



## Deconstructing Modern Educational Theories: Reclaiming Transcendental Values in Islamic Education Curriculum

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### ABSTRACT

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An increasingly pervasive educational paradox lies in the capacity of modern educational theories to generate technical competence while simultaneously eroding the ontological and epistemological foundations that give human learning its ultimate meaning. Beneath the dominance of progressivism, constructivism, and outcome-based educational frameworks resides a secular architecture that progressively marginalizes transcendental sources of knowledge and redefines educational success through empirical utility and socio-economic functionality. This article undertakes a qualitative philosophical-conceptual inquiry employing text-based hermeneutics and critical content analysis of a corpus comprising foundational Western educational theories and seminal works of Islamic educational philosophy. The analysis reveals a structural cascade through which revelation, metaphysical consciousness, and sacred values are displaced from the center of curriculum design and subsequently translated into measurable behavioral indicators, reducing transcendental realities such as ikhlas, taqwa, and spiritual awareness to functional assessment categories. Such reductionism exposes a profound ontological mismatch between secular educational paradigms and the epistemological foundations of Islamic education. In response, the study advances a transcendental canopy model that repositions Divine Revelation (Wahyu) as the supreme epistemological framework governing all domains of knowledge. This reconstruction offers a philosophical foundation for curriculum renewal, educational leadership transformation, and the intellectual de-secularization of contemporary Islamic education.

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## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational landscape is increasingly governed by theoretical paradigms that prioritize measurable competencies, economic productivity, and adaptive social performance. Across diverse educational systems, progressivism, constructivism, learner-centered pedagogy, and Outcome-Based Education have become dominant frameworks for curriculum

design, assessment, and institutional reform. Their widespread acceptance rests upon a compelling promise: education can cultivate autonomous individuals capable of navigating the complexities of modern society and contributing effectively to economic development. Yet beneath their pedagogical sophistication lies a deeper philosophical orientation. These theories are largely grounded in anthropocentric assumptions that position human reason, experience, and agency as the primary sources of knowledge and meaning, while secular-humanist commitments shape their understanding of educational aims and human flourishing (Stenmark, 2022). Consequently, contemporary educational discourse often evaluates success through the lenses of performance, innovation, employability, and social adaptability rather than through questions concerning ultimate truth, metaphysical purpose, or transcendental significance (Chatelier, 2025).

The intellectual influence of these paradigms should not obscure the tensions embedded within their philosophical foundations. While modern educational theories have undoubtedly contributed to pedagogical innovation and democratic participation, they simultaneously generate a profound epistemological and ontological dilemma. By privileging empirical verification, social construction, and pragmatic utility, they tend to marginalize dimensions of reality that transcend sensory experience and human cognition (Mykhailov, 2023). The sacred, the metaphysical, and the revelational are frequently relegated to the periphery of educational inquiry, treated as subjective preferences rather than legitimate sources of knowledge (Garcia-Olp et al., 2022). Such a reduction transforms education into an enterprise primarily concerned with managing human capacities for worldly success, thereby weakening its role as a pathway toward existential meaning and spiritual realization (Çeven & Korumaz, 2025). The result is not merely a methodological imbalance but a deeper ontological vacuum in which education loses its connection to questions of ultimate purpose, moral transcendence, and the nature of being itself (Higgins, 2024).

This crisis becomes particularly consequential within contemporary Islamic educational institutions. In many contexts, efforts to modernize Islamic education have involved the extensive adoption of Western-derived curricular frameworks, assessment models, and pedagogical philosophies (Ismail, 2024). Although these reforms are often motivated by legitimate aspirations toward quality improvement and global competitiveness, they frequently occur without sufficient scrutiny of the philosophical assumptions embedded within the imported models (Krönig, 2025). Consequently, transcendental values that traditionally constituted the core of Islamic education are increasingly translated into technical competencies, behavioral outcomes, or affective indicators that can be measured through standardized evaluation systems (Costes-Onishi & Kwek, 2023). Spiritual formation, devotion, and metaphysical consciousness are often reconfigured as auxiliary components rather than foundational dimensions of learning (Wrigley-Carr, 2024). This process produces a form of epistemological reductionism in which revelation-based knowledge becomes subordinated to

secular standards of educational legitimacy, narrowing the holistic vision that historically characterized the Islamic intellectual tradition (Alvis, 2022).

Existing scholarship has responded to this challenge in various ways, yet significant limitations remain. A substantial body of research has emphasized the integration of religious and secular sciences, the incorporation of Islamic values into contemporary curricula, and the promotion of character education as a corrective to moral decline (Masripah & Mohammad, 2025). Other studies have advanced projects of Islamization intended to align modern disciplines with Islamic worldviews and ethical principles (Hasim et al., 2022). While these contributions have enriched contemporary discussions, they often operate within the conceptual architecture of modern educational thought rather than interrogating its foundational assumptions (Applin, 2024). Many approaches seek accommodation, supplementation, or integration, but few undertake a systematic philosophical deconstruction of the ontological and epistemological premises that structure modern educational theories themselves (Sparman, 2025). Consequently, the deeper question remains largely unexplored: whether the crisis confronting Islamic education stems not from inadequate religious content but from the uncritical adoption of secular philosophical foundations that shape the curriculum at its very core (Barmina, 2025).

This study advances the argument that the contemporary crisis of education is fundamentally an ontological and epistemological crisis rooted in the marginalization of transcendence. The problem does not lie merely in ineffective pedagogical methods, curricular inefficiencies, or insufficient moral instruction. Rather, it emerges from a philosophical worldview that systematically excludes revelation and metaphysical reality from the architecture of educational knowledge. In response, this article proposes a dual intellectual agenda. The first is deconstruction: a critical examination of the assumptions that render modern educational theories implicitly secular and anthropocentric. The second is reclaiming: a reconstruction of the Islamic education curriculum through the restoration of transcendental values, particularly revelation (*wahyu*), as the overarching ontic canopy that orders knowledge, human development, and educational purpose. Through this framework, transcendence is repositioned not as a supplementary ethical element but as the foundational principle from which the curriculum derives its coherence and meaning.

Guided by this perspective, the study addresses four interrelated questions. First, it investigates how the ontological and epistemological assumptions of modern educational theories shape contemporary educational paradigms. Second, it examines the mechanisms through which transcendental values become marginalized within these theoretical frameworks. Third, it explores how Islamic educational thought critiques the philosophical foundations of modern educational discourse. Finally, it develops a conceptual model for reconstructing an Islamic education curriculum grounded in transcendental values. To accomplish these objectives, the article proceeds through a critical philosophical analysis of dominant educational theories,

followed by a deconstructive reading of their underlying assumptions, before articulating a transcendental curriculum framework informed by the epistemological and ontological principles of Islamic education. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute not merely to curriculum reform but to a more fundamental rethinking of the philosophical foundations upon which educational theory itself is constructed.

## **METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative philosophical-conceptual design grounded in text-based hermeneutics and critical content analysis. Rather than treating educational theories as neutral pedagogical instruments, the inquiry approaches them as intellectual constructions embedded within broader ontological, epistemological, and axiological traditions. The methodological orientation therefore seeks to uncover the philosophical assumptions that shape educational discourse and curriculum formation. The textual corpus was selected through purposive theoretical criteria, emphasizing works that have exercised substantial influence on contemporary educational thought and practice. The primary corpus consists of foundational texts associated with progressivism, constructivism, humanistic education, and contemporary curriculum frameworks, including seminal writings that articulate the philosophical foundations of modern educational paradigms. These texts are juxtaposed with key works in Islamic educational philosophy and epistemology, particularly those addressing the relationship between revelation, knowledge, human nature, and educational purpose. Special attention is given to the contributions of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Fazlur Rahman, and classical Islamic epistemological traditions, alongside relevant contemporary scholarship in Islamic curriculum studies. Hermeneutic reading is employed to situate each text within its intellectual horizon and historical context, while critical content analysis facilitates the systematic examination of recurring concepts, assumptions, and philosophical categories embedded within the discourse (Salam et al., 2025; Talib, 2025; Widigdo, 2024).

The analytical procedure unfolds through two interrelated stages that mirror the central agenda of this study: deconstruction and reclaiming. The first stage undertakes a deconstructive reading of modern educational theories to identify the hidden assumptions that sustain their conceptual architecture. Particular attention is directed toward anthropocentric conceptions of human agency, secular understandings of knowledge, and materialist assumptions concerning educational purpose. Through close textual examination, the analysis interrogates what these theories privilege, exclude, and render invisible, thereby exposing the epistemological hierarchies that marginalize transcendental sources of knowledge. The second stage advances a process of reclaiming through the interpretive lens of Islamic epistemology. Here, concepts derived from revelation, tawhid, adab, and the integrated vision of human existence are employed as reconstructive principles for reimaging curriculum foundations.

Rather than merely appending religious content to existing secular frameworks, the analysis seeks to reformulate the ontological and epistemological premises upon which curriculum theory is built. The resulting conceptual synthesis generates a transcendental curriculum model in which spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and existential dimensions are organized within a coherent philosophical framework. The rigor of this inquiry is therefore established through philosophical coherence, conceptual consistency, interpretive depth, and fidelity to the textual traditions under examination rather than through empirical measurement or statistical validation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### **Ontological and Epistemological Mapping of Modern Educational Theories**

A systematic examination of the literature corpus reveals a significant philosophical transformation in the foundations of educational thought during the transition from pre-modern to modern intellectual traditions. Foundational texts associated with pragmatism and progressivism consistently relocate the center of educational authority from transcendent reality toward human experience, social utility, and practical problem-solving. Knowledge is no longer primarily understood as participation in an objective metaphysical order but rather as an instrument for adaptation and reconstruction of human environments. Within this framework, truth acquires a functional rather than ontological status, being validated through usefulness and experiential consequences rather than correspondence with ultimate reality. The corpus repeatedly demonstrates that educational aims are formulated in terms of personal growth, democratic participation, and social efficiency, while references to divine revelation, sacred cosmology, or metaphysical purpose remain largely absent. Consequently, educational legitimacy becomes increasingly grounded in human agency and rational autonomy (Moilanen & Huttunen, 2025).

The second pattern emerging from the corpus concerns the dominance of empirical and positivistic assumptions within major educational frameworks. Texts associated with behaviorism, scientific curriculum planning, and early forms of constructivism consistently privilege observable phenomena as the principal domain of educational inquiry. Learning is conceptualized through measurable behavioral change, cognitive performance, or environmental interaction, while realities that cannot be empirically verified receive limited epistemological recognition. The literature demonstrates a strong tendency to define educational effectiveness through quantifiable indicators, experimental validation, and predictive control. Within such formulations, the learner appears primarily as a cognitive or behavioral subject whose development can be optimized through systematic intervention. Concepts related to the soul, spiritual consciousness, metaphysical awareness, or revelational knowledge rarely occupy central analytical positions. Instead, the educational process is framed through categories derived from psychology, sociology, and empirical

sciences. This pattern establishes a knowledge hierarchy in which empirical observation functions as the dominant criterion of educational validity (Jules, 2022).

Contemporary curriculum literature extends these tendencies through the widespread adoption of Outcome-Based Education and related accountability frameworks. Across policy documents, curriculum standards, and educational reform agendas, learning outcomes are increasingly linked to economic competitiveness, workforce preparedness, innovation capacity, and measurable institutional performance. The reviewed texts consistently describe educational success through indicators associated with employability, productivity, technical competence, and market relevance. Curricular structures are designed by working backward from predefined performance outcomes that align educational processes with labor-market expectations and developmental objectives. While ethical citizenship and social responsibility remain present within many frameworks, these values are frequently articulated in functional rather than transcendental terms. The corpus therefore reveals a close relationship between curriculum architecture and broader socio-economic priorities. Education emerges as a strategic instrument for producing adaptive human capital capable of sustaining economic systems, thereby reinforcing the functional orientation already embedded within modern educational philosophy (Gatley, 2023).

**Table 1:** Textual Mapping of Philosophical Assumptions in Prominent Modern Educational Frameworks

Dimension	Progressivism	Behaviorism	Functionalism / OBE
Ontological Foundation	Human experience as reality-construction	Observable behavior as reality	Socio-economic utility as reality
Source of Knowledge	Experience and inquiry	Empirical observation	Measurable competencies
Concept of Learning	Continuous growth and adaptation	Behavioral conditioning	Achievement of predefined outcomes
Educational Purpose	Democratic participation and problem-solving	Performance optimization	Workforce preparation and economic productivity
Evaluation Standard	Reflective competence	Observable behavior	Outcome attainment and accountability

### Typology and Mechanics of Transcendental Marginalization in Existing Curricula

The literature corpus identifies a recurring mechanism through which revelation and metaphysical realities are positioned outside the boundaries of legitimate curricular knowledge. Modern curriculum frameworks generally operate according to epistemological standards that prioritize empirical

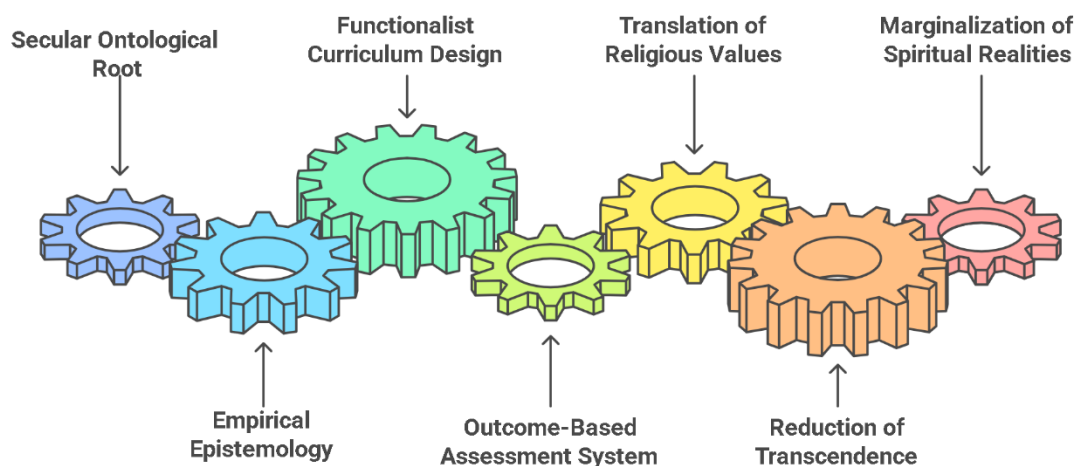
verification, rational justification, and public observability. Knowledge claims derived from revelation, sacred authority, or metaphysical insight are frequently categorized as matters of personal belief, cultural heritage, or private spirituality rather than as foundational sources of truth. Curriculum standards therefore tend to treat religious content as a supplementary domain rather than an organizing principle of knowledge. Textual analysis of curriculum policy documents further demonstrates that educational objectives are typically articulated through secular categories such as citizenship, critical thinking, innovation, and social participation. The cumulative effect is not always the explicit rejection of transcendence but its structural displacement from the center of educational reasoning (Zhu, 2023).

A second pattern concerns the reduction of spiritual and religious values when these values are incorporated into contemporary educational frameworks. Rather than being approached as ontological realities with intrinsic sacred significance, spiritual concepts are frequently translated into social competencies, emotional dispositions, or behavioral characteristics that can be integrated into existing assessment systems. The literature reveals numerous examples where values such as compassion, integrity, responsibility, and respect are detached from their theological foundations and reinterpreted through civic, psychological, or socio-emotional categories. In this process, transcendental meanings become increasingly subordinated to functional educational objectives. The corpus demonstrates that religious values often survive within curricula only after being reformulated into language compatible with dominant secular educational paradigms. Consequently, the sacred dimension is preserved symbolically while its epistemological authority is significantly diminished (Uzlaner, 2026).

The final finding concerns the structural tension between transcendental concepts and contemporary systems of educational measurement. Numerous curriculum frameworks require all learning outcomes to be translated into observable indicators, performance descriptors, and measurable benchmarks (Kulal & Zaini, 2026). This requirement generates significant difficulties when applied to concepts whose essence resides in inward consciousness rather than external behavior. The literature repeatedly highlights the challenge of assessing sincerity, God-consciousness, spiritual humility, or authentic devotion through standardized instruments designed for behavioral evaluation. While institutions often attempt to operationalize such concepts through attendance records, participation metrics, or behavioral checklists, the corpus indicates that these procedures capture external manifestations rather than the realities themselves. A paradox consequently emerges: the more transcendental values are adapted to fit modern assessment frameworks, the further they move from the ontological depth that originally defined them (Kenter & O'Connor, 2022).

Consequently, the systematic attempt to encapsulate infinite spiritual experiences within finite operational parameters does not merely assess piety; it fundamentally alters its substance. This linear trajectory of ideological dilution,

moving from its metaphysical inception down to its mechanistic execution, is structurally mapped in the cascade below



**Figure 1:** The Structural Cascade of Transcendental Marginalization in Modern Curriculum Design

The structural cascade depicted in Figure 1 underscores a profound systemic inevitability: when an educational curriculum operates strictly on an empirical epistemology, the transcendental dimension is not simply ignored – it is actively processed, re-coded, and neutralized. By redefining sacred obligations as quantifiable civic behaviors, the modern institutional apparatus successfully maintains its illusion of administrative neutrality while effectively secularizing the internal, spiritual domain of the learner. This mapping completes the diagnosis of the empirical data, setting the necessary baseline for a radical philosophical reclamation

## Discussion

The findings reveal that the contemporary educational crisis cannot be adequately explained through deficiencies in pedagogy, curriculum implementation, or institutional management alone (Barquero-Ruiz, 2025). The deeper problem resides within the ontological architecture upon which modern educational theories are constructed. By locating the source of meaning, truth, and value within autonomous human experience, modern educational thought gradually detaches knowledge from any transcendent referent. From an Islamic metaphysical standpoint, such a detachment represents not merely an alternative educational preference but a profound distortion of reality itself. Knowledge in the Islamic tradition is inseparable from the recognition of existence as a divinely ordered hierarchy in which revelation illuminates the ultimate nature and purpose of human life (R' Boul et al., 2024). The literature reviewed in this study therefore points toward an ontological mismatch rather than a methodological disagreement. Educational paradigms rooted in secular anthropocentrism

inevitably encounter conceptual blind spots when confronted with questions concerning ultimate truth, spiritual destiny, and the metaphysical vocation of the human being (Srivastava, 2024).

This ontological tension becomes particularly visible in contemporary attempts to reconcile Islamic education with dominant secular frameworks through what may be termed “soft integration.” Numerous institutions seek to address concerns regarding secularization by appending Qur’anic verses, prophetic traditions, or moral injunctions to curricula whose epistemological foundations remain fundamentally unchanged. Such efforts often generate the appearance of religious authenticity while leaving intact the deeper assumptions that govern educational objectives, assessment systems, and conceptions of knowledge (Najah & Romadoni, 2026). The problem is not the inclusion of religious content but the preservation of a philosophical framework that continues to privilege empirical utility and socio-economic functionality as the primary measures of educational success. Under these circumstances, revelation functions as an ornamental supplement rather than an organizing principle. The result is an epistemological compromise in which Islamic symbols coexist with secular assumptions without fundamentally transforming them. Consequently, integration becomes additive rather than transformative, producing curricular hybridity without genuine philosophical coherence (Brooks, 2026).

A more substantive response requires moving beyond integration toward reclamation. The central argument advanced in this study is that revelation must be repositioned from the periphery to the apex of curriculum architecture. Within the reconstructed framework proposed here, *wahyu* is not treated as one domain of knowledge among many others, nor as a separate subject confined to religious instruction. Rather, revelation functions as the supreme ontic and epistemological canopy under which all forms of inquiry acquire coherence, legitimacy, and ultimate meaning. Such a repositioning transforms the structure of the curriculum itself (Zakkiyah et al., 2025). Every discipline, whether scientific, social, technological, or humanistic, becomes situated within a broader horizon of divine purpose. Knowledge is no longer fragmented into autonomous compartments competing for authority but is reintegrated within a unified vision of reality. Through this conceptual reorientation, the curriculum ceases to be a mechanism for producing merely competent individuals and becomes a framework for cultivating intellectually grounded, spiritually conscious, and morally responsible human beings.

The implications of this model do not entail the rejection of modern scientific achievement. The critique advanced in this study is directed toward secular epistemological assumptions rather than toward empirical inquiry itself. Rational investigation, experimentation, and scientific observation remain indispensable dimensions of human knowledge. Their status, however, undergoes a significant transformation. Within a transcendental framework, empirical sciences cease to function as autonomous systems of explanation detached from metaphysical meaning. Instead, they become instruments through

which human beings encounter and interpret the signs of divine wisdom embedded within creation. Scientific discovery thus acquires a contemplative dimension that transcends utilitarian application. Physics, biology, economics, and technological innovation are no longer viewed merely as tools for material advancement but as intellectual pathways toward deeper awareness of cosmic order and divine intentionality. In this sense, acquired knowledge is not abandoned; it is epistemologically recontextualized and spiritually elevated (Yazdi & Asl, 2025).

Such a philosophical reconstruction necessarily produces a corresponding transformation in pedagogy. If the purpose of education extends beyond economic functionality toward the cultivation of the whole person, then teaching can no longer be reduced to the efficient transmission of competencies. The educator assumes a role that is simultaneously intellectual, ethical, and spiritual. Learning becomes a process of formation rather than mere information, orienting students toward self-knowledge, moral refinement, and spiritual consciousness. Within this framework, the classical concepts of *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *tazkiyah* regain central significance. *Tarbiyah* emphasizes the gradual nurturing of human potential, *ta'dib* situates learning within the cultivation of proper conduct and wisdom, while *tazkiyah* directs educational activity toward the purification and elevation of the self. Together, these concepts establish a pedagogical vision in which intellectual excellence and spiritual maturation are inseparable dimensions of authentic educational development.

The reconstructed framework also offers a resolution to the behavioral metrics paradox identified in the findings. Modern educational systems often attempt to evaluate transcendental realities through quantitative indicators that were originally designed for measuring external performance. Such efforts inevitably encounter conceptual limitations because inward states of sincerity, God-consciousness, humility, and devotion cannot be exhaustively captured through numerical scales or behavioral checklists. The alternative proposed here is a holistic approach to evaluation grounded in qualitative judgment, reflective observation, narrative documentation, and long-term character formation. Assessment shifts from the measurement of isolated performances toward the interpretation of developmental trajectories (Suyono et al., 2026). The objective is not to assign numerical values to spiritual realities but to discern evidence of moral growth, ethical consistency, self-awareness, and increasing spiritual maturity. Evaluation therefore becomes a process of educational accompaniment rather than bureaucratic surveillance, preserving the integrity of transcendental values while maintaining accountability within educational practice.

The significance of this reconstruction ultimately extends beyond classrooms and curriculum documents. It calls for a fundamental transformation in educational leadership, governance, and institutional culture. Policies designed exclusively around accreditation metrics, market competitiveness, and performance rankings will struggle to sustain a genuinely transcendental educational vision. Educational leaders must therefore move beyond managerial

conceptions of administration toward a form of stewardship grounded in philosophical clarity and spiritual responsibility. Curriculum governance should begin with questions concerning the nature of knowledge, the purpose of human existence, and the moral direction of society before addressing issues of efficiency and productivity. Such a shift demands intellectual courage because it challenges deeply entrenched assumptions that dominate contemporary educational discourse. Yet without this transformation, efforts to revitalize Islamic education will remain confined to superficial reforms. Reclaiming the transcendental requires nothing less than the reconstitution of the philosophical foundations upon which educational institutions imagine the human person, knowledge, and the future itself.

## CONCLUSION

The educational predicament exposed throughout this inquiry originates from a philosophical architecture that has progressively detached knowledge from its transcendent foundations and relocated educational legitimacy within the confines of empirical verification, functional utility, and socio-economic performance. Such a shift has generated a structural process through which sacred realities are translated into secular categories, spiritual consciousness is reduced to behavioral indicators, and revelation is displaced from its role as the highest source of epistemic authority. The consequence is not merely the marginalization of religious content but the erosion of the ontological horizon through which education derives its ultimate meaning and purpose. Addressing this condition requires considerably more than curricular adjustment or the symbolic insertion of religious values into existing frameworks. What is demanded is a radical reconstruction of educational foundations themselves. The transcendental canopy model proposed in this study responds to that necessity by repositioning Divine Revelation (Wahyu) as the supreme epistemological and ontological reference that illuminates, organizes, and directs all forms of knowledge. Through this reorientation, the curriculum is transformed from an instrument of market-driven efficiency into a vehicle for intellectual, moral, and spiritual flourishing grounded in transcendent purpose.

The implications of such a reconstruction extend far beyond classroom practice and curriculum design. Institutional governance, educational leadership, quality assurance systems, and policy frameworks must be reconsidered in light of a vision of education that prioritizes the formation of spiritually conscious and ethically responsible human beings rather than merely productive economic actors. Educational leaders are therefore challenged to move beyond managerial rationality toward a form of stewardship rooted in metaphysical awareness and civilizational responsibility. At the policy level, the transcendental canopy model invites a reconsideration of the criteria through which educational success is defined, shifting emphasis from quantitative performance alone toward the cultivation of wisdom, character, and meaningful human development. Equally significant is its contribution to future scholarship.

By foregrounding the necessity of intellectual de-secularization, this study opens new pathways for philosophical inquiry into curriculum theory, educational epistemology, and Islamic educational reform. The future of Islamic education may well depend upon its capacity to recover a coherent vision of knowledge in which revelation once again serves not as a peripheral addition to learning, but as the luminous center from which all educational endeavors derive their significance.

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