substantial insights into civilizational studies.

While this focus on doctoral research establishes ISTAC as a hub for advanced scholarship, the lower proportion of master's level theses (45.2%) suggests an area for development. To address this imbalance, ISTAC could invest in interdisciplinary, research-oriented master's programs that serve as a pipeline for doctoral studies. Expanding these programs would also cater to students seeking specialized knowledge without committing to a doctoral track, broadening ISTAC's appeal and academic influence.

## **Evolution of Academic Focus**

The evolution of academic focus at ISTAC from 1993 to 2024 demonstrates significant trends and shifts across its six niche research areas. With the addition of data for the years 2023–2024, ISTAC's thematic priorities reveal increasing diversification and responsiveness to global and regional challenges. The analysis of the academic trends is as follows:

### **1) Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development**

This area consistently remains a cornerstone of ISTAC's research output. Spanning decades, it reflects ISTAC's commitment to exploring the intersection of traditional Islamic

principles with contemporary societal needs. However, its proportional contribution shows slight variability, indicating that while it remains essential, other areas are gaining prominence in ISTAC's scholarly discourse.

## **2) Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World**

This niche has seen a marked increase in recent years, culminating in its highest representation in 2023–2024, accounting for 37.5% of theses. The focus on Malay-Islamic Heritage aligns with ISTAC's mission to address the region's specific intellectual and cultural contexts, as well as its integration into modern global narratives.

## **3) Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective**

This area has experienced a gradual rise, particularly during the latest period, reflecting global concerns around security and civilizational harmony. The increased focus may be attributed to ISTAC's collaborations with international bodies addressing counter-extremism and peacebuilding.

## **4) Islam, Family, and Gender Studies**

While traditionally underrepresented, this field is witnessing slow but steady growth. The rise reflects an increasing awareness of the significance of family and gender issues within the Islamic framework, particularly in the context of global discourse on inclusivity and equality.

## **5) Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization**

This area has maintained a consistent presence, reflecting ISTAC's philosophical underpinnings and its founder's intellectual vision. However, it remains less dominant than other niches, suggesting potential for further exploration, particularly in integrating spirituality with modern intellectual challenges.

## 6) Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies

This area continues to contribute steadily but modestly. Its growth signals a recognition of the importance of interfaith dialogue and comparative studies in fostering mutual understanding in increasingly pluralistic societies.

These findings underscore ISTAC's evolving priorities, reflecting its ability to adapt to contemporary intellectual challenges while maintaining its foundational focus on Islamic thought and civilization. The steady increase in research output, particularly at the doctoral level, highlights ISTAC's role as a leader in advanced Islamic scholarship. This progression reinforces ISTAC's relevance within the global academic landscape and points to opportunities for further strengthening its interdisciplinary and inclusive approach to Islamic studies.

The observed trends in Islamic scholarship, particularly the move from classical studies of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*'aqīdah*) to interdisciplinary approaches integrating modern sciences and humanities, reflect a dynamic response to societal changes. The emergence of fields like Islamic finance, bioethics, and environmental sustainability signals a paradigm shift. This evolution aligns with the growing need for Islamic frameworks to address global challenges in ethically sound and contextually relevant ways.<sup>36</sup>

One significant factor influencing this shift is globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of societies. The proliferation of Western academic paradigms in previously insular Muslim-majority societies necessitated a counter-response, driving scholars to frame Islamic epistemologies that are both rooted in tradition and applicable to contemporary realities. For instance, the focus on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as a guiding principle showcases a shift from rigid jurisprudential applications to holistic frameworks addressing societal well-being.

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<sup>36</sup> See: John L. Esposito and Tariq Ramadan. *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Tariq Ramadan*. Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Video interview, March 12, 2003. Accessed May 29, 2024.

Additionally, advancements in technology and digital communication have democratized access to knowledge, allowing scholars to engage with diverse intellectual traditions. This has encouraged the synthesis of ideas, as evidenced by the incorporation of systems thinking and sustainability science into Islamic scholarship. The increasing emphasis on these fields suggests a deliberate move toward relevance in a rapidly changing world. Understanding these trends is crucial for guiding future research and ensuring that Islamic scholarship continues to serve both local and global needs.

### **Analysis of Post-2020 Thematic Trends**

This section explores recent academic directions based on hypothetical data, offering insights into the distribution of thesis topics at ISTAC from 2020 to 2024. The hypothetical data provides insights into the distribution of thesis topics at ISTAC from 2020 to 2024. Here's an analysis based on each thematic area:

- 1) **Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development:**<sup>37</sup> This area showed strong engagement in 2020 and 2022 but gradually declined in 2023 and 2024. This trend may indicate a shift from traditional civilizational studies to more contemporary concerns.
- 2) **Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World:** This theme exhibits a steady increase, particularly from 2021 to 2024, suggesting a growing focus on integrating Malay-Islamic heritage with modern societal issues. This rise reflects an interest in understanding Malay identity within the broader scope of globalization and modernity.

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<sup>37</sup> Sustainable development, while integral to Islamic thought and civilization, was not explicitly a cornerstone of ISTAC's early academic output. Its prominence grew in the early 2000s as global attention on sustainability increased, aligning with ISTAC's interdisciplinary goals. The term became more prevalent in research outputs post-2000, particularly as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and environmental crises highlighted the need for sustainability-focused studies within Islamic frameworks.

- 3) **Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization:** Research in this area remains stable, showing slight fluctuations. The consistent interest may highlight an ongoing focus on spiritual and intellectual aspects within Islamic scholarship, aligning with ISTAC's philosophical underpinnings.
- 4) **Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies:** This theme shows a gradual increase, particularly in 2023 and 2024, likely driven by the need for dialogue between Islamic and other civilizations amidst contemporary global tensions.
- 5) **Islam, Family, and Gender Studies:** Although traditionally underrepresented, this theme has seen consistent growth each year. The rising interest indicates an awareness of the importance of family and gender issues within Islamic studies, aligning with global discussions on gender equality and family structures.
- 6) **Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective:** This theme peaked in 2021 but saw a slight decline in subsequent years, suggesting fluctuating attention. Interest in this area may correlate with specific global events impacting peace and security.

The post-2020 trends at ISTAC reveal a dynamic academic landscape increasingly responsive to contemporary global challenges. While traditional areas such as "Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development" remain foundational, a marked shift toward themes like "Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World" and "Islam, Family, and Gender Studies" reflects a growing alignment with societal transformations and issues of identity, heritage, and inclusivity. The steady rise in "Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies" and "Peace and Security Studies" highlights ISTAC's commitment to fostering inter-civilizational dialogue and addressing the complexities of peace in an interconnected world.

The evolution of these theses trends over time also mirrors broader shifts in academic priorities. Early research outputs may have

focused heavily on traditional disciplines, however, as societal needs have grown more complex, the scope of research has expanded to include interdisciplinary and applied fields. This transition indicates a maturation of Islamic scholarship, as it adapts to remain relevant and impactful in contemporary contexts.

Furthermore, these classifications trends serve as a reflection of the institution's identity and strategic goals. By integrating multiple fields with Islamic thought and civilization, the institution positions itself as a custodian of cultural and intellectual heritage, ensuring that traditional knowledge systems are preserved and reinterpreted for modern audiences. The trends thus act as a barometer of academic evolution, signaling the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation within the scholarly community.<sup>38</sup>

### **Granular Analysis of NVivo Coding Results**

While NVivo was used to organize and analyze themes, providing a more granular analysis of the coding results would offer readers deeper insight into how specific themes emerged and evolved. NVivo allowed researchers to identify recurring keywords, phrases, and thematic clusters, which were then grouped into ISTAC's six core research areas. This process facilitated the discovery of newer trends and shifts in research focus, particularly in recent years.

For example, themes related to "Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development" showed strong connectivity with sub-themes such as sustainability and climate change, indicating a growing emphasis on modern challenges. Meanwhile, categories like "Islam, Family, and Gender Studies" revealed keywords associated with gender roles, family dynamics, and social justice, reflecting recent global concerns about equality and inclusivity.

To illustrate these insights, the following chart shows the frequency of key themes identified through NVivo across the core areas from 2020 to 2024.

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<sup>38</sup> See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Harvard University Press, 1968), 50–56., which emphasizes the integration of classical Islamic traditions into modern scientific discourse.

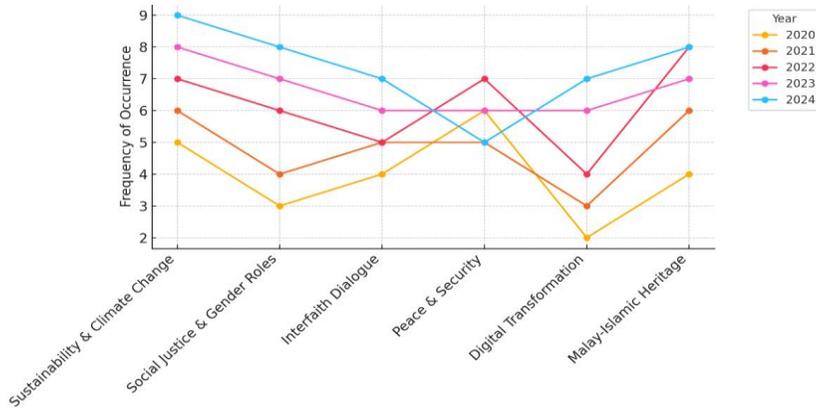


Figure 1: Emerging Themes Identified Between 2020 – 2024

The chart shows key themes that emerged across ISTAC’s theses in recent years, illustrating a progressive increase in themes related to Sustainability and Climate Change and Social Justice & Gender Roles. These trends suggest an increased scholarly interest in addressing environmental and social issues within the Islamic framework. Additionally:

- 1) **Malay-Islamic Heritage** has maintained high relevance, particularly in 2022 and 2024, reflecting a strong cultural emphasis in ISTAC’s research.
- 2) **Digital Transformation and Interfaith Dialogue** have grown steadily, indicating an engagement with technology’s role in Islamic studies and fostering intercultural understanding.
- 3) **Peace and Security** fluctuated, potentially linked to specific global events that impact the focus on security studies.

This detailed analysis, supported by NVivo, demonstrates the evolving thematic focus within ISTAC’s academic community, aligning its research priorities with contemporary societal concerns.

Furthermore, it is crucial to contextualize the reasons behind the thematic shifts observed during 2003–2012 and 2013–2022. The 2003–2012 period marked a significant expansion in ISTAC’s

academic focus, driven by heightened regional collaborations and an increased emphasis on interdisciplinary research. This phase saw the integration of Malay-Islamic civilization with contemporary issues, reflecting Malaysia's socio-political dynamics and ISTAC's strategic efforts to address local and global challenges.

In contrast, the 2013–2022 period was characterized by a rise in global scholarly engagement, particularly in sustainability and peace studies. This shift was fueled by growing global concerns over environmental crises and security issues, emphasizing ISTAC's adaptability and responsiveness to evolving intellectual and societal priorities. These thematic shifts underline ISTAC's alignment with broader academic trends and its commitment to remaining at the forefront of Islamic scholarship.

### **Recommendations for Future Study and Specializations**

To ensure ISTAC remains at the forefront of Islamic scholarship, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance its academic offerings, global appeal, and research impact.

#### **1) Enhancing Academic Pathways and Program**

Introducing integrated Master's and PhD pathways at ISTAC could streamline students' academic transitions, fostering continuity and enhancing enrolment at the Master's level. This initiative would create a cohesive academic journey and attract a diverse global student body. ISTAC should also consider marketing its master's programs internationally, targeting students seeking advanced specialization in Islamic studies. Such efforts would enhance ISTAC's global presence and attract a diverse student body, reinforcing its role as a hub for international academic collaboration.

To broaden its reach, ISTAC could develop shorter, coursework-oriented master's programs tailored for professionals and academics from other disciplines. These programs would make ISTAC's offerings more accessible to a broader audience and encourage interdisciplinary engagement, thus strengthening its position as a leading institution for specialized Islamic studies.

## **2) Balancing and Expanding Specializations**

While “Peace and Security Studies” remain a dominant focus, it is critical to ensure balanced growth across other areas, such as “Spirituality, Family, and Gender Studies”. Equal emphasis on these fields will ensure ISTAC’s curriculum remains aligned with contemporary global contexts and offers a comprehensive perspective on Islamic thought and civilization.

Promoting interdisciplinary studies, such as integrating Peace Studies with Islamic Spirituality or Epistemology, could provide students with a more holistic educational experience and encourage innovative research approaches. Integrating interdisciplinary modules and fostering cross-departmental collaboration would encourage innovative research, bridging multiple areas of inquiry and enhancing ISTAC’s academic output.

Given the increasing global discourse on gender issues, expanding “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies” should be a priority. Developing frameworks sensitive to contemporary gender debates within an Islamic context will position ISTAC as a thought leader in addressing these critical and evolving issues. Similarly, enhancing “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” would enable ISTAC to contribute to and learn from global civilizational dialogues, solidifying its relevance in international academic circles.

## **3) Strategic Research Directions**

Future research efforts should integrate Islamic principles with contemporary global challenges, particularly in gender studies and interdisciplinary approaches. Developing programs that address emerging global trends through Islamic values will provide valuable insights and attract scholars seeking innovative contributions to pressing societal issues.

Expanding research into areas like Digital Transformation and Islamic Ethics would position ISTAC as a leader in addressing technological challenges through an Islamic lens, fostering relevance in global academic discourse. Exploring topics like artificial intelligence, bioethics, and sustainability through Islamic scholarship would enhance ISTAC’s appeal to a broader academic audience and increase its impact.

#### **4) Administrative and Strategic Vision**

ISTAC must prioritize quality over quantity in its research output to strengthen its global reputation. Encouraging publications in high-impact journals, fostering collaborations with leading universities, and attracting international scholars would significantly enhance ISTAC's global reputation and academic influence.

Preserving and promoting ISTAC's foundational works (1993–1999) is also vital. Developing a digital archive of past theses and research would institutionalize ISTAC's legacy, making its intellectual heritage accessible to future students and scholars worldwide.

Looking ahead, ISTAC should adopt a forward-thinking strategic vision that addresses pressing global challenges through its specialized research areas. This approach will allow ISTAC to contribute meaningfully to societal discourse while solidifying its position as a global thought leader in Islamic studies.

#### **Conclusion**

ISTAC has firmly positioned itself as a leading institution for Islamic thought and civilization, with its thesis catalog from 1993 to 2024 reflecting a dynamic and evolving academic focus. Key areas such as “Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” have consistently dominated ISTAC's research output. At the same time, “Malay-Islamic Civilization” and “Peace and Security Studies” have grown significantly in recent years, underscoring ISTAC's adaptability to contemporary global and regional challenges. However, thematic areas such as “Islamic Family and Gender Studies” and “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” remain underrepresented, presenting opportunities for future expansion.

To ensure continued excellence, ISTAC must adopt a forward-looking strategy focused on several critical areas. First, expanding its program offerings at the Master's degree and PhD levels will address the needs of a diverse global academic community while opening avenues for interdisciplinary and innovative research. Developing

areas like “Islamic Family and Gender Studies” can help ISTAC contribute to global conversations on inclusivity, family structures, and gender dynamics within the Islamic framework. Second, strengthening ISTAC’s global outreach is imperative. By enhancing international recruitment and forming partnerships with leading Islamic universities, ISTAC can broaden its influence and attract a more diverse student body. Offering programs in English or other widely spoken languages will further position ISTAC as a global hub for Islamic scholarship. Third, fostering interdisciplinary research will distinguish ISTAC in the academic world. For instance, integrating artificial intelligence with Islamic ethics or addressing climate change through Islamic sustainable development can place ISTAC at the cutting edge of academic inquiry. These innovative areas will attract researchers seeking to explore emerging fields within an Islamic framework. Lastly, ISTAC should leverage its alumni network to enhance its visibility and influence. By celebrating the accomplishments of alumni in academic and policy-making roles, ISTAC can foster a strong sense of pride and community among its stakeholders, reinforcing its global reputation.

### **ISTAC’s Commitment to Innovation and Impactful Research**

To remain impactful and relevant, ISTAC must emphasize innovations and impactful research that enhance its professional and academic standing. Such efforts will directly feed the objectives of the university, which is currently moving toward a Tawhidic and Ummatic framework. By linking groundbreaking research with practical applications, ISTAC can advance a transformative agenda that aligns with the broader mission of fostering integrated and holistic knowledge for the betterment of humanity.

In conclusion, ISTAC’s commitment to linking classical Islamic scholarship with modern societal issues remains evident in its evolving research themes. By prioritizing the expansion of underrepresented fields, encouraging innovative and interdisciplinary research, and enhancing its global collaborations, ISTAC can solidify its position as a world-class institution for Islamic thought and

civilization. This balance of tradition and innovation will ensure ISTAC's contributions remain impactful and relevant in addressing the multifaceted challenges of the modern world, while furthering the university's mission to embody the Tawhidic vision and foster an Ummatic perspective.



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