

Navigating Tradition and Innovation: Institutional and Cultural Determinants of Pedagogical Reform in Pakistani Madrasahs

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Abstract

The longstanding marginalization of religious graduates and the relative lack of socio-economic development in Pakistan are due to the enduring epistemological gap between the traditional Islamic seminaries (madrasahs) and the secular education of the present day. This dichotomy runs counter to *tawhīdic* epistemology (TE), which holds that all knowledge is a whole derived from a single divine source. The attempts of reformism, often securitized, by the state have always proved to be unsuccessful since they impose a dualistic secular assimilation instead of real Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK). This practice has resulted in institutional dissonance and well-founded anxiety among traditional clergy about being secularized. This qualitative study, grounded in the original vision of TE and in Fazlur Rahman's theory of the organic unity of knowledge, explores the institutional and cultural realities of educational reform within the *Dars-e-Nizami* ecosystem. This research uses in-depth interviews and analysis of institutional documents using the constructivist pedagogical paradigm and is based on case studies of two innovative schools: Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran. Findings reveal that the institutions avoid state-madrasah conflict in structural autonomy and assimilation of degrees. Importantly, they dismantle epistemological resistance through institutionalizing Project-Based Learning (PBL). The article claims that PBL is not an exotic secular incursion, but a modern rediscovery of the classical Islamic dialectical tradition and an effective means of Islamising knowledge. This change in pedagogy allows students to synthesize in practice historical principles of jurisprudence with current socio-economic issues.

This paradigm, based on self-initiative and research, ultimately proposes a scaffolded model of integration within the educational system, so that graduates of madrasahs can maintain unchallenged theological validity while still gaining the critical skills of the modern world.

Keywords: Madrasah reform, Project-Based Learning, Islamic epistemology, Fazlur Rahman, curriculum integration, *Dars-e-Nizami*.

Introduction

The epistemological divide of the Pakistani madrasah system can be adequately addressed with reference to the vision of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), which is deeply rooted in *tawhīdic* epistemology and the Islamisation of Knowledge (TEIOK). The notion of TE is fundamentally opposed to the colonial and secular dichotomy of learning into *dini* (religious) and *dunyawi* (worldly) realms. Rather, it assumes that every true knowledge has a single divine source and must be sought in a unified, cohesive unity. In this paradigm, the IOK does not simply consist of the grafting of Islamic terms on the modern secular sciences in a superficial manner. Instead, it is a full-fledged epistemological and pedagogical reorganization, as advocated by the scholastic paradigm at IIUM, to bring modern sciences into conformity with Islam's ethical and spiritual worldview (Hashim & Ross 2000, 1921). Through this integrative vision, the traditional seminary can move beyond its defensive stance of text preservation to actively engage the intellectual world, thereby recovering its historical educational ecosystem, in which the transmitted sciences (*manqulat*) and rational sciences (*maqulat*) were explored as mutually supporting aspects of the same divine reality.

Embedded in this *tawhīdic* paradigm, the implementation of PBL and constructivist pedagogies in the Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran institutions is not only a means of modernizing methods, but also a highly effective and practical way to Islamise Knowledge. Constructivism, with its focus on active, contextual knowledge-building, aligns perfectly with the Islamic imperatives of *tafakkur* (reflection) and *tafaquh* (deep comprehension). PBL will not make students passive receivers of unequal religious and secular knowledge. Instead, they are provoked to creatively integrate classical Islamic jurisprudence with contemporary socio-economic and technological realities. For example, the student must use both empirical research and classical Fiqh to design a project on the ethics of artificial intelligence or the Islamic finance of the day, so that a modern-day issue can be solved with a *tawhīdic* worldview operationalized (AbuSulayman, 2007, pp. 35-38). In this way, the use of constructivist modalities will enable Pakistani madrasahs to move towards integrating modern education in an indigenous Islamic way, generating scholars who can navigate the twenty-first century critically without losing their strong grounding in traditional Islamic epistemology.

This research is guided by the IIUM academic vision, as it empirically explores how TE can be applied to the unique traditional architecture of Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran. The study transforms the IOK from theoretical abstraction into practical pedagogical change by

critically analyzing the institutional policies, cultural determinants, and classroom realities of PBL in these madrasahs. The essence of this research, the development of a culturally and epistemologically contextualized model of PBL, is directly related to the intellectual imperative of IIUM. It presents a solid, evidence-based system outlining how the Pakistani madrasah system can apply constructivist approaches to not secularize, but effectively reclaim the *tawhīdic* synthesis of knowledge, thus empowering traditional graduates to respond to the present-day socio-economic challenges through an integrated, unified Islamic perspective.

The situation in the Pakistani educational landscape has been inherently marked by an overwhelming and sustained fragmentation, the state of which is often theorised in modern literature as educational apartheid. The core of this disrupted structure is the old-fashioned Islamic academy, or madrasah, a place that has traditionally been the primary centre of Islamic knowledge and scholastic education in the Indian subcontinent (Zaman, 1999). The madrasah used to be a total educational institution in which there was virtually no separation between religious and secular knowledge. A complex synthesis of transmitted sciences (*manqulat*), including the exegesis of the Qur'an and hadith, and the rational sciences (*maqulat*), including logic, philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy, the traditional curriculum was initially called the *Dars-e-Nizami* and was standardized in the eighteenth century by Mulla Nizamuddin Sihalvi (Moosa, 2015). Such a consolidated methodology provided that the graduates, in addition to being spiritual guides, were also becoming contributors to the administrative and intellectual backbone of the state.

Nevertheless, with the arrival of British imperialism, a drastic structural divide of knowledge was plunged. The most important interventions of the colonial policy, especially the minutes of 1835 and the Educational Despatch of 1854, introduced a parallel system of Western-style secular education and systematically pushed aside native knowledge systems (Tahir, 2022). Such an experience of colonialism generated a binary of ideas that disarmed madrasahs of their socio-political capital. As part of the response against the existential threat of colonial secularization, the ulama took a defensive position, reducing the purview of the *Dars-e-Nizami* to the preservation of the religious texts and identity almost exclusively. The attempt to shield the Islamic tradition in turn, according to Zaman (2002), brought about the creation of a strong demarcation between the realm of religion and the rest of the society, effectively terminating the natural evolution of Islamic pedagogy, and distancing the madrasah of the fast-modernizing world.

The aftermath of this epistemological discontinuity is still evident in the ongoing tension between the state and independent religious educational boards (*Wifaqs*) in post-colonial Pakistan. Various governments have tried to control and modernize the madrasah sector, starting with earlier efforts in the 1960s to the most recent introduction of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) which became the National Curriculum of Pakistan and the Societies Registration (Amendment) Act of 2024 (Sattar, 2024). Such interventions by the state constantly conceptualize reform in the context of national security and economic integration, which requires the addition of modern discipline subjects such as computer science, English, and social studies. However, these dictates often fail, weighed down by deep mistrust. Administrators in madrasahs are prone to thinking of state policies as neo-colonial moves to modernize their schools and weaken the Islamic spirit that gives them their base, and as a result, their curricular autonomy is fiercely defended (Tahir, 2022).

There is an increasing wave of opinion in progressive religious quarters, that internal educational reform is urgent and that it is time to bring a stop to this institutional opposition to state intervention. This crisis was radically diagnosed by Fazlur Rahman (1967), who concluded that the disunity of knowledge and the polarization of the lay and traditional types of education have put Muslim societies in the intellectual state of paralysis. He stressed that without incorporating this dichotomy into an organic whole, the Muslim mind will be unable to make original contributions to the modern world. The solution to this paralysis is to go beyond the limited inclusion of secular textbooks to the *Dars-e-Nizami*. It requires a pedagogical transformation between memorizing the material and thinking it over on the high level.

Hence, the necessity of the reform lies in the introduction of constructivist pedagogical models, including PBL, which can systematically guide contemporary approaches to the educational process toward the historic and inquiry-oriented ethos of Islamic epistemology. Through exploration of the institutional and cultural factors that either support or hinder this type of pedagogical innovations, this article seeks to justify how traditional Pakistani seminaries are grappling with the fragile routine of balancing, on the one hand, sustaining the purity of their heritage and on the other, negotiating the complexity of the twenty-first-century world.

This article argues that the most effective mechanisms for overcoming the enduring epistemological dichotomy in Pakistan's educational landscape are emerging from within the traditional seminary ecosystem itself, rather than through state-imposed assimilation. By

examining the organic integration of constructivist PBL, this study demonstrates how traditional institutions are reclaiming the *tawhīdic* synthesis of knowledge while simultaneously navigating the complexities of the twenty-first century. To empirically ground this argument, the research employs a qualitative case study methodology, focusing on two pioneering institutions: Jamia-tur-Rashid in Karachi and Minhaj-ul-Quran in Lahore. These specific cases were selected for their distinct, autonomous approaches to curriculum integration and for establishing independent degree-awarding bodies. The article is structured to first outline a multidimensional theoretical framework rooted in Islamic epistemology and constructivist learning, followed by an analysis of the institutional and cultural determinants that historically resist pedagogical reform. It then transitions to a detailed comparative analysis of the institutional policies and classroom realities at Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran, synthesizing these fieldwork findings to offer concrete policy interventions for bridging the madrasah-state divide.

Research Methodology

This study operationalizes a qualitative case study design, a framework particularly suited for analyzing complex educational ecologies where historical traditions and modern pedagogical demands intersect. The research investigates the institutional mechanisms and lived classroom realities of integrating project-based learning within the traditional *Dars-e-Nizami* ecosystem. To capture a comprehensive spectrum of grassroots educational reform, two institutions were selected as primary case studies: Jamia-tur-Rashid in Karachi and Minhaj-ul-Quran in Lahore. These institutions were purposively chosen because they represent distinct theological traditions yet share a common, proactive commitment to structural innovation, curriculum integration, and the establishment of autonomous higher education charters.

Data collection was conducted through a triangulated approach consisting of semi-structured interviews, direct classroom observations, and the critical analysis of institutional documents. In-depth interviews were held with a purposive sample of key stakeholders, including senior administrators, curriculum designers, and faculty members actively engaged in teaching both classical Islamic texts and modern disciplines at the selected institutions. These interviews were designed to extract nuanced perspectives on the friction between state policies, *Wifaq* regulations, and institutional autonomy, as well as the practical challenges of transitioning from the traditional *halaqah* method of transmission to a constructivist, inquiry-based model. Furthermore, institutional documents such as official policy statements, curriculum

frameworks from Majma ul-Uloom al-Islamiyyah, and project-based learning syllabi were collated to provide a textual baseline against which the lived pedagogical realities could be evaluated.

The qualitative data was subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis to ensure a high level of transparency and analytical depth. Following transcription, the data was inductively and deductively coded using a framework aligned with the study's theoretical pillars: TE, constructivist learning, and the sociological dynamics of religious authority. This coding framework facilitated the identification of core themes, including epistemological resistance, the preservation of *ijazah* culture, and the revival of classical dialectical methods through modern project-based pedagogies. By systematically linking the interview narratives and document analyses back to these theoretical constructs, the methodology ensures that the empirical findings robustly support the proposed model for culturally contextualized pedagogical reform within Pakistani madrasahs.

Theoretical Framework

To examine, in a systematic manner, the institutional and cultural factors of pedagogical change in Pakistani madrasahs, this article develops a multidimensional theoretical framework grounded in the vision of the IIUM: TEIOK. This general paradigm is united with the epistemological theories of the educational reform presented by Fazlur Rahman, constructivist pedagogical models, and the sociological theories of religious authority presented by Muhammad Qasim Zaman and Ebrahim Moosa (Rahman, 1982; Zaman, 2002; Moosa, 2015). The prism is so complicated because the *Dars-e-Nizami* ecosystem cannot be restructured pedagogically by simply performing an administrative overhaul of the curriculum but instead a radical epistemological repositioning and subtle social-political bargaining is needed.

This study uses TE as its guiding framework, which essentially rejects the colonial dichotomy in education between *dini* (religious) and *dunyawi* (secular) spheres. Through this vision, the IOK will be no longer seen as the surface level of imparting modern subjects into the traditional curriculum, but as a wholesome structural reorganization of the entire disciplines to be studied as one integrated divine reality (Hashim and Ross, 2000). It is in this general epistemological framework that Fazlur Rahman supports the organic unity of knowledge in its practical and institutional justification (Rahman, 1982).

To operationalize this integration, the framework uses constructivist learning theory and PBL. These approaches fit perfectly into the Islamic requirements of *tafakkur* (critical reflection) and *tafaquh* (deep comprehension) and turn the theoretical basis of the IOK into practical realities in the classrooms of such institutions as Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran. Lastly, to understand how such pedagogical and epistemological changes are negotiated within the old seminary, the framework draws on sociological perspectives on religious authority and tradition. Using Zaman and Moosa (Zaman, 2002; Moosa, 2015), the research demonstrates that the modernization of madrasah education is examined as a lived, multifaceted interaction in which the ulama must strike a delicate balance between safeguarding the sacred and adopting modern pedagogical modes.

Epistemological Synthesis: The Organic Unity of Knowledge

The first cornerstone of this system is based on the intellectual heritage of Fazlur Rahman who critically diagnosed the educational paralysis of the Muslim world as an effect of a serious epistemological dichotomy. Rahman (1982) suggested that due to the historic isolation between traditional Islamic sciences (*manqulat*), and the rational or secular sciences (*maqulat*), the traditional scholars were not well versed to deal with modern complexities. Such dichotomy, which was promoted by colonial disruption using such educational dispatch as 1854, left the traditional madrasah deprived of its dynamic contact with the empirical world and identified only with the preservation of the classical texts (Tahir, 2022; Malik, 1999).

Rahman (1967) argued that the survival, as well as relevance of Islamic education, involved the organic integration of all knowledge, and the secularization of the sacred and the sacred. This integration is justified methodologically by his theory of hermeneutics, which posits a double movement requiring Muslims to extract underlying moral principles from historical texts and apply them innovatively to address current socio-economic realities (Rahman, 1982; Abbas, 2017). Moreover, the paradigm as is expressed by al-Faruqi (1982) and al-Attas (1979) confirms this argument by stating that modern sciences should be critically evaluated and integrated into an Islamic knowledge epistemology instead of being readily embraced.

In this article, the idea of the organic unity of knowledge introduced by Rahman is solidly placed in the context of the wider paradigm of TE, which is the theoretical framework with which to evaluate whether the contemporary subjects and project-based pedagogies currently

propagated in madrasahs are a true, structural progress toward the IOK, or are just superficial, compartmentalized appendages.

Constructivist Pedagogy as a Continuation of Classical Tradition

The second framework pillar establishes the modern constructivist learning theory, i.e., PBL, in the historical spectrum of Islamic pedagogy. Constructivism assumes that learners can actively construct meaning from experience and engagement, rather than being passive recipients of transmitted facts. Although to many critics, the modern-day madrasah resembles an arena of rote memorization with no critical thinking (Nayyar, 1998; Hoodbhoy & Nayyar, 1985), a more historical examination of the history of the madrasah would unveil that classical Islamic education was constructivist in nature.

Previously, both the *halaqah* (learning circle) and *munazara* (scholarly disputation) involved students engaging in dialectical argumentation, critiquing jurisprudential literature, and applying legal maxims to new situations (Moosa, 2015). Halstead (2004) suggests that the goal of Islamic education is the holistic growth of the rational, spiritual and social faculties of the individual, and that one will serve as a *khalifah* (vicegerent) and this role is basically anchored in TE. Through this integrated world-vision, PBL, involving collaborative research, critical thinking, and practical problem-solving, would not be a foreign Western importation but rather a contemporary formalization of the dialectical traditions of the classical madrasah. According to this paradigm, the introduction of such innovations like PBL is to be introduced as some kind of renewal of the indigenous tradition of rationalism. In this way, PBL can serve as an active pedagogical instrument in the IOK, enabling the *ulama* to embrace reform in a more culturally and intellectually harmonious way, as a continuation of divine ethics and modern problem-solving (Moosa, 2015).

Institutional Autonomy and the Preservation of Religious Authority

The third pillar of this basis is the sociological examination of the relations between madrasahs and the state, and of the maintenance of clerical power. Zaman (1999, 2002) extensively records the role of the *ulama* as agents of change, arguing for their role in the contemporary public space. The conservative clergy sees the madrasah not as a school, but as the final bastion of Islamic identity in the face of the secular modern and the hegemony of the state (Sikand, 2005).

As a result, state-driven reforms, e.g. the Madrasah Reform Project (MRP) of 2002 or a Single National Curriculum, are often received with virulent opposition. This may be resistance not necessarily because of theological antagonism to modern knowledge, but because of deep lack of confidence. Madrasah administrators view interventions by the government as politically inclined efforts to monitor, control and eventually secularize their schools (Bano, 2007) and (Bashir & Ul-Haq, 2019). The conservative institutional independence of the ulama is strongly defended, and they use the centralized authority of the *Wifaqs* (madrasah boards) to oppose policies that could challenge their prerogative to establish Islamic orthodoxy (Sajjad, 2013; Andrabi et al., 2006). Thus, this framework posits that pedagogical change cannot be imposed from the top down by the state; it must be internal to the madrasah system of thought, spearheaded by religious thinkers with unquestioned theological authority.

Application of the Theoretical Framework

The three-component framework will be used systematically to analyze the institutional and cultural influences behind pedagogical change and ultimately compare these madrasahs with the vision of the academic of the IIUM. To begin with, the theory of epistemological integration proposed by Rahman, which is deeply rooted in the foundational philosophy of TE of IIUM, will be applied to critically evaluate curriculum restructuring at Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran. We shall examine whether their integration of the sciences of today is successful in producing a real IOK to form an organic unity of all sciences or whether they continue to be caught in a dualistic system of education.

Second, the classroom pedagogical changes will be analyzed using constructivist learning theory as the analytical framework. Through analyzing primary information on the interaction between teachers and students with PBL and current research techniques, the article shall show how these learning institutions are moving away the passive transmission (rote memorization) to the active and high-level cognitive engagement. In this context, PBL is appraised as an effective operationalization of the IOK a revival of the classical Islamic form of dialectic, rather than a secular imposition.

Lastly, the sociological interpretations of religious authority and state-madrasah friction, as postulated by Zaman (1999, 2002) and Bano (2007), will be used to interpret the administrative strategies of Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran. This element will solve the puzzle of how these institutions manage historical distrust and maintain institutional autonomy to culturally

authorize contemporary pedagogical innovations in the perceptions of the wider traditionalist community. Finally, this systematic approach will ensure that the empirical evidence is not only outlined but also critically evaluated against existing scholarly theories and against the extent to which these grassroots reforms will fulfil IIUM's overall vision of a harmonious, *tawhīdic* educational environment.

The synthesis of these views entails the following table, which is the summary of the tripartite theoretical framework adopted in this study:

Table 1: Summary of Theoretical Framework

THEORETICAL PILLAR	KEY THEORISTS	CORE CONCEPTS	APPLICATION IN THIS STUDY
Epistemological Synthesis	Fazlur Rahman, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas	Organic unity of knowledge; Double movement theory; IOK	Evaluating whether the inclusion of modern subjects achieves true epistemological integration rather than superficial addition
Constructivist Pedagogy	Ebrahim Moosa, J. Mark Halstead	Active knowledge construction; Problem-solving; Revival of classical <i>halaqah</i> and <i>munazara</i>	Assessing PBL as an authentic continuation of the traditional Islamic dialectical method
Institutional Autonomy	Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Masooda Bano	Custodians of change; State-madrasah trust deficit; Preservation of religious authority	Analyzing how institutions legitimize pedagogical innovations autonomously to bypass state friction and preserve orthodoxy

Institutional Determinants of Pedagogical Reform: State Friction, *Wifaq* Regulations, And Institutional Autonomy

The structural evolution of the Pakistani madrasah system is deeply engaged with the political economy of the state, and the strongly held status quo of the religious clergy. Attempting to understand the barriers to pedagogical innovation and the implementation of PBL in modern sciences necessitates a study of the institutional resources that underpin these seminaries. The absence of trust, suspicion, and ideological conflict over the ultimate purpose of education characterizes the relationship between the madrasah establishment and the state.

Over the decades, multiple governments in Pakistan have attempted to regulate the madrasah sector by several policy interventions starting with the MRP of 2002, up to the more recent adoption of the Single National Curriculum (since the National Curriculum of Pakistan) and the Societies Registration (Amendment) Act of 2024. The most fundamental aim of these state initiatives has been to integrate religious seminaries by inserting secular subjects, such as English, mathematics, and computer science, into the current curriculum, which would then be under federal control (Sajjad, 2013; Tahir, 2022). Nonetheless, such top-down policy interventions are always unsuccessful. According to Bashir and Ul-Haq (2019), the root of this failure lies in the deep-seated distrust between the two toward financial regulation and curriculum control and degree recognition.

Administrators of Madrasahs perceive reforms imposed by the state not as a way of making real educational gains, but rather as a politicized programme of securitization, surveillance and, eventually, secularization. This perception is reinforced by the fact that government policies tend to be grounded in a national security paradigm rather than an educational one (Ahmad, 2025). The *ulama* in turn view state interference as a direct attack on their epistemological sovereignty as well as their historical role of protectors of Islamic orthodoxy. Considered considering the philosophy underlying the IIUM, this opposition is not merely reactionary; it is a defence of TE. The *ulama* instinctively object to the state policy because it imposes a colonial divide in knowledge, depicting modern sciences as entirely secular (*dunyawi*) additions rather than seeking them as an inseparable part of a single, divine reality. Zaman (2002) highlights that to protect this Islamic tradition, the *ulama* have provided concrete boundaries between the religious sphere and other aspects of the society, citing institutional independence as the main defence against secular modernity.

This institutional resistance is very functionalized and structured by the *Wifaqs*, the main religious education boards who run the madrasahs on sectarian grounds. The Wifaq ul Madaris Al-Arabia and other federations of the Ittehad Tanzimat-e-Madras Al-Pakistan (ITMP) have absolute control over the curriculum, syllabi, and examination system. Bano (2007) cites the centralized leadership of these *Wifaqs* as a reason governments have not reformed madrasahs, even though these *Wifaqs* have strong internal patronage and enjoy a degree of social legitimacy unavailable to the state. According to the *Wifaqs*, the limits of the acceptable knowledge are set, with the classical *Dars-e-Nizami* becoming the indisputable heart of the system. The state is, therefore, at structural and pedagogic crossroads in presenting such structures as the Single National Curriculum. Since these frameworks are a dualistic, secular supplement rather than an actual IOK, the boards feel that the imposition of modern textbooks constitutes a loss of their holy curriculum (Tahir, 2022; Sattar, 2024).

Moreover, new legislative interventions, such as Societies Registration (Amendment) Act of 2024, are aimed at imposing financial auditing, formal registration with the Directorate General of Religious Education or the Ministry of Industries (Ahmad, 2025). Even though these requirements are allegedly intended to promote administrative transparency and provide graduates with greater economic opportunities, they face immense opposition. The leadership of Madrasahs is afraid that economic dependence or subordination to state agencies will inevitably compel ideological concessions, as they claim that an institution whose curriculum and funding are determined by the state cannot easily criticize the socio-political order.

Therefore, the institutional factor that predominantly determines pedagogical reform is the demand on sovereignty. Experience shows that so long as educational modernization is linked to state-managed secularization, it will face uncompromising opposition from traditional boards. To avoid such a state-madrasah friction, the pedagogical reforms should be internally motivated and philosophically supported by the vision of TE of IIUM. By framing the incorporation of constructivist approaches and modern sciences as a true IOK rather than a compromise with the state, madrasahs will be able to modernize their classrooms without compromising their institutional and theological independence.

Cultural Determinants and the Preservation of Tradition

Although the institutional friction with the state is major challenge to pedagogical reform, in-house cultural and epistemological interactions of the madrasah ecosystem are no less of a challenge. The classical seminary is not just a school; it is a holistic socio-cultural haven that

is meant to maintain Islamic orthodoxy and develop a particular form of religious power. To comprehend the opposition to contemporary pedagogical models such as constructivism and PBL, one must critically analyze the epistemological fears of the conservative clergy, the pedagogical significance of the *ijazah* culture, and the institutional realities of teacher readiness.

Epistemological Resistance and the Fear of Secularization

The reluctance of the old ulama to go all the way and adopt contemporary educational methodologies cannot be attributed to intellectual backwardness or sheer resistance. Instead, it is a calculated defence mechanism as Zaman (2002) puts it, to conserve the sanctity of the Islamic epistemology. The *ulama* act as the self-appointed custodians of change, and they are all too conscious of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions inherent in the blind acceptance of the modern, western-infused sciences, as being incompatible with the Islamic worldview.

Modern sciences are not neutral in their values as extensively argued by al-Attas (1979) and al-Faruqi (1982) in their arguments against secular education, they are usually based on a secular, materialistic worldview that excludes divine revelation as the objective truth. In the case of the traditional madrasah administrator, introducing modern subjects without a strong procedure of would pose a danger to expose the students to a dualistic cognitive dissonance. According to Tahir (2022), this fear has deep roots in the colonial experience, as the claim of introducing secular education was openly applied as a weapon to destroy the right of the native Islamic power. The development of the modern pedagogy resistance into cultural resistance is, therefore, inherently an epistemological resistance. The *ulama* are terrified of the possible unintended effect of deconstructing sacred theological boundaries and secularizing the mind of the student as the result of engaging in constructivist methods that allow students to challenge the established norms and create their respective subjective realities (Moosa, 2015).

The *Ijazah* Culture and Pedagogical Stagnation

This epistemological warning is structurally supported by the conventional means of imparting knowledge in the *Dars-e-Nizami*: the first, the *halaqah* (learning circle), and the second, the *ijazah* (certification) system. The *ijazah* was earlier on a very dynamic system of peer review and academic validation whereby a student had not just memorized a text but had also mastered the conceptual nuances of the text through dialectical interaction with a master teacher (Moosa,

2015). In its classical form, this system had strong constructivist features, with students expected to engage in *munazara* (disputation) and to reason by law to new cases.

The *ijazah* culture has however become hardened in the modern Pakistani milieu to a formal structure of propagation. Rahman (1982) noted that the conventional system of education shifted its orientation from generating original thinking to the keen preservation of past commentaries and super commentaries. The exalted role of the *mudharis* (teacher) as the ultimate provider of authoritative knowledge establishes a submissive classroom relationship that leaves the student agency in less than desirable condition. Within this context, the constructivist paradigm, which mandates that the teacher assume a supportive role in student-initiated enquiry rather than being the primary source of knowledge, is frequently seen as both a constituent of *adab* (traditional respect) and a challenge to the teacher's religious authority. A shift in the current model of rote-memorization to PBL framework, however, presupposes an enormous cultural shift, which would demand the ulama to replace the model proposed by Moosa (2015) of a republic of piety with a republic of letters.

Teacher Preparedness and Structural Limitations

Aside from philosophical and cultural opposition, the most practical impediment to pedagogical change is the lack of preparation among teachers. It means that it is necessary to integrate the modern pedagogical innovations not only with the faculty that is thoroughly versed in the Islamic sciences but also with the faculty who possess the skills of contemporary instructional design, curriculum mapping, and educational psychology.

Recent empirical studies evaluating the obstacles to current education in Pakistani madrasahs identify a dire lack of pedagogical training among traditional schoolteachers. Iqbal et al. (2023) found that although madrasah educators have a deep commitment to their religious cause, almost all have never undergone formal pedagogical training, including Bloom's Taxonomy or constructivist pedagogical interventions. The classical *mudarris* adheres to the pedagogical techniques by which he was taught in his own early years, the chief of them the line-by-line reading and translation of the ancient Arabic and Persian books.

In the case of state directives or reformist teachers trying to implement new subjects or research-grounded practices, such teachers do not have the necessary capacity to incorporate it substantially. As a result, modern topics are frequently presented through same rote-memorization methods that are used to learning classical grammar, and they have been entirely

deprived of their analysis (Bashir and Ul-Haq, 2019). Moreover, most madrasahs' financial resources are insufficient to employ experts or invest in the lifelong learning of existing teaching staff to transform them into professionals (Iqbal et al., 2023).

Thus, any model of educational integration which can be successful, must start with the issue of teacher capability. Without altering the intellectual orientation of the educator, it is pointless to change the syllabus as highlighted by Rahman (1982).

Overcoming Impasses: Institutional Case Studies

Case Study 1: Jamia-Tul-Rashid - Autonomous Expansion and Structural Innovation

Jamia-tul-Rashid in Karachi exemplifies a paradigm shift in how the traditional seminaries in Pakistan overcome the structural and cultural dead end of education reform. Jamia-tul-Rashid noticed the historical lack of trust in the regulatory bodies of the state and the precises of the traditional madrasah boards, and this is where a policy of volcanoes escaped expansion was chosen intentionally. Instead of being reactionary to modernization or just accepting the state-imposed curricular, the educational institution actively designed its own educational models to produce the epistemological synthesis proposed by such scholars as Rahman (1982).

Structural Reform: Majma Ul-Uloom Al-Islamiyyah and Al-Ghazali University

The greatest structural change in Jamia-tul-Rashid is the creation of its own educational board, Majma ul-Uloom al-Islamiyyah. As per its original policy statements, this board was specially meant to reconcile the traditional *Dars-e-Nizami* curriculum with modern requirements without undermining the fundamental Islamic epistemology. The curriculum requires such subjects as Islamic history, the modern global affairs, modern languages, astronomy and computer science in addition to classical jurisprudence and theology. This will effectively circumvent the friction between the state and madrasah system since education modernization will be internally standardized under the oversight of proven religious leaders, and as such become immediately acceptable to the traditionalist population.

In addition, to address the socio-economic exclusion of madrasah students, the school led the establishment of Al-Ghazali University and the *Kulliyyah-ush-Shariah*. These institutions provide formal degrees that are recognized by Higher Education Commission such as a Bachelor of Science in Islamic Banking and Finance, which are smoothly integrated with

advanced Islamic studies. Such a dual degree mechanism will solve the longstanding separation of secular and religious studies whereby graduates have the spiritual authority of the *ulama* but lack the professional qualification to engage in the contemporary global economy.

Pedagogical Shifts: Faculty and Management Perspectives

To move away the rote memorization and into the constructivist style of learning, deep-level pedagogical re-engineering is needed. The management interviewed at Jamia-tul-Rashid demonstrates that the integration of the curriculum is focused on a very calculated approach. Describing the systematic reform of the *Dars-e-Nizami*, Inaamullah Bhakarwi described the way in which the institution adjusted the traditional subjects to the modern education systems:

“We divided up the total by discipline. Thereafter, we determined the learning outcomes by the Bloom’s taxonomy. Now, we have had eight years of this. We would like to see that a portion of what we have done on this is done in a yearly basis. How much then shall we learn of the rest of it? This is the extent of his knowledge that he ought to possess” (Inaamullah Bhakarwi, Personal Communication, September 24, 2025).”

Members of the faculty are recognizing the shortcomings of conventional teaching approaches and actively promoting active pedagogical interaction. Focusing on the shift in the direction of student-centered education, Nafees ul Haq Saqib mentioned that traditional texts are nowadays taught in a collaborative way:

“It is more advantageous to practically involve children and offer them more. Thus, such activities can be numerous. Different competitions can also be organized. So, at that, we arranged a contest in our class about the book of the prophet, Seerat Rahi Makhtum. We gave the students the book and instructed them to read it. At that point we created teams of four or five, and made them compete against each other” (Nafees Ul Haq, Personal Communication September 24, 2025).”

Institutionalizing Constructivism: PBL in *Dars-E-Nizami*

The highest expression of constructivist pedagogy at Jamia-tul-Rashid is the institutionalization of PBL as applied in the last year of the study, the Daura-e-Hadith. To decrease the distance between the classical literature and modern socio-economic realities, the administration requires detailed and collective research works. This project targets the cultural obstacle of epistemological stagnation by compelling students to use classical Islam concepts on real-world issues in the present day.

The revolution of this constructivist method is supported by students' narratives. A final year student, Faizullah, emphasized the explanation of theoretical ideas about the Islamic commercial law by real-world experience:

“The approach of religious education which is grounded on practical activities is immensely helpful to have an easy grasp of the religious education. An example of these visits is seen in Jamia where visits to various institutions are made. The book on Islamic and modern economics is taught in the seventh grade. This is followed by a visit to the T-Bank and Stock Exchange to explain it in a practical manner. In the same way, tours with various companies are organized, as well (Faizullah, Personal Communication September 25, 2025).”

In addressing the issue of cultural fear of secularization, Jamia-tul-Rashid manages to enhance the sacred space of the *Dars-e-Nizami* because of the practical and researched activities. The institution shows that contemporary pedagogical tools, such as PBL, do not undermine the Islamic tradition; on the contrary, they are very effective for operationalizing the historical, rationalistic ethos of Islamic epistemology in the twenty-first century.

Case Study 2: Minhaj-UI-Quran - Degree Integration and Research-Driven Pedagogy

Whereas Jamia-tul-Rashid has avoided state friction by independently developing its own educational boards and university charters, Minhaj-ul-Quran in Lahore has been very much institutionalized. The Minhaj-ul-Quran has also operationalized the epistemological synthesis of Fazlur Rahman by systematically institutionalizing the traditional *Dars-e-Nizami* curriculum as part of the Higher Education Commission accredited degree programs of Minhaj University Lahore. This model does not just juxtapose secular and religious studies; it seeks to create a practical merger of complementary studies, allowing students to take parallel courses, with the

ultimate degrees granted in both traditional Islamic sciences (*Shahadat-ul-Alamiya*) and modern university courses (BS, MPhil, and PhD).

Institutional Harmonization and Socio-Economic Mobility

This structural integration has been facilitated by the historical isolation of the madrasah, which has grossly limited the socio-economic mobility of its graduates. Although clerical as a route to the spiritual world, is traditionally important, graduates of such a route are not usually best prepared to play their part in the wider socio-political and economical clockwork of the state. To correct this, Minhaj-ul-Quran has also stipulated simultaneous enrolment to universities.

The given policy is not just the administrative, but a deep psychological and institutional change that the old faculty needs to experience. One of the senior faculty members who taught Hadith and Literature, namely Mohammad Johar Ahmed Sheikhi, described how the library trains students and faculty to be ready to live in this combined reality and added that modern degrees were no longer optional but a requirement to be relevant to society:

“When we assimilate it in the mind, there might be ten, even new ones. We are also updating and upgrading. We have enhanced our courses and acquire new knowledge. It is all possible since we also have workshops where we learn and are taught new things. The student knows that in case he fails to take an MPhil, he cannot access any college in the modern day because a Bachelor of Arts requires a degree to get an access to college. Here, he realizes that it is his compulsion, hence he is receiving an opportunity (Mohammad Johar Ahmed Sheikhi, Personal Communication September 16, 2025).”

This integration is a direct response to the sociological crises developed by Zaman (1999, 2002) in his conquest of the peripheral power of the *ulama*. The institution provides students with modern degrees therefore it can guarantee that graduates will have access to formal employment opportunities. It is eloquently stated that this dual competency revives the social prestige and the power of influence of the religious scholars in the contemporary world of participation by Mohammad Mumtazul Hasan who is the Director of Jamia Islamia Minhaj-ul-Quran:

“Keep it with the other, and second, concentrate on the future, ancient or religious wisdom. And allow for real knowledge. This is the need of the hour. This gives confidence to the children. They do not rely on other people in the society. He can walk on his own feet and earn, and when any one is walking on his own feet and earning, when he speaks of religion, our society looks at what he says in a new light. His words have more impact. With increased acceptance, we will be able to comprehend what the time requires (Mumtazul Ul Hassan, Personal Communication, September 19, 2025)”

Epistemological Shift: From Rote Transmission to Constructivist Inquiry

Nevertheless, without a pedagogical change, it is not enough to structure a BS degree with the *Dars-e-Nizami*. The classic pedagogy of the madrasah which relied on the passive delivery of the text and memorizing by heart is simply incompatible with the research-based requirements of the advanced university education. This is addressed by Minhaj-ul-Quran switching its instructional design to constructivist paradigms, namely, PBL and independent research.

The professors of Minhaj-ul-Quran have a very critical understanding of the weaknesses of the classical approach of using *halaqah* to modern contexts. They understand that the intellectual potential of the youngsters is blocked using centuries-old forms of pedagogy. A severe criticism of the traditional model of transmission came with Sajid Mahmood Al Azhari, who taught *Fiqh and Usul-e-Fiqh*, and aggressively urged the need to engage students through projects to open their potential:

“The preparation you must make is to interest children in their subject, and how will that come? When you engage children and embrace PBL, the old approach of teaching, I am not depicting it in vague terms, is dead. It's a waste of time. Potential of children is being thrown away. On the one hand, we possess so many minds, children, young people, generations, they are talented. They have potential. This is a conventional method of teaching, and you are killing that potential. The fact that you do not give their minds a chance to open. You are holding them back 700 years (Sajid Mahmood, Personal Communication September 16, 2025).”

To overcome this stasis, the College of *Sharia* and Islamic Sciences requires intensive research dissertations and practical works even in the undergraduate equivalent levels of the *Dars-e-Nizami*. This pedagogical change is supported by the creation of the Farid-e-Millat Research Institute as its infrastructure. The students will be expected to apply current research methodologies, electronic databases and comparative analytical systems to solve the current juristic and social problems that will bring them far beyond the simple memorization of classical glosses.

This incorporation of the stern and autonomous investigation required of the university into the sacred programme of the seminary causes Minhaj-ul-Quran to revive successfully the classical rationalistic tradition of Islam. This model demonstrates that the Pakistani madrasah can become more a dynamic knowledge factory rather than a museum of ancient writings, if the reform has Islamic epistemology as the foundation and the real champions of religion as its leaders.

Discussion: Synthesizing Tradition and Innovation Through Project-Based Learning

Experimental support is presented in the comparative analysis of Jamia-tul-Rashid versus Minhaj-ul-Quran that the systemic obstacles to madrasah reform i.e. state friction, epistemological resistance and pedagogical stagnation are not in any manner unbreakable. Rather than perceiving traditional Islamic education and contemporary constructivist pedagogy as mutually exclusive, both schools demonstrate that PBL can serve as an indispensable methodological bridge. With the internalization of the reform process, these institutions have operationalized Fazlur Rahman's vision of organic intellectual integration (Rahman, 1967, 1982).

Overcoming Institutional Friction Through Pedagogical Autonomy

Based on the formed opinion about the institutional factors, the most significant obstacle to pedagogical change is the deep mistrust between the state and the conservative clergy, in which the government interventions are seen as mostly an attempt to secularize Islamic education (Tahir, 2022; Bashir and Ul-Haq, 2019). Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran evade this hurdle by purporting pedagogical autonomy. These institutions eliminate the risk of becoming intervened by the state by creating their own independent degree awarding institutions, i.e. Jamia-tur-Rashid in the case of Minhaj-ul-Quran, and Al-Ghazali University in the case of Jamia-tur-Rashid.

Most importantly, this structural independence allows the safe psychological and theological space necessary to realize the original vision of the IIUM. These madrasahs can base their reforms on TE by maintaining oversight of their educational systems and avoiding the secular-religious dichotomy in state policies. This cultural fear of secularization dissolves when educational standards that are modern are presented, not by state bureaucrats, but by religious scholars in power. Both institutions confirm in their management reports that the traditional community willingly incorporates contemporary pedagogies when they own the curriculum as a real IOK. Such an epistemologically consistent methodology makes external, essentially dualistic state interventions, such as the Single National Curriculum, a thing of the past in these progressive centres.

PBL as the Revival of The Dialectical Tradition

The cultural barrier of pedagogical stagnation, often characterized by a strict adherence to rote memorization and a rigid *ijazah* culture, is directly confronted by the introduction of PBL. However, to ensure this constructivist approach is culturally accepted by the traditional clergy, both Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran avoid framing it as a Western pedagogical import. Instead, it is applied implicitly and strategically as a renaissance of the classical Islamic rationalist tradition. This framing aligns perfectly with the foundational philosophy of the IIUM. Through the lens of IIUM's TE, PBL is not a foreign disruption but a vital mechanism for the IOK. It revives the Qur'anic mandate for active intellectual engagement (*tafakkur*), viewing the pursuit of knowledge as a unified, divine endeavours rather than the mere passive preservation of historical texts.

Traditionally, Islamic pedagogy flourished based on *munazara* (scholarly disputation) and critical inquiry (Moosa, 2015). Qualitative data from both case studies depicts a calculated reversal to this dynamic, *tawhīdic* model of education. At Minhaj-ul-Quran, there is an overt renunciation of the centuries-old passive transmission paradigm in favour of project-based interaction (Sajid Mahmood, Personal Communication, September 16, 2025), underscoring a wilful faculty initiative to release student potential. Equally, at Jamia-tur-Rashid, students are required to derive legal rulings directly from primary texts and apply them to modern fieldwork. For instance, by visiting the stock exchange to analyze corporate finance through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence (Faizullah, Personal Communication September 25, 2025), students transition from being passive recipients of historical glosses to active producers of contemporary Islamic knowledge. This exact synthesis of traditional religious ethics and

modern empirical reality is the ultimate practical realization of IIUM's vision for the IOK, proving that traditional madrasahs can successfully operationalize TE to solve contemporary socioeconomic challenges.

Epistemological Synthesis in Practice

Finally, the latest and most important contribution of these institutional models is their practical application of Fazlur Rahman's theory of epistemological integration (Rahman, 1982). A dualistic form of response to modernity has also been common in the traditional madrasah, a morning of *Dars-e-Nizami* followed by an afternoon of secular English or Math, without any intellectual integration of the two.

As practiced in such institutions, PBL breaks this dualism. The Jamia-tul-Rashid research projects, including Bin Aof E-commerce initiative and the Green Energy feasibility studies (Jamia-tul-Rashid, 2023a; 2023b) demand concurrent application of the modern market analysis and classical *Fiqh al-Muamalat* (Islamic commercial law). These projects cannot be accomplished solely by students using medieval texts; they need to utilize the ethical principles underlying the *Shariah* to address modern economic variables. This is how exactly the theory of the dual movement by Fazlur Rahman is operationalized. These establishments have made PBL a mandatory part of the *Dars-e-Nizami*, thus assuring that modern sciences are not simply accepted as supplementary to religion, but they are actively suppressed to and integrated with the epistemology of Islam.

As a result, this is the synthesis of a new type of religious scholar; that which still has the theological legitimacy of the traditional *ulama* (Zaman, 2002) but who has acquired the critical, problem-solving skill of the modern socio-economic environment.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The dichotomy of education which has also been a constant feature of Pakistan since colonial policy and worsened by the post-colonial policies of the state have continually marginalized the traditional madrasah system. This duality is contrary to the TE promoted by the IIUM, in which all knowledge is seen as a single, coherent whole originating from a single divine source. However, the empirical studies by Jamia-tur-Rashid and Minhaj-ul-Quran demonstrate that the structural and cultural barriers that prevent educational reform are not insurmountable. These schools have practically implemented the IOK vision of IIUM, namely the attainment of a

natural synthesis of all subjects, through the pretence of institutional autonomy and the rediscovery of the classical Islamic culture of dialectical enquiry.

The fact that the *Dars-e-Nizami* system was able to incorporate constructivist paradigms, specifically PBL, proves that the high-order cognitive work and the contemporary social-economic problem-solving do not undermine the traditional Islamic epistemology. Rather, they are practical and classroom level operationalizations of the *tawhīdic* worldview. To generalize these successful models and reduce the general educational gap in Pakistan, reform strategies should be bottom-up, tuned to capture this epistemological synthesis. The policy implications of this study are evident in the policy recommendations it has made to independent religious boards and state policymakers, calling on them to abandon their dualistic educational policies in favour of true integration.

Recommendations For *Wifaq* Boards and Madrasah Leadership

To start with, the central religious educational boards (*Wifaqs*) should acknowledge that pedagogical stagnation is a more serious threat to the existence of Islamic tradition than modernization. The models of the Majma ul-Uloom al-Islamiyyah and the Minhaj-ul-Quran are not to be left a mere experiment; they need to be implemented in a systematic expansion to the general net of the madrasahs. The *Wifaqs* ought to establish centralized curriculum development committees to map traditional *Dars-e-Nizami* subjects to current learning taxonomies, so that students do not merely memorize information but can reason analytically.

Second, *Wifaq* needs to focus on institutionalized teacher training. As research on cultural determinants has shown, the absence of pedagogical abilities among traditional teachers is the main factor preventing constructivist reform (Iqbal et al., 2023). The boards are to impose mandatory programs of continuous professional development for the faculty of madrasahs, primarily in instructional design, research methods, and PBL. With these skills provided to teachers, *Wifaq* can ensure that the introduction of modern sciences is taught not passively but analytically.

Third, madrasah leadership should take the initiative to re-define the tale of modern education. Instead of considering disciplines like economics, political science and digital literacy as secular incursion, these subjects should be included in the school curriculum as mandatory conditions of modern *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning). The proposed epistemological reform will be based on the works of Rahman (1967, 1982) and al-Attas (1979) and will help

to overcome the cultural fear of secularization and enable graduates to take an active leadership position in the public.

Recommendations For State Policymakers

The most crucial challenge towards the policy taken by the state policymakers is to drop the securitized, top-down method of madrasah regulation. As Bashir and Ul-Haq (2019) and Tahir (2022) have extensively described the concept of educational reform as counterterrorism ensures that institutions resist it. The state should treat madrasahs as acceptable educational partners, not as security threats.

To begin with, the government needs to change its approach of dictating the contents of the curriculum like the imposition of the Single National Curriculum, which is inflexible and rigid, to creating pedagogical capacity. Unconditional technical assistance, access to the digital libraries and pedagogic training facilities should be provided by state educational ministries and Higher Education Commission (HEC) to madrasahs and the religious boards should be left to integrate these means independently.

Second, the state needs to be concerned with socio-economic marginalization of madrasah graduates by providing them with an adaptable avenue of degree equivalence and professional inclusion. The blueprint of this integration is found in the dual-degree models instituted by Al-Ghazali University and Minhaj University. HEC and other relevant state institutions must develop clear, transparent guidelines to identify autonomous madrasah boards that meet high standards of academic and research work, thereby enabling them to compete fairly in the country's job market.

Finally, the problem of successful educational reform in Pakistan is to substitute mutual suspicion with epistemological respect. The state and the ulama can contribute to the creation of a generation of scholars capable of maintaining the Islamic tradition and simultaneously working in the complex modern society by supporting internally motivated, constructivist innovations, such as PBL.

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