

Students' Perceptions of Religious Beliefs as Gained from Jordanian Universities Religious Educational Courses

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The present study looked at the educational religious beliefs as gained from university courses using a self-reported questionnaire as well as semi-structured interviews. 591 students chosen through stratified random design responded to the questionnaire. 64 students from the study's sample were interviewed. The current study presented evidence to support the identification and comparison of the educational religious perceptions held by the two sets of students from Mu'tah University and Al al-Bayt University. The analysis concluded that religious education courses influenced deeply and with varying degrees students' perceptions of religious affiliation to a large extent at Al-al Bayt University; nevertheless, it was not the case at Mu'tah. Moreover, the study reported students' perceptions on religious awareness and religious attitudes as weak. That is, the actualization of making meaning and transferring what they believe into what they act and what they do was relatively unattainable. The study suggested the need for more courses. Hence, the study believed that universities should form the cement holding of society's religiosity together.

Keywords: religious beliefs, students' perceptions, religious affiliation, religious attendance, religious attitude.

تصورات الطلبة للمعتقدات الدينية المكتسبة من مساقات الجامعات الاردنية الدينية

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بحثت هذه الدراسة موضوع تصورات الطلبة للمعتقدات الدينية المكتسبة من مساقات الجامعات للتربية الدينية. واستخدمت في الدراسة أدوات بحثية كمية ونوعية؛ الاستبانة الذاتية والمقابلات. وتكونت عينة الدراسة من (591) طالبا وطالبة اختيروا باستخدام العينة الطبقية العشوائية للإجابة على الاستبانة و٦٤ طالبا وطالبة للخضوع للمقابلات وذلك من ضمن طلاب جامعتي آل البيت ومؤتة. وقد ساهمت هذه الدراسة بتقديم أدلة للمساعدة في معرفة ومقارنة تصورات مجموعتين من الطلاب حول انتماءاتهم واتجاهاتهم ومشاركاتهم الدينية. وخلص التحليل إلى أن مساقات التربية الدينية أثرت بعمق وبدرجات متباينة في تصورات الطلاب لانتمائهم الديني إلى حد ملموس وواضح في جامعة آل البيت. بينما تمثلت تصورات طلاب الجامعتين في مسألة كل من الحضور والاتجاهات الدينية ضعيفة. مما يعني أن طلاب كلتا الجامعتين لا يترجمون ما يؤمنون به قولاً كان أم فعلاً على أرض الواقع. بيد أن الدراسة أوصت بضرورة العمل على زيادة هذه المساقات الدينية في كافة الجامعات الأردنية لأثرها الايجابي الكبير في الحفاظ على الوحدة الدينية للمجتمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المعتقدات الدينية، تصورات الطلاب، الانتماء الديني، الحضور الديني، الاتجاه الديني.

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The Prophet, peace be upon Him, asked His Companion: who among you got up fasting this morning? Abu Bakr said: I did. He asked: who among you has attended a funeral today? Abu Bakr said: I have. He asked: who among you has fed maskin (a needy person) today? Abu Bakr said: I have. He asked: who among you has visited a sick person today? Abu Bakr said: I have. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon Him) said: No one does all of that but he will enter Paradise (Muslim, 1374H: No. 1028).

The above prophetic tradition demonstrates how the Prophet, peace be upon Him, stressed religious beliefs, commitments and practices of Muslims. Allah says (interpretation of the meanings): *Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah (Al-Ahzab: 21).* Consequently, Muslim scholars and parents in particular and all of Muslims in general should follow the Prophet (peace be upon Him) in this matter as well as in all of His *Sunnah*.

There are a lot of factors or social settings that shape one's beliefs about religiosity and are consequently important in determining one's beliefs, as well as, one's practices (Kelly and De Graaf, 1997). Islamically, people are mainly affected by their families, particularly by the religiosity of their parents. Provided that, the example the famous Prophetic Hadith as narrated by Abu Hurairah: *Every newborn is born in a state of Fitrah (divinely endowed natural disposition of Islam). Its parents then make it a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian (Muslim, 1374H:No. 2658).* Later in life, people are exposed to norms in schools to the ideas of their teachers. The university setting, however, provides an extremely significant social context where students are to interact with new trends which may, in turn, affect their religious beliefs (Abu Arqub & Al-Jawarnah, 2011; Al-Jallad, 2010).

Belief research has shaped varied approaches of investigation, many of which have been specifically associated with educational patterns. Accordingly, 'beliefs are described as psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true (Richardson, 1996: 102-119). Barcelos (2000) stated that 'beliefs cannot be separated from our identities, actions, and social experience'. A recent definition of 'beliefs' defined it as the psychological state in which an

individual holds a proposition or premise to be true (Schwitzgebel, 2011).

The present study defined 'religious beliefs' as intangible properties of human mind based on divine reference about what is true/right or false/wrong. Researchers of students' epistemological beliefs such as Brownlee (2003), Howard, McGee, Schwartz and Purcell (2000), and Schommer (1993) described individuals 'epistemological beliefs' in terms that range from objectivist through to relativistic, from simple to complex or from naive to sophisticated.

Although the belief literature has provided guiding concepts which have framed theoretical structures, the current study adopts the interpretive manner of constructivist's paradigm inquiry. In the constructivist paradigm, the aim of inquiry is to comprehend and rebuild the perceptions that people originally embrace, steering towards agreement (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 111). This study arose out of a search for a suitable scale to measure religious perceptions among students at two public Jordanian Universities (namely; Al al-Bayt, and Mu'tah). The study used the accommodation idea in order to develop a hypothesis on the religiosity of students of Al al-Bayt University who are privileged to undertake extra courses in religious education if compared with other public universities. At Al al-Bayt University, students are entitled to study twenty-one credit hours at the Faculty of Shareea. In contrast, students study only three credit hours in every other public university in Jordan. It is worth pointing out that the syllabus of Al al-Bayt University from the fall semester 2011 has witnessed general changings in term of reducing the religious compulsory requirements from twenty one credit hours into only six credit hours.

Context is viewed as an important factor when exploring students' beliefs. All of Abu Arqub and Al-Jawarnah (2011), Al-Jallad (2010), Al-Jwarnah (2010), Brownlee (2003), Conley (2004), Phillips (2001), Schommer-Aikins (2002), and Schraw (2001) stressed that learners' beliefs are context-based. And such context may be separated into macro and micro levels, and viewed in macro-context. The former incorporates sociocultural traditions and predominant views on religiosity and the attitudes towards learning in learner's society. The latter, however includes individual learn-

er's previous experience of religious education (successful or otherwise) and their current situation.

In the current study, separating students' views into two different contexts added particular structure to learner's religious beliefs which allows better understanding into organization and nature of those beliefs and perceptions as fed by each context (i.e. each University). For example, this allowed making tentative propositions as to which of the learner's assumptions are more central since they were shaped by the social factors or the macro-context and, therefore, be more resistant to change. On the other hand, learner's beliefs shaped by micro-context should be viewed as peripheral and, as such, of more transient nature.

Students' perceptions shape religious dedication (Abu Arqub & Al-Jawarnah, 2011; and Al-Jawarnah, 2010), academic performance (Schommer's, 1993; Schommer-Aikens, 2002), contextual factors (Chapple, 1999; Parr's, 1999), approach or method selection (Dart, Burnett, Purdie, Boulton-Lewis, Campbell, & Smith, 2000), or even their practices (Northcote, 2009). The present literature account attempts to embody various aspects of students' perceptions; ending up with Chan's (2001) model which investigated the relationship between epistemological beliefs and learning conceptions.

As far as can be ascertained, this study is believed to be the first study of its kind in Jordan, which aims to explore the religious educational perceptions of university context. Only two studies (Abu Arqub & Al-Jawarnah, 2011; and Al-Jawarnah, 2010) are found to be relevant to the present research. Abu Arqub & Al-Jawarnah (2011) conducted a descriptive and analytical study explored the influence of Dawa (calling to Allah) methods and interpersonal communications on the enhancement of the religious dedication of students of Dawa and Media department in the Faculty of Shareaa. The study took place at Yarmouk University where a sample of 74 questionnaires were analyzed and studied. The study revealed factors that were associated with the effective Dawa; factors were those of; the mother, the school, the professors of the university, the university students' mates and prayer congregation. The study, also, shown that the successful *Daieyah* (a person who calls to Allah) should be endowed with the follow-

ing characteristics; close to youth in age, as well as calm and peaceful in the process of Dawa.

Students' perceptions figure religious dedication in AL-Jawarnah's (2010) study. In his study, the impact of external factors on the piety of individuals was investigated. The types of such external factors were categorized in light of Islamic Jurisprudence and the Islamic commitment. The findings stressed that piety is mostly influenced by the relationships of the individual with friends, educational institutions, mosques, media, books, and magazines. However, the study reported the least influential factors impacting piety as Islamic associations, cultural associations and charitable associations.

It is worthwhile stating the relevance of the current study to earlier Arab local studies. This study is different in terms of population (two universities rather than one), sampling procedure (stratified random rather than purposeful), instruments (triangulation of qualitative and quantitative rather than quantitative only), themes focused on (affiliation, attendance, and attitudes rather than Dawa and piety).

It was proven that beliefs are correlated with academic performance. Findings from research by Schommer's (1993) confirmed that students with more sophisticated epistemological beliefs have a higher grade point average, indicating a reciprocal relationship between the quality of learning experienced by students, their academic performance and their epistemological beliefs. Schommer stated that beliefs research is a "target of increased research interest" (p. 186). She found that students with dualistic epistemological beliefs were able to integrate complex information into their own knowledge base to a lesser degree of knowledge base than students with less sophisticated epistemological beliefs. Later by Schommer-Aikens (2002), beliefs were always associated with the learning process. Schommer-Aikens' study found further evidence of how students' epistemological beliefs impact on their learning, suggesting that school students who hold complex epistemological beliefs and beliefs in gradual learning have higher grade point averages than their peers who hold more naive epistemological beliefs.

Beliefs were continually confirmed as reflecting students' conceptions. Parr's (1999)

Research investigated students' conceptions of learning by means of using technology. Instead of examining how the learning context impacts students' conceptions, Parr's research explored how students' beliefs actually affected the classroom context. Parr was motivated by the observation that *the perspectives of students have been largely neglected* (p.365). Instead of being examined from an outside-in perspective, the students in Parr's study were viewed as *active contributors to the complex classroom community* (p.376). Such insight should be transferred to research situations in the higher education sector, in which both the beliefs of instructors and students are viewed as important, and reflect a learning environment that acknowledges how learning is a process that is co-constructed by both teachers and students. It's worth pointing out that the present study accounted for the students' perceptions only, rather than the instructors'.

The role of contextual factors were perceived as significant in shaping students' perceptions. Chapple (1999) examined the effect of particular contextual factors on students' learning conceptions. In this regard, Chapple maintained that:

These insights into how students learn, their conception of learning and the factors associated with the approaches they take can assist me in planning my teaching strategies. I see my role is to facilitate deep learning by setting a positive climate for learning, clarifying the purposes of the learners, organizing and making available learning resources, balancing intellectual and emotional components of learning and sharing feelings and thoughts with learner (p.71).

Results from Chapple's study indicated how students' beliefs about learning methods and approaches are influenced by assessment, teaching style and the amount of teaching time. Many of the participants in Chapple's study described the learning process in terms of specific knowledge and skills. One student commented that: *committing to memory information, knowing what you are talking about with confidence and something you can draw on and apply and use* (p.69). Students who were categorized as having deeper learning.

conceptions defined learning in terms of *the experience* (p.70). Deeper learning conception students were, also, able to make sense of reality and capable of using facts and skills in their practice. Chapple's perspective was carried

further in the current study. This is why the perceptions of students as a result of instruction at religious education courses were explored.

Students' learning conceptions have an effect on learning methods selection in secondary school context as illustrated by Dartet al. (2000). They further investigated the link between students' conceptions of learning and the learning approaches they adopted. These researchers found out that students with qualitative and experiential conceptions of learning were likely to use deep approaches to learning whereas students with quantitative conceptions were likely to use surface approaches.

Students' conceptions, likewise, have an influence on their practices in higher education settings. In this regard, Northcote (2009) examined the relationship between students' educational beliefs, on the one hand, and tutors together with their students' teaching/learning practices, on the other hand. Based on that investigation, Northcote explored the beliefs of a group of higher education instructors and their students in a learning-based setting. The study concluded with a set of practical suggestions for university instructors and students involved in teacher education courses.

Models were developed to illustrate the associations of students' conceptions and beliefs. One example of these models was that of Chan (2001). Chan investigated the relationship and connection between epistemological beliefs and conceptions of learning. Such relationships were put together on four structural equation models to examine the predictive relationships between epistemological beliefs and selected pairs of quantitative and qualitative conceptions of learning. The models were validated by confirmatory factor analysis. The results, accordingly, supported the hypothesis that epistemological beliefs have significant predictive relationships with quantitative and qualitative conceptions of learning, implying epistemological beliefs may, in turn, play an important role in students' learning.

Concerning literature account, this study focused on various themes mostly relevant to students' perception in forming and shaping religiosity, academic performance, method selection, and context adoption. Themes that

are consistent with this study were related to the supremacy of context in modeling one's belief. Themes that emerged and incorporated later in the current study were those relevant to religious educational beliefs. Yet, the combined findings of previous research, those concentrated specifically on the extent to which students' beliefs about learning impacted on or were influenced by the context in which they studied, did not generate any definitive generalizations about whether or not the variables of context or experience consistently affected students' religious educational beliefs. Accordingly, this study examined the impact of context (University setting) in shaping religious beliefs in terms of three domains; namely, affiliation, attitudes and attendance.

Statement of the problem

The quality of students' religiosity in higher education tends to be affected by the educational beliefs fed by the university context (Al-Jawarnah 2010, p. 786; Abu Arqub & Al-Jawarnah 2011, p. 221; Dartet et al., 2000, p. 265). Although the belief literature documents various examples of the educational beliefs held by teachers, very little research has focused on the beliefs held by students as being in different educational contexts. The problem is that more educated people tend to display little or no religious beliefs. What happens to people's religious practices and beliefs as they move from one setting (school) to another (university)? It was assumed that, if religious education courses fulfill their objectives and goals, religious beliefs of students are best understood and interpreted. This, in turn, will improve the religiosity of students. Also, the study reported here contributes to the growing research on students' religion in Jordan.

Aims and questions of the study

The current research aims to investigate, and contribute to, a fuller understanding of the educational beliefs held by two groups of students and the extent to which their beliefs overlap. By accessing the varied constructions of reality represented by the multiple perspectives of both groups, the findings of this study aims at providing a rich, detailed understanding of university students' educational beliefs regarding religious education, as well as, some understanding of the level of congruence of such beliefs into meaningful practices.

Overall, the aims of this study were guided by

two major *questions* which emerged from a comprehensive review of the research into educational religious beliefs represented by past, recent and current literature:

1. Research Question 1: What are the students' perceptions of religious beliefs as gained from religious education courses at Al al-Bayt University?
2. Research Question 2: What are the students' perceptions of religious beliefs as gained from religious education courses at Mu'tah University?

Significance of the study

The study tends to be significant as it aims to focus on students' beliefs on religious education at two different educational settings. Very few studies have studied the religious beliefs of students in university context. All of Abu Arqub & Al-Jawarnah (2011), Al-Jawarnah (2010), Kember & Kwan (2000), and Prosser & Trigwell (1997) noted that, compared to the research on students' beliefs, there is a lack of research in later years about teaching in higher education. Also, the study is significant for the participants as they were encouraged to reflect upon and, thus, became more sensitized to their personal religious educational beliefs. From this extended level of consciousness about their own educational beliefs, it is anticipated that the students who participated in the study may increase their ability to be more reflective about their own learning, and, thus, improve the quality of their learning practices.

Moreover, it is felt that more educated people have a more tolerant and open worldview, leading a lower attachment to their religious beliefs. Based on this argument, the study hypothesizes a positive effect of religion on education. It is anticipated that this study will illuminate the nature of the relationship between the faculty of Shareea courses and the religiosity of students and provide a framework for consideration of possible changes of the objectives of such courses.

Limitation of the study

There are some limitations to this study. The researcher may point out these limitations in the following points:

1. The results will be generalized to the participants of the study and limited to Jordanian public Universities. The results, also, can be generalized to similar con-

text, sample, instruments and procedures.

2. The results are bounded by two demographic details concerning fourth year level students, as well as, family religiosity. Yearlevel (i.e fourth year) may ensure that students have passed the courses in question. The religiosity of students' families was considered in order to embark on micro-level context impact. Other demographic details such as gender were not studied for they may have different results, also the researcher considers such results concerning gender as not drawing substantial information to the literature account together with the aims of the study.

METHOD

The purpose of this research was to explore the connection between faculty of Shareea courses and the employment of religiosity as a pedagogical tool. The study followed a descriptive and analytical research design. It explored the religiosity of students enrolled at Al-Bayt University, as well as, students enrolled at Mu'tah University in the academic year 2010/2011. Religiosity was investigated in terms of students' perception of their religious affiliation, religious attitudes, and religious attendance. It is hypothesized that religious education courses have the predicted positive effect on the students' perceptions and subsequently on their beliefs. (Al-Jawarnah, 2009; Al-Jallad, 2010; and Abu Arqub & Al-Jawarnah, 2011). In order to achieve the aims of the study, a survey as well as semi-structured interviews of students as being drawn from all Faculties at the two Universities in question. It is hoped that the suggestions of the study to be highlighted as points of departure, rather than arrival, and that they might serve as useful topics for discussion when improving the quality of religious courses.

Sample of the study

The present study focused particularly on students' perceptions of the educational beliefs held by two groups of students who study at two large Jordanian universities (namely; Al-Bayt University and Mu'tah University). It is worth mentioning that student at Mu'tah University undertake only three credit hours in religious education, in contrast with students

at Al-Bayt University where they undertake twenty-one credit hours in religious education.

The population of the study, however, consisted of all senior students during the second semester of the academic year 2010/2011. The population consisted of forty various majors students at Mu'tah University and thirty-eight different majors students at Al-Bayt University. According to Fraij & Shehab (2012) the total number of the undergraduate registered at Mu'tah University and Al-Bayt University in the academic year 2010/2011 was 16457 students and 12873 students respectively.

The year level which was thought suitable for the purposes of the present research was that of level four; in order to make sure that all senior students expecting graduation have undertaken the courses in question. The total number of the senior student was 5907 (2395 students from Al-Bayt University and 3512 students from Mu'tah University). Ten percent (10%) of the study's population was seen adequate to achieve the objectives of this study. Therefore, the sample mounted up to 591 students from both universities responded to the religious education questionnaire (285 students from Al-Bayt University, and 306 students from Mu'tah University).

However, the sample was that of stratified random where the strata of sample selection was based on student's year level. The advantage of stratified random sampling is that it increases the likelihood of representativeness as well as insures that any key characteristics of individuals in the population are included in the same proportion in the sample. The disadvantage is that it involves more effort on the part of the researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Sixty four student out of the study's sample (32 students from each participating university) interviewed. The semi-structured interviews consisted of a series of questions designed to elicit specific answer on the part of respondents. Semi-structured interviews are often best conducted toward the end of a study, as they tend to shape responses to the researcher's perceptions of how things are. That is, they are most useful for obtaining information to test a specific hypothesis that the researcher has in mind (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Data collection

To successfully conduct the study, the following instruments were used:

- 1- A semi-structured interview: It is representative in providing the participants with the chance to talk about their opinions and allows them to express themselves, whilst providing adequate structure to avoid rambling (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). The checked validity and reliability of the interview instrument followed different procedures suggested by Fraenkel & Wallen (2003). Therefore, a digital audio recorder was used. Also, each participant was interviewed twice for the following reasons: first, to check the credibility of the data collected from the respondents in the first interviews; second, to supplement the first interviews and to ask questions that had emerged in the researcher's diaries. It was found out that the second interview provided in-depth information. The interviews were conducted from the 3rd of April to 5th of May in comfortable staff meeting rooms at the Faculty of Educational Sciences in each University. Each interview lasted approximately for 25-40 minutes, depending on the willingness of the participant. Each interview began with background questions concerning student's name, year level, and passing religious education courses. To analyze the data, transcripts were made of the interviews and notes were made from the recorded material on students' religious beliefs. Interviews were transcribed by listening to the tape and writing down the responses on separate sheets of paper. The whole assemblage of tape recording was put together and/or written on different sheets of paper, which were then transferred to the interview answer sheet. Afterwards, the responses were categorised and conceptualised using themes, supporting quotations and interpretations. These data were triangulated with the information obtained from the religious education belief questionnaire. All data were examined in order to answer the research questions about students' religious beliefs in higher education setting.

In order to determine students' educational religious beliefs, each student was requested to give responses to the following questions:

Table 1
Interview Questions

Interview Question	Key word answer
1. What do you think of your parents' religiosity?	-very religious - moderately religious - not religious at all
2. What do you think of religious education courses offered by the university?	- very helpful - helpful - not helpful at all

A religious education belief questionnaire. The researcher developed an 18 items questionnaire. The questionnaire was built upon past literature incorporated in the literature review section and taken further in the current study. 591 students in both participating universities (Al al-Bayt= 285; Mu'tah= 306) responded to the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire, however, was distributed to identify the perspectives of the students on their religious beliefs. A coding system was established where information was presented in numbers. A Likert type scale was used, comprising alternatives such as 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'undecided', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree' which were given numbers 5,4,3,2, and 1 respectively and reversed items were considered as well. The coded data was then entered into the computer. The SPSS package was used to calculate the required statistical procedures representing the descriptive analysis, that is, frequencies and percentages. After processing the data of each category, it was tabulated and each table was analysed by categorising the responses or percentages of respondents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the issues encompassed in the questionnaire. The form of the survey questionnaire was as follows:

Table 2
Religious Beliefs Classifications

Religious value	The number of items
Affiliation	Items: 1-8
Attitudes	Items: 9-15
Attendance	Items: 16-18

Validity and reliability of the instruments

Validity is a measure of the degree to which the instrument is measuring what is intended to measure. Reliability, on the other hand, is a measure of the degree to which the same analysis procedure is likely to give consistent results (Gay, 1996). The instruments were subjected to judgment and piloting, as well. The questionnaire and the interview questions were validated by a jury of educators. The jury was formed as follows:

- 1- Six experienced university professors in Theology;
- 2- Two university professors in Evaluation and Assessment.
- 3- Four experienced university professors in Islamic teaching methods.

The team was asked to validate the content of the instrument concerning its instructions and suitability to the objectives of the present study. The team's comments and suggestions were studied carefully, and the necessary modifications were made accordingly. For example, the statements of the questionnaire integrated twenty-five items which were restated while considering the comments of the jury; thus reduced to eighteen items.

The reliability of the instrument, however, was field tested and refined through the split-half method on a pilot group of twenty senior students at Al al-Bayt University and of another twenty of senior students at Mu'tah University who were randomly chosen from the both Universities. The correlation coefficient was found to be 0.88 which was considered to be appropriate to conduct the present study.

Procedure

The following procedures were carried out in the present study:

- 1- Identifying the target population which was all 5907 senior students who enrolled in religious education courses or have undertaken the courses. Identifying such population was with the help of admission and registration offices in both universities.
- 2- A table of random numbers was used, then randomly selected 10 percent from the strata of the population which results in 591 students being selected from this subgroup.
- 3- The questionnaire was distributed on the second semester of the academic year 2010/2011. It was given to students while studying courses of religious education, as well as, to students at other courses upon checking that they have studied religious education courses formerly. In order to ensure that the respondents expressed their own views, they were encouraged to give answers individually without consulting their classmates. The return rate of the 591 students' questionnaires was 100%. There was no missing data as distributed and administered personally by the researcher

himself where colleagues in both Universities strongly collaborated.

In this current study, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. The frequencies of the occurrence for each of the questionnaire statements were tabulated first. Then, analysis of the data was performed using the SPSS software. Percentages for each statement were reported. In the data analysis, responses 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were grouped as disagreement with a statement, while 'strongly agree' and 'agree' answers were interpreted as agreement. The respondents were separated into two groups according to their university: (1) the senior students who study at Al al-Bayt University, and (2) the senior students who study at Mu'tah University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was analyzed separately according to the research questions stated earlier. The following sections present the findings as related to each research question independently. The crucial issue raised by this research was to find patterns of students' perceptions as influenced by university courses as macro-level contexts, rather than embarking on the beliefs held by students at different Universities.

I. Results related to the first question

The first research question was: What are the students' perceptions of religious beliefs as gained from religious education courses at Al al-Bayt University?

1. The survey questionnaire

Table 3 displays the percentages of senior students' responses to the beliefs questionnaire.

The central focus in this research is what happens to the religious commitment of university students when they become more socially integrated into a rather semi-secular setting (i.e. university)? To examine this issue, Table 3 displays that students at Al al-Bayt University seemed to hold quite positive and definite perceptions about their religious affiliation beliefs. Regarding the existence of religious commitment, the majority of students at Al al-Bayt University strongly agreed that *Islam is always first in my life* (85% of students); *Islam is my source of happiness* (94% of students); *Islam solves my problems* (88% of students); and *the day to day meaning of life to me is totally described by the holy Qur'an* (89% of students).

Nevertheless, a large number of students at Al al-Bayt University tended to adjust themselves to the context of the university. That is, although they (the students) think of themselves as members of a religious community, yet they tended to accommodate themselves in the university context. Accordingly, 94% of the responses strongly advocated the idea that states: *Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life.* Also, 96% strongly agreed with the statement *I don't try very hard to live my life all my life according to my religion.* Only 15% of the students participating in the current study strongly disagreed with the statement: *Although I am religious, I don't let my religion affect my daily life.* Again, this supports the argument firstly stated by this study which entails that the religious beliefs of people change

when they move from one conservative setting (school) to another non-conservative (university) setting.

In addition to religious affiliation, religious attitudes as well as religious attendance were investigated in the present study in order to shed the light on students' overall religious beliefs perception account. attitudes were talked in terms of students' feelings towards the religious education courses offered by the two Universities. However, attendance was examined in terms of the frequency with which people attend religious meetings. Table 4 presents the findings of the survey questionnaire at Al al-Bayt University.

Table 3
The Religious Affiliation of Students at Al al-Bayt University

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Un-decided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
1. Islam is always first in my life.	85%	8%	-	5%	2%	285
2. Islam is my source of happiness.	94%	-	-	2%	4%	285
3. Islam solves my problems.	88%	8%	1%	2%	1%	285
4. Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life	94%	4%	2%	-	-	285
5. My whole approach to life is based on my religion.	40%	18%	2%	12%	28%	285
6. Although I am religious, I don't let my religion affect my daily life	46%	6%	18%	15%	15%	285
7. I don't try very hard to live my life all my life according to my religion.	96%	3%	-	1%	-	285
8. The day to day meaning of life to me is totally described by the holly Qur'an.	89%	5%	5%	-	1%	285

Table 4
Religious Attitudes and Attendance of Students at Al al-Bayt University

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
9- I enjoy undertaking courses about my religion.	82%	4%	5%	-	9%	285
10- I feel the number of courses on Islam is very limited.	14%	10%	-	64%	12%	285
11- I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on Islamic jurisprudence.	88%	2%	3%	4%	3%	285
12- I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on Islamic creed.	2%	8%	1%	85%	4%	285
13- I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on the science of the Tradition of the Prophet.	90%	4%	2%	4%	1%	285
14- I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on the sciences of the Holy Qur'an.	38%	9%	2%	4%	49%	285
15- I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on contemporary issues.	97%	1%	2%	-	-	285
16- It is important to me to pray five times a day.	64%	12%	-	21%	3%	285
17- I have never attended a mosque prayer.	40%	18%	2%	12%	28%	285
18- I rarely have Qur'an study	88%	8%	1%	2%	1%	285

Table 5
Al al-Bayt University students Perceptions of Their Parents' Religiosity

what do you think of your parents' religiosity?	very religious	moderately religious	not religious at all	Total
Frequency	5	21	6	32
Percent	15%	66%	19%	100%

The data provided a description of the current perception of students in Al al-Bayt University. An analysis of this data was then completed in order to establish patterns or trends. The patterns identified by the researcher have provided some direction for the future on how to increase the courses of religious education at the University. Because religious adherence tended to be somewhat high among the responses of students at Al al-Bayt University. Highly positive attitudes towards religious education courses were, also, found. This is explained through students' (85% of students) great support of *I enjoy undertaking courses about my religion*. Moreover, most of the students agreed strongly with items indicating having more courses in religious education courses especially: *Islamic jurisprudence* (88% of students); *the science of the Tradition of the Prophet* (90% of students); and *contemporary issues* (97% of students).

Yet, students' perceptions of religious attendance reflected a low percentage rates as representing the current experience of students at Al al-Bayt University. A significant proportion (88%) of students indicated that *they rarely have Qur'an study*. A rather large proportion (60%) of the students expressed that they pray, and even worse 40% of the students stated that *they have never attended a mosque prayer*. Although the current research attempted to question the issue of educational religious beliefs gained by University courses in a way that assist students to meaningful links between personal experience and religious theory in order to construct meaning, it seemed that the setting of Al al-Bayt University courses are ineffective in engaging student potential for meaning making. The results of the study, in this specific and substantial part showed that the courses are ineffective enough in promoting religious attendance of students. Other factors are worth considering when explaining the questionnaire results such as the perceptions obtained from the interviews with students at the University.

2. The interviews

Generally speaking, parental emphasis aims at getting students understand religiosity in order

to be able to apply such knowledge and understanding not only to within the family context but also beyond the boundaries of the family (i.e. university context). The sign that student's religiosity have been affected to new circumstances. During the fieldwork of the current research, most of the interviewed participants stressed that Islam was a part of their family heritage. As one can see from Table 5, students' parents tend to be 'moderately religious'.

One student at Al al-Bayt University described his family's religious orientation as: *my family directs my religiosity*. Another student remarked: *my family have told me a lot about religiosity*. Such views as obtained from the interviews support those views as obtained from the questionnaire as reflecting rather moderate perception of religious affiliation. In fact, this result is consistent with the nature of the Jordanian society as stated by Amman Message; a moderate nation. One student, interestingly, reported that:

I started to practice Islam at home with my family, and so it was something that I had exposure to from a very young age. But in terms of practicing it, it is a conscious choice. Because you can be Muslim by name, and you can be Muslim by birth, and you can be Muslim from what your parents tell you that you are. But in terms of being a true believer, that is something that you have to consciously choose. And I believe that I consciously chose that [Islam] on my own, otherwise I could go through life with a title but not have anything behind it to back it up.

Regarding the role of university courses' effect on the religiosity of the students, Table 6 reflects varying degrees of students' perceptions of the 'exact' impact of religious education courses. Nineteen participants stressed that university courses are 'helpful', while three out of thirty two participants at Al al-Bayt University maintained that courses are 'not helpful at all'. This view, however, supports results obtained by the questionnaire where students expressed varying degrees of profiting from the courses in question, and accordingly varying degrees of more courses on religious education.

One interviewed student at Al al-Bayt University indicated that: *I perceive religious education courses as theoretical models that help me like a pair*

of glasses that I put on and it can order the world for me. This perception was verified by another student who stated that: *...the courses present the material in a form which would make us able to use, understand and make sense in some way in our life experienc.*

In contrast, one of the interviewed students at Al al-Bayt University explained the significant role of university courses in formulating her religious beliefs, she stated: *when I came to the University, I was not particularly religious at first. But when you end up in a large number of religious education courses, I found myself as a true believer who practices her religion as required.*

II) Results related to the second question

The second research question was: What are the students' perceptions of religious beliefs as gained from religious education courses at Mu'tah University?

The survey questionnaire

Table 7 displays the percentages of religious affiliation as an integral component of students' beliefs as obtained from the perceptions of students at Mu'tah university.

On the other hand, results of the data analysis of students at Mu'tah University tend to follow a different pattern from students at Al al-Bayt University students. The data presented in Table 7 provided a description of the current perceptions of the religious beliefs of students at

Mu'tah University. The students' perceptions reflected a significant difference in terms of religious affiliation. That is, low and moderate levels of religious affiliation were found in Mu'tah as varying from *Islam is always first in my life*" (51% of students); and *Islam is my source of happiness* (43% of students). The students at Mu'tah University seemed to be not sure and not confident of their religious affiliation perceptions. The results, however, reflects hesitant views (3% of students) contrasting from strongly discouraging living Islamic life to rejecting (49% of students) whole approach to life as based on religion.

The way such students felt towards their religious attachment is clearly indicative of high levels of hesitancy if compared to the perceptions of students at Al al-Bayt University. This may be interpreted on the grounds that, at Al al-Bayt University, students undertake twenty-one obligatory credit hours in religious education. On the other hand, students at Mu'tah University undertake only three credit obligatory hours in religious education. As far as one can see, beliefs were inconsistent between the two groups of students involved in the current study in the areas of religious affiliation.

Table 6
Al al-Bayt University Students Perceptions of Religious Education Courses

2. What do you think about religious education courses offered by the University	very helpful	Helpful	Not helpful at all	Total
Frequency	10	19	3	32
Percent	31%	59%	10%	100%

Table 7
Religious Affiliation of Students at Mu'tah University

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
1- Islam is always first in my life.	51%	25%	16%	2%	6%	306
2-Islam is my source of happiness.	43%	34%	7%	1%	15%	306
3-Islam solves my problems.	25%	10%	4%	40%	21%	306
4-Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life	45%	18%	7%	8%	22%	306
5-My whole approach to life is based on my religion.	12%	18%	4%	17%	49%	306
6-Although I am religious, I don't let my religion affect my daily life	11%	34%	21%	25%	9%	306
7-I don't try very hard to live my life all my life according to my religion.	3%	2%	13%	49%	33%	306
8-The day to day meaning of life to me is totally described by the holly Qur'an.	25%	7%	4%	57%	7%	306

Table 8
Religious Attitudes and Attendance of Students at Mu'tah University

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N
9-I enjoy undertaking courses about my religion.	62%	3%	18%	2%	15%	306
10-I feel the number of courses on Islam is very limited.	3%	18%	29%	30%	20%	306
11-I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on Islamic jurisprudence.	42%	29%	4%	4%	21%	306
12-I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on Islamic creed.	3%	8%	31%	49%	9%	285
13-I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on the science of the Tradition of the Prophet.	55%	15%	-	28%	2%	306
14-I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on the sciences of the Holy Qur'an.	45%	19%	30%	6%	-	306
15-I feel that it is urgent to have more courses on contemporary issues.	50%	18%	10%	2%	20%	306
16-It is important to me to pray five times a day.	15%	15%	-	39%	31%	306
17-I have never attended a mosque prayer.	10%	22%	10%	32%	26%	306
18-I rarely have Qur'an study	40%	41%	4%	8%	7%	306

Table 8 presents an analysis of the data concerning religious attitude and attendance. The patterns identified by the researcher have provided some direction for the future on how to increase the courses of religious education at the University. Because religious devotion tended to be somewhat little responses of students at Mu'tah University. This is explained through only 62% of students' participating in the current study enjoyed undertaking more courses about Islam. In particular, only 42% liked to have courses on Islamic jurisprudence, 45% desired courses on the science of the Tradition of the Holy Qur'an, 50% wished to have more courses on contemporary issues, while 55% of students liked more courses on the science of the Tradition of the Prophet.

Peculiar agreement between both groups who expressed comparable minor needs of more courses on Islamic creed (2% at Al-alBayt; 3% at Mu'tah respectively). This may be interpreted on the basis that this course aims at strengthening the creed of Muslims. Both groups of participants seemed to feel happy with their status of faith. Yet, the only problem students seemed to face is the act of practicing their faith in a modern style society which is full of many demands. So, the conflict tended, here, to be very clear in highlighting the impact of the context in shaping students' practices.

The previous finding, also, seemed to be consistent with findings relevant to students' perceptions of religious scarce attendance at Al alBayt University (see Table 4). Unfortunately, it seems to be the case at Mu'tah University where a significant great proportion (81% of students) strongly agree and agree that *they rarely have*

Qur'an study. Moreover, 30% of students strongly agree and agree with the statement that entails that *they pray five times a day*, and 10% of the students stated that *they have never attended a mosque prayer*. The current research addressed the issue of educational religious beliefs in a way that assist students to meaningful links between personal experience and religious theory in order to construct meaning. This leads to the following significant question: do religious education courses at Mu'tah University effective enough to engage student's potential for meaning making? The results of the study showed that there is a frantic need of more courses that promote religious attendance and meaning making of students. Other factors are worth considering when explaining the questionnaire results such as the perceptions obtained from the interviews with students at the University.

Interviews

The interviews accounted for in-depth investigation of the family before judging the university context. Considering the parental perspective at Mu'tah university, the views maintained through the interviews reported that students tend to practice religious education knowledge and understanding not only within the family context but, also, beyond the boundaries of the family (i.e. university context) as a result of their parent' moderateness, as seen at Table 9.

One student at Mu'tah University expressed his family's religious orientation; he remarked that: *my family is fair, none of our relatives is extreme: all our family members tend to be temperate*. Another student explained: *my parents are very modern, but religious at the same time*. Such views as obtained from the interviews do not support those

views as obtained from the questionnaire as reflecting rather moderate perception of religious affiliation. The results obtained by the questionnaire, however, reflected moderate religious affiliation. In fact, this result is consistent with the nature of the Jordanian society as stated by Amman Message; a *moderate nation*.

This is why similarities among two parental contexts tend to be the same, and consequently similar findings are found when the family context is investigated.

The central theme of the present research addressed the question of whether religious education courses at Jordanian universities form the cement holding society's religiosity together. Regarding the role of university courses effect on the religiosity of the students, Table 10 accordingly reflects the degree of students' advocacy of the helpfulness of religious education courses. It is not a surprise to find out that only two students out of 32 interviewed students at Mu'tah University find religious education course as very helpful; whereas 21 students find the course as not helpful at all. It's worth pointing out that, at Mu'tah University there is only one single religious education course; unlike Al al-Bayt University where there are seven religious education courses. This view, however, supports results obtained by the questionnaire where students expressed a frantic need of more courses on religious education at Mu'tah University. On interviewed student at Mu'tah University indicated that;

...we need more; more religious education courses. One course is not enough; we need courses on the tradition of the Prophet, and because there are many new jurisprudential things I say we need to be more conscious of these contemporary issues and of course more education on Qur'anic sciences is needed.

Another student at Mu'tah University remarked that the university context tends to be affected by individualism, she stated that: *Undoubtedly, the aspect of choice the University is affected by a contemporary Western discourse, where the processes of human life are significantly individualized.*

CONCLUSION

The present study focused on Jordanian University students' perceptions belief comparison with a noticeable gap within reference to setting, in which each University offer more courses on religious education than other. The study posed the question that entails whether a relationship between students' epistemological beliefs of religiosity and the high education social context may exist? The context of the university may, of course, lead students to hold mixed (constructive and reproductive) beliefs about religion; students with sophisticated epistemological beliefs of religiosity may believe that knowledge is constructed and they tend to hold constructivist beliefs about religiosity.

One may suggest that when students have more complex beliefs about knowledge, the quality of their religiosity is improved. This is supported by the result obtained from students at Al al-Bayt University where the amount of knowledge base courses is huge as compared to other public Jordanian university.

Analyses and interpretations of the data provided answers to the questions of the present study. When the beliefs that were expressed by Al al-Bayt University students were compared to the beliefs expressed by Mu'tah University students, different beliefs about most topics were elicited. There were outsized noticeable trends within these degrees of differences.

Overall, the students at Al al-Bayt University expressed different religious beliefs in terms of stronger religious affiliation than students at Mu'tah University. Regarding issues that concerns the domains of religious attitudes and attendance, the findings of the present study reported that students at both Universities display varying religious attitudes, as well as, lowreligious attendance, yet with varying degrees. That is, the actualization of making meaning and trasfering what they believe onto what they act and do was unattainable.

No impact of the family background was detected all through the analysis. For it was noted from the views of the students in both Universities that their parents were 'moderately' religious' which is the proto type of religiosity mostly spread in the Jordanian society. So, assuming that students come from such context, the university context, in turn, is argued to add

Table 9
Mu'tah University Students' Perceptions of Their Parents' Religiosity

what do you think of your parents' religiosity?	very religious	moderately religious	not religious at all	Total
Frequency	6	22	4	32
Percent	19%	69%	12%	100%

Table 10
Mu'tah University Students Perceptions of Religious Education Courses

What do you think of religious education courses offered by your university?	very helpful	Helpful	Not helpful at all	Total
Frequency	2	9	21	32
Percent	6 %	28%	66%	100%

more or less to the religiosity of the students. That is to say, the university in its religious courses and religious ethos have a significant role in enhancing the religiosity of students.

The results of the study were interpreted, accordingly, on the basis of the number of religious education courses that impact students' religiosity as offered by each university. Both groups of students expressed the need to have more courses on "the science of the Prophetic Tradition".

University students' epistemological beliefs about learning reflect reproductive through transformative conceptions of learning (Brownlee, 2003, pp. 1-3). Findings provided evidence that the religious educational beliefs of students who participated in this study were generally different and contrasting to each other. However, students' epistemological beliefs have been usually considered in association with their beliefs about affiliation (Chan, 2001).

Findings of the present research lend support to a proposition that the tenacity of learners' beliefs depends on whether those beliefs were shaped by micro context or macro context (Brownlee, 2003, p. 5; and Schraw, 2001: p. 451). Beliefs formed by micro context (e.g. learning situation: university context) tend to be less stable (Phillips, 2001; Schommer-Aikins, 2002)

By contrast, beliefs shaped by the macro context (i.e. prevailing attitudes within society) were more tenacious. The findings reported that University students who participated in the current study were very enthusiastic about having more religious education courses. The study confirmed that students' beliefs tend to become more complex and sophisticated as their learning experience increases and their awareness of learning issues extends.

Despite the findings of the study have stressed the importance of providing more different Islamic

religious courses at Mu'tah University syllabuses and all other public Universities in Jordan, Al al-Bayt University, sadly, has reduced the Islamic courses to be six credit hours instead of twenty one credit hours starting from the beginning of the 2011 fall semester.

Based on the literature and the findings of the current study, a number of recommendations should be addressed:

- 1- Al Al-Bayt University is advisable to conduct a study to find the effect of reducing the Islamic religious courses on the students' beliefs.
- 2- In accordance with the opinions of Mu'tah University's students, more Islamic courses on making meaning on students' perceptions and practices should be offered.
- 3- All Jordanian universities should increase the number of religious education courses, especially courses that promote religious attendance and participation.
- 4- As far as there is shortness of research focused on the beliefs held by students at universities or schools, more studies in this field are required.

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