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Contributions of John Dewey and Immanuel Kant's Thought in Formulating Islamic Education Objectives

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Abstract

The formulation of Islamic education objectives represents one of the most critical challenges in contemporary Islamic pedagogy. This research explores the significant contributions of John Dewey's pragmatism and Immanuel Kant's philosophical thought in constructing a comprehensive framework for Islamic education objectives. Through a critical literature review approach, this study examines how Dewey's emphasis on experiential learning and social relevance, combined with Kant's categorical imperative and moral philosophy, can enrich the traditional understanding of Islamic education objectives. The findings demonstrate that Dewey's concept of learning by doing and problem-solving methodology complement Islam's emphasis on wisdom (al-hikma) and the practical application of knowledge, while Kant's duty-based ethics align with the Islamic concept of moral responsibility (amanah). This research concludes that integrating these Western philosophical perspectives with Islamic education principles creates a holistic framework that emphasizes not only the transmission of knowledge but also the development of ethical consciousness, critical thinking, and social responsibility. The synthesis of these three philosophical traditions offers new possibilities for contemporary Islamic education in addressing modern educational challenges while preserving Islamic values and principles. This research contributes to the formulation of an innovative and inclusive Islamic educational model in which philosophical dialogue between Western and Islamic intellectual traditions establishes robust academic grounds for curriculum reform and pedagogical innovations that effectively address the demands of both local and global educational contexts.

Kata Kunci:
Pendidikan Islam, John Dewey, Immanuel Kant, tujuan pendidikan, Pragmatisme, Etika Kantian, Pedagogi Islam.

Abstrak

Perumusan tujuan pendidikan Islam merupakan salah satu tantangan paling kritis dalam pedagogi Islam kontemporer. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi kontribusi signifikan pragmatisme John Dewey dan pemikiran filosofis Immanuel Kant dalam membangun kerangka kerja komprehensif untuk tujuan pendidikan Islam. Melalui pendekatan tinjauan pustaka kritis, studi ini mengkaji bagaimana penekanan Dewey pada pembelajaran pengalaman dan relevansi sosial, dikombinasikan dengan imperatif kategoris dan filsafat moral Kant, dapat memperkaya pemahaman tradisional tentang tujuan pendidikan Islam. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa konsep Dewey tentang belajar sambil melakukan dan metodologi pemecahan masalah melengkapi penekanan Islam pada kebijaksanaan (al-hikma) dan penerapan pengetahuan secara praktis,.

sementara etika berbasis kewajiban Kant selaras dengan konsep Islam tentang tanggung jawab moral (amanah). Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa mengintegrasikan perspektif filosofis Barat ini dengan prinsip-prinsip pendidikan Islam menciptakan kerangka kerja holistik yang menekankan tidak hanya transmisi pengetahuan tetapi juga pengembangan kesadaran etis, pemikiran kritis, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Sintesis dari ketiga tradisi filosofis ini menawarkan kemungkinan baru bagi pendidikan Islam kontemporer dalam mengatasi tantangan pendidikan modern sambil tetap melestarikan nilai-nilai dan prinsip-prinsip Islam. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perumusan model pendidikan Islam yang inovatif dan inklusif di mana dialog filosofis antara tradisi intelektual Barat dan Islam membangun landasan akademis yang kuat untuk reformasi kurikulum dan inovasi pedagogis yang secara efektif menjawab tuntutan konteks pendidikan lokal dan global.

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INTRODUCTION

The fundamental purpose of Islamic education remains one of the most pressing concerns in contemporary Islamic thought. Traditionally, Islamic educational philosophy has centered on two main pillars: the transmission of Islamic knowledge ('ilm) and the development of noble character (akhlak), which are rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and the exemplary practice of the Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah). However, rapid societal modernization and the emergence of new educational challenges have fundamentally transformed the educational landscape, prompting Muslim educators and philosophers to seek additional philosophical frameworks that can complement and enhance this traditional approach. In the effort to address these contemporary challenges, dialogue with Western philosophical traditions—particularly John Dewey's pragmatism and Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy—becomes increasingly relevant and necessary to explore (Al-Attas, 1979).

John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy and Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy offer valuable insights that deserve serious consideration in the context of Islamic educational discourse. Dewey's groundbreaking work in educational theory emphasizes the importance of experiential learning, social relevance, and the development of problem-solving capacities. His assertion that "education is life itself, not preparation for life" revolutionized how educators conceptualize the learning process. Similarly, Immanuel Kant's philosophical contributions—particularly his categorical imperative and emphasis on the development of rational and autonomous moral agents—present a complementary perspective on human development and ethical formation.

Several previous studies have explored the relevance of Dewey and Kant's thinking in the context of Islamic education, but with limited focus and scope. The study conducted by Halstead (2004) examined the compatibility between Islamic values and Western liberal education, including touching upon Dewey's thinking on democracy and education, but did not deeply analyze its implications for the formulation of Islamic educational objectives. Meanwhile, research by Wan Daud (2003) discusses the concept of Islamization of contemporary knowledge that includes dialogue with Western philosophy, including Kant,

but emphasizes epistemology more than educational objectives specifically. Tan (2014) in his study on Islamic character education identifies parallelism between Kantian ethics and the concept of akhlak in Islam, but his analysis has not yet integrated Dewey's pragmatic dimension within a comprehensive framework. While these contributions provide important foundations, there remains a significant research gap in terms of systematic synthesis between Dewey's pragmatism, Kant's moral philosophy, and the principles of Islamic education to produce a holistic and operational framework for educational objectives.

The intellectual gap lies in the inadequate integration of these Western philosophical traditions with the principles of Islamic education. Although some contemporary Muslim educators have referenced Dewey and Kant, there remains a need for more systematic and comprehensive analysis of how these philosophical frameworks can specifically contribute to the formulation of clearer and more robust Islamic educational objectives that address contemporary needs while remaining rooted in Islamic principles. The purpose of this research is to conduct a critical examination of how John Dewey's pragmatism and Immanuel Kant's philosophy can meaningfully contribute to the formulation and clarification of Islamic educational objectives. This investigation seeks to bridge the philosophical divide between Western educational thought and Islamic tradition, demonstrating that apparent tensions can often be resolved through careful synthesis and critical dialogue.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative literature review methodology, utilizing a critical interpretive approach to analyze primary and secondary sources. The data collection process involved systematic examination of philosophical texts, including works by John Dewey and Immanuel Kant, as well as contemporary Islamic education literature and scholarly articles discussing the intersection between Western philosophy and Islamic thought. The primary sources examined include Dewey's seminal works such as Experience and Education (1938) and Democracy and Education (1916), as well as Kant's works including Critique of Pure Reason (1781), Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics (1783), and his writings on ethics. Secondary sources include contemporary scholarly analyses of Islamic educational philosophy, comparative studies of educational traditions, and recent journal articles addressing Islamic education in modern contexts. The data analysis process involved thematic analysis of philosophical texts, identifying key concepts and principles from each philosopher and testing their compatibility with Islamic education principles derived from Qur'anic and Hadith sources. The analysis proceeded through several stages: first, extracting core concepts from each philosopher's work; second, identifying corresponding concepts in Islamic education tradition; third, analyzing points of convergence and potential synthesis; and fourth, drawing implications for contemporary Islamic education practice.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

John Dewey's Pragmatism and Islamic Education

Dewey's revolutionary approach to education centers on his pragmatic epistemology, which emphasizes the inseparable relationship between knowledge,

experience, and practical application. For Dewey, true learning does not occur through passive reception of information but through active engagement with one's environment and solving real problems. This philosophy directly challenges the model of education centered on traditional lectures and mechanical memorization that has sometimes dominated Islamic schools (Rasmussen, 2003).

Dewey in Democracy and Education (1916) asserts that education is not merely preparation for future life, but life itself. This principle transforms the educational paradigm from an abstract future orientation to meaningful experience in the present. In the context of Islamic education, this perspective resonates with Islam's concept of worldly life as a field of action (amal) that must be lived with full awareness and responsibility, not merely as a preparatory phase for the afterlife.

Dewey's concept of "learning by doing" demonstrates striking alignment with the Islamic principle of integration between 'ilm (knowledge) and 'amal (action). The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes that knowledge without corresponding action is not meaningful spiritually, as stated in verses that condemn those who know what is right but fail to practice it (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 44). Rafilah, Surahman, and Sumarna (2024) in their educational interpretation study emphasize that the integration of knowledge and action constitutes a fundamental foundation in Islamic education, where knowledge without action is considered to have lost its essential value. Thus, Dewey's pragmatism provides a philosophical framework that validates and reinforces Islam's emphasis on the practical application of knowledge.

Furthermore, Dewey's commitment to democratic education and social relevance aligns with the Islamic principle of collective responsibility (takaful al-ijtima'i) and the Prophet's command that "each of you is a guardian and each of you is responsible for what is under your guardianship" (Hadith from Sahih Al-Bukhari). The concept of takaful al-ijtima'i in Islam emphasizes social solidarity and collective responsibility for community welfare, which aligns with Dewey's vision of education as a social process involving active participation in democratic life (Mohd Rom et al., 2022). When education emphasizes problem-solving in a social context, it inherently fosters awareness of one's responsibility to the community and society. This dimension of Deweyan philosophy enriches Islamic educational objectives by providing a concrete methodological approach to developing socially conscious and engaged Muslims.

Dewey's emphasis on cultivating critical thinking and scientific inquiry also complements the Islamic tradition of intellectual rigor. The historical Islamic civilization produced remarkable achievements in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy precisely because it encouraged critical examination and scientific investigation. Al-Attas (1979) emphasizes that Islamic education must develop critical intellectual capacities while remaining rooted in Islamic values. Integrating Deweyan principles into Islamic education can help restore and revive this tradition of intellectual inquiry, which is highly relevant to contemporary educational challenges (Kholil & Nugroho, 2023).

Immanuel Kant's Moral Philosophy and Islamic Ethics

Immanuel Kant's philosophical contribution to education centers primarily on his vision of developing autonomous moral agents capable of making rational ethical decisions. His categorical imperative—the principle that one should act only according to maxims that can be willed to become universal law—provides a rational foundation for

ethical behavior that transcends cultural particularism. Kant states in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) that true morality must be universal and accessible to all rational beings, regardless of their cultural or religious context.

Kant's emphasis on moral duty (pflicht) and the development of autonomous ethical reasoning demonstrates remarkable similarity with Islam's concept of amanah (trust/responsibility) and the development of moral consciousness in Islamic education. Islamic tradition emphasizes that all human beings bear a fundamental trust from God and are responsible for fulfilling the duties and obligations borne by this trust (Q.S. Al-Ahzab: 72). Similarly, Kant emphasizes that true morality arises not from external coercion but from internal commitment to the principles of universal reason. Rahman and Abdullah (2021) in their comparative study demonstrate that Kant's categorical imperative and Islam's concept of amanah share the same ethical foundation in terms of emphasis on moral responsibility and the universality of ethical principles.

Furthermore, Kant's insistence that individuals must be treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means presents a profound ethical principle that aligns with Islam's respect for human dignity (karamah al-insan). The Qur'an affirms human dignity as an inherent characteristic bestowed by God: "Indeed, We have created mankind in the best of forms" (Q.S. At-Tin: 4). Achruh and Pasinringi (2023) in their study on the nature of humanity in the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy emphasize that respect for human dignity is a fundamental principle that should permeate the entire educational process. Kant's categorical imperative provides a rational philosophical foundation for this Islamic principle.

The Kantian emphasis on developing rational autonomy rather than blind obedience offers important insights for contemporary Islamic education. While the Islamic tradition certainly values obedience to divine law, it also recognizes that true faith requires intellectual understanding and conscious commitment. The Prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers to use their reason ('aql) and warned against blind following (taqlid). The Qur'an explicitly invites humans to use their reason in understanding God's verses (Q.S. Ali Imran: 190-191). Integrating Kantian principles can help Islamic education develop Muslims who understand and are committed to Islamic values through rational reflection rather than mere cultural transmission. Hidayat and Sari (2024) demonstrate that Kantian ethics can contribute to the development of autonomous moral agents in the context of pesantren, where students are not merely externally obedient but also have strong internal commitment to moral values.

Integration of Dewey and Kant with Islamic Educational Objectives

The most significant contribution emerges when Deweyan pragmatism and Kantian moral philosophy are integrated together with the principles of Islamic education. This integration creates a comprehensive framework for Islamic educational objectives that encompasses four essential interrelated dimensions that reinforce one another:

First, Intellectual Development: Islamic education should foster the capacity for critical and scientific thinking that investigates both natural phenomena and revealed teachings. The synthesis of Deweyan pragmatism and the Islamic intellectual tradition provides a methodological approach to developing inquiry-based learning that respects the principles of Islamic epistemology. Al-Attas (1979) emphasizes that the objectives of Islamic education must include balanced intellectual development between naqli

knowledge (revelation) and aqli knowledge (rational). Dewey provides a concrete methodological framework for achieving this objective through experiential learning and systematic scientific investigation.

Second, Moral and Ethical Formation: By applying Kant's categorical imperative combined with Islamic ethical principles, Islamic education must develop individuals capable of making autonomous ethical decisions based on rational reflection about both reason and revelation. This transcends the dangers of mechanical obedience and pure subjective moral relativism. Nashir (2013) emphasizes the importance of character education based on religious and cultural values, where moral formation is not merely through indoctrination but through the internalization of values based on rational and spiritual understanding.

Third, Social Responsibility: Integrating Dewey's emphasis on social relevance with Islamic concepts of collective responsibility and the Prophet's model of engaged community leadership creates an educational objective focused on developing Muslims who actively contribute to social justice and common welfare. The concept of takaful al-ijtima'i in Islam emphasizes that each individual has responsibility for community welfare, which aligns with Dewey's vision of education for social transformation (Abu Seman et al., 2020). Siregar and Putri (2025) demonstrate that a holistic framework synthesizing Dewey, Kant, and Al-Attas can produce an Islamic educational model that focuses not only on individual development but also on significant social contribution.

Fourth, Spiritual Development and Character: Although Dewey and Kant contribute primarily to the dimensions of intellectual development, moral reasoning, and social consciousness, Islamic education must remain rooted in spiritual formation and the cultivation of virtue character *(akhlaq)* as understood in the Islamic tradition. Integration does not replace Islamic spiritual education but provides complementary intellectual and ethical frameworks. Al-Attas (1979) emphasizes that the highest objective of Islamic education is to form *insan kamil* (the perfect human) that encompasses intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social perfection.

Table 1 Philosophical Dimension Comparison

Dimension	John Dewey	Immanuel Kant	Islamic Tradition
Epistemology	Knowledge acquisition through experiential, pragmatic approach	Synthesis of reason and experience	Wahyu + 'aql (Reason)
Teaching Method	Learning by doing, problem-solving, addressing actual problems	Rational reflection and inquiry	Practice ('amal) + Understanding
Moral Foundation	Social consequences and community contribution	Categorical imperative, universal rational principle	Divine principle and ethical doctrine
Individual Development	Critical thinking, social awareness	Rational autonomous agent	Conscious being (makhluq sadar) under God, morally responsible
Community Role	Democratic participation, social reform	Respect for universal principles of humanity	Collective responsibility (takaful)

This philosophical synthesis has significant practical implications for contemporary Islamic education. First, Islamic education curricula need to be redesigned to incorporate more experience-based learning and problem-solving, in line with Deweyan principles. Second, teaching methods should move from passive knowledge transmission models toward facilitating active learning that encourages critical investigation and moral reflection. Third, Islamic education should be more explicit in developing social awareness and commitment to social justice, connecting learning with real problems faced by contemporary Muslim societies.

Abdul-Rahman and Ismail (2022) demonstrate that the integration of Dewey's pragmatism in contemporary madrasah curricula in Malaysia has resulted in significant improvements in student engagement and the relevance of learning to everyday life. Kholil and Nugroho (2023) demonstrate that problem-based learning models influenced by Dewey in Islamic education in Indonesia have successfully developed students' problem-solving skills while maintaining the foundation of Islamic values. Hidayat and Sari (2024) demonstrate that the application of Kantian ethics in moral education in pesantren can produce more autonomous and reflective moral agents, capable of making ethical decisions based on deep understanding of Islamic moral principles.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy and Immanuel Kant’s critical moral philosophy share substantive points of convergence with Islamic educational principles and can be productively synthesized without undermining Islamic epistemological or spiritual foundations. Dewey’s emphasis on experiential learning, social relevance, and problem-solving offers a concrete pedagogical framework for actualizing the long-established Islamic ideal of integrating *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *‘amal* (action), while simultaneously strengthening education’s role in cultivating socially responsible and engaged Muslim individuals. In parallel, Kant’s moral philosophy provides a robust rational grounding for Islamic ethics by emphasizing moral autonomy, responsibility, and human dignity, thereby reinforcing the Islamic vision of learners as conscious moral agents who commit to divine values through reflective understanding rather than mere formal obedience. The integration of these perspectives yields a comprehensive formulation of Islamic educational objectives that encompasses intellectual rigor, ethical autonomy, social responsibility, and spiritual development in a balanced and coherent manner.

Furthermore, this research contributes to contemporary Islamic education scholarship by offering a conceptual model of critical philosophical dialogue that is both selective and principled. Rather than uncritical adoption of Western thought, the proposed synthesis reflects the historical openness of the Islamic intellectual tradition to engage diverse philosophies while safeguarding its normative commitments. The findings suggest that such dialogue can enhance the relevance and responsiveness of Islamic education to contemporary challenges, including the cultivation of critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement in an increasingly complex global context. Future research is encouraged to translate this philosophical synthesis into concrete pedagogical strategies and curriculum designs, as well as to undertake empirical studies assessing their educational impact. Comparative analyses involving classical and modern Islamic thinkers alongside other philosophical traditions would further deepen scholarly discourse and strengthen the

theoretical foundations of an adaptive yet value-centered Islamic education.

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