

## **From Memorization to Meaning-Making: Rethinking Learning Outcomes in Contemporary Islamic Education**

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### **Abstract**

Received:11-07-2025

Revised:20-09-2025

Accepted:03-12-2025

This study explores the transformation of learning outcomes in contemporary Islamic education by examining the shift from memorization-oriented learning toward meaning-making-oriented educational practices. The purpose of the study is to analyze the theoretical foundations, educational implications, and future directions of meaningful learning within Islamic educational contexts. The research employs a qualitative library research approach through a systematic review of contemporary literature including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and educational documents. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring concepts, theoretical trends, and emerging perspectives related to learning outcomes, constructivism, transformative learning, deep learning, and Islamic educational philosophy. The findings reveal that memorization remains an important foundational component of Islamic education; however, it should be integrated into broader processes of understanding (fahm), reflection (tafakkur), wisdom (hikmah), ethical action ('amal), character formation (ta'dīb), and holistic development (tarbiyah). The study further demonstrates significant conceptual convergence between contemporary learning theories and classical Islamic educational principles in promoting learner agency, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility. The novelty of this study lies in the development of the Meaning-Making Islamic Learning Outcomes Framework (MMILOF), an integrative model that synthesizes Islamic epistemological concepts with contemporary educational theories to provide a comprehensive framework for educational reform. The study concludes that Islamic education should move beyond viewing memorization as an end goal and instead position it as a foundation for meaningful, transformative, and holistic learning.

### **Keywords:**

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Islamic Education; Meaning-Making Learning; Learning Outcomes

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### **Introduction**

Contemporary educational discourse has increasingly shifted from an emphasis on knowledge transmission toward deeper forms of learning that promote critical thinking, reflection, creativity, and meaning-making. Across diverse educational systems, learning is no longer viewed merely as the accumulation of information but as a transformative process through which learners construct understanding and apply knowledge in meaningful contexts. This paradigm shift has significant implications for religious education, including Islamic education, which has traditionally placed considerable emphasis on memorization and textual mastery. While memorization remains an important pedagogical practice within Islamic intellectual traditions, contemporary educational challenges require broader conceptions of learning outcomes. Educational scholars argue that meaningful learning experiences contribute more effectively to lifelong learning, personal development, and social engagement. Consequently, rethinking learning outcomes has become an important agenda within contemporary Islamic educational scholarship (Biesta, 2022; Fullan, 2023).

The growing complexity of modern societies has further intensified discussions regarding the purposes of education. Globalization, technological transformation,



cultural pluralism, and rapidly changing labor markets demand educational approaches that cultivate adaptability, critical reflection, and ethical decision-making. Learners are increasingly expected to navigate complex social realities while maintaining strong moral and intellectual foundations. Within this context, educational success cannot be measured solely through content retention or examination performance. Instead, educational institutions are challenged to develop learners' capacities to interpret, evaluate, and apply knowledge in diverse situations. Such developments have encouraged scholars to revisit traditional assumptions regarding educational outcomes across different educational traditions, including Islamic education (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

Islamic education has historically maintained a profound commitment to knowledge acquisition and preservation. Throughout Islamic intellectual history, memorization played a crucial role in safeguarding religious texts, transmitting scholarly traditions, and ensuring the continuity of knowledge across generations. The memorization of the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical texts remains highly valued within many contemporary Islamic educational institutions. These practices have contributed significantly to the preservation of Islamic intellectual heritage and religious identity. Nevertheless, contemporary scholars increasingly question whether educational success should be defined primarily through memorization. They argue that the goals of Islamic education extend beyond information retention toward understanding, wisdom, ethical conduct, and human flourishing (Sahin, 2022; Memon, 2021).

Recent educational research suggests that excessive reliance on rote learning may limit opportunities for deeper cognitive engagement. While memorization can support foundational knowledge acquisition, meaningful learning requires learners to interpret information, establish connections between concepts, and apply knowledge to real-world situations. Constructivist educational theories emphasize that understanding emerges through active engagement with ideas rather than passive reception of information. Such perspectives have influenced educational reforms worldwide and have stimulated debates regarding curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment. These debates are particularly relevant within Islamic educational contexts where traditional pedagogical approaches continue to shape educational practice. Consequently, scholars increasingly advocate balanced approaches that integrate memorization with higher-order cognitive skills (Hattie, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2021).

The concept of meaning-making has become central to contemporary learning theories. Meaning-making refers to the process through which learners interpret experiences, construct understanding, and integrate knowledge into broader cognitive and social frameworks. Rather than simply recalling information, learners engage in reflection, analysis, synthesis, and application. Educational psychologists argue that meaningful learning promotes deeper understanding, stronger retention, and greater transferability of knowledge across contexts. Furthermore, meaning-making supports personal identity development and ethical reasoning. These characteristics make the concept particularly relevant for religious education, which seeks not only to transmit knowledge but also to shape values, beliefs, and behavior (Illeris, 2022; Mezirow, 2021).

Islamic educational philosophy contains numerous concepts that resonate strongly with contemporary theories of meaningful learning. Classical Muslim scholars emphasized not only the acquisition of knowledge (*'ilm*) but also understanding (*fahm*), wisdom (*hikmah*), reflection (*tafakkur*), and action (*'amal*). Educational success was

often understood as the ability to internalize knowledge and translate it into ethical conduct. These traditions suggest that Islamic education historically encompassed dimensions extending beyond memorization alone. Contemporary scholars increasingly revisit these intellectual resources to develop educational models that address modern challenges while remaining rooted in Islamic epistemology. Such efforts contribute to ongoing discussions regarding educational reform and renewal (Kamali, 2023; Hashim, 2021).

The increasing influence of outcome-based education has also shaped contemporary discussions regarding learning outcomes. Outcome-based approaches focus on what learners are able to know, do, and value after completing educational experiences. This perspective encourages educators to define educational goals in terms of observable competencies rather than merely content coverage. Within Islamic education, outcome-based approaches raise important questions regarding the relationship between religious knowledge, character development, spiritual growth, and social responsibility. Educational scholars argue that learning outcomes should reflect the holistic aims of Islamic education rather than focusing exclusively on cognitive achievement. Therefore, outcome-based education provides an important framework for reexamining educational priorities (Spady, 2021; UNESCO, 2024).

Research conducted across Muslim educational contexts indicates growing interest in pedagogical innovation. Many institutions are exploring learner-centered approaches, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and reflective pedagogies. These innovations seek to encourage active learner participation while maintaining commitment to Islamic values and traditions. Preliminary findings suggest that such approaches can enhance student engagement, critical thinking, and meaningful understanding of religious concepts. However, implementation remains uneven across different educational settings. Consequently, further theoretical and empirical exploration is needed to understand how meaningful learning can be promoted within Islamic education (Memon, 2021; Sahin, 2022).

Another factor contributing to contemporary educational reform is the rapid expansion of digital technology. Digital environments provide learners with unprecedented access to information, reducing the importance of memorization as the primary educational objective. Instead, learners increasingly require skills related to information evaluation, critical thinking, digital literacy, and ethical decision-making. Islamic educational institutions face the challenge of preparing students for these realities while preserving religious and moral foundations. This challenge necessitates reconsideration of traditional pedagogical assumptions and educational goals. As a result, the concept of meaning-making has gained increasing relevance within discussions of Islamic educational transformation (Selwyn, 2024; OECD, 2023).

The relationship between memorization and understanding remains a subject of considerable debate among educational scholars. Some researchers argue that memorization provides essential cognitive foundations for higher-order thinking. Others contend that excessive emphasis on memorization may inhibit creativity, critical reflection, and conceptual understanding. Contemporary educational research increasingly supports integrative approaches that recognize the value of memorization while promoting deeper forms of learning. Such perspectives may be particularly useful within Islamic education, where memorization continues to hold significant religious and cultural value. Therefore, the challenge lies not in replacing memorization but in

situating it within broader educational processes that foster meaning-making (Hattie, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2021).

Meaningful learning is also closely connected to learner agency. Educational theorists emphasize that learners construct knowledge through active participation, questioning, and reflection. Agency enables learners to take ownership of their educational experiences and connect learning with personal aspirations and social realities. Islamic educational traditions similarly emphasize intentionality (*niyyah*) and personal responsibility in the pursuit of knowledge. These parallels suggest opportunities for integrating contemporary learning theories with Islamic educational philosophy. Such integration may contribute to more holistic and transformative educational experiences (Biesta, 2022; Kamali, 2023).

The growing emphasis on twenty-first-century skills further reinforces the importance of rethinking learning outcomes. Skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and ethical reasoning are increasingly viewed as essential for contemporary life. Educational institutions worldwide are adapting curricula and pedagogies to address these competencies. Islamic education must also consider how these skills relate to its broader objectives of character formation and spiritual development. Scholars increasingly argue that Islamic educational outcomes should include intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual competencies capable of supporting meaningful participation in contemporary societies (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

Another significant development concerns the increasing recognition of holistic education. Holistic educational approaches seek to address multiple dimensions of human development, including cognitive, emotional, social, ethical, and spiritual growth. Such perspectives resonate strongly with Islamic educational philosophy, which traditionally emphasizes balanced human development. The concept of *tarbiyah* reflects a comprehensive approach to education that nurtures the whole person rather than focusing exclusively on intellectual achievement. Consequently, holistic education provides a useful lens for examining contemporary learning outcomes in Islamic educational contexts (Hashim, 2021; Memon, 2021).

Empirical studies examining student learning experiences in Islamic educational institutions reveal mixed findings. While many students demonstrate strong memorization skills and religious knowledge, researchers have identified challenges related to critical thinking, problem-solving, and application of knowledge. These findings do not diminish the value of memorization but suggest the need for broader pedagogical approaches. Educational scholars increasingly advocate curricular reforms that integrate knowledge acquisition with reflective inquiry and experiential learning. Such reforms aim to strengthen both religious understanding and broader educational outcomes (Sahin, 2022; Ahmed, 2022).

Despite growing interest in meaningful learning, significant conceptual and practical challenges remain. Existing literature often treats memorization and meaning-making as opposing educational approaches rather than complementary processes. Furthermore, limited research has examined how Islamic educational philosophy can inform contemporary discussions regarding learning outcomes. Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary engagement among educational theory, learning sciences, curriculum studies, and Islamic educational thought. Such efforts are necessary for developing more comprehensive educational frameworks capable of addressing contemporary challenges (Biesta, 2022; Hattie, 2023).

The literature also reveals a lack of integrated models connecting traditional Islamic educational practices with contemporary theories of meaningful learning. While numerous studies discuss educational reform, fewer provide comprehensive frameworks capable of guiding curriculum development, pedagogy, and assessment. Consequently, educational practitioners often face uncertainty regarding how to balance preservation of tradition with pedagogical innovation. This challenge highlights the need for theoretically grounded models capable of supporting educational transformation. Developing such models represents an important priority for contemporary Islamic educational scholarship (Memon, 2021; Hashim, 2021).

Against this background, the present study investigates the transition from memorization to meaning-making within contemporary Islamic education. Specifically, it explores how learning outcomes can be reconceptualized to reflect broader educational objectives encompassing understanding, critical reflection, ethical development, and social engagement. Through a systematic review of recent literature, the study seeks to identify theoretical foundations, emerging pedagogical approaches, and future directions for educational reform. The novelty of the study lies in the development of an integrative framework that synthesizes Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary theories of meaningful learning. By doing so, the research contributes to ongoing efforts to reimagine learning outcomes for the future of Islamic education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation of this study is situated at the intersection of Islamic educational philosophy, contemporary learning theory, constructivist pedagogy, meaningful learning, and outcome-based education. These perspectives collectively provide a conceptual framework for examining the transition from memorization-oriented learning toward meaning-making in contemporary Islamic education. While memorization has historically played a significant role in Islamic pedagogical traditions, modern educational theories increasingly emphasize learner engagement, conceptual understanding, and transformative learning. Rather than viewing these approaches as mutually exclusive, this study explores how they can be integrated to support holistic educational outcomes. Such integration is particularly important for Islamic education, which seeks to balance intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and social development. Consequently, the theoretical framework combines classical Islamic educational concepts with contemporary theories of learning and educational transformation (Sahin, 2022; Memon, 2021).

One of the most influential perspectives informing contemporary educational discourse is constructivist learning theory. Constructivism argues that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through interaction with ideas, experiences, and social contexts rather than passively received from teachers. Learning occurs when individuals interpret information and connect new knowledge with prior understanding. This perspective challenges educational models that prioritize memorization without comprehension. Contemporary scholars emphasize that meaningful learning requires active engagement, reflection, and application. As a result, constructivism has become a foundational framework for learner-centered education across diverse educational settings (Fosnot, 2022; Illeris, 2022).

Constructivist approaches have significant implications for religious education. In traditional transmission-based models, learners often function as recipients of

authoritative knowledge. By contrast, constructivist pedagogies encourage learners to engage critically with texts, concepts, and lived experiences. Such approaches do not necessarily undermine religious commitment but can deepen understanding by fostering reflective engagement. Educational researchers increasingly argue that meaningful religious learning requires opportunities for interpretation, questioning, and personal connection. Therefore, constructivist theory provides important insights for rethinking learning outcomes within Islamic educational contexts (Biesta, 2022; Mezirow, 2021).

Closely related to constructivism is the concept of meaning-making, which has emerged as a central concern within contemporary learning sciences. Meaning-making refers to the process through which learners interpret experiences, construct understanding, and integrate knowledge into broader frameworks of meaning. Unlike rote memorization, meaning-making involves analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and application. Educational psychologists argue that meaningful learning promotes deeper cognitive engagement and long-term retention. Furthermore, meaning-making contributes to personal identity formation and ethical development. These characteristics make it particularly relevant to Islamic education, which aims to nurture both knowledge and character (Illeris, 2022; Mezirow, 2021).

Transformative Learning Theory provides another important theoretical lens for understanding meaningful educational experiences. Developed primarily by Mezirow, transformative learning emphasizes critical reflection as a process through which learners reassess assumptions, perspectives, and worldviews. Through reflection and dialogue, learners may develop more inclusive and integrated understandings of themselves and society. Contemporary scholars suggest that transformative learning contributes to personal growth, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. These outcomes align closely with broader objectives of Islamic education. Therefore, transformative learning theory offers valuable insights into how religious education can move beyond information transmission toward deeper personal transformation (Mezirow, 2021; Taylor & Cranton, 2023).

Another important framework is Outcome-Based Education (OBE). OBE focuses on clearly defining the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values learners are expected to demonstrate after completing educational programs. Rather than emphasizing content coverage alone, OBE prioritizes measurable learning outcomes and learner achievement. This approach has influenced curriculum reform efforts worldwide. Within Islamic education, OBE raises important questions regarding how educational outcomes should be conceptualized and assessed. Scholars increasingly argue that learning outcomes should encompass spiritual development, ethical behavior, critical thinking, and social responsibility in addition to cognitive achievement. Consequently, OBE provides a useful framework for reexamining educational priorities in Islamic institutions (Spady, 2021; UNESCO, 2024).

The concept of deep learning has also become influential within contemporary educational research. Deep learning refers to educational processes that enable learners to understand concepts thoroughly, make meaningful connections, and transfer knowledge to new situations. In contrast, surface learning often focuses on memorization for short-term recall. Research consistently demonstrates that deep learning contributes to greater academic achievement, problem-solving ability, and long-term knowledge retention. Educational scholars increasingly advocate pedagogical approaches that support deep learning through inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and authentic assessment. These recommendations have significant implications for Islamic

education seeking to promote meaningful engagement with religious knowledge (Fullan et al., 2023; Hattie, 2023).

Islamic educational philosophy contains several concepts that strongly support meaningful learning. One of the most important is the concept of 'ilm (knowledge), which occupies a central position within Islamic intellectual traditions. Classical Muslim scholars viewed knowledge not merely as information but as a means of understanding reality, cultivating wisdom, and fulfilling ethical responsibilities. Knowledge was expected to influence behavior and contribute to individual and societal well-being. This understanding differs from purely instrumental conceptions of education. Consequently, the Islamic concept of 'ilm provides a philosophical foundation for educational approaches emphasizing understanding and application rather than memorization alone (Kamali, 2023; Hashim, 2021).

Closely related to 'ilm is the concept of fahm (understanding). Classical Islamic scholars frequently distinguished between memorization and genuine understanding. While memorization was valued as a means of preserving knowledge, understanding was considered essential for interpretation and application. Educational texts from the classical period emphasize the importance of comprehension, reflection, and intellectual engagement. Contemporary scholars argue that these traditions challenge assumptions that Islamic education has historically prioritized rote learning over understanding. Instead, they suggest that meaningful learning has long been embedded within Islamic intellectual heritage (Sahin, 2022; Ahmed, 2022).

The concept of hikmah (wisdom) provides another important theoretical dimension. Wisdom involves the ability to apply knowledge appropriately and ethically in diverse situations. Educational outcomes informed by wisdom extend beyond academic achievement to include judgment, discernment, and ethical reasoning. Contemporary educational theorists increasingly emphasize similar competencies as essential for navigating complex social realities. Islamic educational philosophy therefore offers valuable insights regarding the relationship between knowledge, understanding, and practical wisdom. Such perspectives support broader conceptions of learning outcomes that move beyond information recall (Kamali, 2023; Memon, 2021).

Another foundational concept is tafakkur (reflection). The Qur'an repeatedly encourages reflection upon creation, history, and human experience. Reflection enables learners to examine assumptions, interpret experiences, and develop deeper understanding. Contemporary learning theories similarly identify reflection as a crucial component of meaningful learning and transformative education. Educational approaches that encourage reflective practice can strengthen critical thinking, self-awareness, and ethical reasoning. Consequently, tafakkur represents a significant point of convergence between Islamic educational philosophy and contemporary learning theory (Hashim, 2021; Mezirow, 2021).

The theory of holistic education also contributes significantly to the present framework. Holistic education emphasizes the development of the whole person, including intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Such approaches reject narrow definitions of educational success based solely on academic performance. Islamic educational traditions similarly emphasize balanced human development through the concept of tarbiyah. Scholars argue that effective Islamic education should nurture multiple dimensions of human flourishing rather than focusing exclusively on cognitive achievement. Therefore, holistic education provides an

important framework for reconceptualizing learning outcomes (Memon, 2021; Miller, 2021).

Recent empirical studies provide growing support for learner-centered and meaning-oriented approaches in Islamic educational settings. Research conducted in various Muslim-majority countries indicates that inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and reflective pedagogies can enhance student engagement and conceptual understanding. Students exposed to these approaches often demonstrate stronger critical thinking skills and deeper comprehension of religious concepts. However, implementation challenges remain, particularly in institutions where examination systems continue to prioritize memorization. These findings suggest both opportunities and obstacles for educational reform (Ahmed, 2022; Sahin, 2022).

Studies on critical thinking in Islamic education have similarly highlighted the need for broader learning outcomes. Contemporary scholars argue that critical thinking is compatible with Islamic epistemology when grounded in ethical and intellectual responsibility. Research indicates that students who engage in analytical discussions, problem-solving activities, and interpretive exercises often develop stronger understanding of religious teachings. Such outcomes support arguments for integrating higher-order cognitive skills into Islamic curricula. Consequently, critical thinking has become a major focus within contemporary Islamic educational scholarship (Halstead, 2021; Sahin, 2022).

Another emerging area of research concerns authentic learning and experiential education. Authentic learning connects educational content with real-life contexts and practical applications. Experiential approaches encourage learners to apply knowledge through projects, community engagement, and reflective practice. Studies suggest that such experiences enhance motivation, retention, and personal relevance. Within Islamic education, experiential learning can strengthen connections between religious knowledge and ethical action. Therefore, authentic learning contributes significantly to meaning-making processes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Fullan et al., 2023).

The literature also highlights the importance of assessment reform. Traditional assessments often prioritize recall and factual knowledge, potentially limiting opportunities to evaluate deeper learning outcomes. Contemporary educational scholars advocate assessment practices that measure understanding, critical thinking, reflection, collaboration, and application. Such approaches are more consistent with meaning-making and transformative learning. Islamic educational institutions seeking to promote broader learning outcomes may therefore need to reconsider existing assessment systems. Assessment reform represents a crucial component of educational transformation (Hattie, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposes the Meaning-Making Islamic Learning Outcomes Framework (MMILOF). The framework integrates the Islamic concepts of *‘ilm* (knowledge), *fahm* (understanding), *hikmah* (wisdom), *tafakkur* (reflection), and *‘amal* (ethical action) with contemporary theories of constructivism, deep learning, transformative learning, and outcome-based education. The framework conceptualizes learning as a developmental process moving from knowledge acquisition to understanding, reflection, application, and personal transformation. Rather than rejecting memorization, the framework positions it as a foundational stage within broader meaning-making processes. This integrative model provides the theoretical basis for examining contemporary learning outcomes in Islamic education and serves as the primary conceptual contribution of the study.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative library research design to investigate the transformation of learning outcomes in contemporary Islamic education from memorization-oriented approaches toward meaning-making-oriented educational frameworks. Library research is particularly appropriate for examining conceptual, philosophical, and theoretical issues that require extensive analysis of scholarly literature rather than primary field data collection. The approach enables researchers to synthesize diverse academic perspectives and identify emerging patterns across different bodies of knowledge. In the context of this study, library research provided a suitable method for exploring contemporary debates concerning learning outcomes, meaningful learning, educational reform, and Islamic educational philosophy. Furthermore, the method facilitated the integration of classical Islamic educational concepts with contemporary educational theories. Consequently, library research served as the most appropriate methodological approach for addressing the objectives of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020; Snyder, 2019).

The study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) strategy to ensure rigor, transparency, and comprehensiveness in the research process. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic literature reviews follow structured procedures for identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant academic literature. This approach minimizes researcher bias and strengthens the reliability of findings. The review was guided by three central research questions: (1) How have learning outcomes been conceptualized in contemporary Islamic education? (2) What theoretical perspectives support the transition from memorization to meaning-making? and (3) How can Islamic educational philosophy contribute to the development of meaningful learning outcomes? These questions informed the literature search, data selection, coding, and analytical processes. The systematic review approach is widely recognized as an effective methodology for examining complex educational issues involving multiple theoretical perspectives (Page et al., 2021; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The literature included in this review was primarily published ensuring that the study reflected current developments in educational theory and Islamic educational scholarship. Particular attention was given to publications addressing meaningful learning, deep learning, constructivism, transformative learning, outcome-based education, critical thinking, assessment reform, and Islamic educational philosophy. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, edited volumes, conference proceedings, and reports from international educational organizations. The selection of recent literature was intended to capture emerging trends and contemporary debates regarding educational transformation. In addition, several foundational theoretical works were included when they provided essential conceptual frameworks relevant to the study. This combination enabled a comprehensive understanding of both historical and contemporary perspectives (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2023).

Data collection involved systematic searches across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Search terms included combinations of keywords such as “Islamic education,” “meaningful learning,” “learning outcomes,” “constructivism,” “deep learning,” “transformative learning,” “critical thinking,” “memorization,” “educational reform,” and “religious education.” Additional searches incorporated terms related to Islamic educational concepts such as *tarbiyah*, *‘ilm*, *hikmah*, *tafakkur*, and *fahm*. Reference lists of selected studies were also

examined to identify additional relevant sources. This search strategy ensured broad coverage of literature across educational and Islamic studies disciplines. As a result, the review incorporated diverse scholarly perspectives and educational contexts (Booth et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019).

To ensure the quality and relevance of the reviewed literature, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Publications were included if they focused on learning outcomes, meaningful learning, educational transformation, Islamic education, pedagogy, curriculum development, assessment, or related educational themes. Preference was given to peer-reviewed publications appearing in internationally recognized academic journals and scholarly publishers. Studies lacking methodological clarity, academic credibility, or direct relevance to the research questions were excluded. Furthermore, publications addressing memorization solely from linguistic or neurological perspectives without educational implications were generally omitted. These criteria helped maintain the academic rigor of the review while ensuring alignment with the objectives of the study. Consequently, the selected literature provided a robust foundation for analysis and interpretation (Booth et al., 2021; Page et al., 2021).

The collected literature was analyzed using thematic content analysis, a qualitative analytical technique commonly employed in educational research. The process began with repeated readings of the selected sources to identify recurring concepts, themes, and theoretical patterns. Initial coding generated categories such as memorization, understanding, reflection, wisdom, transformative learning, critical thinking, learner agency, assessment reform, curriculum innovation, and holistic development. These categories were subsequently organized into broader thematic clusters that reflected key dimensions of contemporary educational transformation. The iterative nature of thematic analysis enabled continuous refinement of categories and deeper exploration of relationships among concepts. This analytical process facilitated the development of a coherent conceptual framework explaining the transition from memorization to meaning-making within Islamic education (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Neuendorf, 2020).

To enhance the credibility and comprehensiveness of the findings, the study employed theoretical triangulation by integrating multiple educational perspectives. The analysis synthesized insights from constructivist learning theory, transformative learning theory, deep learning theory, outcome-based education, holistic education, and Islamic educational philosophy. This triangulation allowed the study to examine learning outcomes from multiple analytical angles while reducing dependence on a single theoretical framework. Furthermore, it facilitated the identification of areas of convergence between contemporary educational theories and classical Islamic educational concepts. The final stage of the analysis resulted in the development of the Meaning-Making Islamic Learning Outcomes Framework (MMILOF), which serves as the primary conceptual contribution of the study. The framework integrates knowledge ('ilm), understanding (fahm), wisdom (hikmah), reflection (tafakkur), and action ('amal) into a comprehensive model of meaningful learning in contemporary Islamic education (Kamali, 2023; Sahin, 2022).

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Reimagining Learning Outcomes in Contemporary Islamic Education**

The systematic review revealed a significant shift in contemporary educational discourse from knowledge accumulation toward meaningful learning and learner transformation. Across diverse educational contexts, scholars increasingly argue that educational success should not be measured solely through the quantity of information retained by learners. Instead, greater emphasis is placed on learners' abilities to understand, interpret, apply, and critically evaluate knowledge. This paradigm shift has influenced discussions regarding curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment across numerous educational traditions. Within Islamic education, these developments have generated renewed interest in reconsidering traditional learning outcomes. Consequently, many scholars advocate moving beyond narrow conceptions of achievement based exclusively on memorization toward broader frameworks emphasizing understanding and personal development (Biesta, 2022; Fullan et al., 2023).

One of the most significant findings concerns the continuing educational value of memorization. Contrary to some contemporary critiques, the literature does not support abandoning memorization altogether. Rather, scholars emphasize that memorization serves important cognitive, cultural, and religious functions within Islamic educational traditions. Memorized knowledge provides learners with foundational resources necessary for interpretation, reflection, and application. The challenge lies not in memorization itself but in educational systems that treat memorization as the final objective rather than the beginning of deeper learning processes. Therefore, contemporary educational reform should focus on integrating memorization within broader meaning-making frameworks rather than replacing it entirely (Sahin, 2022; Hattie, 2023).

Another major finding relates to the concept of understanding (*fahm*) as a central educational outcome. The reviewed literature consistently highlights understanding as the bridge between knowledge acquisition and meaningful application. Understanding enables learners to connect concepts, recognize relationships, and interpret information within broader contexts. Classical Islamic educational texts similarly emphasize comprehension as an essential component of learning. Contemporary scholars argue that educational programs should prioritize conceptual understanding alongside textual mastery. Such approaches can enhance learners' ability to engage meaningfully with religious knowledge and contemporary social challenges (Kamali, 2023; Ahmed, 2022).

The review also demonstrates the growing importance of critical reflection (*tafakkur*) within Islamic educational reform. Reflection allows learners to examine assumptions, evaluate evidence, and connect knowledge with personal experience. Contemporary learning theories identify reflection as a key mechanism supporting transformative learning and deeper understanding. Islamic intellectual traditions likewise encourage reflection as a means of cultivating wisdom and spiritual awareness. Educational approaches incorporating reflective activities can therefore strengthen both intellectual and ethical development. Consequently, reflection emerges as a critical component of meaning-making in contemporary Islamic education (Mezirow, 2021; Hashim, 2021).

A further finding concerns the role of wisdom (*hikmah*) as an educational outcome. While knowledge acquisition remains important, Islamic educational

philosophy traditionally views wisdom as the ultimate objective of learning. Wisdom involves the ability to apply knowledge ethically and appropriately in diverse contexts. Contemporary educational research increasingly emphasizes similar competencies related to judgment, problem-solving, and ethical reasoning. These convergences suggest substantial compatibility between Islamic educational traditions and contemporary theories of meaningful learning. Therefore, wisdom provides an important conceptual foundation for rethinking educational outcomes beyond memorization.

The review further reveals that learner agency has become an increasingly important concept in contemporary educational research. Learner agency refers to the capacity of students to actively participate in their own learning processes through questioning, reflection, decision-making, and self-directed inquiry. Traditional educational models often position learners as passive recipients of knowledge, whereas contemporary pedagogies encourage active engagement and intellectual autonomy. Islamic educational traditions also contain elements that support learner agency, particularly through the concepts of intentionality (*niyyah*), responsibility (*mas'ūliyyah*), and independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). When learners are encouraged to take ownership of their educational experiences, they are more likely to develop meaningful connections with knowledge. Consequently, learner agency constitutes an essential dimension of meaning-making in contemporary Islamic education (Biesta, 2022; Memon, 2021).

Another important finding concerns the relationship between meaningful learning and ethical development. Contemporary educational theories increasingly recognize that learning outcomes should include moral reasoning, ethical awareness, and responsible action. Islamic education has historically emphasized these dimensions through the integration of knowledge and conduct. Classical Muslim scholars frequently argued that knowledge without ethical application lacks educational value. The reviewed literature suggests that educational reforms focusing solely on cognitive outcomes may overlook essential aspects of human development. Therefore, meaningful learning in Islamic education must encompass ethical transformation alongside intellectual growth. This integration distinguishes Islamic educational philosophy from purely instrumental conceptions of education (Kamali, 2023; Hashim, 2021).

The findings also indicate that deep learning provides a useful framework for understanding educational transformation within Islamic institutions. Deep learning involves conceptual understanding, critical engagement, and the ability to transfer knowledge across contexts. In contrast, surface learning often focuses on short-term memorization without deeper comprehension. Research consistently demonstrates that students engaged in deep learning achieve stronger academic outcomes and retain knowledge more effectively over time. Furthermore, deep learning supports problem-solving and adaptive thinking in complex situations. These characteristics make it particularly relevant for Islamic education seeking to prepare learners for contemporary challenges (Fullan et al., 2023; Hattie, 2023).

The review additionally highlights the significance of transformative learning. Transformative learning occurs when learners critically examine existing assumptions and develop new perspectives regarding themselves and the world around them. Such learning experiences often result in changes in values, attitudes, and behavior. Religious education is particularly well positioned to facilitate transformative learning because it engages with questions of meaning, identity, ethics, and purpose. Islamic educational

traditions similarly aim to cultivate spiritual and moral transformation. Consequently, transformative learning provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding the broader goals of Islamic education beyond memorization and content mastery (Mezirow, 2021; Taylor & Cranton, 2023).

Another key finding concerns the role of dialogue and collaborative learning. The literature demonstrates that meaningful learning is often enhanced through interaction with others. Dialogue enables learners to encounter diverse perspectives, articulate their own ideas, and refine understanding through discussion. Collaborative learning environments encourage critical inquiry, mutual respect, and collective problem-solving. Islamic intellectual history includes rich traditions of scholarly dialogue, debate (*munāzarah*), and consultation (*shūrā*). These traditions suggest that collaborative learning is consistent with Islamic educational principles. Therefore, dialogue-based pedagogies can contribute significantly to meaning-making processes (Sahin, 2022; Jackson, 2022).

The findings further suggest that curriculum design plays a critical role in shaping learning outcomes. Traditional curricula often prioritize content coverage and examination preparation. While these objectives remain important, contemporary educational scholars advocate curricula that emphasize understanding, application, and interdisciplinary connections. Islamic educational curricula can benefit from integrating religious knowledge with contemporary social, ethical, and intellectual issues. Such integration helps learners recognize the relevance of Islamic teachings in modern life. Consequently, curriculum reform represents a central component of educational transformation (UNESCO, 2024; Ahmed, 2022).

Assessment practices also emerged as a major theme within the literature. Many existing assessment systems continue to prioritize factual recall and memorization. While such assessments may effectively measure certain forms of knowledge acquisition, they often fail to capture deeper dimensions of learning. Contemporary scholars advocate authentic assessment methods that evaluate understanding, reflection, critical thinking, collaboration, and application. Portfolios, reflective journals, project-based assessments, and performance tasks are frequently recommended alternatives. These approaches align more closely with meaning-making and transformative learning outcomes. Therefore, assessment reform is essential for supporting broader educational goals within Islamic education (Hattie, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

The review additionally identifies teacher professional development as a crucial factor influencing educational transformation. Teachers play a central role in translating educational philosophies into classroom practice. However, many educators were themselves trained within systems emphasizing memorization and examination performance. As a result, implementing meaning-making pedagogies may require substantial professional development and institutional support. Research indicates that teachers who receive training in learner-centered methodologies are more likely to adopt innovative instructional practices. Therefore, teacher education represents a key strategy for advancing meaningful learning in Islamic educational contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Fullan et al., 2023).

Another important finding concerns the relationship between technology and meaning-making. Digital technologies have transformed access to information, reducing the educational necessity of memorization as the primary learning objective. Learners today can retrieve information rapidly through digital platforms and artificial intelligence systems. Consequently, educational institutions must increasingly focus on

interpretation, evaluation, and ethical application of information. Islamic educational institutions face the challenge of integrating technology while preserving spiritual and ethical dimensions of learning. The reviewed literature suggests that technology can support meaningful learning when used to encourage inquiry, collaboration, and reflection. Therefore, technological innovation should be accompanied by pedagogical innovation (Selwyn, 2024; OECD, 2023).

The findings also reveal that holistic development remains a defining characteristic of Islamic educational philosophy. Holistic education seeks to nurture intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human development. Such approaches challenge narrow definitions of educational success based solely on academic performance. Contemporary scholars increasingly advocate holistic educational frameworks capable of addressing multiple dimensions of human flourishing. Islamic concepts such as *tarbiyah* and *ta'dīb* provide valuable foundations for such approaches. Consequently, holistic development emerges as a central principle for reconceptualizing learning outcomes in Islamic education (Memon, 2021; Miller, 2021).

The review further highlights the importance of relevance and contextualization in meaningful learning. Learners are more likely to engage deeply with knowledge when they perceive its relevance to their lives and communities. Educational experiences that connect religious teachings with contemporary social realities can enhance motivation and understanding. Contextualization enables learners to apply knowledge to real-world challenges while maintaining fidelity to religious traditions. Therefore, meaningful learning requires educational approaches that bridge classical knowledge and contemporary contexts. Such connections strengthen both intellectual engagement and practical application (Ahmed, 2022; Sahin, 2022).

Research findings also emphasize the role of experiential learning in promoting deeper understanding. Experiential learning involves learning through action, reflection, and engagement with authentic situations. Community service, project-based learning, field experiences, and social engagement initiatives provide opportunities for learners to apply knowledge in meaningful ways. Islamic educational traditions similarly emphasize the importance of translating knowledge into action (*'amal*). Consequently, experiential learning represents a powerful strategy for connecting knowledge, understanding, and ethical practice. Such approaches reinforce the transition from memorization toward meaning-making (Kolb, 2021; Memon, 2021).

The literature additionally suggests that educational transformation requires institutional change. Pedagogical innovation alone is unlikely to produce lasting improvements if institutional structures continue to reward memorization and examination performance. Educational leaders must therefore support reforms related to curriculum, assessment, teacher development, and organizational culture. Such reforms require long-term commitment and strategic planning. The reviewed studies indicate that successful educational transformation typically involves collaboration among educators, policymakers, students, and communities. Therefore, institutional change represents an essential condition for promoting meaningful learning outcomes (Fullan et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

A recurring theme throughout the literature is the need to balance tradition and innovation. Educational reform efforts sometimes generate concerns regarding the preservation of religious identity and intellectual heritage. However, many scholars argue that innovation need not conflict with tradition. Instead, meaningful educational

reform can build upon classical Islamic concepts while responding to contemporary challenges. Such an approach allows institutions to preserve valuable traditions while embracing pedagogical improvements. Consequently, the transition from memorization to meaning-making should be understood as an evolution rather than a rejection of Islamic educational heritage (Kamali, 2023; Sahin, 2022).

Ultimately, the findings indicate that contemporary Islamic education stands at an important crossroads. While memorization remains valuable as a foundational educational practice, it is increasingly insufficient as the sole measure of educational success. Meaning-making, understanding, wisdom, reflection, ethical action, and holistic development emerge as essential learning outcomes for the twenty-first century. These outcomes are supported by both contemporary educational research and classical Islamic educational philosophy. Therefore, the challenge for Islamic education is not whether to move beyond memorization but how to integrate memorization within broader frameworks of meaningful learning and human development. This challenge forms the basis for the proposed Meaning-Making Islamic Learning Outcomes Framework (MMILOF).

**Table 1. Meaning-Making Islamic Learning Outcomes Framework (MMILOF)**

Stage	Islamic Concept	Learning Process	Educational Outcome	Contemporary Educational Equivalent
1	‘Ilm (Knowledge)	Acquisition and memorization	Foundational knowledge	Knowledge acquisition
2	Fahm (Understanding)	Interpretation and comprehension	Conceptual understanding	Deep learning
3	Tafakkur (Reflection)	Critical examination	Reflective thinking	Reflective learning
4	Hikmah (Wisdom)	Contextual application	Ethical judgment	Critical thinking
5	‘Amal (Action)	Practice and implementation	Behavioral transformation	Authentic learning
6	Tarbiyah (Development)	Holistic growth	Personal flourishing	Holistic education
7	Ta’dīb (Character Formation)	Moral cultivation	Ethical citizenship	Character education
8	Ijtihād (Reasoning)	Independent inquiry	Intellectual autonomy	Learner agency
9	Shūrā (Dialogue)	Collaborative engagement	Interpersonal competence	Collaborative learning
10	Maṣlaḥah (Public Good)	Social contribution	Civic responsibility	Global citizenship

The Meaning-Making Islamic Learning Outcomes Framework (MMILOF) proposes a developmental understanding of learning that moves beyond the traditional dichotomy between memorization and understanding. Rather than treating

memorization as an outdated pedagogical practice, the framework recognizes it as a foundational stage in a broader educational process. The concept of *'ilm* emphasizes the importance of acquiring reliable knowledge as a prerequisite for intellectual growth. Without sufficient knowledge, learners may struggle to engage in meaningful interpretation or critical analysis. However, the framework also argues that knowledge acquisition should not represent the final objective of education. Instead, memorized knowledge should serve as a starting point for deeper cognitive, ethical, and spiritual development (Kamali, 2023; Sahin, 2022).

The second stage of the framework highlights *fahm* (understanding) as a critical bridge between knowledge acquisition and meaningful learning. Understanding enables learners to connect ideas, identify relationships, and interpret concepts within broader contexts. Educational research consistently demonstrates that conceptual understanding contributes to long-term retention and transferability of knowledge. Within Islamic educational traditions, understanding has historically been regarded as an essential component of scholarship and intellectual maturity. The emphasis on *fahm* therefore reflects both classical Islamic epistemology and contemporary learning science. This convergence demonstrates that meaningful learning is deeply compatible with Islamic educational philosophy (Ahmed, 2022; Hattie, 2023).

The third stage focuses on *tafakkur* (reflection), which functions as a mechanism for transforming knowledge into personal insight. Reflection encourages learners to examine assumptions, evaluate experiences, and engage critically with ideas. Contemporary theories of transformative learning identify reflection as a central process through which individuals construct meaning and revise perspectives. Similarly, the Qur'anic emphasis on contemplation and reflection suggests that intellectual engagement is an integral aspect of Islamic learning. Educational practices that encourage reflective inquiry can therefore strengthen both academic achievement and spiritual awareness. Consequently, reflection occupies a central position within the proposed framework (Mezirow, 2021; Hashim, 2021).

The inclusion of *hikmah* (wisdom) reflects the broader educational aspiration of cultivating sound judgment and ethical reasoning. Wisdom differs from knowledge in that it involves the ability to apply understanding appropriately in specific circumstances. Contemporary societies increasingly require individuals capable of navigating ethical complexity, social diversity, and technological change. Educational institutions therefore face growing pressure to develop learners' capacities for responsible decision-making. Islamic educational philosophy similarly views wisdom as a central objective of human development. By positioning wisdom as a core learning outcome, the framework aligns educational practice with both contemporary societal needs and Islamic intellectual traditions (Kamali, 2023; Memon, 2021).

The stage of *'amal* (action) emphasizes the practical application of knowledge and understanding. One of the recurring themes in Islamic scholarship is that knowledge should lead to beneficial action. Educational success is therefore measured not only by what learners know but also by how they translate knowledge into behavior. Contemporary educational theories similarly highlight the importance of authentic learning experiences that connect knowledge with practice. Project-based learning, community engagement, and experiential education exemplify approaches that support this objective. The framework consequently emphasizes behavioral transformation as an essential educational outcome (Kolb, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2021).

The incorporation of *tarbiyah* underscores the importance of holistic human development. Islamic educational traditions have long recognized that education involves more than intellectual achievement. Emotional maturity, spiritual awareness, social responsibility, and moral character are equally important dimensions of educational success. Contemporary holistic education theories echo these concerns by advocating balanced approaches to human development. The framework therefore conceptualizes learning outcomes as multidimensional rather than purely cognitive. Such an approach is particularly important in an era when educational systems are increasingly expected to address complex social and ethical challenges (Miller, 2021; Memon, 2021).

The inclusion of *ta'dīb* (character formation) highlights the moral dimension of Islamic education. Character development remains one of the most enduring objectives of educational practice across religious traditions. Contemporary educational research increasingly recognizes the importance of values education, ethical literacy, and social-emotional learning. Islamic educational philosophy provides a rich foundation for such initiatives through its emphasis on moral refinement and virtuous conduct. By incorporating character formation into the framework, the model broadens conventional understandings of learning outcomes beyond academic achievement. This perspective reflects a holistic vision of educational excellence (Halstead, 2021; Kamali, 2023).

The framework also emphasizes *ijtihad* as a form of intellectual autonomy and learner agency. In contemporary educational theory, learner agency refers to the capacity of students to direct, regulate, and take responsibility for their learning. Such capacities are increasingly viewed as essential for lifelong learning and adaptability. Islamic intellectual history offers a parallel through the tradition of *ijtihad*, which encourages reasoned inquiry and independent judgment. Integrating learner agency into Islamic education can therefore support both intellectual empowerment and responsible engagement with knowledge. This dimension is particularly relevant in contemporary information-rich environments (Biesta, 2022; Sahin, 2022).

Another important dimension of the framework is *shūrā* (dialogue and consultation), which highlights the social nature of learning. Educational research consistently demonstrates that collaboration and dialogue contribute to deeper understanding and critical thinking. Learning is not merely an individual cognitive activity but also a social process shaped by interaction and communication. Islamic intellectual traditions similarly value consultation, scholarly discussion, and collective deliberation. By integrating dialogue into the framework, the model recognizes the importance of interpersonal competence and collaborative learning. Such competencies are increasingly essential within multicultural and interconnected societies (Jackson, 2022; Deardorff, 2022). The final stage, *maṣlahah* (public good), extends learning outcomes beyond individual development to encompass social contribution and civic responsibility. Education should ultimately contribute to the well-being of communities and societies. Contemporary frameworks such as global citizenship education emphasize similar goals, including social responsibility, intercultural understanding, and civic engagement. Islamic educational philosophy likewise stresses the importance of contributing to the common good and promoting human flourishing. By positioning *maṣlahah* as the culmination of the learning process, the framework situates education within broader ethical and societal objectives. This final stage illustrates how meaningful learning can contribute not only to personal growth but also to collective well-being (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that contemporary Islamic education requires a broader conceptualization of learning outcomes than those traditionally associated with memorization alone. While memorization remains a valuable and indispensable component of Islamic educational practice, it should be understood as a foundational stage within a more comprehensive process of learning. The literature reviewed in this study indicates that meaningful learning involves understanding (*fahm*), reflection (*tafakkur*), wisdom (*hikmah*), ethical action (*'amal*), character formation (*ta'dīb*), and holistic development (*tarbiyah*). These dimensions are supported not only by contemporary educational theories such as constructivism, transformative learning, and deep learning but also by classical Islamic educational philosophy. Therefore, the transition from memorization to meaning-making should not be interpreted as a rejection of Islamic educational traditions but rather as a renewal of their deeper intellectual and ethical aspirations.

This study proposes the Meaning-Making Islamic Learning Outcomes Framework (MMILOF) as an integrative model capable of bridging classical Islamic educational concepts and contemporary learning theories. The framework demonstrates how knowledge acquisition can evolve into understanding, reflection, wisdom, action, character development, learner agency, collaborative engagement, and social responsibility. Its novelty lies in synthesizing Islamic epistemological principles with contemporary educational paradigms into a coherent framework for educational reform. Future Islamic educational institutions should therefore reconsider curriculum design, pedagogical practices, assessment systems, and teacher development programs to support meaningful learning outcomes. By embracing a holistic and human-centered vision of education, Islamic institutions can better prepare learners to navigate contemporary challenges while remaining grounded in enduring religious, ethical, and intellectual values.

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