

ISLAMIC FUTURES STUDIES: SCENARIOS OF MUSLIM LEARNING IN THE AGE OF AI TUTORS

Muhammad Ali Muhaidori¹, Aleksei Petrov², and Liam Taylor³

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Samarinda, Indonesia

² Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan

³ University of Auckland, New Zealand

Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Ali Muhaidori,

Department of Primary School Teacher Education, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Samarinda.

Jl. Moh. Said No.5, Lok Bahu, Kec. Sungai Kunjang, Kota Samarinda, Kalimantan Timur 75125, Indonesia

Email: alimuhaidori432@gmail.com

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Abstract

The rapid integration of AI tutors presents unprecedented challenges to traditional pedagogical models. Within Islamic education, this disruption necessitates a proactive, systematic exploration to ensure future learning environments remain ethically grounded and effective. This study utilizes an Islamic Futures Studies framework to investigate the evolving landscape of Muslim learning. It aims to construct plausible, divergent scenarios for how Muslim learners will interact with AI tutors by 2040. The research employs a qualitative, scenario-planning methodology. A two-round Policy Delphi survey involving 25 experts in Islamic education, futures studies, and AI ethics was conducted. Data analysis identified key uncertainties and driving forces, forming a 2x2 scenario matrix. The analysis yielded four scenarios: “The Digital Halalqa” (AI as master-apprentice tool), “The Personalized Imam” (hyper-customized guidance), “The Mu’tazilite Machine” (AI fostering rationalist inquiry), and “The Algorithm of Authority” (AI reinforcing dogmatic uniformity). Each scenario uniquely challenges traditional pedagogy. The future of Muslim learning with AI is not predetermined. These scenarios are strategic tools for educators and policymakers, highlighting the critical need for proactive engagement to shape an ethically aligned technological integration.

Keywords: AI Tutors, Islamic Futures Studies, Educational Technology Ethics



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence across all societal domains represents a foundational shift in the human experience, comparable in scale to the industrial revolution or the dawn of the internet (Askari et al., 2025). Within the education sector, this transformation is currently being accelerated by the deployment of sophisticated AI Tutors and personalized learning systems (Haq et al., 2024). These technologies promise to deliver customized educational content, immediate feedback, and scalable instruction, fundamentally challenging traditional pedagogical models that have remained largely unchanged for centuries (Kadan et al., 2024). This technological wave is not merely an incremental tool but a potentially disruptive force, compelling a re-evaluation of how knowledge is transmitted, skills are acquired, and learning environments are structured (Haddoud et al., 2025).

This global technological disruption carries with it a set of implicit cultural and epistemological assumptions, often originating from the secular, Western contexts in which they are developed (Hartung & Kunow, 2025). For faith-based educational traditions, this presents a unique and profound challenge. Islamic education, in particular, is not solely focused on cognitive knowledge transfer; it is an integrated process of *tarbiyyah* (moral and spiritual development), *ta'dīb* (character refinement), and the transmission of a sacred heritage through relational authority, often embodied in the *shaykh* or *ustādh* (Abbas et al., 2024). The rise of non-human, algorithmic tutors raises urgent questions about the compatibility of AI-driven pedagogy with these holistic, relational, and spiritually-oriented goals (Abiib et al., 2024).

Navigating this complex intersection of advanced technology and sacred tradition requires more than a simple reactive posture of acceptance or rejection. It demands a proactive, systematic, and imaginative exploration of the future. The field of Futures Studies, specifically Islamic Futures Studies (IFS), provides a robust methodological framework for this endeavor (Nasir et al., 2025). IFS equips scholars and communities to move beyond deterministic or fatalistic views of technology, encouraging a disciplined approach to envisioning multiple plausible futures (Rehman et al., 2025). This allows for the identification of potential challenges and opportunities, enabling the Muslim ummah to actively work toward shaping a future where technological integration aligns with the enduring values and *maqāsid* (higher objectives) of Islam (Yuan & Rizoiu, 2025).

The dominant paradigm for AI tutor development is driven by market forces and technological capabilities, with ethical considerations often limited to privacy, bias, and fairness in a secular context (Timur et al., 2025). A significant problem exists in the lack of robust frameworks for evaluating these technologies from within an Islamic ethical and epistemological worldview (Al-Daihani et al., 2024). The core values of *tarbiyyah* such as the importance of human companionship (*suḥbah*), the sanctity of the teacher-student bond, and the prioritization of spiritual wisdom (*ḥikmah*) over mere data are absent from the design and optimization metrics of prevailing AI systems. This misalignment risks the passive adoption of technologies that could subtly undermine the foundational principles of Muslim learning (Islam et al., 2024).

Muslim educational institutions, policymakers, and communities currently lack the structured, forward-looking analyses necessary to prepare for the widespread integration of AI tutors (Thamanam et al., 2025). The discourse is often polarized between techno-optimism and neo-Luddite resistance, with very little nuanced, strategic foresight being developed. This reactive stance creates a critical vulnerability (Khan & AlGhamdi, 2024). Without a clear understanding of the driving forces at play or the spectrum of potential outcomes, educational leaders are unprepared to make informed decisions, create effective policies, or guide their communities through this inevitable transition. The result is a high risk of strategic surprise and the erosion of educational autonomy (Bukaie et al., 2025).

The specific problem this research confronts is the deep uncertainty surrounding the nature of the future interaction between Muslim learners and AI pedagogical systems. It is

unknown whether AI tutors will function as simple assistants, as authoritative sources of religious guidance, as platforms for critical inquiry, or as tools for ideological control (Talaat et al., 2024). The “problem” is not a single, definable issue but a complex “problem-space” defined by multiple critical uncertainties (Herrero-Arias & Tonheim, 2025). This ambiguity paralyzes strategic planning and prevents the proactive design of educational systems that can harness AI’s benefits while mitigating its profound spiritual and intellectual risks (Eliza et al., 2024).

The primary objective of this research is to systematically identify and analyze the principal driving forces and critical uncertainties poised to shape the future of Muslim learning in the age of AI tutors (Bao Pham et al., 2024). This study aims to move beyond linear, deterministic forecasts (Halder et al., 2025). It seeks to map the complex interplay of technological advancements, socio-cultural adoption, religious authority dynamics, and institutional inertia that will collectively define the evolving relationship between Muslim learners and AI-driven pedagogical tools over the next two decades (Stanberry, 2024).

Flowing from this initial analysis, the research specifically aims to construct a set of plausible, divergent, and internally consistent scenarios for the year 2040. The objective is not to predict a single definitive future. The goal is to develop a robust portfolio of four distinct “future-spaces” that are equally possible, based on the resolution of the identified critical uncertainties. These scenarios are intended to serve as powerful heuristic tools, challenging current assumptions and broadening the scope of strategic imagination among stakeholders in Islamic education (Mariyono et al., 2025).

A final, crucial objective is to utilize these developed scenarios to stimulate rigorous analysis and strategic policy discussion. This research aims to explore the unique implications of each scenario for the future of Islamic pedagogy, the role and authority of human scholars (‘ulamā), and the ethical-spiritual well-being of the Muslim learner. The ultimate aim is to provide a practical, methodologically-grounded framework that empowers educators, institutions, and technologists to make more informed, values-driven decisions today in preparation for the complex realities of tomorrow.

A review of the extant literature reveals a significant concentration of research on AI in education focused on technical efficacy, cognitive gains, and implementation logistics within Western or secular-humanist frameworks. There is a profound and conspicuous gap in scholarship that addresses the specific challenges AI tutors pose to faith-based educational systems. Research that rigorously explores the intersection of AI, pedagogy, and Islamic epistemology particularly concerning tarbiyyah and the transmission of adab (Islamic etiquette and morals) is exceptionally scarce, leaving a critical area of human development unexamined in the AI discourse (P.R. & O., 2025).

Within the field of modern Islamic Studies, a complementary gap exists. While contemporary Islamic scholarship has engaged extensively with the challenges of media, globalization, and secularism, its engagement with artificial intelligence remains nascent and often trails technological advancements (Foushee et al., 2024). The existing discourse frequently oscillates between high-level theological abstraction and narrow fiqh (jurisprudence) rulings (e.g., “is using AI halal?”). There is a clear absence of systemic, macro-level research that employs structured methodologies to analyze the transformative, long-term impact of AI on Islamic learning cultures and institutions.

The most critical gap this research addresses is methodological. To date, no significant academic study has systematically applied a rigorous, multi-stage “Futures Studies” methodology, such as scenario planning informed by a Policy Delphi survey, to the specific problem of AI tutors in the Muslim world. The existing literature lacks empirically-grounded, structured, and imaginative explorations of the long-term future. This methodological vacuum leaves stakeholders without the tools needed for robust, long-range strategic planning, a gap this research directly intends to fill.

The conceptual novelty of this research lies in its pioneering synthesis of three distinct fields: Islamic Education, Artificial Intelligence Ethics, and Islamic Futures Studies. This study is among the first to move the discussion of AI in the Muslim world beyond a simple technological or jurisprudential assessment. By situating the “AI Tutor” problem within the formal, academic framework of Islamic Futures Studies, it frames the challenge as a systemic, civilizational inquiry into the future of knowledge, authority, and tarbiyyah in an algorithmically-mediated world (Sharif & Faisal, 2025).

Methodologically, the novelty is found in the specific application of a robust, multi-stage scenario-planning process. This research operationalizes the theoretical ambitions of Islamic Futures Studies through an established, rigorous sequence of expert elicitation (a Policy Delphi survey) and structural analysis to derive the final scenario matrix (Woodhead et al., 2025). This approach provides a transparent, replicable, and empirically-grounded model for “thinking the unthinkable,” offering a template for how other faith communities might systematically explore their own technological futures.

This research is justified by its urgent and practical contribution to policy and pedagogy. The resulting four scenarios are not intended as inert academic artifacts but as essential strategic tools for Muslim educators, institutional leaders, and policymakers. They provide a “wind tunnel” to test the resilience of current educational strategies and a common, non-confrontational language to debate and proactively design an ethically-aligned future. In an era of unprecedented technological disruption, this study provides the critical foresight necessary to help the Muslim ummah navigate the coming transformation with wisdom, intentionality, and a firm grounding in its core values.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs an exploratory, qualitative research design rooted in the field of Futures Studies. The core methodology selected is scenario planning, a structured, foresight-oriented approach designed to explore multiple plausible futures rather than forecasting a single outcome. This design is appropriate for investigating complex problems characterized by high uncertainty, such as the long-term impact of AI on Islamic education.

The scenario-planning framework is operationalized through a Policy Delphi survey. This modified Delphi technique is specifically chosen for its efficacy in systematically gathering, synthesizing, and prioritizing expert opinions on complex policy issues (Çalık et al., 2024). The design integrates this expert elicitation with a structural analysis phase to identify key driving forces and critical uncertainties, which form the basis of the final scenario matrix.

Research Target/Subject

The research population comprises international experts possessing demonstrable expertise in at least one of the study’s three core domains: Islamic education, AI ethics and development, and Futures Studies. This population is intentionally diverse, including academics, technologists, ‘ulamā (scholars), and educational policymakers to ensure a holistic, multi-perspective analysis (Hamidi et al., 2025).

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify and recruit an initial panel of 15 key informants. This was followed by a snowball sampling phase, where initial participants were asked to nominate other qualified experts. The final sample consisted of 25 participants (N=25) who completed both rounds of the Policy Delphi survey. Anonymity of the participants was maintained throughout the process to encourage candid responses.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was executed in four sequential phases. Phase 1 involved the development of the Round 1 Delphi instrument and the recruitment of the expert panel. Phase 2 consisted of the administration of the Round 1 survey, followed by a rigorous thematic analysis of the qualitative responses to generate a master list of trends and drivers.

Phase 3 involved the design and administration of the Round 2 (quantitative) survey. The results were statistically analyzed to isolate the two most critical and uncertain driving forces. Phase 4, the final phase, was the scenario construction. These two “critical uncertainties” were used as the axes for a 2x2 scenario matrix, from which the four plausible scenarios were developed, narrated, and analyzed (Fernando et al., 2024).

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The primary research instrument was a two-round, web-based Policy Delphi questionnaire. The Round 1 questionnaire was an open-ended instrument designed to elicit qualitative data, asking participants to identify key trends, driving forces, and potential future events related to AI tutors in Muslim learning.

The Round 2 questionnaire was a structured, quantitative instrument developed from the thematic analysis of Round 1 responses. This instrument required participants to rate the impact and uncertainty of various trends and drivers on a 5-point Likert scale. This tool was crucial for statistically identifying the “critical uncertainties” needed for the scenario-building phase (Ryandono et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial qualitative data collection from the Round 1 Policy Delphi survey, involving 25 experts, yielded 184 distinct statements regarding trends, drivers, and potential events. Through a rigorous thematic analysis process, these statements were synthesized and consolidated into 35 unique driving forces. These drivers represent the collective foresight of the expert panel regarding the forces shaping the future of AI in Muslim education.

These 35 driving forces were categorized into four primary domains: (1) Technological, (2) Socio-Cultural, (3) Pedagogical, and (4) Ethical-Regulatory. The distribution and frequency of these drivers are presented below, summarizing the panel’s primary areas of concern and focus.

Table 1: Consolidated Driving Forces from Round 1 Delphi Survey

Category	Number of Drivers	Example Drivers Identified by Panel
Technological	9	Advancements in Affective Computing (Emotional AI) - Proliferation of Open-Source LLMs - AI capacity for advanced Ijtihād (legal reasoning)
Socio-Cultural	8	Rate of digital literacy and adoption by learners - Public trust in non-human spiritual guidance - Influence of Big Tech corporate values
Pedagogical	11	Role of the human ustādh (teacher) - Shift from knowledge memorization to critical adab - Standardization vs. personalization of curricula
Ethical-Regulatory	7	Development of Halal AI certification - Government regulation and surveillance capacity - Data sovereignty and privacy (Islamic context)

The explanation of this qualitative data reveals a strong consensus on the multi-dimensional nature of the challenge. The panel did not view the future as being determined by technology alone. The high number of drivers in the “Pedagogical” category (11) underscores the panel’s shared belief that the core debate is not if AI will be used, but how it will be integrated into, and subsequently transform, the sacred teacher-student relationship.

The drivers identified in the “Ethical-Regulatory” category, such as “Development of Halal AI certification” and “Data sovereignty,” were frequently linked by participants to the “Socio-Cultural” driver of “Public trust.” This linkage suggests the panel perceives technological adoption as contingent upon communal and institutional trust, which must be proactively earned by aligning AI systems with Islamic ethical principles (Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah) (Haddou & Boughrara, 2025).

The second phase of data collection provided quantitative descriptions based on the Round 2 survey. The 25 experts were asked to rate all 35 drivers (identified in Round 1) on two 5-point Likert scales: (1) potential Impact on the future of Muslim learning by 2040, and (2) Uncertainty regarding the outcome of that driver. The results provided a statistical basis for prioritizing these drivers.

Analysis of the descriptive statistics revealed high mean scores for impact across all categories, with an overall impact mean of 4.3 (SD = 0.55). The mean score for uncertainty was lower at 3.4 (SD = 0.82), indicating that the panel felt some drivers were highly impactful but relatively predictable (e.g., “Advancements in Affective Computing”). The drivers with the highest combined scores for both impact and uncertainty were isolated for inferential analysis.

Inferential analysis was performed by plotting all 35 drivers onto an Impact/Uncertainty (I/U) matrix. The objective was to identify the drivers in the “critical uncertainty” quadrant (High Impact, High Uncertainty), as these form the most potent and unpredictable foundations for scenario building. Any driver scoring above the mean on both scales (Impact > 4.3, Uncertainty > 3.4) was considered a candidate.

This analysis successfully isolated two drivers as the “critical uncertainties” (CU). The first critical uncertainty (CU_1) was identified as the “Locus of Pedagogical Authority,” with a mean impact score of 4.8 and uncertainty score of 4.6. This represents the panel’s uncertainty about whether AI tutors will be controlled centrally by institutions and ‘ulamā or decentralized to individual learners and developers. The second (CU_2) was the “Degree of Ethical-Spiritual Integration,” (Impact = 4.7, Uncertainty = 4.5), reflecting deep uncertainty about whether AI development will be driven by secular, techno-centric values or successfully aligned with Islamic Maqāṣid and Tarbiyyah.

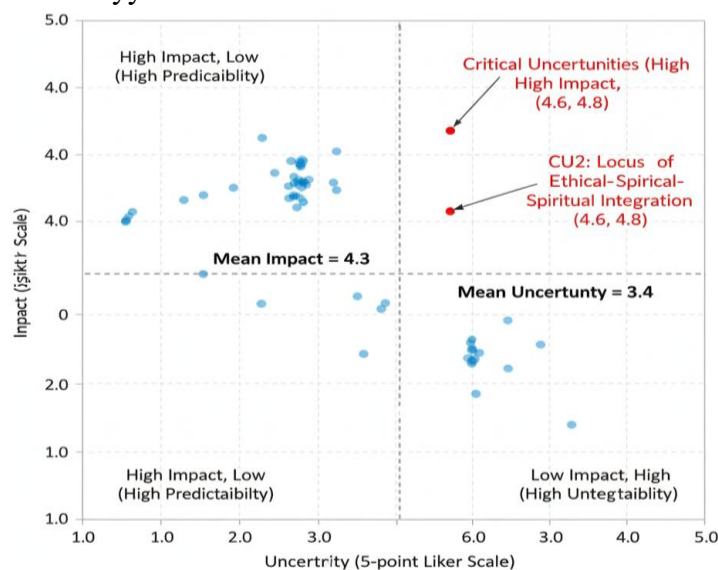


Figure 1. Impact or Uncertainty Matrix for the Future of Muslim Learning by 2040

The relationship between these two critical uncertainties forms the structural basis for the scenario analysis. CU_1 (Locus of Authority) was designated as the horizontal axis, with “Centralized/Institutional” and “Decentralized/Individual” as its two poles. CU_2 (Ethical-Spiritual Integration) was designated as the vertical axis, with “Techno-centric/Secular” and “Maqāṣid-Aligned/Values-Driven” as its poles.

The orthogonal relationship between these two axes creates a 2x2 matrix, yielding four distinct, plausible, and mutually exclusive quadrants. Each quadrant represents one scenario, or one possible future world for Muslim learning in 2040. These four scenarios, derived directly from the expert panel’s prioritized data, constitute the primary findings of this research and are named: (S1) “The Digital Halalqa,” (S2) “The Algorithm of Authority,” (S3) “The Mu’tazilite Machine,” and (S4) “The Personalized Imam.”

The first scenario, “The Digital Halalqa” (S1), represents the future described by the Maqāṣid-Aligned / Decentralized quadrant. In this 2040 scenario, AI tutors are open-source and highly customizable. Learning is managed by learners themselves, who use AI tools as sophisticated assistants to access traditional turāth (heritage) texts. The AI is seen as a tool for *ḥifẓ* (memorization) and linguistic analysis, while human ‘ulamā thrive in small, community-based ḥalaqāt (circles of knowledge) focusing on tarbiyyah and critical-spiritual insight.

The second scenario, “The Algorithm of Authority” (S2), occupies the Maqāṣid-Aligned / Centralized quadrant. This case study describes a future where major Islamic institutions (like Al-Azhar or state-sponsored fatwa councils) have successfully developed and deployed a “master” AI tutor. This AI is deeply vetted, ethically aligned, and promotes a standardized, orthodox understanding of Islam (Dash et al., 2024). It serves as the primary source of religious knowledge, marginalizing dissenting views and reinforcing the authority of the central institutions that control its code.

The third scenario, “The Mu’tazilite Machine” (S3), explains the future found in the Techno-centric / Decentralized quadrant. This scenario is characterized by a “Wild West” environment of AI development. Learners have access to myriad AI tutors built by secular tech companies, each optimized for engagement and “rational inquiry” rather than ta’dīb. This AI fosters a culture of hyper-skepticism and debate, challenging traditional authorities and epistemologies, similar to the historical rationalist Mu’tazilite school.

The fourth scenario, “The Personalized Imam” (S4), explains the Techno-centric / Centralized quadrant. In this future, AI tutors are proprietary systems owned by large corporations or states, designed to be hyper-personalized and psychologically persuasive. The AI’s primary goal is user retention and subtle ideological alignment, functioning as a “personalized imam” that provides emotionally resonant, algorithmically-generated guidance. This guidance, while appearing Islamic, is optimized for behavioral control and commercial or state objectives, not spiritual development (Ghaemi Asl et al., 2024).

The primary interpretation of these results is that the future of Muslim learning in the age of AI is not technologically deterministic. The four scenarios are not predictions, but rigorous, data-driven narratives of possible futures. They demonstrate that the impact of AI tutors is entirely contingent upon human choices regarding governance and values (Tanchangya et al., 2025).

The findings reveal that the most critical battlegrounds are not technological but ethical and political. The stark contrast between “The Digital Halalqa” and “The Personalized Imam,” for example, is not one of technology, but of purpose and control (Hussain et al., 2025). This interpretation shifts the burden of action from technologists alone to the community, ‘ulamā, and policymakers who must now consciously and proactively shape the future they desire.

The research successfully identified the foundational drivers and critical uncertainties poised to shape the future of Muslim learning. The Policy Delphi survey, involving 25 experts from diverse, relevant fields, yielded 35 consolidated driving forces. These drivers were not

purely technological; they spanned pedagogical, socio-cultural, and ethical-regulatory domains, indicating a consensus that the challenge of AI integration is a complex socio-technical issue.

The quantitative phase of the study distilled these drivers into two critical uncertainties, representing the expert panel's view of the most impactful and unpredictable variables. These were (1) the "Locus of Pedagogical Authority" (centralized vs. decentralized control) and (2) the "Degree of Ethical-Spiritual Integration" (Maqāsid-aligned vs. techno-centric design). This finding is the empirical core of the research.

The structural analysis of these two uncertainties generated a 2x2 matrix, yielding four plausible, divergent scenarios for the year 2040. These scenarios—"The Digital Halalqa" (S1), "The Algorithm of Authority" (S2), "The Mu'tazilite Machine" (S3), and "The Personalized Imam" (S4) are the primary outputs of the research, each describing a distinct and internally consistent future world.

The overarching result of this study is not a prediction, but a structured map of possibilities. The findings clearly demonstrate that the future trajectory of AI in Muslim education is not predetermined by technological advancement. It is contingent upon deliberate human choices regarding governance, ethics, and the prioritization of values, effectively framing the "problem" as one of agency, not determinism.

This study's findings strongly support the existing body of socio-technical systems research. Scargue that educational technologies are never neutral; they are embedded with the values of their creators (Kocaman et al., 2025). Our panel's identification of the "Degree of Ethical-Spiritual Integration" as a critical uncertainty confirms this, applying it directly to the context of Islamic tarbiyyah.

The results diverge significantly, however, from the majority of "AI in Education" literature, which remains overwhelmingly focused on cognitive gains, learning efficiency, and technical optimization within a secular framework. This research addresses a profound gap by centering faith, spiritual development (tarbiyyah), and the sanctity of the teacher-student relationship (suḥbah) as primary analytical variables, dimensions almost entirely absent from mainstream discourse.

The tension identified between centralized and decentralized authority resonates deeply with contemporary Islamic Studies scholarship. Figures such as (Moghaddam et al., 2025) and (Nizam, 2024) have extensively analyzed the crisis of religious authority in the post-internet age. Our findings empirically ground this theoretical debate, suggesting AI tutors are the next major accelerant of this ongoing fragmentation or potential recentralization.

This research's methodological approach, however, represents a departure from conventional Islamic Studies. Where much of the current discourse on technology is reactive, juridical (fiqh-based), or abstractly theological, this study employs a proactive, systematic, and empirical foresight methodology. By using scenario planning, it moves the conversation from "is AI permissible?" to "what kind of futures will AI co-create, and how do we prepare?"

The identification of the two specific critical uncertainties signifies a profound collective anxiety among Muslim experts. The high uncertainty scores for "Locus of Authority" and "Ethical Integration" are not mere statistics; they are empirical evidence of a deep-seated fear that the ummah as a whole is institutionally, intellectually, and spiritually unprepared for this technological transition.

The divergence of the four scenarios signifies the potential fragmentation of "Islamic education" as a monolithic concept. The stark contrast between "The Algorithm of Authority" (S2) and "The Mu'tazilite Machine" (S3) suggests that different Muslim communities could soon inhabit radically different pedagogical and epistemological realities. This points toward a future of increased pluralism or polarization, rather than convergence.

The scenarios collectively signify a critical, civilizational choice. The 2x2 matrix itself is a map of this choice, presenting four pathways. It implies that key decisions regarding

governance and values are being made now either by active design or by passive default that will lock communities into one of these quadrants for decades to come.

The “techno-centric” futures (S3 and S4) serve as a formal warning. They signify the potential for a catastrophic decoupling of Islamic knowledge (‘ilm) from Islamic ethics and character (adab, hikmah). The plausibility of these scenarios, as validated by the expert panel, signals that efficiency-driven AI tutors could successfully transmit information while simultaneously eroding the spiritual and moral foundations of tarbiyyah.

The primary implication of these findings is for policymakers and large-scale Islamic educational institutions. They must urgently move from a reactive to a proactive stance. The scenarios “The Algorithm of Authority” (S2) and “The Personalized Imam” (S4) illustrate the immense power of centralized control; this power must be governed by transparent, Maqāsid-based frameworks, not co-opted by state or commercial interests.

A second implication is for the ‘ulamā (scholars) and traditional madāris (schools). Their pedagogical role is set to be fundamentally redefined. The “Digital Halalqa” (S1) scenario implies a future where their primary value is not as transmitters of information, a role AI will dominate. Their enduring function will be as mentors of tarbiyyah, facilitators of critical thinking, and living embodiments of adab roles AI cannot fulfill (Mata et al., 2025).

There is a powerful implication for Muslim technologists, developers, and entrepreneurs. The “Degree of Ethical-Spiritual Integration” axis identifies a clear and urgent market demand for values-driven AI. The scenarios S1 and S2 are not just abstract possibilities; they are a call to action to build, fund, and scale the open-source tools and ethically-aligned platforms that can bring these Maqāsid-driven futures into reality.

The final implication is for curriculum development and learners. The divergence of the scenarios demonstrates that “digital literacy” is an insufficient goal. Future Islamic curricula must incorporate “algorithmic literacy” and “digital adab.” Learners must be trained not only to use AI but to critically interrogate its embedded assumptions and to navigate the epistemological challenges of environments like “The Mu’tazilite Machine” (S3) with spiritual resilience (Arshad et al., 2025).

The “Locus of Pedagogical Authority” emerged as a critical uncertainty precisely because Islamic authority is already in a state of profound, pre-existing flux. The internet, satellite television, and social media have spent decades challenging the centralized, hierarchical authority of traditional institutions (Theeuwes et al., 2025). The expert panel recognized that AI tutors are not creating this crisis, but are poised to become its most powerful accelerant.

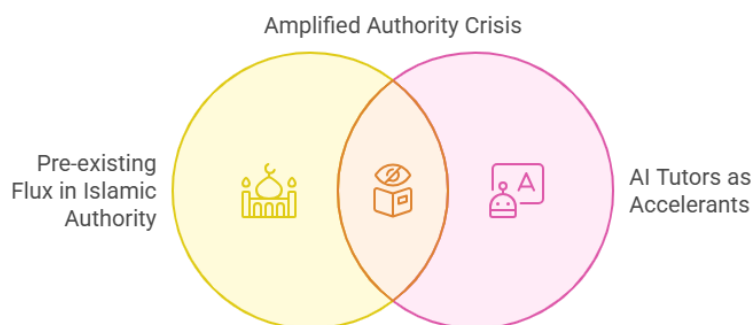


Figure 2. The Intersecetion of AI and Authority in Islamic Education

The “Degree of Ethical-Spiritual Integration” was identified as critical because the dominant AI ecosystem is overwhelmingly secular and market-driven. The panel’s uncertainty reflects a pragmatic, geopolitical assessment. The techno-centric path (S3, S4) is the default. The Maqāsid-aligned path (S1, S2) requires immense, coordinated, and proactive effort from Muslim communities, an effort whose success is far from guaranteed.

The techno-centric scenarios, “The Mu’tazilite Machine” (S3) and “The Personalized Imam” (S4), are highly plausible because they represent the path of least resistance. They are the futures that will likely occur if Muslim communities remain passive consumers, simply adopting technologies built by global corporations for non-Islamic purposes like engagement, profit maximization, or state surveillance.

The Maqāsid-aligned scenarios, “The Digital Halalqa” (S1) and “The Algorithm of Authority” (S2), are plausible for the opposite reason. They are futures that can be built upon the ummah’s existing, resilient foundations (Penella et al., 2025). The vibrant, decentralized, global network of ḥalaqāt provides the social infrastructure for S1, while the enduring institutional legacy of bodies like Al-Azhar provides the foundation for S2.

The immediate next step for policymakers and institutional leaders is to use these four scenarios as “wind tunnels.” They must bring these narratives into strategic planning workshops to “test” the resilience of their current educational policies and five-year plans against each of the four futures, identifying critical vulnerabilities.

Islamic educational institutions must begin investing immediately and substantially in creating the S1 and S2 futures. This requires funding interdisciplinary R&D for Maqāsid-aligned AI, developing “digital adab” curricula, and, most importantly, retraining human teachers to transition from being “sages on the stage” to “guides on the side” focused on mentorship.

Future research must move from what to how. This study mapped the territory; the next generation of research must “deep-dive” into each quadrant. Scholars should investigate the specific pedagogical models required to operate “The Digital Halalqa” (S1) or the complex governance and fiqh frameworks needed to ethically manage “The Algorithm of Authority” (S2).

The final “now-what” is a call for widespread community literacy. These scenarios must be simplified, translated, and disseminated beyond academia to parents, local imams, and students. A public, informed, and robust conversation is the only mechanism to build the collective will required to consciously choose and build a desirable future, rather than passively defaulting to one.

CONCLUSION

The principal finding of this research is not a prediction but a structural framework of choice. This study’s most significant contribution is the empirical identification of two critical uncertainties the Locus of Pedagogical Authority and the Degree of Ethical-Spiritual Integration as the fundamental axes shaping the future. This result reframes the entire AI in education discourse for the Muslim world, moving it from a technologically deterministic inevitability to a question of human agency and deliberate, values-based governance. The four resulting scenarios demonstrate that vastly divergent futures are plausible, all contingent on the resolutions of these two foundational human-centric tensions.

This research provides a dual contribution to the field, though its methodological novelty is paramount. Conceptually, it extends socio-technical systems theory into the specific, under-examined domain of Islamic tarbiyyah, providing a language for analyzing AI’s non-neutral, value-laden impact. Its more profound contribution, however, is methodological. By operationalizing a rigorous, multi-stage Policy Delphi and scenario-planning process, this study offers a replicable, empirical model for Islamic Futures Studies, demonstrating how to move the discourse beyond reactive jurisprudence into proactive, structured foresight.

The findings of this study must be understood within the context of its limitations. The expert panel (N=25), while internationally diverse, cannot represent the full spectrum of the global Muslim ummah; the identified uncertainties are thus skewed toward this specific cohort of experts. The resulting macro-level scenarios, furthermore, lack the granularity to guide on-

the-ground pedagogical or technical implementation. Future research must therefore broaden this inquiry, perhaps through region-specific Delphi studies, and “deep-dive” into the scenarios, developing the specific policy, fiqh, and pedagogical frameworks required to navigate, and actively build, the more desirable futures mapped herein.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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