

Developing Islamic Innovative Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education: A Faith-Informed Framework for Holistic and Sustainable Learning

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ABSTRACT

Islamic early childhood education (ECE) lacks a sufficiently articulated pedagogical framework that connects Islamic epistemology with contemporary child-centred practice and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) priorities. This conceptual paper develops Islamic Innovative Pedagogy (IIP) to address that integration problem. Using an integrative conceptual review and framework-development synthesis, the paper brings together foundational Islamic education scholarship, recent ECE literature, and policy sources on quality, inclusion and sustainability. The synthesis is organised around tawhid, tarbiyah, ta'dib and ta'lim and is informed by comparison with integrated Islamic education and contemporary child-centred pedagogy. IIP comprises four interrelated dimensions: Tawhidic worldview integration, holistic child development, innovative child-centred methodologies, and inclusive and sustainable learning ecosystems. Its distinctive contribution lies not in introducing these elements individually, but in configuring them as an ECE-specific architecture linking worldview, developmental aims, pedagogical practice, ecosystem conditions and SDG 4. The framework offers a theoretically informed basis for curriculum design, teacher professional learning, quality discussion and future research in Islamic ECE. As a conceptual model, however, its feasibility, effects and transferability require empirical validation across diverse ECE contexts.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) has increasingly been recognized as a strategic foundation for equitable, inclusive and sustainable human development. Within the global education agenda, Sustainable Development Goal 4 positions quality education not merely as access to schooling, but as the provision of inclusive, equitable and lifelong learning

opportunities that nurture children’s cognitive, social, emotional, moral and lifelong developmental capacities (UN, 2025). In particular, SDG Target 4.2 emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education. This target confirms that the early years are not simply a preparatory stage for formal schooling, but a critical developmental period for shaping children’s identity, values, readiness to learn, social participation and future well-being. UNESCO (2025) similarly frames early childhood care and education as a key mechanism for promoting equity, inclusion and lifelong learning especially for children whose development is shaped by diverse cultural, religious, linguistic and socio-economic contexts.

The significance of ECE is further strengthened by growing international recognition that learning quality must be understood holistically. Indeed, quality early learning does not depend only on academic readiness, literacy or numeracy achievement. Rather, it also involves emotionally secure environments, meaningful teacher-child interactions, inclusive classroom practices, culturally responsive pedagogy, family engagement and opportunities for children to develop curiosity, creativity and ethical awareness (OECD, 2025a). In this regard, ECE becomes a formative space where children begin to construct meaning about themselves, others, the environment and the wider world. Therefore, any discussion of quality education in ECE demands not only with curriculum and pedagogy, but also with the philosophical assumptions that define what it means to educate the child.

In Islamic ECE, the question of quality also involves how educational purpose is understood. Contemporary ECE scholarship emphasises child agency, guided play, inquiry, participation, creativity and holistic development (Ha et al., 2025; OECD, 2025b), whereas Islamic educational philosophy foregrounds tawhid, tarbiyah, ta’dib and ta’lim as interrelated foundations for the unity of knowledge, holistic nurturing, moral formation and meaningful learning (Al-Attas, 1980, 1993; Wan Daud, 1998; Azzam et al., 2025). These traditions are not inherently incompatible; the conceptual challenge is to articulate how Islamic epistemological commitments can guide developmentally appropriate and participatory ECE practice rather than remain as parallel religious content.

Existing approaches address parts of this challenge but from different levels of analysis. The Al-Attas/Wan Daud tradition provides a strong philosophical account of knowledge, adab and educational purpose, yet it is not an operational ECE pedagogy. Integrated Islamic education models in Malaysia and Indonesia demonstrate ways of connecting religious and general knowledge at curriculum or institutional level (Fatah Yasin & Jani, 2019; Basri & Abdullah, 2024), but they are not specifically designed around early-childhood developmental processes. Islamic ECE scholarship further shows that play and child-responsive learning can be interpreted through fitrah and Islamic values (Ramli, 2022; Sairan, 2024), while contemporary child-centred models provide rich methods for participation and exploration but do not ordinarily position Islamic epistemology as their organising worldview. The issue, therefore, is not an absence of Islamic education scholarship, but limited conceptual integration across these strands.

This paper addresses that integration problem by developing Islamic Innovative Pedagogy (IIP) as an ECE-specific synthesis. IIP does not claim that tawhid, tarbiyah, ta’dib, ta’lim, play, inquiry, inclusion or sustainability are individually new. Its distinct contribution lies in configuring these established ideas into a four-dimensional architecture that links (1) worldview and epistemology, (2) holistic developmental aims, (3) child-centred pedagogical methods, and (4) inclusive and sustainable learning ecosystems, with explicit conceptual mapping to SDG 4. Table 1 positions IIP in relation to the principal traditions from which it draws.

Table 1

Comparative Positioning of Islamic Innovative Pedagogy (IIP)

Approach / Tradition	Primary Contribution	Scope Limitation for The Present Problem	How IIP Is Positioned
Al-Attas / Wan Daud Islamic educational philosophy	Islamic epistemology, unity of knowledge, adab and educational purpose (Al-Attas, 1980, 1993; Wan Daud, 1998).	Provides a philosophical foundation rather than an ECE-specific set of child-centred pedagogical and ecosystem practices.	Translates epistemological principles into an ECE architecture linking worldview, development, pedagogy and learning conditions.

Integrated Islamic education / school curriculum	Connects religious and general knowledge and supports whole-person formation (Fatah Yasin & Jani, 2019; Basri & Abdullah, 2024).	Predominantly curriculum- or institution-level and commonly focused on primary/secondary schooling rather than early-childhood pedagogy.	Specifies ECE-level developmental aims, teaching methods, inclusion, family engagement and sustainability.
Islamic ECE and fitrah-/play-informed scholarship	Shows compatibility between Islamic values, fitrah, play and child-responsive learning (Ramli, 2022; Sairan, 2024).	Often addresses particular practices or developmental concerns rather than a multi-dimensional framework.	Integrates these practices within four mutually connected dimensions and links them to a quality-education agenda.
Contemporary child-centred ECE pedagogy	Emphasises play, inquiry, participation, creativity and developmentally appropriate practice (Ha et al., 2025; OECD, 2025b).	Islamic epistemology and spiritual-moral purpose are not its organising premises.	Recontextualises child-centred methods through Islamic educational purpose rather than treating faith as an added content area.

This positioning is important because current quality frameworks treat curriculum, pedagogy, educator capability, family engagement, equity and inclusion as interconnected features of ECE provision (OECD, 2025a). For Islamic ECE, quality therefore requires more than adding religious content to an otherwise separate curriculum. A coherent framework must explain how worldview informs pedagogical decisions, how those decisions support the whole child, and how institutional and community conditions sustain participation and values-based learning.

Accordingly, the paper develops IIP through an integrative conceptual synthesis guided by the question: How can Islamic educational principles be conceptually integrated with contemporary ECE pedagogy to support holistic child development and align with SDG 4? Two supporting questions are: (1) What interrelated dimensions constitute IIP in ECE? and (2) How do these dimensions conceptually connect with inclusive, sustainable and quality learning conditions? These questions are conceptual rather than causal and do not presume empirically established effects.

The paper contributes by clarifying the conceptual boundaries of IIP and specifying how its four dimensions relate. The framework is intended as a theoretically informed basis for curriculum design, teacher professional learning and future research in Islamic ECE. Because IIP has not yet been empirically validated, claims about effectiveness, transferability or wider applicability are treated as propositions for investigation rather than established outcomes.

2. Methodology: Integrative Conceptual Review and Framework Development

This conceptual study employed an integrative literature review and framework-development approach. An integrative review is appropriate when the purpose is to bring together heterogeneous theoretical, empirical and policy sources to clarify constructs and build a conceptual model rather than estimate effects. The conceptual corpus comprised the 28 sources cited in this manuscript, including foundational texts in Islamic educational philosophy, peer-reviewed work on Islamic and integrated education, recent ECE studies, and international policy and quality reports. Contemporary sources published mainly between 2021 and 2026 were prioritised for discussion of ECE, inclusion, innovation and SDG 4, while earlier seminal works by Al-Attas and Wan Daud were retained because they establish the epistemological concepts underpinning the framework.

Source inclusion was criterion-based rather than exhaustive. A source was retained when it directly informed at least one of four analytic domains: Islamic worldview and educational purpose; holistic child development; child-centred pedagogy and innovation; or inclusive and sustainable learning conditions. Policy sources were included when they specified quality ECE or SDG 4 priorities. This is therefore not a PRISMA-style systematic review, and the paper does not make claims about the numerical prevalence of particular positions in the literature. Instead, the literature gap is treated as a problem of conceptual integration: relevant ideas exist, but they are dispersed across philosophical, curriculum, pedagogical and policy literatures.

Framework development proceeded in three stages. First, recurring Islamic concepts (tawhid, tarbiyah, ta'dib and ta'lim) and contemporary ECE constructs (play, inquiry, participation, inclusion, family engagement and sustainability) were extracted and defined. Second, these constructs were compared across existing Islamic education and ECE approaches to identify overlap, complementarity and differences in scope. Third, the constructs were synthesised into four interrelated IIP dimensions and mapped conceptually to selected SDG 4 targets. The resulting framework is an analytic proposition rather than an empirically tested model; its practical feasibility and relationships with child, teacher or institutional outcomes require subsequent qualitative and quantitative validation.

3. SDG 4 and ECE

SDG 4 provides a global policy framework for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Within this agenda, ECE is positioned as a foundational stage for reducing inequality, strengthening school readiness and supporting holistic human development. SDG Target 4.2 is particularly relevant because it calls for all girls and boys to have access to quality ECE, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (UN, 2025). This target confirms that ECE is not merely a preparatory phase for formal schooling but a critical developmental period that shapes children's cognitive, socio-emotional, moral, physical and spiritual growth. Therefore, ECE should be understood as a strategic entry point for achieving educational justice, social inclusion and long-term sustainable development.

From a quality perspective, SDG 4 expands the meaning of education beyond enrolment and access. It requires sustained attention to learning environments, teacher competence, curriculum relevance, inclusion, equity and child well-being. In ECE settings, quality education must therefore be understood as the integration of safe learning spaces, developmentally appropriate pedagogy, responsive teacher-child interactions and meaningful family-community engagement. These elements are important because young children learn through relationships, play, exploration, imitation and interaction with their immediate environments (Theobald et al., 2025). Thus, the quality of ECE provision depends not only on what is taught, but also on how learning is organized, experienced and supported.

This perspective is especially significant in Islamic ECE, where quality also includes values formation, moral consciousness and spiritual nurturing. Islamic education views the child as a whole person whose intellectual, emotional, social, physical, moral and spiritual dimensions are interconnected. The concepts of tarbiyah, ta'dib and ta'lim are compatible with the holistic aspirations of SDG 4 because they emphasise balanced development of knowledge, character and ethical responsibility. Tarbiyah focuses on gradual nurturing and growth (Ramli, 2022), ta'dib emphasises moral refinement and proper conduct (Negara, 2026), while ta'lim refers to meaningful teaching and the cultivation of knowledge (Ridwan, 2025). Together, these concepts provide a philosophical basis for interpreting quality education through an Islamic educational lens.

For IIP, the distinctive contribution to SDG 4 is interpretive and pedagogical: the framework translates policy concepts such as quality, inclusion and sustainability into an Islamic educational vocabulary and into ECE design principles. Inclusion is connected with human dignity and differentiated participation; sustainability is linked with amanah, mizan and khalifah; and quality is framed as development that includes cognitive, socio-emotional, moral, spiritual, physical and creative dimensions. These connections are made explicit in the SDG mapping in Section 8. Because IIP is conceptual, the alignment represents a theoretical mapping rather than evidence that the framework has already improved SDG indicators.

Accordingly, IIP connects child-centred learning, inclusive practice, moral education and sustainability within an Islamic worldview. Play, storytelling, inquiry, nature-based reflection and community engagement are treated as pedagogical means through which Islamic educational purposes can be enacted in developmentally appropriate ways. This conceptual integration positions Islamic ECE within the SDG 4 discussion while retaining its own epistemological and ethical foundations.

4. Foundations of Islamic Educational Philosophy

Islamic educational philosophy is grounded in a holistic understanding of human development (Alya et al., 2024), where education is not limited to the transmission of knowledge but includes the formation of faith, character, ethical responsibility and purposeful living (Asiah & Desky, 2025). Rather than treating cognitive achievement as the sole or primary educational aim, Islamic education views the child as an amanah and as a developing human being whose intellectual, spiritual, emotional, moral, physical and social dimensions should be nurtured in balance (Bano, 2025). This philosophical orientation is especially relevant to ECE because the early years are formative for habits, identity, relationships and ways of interpreting the world (Rumbidzai & Achebe, 2023).

In fact, four key concepts form the foundation of Islamic educational philosophy: *tawhid*, *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib* and *ta'lim* (Farida and Zuhairi, 2025). *Tawhid*, or the unity of Allah, provides the epistemological basis for integrating revealed knowledge and acquired knowledge. It rejects the separation between religious and worldly learning, positioning all forms of beneficial knowledge as connected to divine purpose. *Tarbiyah* refers to holistic nurturing and gradual development, emphasizing care, guidance and growth according to the child's developmental readiness (Ramli, 2022). *Ta'dib* focuses on moral refinement, discipline and the cultivation of proper conduct (Negara, 2026), while *ta'lim* refers to teaching, instruction and knowledge acquisition (Ridwan, 2025).

In ECE settings, these principles support a pedagogy that is both values-based and child-centred. Storytelling, play, inquiry, memorisation, observation of nature and social interaction can support children's language, reasoning, creativity and moral awareness (Nhase & Dube, 2023; Sairan, 2024). The challenge is not whether Islamic values and active learning can coexist, but how they are pedagogically connected. When religious learning is restricted to ritual instruction or memorisation, opportunities for inquiry, dialogue and experiential meaning-making can remain underdeveloped (Hasby, 2025). IIP therefore treats innovation as a process of pedagogical reinterpretation that preserves Islamic educational purpose while strengthening developmentally appropriate participation.

5. Innovation in ECE Pedagogy

In this paper, innovation in ECE is defined as purposeful pedagogical redesign that strengthens the meaning, participation, inclusiveness and developmental appropriateness of children's learning. It includes new or adapted teaching strategies, curriculum design, teacher creativity, learning-environment transformation and, where educationally justified, digital tools. Technology is therefore one possible resource rather than the defining feature of innovation. Within IIP, innovation is evaluated through Islamic educational purpose: methods are innovative when they enable active, reflective and relational learning while remaining coherent with *tawhid*, *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib* and *ta'lim*.

Child-centred approaches such as guided play, inquiry-based exploration, project work, storytelling and collaborative problem-solving are central to contemporary ECE because they recognise children as active participants in learning (Ha et al., 2025; Emenike, 2025). Islamic ECE can engage these approaches without treating them as culturally neutral imports. The Islamic concept of *fitrah*, for example, supports attention to children's developmental tendencies, curiosity and play, while *tarbiyah* emphasises gradual guidance and responsive nurturing (Ramli, 2022; Sairan, 2024). This creates a basis for connecting active learning with moral and spiritual purpose from the outset rather than adding religious content after the pedagogical method has been selected.

Pedagogical innovation nevertheless requires critical recontextualisation. Models such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia and other play-oriented curricula contribute important ideas about autonomy, exploration, environment and creativity (Mughakali & Joseph, 2026), but their assumptions about knowledge, personhood and educational purpose are not identical to those of Islamic education. Conversely, an Islamic label does not by itself make a practice innovative or developmentally appropriate. IIP therefore rejects both uncritical transfer of external models and unreflective reliance on didactic tradition; pedagogical choices are assessed in relation to child development, participation, ethical purpose and contextual relevance.

Within IIP, this synthesis is operationalised through practices that connect active learning with Islamic meaning. Storytelling can combine prophetic narratives with language development and moral reasoning; inquiry can connect observation of nature with wonder, responsibility and stewardship; project-based learning can cultivate cooperation and service; and carefully selected digital resources can support exploration where they add developmental value. Meaningful innovation therefore depends on teacher professional learning, reflective curriculum design and supportive learning conditions, not on novelty alone (OECD, 2025a).

In sum, innovation in IIP refers to context-responsive pedagogical renewal across teaching strategies, curriculum, teacher roles and learning environments. Its defining criterion is not newness, but whether learning becomes more meaningful, participatory, inclusive, developmentally appropriate and ethically grounded within an Islamic worldview.

6. Islamic Innovative Pedagogy (IIP): Conceptual Integration

Islamic Innovative Pedagogy (IIP) is proposed as a framework-development synthesis rather than a wholly new educational theory. Its constituent ideas are established in Islamic education and ECE; the conceptual innovation lies in organising them into one ECE-specific architecture that links worldview, developmental aims, pedagogical methods and ecosystem conditions. IIP therefore integrates four core dimensions: Tawhidic worldview integration, holistic child development, innovative child-centred methodologies, and inclusive and sustainable learning ecosystems. These dimensions are interrelated rather than sequential, because decisions about what counts as meaningful learning, how children participate, and what environments support them are shaped by a common educational purpose.

The distinct contribution of IIP becomes clearer when compared with related approaches. The Al-Attas/Wan Daud tradition provides the epistemological and moral foundation for unity of knowledge and adab (Al-Attas, 1980, 1993; Wan Daud, 1998); integrated Islamic education models demonstrate curriculum-level integration of religious and general knowledge (Fatah Yasin & Jani, 2019; Basri & Abdullah, 2024); and Islamic ECE studies illustrate particular practices such as play, storytelling and fitrah-responsive learning (Ramli, 2022; Sairan, 2024). IIP adds an explicitly early-childhood pedagogical layer by specifying how these foundations relate to development, child-centred methodology, inclusion, family/community partnership and sustainability. Its contribution is therefore integrative and architectural rather than a claim that its individual concepts are unprecedented.

6.1 Dimension 1: Tawhidic Worldview Integration

The first dimension of IIP is *Tawhidic* worldview integration. Tawhid, the belief in the oneness of Allah, is not only a theological principle but also an epistemological foundation for understanding knowledge, reality and human purpose. In education, a *Tawhidic* worldview rejects the separation between religious knowledge and worldly knowledge. Instead, it frames all beneficial knowledge as interconnected and purposeful. For young children, this means that learning about language, numbers, nature, relationships, creativity and daily routines can be connected to wonder, gratitude, responsibility and moral awareness.

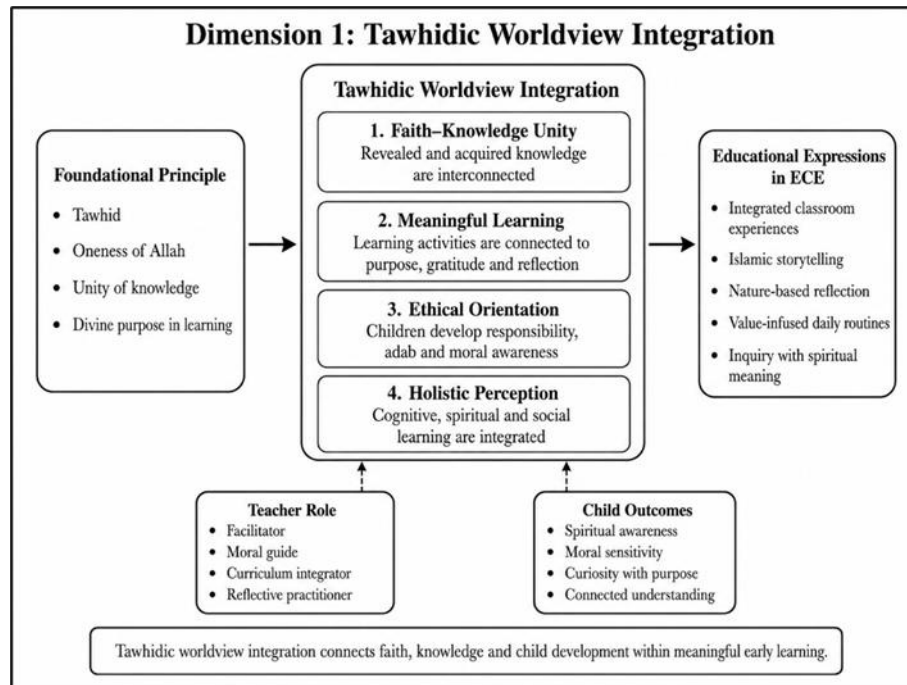
In practice, *Tawhidic* integration does not mean inserting religious content superficially into every lesson. Rather, it requires teachers to design learning experiences that help children recognize unity, meaning and ethical responsibility in their environment. For example, a science activity on plants may include observation, vocabulary development and counting, while also nurturing gratitude for Allah's creation and responsibility toward the environment. A storytelling session may develop listening and literacy skills while also encouraging honesty, compassion and patience. In this way, the *Tawhidic* worldview becomes an organizing principle for curriculum coherence.

The conceptual contribution of this dimension is to resist compartmentalization between religious and other forms of knowledge. Within IIP, quality cannot be reduced to school readiness or academic attainment; it also includes

children's developing capacity to connect learning with gratitude, responsibility and ethical judgement. These are conceptual aims whose enactment and assessment require context-sensitive empirical study.

Figure 1

Tawhidic Worldview Integration



6.2 Dimension 2: Holistic Child Development

The second dimension is holistic child development. Islamic educational philosophy recognizes the child as a whole being whose intellectual, spiritual, moral, emotional, physical and social dimensions are interconnected. This aligns strongly with contemporary ECE theories that emphasize integrated development rather than narrow academic preparation. However, IIP extends the idea of holistic development by explicitly incorporating spiritual and moral formation as central dimensions of child growth.

Within IIP, holistic development comprises four interrelated domains consistent with the framework in Figure 2. First, cognitive development includes language, numeracy, curiosity, problem-solving and early reasoning. Second, spiritual development includes awareness of Allah, gratitude, reflection and a developing sense of purpose. Third, moral and socio-emotional development includes adab, honesty, responsibility, empathy, cooperation and self-regulation. Fourth, physical and creative development includes movement, health, sensory exploration, play, imagination and artistic expression. These domains are not treated as isolated outcomes; they are integrated within meaningful classroom experiences.

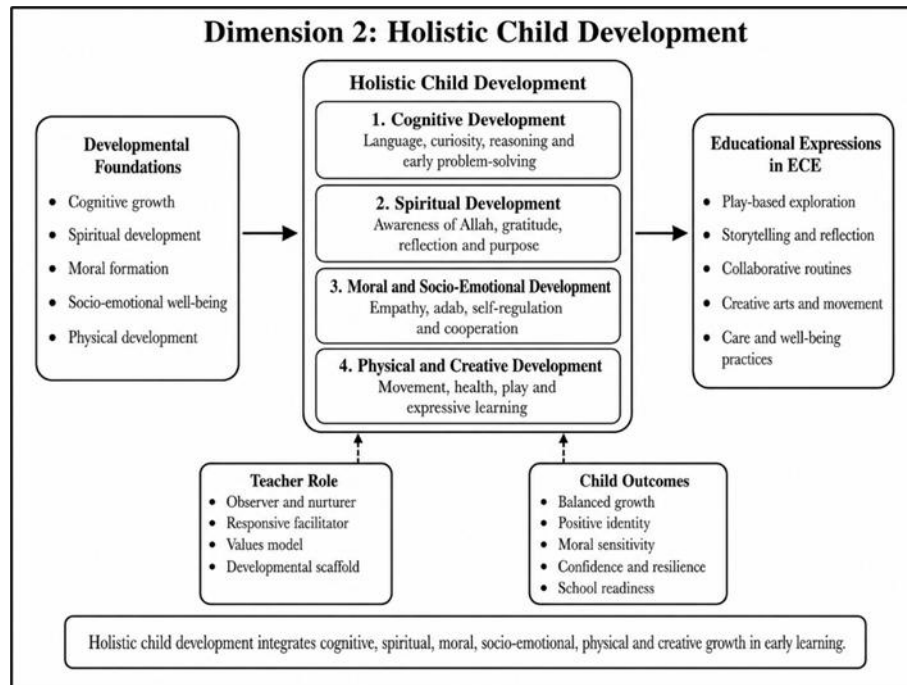
For example, collaborative play can support communication, turn-taking and empathy while also cultivating values such as kindness, fairness and patience. Outdoor learning can stimulate curiosity and scientific thinking while introducing khalifah as a responsibility of stewardship. Daily routines such as greetings, sharing food, cleaning up and helping peers can become pedagogical moments for developing responsibility, belonging and moral awareness.

The critical contribution of this dimension is that it resists the over-academization of ECE. In many education systems, children are increasingly exposed to formal literacy and numeracy expectations at younger ages. While early

academic foundations are important, an excessive emphasis on measurable performance may neglect emotional well-being, moral growth and spiritual identity. IIP therefore positions quality ECE as balanced formation, not merely readiness for primary school.

Figure 2

Holistic Child Development



6.3 Dimension 3: Innovative Child-Centred Methodologies

The third dimension of IIP is innovative child-centred methodology. Here, innovation refers to pedagogical renewal that makes learning more meaningful, participatory, reflective and developmentally appropriate rather than simply increasing technology use or changing classroom appearance. Core methods include guided play, inquiry-based learning, storytelling, project-based learning, experiential learning, creative arts, appropriately selected digital media and collaborative exploration.

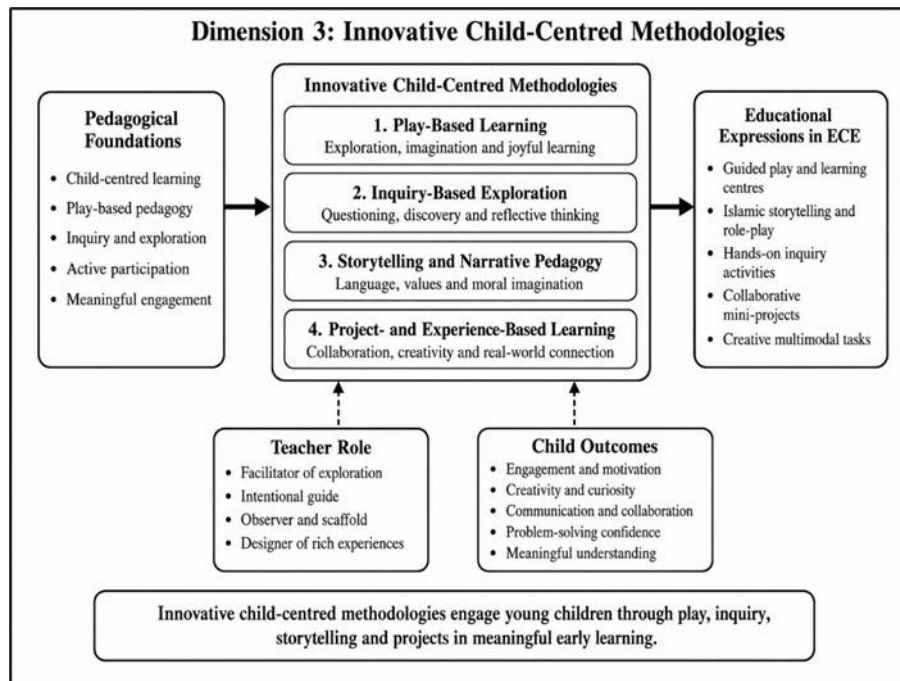
In IIP, these methodologies are recontextualised through Islamic epistemology and values. Guided play can cultivate cooperation, gratitude and problem-solving; Islamic storytelling can support language, imagination and moral reflection through prophetic narratives and everyday ethical situations; inquiry can encourage questions about nature and human relationships while connecting observation with wonder and meaning; and project-based learning can involve children in gardening, charity, recycling or community service, linking creativity with social and environmental responsibility.

This dimension is important because Islamic pedagogy is sometimes misinterpreted as teacher-centered, didactic or memorisation-based. While memorisation has a place in Islamic learning, especially in Qur'anic recitation and basic religious knowledge, it should not dominate the entire pedagogical experience of young children. Early childhood learning is most effective when children are actively engaged through movement, sensory experience, dialogue, imitation, repetition, imagination and social interaction. Therefore, IIP calls for a shift from passive reception to active meaning-making.

At the same time, IIP avoids the opposite problem: innovation without moral direction. Not all new methods are automatically educationally valuable. Digital tools, games or child-led activities may become superficial if they lack intentionality, ethical grounding and developmental appropriateness. Therefore, the role of the teacher remains central. Teachers act as facilitators, moral guides, curriculum designers and reflective practitioners who connect children's interests with Islamic values and developmental goals.

Figure 3

Innovative Child-Centred Methodologies



6.4 Dimension 4: Inclusive and Sustainable Learning Ecosystems

The fourth dimension of IIP is the development of inclusive and sustainable learning ecosystems. Quality Islamic ECE cannot depend only on classroom pedagogy; it requires a wider ecosystem involving teachers, families, school leaders, communities, curriculum authorities and policy structures. This dimension aligns IIP with SDG 4 by emphasizing equity, inclusion, sustainability and lifelong learning.

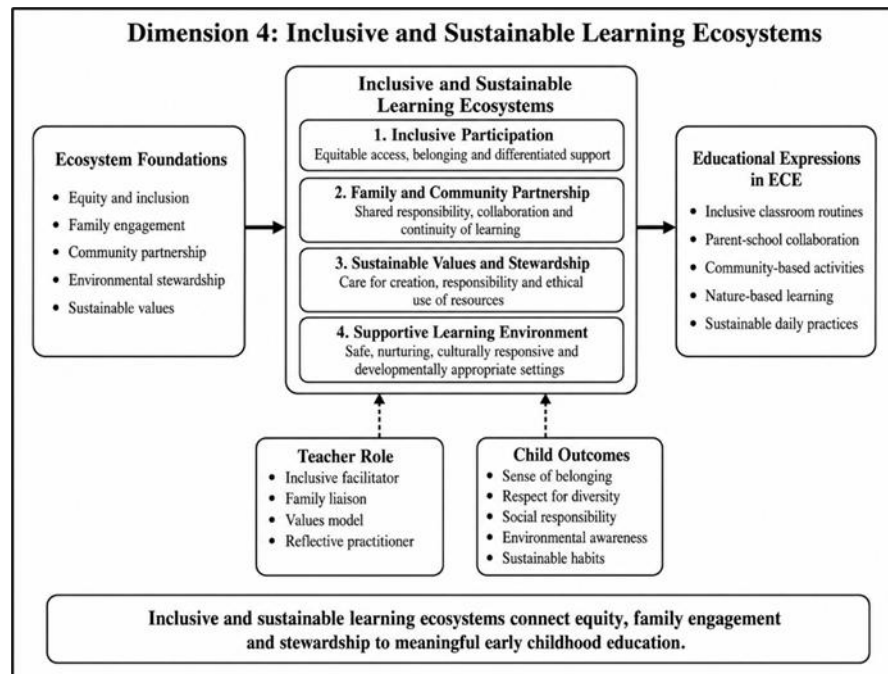
Inclusion within IIP means that every child is recognized as having dignity, potential and the right to meaningful participation. Islamic ECE should therefore support children of different abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, languages, learning needs and family contexts. An inclusive Islamic classroom should avoid rigid uniformity and instead provide flexible learning opportunities, differentiated instruction, emotional support and culturally responsive practices. This is particularly important for children with special educational needs, who may require additional scaffolding, assistive resources and teacher sensitivity.

Sustainability is also central to IIP. Islamic concepts such as amanah (trust), mizan (balance) and khalifah (stewardship/vicegerency) provide ethical foundations for environmental and social responsibility. In early childhood settings, sustainability can be introduced through simple but meaningful practices such as caring for plants, reducing waste, sharing resources, respecting animals and participating in community-based activities. These experiences connect faith with responsibility toward people, nature and the wider world.

Family and community engagement are equally important. In Islamic ECE, values formation is most effective when there is continuity between home, school and community. Teachers should therefore work collaboratively with parents to support children’s moral habits, language development, emotional regulation and spiritual routines. This strengthens the ecological validity of pedagogy and ensures that learning is not disconnected from children’s lived realities.

Figure 4

Inclusive and Sustainable Learning Ecosystems

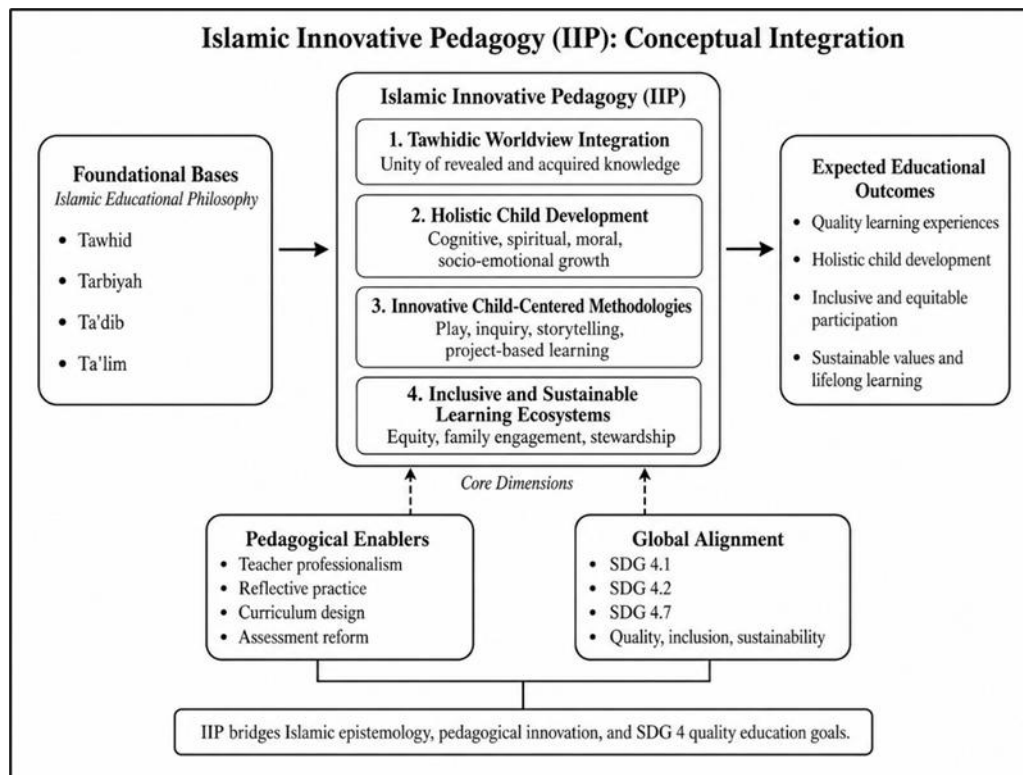


7. Conceptual Contribution of IIP

The conceptual contribution of IIP lies in the level and structure of its integration. It does not present tawhid, tarbiyah, ta’dib, ta’lim, child-centred learning or sustainability as new ideas. Rather, it links these established ideas in an ECE-specific architecture that connects epistemology (why and what counts as knowledge), developmental aims (the whole child), pedagogy (how children learn), and ecosystem conditions (where and with whom learning is sustained). This positioning distinguishes IIP from broad Islamic philosophy, school-level integrated curricula and single-method Islamic ECE approaches. The framework also makes its SDG 4 relationship explicit, thereby providing a common structure for conceptual discussion, curriculum design and future empirical testing. Its current contribution is theoretical; claims about effectiveness, child outcomes or cross-context transferability remain to be established empirically.

Figure 5

Islamic Innovative Pedagogy (IIP)



In summary, IIP represents a conceptual integration of faith, pedagogical innovation and quality education. Its four dimensions—Tawhidic worldview integration, holistic child development, innovative child-centred methodologies, and inclusive and sustainable learning ecosystems—provide a coherent structure for examining how Islamic educational purpose can be enacted in early-childhood practice. The framework is intended to guide theoretical development and empirical inquiry rather than to claim established effectiveness across contexts.

8. Alignment of IIP with SDG 4

At a conceptual level, IIP aligns with selected SDG 4 priorities by translating them into an ECE-specific, faith-informed pedagogical architecture. Target 4.2 is addressed through holistic, developmentally appropriate early learning; Target 4.5 through equitable participation and responsive support; Target 4.7 through values, cultural meaning and environmental stewardship; and Target 4.c through the educator capability needed to enact integrated pedagogy. Table 2 makes these relationships explicit.

Table 2

Conceptual Mapping of IIP To Selected SDG 4 Priorities

SDG 4 Priority	Relevant IIP Dimension(S)	Conceptual Contribution of IIP	Illustrative ECE Enactment
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Target 4.2: quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education	Holistic Child Development; Innovative Child-Centred Methodologies	Frames quality as integrated cognitive, spiritual, moral, socio-emotional, physical and creative development supported through active learning.	Guided play, inquiry, storytelling, creative exploration and responsive routines.
Target 4.5: equity and inclusion	Inclusive and Sustainable Learning Ecosystems	Connects dignity and equitable participation with differentiated support, cultural responsiveness and attention to diverse learning needs.	Flexible participation, scaffolding, family partnership, emotional support and inclusive resources.
Target 4.7: sustainable development, culture and values	Tawhidic Worldview Integration; Inclusive and Sustainable Learning Ecosystems	Links values education and sustainability with amanah, mizan and khalifah, positioning stewardship as part of meaningful learning.	Nature-based inquiry, care for living things, resource sharing, recycling and community activities.
Target 4.c: qualified and supported teachers	All four dimensions; pedagogical enablers	Highlights teacher knowledge, reflective practice and curriculum design as conditions for translating Islamic purpose into child-centred and inclusive practice.	Professional learning, collaborative planning, reflective assessment and family/community engagement.

Note. This mapping represents conceptual alignment and does not constitute evidence that IIP implementation improves SDG 4 indicators.

The mapping does not treat Islamic concepts as substitutes for internationally agreed SDG indicators. Rather, it shows how priorities such as quality, inclusion and sustainability can be interpreted through a culturally meaningful educational rationale in Islamic ECE. This distinction is important because conceptual compatibility does not itself demonstrate implementation quality or measurable impact; those questions require empirical validation.

9. Implications

The proposed IIP framework offers theoretical, practical and policy implications for strengthening discussion of quality ECE in Islamic contexts. Theoretically, IIP extends faith-informed pedagogy by integrating Islamic educational philosophy with child-centred learning, inclusion and sustainability. Rather than positioning Islamic pedagogy as separate from contemporary educational innovation, the framework explains how tawhid, tarbiyah, ta'dib and ta'lim can inform holistic, developmentally appropriate and values-based early learning. Practically, IIP can guide curriculum design, classroom pedagogy and teacher professional learning. Curriculum developers can use the four dimensions to examine whether learning experiences integrate cognitive, spiritual, moral, socio-emotional, physical and creative development. Teachers can draw on guided play, Islamic storytelling, nature-based reflection, inquiry and collaborative projects while maintaining intentional links to values and developmental goals. At the policy and leadership level, IIP can inform discussion of teacher preparation, inclusive learning environments, family-community partnership and quality assurance in Islamic ECE. These applications should be treated as design propositions rather than validated effects. Empirical studies are needed before the framework is used to make claims about improved learning, development or institutional quality.

10. Future Research Directions

Future research should move beyond conceptual development by empirically examining the Islamic Innovative Pedagogy (IIP) framework across diverse ECE contexts. Qualitative studies can first explore how preschool teachers interpret and enact the four dimensions through interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. Subsequent quantitative work can develop and validate measures of IIP implementation, including teacher beliefs, pedagogical practice, inclusion, family engagement and sustainability. Mixed-methods and longitudinal designs can

then examine relationships between IIP practices, teacher capability, process quality and child development outcomes without assuming causality in advance. Comparative research across Muslim-majority and minority contexts is also needed to identify which elements are stable and which require cultural or policy adaptation. Such work would test the framework's feasibility, construct validity, contextual boundaries and practical relevance.

11. Conclusion

This conceptual paper has developed IIP as a faith-informed framework for examining quality ECE in Islamic contexts. By synthesising Islamic educational philosophy, contemporary child-centred pedagogy and selected SDG 4 priorities, IIP organises four interrelated dimensions: Tawhidic worldview integration, holistic child development, innovative child-centred methodologies, and inclusive and sustainable learning ecosystems. Its contribution lies in the configuration of these established ideas into an ECE-specific architecture rather than in claiming that the individual concepts are new. The framework clarifies how worldview can inform developmental aims, pedagogical choices and the wider learning ecosystem while preserving attention to inclusion, family engagement and sustainability. In relation to SDG 4, IIP offers a conceptual mapping through which quality, equity and sustainable learning can be interpreted within an Islamic educational rationale. Because the framework remains conceptual, its feasibility, effectiveness and transferability are not yet established. Future empirical research is therefore essential to validate its dimensions, refine its boundaries and examine its relevance across diverse Islamic ECE settings.

Declarations

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Competing Interests

None.

Ethical Approval

This study was granted an exemption from requiring ethics approval as it does not involve human participants or the collection of sensitive personal data. The research is based on bibliometric methods, utilizing secondary data exclusively from the Scopus/WoS database. As such, it adheres to institutional guidelines that classify this type of study as low-risk and not subject to formal ethics approval.

Author Contributions

Author¹: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft

Author²: Supervision, Investigation, Validation, Visualization

Author³: Resources, Writing – review and editing

Data Availability

None.

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