

Research Article

The Impact of Islamic Educational Philosophy on Youth Development in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Islamic educational philosophy has shaped moral landscapes, social identities, and civic values in Muslim-majority societies for over fourteen centuries. In Bangladesh, a nation where approximately 91% of the population identifies as Muslim (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022) and where a dual educational system of modern secular and traditional Islamic (*madrasah*) institutions coexists, understanding how this philosophical tradition is associated with youth development is both academically urgent and socially consequential. This study investigates the relationship between Islamic educational philosophy and the moral, social, leadership, and identity development of Bangladeshi youth aged 14–25. Employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the research draws on survey data collected from 320 students (160 male, 160 female) across six educational institutions in Dhaka, Comilla, and Sylhet, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 24 educators and 12 Islamic scholars. Thematic analysis of qualitative data and descriptive-inferential statistical analysis of quantitative data reveal that engagement with Islamic educational philosophy is significantly and positively associated with moral reasoning, prosocial behaviour, and civic identity among Bangladeshi youth. Specifically, institutions integrating Quranic epistemology with modern pedagogy demonstrate stronger outcomes across all five measured developmental dimensions. However, persistent challenges, including curriculum rigidity, gendered access disparities, and a perceived tension between Islamic credentials and employment markets, constrain the full transformative potential of the tradition. The study concludes with evidence-based recommendations for curriculum reform, policy integration, and teacher professional development.

Keywords

Islamic educational philosophy, youth development, Bangladesh, madrasah education, character formation, moral development, positive youth development

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Education is widely recognised as the most powerful instrument through which societies transmit values, shape identities, and prepare citizens for meaningful participation in public life (UNESCO, 2020). Among the various philosophical traditions that have historically

informed educational theory and practice, the Islamic tradition occupies a distinctive position: it does not merely treat education as an instrumental process of knowledge transmission, but rather conceptualises it as a spiritually purposive act, the cultivation of the whole human being (*al-insan al-kamil*) in harmony with divine guidance (Al-Attas, 1980; Sahin, 2018). This integrated vision of human

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development, in which intellectual formation is inseparable from moral cultivation and spiritual awareness, has profoundly influenced educational institutions across the Muslim world.

In Bangladesh, the encounter between Islamic educational philosophy and the demands of modern nation-building has produced a complex, multi-layered educational landscape. The country hosts one of the largest madrasah systems in the world, with over 19,000 Alia madrasahs and a substantial number of Qawmi madrasahs serving millions of students (BANBEIS, 2022). Alongside these institutions, a modern general education system, inherited from British colonial architecture and subsequently nationalised, serves the majority of the student population. The two systems have historically operated in relative isolation from one another, producing graduates with markedly different intellectual orientations, career pathways, and social worldviews (Riaz, 2008; Ahmed, 2015). Youth development, as a multidimensional construct encompassing moral, cognitive, social, emotional, and civic growth, has gained increasing attention among policymakers, educators, and developmental scientists globally (Lerner et al., 2015). In Bangladesh, where approximately 28% of the population is between the ages of 15 and 29 (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2021), the developmental trajectories of young people carry profound implications for the country's democratic governance, economic productivity, and social cohesion. Understanding the philosophical foundations and empirical outcomes of Islamic education, the primary educational experience of millions of Bangladeshi youths, is therefore not merely an academic exercise but a matter of practical national importance.

Problem Statement

Despite the scale and significance of Islamic education in Bangladesh, it remains one of the relatively underexplored dimensions of the country's educational system. Existing scholarship has tended to focus on the political dimensions of madrasah education, particularly its alleged links to religious conservatism or extremism, while largely neglecting the developmental outcomes for the millions of ordinary young people who pass through these institutions each year (Riaz, 2008). This political framing has distorted policy discourse and obscured the educational realities on the ground.

Concurrently, there exists a growing disconnect in Bangladesh, as in many Muslim-majority contexts globally, between the formal moral education offered in Islamic institutions and the behavioural, civic, and professional demands of contemporary society (Sahin, 2018). Critics from within the

Islamic educational tradition itself have noted that a narrow focus on rote memorisation of classical texts, without attention to critical reflection, contextualisation, or applied ethics, may produce formally knowledgeable but practically disengaged graduates (Mohd Nor & Hamzah, 2016; Memon, 2011). The gap between intended moral formation and lived moral agency among youth therefore constitutes a genuine problem warranting systematic investigation.

Furthermore, the lack of robust empirical data, particularly mixed-methods evidence that captures both measurable outcomes and the lived experiences of students, teachers, and scholars, creates a significant evidence gap that this study seeks to address. Without such evidence, curriculum reform, teacher training initiatives, and educational policy in Bangladesh risk being guided by ideological assumptions rather than grounded educational science.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following primary and secondary research questions:

RQ1: How is Islamic educational philosophy, as practised in Bangladeshi educational institutions, associated with the developmental outcomes of youth aged 14–25?

RQ2: Which dimensions of youth development, moral, social, leadership, academic, or identity-related, are most significantly shaped by engagement with Islamic educational philosophy?

RQ3: What institutional, curricular, and pedagogical factors mediate or moderate the relationship between Islamic educational philosophy and positive youth development outcomes?

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to produce a comprehensive, empirically grounded account of the relationship between Islamic educational philosophy and youth development in Bangladesh. Specific objectives include: (a) to identify and operationalise the key dimensions of Islamic educational philosophy as implemented across different institutional contexts in Bangladesh; (b) to measure the association between Islamic educational philosophy and five dimensions of youth development, moral reasoning, social responsibility, leadership capacity, academic motivation, and civic identity; (c) to examine the perceptions of students, teachers, and scholars regarding the strengths and limitations of current practice; and (d) to develop evidence-based recommendations for curriculum development, pedagogical reform, and policy integration.

Significance of the Study

Academically, this study makes an original contribution to the growing literature on Islamic education and positive youth development by providing one of the first large-scale mixed-methods investigations of this relationship in the Bangladeshi context. It engages critically with both Western developmental psychology and Islamic educational theory, advancing a culturally grounded framework for understanding youth flourishing in Muslim-majority societies.

Socially, the findings have direct relevance for the millions of Bangladeshi families whose children attend madrasah and integrated Islamic institutions. Evidence-based insights into what works, and what does not, can empower communities to advocate for more effective educational environments for their children.

From a policy perspective, this study is timely given the Government of Bangladesh's ongoing efforts to reform and modernise the madrasah curriculum (Ministry of Education Bangladesh, 2020). The evidence generated here can inform the design of curricula that honour Islamic values while equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for full and dignified participation in twenty-first century society.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Islamic Educational Philosophy

Islamic educational philosophy, known in classical Arabic discourse as *tarbiyah* (moral nurturing), *ta'lim* (knowledge transmission), and *ta'dib* (the cultivation of *adab* or refinement of conduct), constitutes a rich, internally diverse intellectual tradition whose roots extend to the foundational sources of Islam: the Quran and the Sunnah (prophetic tradition). Al-Attas (1980), whose work remains among the most systematically developed accounts of Islamic educational philosophy in the modern period, argues that the central concept of Islamic education is *ta'dib*, which he defines as the instillation of *adab*, a comprehensive orientation of the self toward truth, justice, and beauty as disclosed through the divine order. This framing, while contested by other scholars who privilege *ta'lim* or *tarbiyah* as the governing concept, helpfully illuminates the fundamentally anthropological character of Islamic educational thought: education is, at its core, a process of human formation, not merely knowledge acquisition.

The Quranic foundations of this philosophy are multilayered. The first revealed word, *iqra'* (read, recite, proclaim), affirms knowledge-seeking as a divine imperative (Quran 96:1). Numerous verses celebrate the superiority of those who know over

those who do not (Quran 39:9), while simultaneously insisting that genuine knowledge produces humility, gratitude, and moral responsiveness rather than arrogance or self-sufficiency (Quran 2:269; 58:11). The Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) reported saying, "Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim" (Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, Hadith 224), has historically grounded the intellectual culture of Islamic civilisation in an egalitarian and inclusive epistemological ethic.

Contemporary scholars have worked to translate these classical foundations into modern educational frameworks. Sahin (2018), in a widely cited critical review of Islamic education studies, argues that the field has been constrained by two dominant but inadequate paradigms: a traditionalist paradigm that valorises classical texts without attending to contemporary contexts, and a reformist paradigm that uncritically imports Western educational models while marginalising Islamic epistemic contributions. Sahin advocates for a "dialogical critical" approach that takes both the Islamic tradition and modern educational science seriously as sources of insight.

Major Islamic Educational Thinkers

Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE)

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali remains, more than nine centuries after his death, widely regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of Islamic education. His magnum opus, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), devotes substantial attention to the education of the self (*tarbiyah al-nafs*) and the responsibilities of teachers and students (Al-Ghazali, 2015). For al-Ghazali, the purpose of education is the purification of the heart and the attainment of nearness to God, a goal that encompasses intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. He famously argued that knowledge without moral formation is not merely incomplete but dangerous: "The learned man is one whose knowledge leads him to renounce the present world and yearn for the next" (Al-Ghazali, 2015, p. 83).

Al-Ghazali's educational thought has direct relevance to youth development. His account of the development of character through habituation (*malakah*), the cultivation of virtuous dispositions through repeated practice until they become second nature, anticipates modern virtue ethics and developmental psychology's emphasis on the role of habitual behaviour in moral formation (Kohlberg, 1984; Halstead, 2004). His insistence that teachers must embody what they teach, that they must be moral exemplars, not merely instructional technicians, also resonates with contemporary

research on the importance of teacher-student relationships in shaping young people's values and identities (Memon, 2011).

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406 CE)

The Tunisian polymath Ibn Khaldun, writing in his monumental *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena), offers what is arguably the first systematic sociology of education in world history. Ibn Khaldun (1967) analyses the relationship between educational methods, social environments, and intellectual outcomes with remarkable empirical precision. He observes that harsh pedagogical methods, particularly corporal punishment, damage the psychological security of students, producing submissiveness and intellectual timidity rather than intellectual confidence and moral courage. He argues, conversely, that an educational environment characterised by encouragement, graduated challenge, and respect for the student's developmental stage produces individuals of strong character and independent judgement.

Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on social context as a determinant of educational outcomes, his recognition that *'asabiyyah* (group solidarity, social cohesion) shapes the motivation and capacity of learners, anticipates both Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development and more recent community-based approaches to youth development (Lerner et al., 2015). His insistence that practical engagement with the world is educationally essential, that abstract knowledge without experiential grounding produces intellectually impoverished graduates, remains a powerful critique of rote-learning pedagogies prevalent in some contemporary madrasah contexts.

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1931–2023)

The Malaysian philosopher and intellectual historian Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas represents the most systematic attempt in the twentieth century to develop a comprehensive philosophy of Islamic education for the modern world. His concept of the Islamization of knowledge, the critical reappropriation and restructuring of the modern sciences through an Islamic epistemological framework, has been influential across Muslim-majority academic institutions globally (Wan Daud, 1998). Al-Attas (1985) argues that the fundamental crisis of Muslim education is not technological backwardness or political subjugation, but rather a crisis of knowledge, specifically, the uncritical acceptance of a secularised Western epistemology that evacuates divine transcendence and moral purposiveness from intellectual life.

For Al-Attas, authentic Islamic education forms human beings who possess *'ilm* (knowledge

grounded in both revelation and reason), *'amal* (action aligned with knowledge), and *adab* (refined moral sensibility that enables right relationship with God, self, others, and the natural world). This triadic vision of education as simultaneously cognitive, practical, and ethical has direct implications for youth development programming: it implies that developmental interventions limited to cognitive skill-building, without attention to moral formation and spiritual grounding, may not fully cultivate the wisdom necessary for professional and civic life (Sahin, 2013; Wan Daud, 1998).

Youth Development Theories

Moral Development

The dominant Western frameworks for understanding moral development in youth have been cognitive-developmental in orientation. Piaget (1972) proposed that moral reasoning evolves through qualitatively distinct stages tied to broader cognitive development, from a heteronomous stage characterised by respect for rules as externally imposed to an autonomous stage in which rules are understood as socially constructed and subject to rational critique. Kohlberg (1984) extended this framework into a six-stage theory of moral reasoning, from pre-conventional self-interest through conventional social conformity to post-conventional principled reasoning. These frameworks have been criticised for cultural bias: their valorisation of individualised, rights-based moral reasoning may not adequately capture the communitarian, duty-oriented, and spiritually grounded moral frameworks prevalent in Muslim cultures (Halstead, 2004).

An Islamic framework for moral development shares Kohlberg's emphasis on the development of reasoned moral judgement but situates this development within a broader theological anthropology: the human being is created by God with an inherent moral orientation (*fitrah*) toward good, which can be nurtured through education and corrupted through neglect or miseducation (Sahin, 2018). Moral education in the Islamic tradition is therefore not primarily about inculcating external rules but about aligning the self with its created nature, a process that involves intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions simultaneously.

Social Development

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory provides a powerful framework for understanding the social dimensions of youth development. According to this model, young people develop within nested systems of relationships, family, peer group, school, community, culture, and macrosocial structures, all of which interact dynamically to

shape developmental outcomes. The Islamic educational tradition offers a remarkable parallel: its concept of the *ummah* (the global Muslim community) as a social-moral environment within which individual development is nurtured, and its emphasis on the family as the primary site of *tarbiyah* (moral nurturing), resonate strongly with Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective.

Leadership Development

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, particularly as elaborated by Lerner et al. (2015), emphasises the cultivation of what they term the "Five Cs" of youth development: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring. When these five dimensions are robustly present in a young person's development, a sixth C, Contribution, tends to emerge naturally: the young person becomes an active contributor to the wellbeing of their community and society. This framework's emphasis on civic engagement and social contribution as developmental outcomes closely parallels the Islamic educational tradition's emphasis on *khilafah*, the human being's vocation as a responsible steward (*khalifah*) of God's creation (Quran 2:30), and on *fard al-kifayah*, collective obligations that each community member has a duty to fulfil (Al-Ghazali, 2015).

Islamic Education in Bangladesh

Historical Background

The history of Islamic education in Bangladesh is inseparable from the history of the broader Bengal region, where Islamic learning took root in the twelfth century CE with the arrival of Sufi missionaries and scholars from Central Asia and the Middle East. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a network of madrasahs and *khanqahs* (Sufi hospices that doubled as centres of learning) had been established across the region, providing education in Quranic sciences, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Arabic language, and Sufi spiritual disciplines (Riaz, 2008). The advent of British colonial rule in the late eighteenth century introduced a fundamentally different educational architecture, English-medium schools oriented toward the production of colonial administrators, which marginalised the existing Islamic educational infrastructure and created the dual-track system that persists to the present day.

The Madrasah System

Contemporary Bangladesh hosts two major streams of formal Islamic education. The Alia madrasah system, regulated by the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board and partially funded by the state, follows a government-approved curriculum that integrates Islamic subjects with standard secular subjects including mathematics, science, social

studies, and English. As of 2022, there were 19,192 Alia madrasahs enrolling approximately 3.5 million students (BANBEIS, 2022). The Qawmi (or Deoband-affiliated) madrasah system, by contrast, operates outside state regulation, follows a classical Dars-i-Nizami curriculum rooted in seventeenth-century Mughal scholarship, and is funded entirely through private charitable donations (Riaz, 2008). While Qawmi madrasah enrollment figures are difficult to determine with precision due to the absence of centralised registration, estimates range from 1.5 to 2 million students (World Bank, 2022).

Contemporary Reforms

In recent decades, the Government of Bangladesh has undertaken a series of reform initiatives aimed at modernising madrasah education and aligning it more closely with the national education mainstream. The National Education Policy of 2010 called for the gradual integration of vocational and technical training into madrasah curricula, and subsequent implementation reports have documented progress toward this goal, albeit unevenly distributed across regions and institution types (Ministry of Education Bangladesh, 2020). The recognition of Qawmi madrasah's *Dawra-e-Hadith* (the highest level of classical Islamic learning) as equivalent to a Master's degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies, initially announced in 2017 and formalised through legislation in 2018, has opened new avenues of academic and professional advancement for Qawmi graduates, though significant challenges in equivalence and employability remain (Ahmed, 2015).

Research Gap

Despite the extensive literature on Islamic education in South Asia and on youth development globally, the intersection of these two fields in the Bangladeshi context remains substantially underexplored. Existing studies have tended to focus either on the structural and political dimensions of madrasah education (Riaz, 2008) or on the developmental outcomes of youth in mainstream secular institutions (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2021), with little attention to the specific developmental experiences of youth in Islamic educational institutions. Furthermore, the bulk of available research employs single-method designs, either qualitative case studies or quantitative surveys, that cannot capture the complexity of the relationship between educational philosophy and developmental outcomes. This study addresses these gaps through a theoretically grounded, mixed-methods investigation that gives voice to students, teachers, and scholars while also generating quantifiable, generalisable evidence.

III. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that synthesises insights from Islamic educational philosophy, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory, and Lerner et al.'s (2015) Positive Youth Development model. The framework posits that Islamic educational philosophy, as operationalised through curriculum content, pedagogical practice, institutional culture, and teacher-student relationships, functions as a proximal developmental context within which specific developmental outcomes are nurtured or constrained.

Specifically, the framework proposes the following association model: Exposure to Islamic Educational Philosophy (encompassing Quranic epistemology, prophetic ethics, Islamic history, and spiritual practice) → Internalisation of Core Islamic Values (*taqwa*/God-

consciousness, '*adl*/justice, *rahma*/compassion, *am anah*/trustworthiness, *khidmah*/service) → Character Formation (the integration of these values into stable dispositional orientations) → Leadership and Social Development (the expression of formed character in proactive civic, professional, and community engagement) → Identity and Nation Building (the contribution of morally formed, socially engaged young people to the construction of a just, cohesive Bangladeshi society).

This model does not assume a deterministic causal pathway. Rather, it recognises that institutional, familial, peer, and macrosocial factors mediate and moderate the relationship between educational philosophy and developmental outcomes at each stage. The ecological systems lens reminds us that Islamic educational institutions are not sealed environments but porous social spaces whose educational effects are continuously shaped and reshaped by the broader social, economic, cultural, and political contexts in which they are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Lerner et al., 2015).

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which quantitative survey data and qualitative interview and focus group data are collected simultaneously, analysed independently, and then integrated in the interpretation phase to produce a richer, more comprehensive account of the phenomenon under investigation. This design is appropriate given the study's dual aim: to produce generalisable quantitative evidence about the association between Islamic educational philosophy

and youth development outcomes, and to generate contextually rich qualitative understanding of the mechanisms, experiences, and meanings underlying those outcomes.

Study Area

The study was conducted across three divisions of Bangladesh representing distinct educational and socio-economic contexts: Dhaka (urban metropolitan), Comilla (semi-urban), and Sylhet (rural-urban mixed, with a large diaspora-connected population and significant historical Islamic scholarship). Within each division, two educational institutions were purposively selected to ensure representation of both Alia madrasah and integrated (Islamic-mainstream hybrid) institutional types. This produced a total sample of six institutions.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised three groups: (a) students aged 14–25 enrolled in the six selected institutions; (b) teachers and administrative staff at those institutions; and (c) Islamic scholars with recognised expertise in Islamic education and youth development. A stratified random sample of 320 students was drawn from the student population, with stratification by gender (male/female), institution type (Alia madrasah/integrated), and educational level (secondary/higher secondary/degree). This yielded an equal distribution of 160 male and 160 female students, permitting balanced gender comparisons. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was employed to recruit 24 teachers/administrators and 12 Islamic scholars for semi-structured individual interviews, supplemented by four focus group discussions (FGDs) with student groups ($n = 6-8$ per FGD).

Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Dhaka (Ref: DU/IRB/2025/14). All participants provided informed consent; for participants under 18 years of age, parental or guardian consent was obtained in addition to the participant's assent. All data were anonymised, and participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Pseudonyms are used for all qualitative excerpts to protect confidentiality.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey instrument developed by the research team, drawing on validated scales from the developmental psychology literature and adapted for the Islamic educational context. The instrument comprised five subscales measuring moral reasoning, social responsibility, leadership self-efficacy, academic motivation, and civic identity,

with a total of 65 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The instrument was translated into Bengali, piloted with a sample of 30 students not included in the main study, and refined on the basis of pilot feedback and psychometric analysis (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82-.91$ across subscales, indicating strong internal consistency).

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and scholars (average duration: 55 minutes) and focus group discussions with students (average duration: 75 minutes). Interview and FGD guides were developed around a common set of themes, the perceived goals and values of Islamic education, the experiences of students in Islamic educational institutions, the relationship between Islamic education and civic and social engagement, and the challenges and opportunities facing Islamic education in contemporary Bangladesh, with sufficient flexibility to allow participants to raise additional issues of relevance to their experience.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) were calculated for all subscale and item scores. Inferential analyses included independent-samples t-tests to examine gender differences; one-way ANOVA to examine differences by institution type and educational level; and multiple regression analysis to identify significant predictors of each developmental outcome. Effect sizes (Cohen's d^* for t-tests; η^2 for ANOVAs) were calculated to assess the practical significance of statistically significant differences.

Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis procedure, comprising six stages: familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the written report. Analysis was conducted in both Bengali (for original interview transcripts) and English (for the report), with meticulous attention to preserving nuance and avoiding cultural mistranslation. Member-checking was conducted with a subset of interview participants to ensure the accuracy and representativeness of emerging themes.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Moral and Ethical Development

Moral development emerged as the dimension of youth development most strongly and consistently associated with Islamic educational philosophy across both quantitative and qualitative strands of the study. Students at integrated institutions, where

Islamic values were woven through both curricular content and institutional culture, scored significantly higher on the Moral Reasoning subscale ($M = 4.21, SD = 0.61$) than students at conventional Alia madrasahs ($M = 3.78, SD = 0.74$; $t(318) = 5.43, p < .001, d^* = 0.63$), suggesting a medium-to-large effect of integration approach on moral reasoning outcomes.

Qualitatively, students and teachers consistently emphasised the concept of *taqwa* (God-consciousness, or the awareness that one's actions are witnessed and will be judged by God) as the foundational moral motivator in their educational experience. One teacher at a Dhaka integrated institution articulated this in terms that may parallel aspects of Kohlberg's (1984) highest stage of moral development: "We do not teach students to be honest because they will be punished for dishonesty or rewarded for honesty. We teach them that honesty is what it means to be a human being created in the image of God's trust (*amanah*). The motivation comes from within, not from outside." This internalised moral motivation, which carries features of post-conventional moral orientation, was reported consistently by students at institutions where Islamic philosophy was actively and reflectively taught, rather than merely formally prescribed.

The relationship between *hadith* (prophetic traditions) study and ethical reasoning was noted by multiple interview participants. Scholars in particular observed that the study of *hadith*, when conducted through critical, contextualising pedagogies rather than rote memorisation, cultivates habits of evidential reasoning, attention to context, and sensitivity to the situations and vulnerabilities of others that transfer meaningfully to everyday ethical decision-making (Sahin, 2018). One female scholar from Sylhet described the pedagogical transformation she had observed in students who engaged deeply with the *Hadith of Gabriel (Jibril)*, a foundational text outlining *Islam*, *iman* (faith), and *ihsan* (excellence/beauty of conduct), noting that the concept of *ihsan* ("to worship God as though you see Him; for if you do not see Him, He sees you") created a sustained internal moral orientation that students carried beyond the classroom.

Leadership Skills

The relationship between Islamic educational philosophy and leadership development is more nuanced and contextually variable than the relationship with moral development. Overall, students in the study sample scored moderately on the Leadership Self-Efficacy subscale ($M =$

3.64, $SD = 0.79$), with significantly higher scores among male students ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.71$) compared to female students ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.81$; $t(318) = 5.52$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.64$). This gendered disparity, which was consistent across institution types, points to a structural limitation in the implementation of Islamic educational philosophy in Bangladesh: the tradition's substantial internal resources for affirming women's intellectual authority and leadership capacity (as evidenced in the lives of the Prophet's female companions, his wives' roles as teachers and jurists, and numerous female Islamic scholars throughout history) are not consistently translated into equalising pedagogical practices on the ground.

Among male students, leadership development was most strongly predicted by engagement with Islamic history and biography (*seerah*), the lives of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions, which provided concrete exemplars of principled leadership under conditions of social adversity, political pressure, and moral complexity. Multiple students cited figures such as 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, Bilal ibn Rabah, and Khadijah bint Khuwaylid as role models whose lives demonstrated that principled moral conviction, rather than inherited power or social privilege, is the foundation of authentic leadership. This narrative-exemplar approach to leadership development aligns with contemporary research on the importance of positive identity-based role models in shaping young people's leadership aspirations and self-concept (Lerner et al., 2015).

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility, operationalised in this study as the disposition and capacity to act for the benefit of one's community, to recognise and respond to the needs of others, and to participate constructively in civic life, was the second most strongly predicted developmental outcome. Students with higher exposure to Islamic educational content showed significantly higher scores on the Social Responsibility subscale ($r = .47$, $p < .001$), and this relationship was moderated by the pedagogical approach of the institution: active, dialogue-based pedagogies produced stronger social responsibility outcomes than passive, rote-learning approaches.

Qualitatively, the concepts of *zakat* (obligatory charitable giving) and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) emerged as pedagogically rich entry points for social responsibility education. Teachers at multiple institutions described using the Quranic injunctions regarding *zakat* (Quran 9:60) as springboards for discussions about poverty, inequality, and the structural causes of social suffering in Bangladesh. The concept of *fard al-kifayah* (collective

obligation), the Islamic legal principle that certain social duties, if not discharged by a sufficient number of community members, become obligatory for all, was invoked by scholars as providing a theological foundation for social activism and community service that is distinctively Islamic yet fully compatible with the goals of democratic citizenship education (Al-Ghazali, 2015; Sahin, 2013).

Focus group discussions with students revealed that community service experiences organised by Islamic institutions, including charitable collections during Ramadan, volunteering at local clinics, and participation in flood-relief efforts, were among the most powerfully developmental experiences reported. Students described these experiences as moments in which Islamic values moved from abstract principles to embodied realities, producing a sense of agency, competence, and moral purpose that persisted long after the service experience itself. This finding resonates strongly with the Positive Youth Development literature's emphasis on "contribution" as both a developmental outcome and a developmental accelerator (Lerner et al., 2015).

Academic Motivation

The relationship between Islamic educational philosophy and academic motivation is complex and bidirectional. On the one hand, the Islamic tradition's unambiguous valorisation of knowledge-seeking, enshrined in prophetic traditions such as "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" and "The ink of the scholar is holier than the blood of the martyr" (though the latter's authenticity is debated), provides a powerful intrinsic motivational framework for intellectual effort (Halstead, 2004). Students who had internalised this Islamically grounded epistemological valuation of knowledge reported significantly higher levels of academic motivation than those who had not, even after controlling for socio-economic background ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$).

On the other hand, the study found evidence that pedagogical approaches characterised by excessive reliance on rote memorisation, particularly in the Qawmi madrasah tradition, can paradoxically undermine deep academic motivation by divorcing learning from understanding and by failing to nurture the intellectual curiosity and critical thinking that sustain long-term engagement with knowledge (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Memon, 2011). Students at Qawmi-aligned institutions reported lower scores on the intrinsic academic motivation subscale ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.88$) compared to students at integrated institutions ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.72$; $t(198) = 4.87$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.63$), suggesting

that the mode of implementing Islamic educational philosophy matters as much as, perhaps more than, the philosophy's formal content.

Identity and Nation Building

Identity development emerged as the most complex and contested domain in this study. Islamic educational philosophy offers Bangladeshi youth a powerful and coherent identity narrative, as members of a global *ummah* with a rich intellectual and spiritual heritage, as bearers of a divinely sanctioned moral tradition, and as citizens with a distinctive contribution to make to the nation and the world. Multiple students described the experience of Islamic education as providing a stable "identity anchor," a sense of who they are and what they stand for, in a social context characterised by rapid change, cultural flux, and competing value systems.

However, the relationship between Islamic identity and Bangladeshi national identity is not without tension. The study found that students at institutions with a more globally oriented Islamic identity framing, emphasising membership in the transnational Muslim *ummah* over specifically Bangladeshi cultural identity, reported somewhat lower scores on the civic identity subscale ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.81$) than students at institutions that actively integrated Bengali cultural heritage and national history within an Islamic framework ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.74$; $t(188) = 3.94$, $p < .001$, $d^* = 0.48$). This finding suggests that the civic and national developmental potential of Islamic education in Bangladesh is maximised when Islamic identity formation is consciously integrated with, rather than positioned in opposition to, Bangladeshi cultural and civic identity (Bakar, 2019; Sahin, 2013).

VI. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The study identified four principal challenges facing Islamic education as a vehicle for positive youth development in Bangladesh, alongside corresponding opportunities for transformative reform.

Curriculum Modernisation: The most frequently cited challenge across all participant groups was the rigidity of existing madrasah curricula, particularly in the Qawmi stream. The Dars-i-Nizami curriculum, despite its profound intellectual richness, was designed for a social context fundamentally different from contemporary Bangladesh, and its wholesale implementation without contextualisation produces graduates ill-equipped for the epistemological demands of the twenty-first century. The opportunity lies in the growing consensus among Islamic scholars

themselves, including influential figures within the Qawmi tradition, that curriculum reform is not merely permissible but obligatory, given Islam's insistence that education serve the actual needs of the community (*maslahah*) (Al-Ghazali, 2015). Carefully designed curriculum reforms that preserve the classical inheritance while contextualising it for contemporary life, a process of thoughtful *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) rather than mere borrowing from Western educational models, represent the most promising pathway forward.

Employment Perceptions: A second challenge concerns the widely held perception, documented in both government reports and this study's qualitative data, that madrasah education, particularly Qawmi, does not equip graduates for competitive participation in the modern labour market. This perception, which is partially accurate for some graduates in some contexts, creates a stigma that discourages enrolment, erodes student motivation, and reduces the social standing of Islamic education. The opportunity here lies in developing compelling evidence of the transferable skills and dispositions, in moral reasoning, social responsibility, Arabic language competency, and global cultural literacy, that Islamic education cultivates, and in creating structured pathways that enable Islamic education graduates to pursue further professional and academic development without abandoning their educational heritage.

Integration with Mainstream Education: The structural separation of Islamic and mainstream education systems in Bangladesh perpetuates mutual misunderstanding, social stratification, and the waste of educational resources. The opportunity for meaningful integration, not homogenisation, but constructive dialogue and resource-sharing between the two systems, is significant, given the government's stated commitment to educational inclusion and the growing movement among Islamic educators themselves toward holistic, integrated educational models (Ministry of Education Bangladesh, 2020).

Technology and Globalisation: The rapid penetration of smartphones, social media, and internet access into even rural Bangladesh is transforming the information environment within which young people in Islamic educational institutions are developing. This transformation presents both risks, exposure to content that contradicts or undermines Islamic values, distraction from deep intellectual engagement, and opportunities, including access to global Islamic scholarship, digital tools for Quranic study, and platforms for civic engagement and social

responsibility expression. Educational institutions that can thoughtfully integrate digital literacy with Islamic epistemological frameworks will be better positioned to nurture developmentally robust youth than those that either uncritically embrace or reflexively reject the digital environment.

VII. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study both corroborate and extend the existing literature on Islamic education and youth development. The strong positive association between Islamic educational philosophy and moral development, particularly in institutions employing active, dialogical pedagogies, is consistent with Sahin's (2018) argument that the Islamic tradition possesses rich internal resources for the cultivation of moral reasoning, provided those resources are engaged critically rather than transmitted mechanically. The finding that *taqwa* functions as a powerful intrinsic moral motivator may offer an alternative pathway to moral motivation that complements but does not directly map onto Kohlberg's (1984) secular post-conventional stage, suggesting the need for more culturally inclusive models of moral development. The gender disparity in leadership development outcomes represents one of the study's most important and challenging findings. It confirms the observations of Mohd Nor and Hamzah (2016) and Memon (2011) that the Islamic tradition's substantial internal resources for gender-equitable education are frequently suppressed by cultural practices and institutional structures that have no necessary connection to Islamic theology or jurisprudence. This finding calls for a clear distinction, in research, policy, and educational practice, between what Islamic educational philosophy actually teaches and what any particular community's implementation of that philosophy involves, since the gap between the two is often large and consequential.

The finding that the mode of implementing Islamic educational philosophy, particularly the degree of dialogical, critically engaged pedagogy, matters as much as the philosophy's formal content is perhaps the most practically significant outcome of the study. It suggests that curriculum reform alone, without accompanying pedagogical transformation, will not produce the developmental outcomes that Islamic educational philosophy is capable of nurturing. This insight aligns with Memon's (2011) argument that Islamic teacher education must prioritise the development of teachers who are themselves morally formed, intellectually curious, and pedagogically skilled, not merely curriculum-deliverers.

The relationship between Islamic identity formation and civic identity in the Bangladeshi context deserves particular attention. The study's finding that institutions integrating Bengali cultural heritage with Islamic values produce stronger civic identity outcomes than those adopting a more exclusively transnational Islamic identity framing has important implications for nation-building. Bangladesh's distinctive cultural heritage, including its rich Bengali literary and artistic tradition, its history of popular resistance to colonial and military rule, and its ethno-linguistic nationalism, can be understood not as a rival to Islamic identity but as a complementary expression of it: a specifically Bangladeshi contribution to the diverse tapestry of the global *ummah*. Educational institutions that enable young Bangladeshis to inhabit both identities simultaneously and constructively are making a vital contribution to the country's democratic culture and social cohesion.

It is important to acknowledge that this study did not directly measure potential negative outcomes that some critics associate with certain forms of religious education, such as dogmatism, social exclusion, or reduced intergroup tolerance. The present findings focus primarily on positive developmental indicators; future research should deliberately investigate these critical dimensions to provide a fully balanced assessment of Islamic education's impact.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Educators

Teachers in Islamic educational institutions should be equipped, through sustained professional development programmes, with pedagogical repertoires that move beyond rote transmission toward active, dialogical, inquiry-based approaches. The study's evidence that dialogical pedagogy produces significantly stronger developmental outcomes across all five measured dimensions constitutes a powerful practical argument for investing in teacher professional development as the primary lever of educational improvement. Specifically, teachers should be supported in developing competence in: Socratic questioning techniques that draw out students' moral reasoning capacities; project-based learning that enables students to apply Islamic values to real-world social problems; gender-equitable classroom practices that create space for the intellectual and leadership development of female students; and critical engagement with Islamic history that models independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) rather than uncritical deference to authority.

For Policymakers

The Government of Bangladesh should develop a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy for Islamic educational reform that: (a) adequately funds curriculum development initiatives in both Alia and Qawmi madrasah streams; (b) establishes clear, measurable quality standards for Islamic educational institutions that address developmental outcomes, not merely academic performance on standardised tests; (c) creates formal mechanisms for dialogue between Islamic educational institutions and mainstream educational institutions, including joint professional development programmes for teachers; and (d) addresses the gender disparity in leadership development outcomes through targeted policy interventions, including the promotion of female Islamic scholarship and the establishment of gender-equitable governance structures in Islamic educational institutions.

For Institutions

Islamic educational institutions should undertake systematic self-assessment of their developmental outcomes, not merely their academic outcomes, and use the resulting evidence to drive continuous improvement. Community service programmes should be formalised and structured as developmental experiences, with explicit reflection components that enable students to connect their service activities to Islamic values and civic responsibilities. Institutions should also develop structured partnerships with higher education institutions, vocational training programmes, and civil society organisations to create enriched developmental pathways for their graduates.

For Curriculum Developers

Curriculum developers working in Islamic educational contexts in Bangladesh should prioritise: (a) the development of contextualised, Bangladesh-grounded Islamic studies content that draws on the country's rich Islamic heritage while addressing contemporary social and moral issues; (b) the explicit integration of critical thinking, evidential reasoning, and creative problem-solving across all curricular domains; (c) the inclusion of women's Islamic scholarship, both classical and contemporary, as a standard component of Islamic studies curricula; and (d) the development of digital literacy programmes grounded in Islamic epistemological frameworks.

IX. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated, through rigorous mixed-methods investigation, that Islamic educational philosophy is positively associated with the development of Bangladeshi youth across multiple dimensions. When implemented through

active, dialogical pedagogies, within institutions that consciously integrate Islamic values with Bengali cultural heritage and civic identity, and with equitable attention to the development of both male and female students, Islamic educational philosophy is linked with young people of strong moral character, broad social responsibility, genuine leadership capacity, and deep civic commitment, precisely the developmental outcomes that Bangladesh's democratic future requires.

At the same time, the study has identified persistent challenges, including curriculum rigidity, gendered access disparities, pedagogical conservatism, and structural separation from the mainstream educational system, that constrain the full realisation of Islamic education's developmental potential. Addressing these challenges will require sustained effort, creative courage, and genuine partnership among educators, policymakers, scholars, communities, and young people themselves.

The tradition of Islamic educational philosophy, as articulated by Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, Al-Attas, and their many intellectual heirs, has never been a static or finished system. It is a living tradition of critical reflection on the meaning and purpose of human formation, a tradition fully capable of renewal, contextualisation, and creative engagement with the demands of contemporary life. The challenge for Islamic education in Bangladesh, as this study's findings suggest, is not whether that renewal is possible, but whether the institutions, policies, and pedagogical practices through which Islamic education is implemented will be adequate to the task.

Future research should examine: the long-term civic and professional outcomes of graduates of different types of Islamic educational institutions in Bangladesh; the specific pedagogical practices that most effectively translate Islamic values into developmental outcomes; the potential negative outcomes, such as dogmatism or intergroup intolerance, that may accompany certain instructional approaches; and the experiences of female students and scholars in Islamic educational contexts, whose voices remain significantly underrepresented in the existing literature.

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