https://research.adra.ac.id/index.php/islamicstudies
P - ISSN: 3048-3980
E - ISSN: 3048-4146

Reimagining Tarbiyah: Designing a Progressive Islamic Pedagogical Framework for the 21st-Century Cosmopolitan Learner

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ABSTRACT

Background. Contemporary Islamic education encounters complex challenges in maintaining the formative objectives of *tarbiyah* while adapting to digital transformation, cultural diversity, global mobility, and evolving knowledge landscapes. Therefore, a renewed educational framework is needed to connect Islamic educational values with the competencies required for twenty-first-century learning.

Purpose. This study aimed to develop a Progressive *Tarbiyah* Framework for preparing cosmopolitan learners by integrating Islamic educational principles with contemporary pedagogical competencies. Specifically, it explored the conceptual foundations, essential dimensions, and educational implications of a future-oriented Islamic learning model.

Method. A qualitative conceptual-design approach was employed through philosophical inquiry, integrative literature analysis, comparative conceptual synthesis, framework construction, and expert review. The study examined classical and contemporary Islamic educational perspectives alongside current pedagogical theories to formulate an adaptive framework.

Results. The findings identify nine interconnected dimensions of progressive *tarbiyah*: spiritual-moral grounding, *adab*-based learning, critical and reflective inquiry, learner agency, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, collaborative responsibility, creativity, and socially meaningful knowledge application. The study further introduces the concept of the rooted cosmopolitan learner, characterized by religious commitment, intellectual openness, ethical responsibility, digital discernment, intercultural sensitivity, and constructive social engagement.

Conclusion. This study concludes that progressive *tarbiyah* does not require the abandonment of Islamic educational traditions but rather their reinterpretation through pedagogical approaches responsive to contemporary realities. The proposed framework provides a conceptual bridge between Islamic educational philosophy and twenty-first-century learning, offering implications for curriculum development, teacher education, digital learning, and future empirical research across diverse Islamic educational contexts.

KEYWORDS

Cosmopolitan Learner, Digital Literacy, Progressive Tarbiyah.

Citation: Krasniqi, E., Lika, L., & Hoxha, E. (2026). Reimagining Tarbiyah: Designing a Progressive Islamic Pedagogical Framework for the 21st-Century Cosmopolitan Learner. *Islamic Studies in the World, 3*(3), 174–191. https://doi.org/10.17323/islamicstudies.v3i3.4457

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Received: January 12, 2026

Accepted: March 15, 2026

Published: June 24, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has historically understood tarbiyah as a comprehensive process of human formation encompassing intellectual development, moral cultivation, spiritual refinement, social responsibility, and disciplined engagement with knowledge. This understanding distinguishes education from the mere transmission of

information because learning is expected to shape the learner's character, judgment, conduct, and relationship with God, society, and the wider world (Abdelmajeed & Alansary, 2026; Dinçer & Dilek, 2025; Karami & Saeidi Rezvani, 2025). Contemporary educational environments, however, are increasingly defined by digital connectivity, global mobility, cultural plurality, artificial intelligence, transnational media, and rapidly changing forms of knowledge production. These transformations require renewed reflection on how tarbiyah can remain faithful to its normative foundations while responding effectively to the conditions experienced by twenty-first-century learners.

The contemporary learner is increasingly cosmopolitan in the sense that knowledge, identity, and social interaction are formed across multiple cultural, linguistic, national, and digital spaces (B. Han & Ji, 2026; Karim & Harwood, 2026; S. Li dkk., 2025). Muslim students may receive religious education within local institutions while simultaneously engaging with international academic discourse, global popular culture, social media, multilingual information networks, and diverse moral perspectives. Such exposure creates opportunities for intellectual growth and intercultural understanding, yet it also introduces challenges related to identity fragmentation, misinformation, moral uncertainty, ideological polarization, and superficial engagement with religious knowledge. Islamic pedagogy must therefore prepare learners not only to preserve religious commitments but also to participate intelligently and ethically in complex pluralistic environments.

Educational reform within Muslim societies has increasingly emphasized critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, digital competence, global citizenship, and learner-centered instruction. These competencies are frequently adopted from contemporary educational discourse without sufficient integration with Islamic concepts of knowledge, ethics, responsibility, and human development (Ferdiansyah dkk., 2025; Hajar dkk., 2026; Niloy dkk., 2025). Traditional Islamic pedagogical discourse, on the other hand, sometimes emphasizes preservation, discipline, and moral formation without fully addressing the epistemic demands of digital culture and cosmopolitan life. The challenge is not to choose between tradition and progress but to construct a pedagogical model in which Islamic educational principles can guide meaningful engagement with contemporary knowledge and social realities.

The central problem addressed by this study is the growing mismatch between inherited models of Islamic pedagogy and the educational conditions facing contemporary Muslim learners (Ali dkk., 2026; Chen & Wang, 2025; Shahini dkk., 2025). Some approaches to tarbiyah remain heavily teacher-centered, content-oriented, and focused on memorization or normative transmission, while students increasingly require capacities for interpretation, inquiry, evaluation, problem solving, and ethical judgment. Such pedagogical limitations may weaken the ability of learners to connect religious knowledge with complex issues involving science, technology, global citizenship, cultural difference, and rapidly changing social realities. A renewed framework is therefore needed to preserve the formative purpose of tarbiyah while extending its pedagogical reach.

A second problem concerns the relationship between religious identity and cosmopolitan engagement. Educational discourse sometimes presents Islamic identity and global citizenship as competing commitments, creating the impression that strong religious formation limits openness to cultural diversity or that cosmopolitanism requires weakening particular religious attachments (Aschner Rosselli dkk., 2025; Samandarov dkk., 2026; Suleman dkk., 2025). This opposition overlooks the possibility that Islamic ethical traditions can support responsible engagement across cultural boundaries through principles such as justice, compassion, human dignity, knowledge-seeking, trust, moderation, and social responsibility. The pedagogical challenge lies in translating

these values into learning practices that enable students to remain rooted in their religious identity while engaging constructively with difference.

A third problem involves the increasingly powerful role of digital technologies in shaping learning and authority (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano & Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2026; Jafari dkk., 2026; Y. Li dkk., 2026). Students now encounter knowledge through search engines, social media, artificial intelligence systems, online scholars, educational platforms, and globally circulating content. Access to information has expanded dramatically, but the ability to distinguish credible knowledge from misinformation has not developed at the same pace. Islamic education that does not cultivate digital literacy, epistemic responsibility, source criticism, and reflective judgment risks leaving learners vulnerable to both religious misinformation and uncritical dependence on technological systems.

The primary objective of this study is to reconceptualize tarbiyah as a progressive Islamic pedagogical framework that responds to the intellectual, ethical, spiritual, technological, and social conditions of the twenty-first century (Alazmi, 2024; Handoyo, 2024; Javed dkk., 2025). The study seeks to identify which classical educational principles remain foundational and how these principles can be translated into contemporary pedagogical practices. Particular attention is directed toward the relationship among adab, knowledge, critical inquiry, learner agency, moral responsibility, and meaningful participation in society.

The second objective is to design a pedagogical framework suitable for the cosmopolitan Muslim learner. The proposed model aims to integrate Islamic identity formation with intercultural competence, critical thinking, digital literacy, collaboration, creativity, and global ethical awareness (Aljudaya, 2026; Jamaludin dkk., 2026; Na & Jeong, 2026). Such integration is intended to move beyond models that treat modern educational competencies as external additions to Islamic education. Contemporary competencies are instead positioned within a broader moral and epistemological structure in which knowledge remains connected to responsibility, character, and purposeful human development.

The third objective is to establish pedagogical principles that can guide curriculum design, instructional practice, teacher development, and learner assessment within Islamic educational institutions (Mohd Zain dkk., 2026; Muthohar dkk., 2026; Ursavaş dkk., 2026). The study seeks to formulate practical dimensions of progressive tarbiyah that can be adapted to schools, madrasas, Islamic universities, community learning environments, and digitally mediated education. The expected outcome is a coherent framework that enables educators to evaluate whether teaching practices cultivate knowledgeable, reflective, ethically responsible, spiritually grounded, and socially competent learners.

Existing scholarship on Islamic education has extensively discussed concepts such as tarbiyah, ta‘lim, ta’dib, knowledge, morality, spiritual formation, and the purpose of education in Islam (Asiri dkk., 2025; Jabeen & Lux, 2026; Saadh dkk., 2024). Much of this scholarship provides strong philosophical foundations but often remains at the normative or conceptual level. Limited attention has been given to translating these foundations into pedagogical structures capable of addressing digital learning, learner diversity, globalization, critical inquiry, and contemporary competence development. A gap therefore exists between Islamic educational philosophy and operational pedagogy.

Contemporary research on twenty-first-century learning emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, and global competence (Çelik & Dutta, 2025; Phan dkk., 2025; Wang dkk., 2026). Such frameworks have shaped curriculum reform internationally, including within Muslim educational institutions. Their application is frequently

instrumental, however, because competencies are treated as employability skills or academic outcomes without sufficient attention to moral purpose, spiritual responsibility, and epistemic ethics. Islamic education requires a model capable of incorporating these competencies without reducing education to productivity, competitiveness, or technological adaptability.

Research on global citizenship and cosmopolitan education also provides important perspectives on intercultural understanding, human rights, diversity, and transnational responsibility. These frameworks often emerge from secular philosophical traditions and may not adequately address the role of religious identity in shaping moral agency and belonging. Islamic educational scholarship has not yet sufficiently developed a systematic model of cosmopolitan learning rooted in Islamic ethical and epistemological principles. This theoretical gap limits the ability of Islamic pedagogy to contribute distinctively to global educational debates.

The principal novelty of this study lies in proposing a Progressive Tarbiyah Framework that integrates Islamic formative education with contemporary pedagogical competencies. The framework positions tarbiyah as a dynamic process of intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and social development rather than a static model of religious instruction. Its core dimensions include spiritual-moral grounding, adab-based learning, critical and reflective inquiry, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, learner agency, collaborative responsibility, and socially meaningful knowledge application. This formulation provides a bridge between Islamic educational philosophy and twenty-first-century pedagogical practice.

A second element of novelty is the concept of the rooted cosmopolitan learner, defined as a learner who possesses a strong Islamic moral and epistemic identity while remaining intellectually open, culturally literate, critically engaged, and socially responsible across diverse contexts. This concept rejects both educational isolationism and identity-neutral cosmopolitanism. Rooted cosmopolitanism recognizes that meaningful engagement with global diversity does not require the abandonment of religious commitments; it requires the capacity to interpret, articulate, and enact those commitments responsibly within pluralistic environments.

The justification for this research rests on the urgent need for Islamic education to respond constructively to technological transformation, cultural complexity, global interdependence, and changing forms of knowledge authority. Educational institutions that preserve religious content without renewing pedagogy risk producing learners who possess information but lack adaptive judgment, while institutions that pursue innovation without ethical foundations risk weakening the formative purpose of education. A progressive model of tarbiyah offers a middle path by connecting tradition with inquiry, identity with openness, spirituality with intellectual rigor, and digital competence with epistemic responsibility. The study contributes to Islamic education, curriculum studies, comparative pedagogy, educational philosophy, digital learning, and global citizenship education by demonstrating how Islamic pedagogical thought can be rearticulated as a forward-looking framework for the formation of competent, ethical, and cosmopolitan learners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative conceptual-design research approach to develop a progressive Islamic pedagogical framework for the twenty-first-century cosmopolitan learner. The design combined philosophical inquiry, integrative literature analysis, and pedagogical framework development. This approach was selected because the research aimed not merely to describe existing educational practices but to reconstruct the concept of tarbiyah into an operational pedagogical model capable of addressing contemporary intellectual, ethical, technological, and intercultural demands.

The conceptual foundation of the study drew on Islamic educational philosophy, particularly the interrelationship among tarbiyah, ta'lim, ta'dib, adab, knowledge, moral responsibility, spiritual development, and human agency (Al-Sofi, 2026; J. Li dkk., 2023; Shonfeld dkk., 2025). Contemporary educational perspectives were incorporated through literature on critical thinking, transformative learning, learner-centered pedagogy, digital literacy, global competence, intercultural education, and twenty-first-century skills. The study treated these bodies of knowledge as complementary analytical domains rather than as competing educational traditions.

The framework-development process was organized around a synthesis model linking Islamic normative foundations with contemporary pedagogical requirements. Classical principles were examined according to their educational purposes, while contemporary competencies were evaluated according to their compatibility with Islamic conceptions of human development. The resulting framework was designed to preserve the formative character of tarbiyah while expanding its applicability to pluralistic, digitally mediated, and globally interconnected learning environments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The final analytical corpus consisted of 146 scholarly and institutional sources that met the inclusion criteria for conceptual relevance and pedagogical applicability. The corpus comprised 58 sources on Islamic educational philosophy, 34 studies on contemporary pedagogy and twenty-first-century competencies, 21 publications on digital and epistemic literacy, 18 studies on intercultural and cosmopolitan education, and 15 documented educational models from schools, madrasas, universities, and digital learning environments. Conceptual coding identified nine recurring dimensions that were sufficiently robust to form the preliminary Progressive Tarbiyah Framework: spiritual-moral grounding, adab-based learning, critical and reflective inquiry, learner agency, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, collaborative responsibility, creativity, and socially meaningful knowledge application.

Table 1. Distribution of Core Concepts Identified in the Analytical Corpus

Framework Dimension	Sources Showing Strong Relevance (n)	Percentage of Corpus (%)	Dominant Pedagogical Function
Spiritual-moral grounding	118	80.8	Moral purpose and spiritual orientation
Adab-based learning	104	71.2	Ethical teacher–learner relationships
Critical and reflective inquiry	96	65.8	Reasoning and intellectual discernment
Learner agency	88	60.3	Responsible participation and autonomy
Digital epistemic literacy	79	54.1	Source verification and digital responsibility
Intercultural competence	74	50.7	Engagement with cultural and religious diversity
Collaborative	83	56.8	Social learning and collective

responsibility			accountability
Creativity	69	47.3	Innovation and adaptive problem solving
Meaningful knowledge application	91	62.3	Socially relevant and transformative learning

The descriptive pattern indicates that Islamic educational literature remained strongest in spiritual-moral formation and adab, while contemporary pedagogical scholarship contributed more explicitly to critical inquiry, learner agency, digital competence, creativity, and intercultural learning. Meaningful overlap appeared around responsibility, ethical knowledge use, reflective judgment, and socially oriented learning. This overlap provided the conceptual basis for integrating classical Islamic educational principles with contemporary pedagogical competencies without treating either tradition as merely supplementary to the other.

The prominence of spiritual-moral grounding confirms that the formative purpose of tarbiyah remains central to Islamic educational thought. Learning is repeatedly framed as a process of developing the whole person rather than merely increasing cognitive performance. Knowledge acquisition is therefore connected to moral responsibility, self-discipline, social conduct, and spiritual orientation. This pattern differentiates the proposed framework from contemporary competency models that can become primarily instrumental when educational success is measured only through employability, technological adaptability, or academic achievement.

The strong presence of critical inquiry, learner agency, and digital epistemic literacy demonstrates that progressive Islamic pedagogy cannot remain confined to one-directional transmission. Contemporary Muslim learners operate in informational environments where religious, scientific, political, and cultural claims circulate rapidly through digital platforms. Pedagogical development therefore requires learners to examine evidence, evaluate sources, distinguish credible authority, formulate reasoned judgments, and assume responsibility for how knowledge is used. The findings suggest that critical inquiry is compatible with tarbiyah when intellectual freedom is linked to ethical accountability rather than treated as unrestricted individualism.

The framework-development stage produced an initial model containing eleven pedagogical dimensions, which was subsequently reduced to nine after conceptual overlap and redundancy were examined. Self-regulation was integrated into learner agency and adab-based learning because its functions were already represented through disciplined autonomy and ethical responsibility. Global citizenship was incorporated into intercultural competence and collaborative responsibility because the analytical corpus showed that global engagement was more coherent when grounded in specific moral and relational commitments rather than treated as an independent generic competence.

Table 2. Conceptual Refinement of the Progressive Tarbiyah Framework

Preliminary Dimension	Final Status	Final Conceptual Location
Spiritual-moral grounding	Retained	Core foundation
Adab-based learning	Retained	Relational foundation

Critical inquiry	Retained	Intellectual dimension
Reflective learning	Integrated	Critical and reflective inquiry
Learner agency	Retained	Agency dimension
Self-regulation	Integrated	Learner agency and adab
Digital literacy	Refined	Digital epistemic literacy
Intercultural competence	Retained	Cosmopolitan dimension
Global citizenship	Integrated	Intercultural competence and collaborative responsibility
Creativity	Retained	Generative dimension
Knowledge application	Retained	Transformative dimension

Expert review of the preliminary model showed strongest conceptual agreement around spiritual-moral grounding, adab, critical inquiry, digital epistemic literacy, and socially meaningful knowledge application. Reviewers considered these dimensions essential because they connected Islamic educational purposes with the realities of contemporary learning. Greater discussion occurred around cosmopolitanism and learner autonomy, particularly concerning the possibility that both concepts might be interpreted through overly individualistic or identity-neutral assumptions. The revised framework consequently defined cosmopolitanism as ethically rooted openness and learner agency as responsible rather than unrestricted autonomy.

Comparative conceptual inference indicates that the most viable model of progressive tarbiyah is neither a preservationist reconstruction of classical pedagogy nor an uncritical adaptation of contemporary educational theory. Classical Islamic concepts provided normative direction, while contemporary pedagogy supplied instructional mechanisms capable of translating those principles into current learning environments. The synthesis showed that adab becomes pedagogically stronger when combined with dialogic learning, critical inquiry becomes more ethically coherent when connected to responsibility, and digital literacy becomes epistemically meaningful when learners are trained to evaluate both information and authority.

A second inference concerns the relationship between identity and cosmopolitanism. The corpus did not support the assumption that strong Islamic identity necessarily reduces openness to cultural difference. Sources emphasizing moral confidence, intellectual humility, justice, and human dignity were frequently compatible with intercultural engagement and global responsibility. Cosmopolitan competence appeared most sustainable when learners possessed a coherent moral standpoint from which to engage difference rather than being expected to suspend particular religious commitments. The proposed notion of the rooted cosmopolitan learner therefore emerged as a theoretically defensible synthesis rather than a compromise between incompatible educational goals.

Conceptual co-occurrence analysis revealed particularly strong relationships among adab, spiritual-moral grounding, and learner agency. Agency appeared constructive when accompanied by disciplined responsibility, while autonomy detached from moral purpose was more difficult to align with the formative aims of tarbiyah. Critical inquiry was also closely related to digital epistemic

literacy because both required evidence evaluation, source verification, intellectual humility, and awareness of the limitations of one's knowledge. These relationships indicate that the nine dimensions function as an interconnected pedagogical architecture rather than as an independent list of competencies.

Table 3. Major Relationships within the Progressive Tarbiyah Framework

Related Dimensions	Relationship Strength	Main Educational Meaning
Spiritual-moral grounding ↔ Adab	Very strong	Ethical orientation of learning
Adab ↔ Learner agency	Strong	Responsible autonomy
Critical inquiry ↔ Digital epistemic literacy	Very strong	Verification and intellectual discernment
Intercultural competence ↔ Collaborative responsibility	Strong	Ethical engagement across differences
Creativity ↔ Critical inquiry	Moderate–strong	Generative and reflective problem solving
Knowledge application ↔ Social responsibility	Very strong	Transformative use of learning
Spiritual grounding ↔ Cosmopolitan engagement	Strong	Rooted openness rather than identity detachment

The relationship between spiritual grounding and intercultural competence was particularly significant for the construction of the Rooted Cosmopolitan Learner Profile. The evidence suggested that students require both stable ethical orientation and openness to perspectives beyond their immediate religious, cultural, or national context. Digital epistemic literacy connected these domains by enabling learners to encounter global knowledge without becoming passive consumers of information. Progressive tarbiyah therefore requires intellectual openness to operate alongside moral discernment, rather than positioning openness and commitment as opposing educational outcomes.

The first contextual case involved an Islamic higher-education environment that combined classical religious texts with inquiry-based seminars, collaborative projects, digital source analysis, and community-oriented assignments. Students were expected to engage authoritative Islamic sources while comparing interpretations, verifying contemporary information, and applying ethical principles to social problems. Teacher authority remained important, yet instruction encouraged students to formulate questions, defend arguments, and evaluate evidence. This model demonstrated how adab and critical inquiry could coexist when dialogue was structured around intellectual responsibility rather than adversarial debate.

The second contextual case concerned a digitally mediated Islamic learning environment in which students had extensive access to religious lectures, artificial intelligence tools, online libraries, and international scholarly content. Access expanded learning opportunities, but students displayed uneven abilities to assess source credibility, distinguish scholarly authority from digital popularity, and recognize inaccurate AI-generated religious information. Pedagogical intervention

that required citation checking, comparison of primary and secondary sources, teacher consultation, and reflective justification improved the quality of learner engagement. This case highlighted digital epistemic literacy as an essential rather than optional element of contemporary tarbiyah.

The higher-education case demonstrates that progressive Islamic pedagogy does not require reducing teacher authority in order to increase learner participation. Authority can be repositioned from unilateral transmission toward guided intellectual formation. Teachers retain responsibility for disciplinary standards, ethical orientation, and epistemic guidance while students assume greater responsibility for inquiry, interpretation, and application. This relational model extends the meaning of adab beyond obedience by connecting respect for knowledge with disciplined questioning and intellectual accountability.

The digitally mediated case explains why technological competence alone is insufficient for the cosmopolitan learner. Students may operate digital tools fluently while remaining vulnerable to misinformation, fabricated references, decontextualized religious claims, and algorithmically amplified content. Digital literacy within a Progressive Tarbiyah Framework must therefore include epistemic judgment: knowing how information is produced, who possesses relevant authority, how claims can be verified, and when technological outputs require human scholarly correction. The pedagogical task is not merely to provide access to knowledge but to cultivate responsible navigation through environments of excessive and uneven information.

The overall findings indicate that tarbiyah can be reimagined as a progressive pedagogical framework without abandoning its Islamic formative foundations. Spiritual-moral grounding and adab provide normative direction, while critical inquiry, learner agency, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, collaboration, creativity, and meaningful knowledge application provide contemporary pedagogical capacity. The synthesis therefore challenges the assumption that Islamic educational authenticity requires pedagogical conservatism or that educational progress requires detachment from religious epistemology.

The resulting Progressive Tarbiyah Framework positions the rooted cosmopolitan learner as its central educational outcome. Such a learner is expected to remain religiously and ethically grounded while demonstrating intellectual openness, critical discernment, technological responsibility, intercultural competence, creativity, and meaningful social engagement. The framework therefore interprets twenty-first-century Islamic education as a process of forming learners capable of navigating complexity without losing moral coherence. Progressive tarbiyah becomes most viable when tradition functions as an ethical and epistemic foundation for engagement with contemporary realities rather than as a barrier separating learners from them.

The findings demonstrate that tarbiyah can be rearticulated as a progressive pedagogical framework without abandoning its Islamic formative foundations. Spiritual-moral grounding and adab emerged as the strongest normative dimensions, while critical inquiry, learner agency, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, collaborative responsibility, creativity, and meaningful knowledge application provided the pedagogical capacities required for contemporary learning. The resulting framework therefore does not position tradition and innovation as competing educational orientations. It treats Islamic educational principles as an ethical and epistemic foundation through which modern pedagogical competencies can be interpreted and directed.

The analysis also showed that the nine dimensions of the Progressive Tarbiyah Framework function as an interconnected structure rather than as isolated educational competencies. Adab was closely related to learner agency because autonomy became pedagogically constructive when accompanied by discipline and responsibility. Critical inquiry was strongly connected to digital epistemic literacy because both required source verification, judgment, intellectual humility, and

awareness of the limits of knowledge. Intercultural competence was similarly strengthened when connected to moral grounding and collaborative responsibility.

The findings further indicate that the concept of the rooted cosmopolitan learner offers a viable synthesis between religious commitment and global engagement. Islamic identity did not emerge as an obstacle to intellectual openness or intercultural interaction when it was articulated through justice, dignity, humility, knowledge-seeking, and responsibility. Cosmopolitan competence appeared more sustainable when learners possessed a coherent ethical standpoint from which to engage cultural and intellectual difference. This pattern challenges assumptions that global-minded education requires learners to detach themselves from particular religious identities.

The contextual cases clarified the practical significance of the proposed framework. Inquiry-based Islamic learning showed that teacher authority can coexist with disciplined questioning, while digitally mediated learning demonstrated that technological access without epistemic judgment leaves learners vulnerable to misinformation and unverified authority. These cases reinforce the view that progressive tarbiyah is not achieved by adding technology or active-learning techniques to conventional instruction. Its defining feature is the integration of moral purpose, intellectual agency, and responsible engagement with knowledge.

The findings are consistent with established scholarship on Islamic education that treats learning as a process of holistic human formation rather than cognitive transmission alone. Classical and contemporary discussions of tarbiyah, ta‘lim, ta’dib, and adab have repeatedly emphasized the relationship among knowledge, character, moral responsibility, and spiritual development. The present study supports this tradition while extending it into contemporary pedagogical domains. Its distinctive contribution lies in translating these normative foundations into competencies relevant to digital, intercultural, and learner-centered educational environments.

The results also converge with contemporary research on twenty-first-century learning, particularly scholarship emphasizing critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, communication, learner agency, and digital competence (Abbas dkk., 2026; Adler & Akad, 2024; Ghanamah & Eghbaria-Ghanamah, 2026). The present framework differs from many competency-based approaches by refusing to treat these capacities as neutral or purely instrumental skills. Critical thinking is connected to responsible judgment, digital literacy to epistemic accountability, creativity to meaningful social contribution, and autonomy to moral discipline. Contemporary competencies are therefore reconstructed within a normative educational architecture rather than simply imported into Islamic education.

The rooted cosmopolitan learner model shares important similarities with research on global citizenship and cosmopolitan education that emphasizes intercultural understanding, openness, human dignity, and transnational responsibility (Hou dkk., 2023; Humairoh dkk., 2024; Mohiuddin dkk., 2023). The present findings differ from approaches that treat cosmopolitanism primarily as detachment from particular cultural or religious commitments. Rooted cosmopolitanism assumes that learners can engage diverse communities from within a coherent moral and religious identity. This position offers an alternative to both educational isolationism and identity-neutral cosmopolitanism.

The findings also extend emerging scholarship on digital Islamic education by emphasizing epistemic literacy rather than technological proficiency alone. Research on digital learning often focuses on access, usability, participation, and technological competence, while studies of digital religion increasingly raise concerns about fragmented authority and misinformation (Adiningrum dkk., 2026; Muthohirin, 2025; Namaziandost & Çelik, 2025). The present framework connects these debates pedagogically by treating source verification, authority evaluation, AI literacy, and

intellectual responsibility as core elements of tarbiyah. Digital participation therefore becomes an epistemic and ethical issue, not merely a technical one.

The findings signify that Islamic educational reform does not require a choice between preserving tradition and embracing contemporary pedagogy (Altalbawy dkk., 2025; W. Han dkk., 2026; Mu'alimin dkk., 2026). Such a binary obscures the adaptive capacity of Islamic educational thought and underestimates the possibility of principled innovation. Tarbiyah can remain grounded in spiritual and moral purposes while adopting pedagogical methods that cultivate inquiry, creativity, collaboration, and digital competence. Educational authenticity therefore depends less on preserving historical instructional forms than on maintaining the ethical purposes that those forms were intended to serve.

The strong relationship between adab and learner agency signifies a broader transformation in how authority can be conceptualized within Islamic pedagogy. Respect for teachers and knowledge need not imply passivity, just as learner autonomy need not imply rejection of authority. A progressive model reframes adab as disciplined participation in knowledge rather than unquestioning reception. Learners become active interpreters and responsible participants while teachers remain epistemic guides, moral exemplars, and facilitators of intellectual formation.

The importance of digital epistemic literacy signifies that the educational problem of the twenty-first century is no longer limited to access to knowledge. Learners increasingly face an excess of information, competing authorities, algorithmic recommendation systems, synthetic media, and AI-generated content. The central pedagogical task is therefore the cultivation of discernment. Islamic education that does not teach students how to verify, contextualize, and ethically use knowledge risks producing technologically capable learners who remain epistemically dependent.

The emergence of the rooted cosmopolitan learner signifies that identity and openness can be pedagogically complementary. Learners who possess clear moral commitments may be better equipped to engage diversity without either defensive withdrawal or uncritical assimilation. Cosmopolitan competence becomes more meaningful when it develops from confidence, humility, and ethical responsibility rather than identity detachment. The findings therefore suggest that religious education can contribute positively to global citizenship when it cultivates principled engagement rather than exclusivism.

The theoretical implication is that tarbiyah should be developed as an operational pedagogical concept rather than discussed only as a philosophical ideal. Islamic educational scholarship possesses rich normative resources, but their contemporary relevance depends on translation into curriculum design, instructional practice, teacher education, and assessment. The Progressive Tarbiyah Framework provides a structure for connecting philosophical foundations with observable educational processes. This shift can help reduce the gap between Islamic educational theory and classroom implementation.

The curricular implication is that Islamic education should integrate critical inquiry, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, creativity, and social application across subjects rather than confining them to separate skills programs. Religious and ethical learning can be connected to contemporary social problems, digital environments, scientific developments, and intercultural questions. Curriculum design should therefore move beyond content accumulation toward tasks that require interpretation, verification, dialogue, ethical reasoning, and meaningful application of knowledge.

The pedagogical implication concerns the role of the teacher. Progressive tarbiyah requires teachers who can combine scholarly authority with dialogic and inquiry-oriented practice. Teachers

must be capable of guiding students through disagreement, evaluating digital sources, supporting reflective questioning, and connecting religious values with contemporary issues. Professional development should therefore extend beyond subject mastery to include pedagogical reasoning, digital literacy, intercultural competence, and the facilitation of responsible learner agency.

The institutional implication is that assessment systems should evaluate more than memorization or factual recall. Schools, madrasas, and universities need assessment practices capable of measuring reasoning, ethical judgment, source evaluation, collaborative problem solving, reflection, and socially meaningful application. Such assessment should remain aligned with spiritual and moral formation rather than reducing educational quality to standardized performance indicators. Progressive tarbiyah becomes credible only when institutional structures reinforce the capacities the framework claims to value.

The prominence of spiritual-moral grounding can be explained by the normative structure of Islamic education. Knowledge is traditionally understood as carrying ethical consequences, making education inseparable from questions of purpose, conduct, and responsibility. Contemporary competencies were most easily integrated when they could be linked to this formative orientation. The framework therefore retained spiritual and moral grounding as its central axis because removing this dimension would transform tarbiyah into a generic competency model rather than an Islamic pedagogical framework.

The strong relationship between adab and agency can be explained by the tension between inherited teacher-centered models and contemporary learner-centered approaches. Islamic educational traditions place legitimate value on teachers, disciplined learning, and epistemic hierarchy, while current pedagogy emphasizes participation and autonomy. The framework resolved this tension by defining agency as responsible participation rather than unrestricted independence. This formulation allows students to question, interpret, and create without disconnecting intellectual freedom from ethical discipline.

The significance of digital epistemic literacy can be explained by changes in the ecology of knowledge. Learners no longer encounter information primarily through teachers, textbooks, or institutional libraries. Search engines, social media, AI systems, online preachers, podcasts, and digital communities now participate in shaping what students regard as credible. The expansion of informational access has therefore made authority evaluation and source criticism essential components of educational formation.

The strength of rooted cosmopolitanism can be explained by the lived reality of contemporary Muslim learners. Students increasingly inhabit overlapping local, national, religious, digital, and global communities. Educational models that ask them to choose between religious rootedness and global participation fail to reflect this complexity. The proposed framework responds to this condition by enabling learners to develop stable ethical commitments while engaging productively with diverse cultures, perspectives, and forms of knowledge.

Future research should empirically test the Progressive Tarbiyah Framework across schools, madrasas, Islamic universities, and digital learning environments. Experimental, quasi-experimental, and design-based research could examine whether the framework improves critical thinking, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, learner agency, and ethical reasoning. Empirical validation is necessary to determine whether the proposed relationships among framework dimensions produce measurable educational benefits in practice.

Future studies should also develop reliable instruments for assessing the rooted cosmopolitan learner. Constructs such as religious-moral grounding, intellectual openness, digital discernment, intercultural sensitivity, responsible agency, and social engagement require careful

operationalization. Scale development, factor analysis, and cross-cultural validation could transform the current conceptual profile into a robust measurement framework suitable for comparative educational research.

Future teacher-education research should investigate how educators interpret and implement progressive tarbiyah. Teachers may differ considerably in how they understand critical inquiry, learner autonomy, adab, digital authority, or cosmopolitan engagement. Professional-learning interventions should therefore examine which forms of training enable teachers to combine Islamic educational values with inquiry-oriented, technologically informed, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Future theoretical work should refine the framework by engaging more deeply with diverse Islamic intellectual traditions and educational contexts. The relationship among tarbiyah, ta'lim, ta'dib, spirituality, epistemology, technology, and global citizenship requires continued conceptual development. The most promising direction is not to modernize Islamic education by replacing its intellectual inheritance, but to reconstruct its pedagogical possibilities so that contemporary learners can remain ethically grounded, intellectually rigorous, digitally discerning, culturally open, and capable of contributing meaningfully to an interconnected world.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that tarbiyah can be reconstructed as a progressive pedagogical framework without losing its Islamic ethical and spiritual foundations. The analysis shows that spiritual-moral grounding and adab remain central to Islamic education, while critical inquiry, learner agency, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, collaborative responsibility, creativity, and meaningful knowledge application are necessary for addressing the realities of twenty-first-century learning. The proposed framework also demonstrates that religious rootedness and cosmopolitan engagement are not inherently contradictory. A learner can remain firmly grounded in Islamic moral commitments while developing intellectual openness, technological responsibility, intercultural sensitivity, and the capacity to engage constructively with global diversity. Progressive tarbiyah therefore represents a model of educational renewal in which tradition functions as a normative foundation for contemporary engagement rather than as a barrier to pedagogical innovation.

The principal contribution of this research is conceptual, supported by a qualitative conceptual-design methodology that integrates Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary pedagogical theory. The study introduces the Progressive Tarbiyah Framework as an interconnected model consisting of spiritual-moral grounding, adab-based learning, critical and reflective inquiry, learner agency, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, collaborative responsibility, creativity, and socially meaningful knowledge application. The study also advances the concept of the rooted cosmopolitan learner, referring to a learner who is religiously grounded, intellectually open, ethically responsible, digitally discerning, culturally responsive, and socially engaged. Methodologically, the use of conceptual synthesis, pedagogical alignment analysis, framework construction, and expert review provides a systematic pathway for translating normative Islamic educational concepts into operational pedagogical dimensions. This contribution strengthens the connection between Islamic educational philosophy and curriculum design, teacher development, digital education, global citizenship, and contemporary learning theory.

The study is limited by its conceptual and literature-based design, the selective nature of the analytical corpus, the absence of large-scale classroom implementation, and the limited empirical validation of the proposed framework across different cultural and institutional contexts. Variations

among schools, madrasas, universities, digital learning environments, and diverse Islamic intellectual traditions may influence how the framework is interpreted and enacted. Future research should therefore employ design-based research, quasi-experimental studies, longitudinal evaluation, classroom observation, teacher interviews, and learner-outcome assessment to test the pedagogical effectiveness of the Progressive Tarbiyah Framework. Further studies should also develop and validate instruments for measuring the rooted cosmopolitan learner, particularly in relation to moral grounding, critical thinking, digital epistemic literacy, intercultural competence, learner agency, and social responsibility. Such research would determine how progressive tarbiyah can move from conceptual architecture toward an empirically grounded model for contemporary Islamic education.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with English language refinement, grammatical correction, academic writing structure, and improving the clarity and coherence of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is a short text to acknowledge the contributions of specific colleagues, institutions, or agencies that aided the efforts of the authors.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

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

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

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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