

Harmonising Progressivist and Islamic Pedagogical Frameworks for 21st-Century Curriculum Innovation

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ABSTRACT

In the evolving landscape of 21st-century education, the integration of diverse pedagogical frameworks is crucial to fostering intellectual, moral, and social development. This paper explores the synthesis of Progressivist and Islamic pedagogical principles in curriculum design, highlighting their shared emphasis on holistic education, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility. Progressivism, rooted in the philosophies of John Dewey, advocates student-centered, experiential learning to cultivate independent thinking and adaptability. Similarly, Islamic educational principles, derived from the Quran and Hadith, stress *Tarbiyah* (holistic development), *Ilm* (knowledge acquisition as a moral duty), and *Adab* (ethical discipline). This study examines the compatibility of these two paradigms and their potential for integration within contemporary educational models. Drawing on case studies from international Islamic schools, it demonstrates how inquiry-based learning, community engagement, and moral education can be effectively combined to produce well-rounded individuals equipped for modern societal challenges. The paper also addresses key challenges, including resistance from traditional educators, the reconciliation of secular and religious content, and the need for culturally sensitive teacher training. Recommendations include structured curriculum reforms, professional development programs, and stakeholder collaboration to ensure a balanced approach to education that aligns with both Progressivist and Islamic values. This study contributes to the discourse on curriculum innovation, offering a model for educational institutions seeking to harmonize tradition with modern pedagogical advancements.

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of 21st-century education, there is an increasing demand for pedagogical approaches that nurture students' intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual development. Modern societies are more interconnected and complex than ever before, necessitating an education system that not only equips learners with critical thinking and problem-solving skills but also instills ethical values and social responsibility. As educators strive to balance tradition with innovation, two prominent educational philosophies—Progressivism and Islamic

pedagogy—offer complementary frameworks that can enrich contemporary curriculum design.

Progressivism, rooted in the ideas of John Dewey and other early 20th-century educational reformers, advocates student-centered learning, experiential education, and active engagement with real-world issues. It promotes problem-solving, teamwork, and reflective thinking—essential skills for today's learners (Dewey, 2024). Progressive education rejects rigid, authoritarian teaching methods and instead fosters inquiry-based

learning, adaptability, and social responsibility, aligning well with the demands of modern, dynamic educational environments (Rodgers, 2017).

Similarly, Islamic educational principles, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, emphasize holistic development, Harmonising intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. Key concepts such as Tarbiyah (comprehensive personal development), Ilm (knowledge as both an intellectual pursuit and religious duty), and Adab (moral discipline and ethical conduct) seek to cultivate individuals who are not only academically proficient but also socially responsible and ethically grounded (Sheikh & Ali, 2019). Islamic pedagogy encourages critical reflection (Ijtihad), ethical leadership, and community engagement, aligning with modern educational goals of producing well-rounded, socially conscious individuals (Najwan, 2018).

Given the shared emphasis on critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and holistic development, Harmonising Progressivist and Islamic pedagogical principles presents an opportunity to create a balanced, inclusive, and ethically grounded curriculum. However, challenges persist, including resistance from traditional educators, tensions between secular and religious content, and the need for culturally sensitive teacher training (Chu et al., 2017).

This paper explores the intersection of Progressivist and Islamic education principles and their potential integration within contemporary curriculum design. It examines common values, real-world applications, and case studies of international

Islamic schools implementing these frameworks. Furthermore, the study highlights challenges to this integration and offers recommendations for curriculum reform, teacher development, and stakeholder collaboration. By synthesizing these two educational philosophies, the paper argues that harmonizing Progressivism with Islamic pedagogy can produce intellectually competent, morally responsible, and socially engaged learners equipped to navigate the complexities of modern society with integrity and resilience.

Overview of Educational Progressivism

John Dewey and other educational reformers who felt that traditional, authoritarian education inhibited students' curiosity and ability for personal growth were the main influences behind the reform movement known as progressivism in education, which arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In traditional education, teachers were the main source of knowledge pupils were passive listeners, and rote memorisation and a strict, lecture-centred approach were common. On the other hand, progressivism sees education as a dynamic and participatory process that should emphasise student-centred learning and experiential learning to promote real-world application and practical comprehension.

Progressive education strongly emphasises social interaction, flexibility, and critical thinking to prepare pupils for life in a world that is changing quickly. Progressivism seeks to develop problem-solving, cooperation, and reflective thinking that are becoming increasingly important in personal and professional situations by

enticing students to engage in their education actively. (Rodgers, 2017)

Progressivist Educational Philosophy

Progressive education centres learning on the student, anchoring it on interest, ability, and other differences in the process of learning. Such an approach achieves personalised, inquiry-based, and collaborative learning, thereby encouraging debates, group projects, and even discussions to help students take active ownership of their education.

One core aspect of educational practice is that “learning by doing” is often understood as involving physical actions rather than mental activities. From the idea of John Dewey that education is “life itself,” progressive classrooms keep engaging the student through projects, experiments, and internships rather than mere memorisation and instead broaden the practical skills in solving problems (Skulmowski, 2024).

Critical thinking is fostered by independent exploration of complex issues, an examination of evidence and coming to a reasoned conclusion. It encourages intellectual independence and skills when problem-solving and results in students approaching problems with confidence, developing resilience and adaptability. Finally, it encourages social responsibility and democracy: teamwork, respect for all kinds of diversity, and ethical awareness. The students learn to cooperate and socialise without disrespecting others' differences through group work or social projects. This fosters not only moral awareness but also prepares students for contribution to society. (Naatonis, et al., 2022)

Impact on Teaching Methodologies

Active, student-centred approaches to learning have had an immense impact on teaching methodologies due to the influence of progressivism. The important methods include group projects, inquiry-based learning, flipped classrooms, and continuous assessment. (Bezanilla, et al., 2019)

Group projects encourage teamwork skills in that the students work together, communicate well with each other, and appreciate the diversity of opinions as they collectively address tasks. Inquiry-based learning involves asking questions, researching, and drawing conclusions by students on a given topic, hence promoting analytical thinking similar to the scientific process. The flipped classroom model turns traditional instruction on its head, bringing introductory material into the class via video or reading and freeing up time in the classroom to be used for interactive, problem-solving activities that support independent learning. Which may include writing papers, portfolios or diaries; project-based and participatory assessment supplants a focus on high-stakes tests to comprehensively measure the growth, skills, and level of understanding of students. All of these strategies align with the principle of engaging the active learner in the process of education. Most studies analyse one methodology and the impact of that methodology on students. (Brooks, et al., 2020)

Islamic Principles of Education

According to Islamic educational principles, holistic development should be gained in connection with academic, moral, and

spiritual growth, as imparted by the Quran and Hadith. The concept of *Tarbiyah* considers the intellectual, ethical, spiritual, and physical development of the learner, who also imbibes values like empathy and resilience in his being. This further motivates students to bring harmony between faith and study to benefit not only themselves but society also.

Ilm, the divinity of search for knowledge, and *Ijtihad*, or independent reasoning, evoke lifelong learning and critical thinking. Students are taught to regard different perspectives and apply knowledge in real-life conditions parallel to the modern inquiry-based method of learning.

Adab, or Moral and ethical education, emphasises honesty, humility, and kindness. As students build a foundation of ethical behaviour and community responsibility through *Adab*, they cultivate compassion and integrity.

The mentorship and respect-based relationship between teachers and students would also form the foundation of Islamic education. Role models and teachers guide students in their academic and moral development and facilitate active learning practice. Such a relationship supports the integral development of students by Harmonising knowledge acquisition and character building within a collaborative and respectful setting. (Sheikh & Ali, 2019)

Harmonising Progressivist and Islamic Principles in Curriculum Design

The philosophy of Islamic education makes an important contribution to the development of progressive Islamic education in optimizing religious moderation. Islamic

educational philosophy views education as a means to develop human potential holistically, both in terms of intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social.⁴³ In the context of progressive Islamic education, the philosophy of Islamic education puts forward an understanding that is inclusive, critical, and oriented towards the times. To encourage students to have a deep understanding of Islamic values that are universal and relevant in contemporary life. Philosophy of Islamic education helps identify fundamental principles in Islam that can provide a basis for the development of progressive Islamic education in optimizing religious moderation. (Hasanah & Abbas, 2023)

A curriculum combining these approaches can help with intellectual competence along with moral and social development. Incorporation of Islamic principles into the learning objectives will help connect the students' academic learning to real-life applications as well as moral principles. Modern classrooms can use approaches like project-based learning, inquiry-based instruction, or active learning and relate them to Islamic principles.

Community service activities, charitable projects, or acts of empathy are practical ways that can be very effective avenues for this type of integration. For instance, in social initiatives, volunteer work, and the reenactment of both content and ideological aspects of serving others by students, humility, the spirit of serving, and intellectual growth as embodied both in Islamic educational models and Progressivist versions. (Sahin, 2018)

Harmonising Progressivism and Islamic Education

Aligned with both Progressivism and Islam, it outlines a broad model of education that incorporates all of these ingredients-making for a more balanced meal of intellectual and moral growth.

Both philosophies place great importance on critical thinking and inquiry-based learning. Progressivism is inspired by John Dewey and pushes students to actively explore concepts, whereas students question and experiment to construct knowledge. That is exactly like what Ijtihad in Islamic education avails to students; make them critically engage issues which give findings that shall be within the values of Islam. Such a marriage creates in-depth analysis skills that promote reflective thinking along with well-thought ideas. (Sari, et al., 2017)

Learner-centred approaches equally have a robust foundation both in the philosophies. Progressivism encourages active student participation through experiential and hands-on learning where the learners are in charge of their learning process. Similarly, Islamic education requires active participation, particularly through *Tadabbur*, or meditation on the Quran, which necessitates that the learner develop personal reflection and insight. Thus, both systems foster curious and self-managed learners who form an unbreakable bond with learning.

Holistic development is equally important in both approaches. Progressivism focuses on intellectual, emotional, and social development as it prepares students for a balanced life. This perspective is echoed by

Islamic education with *Tarbiyah*: it nurtures the mind, body, and soul to develop the ethical aspect of human character. This approach would help in producing well-balanced students who are morally grounded, tolerant, and resilient.

This model is completed by social responsibility and community engagement. Progressivism encourages civics, teamwork, and respect for many diverse perspectives, while Islamic education teaches *Sadaqah* (charity) and community service, applying knowledge for the betterment of others. By requiring collaborative projects, community involvement, and volunteer work, educators can create real-world connections that will help students see knowledge as a tool for societal benefit, enriching both communities and individuals. (Suyatno, et al., 2021)

Progressivism and Islamic Principles in Practice

Educational philosophies, such as Progressivism and Islamic principles, lead to different approaches in teaching that can serve intellectual and moral development. Below are examples of how such principles come alive in the classrooms as applicable to real-life issues in ethics and dilemmas:

1. Progressivism in Practice

In a progressive classroom, active learning, thinking skills, and hands-on experience are stressed. The environment of a progressive classroom will be dynamic and will encourage students to explore, question, and even collaborate.

Example 1: Collaborative Science Project on Local Environmental Issues

Progressive principles might apply to a science class project in which the students

conduct some collective activity to tackle a problem in their community: perhaps reducing the amount of waste in the community. The teacher could then facilitate this process by helping guide the discussions of research, by exploring, in the class, what is learned, and by developing possible solutions. For instance, they might look into recycling, help implement a composting program for schools, or just design posters with ideas to raise a little environmental awareness.

By the time the project is completed, the students not only learn the principles involved but also apply them in real life, making the matter more meaningful. Working in groups, honing their communication and teamwork skills and being responsible for the project's outcomes are motivated by this system to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and social responsibility, all very important values of Progressivism.

Example 2: Applying Mathematics to Real-Life Scenarios

A progressive math teacher can make life a lesson for numerical learning. For example, this student will be able to participate in a budgeting lesson whereby they will calculate costs for a hypothetical house on a month-by-month basis. So they learn simple arithmetic, percentages, and problem-solving skills in a very reality-based context.

Another approach is to ask teachers to have their students collect data for a topic of interest, such as the average amount of homework completed by students in a week and draw statistical conclusions about the result. This approach engages students in

real-world problems that make mathematical concepts relevant and impactful in various learning situations.

2. Islamic Practices in Education

Education through Islamic activities is thus for the development of an all-rounded individual for high moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth. The activities run in an Islamist school normally help build up in them a sense of community, sympathy, and responsibility.

Example 1: Charity Drives and Community Service Days

With other subject areas, service projects are also incorporated in the curriculum of the Islamic educational institutions to enable pupils understand the need for altruism. For example scholarship students in Islamic institutions may be involved in a charity drive during the month of Ramadan bringing food, clothes and other useful items for the less fortunate families within their locality. This is also the case for these community service projects, which assist students in embracing the Islamic teachings of kindness and giving resulting to concern and responsibility towards other people.

In some of these institutions, learners are involved in compulsory community service days, when they may work in some sort of a shelter or pick up trash in the nearby area. Such activities enhance the learning experience of students in making the learning act, practical and are socially useful, which is one of the great values of Islam.

Example 2: Ethics Lessons on Contemporary Issues

Most of the Islamic schools include ethics lessons from contemporary problems in the

lived values of Islam. So, for example, when teaching students how to conserve the environment, they would analyse verses in the Quran about Earth stewardship. They then proceed to discuss ways those values could be applied to modern environmental issues, and it's similar parallels drawn between ancient teaching and contemporary challenges.

This approach enables students to look at ethical issues within the framework of spiritual and moral study, relating the academics they learn in school with personal beliefs. Appreciating how Islamic values could be applied to guide responses to all global problems sets up students to responsibly and thoughtfully respond to important social issues.

3. Blended Approaches

The blended practices of education combine elements of Progressivism with those of Islamic principles to produce academic and moral growth in students. Such practices involved project-based learning and infused educational experiences with ethical and spiritual values.

Example 1: International Islamic Schools with Integrated Methodologies

Some international Islamic schools embrace blended approaches that remain true to Islamic principles: progressive methodologies in teaching are balanced with spiritual development. Such schools tend to focus on project-based learning, which promotes critical thinking and a more holistic engagement, but complete the day or week with one or several activities or lessons in spiritual development. For example, in a global project on the scarcity of water,

students might research the subject area, propose solutions, and reflect on moral responsibility as Earth's steward.

Through this blended approach, students are prepared for academic performance and professional service while possessing a sound moral stance. Class discussions often contain group exercises, group dialogues, and inquiring projects that help balance the environment of learning knowledge and self-growth.

Example 2: Moral and Ethical Lessons Integrated into Project Work

In some schools, lessons on moral values and Islamic studies are also incorporated into project-based activities. For example, literature classes could discuss stories about justice, compassion, and honesty from Western literature and Islamic history. Characters and situations are analysed so students can discuss their applicability in real life and their connection to Islamic teachings. This encourages students to value how moral and ethical values can be applied in a few areas. Their understanding is further enhanced by the principle of how value systems play a role in decision-making.

In coeducational classes, students experience the educational intensity of progressive methodologies with accompanying spiritual guidance through Islamic values. The experience will help balanced growth because students are empowered with both practical know-how and an ethical base to confront the real world. These examples show how a single principle of Progressivism or Islamic values may be practised either in solitude or in combination within an educational context. In this sense,

schools could ensure that environments of intellectual curiosity and moral integrity coexist to prepare the citizens to participate responsibly and meaningfully in their community and world. Is there something else you want to develop?

Challenges and Recommendations

While combining intellectual and spiritual development in learning, Harmonising Progressivism with Islam presents a challenge. Secular content needs to be infused with religious input and organised to reinforce academic and ethical integrity. Teacher preparation is crucial, as religious scholars might be less familiar with Progressive tools such as project-based learning. Some may resent change because they fear new methods may reduce or minimise religious values.

Aspects of values were adapted in the curriculum design by being part of common, learned, and practised lessons through the integration approach, which were academically relevant and spiritually relevant. Pedagogy training in culturally sensitive approaches can facilitate the alignment of different pedagogies since effective training on how to fit progressive practices with Islamic values is provided to educators. Establishing cooperation with parents, teachers, administrators, and other leaders in the community strengthens this approach by establishing an avenue for developing support networks toward a holistic, all-inclusive environment for learning.

Conclusion

In the transforming education landscape, there is the Progressive-Islamic approach that

balances intellectual and moral growth. Given much emphasis on critical thinking, hands-on learning, and adaptability, Progressivism is intended to prepare the student for an ever-changing world and encourage student-centred learning where the learner takes responsibility for independent thought and problem-solving. In line with such recognition, their principles of education based on teachings from the Quran and Hadith emphasise the concept of holistic development-competence in intellect as well as in morality and ethics. Critical concepts in *Tarbiyah, Ilm, and Adab* instill individuals with profound social responsibility and empathy towards others' views.

Such approaches, when intertwined, pose problems in terms of both secular and religious content, training the educators themselves, and resistance among parents towards progressive methods inside traditional settings. However, strategic curricula, strong teacher training, and collaboration between parents, educators, and community members can enable one to solve problems effectively. Thus, enhancing both academic and spiritual growth, a blended approach fulfills the needs of modern education and ensures that students are not only cognitively ready but conscious as well as responsible citizens.

Such synergy between the framework of Progressivism and Islamic principles fosters rounded individuals equipped to face complexities in modern life with integrity and resilience. Balanced approaches in teaching methodologies enrich modern teaching methods; students are well-meaning

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and have transformative experiences in school.

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