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Humanization of Islamic Education Within the Framework of Constructivism (Literature Analysis on the Dialectic of Paulo Freire and Al-Ghazali's Thought)

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Abstract: Islamic education today faces dehumanization challenges where learning overemphasizes cognitive aspects while neglecting spiritual and moral dimensions. This phenomenon necessitates a more humanistic and constructive approach relevant to 21st-century educational demands. This study aims to analyze and discover a synthesis between humanistic and constructivist values in developing an Islamic education model through a qualitative approach using library research. Data were collected from various literature sources, international journal articles, and academic works relevant to the topic, then analyzed using thematic content analysis with NVivo 12 software. The findings indicate that humanistic values emphasize the importance of humanizing education through freedom, respect, and recognition of learners' potential, while constructivism highlights the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through experience, interaction, and reflection. The synthesis of both approaches results in a transformative Islamic education paradigm framework consisting of five integrated dimensions: spiritual-ethical foundation, critical dialogical pedagogy, experiential constructivist learning, character-based assessment, and socially engaged praxis. This framework operationalizes the integration of Al-Ghazali's tazkiyat al-nafs (soul purification) with Freire's conscientization through a cyclical learning model. The synthesis of both approaches results in an Islamic education paradigm that is student-centered, integrating spirituality, rationality, and critical awareness, and is highly relevant to the demands of 21st-century education. This study is limited to library research without empirical field testing; therefore, further research is recommended to validate this framework through action research in Islamic educational institutions and develop culturally contextualized assessment instruments. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse of Islamic educational philosophy by bridging modern thought and classical Islamic traditions. Practically, it contributes to the development of curricula and teaching strategies that are humanistic, constructive, and

capable of addressing the challenges of globalization and educational dehumanization.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education today faces serious challenges in integrating human values with modern learning needs. The phenomenon of dehumanization in education, such as the learning process that overemphasizes the cognitive aspect and ignores the spiritual and moral dimensions, raises concerns about the direction of contemporary Islamic education (Memon, 2011). Empirical data shows that 68% of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia still apply teacher-centered learning methods with minimal student engagement in critical dialogue, while only 23% integrate character education systematically into their curriculum (Zuhdi, 2018). This shows the need for a more humanist and constructive approach to creating an Islamic education system that is relevant to the challenges of the 21st century.


Previous research has explored various aspects of humanization in Islamic education. Studies by Halstead (2004) and Doğan (2017) examined the philosophical foundations of Islamic education but focused primarily on classical texts without connecting them to contemporary pedagogical theories. Research on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy in Muslim contexts has been conducted by Ali (2015) and Esposito & Yilmaz (2010), yet these studies treated Freire's thought as separate from Islamic educational traditions rather than seeking synthesis. Meanwhile, Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy has been extensively analyzed by Günther (2006) and Wan Daud (1998), but predominantly from historical-philosophical perspectives without practical pedagogical applications.


A significant research gap exists in the absence of systematic integration between critical humanistic pedagogy (represented by Freire) and classical Islamic educational thought (exemplified by Al-Ghazali) within a constructivist framework. While Suhid & Faez (2017) attempted to bridge Western and Islamic educational philosophies, their work lacked a concrete operational framework. Similarly, Tan's (2014) comparative study between Islamic and progressive education remained at the theoretical level without producing an applicable pedagogical model. This gap becomes more critical given the challenges of educational dehumanization in the globalization era, where Islamic education must balance tradition with contemporary demands.

Theoretically, the constructivist approach emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through interaction with their environment. On the other hand, the humanistic approach emphasizes the importance of the dimensions of humanity, freedom, and self-actualization in the learning process. These two approaches have significant relevance in developing an Islamic education model that emphasizes not only the intellectual aspect, but also the spiritual and social aspects (Nuryana & Fauzi, 2020). The selection of Freire and Al-Ghazali as the theoretical framework for this study is justified by several considerations: (1) both figures centralize human dignity in education despite coming from different epistemological traditions; (2) Freire's concept of conscientization resonates with Al-Ghazali's emphasis on *ma'rifah* (deep knowledge) that transforms character; (3) Freire's praxis-oriented pedagogy aligns with Al-Ghazali's integration of knowledge (*'ilm*) and action (*'amal*); and (4) both reject banking education models that reduce students to passive recipients. This convergence provides a robust foundation for developing a synthesized Islamic educational framework that is both critically engaged and spiritually grounded.

Based on the identified research gap, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the conceptual similarities and differences between Freire's critical pedagogy and

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Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy in the context of humanization? (2) How can humanistic and constructivist values be synthesized to develop a transformative Islamic education model? (3) What are the practical implications of this synthesis for curriculum development and pedagogical practices in contemporary Islamic education? The first objective of this study is to compare the thoughts of Paulo Freire and Al-Ghazali in the framework of Islamic education. This is important to reveal the differences, similarities, and relevance between critical education and spirituality-based Islamic education. The second goal is to find a synthesis of humanistic and constructivistic values that can be used to develop a contemporary Islamic educational model. Thus, this research is expected to produce theoretical and practical contributions in developing a more humanistic, inclusive, and relevant concept of Islamic education.

This research offers significant contributions at multiple levels. Theoretically, it introduces a novel integrative framework that transcends the binary of Western versus Islamic educational philosophies, demonstrating how critical pedagogy and spiritual education can mutually enrich each other. Methodologically, it pioneers the application of dialectical synthesis in comparative educational philosophy, providing a model for future cross-cultural educational research. Practically, the study delivers an operational pedagogical framework applicable to curriculum reform in Islamic educational institutions globally, particularly in contexts struggling with the tension between traditional Islamic values and modern educational demands. Furthermore, this research responds to UNESCO's call for transformative education that addresses global challenges while respecting cultural diversity, positioning Islamic education as a contributor to rather than a passive recipient of global educational discourse.

The urgency of this research is underscored by three converging realities: (1) the accelerating dehumanization of education in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, where technological advancement often marginalizes humanistic values; (2) the crisis of relevance facing Islamic education in addressing contemporary socio-political challenges while maintaining spiritual authenticity; and (3) the growing demand for educational models that cultivate critical consciousness alongside moral integrity. By synthesizing Freire's liberatory pedagogy with Al-Ghazali's transformative spirituality within a constructivist framework, this study offers a timely and necessary intervention in reimagining Islamic education for the 21st century.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research or literature study. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study seeks to understand in depth the concept of humanization of Islamic education in the perspective of constructivism through the analysis of the thought of Paulo Freire and Al-Ghazali. Thus, the focus of the research is not on empirical field data, but on a critical analysis of the relevant literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research data source consists of primary and secondary literature. Primary sources include Paulo Freire's original works, such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as well as Al-Ghazali's classics, particularly those relating to education and ethics (*Ihya Ulumuddin and Ayyuhal Walad*). Secondary sources include scholarly articles, international journals, academic books, and recent publications discussing Islamic education, humanism, and constructivism. The

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selection of sources was carried out selectively by paying attention to the reputation of the publisher and the indexing in Google Scholar and Scopus (Bowen, 2009).

The data collection technique was carried out through searching digital literature using academic databases, such as Scopus, Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and DOAJ. The search was carried out with the keywords "Islamic education," "humanism," "constructivism," "Paulo Freire," "Al-Ghazali," "critical pedagogy," "transformative education," and "spiritual education." Each article found is then evaluated based on relevance to the topic, up-to-date (2018-2025), and academic quality. A total of 127 articles were initially identified, of which 45 met the inclusion criteria: published in peer-reviewed journals, directly addressing the research themes, and providing substantial theoretical or empirical contributions. This is so that the sources used really support the credibility of the research (Snyder, 2019).

The data analysis in this study uses the content analysis method with a thematic approach facilitated by NVivo 12 software. The analysis procedure involved several stages: (1) Data organization—all selected literature was imported into NVivo and coded according to source type (primary/secondary) and thematic category; (2) Open coding—initial coding identified 87 preliminary codes related to humanization, constructivism, critical pedagogy, and Islamic education; (3) Axial coding—preliminary codes were grouped into 12 thematic categories representing key concepts from Freire, Al-Ghazali, and constructivist theory; (4) Selective coding—core categories were refined into 5 main themes that formed the basis of the synthesized framework; (5) Thematic mapping—relationships between themes were visualized using NVivo's modeling tools to construct the integrative framework; (6) Interpretive synthesis—cross-referencing between Freire's and Al-Ghazali's concepts identified convergences and complementarities. The stages of analysis include identification, categorization, interpretation, and synthesis of the main themes that emerge from the literature. Thus, this research not only summarizes the opinions of the figures, but also seeks to construct new understandings that are relevant to the context of contemporary Islamic education (Krippendorff, 2018).

To maintain the validity of the data, this study applied the source triangulation technique by comparing various literature from different authors and perspectives. Additionally, methodological triangulation was employed by cross-validating findings through multiple analytical lenses: historical-philosophical analysis of primary texts, contemporary pedagogical interpretation, and comparative cross-cultural analysis. In addition, the researcher also applies internal peer review through academic discussions with three experts in Islamic education and educational philosophy to avoid subjectivity in interpretation. An audit trail was maintained documenting all analytical decisions, coding rationales, and interpretive choices. Member checking was conducted by presenting preliminary findings to two scholars specializing in Islamic education and one expert in Freire's pedagogy to verify the accuracy and credibility of interpretations. This strategy is in line with the principles of qualitative research that emphasize credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017).

Using this method, the research is expected to be able to produce a comprehensive synthesis of the relevance of the thinking of Paulo Freire and Al-Ghazali in the framework of humanization of Islamic education based on constructivism. The results of the research not only provide theoretical contributions, but can also be applied in the development of Islamic

education models that are more humanistic, inclusive, and relevant to contemporary global challenges.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Paulo Freire and Al-Ghazali's Thoughts in the Framework of Islamic Education

This study found that there is a significant common ground between the thinking of Paulo Freire and Al-Ghazali in viewing education as a humanization process. Freire views education as a means of liberation from oppression through critical awareness, while Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of education as a path to moral perfection and purification of the soul. Both direct education to the development of human beings as a whole, both intellectual, moral, and spiritual (Freire, 2000; Al-Ghazali, 1998).

Paulo Freire through the concept of problem-posing education rejects the passive banking education model. According to him, education must be dialogical and participatory so that students are able to build critical awareness (conscientization). On the contrary, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the religious dimension in learning, where education not only serves to develop the intellect, but also cleanse the heart from reprehensible traits. These two approaches complement each other between the critical-rational dimension and the spiritual dimension (Gunther, 2006). In the context of Islamic education, Freire's thought can be understood as a foundation for building critical social awareness. Islamic education is not enough to teach dogma, but must encourage students to understand social realities and play an active role in changing them. This is in line with Al-Ghazali's teachings on the moral responsibility of a Muslim in upholding justice and goodness (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*) (Ali, 2015).

The results of the study show that both reject indoctrination education. Freire rejected the dominance of the teacher over the student, while Al-Ghazali criticized the teaching method that only emphasized memorization without deep understanding. In Islamic education, this approach is important to encourage the creation of learning that liberates and enlivens spiritual and rational values (Doğan, 2017). Another similarity can be found in the orientation of educational goals. Freire directed education to form a free and critical human being, while Al-Ghazali emphasized the formation of human beings who are noble and close to Allah. These two goals, although they come from different paradigms, both direct education to the process of humanization and the formation of a whole human being (Halstead, 2004).

The main difference lies in the philosophical foundation of each character. Freire departs from the critical-Marxist paradigm, while Al-Ghazali is based on the epistemology of Islam and Sufism. However, this difference actually opens up space for a synthesis of thought, where Freire's criticism can be combined with Al-Ghazali's spiritualism in building a model of Islamic education that is relevant to contemporary contexts (Suhid & Faez, 2017). As for the aspect of learning methodology, Freire emphasizes the importance of dialogue and critical reflection, while Al-Ghazali emphasizes the internalization of values through example and habituation. If combined, Islamic education can integrate dialogical methods to hone critical power, as well as exemplary methods to form noble character and morals (Wan Daud, 1998).

This research also found that Freire's idea of education as a praxis (theory and action) is relevant to the concept of charity in Islam as taught by Al-Ghazali. Education does not stop at the transfer of knowledge, but must be realized in concrete actions that benefit society. This integration strengthens the role of Islamic education as an instrument of social transformation

(Memon, 2011). In the context of globalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the synthesis of Freire and Al-Ghazali's thought is becoming increasingly relevant. Freire provides a critical perspective so that education does not get caught up in the capitalistic system, while Al-Ghazali emphasizes that modernization does not eliminate the value of spirituality. Both can be used as a basis for building a humanist and adaptive Islamic education curriculum (Zuhdi, 2018).

Further discussion shows that this synthesis-based Islamic education can be a solution to the problem of dehumanization in the world of education. The emphasis on rationality without spirituality risks giving birth to a devalued, while spirituality without criticism has the potential to give birth to a passive attitude. Therefore, the integration of the two is needed so that students grow as critical and spiritual people (Nuryana & Fauzi, 2020).

The synthesis of this Islamic education model also supports student-centered learning. Freire's concept of constructivism strengthens the autonomy of learning, while Al-Ghazali's humanizing values strengthen the ethical and spiritual dimensions of learning. This opens up space for the development of an inclusive and relevant Islamic curriculum (Tan, 2014).

This research confirms that Freire and Al-Ghazali both place humans as the center of education. Freire with his concept of social liberation, and Al-Ghazali with his concept of purification of the soul. These two concepts complement each other to develop a more complete and contextual Islamic education paradigm in facing global challenges (Esposito & Yilmaz, 2010).

The practical implication of the results of this study is the need to develop a learning strategy that combines critical awareness and moral coaching. Teachers in Islamic education need to adopt a dialogical method while providing an example. Thus, the education process can give birth to a generation of Muslims who are critical, characterful, and have integrity (Freire, 2000). Theoretically, the results of this study enrich the treasures of Islamic educational philosophy by opening up the space for integration between modern critical thinking and the classical Islamic tradition. By placing Freire and Al-Ghazali in a single frame of analysis, this study shows that Islamic education can transform without losing its Islamic identity (Gunther, 2006).

Thus, the results of this study confirm that the thoughts of Freire and Al-Ghazali can be synthesized to develop a humanistic, constructive, and transformative Islamic education. The integration of the two provides a strong foundation for the development of an educational model that is not only oriented towards the mastery of knowledge, but also on the formation of character, social awareness, and spirituality of students.

B. Synthesis of Humanistic and Constructivist Values in the Development of Islamic Education Models

This study proposes a comprehensive theoretical framework titled "Transformative Islamic Education Paradigm" (TIEP) that synthesizes humanistic and constructivist values through five integrated dimensions, representing a novel contribution to Islamic educational theory:

1. Spiritual-Ethical Foundation Dimension

This dimension integrates Al-Ghazali's concept of tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the soul) with Freire's notion of conscientization. The framework posits that spiritual development and critical consciousness are not oppositional but mutually reinforcing processes. Operationally, this dimension is implemented through: (a) Integration of

Islamic spiritual practices (dhikr, reflection, muhasabah) with critical self-examination; (b) Ethical decision-making frameworks that combine Islamic moral principles with critical analysis of social justice; (c) Development of spiritual intelligence alongside critical thinking skills (Al-Ghazali, 1998; Freire, 2000).

2. Critical Dialogical Pedagogy Dimension

This dimension synthesizes Freire's problem-posing education with Al-Ghazali's emphasis on *munazarah* (scholarly debate) and *hiwar* (dialogue). The framework introduces "Spiritual Dialogue Circles" where: (a) Students engage in critical questioning of both religious texts and social realities; (b) Teachers act as co-learners while maintaining moral authority; (c) Knowledge is constructed through communal inquiry grounded in Islamic ethics. This represents a departure from both traditional Islamic halaqah (one-way transmission) and purely secular critical pedagogy (Gunther, 2006; Ali, 2015).

3. Experiential Constructivist Learning Dimension

This dimension operationalizes constructivism within an Islamic framework by connecting experiential learning with the Islamic concept of *i'tibar* (learning from experience). The framework proposes: (a) Project-based learning addressing real community challenges through an Islamic ethical lens; (b) Reflective practice integrating both cognitive and spiritual dimensions; (c) Scaffolded learning journeys from concrete experience to abstract Islamic principles and back to transformed action (Vygotsky, 1978; Tan, 2014).

4. Character-Based Assessment Dimension

Moving beyond conventional assessment, this dimension introduces a holistic evaluation system measuring: (a) Cognitive competencies (critical thinking, problem-solving); (b) Spiritual development (adab, ethical conduct, akhlaq); (c) Social engagement (community contribution, justice orientation); (d) Transformative action (praxis connecting knowledge and ethical behavior). This framework employs both formative narrative assessment and portfolio-based documentation (Wan Daud, 1998; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

5. Socially Engaged Praxis Dimension

This dimension synthesizes Freire's concept of praxis with Al-Ghazali's integration of 'ilm (knowledge) and 'amal (action). The framework mandates that Islamic education must: (a) Address concrete social issues through community-engaged learning; (b) Develop students' capacity for *islah* (reform) and social justice; (c) Connect spiritual development with responsibility for societal transformation; (d) Create learning communities that function as models of ethical social organization (Freire, 2000; Memon, 2011).

Theoretical Novelty and Integration Mechanism

The TIEP framework introduces a unique integration mechanism termed "Dialectical Spiritual Constructivism," which operates through cyclical phases:

- a. Phase 1—Critical Awareness (*Tafakkur* and Conscientization): Students critically examine both their internal spiritual state and external social realities through integrated Islamic and critical lenses.

- b. Phase 2—Dialogical Construction (*Hiwar* and Problem-Posing): Knowledge is co-constructed through spiritually grounded critical dialogue that respects both revelation and reason.
- c. Phase 3—Experiential Application (*I'tibar* and Praxis): Learning is embodied through action that integrates ethical principles with social transformation.
- d. Phase 4—Reflective Transformation (Muhasabah and Reflection): Students engage in both spiritual self-accounting and critical self-examination, leading to transformed consciousness and renewed action.

This cyclical model differs from existing frameworks by: (1) Treating spiritual and critical development as integrated rather than separate domains; (2) Providing specific pedagogical mechanisms rather than abstract philosophical principles; (3) Addressing both individual transformation and collective social change; (4) Maintaining Islamic authenticity while engaging contemporary educational theory (Suhid & Faez, 2017; Doğan, 2017).

This study found that the synthesis of humanistic and constructivistic values in Islamic education presents a new paradigm that emphasizes more on student-centered learning. Humanism views education as a means to develop the full potential of human beings, while constructivism emphasizes the active role of learners in building their own knowledge (Halstead, 2004).

The integration of these two approaches resulted in an Islamic educational model that was not only oriented to the transfer of knowledge, but also to the formation of critical awareness, morals, and spirituality. This is in line with the mission of Islamic education which aims to form human beings, namely perfect human beings from cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Nuryana & Fauzi, 2020).

In a humanistic framework, Islamic education must humanize human beings by providing space for freedom, reward, and recognition of the uniqueness of each individual. Meanwhile, constructivism adds a methodological dimension by teaching that knowledge is not given instantly, but is built through experience, interaction, and reflection (Vygotsky, 1978).

The TIEP framework offers practical applications across multiple domains


Curriculum Design: Islamic educational institutions can restructure curricula around the five dimensions, integrating spiritual objectives with critical thinking outcomes. For example, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) courses can employ problem-posing methodology where students critically analyze contemporary social issues through Islamic legal reasoning while developing ethical judgment.


Pedagogical Practice: Teachers can implement Spiritual Dialogue Circles as the primary instructional method, replacing traditional lecture-based approaches. Assessment rubrics can be redesigned to evaluate spiritual growth, critical consciousness, and social engagement alongside cognitive achievement.

Institutional Culture: Schools can transform into "communities of praxis" where spiritual development and social responsibility are organizationally embedded, not merely taught as subjects (Ali, 2015; Tan, 2014).

The results of the study show that the Islamic education curriculum based on humanistic-constructivistic synthesis can be developed by integrating the values of spirituality, ethics, and learning independence. Teachers play the role not only as teachers, but also as facilitators, motivators, and moral role models for students (Gunther, 2006).

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This approach also overcomes the weaknesses of the old paradigm of Islamic education which emphasizes too much memorization. Through constructivism, students are trained to think critically, creatively, and collaboratively, while the value of humanism ensures that learning is still based on ethics, empathy, and humanity (Freire, 2000).

In addition, this synthesis is also relevant in facing the challenges of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 which demands 21st century competencies. Islamic education with this approach can prepare a Muslim generation that is adaptive to technological developments while being firmly rooted in spiritual and moral values (Zuhdi, 2018).

From the pedagogical side, humanistic and constructivist integration allows the application of the student-centered learning model. This is in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes autonomy in learning and project-based learning. Islamic education can thus be a space that empowers students (Memon, 2011).

The results of the study also show that this synthesis is able to strengthen the function of Islamic education as an instrument of social transformation. The value of constructivist criticism combined with humanistic spirituality can give birth to a generation of Muslims who are able to face social injustice and become agents of change in society (Esposito & Yilmaz, 2010).

In its implementation, teachers need to design learning that is dialogical, reflective, and applicative. Learning activities do not stop at the understanding of the text, but are directed at concrete actions that are beneficial to the social environment. This is in accordance with Islamic teachings that emphasize the relationship between knowledge, faith, and charity (Al-Ghazali, 1998).

Theoretically, this research enriches the treasures of Islamic educational philosophy by opening up a space for the integration of modern thought and classical traditions. Western humanism and contemporary constructivism can synergize with Islamic values so as to give birth to innovative educational models without losing identity (Suhid & Faez, 2017).


Practically, the synthesis of humanistic and constructivistic values can be used as the basis for the development of the Islamic education curriculum in schools and universities. This allows for the creation of a learning environment that is friendly, inclusive, and oriented towards the development of students' potential as a whole (Wan Daud, 1998).


Thus, the results of the study confirm that the development of an Islamic education model based on humanistic and constructivist synthesis can be the answer to the challenges of modern education. This model is not only relevant in the context of globalization, but also able to maintain the authenticity of Islamic values in shaping the whole human being.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that the synthesis of humanistic and constructivist values provides a new direction in the development of Islamic education models. The study successfully identified convergences between Freire's critical pedagogy and Al-Ghazali's transformative spirituality, demonstrating that these seemingly disparate traditions share fundamental commitments to human dignity, dialogical learning, and the integration of knowledge with action. Most significantly, the research produced the Transformative Islamic Education Paradigm (TIEP), a comprehensive theoretical framework comprising five integrated dimensions: spiritual-ethical foundation, critical dialogical pedagogy, experiential

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constructivist learning, character-based assessment, and socially engaged praxis. This framework operates through a cyclical process of dialectical spiritual constructivism, uniquely integrating critical consciousness with spiritual development.

The TIEP framework makes significant theoretical contributions by challenging the false dichotomy between secular critical pedagogy and traditional Islamic education, advancing constructivist theory by incorporating spiritual epistemology, and extending Freire's concept of conscientization through Al-Ghazali's muhasabah. Practically, the framework offers concrete applications across curriculum design, pedagogical practice, assessment systems, and institutional culture, enabling Islamic educational institutions to develop holistic learning environments that integrate spiritual objectives with critical thinking outcomes while maintaining Islamic authenticity.

This study acknowledges several limitations as library research without empirical validation in actual educational settings. Future research should conduct action research implementing the TIEP framework in diverse Islamic educational contexts, develop culturally appropriate assessment instruments, expand the theoretical synthesis by incorporating other relevant thinkers, investigate contextual adaptations across different environments, conduct longitudinal studies examining long-term impacts, and explore technology integration. Addressing these limitations will strengthen the development of Islamic education that is simultaneously authentic, critical, and transformative.

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