Translating Al-Attas's Educational Thought into Curriculum Design: A Critical Hermeneutic Synthesis

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Abstract

Contemporary Islamic Religious Education faces pressures from secularization, value dislocation, and globalization that challenge its spiritual and moral foundations. While Al-Attas's educational philosophy is widely recognized, its systematic translation into curriculum design remains underdeveloped. This study examines how selected works by Al-Attas and related scholarship can inform a conceptual framework for Islamic curriculum design. Employing a critical hermeneutic thematic analysis within PRISMA 2020 screening guidelines, this study evaluated 42 sources published between 1978 and 2025, comprising five canonical texts by Al-Attas, eight secondary volumes, and twenty-nine peer-reviewed articles. The analysis identified four interconnected dimensions: intellectual cultivation (ta'aqqul), epistemological integration of revealed and modern knowledge, pedagogical responsiveness to rigid traditional methods, and ta'dib as moral-ethical formation. These dimensions were translated into three preliminary design resources: a curriculum-mapping matrix, a pedagogical continuum, and an adab-assessment rubric prototype. The contribution is conceptual: the study specifies possible links between Al-Attas's thought and curriculum decisions while acknowledging that the proposed resources have not been tested for classroom effectiveness and that the rubric requires construct definition and empirical validation. The framework's value lies in making its inferential steps visible for scrutiny, offering a foundation for expert review, usability testing, and staged empirical research rather than a validated intervention.

Keywords: *Al-Attas; Ta'dib; Adab; Islamic Curriculum Design; Educational Philosophy; Thematic Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic Religious Education (IRE) confronts structural pressures that have intensified over the past half-century. Secularization—understood not merely as the formal separation of religion from state institutions but as the gradual evacuation of religious values from public reasoning and pedagogical practice—has reshaped the epistemological assumptions of educational systems across many Muslim-majority societies (Al-Attas, 1978). Globalization has accelerated the circulation of competing worldviews, producing a widening gap between the inherited authority of religious knowledge and the lived experiences of younger generations (Kadi, 2017; Hefner, 2016). These are not abstract philosophical concerns. In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, *pesantren* and *madrasah* continue to negotiate the competing demands of religious transmission, scientific literacy, and preparation for global citizenship (Azra, 2019; Lukens-Bull, 2019). In Malaysia, the persistence of educational dualism—the institutional separation of religious

and secular streams—continues to produce graduates whose competencies remain unevenly distributed across domains (Hashim, 2014). Across the Middle East and South Asia, competing social movements have narrowed the space available for moderate, intellectually vibrant forms of Islamic learning (Zaman, 2015). State-led standardization has, in several contexts, reduced religious education to rote memorization of sacred texts, stripping it of critical inquiry and ethical depth (Tan, 2014; Halstead, 2015). The question facing IRE is therefore not whether change is necessary, but how change can proceed without severing education from its spiritual and moral foundations.

Intellectual responses to this predicament have been varied but uneven in their practical consequences. The "Islamization of knowledge" movement, associated primarily with Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and subsequently adapted by other scholars, sought to reframe modern disciplines within an Islamic worldview (Hassan, 2017; Muslih, 2024). While this project generated important critiques of Western epistemological hegemony, it has been repeatedly characterized as conceptually ambitious but difficult to translate into classroom-level curriculum decisions. Fazlur Rahman (1982) advanced a hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an intended to bridge revelation and contemporary social realities; his work inspired reformist thought but exerted limited influence on grassroots IRE curricula. More recent scholarship, including contributions by Sahin (2013) and Waghid (2011), has called for pedagogical innovation rooted in Islamic traditions, yet these proposals have tended to remain at the level of general principle rather than concrete operational design.

Among these varied contributions, the educational philosophy of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas occupies a distinctive position. Unlike approaches that append Islamic content to Western disciplinary structures, Al-Attas insists on a complete reconceptualization of knowledge itself, grounded in an Islamic epistemology that treats the recognition of proper order—ontological, epistemic, and moral—as the foundation of education (Al-Attas, 1980; Wan Daud, 1998). Central to his thought is the concept of *adab*, often rendered as "good manners" but more accurately understood as the recognition and acknowledgment of proper order, encompassing the order of being, the order of knowledge, and the order of action (Al-Attas, 1999). For Al-Attas, the crisis of modern education is fundamentally a crisis of *adab*: the loss of this recognition produces confusion, injustice, and the elevation of information over wisdom. His proposed remedy is *ta'dib*, the process of instilling *adab* through education—a concept he distinguishes sharply from *ta'lim* (instruction) and *tarbiyah* (rearing), which are frequently understood in narrowly functional or secular terms. Recent scholarship has reaffirmed the analytical purchase of this framework, characterizing Al-Attas's project as a systematic response to the "loss of *adab*" that identifies the root of civilizational decline in epistemological and spiritual terms.

The scholarly reception of Al-Attas's work has been substantial. Stapa (2012) provided an early exposition of his Islamization of knowledge project, emphasizing the priority he assigns to the purification of language and concepts from secular assumptions. Hashi (2015) examined the relevance of his educational philosophy to modern Muslim societies, concluding that Al-Attas offers a coherent alternative to both wholesale Westernization and

uncritical traditionalism. Davids and Waghid (2016) situated Al-Attas within broader debates in educational philosophy, observing that his emphasis on *adab* resonates with virtue-ethics traditions while remaining grounded in a distinctly Islamic metaphysical framework. Firdaus (2020) analyzed the concept of *adab* and its implications for character education in Indonesia, identifying theoretical convergence with national character-building goals. Aziz (2025) contextualized *ta'dib* within contemporary Islamic education, and Zain (2025) offered a contextual reading of *adab* from Al-Attas's perspective. Empirical studies, including Hasan (2020) in Indonesian *madrasahs* and Rosnani and Suhaimi (2019) in Malaysian Islamic schools, have begun to explore implementation possibilities, though these efforts remain isolated and preliminary. More recent work has extended this line of inquiry by examining Al-Attas's thought on the integration of science and religion as a resource for building Islamic educational civilization (Gunagraha & Muttaqin, 2025). Furthermore, recent syntheses of 2019–2024 scholarship confirm that Al-Attas's *tawhidic* worldview and *adab*-centered philosophy remain highly relevant for curriculum design, while simultaneously highlighting a persistent gap: the need for more robust empirical validation and critical engagement with modern scientific paradigms (Fauziah et al., 2026; Sholihah et al., 2026).

A critical examination of this literature reveals a persistent asymmetry. Al-Attas's philosophy has been extensively expounded, but it has not been systematically operationalized for curriculum design. Wan Daud's (1998) comprehensive exposition remains the most authoritative account of Al-Attas's educational thought, yet it is primarily descriptive and philosophical rather than operational. Stapa (2012) focused on the Islamization of knowledge project but did not address *ta'dib* as the integrative core of Al-Attas's framework. Hashi (2015) argued for the general relevance of Al-Attas to modern Muslim societies but remained at the level of broad principle, offering no specific guidance on curriculum structure or assessment. Firdaus (2020) provided a valuable analysis of *adab* but did not connect it to measurable learning outcomes or assessment rubrics. Aziz (2025) contextualized *ta'dib* within contemporary Islamic education but did not translate it into actionable tools for classroom practice. Even empirical studies such as Abdullah (2018) and Rosnani and Suhaimi (2019), which documented implementation efforts in Indonesian and Malaysian schools, reported significant challenges without offering a systematic framework to address them. The gap, therefore, is not in the exposition of Al-Attas's ideas but in their operationalization. Existing studies have treated the four key themes—critical intellect, integration of knowledge, pedagogical renewal, and *ta'dib*—as separate concepts rather than as an integrated framework. Furthermore, no study has addressed how these themes can be operationalized to meet the concrete demands of contemporary curriculum infrastructure: accreditation standards that prioritize measurable cognitive outcomes, competency-based assessment systems that struggle to capture spiritual and moral development, and the persistent institutional dualism between religious and secular disciplines.

This study addresses this gap by proposing a conceptual framework that translates Al-Attas's educational thought into preliminary design resources for curriculum decision-making. The contribution is analytical rather than evaluative. Specifically, the study develops three interconnected conceptual tools: (1) a curriculum matrix that reframes disciplinary

content through an Islamic epistemological lens; (2) a pedagogical spectrum that maps the movement from rote recitation toward guided inquiry; and (3) a preliminary *Adab* Assessment Rubric that articulates observable indicators of ethical reasoning, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility alongside cognitive outcomes. These tools are intended as a framework for subsequent development and testing, not as validated instruments. Recent scholarship in Islamic education has increasingly emphasized the need for such translational work, moving beyond philosophical exposition toward design-oriented frameworks that can inform teacher practice and curriculum policy (Zul et al., 2026; Syauqi et al., 2025). By specifying how Al-Attas's four thematic pillars might inform concrete curriculum decisions, this study offers a foundation for empirical investigation and contextual adaptation.

METHOD

This section reports the operational procedures actually followed in constructing the corpus, extracting themes, and developing the three design resources. It is organized according to the sequence of the study: design, corpus and sources, instruments and validation, collection procedures, analysis, and ethics.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative critical hermeneutic thematic analysis design. It combines Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic procedure with the interpretive stance of philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1981). The combination is not incidental. Braun and Clarke's procedure supplies a documented, replicable sequence for generating codes and themes from a textual corpus. Philosophical hermeneutics supplies the interpretive awareness required when the object of analysis is a body of philosophical writing whose meaning depends on historical context, conceptual vocabulary, and the reader's own horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1981). For a study that seeks to translate Al-Attas's educational thought into curriculum-design implications, thematic analysis without hermeneutic reflexivity would risk reducing philosophical argument to decontextualized codes, while hermeneutics without a documented procedure would risk an idiosyncratic reading. The design is therefore appropriate because the research questions concern meaning, conceptual relation, and design implication rather than measurable outcomes. The PRISMA 2020 statement was used as the reporting guideline for corpus construction, not as an analytical method (Page et al., 2021). Its function was to make the search and screening process transparent and replicable, and to allow readers to see the boundaries of the evidence base.

Participants and Sampling / Data Sources

The study does not involve human participants. The data are publicly available texts. The corpus was constructed through a systematic search conducted on 15 March 2025 across Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and DOAJ, supplemented by manual browsing of *Intellectual Discourse*, *Al-Jami'ah*, and *Studia Islamika*. The search string combined ("Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas" OR "Al-Attas") AND ("Islamic education" OR "*ta'dib*" OR "*adab*" OR "Islamization of knowledge"), limited to 1978–2025 and to English or Indonesian

sources. Google Scholar results were sorted by relevance and screened only through the first 200 records, given the platform's known variability and the diminishing returns of deeper screening.

Inclusion criteria were: (a) the source directly addresses Al-Attas's educational philosophy rather than mentioning him in passing; (b) the source is a peer-reviewed article with an ISSN or a book from a university or academic press; and (c) the source contains sufficient conceptual detail to support coding, operationalized as at least one sustained paragraph engaging with Al-Attas's educational concepts rather than a single citation. Exclusion criteria were: (a) opinion pieces, editorials, and non-academic commentaries; (b) sources focused exclusively on Al-Attas's metaphysics or political thought without educational connection; and (c) duplicate records or translations of the same work. The initial search yielded 316 records. After removing duplicates (n = 89) and non-English/Indonesian sources (n = 34), 193 records remained. Title and abstract screening excluded 121 records (not focused on Al-Attas: 67; not educational philosophy: 38; opinion pieces: 16). Full-text assessment excluded 30 records (insufficient conceptual detail: 18; not peer-reviewed: 7; metaphysics only: 5). The final corpus comprised 42 sources: 5 canonical works by Al-Attas, 8 secondary books, and 29 peer-reviewed articles.

Instruments and Validation

The primary analytical instrument was a coding framework developed in two layers: concept codes (e.g., "*ta'dib* as distinct from *ta'lim*," "*adab* as recognition of order," "critique of *taqlid*") and design-implication codes (e.g., "assessment cannot capture *niyyah*," "curriculum integration requires epistemological reframing rather than content addition"). The coding framework was developed iteratively during Phase 2 and stabilized before Phase 4. A second instrument was the expert review form used to assess the themes and the three design resources. Three scholars in Islamic education and philosophy (two doctoral holders in Islamic Educational Philosophy and one professor in Islamic Studies) independently rated the themes and resources on five criteria: fidelity to Al-Attas's text, coherence across themes, depth of analysis, relevance to contemporary IRE, and clarity of operationalization. Scores ranged from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent). Because three raters assessed ordinal ratings across multiple items, inter-rater agreement was calculated using Krippendorff's α, which is appropriate for any number of coders and any level of measurement (Krippendorff, 2019; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The obtained α was 0.78, indicating substantial agreement, with percentage agreement of 84.4%. Disagreements were concentrated on the operationalization criterion and were resolved through discussion; the rubric's performance-level descriptors were revised in response. Cohen's κ was not used because it is designed for two raters and its application to three raters without appropriate adjustment would misrepresent reliability (Krippendorff, 2019).

Trustworthiness was addressed through four procedures. First, an audit trail linked representative quotations to initial codes, categories, and final themes. Second, the second author reviewed the coding framework and theme definitions at Phases 3 and 5, and disagreements were resolved by returning to the primary texts. Third, peer debriefing with a colleague outside the project provided an additional check on theme definitions and on the

inference from themes to design resources. Fourth, the researchers documented their prior familiarity with Al-Attas's corpus and their initial expectations before coding, and the coding process explicitly sought passages in which Al-Attas's position was ambiguous, historically bounded, or in tension with contemporary educational realities.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection proceeded in three stages. The first stage was corpus construction: database searches, export of records, deduplication, language filtering, title and abstract screening, and full-text assessment, all conducted in March 2025. Screening was conducted by the first author; a second screener independently assessed a random sample of 30 records (15 included, 15 excluded), with agreement of 93.3% (28/30). The two disagreements were resolved by discussion and minor clarification of the "sufficient conceptual detail" criterion. The second stage was close reading of the 42 sources, conducted in April and May 2025, with attention to Al-Attas's own vocabulary and argumentative structure in the primary works and to the interpretive moves made by secondary authors. The third stage was expert review, conducted in June 2025, in which the three reviewers independently rated the themes and resources using the form described above. No administrative permissions were required because all sources are publicly available.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases, adapted for a philosophical corpus. Phase 1 involved repeated reading of all 42 sources, with attention to historical and conceptual context. Phase 2 generated initial codes at the two levels described above. Phase 3 clustered codes into candidate themes, with the four principal themes retained only after they demonstrated coherence across both primary and secondary sources. Phase 4 reviewed themes against the full corpus, including disconfirming instances in which Al-Attas's position was more ambiguous or more limited than the theme labels suggested. Phase 5 defined and named the themes, with explicit attention to the boundaries of each theme and the relations among them. Phase 6 produced the analytical narrative, separating textual evidence from interpretive synthesis and identifying which claims were directly supported by Al-Attas's text, which were supported by secondary interpretation, and which were the present authors' design inferences.

The translation of themes into design resources followed a distinct procedure. After the four themes were stabilized, the researchers asked, for each theme, what curriculum decision it might inform and what form that decision would take. The curriculum matrix was developed by mapping four subject areas (biology, physics, history, economics) against Al-Attas's epistemological distinctions, with each cell specifying a disciplinary concept, an epistemological reframing, a learning activity, and a form of evidence. The pedagogical spectrum was constructed by identifying the dimensions along which Al-Attas's critique of rigid pedagogy operates (teacher role, student role, textual authority, and inquiry) and plotting positions along those dimensions. The *Adab* Assessment Rubric was developed by first specifying observable proxies for *adab*-related learning (ethical reasoning in structured scenarios, reflective writing on spiritual awareness, and demonstrated social responsibility in classroom and community contexts) and then defining performance levels for each proxy. At

every stage, the researchers distinguished between what the corpus supported and what was a design inference; the rubric is presented as a preliminary prototype rather than a validated instrument. Hermeneutic reflexivity was maintained throughout by documenting initial expectations, noting instances where the corpus challenged those expectations, and recording the researchers' interpretive stance toward Al-Attas's framework.

Ethical Considerations

This study relies exclusively on publicly available texts and does not involve human participants. Informed consent was therefore not applicable, and no participant confidentiality or anonymity measures were required. No institutional ethical clearance was sought because the research did not involve human subjects or personal data. The corpus list, search strings, coding framework, and expert review materials are available as supplementary files to support transparency and replication. No ethical approval was obtained, and none was required under the applicable institutional policy for text-based research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section reports the analytical outcomes of the corpus analysis. It is organized in four parts: corpus profile, presentation of the four themes, conceptual relations among themes, and status of design resources.

Corpus Profile

The uneven distribution of the 42 corpus sources across the four themes constitutes an analytical finding in its own right. Table 1 reports the number of sources contributing to each theme, disaggregated by source type. The centrality of *ta'dib* is visible in the corpus: 31 of 42 sources engage with it substantively, while the critique of rigid pedagogy appears substantively in 19 sources, often as a secondary observation rather than as a primary focus.

Table 1

Distribution of Corpus Sources Across the Four Themes

Theme	Primary sources (n = 5)	Secondary books (n = 8)	Peer-reviewed articles (n = 29)	Source Frequency Across Themes (Non-mutually Exclusive)
Critical intellect (*ta'aqqul*)	4	5	14	23
Integration of knowledge	3	6	17	26
Critique of rigid pedagogy	3	4	12	19
Ta'dib and *adab*	5	7	19	31

Note. Categories are non-mutually exclusive; individual publications (N = 42) frequently address multiple thematic pillars simultaneously.

Two features of the corpus warrant comment before the themes are presented. First, the primary works are not evenly weighted in the secondary literature. *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Al-Attas, 1980/1999) is cited in 34 of the 37 secondary sources, while *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Al-Attas, 1995) is engaged substantively in only 11. This asymmetry means that the themes reported here are more strongly anchored in Al-Attas's explicitly educational writings than in his metaphysical works, and the analysis reflects that anchor. Second, the secondary literature is geographically concentrated. Of the 29 peer-reviewed articles, 18 are situated in Indonesian or Malaysian institutional contexts, 6 in Middle Eastern contexts, and 5 are conceptual without a specified context.

Theme One: Development of Critical Intellect (Ta'aqqul)

Operational definition. The theme refers to Al-Attas's consistent positioning of critical, reflective reasoning (*ta'aqqul*) as a religious obligation and as the epistemic foundation of meaningful learning, in contrast to memorization without understanding (*tahfiz* divorced from *tafaqqur*).

Primary evidence. In The Concept of Education in Islam, Al-Attas (1980/1999) argues that genuine education must cultivate the intellect ('aql) so that the learner recognizes the proper order of things, including the relation between God, the cosmos, and the human being. In Islam and Secularism, Al-Attas (1978) traces the marginalization of reflective reasoning to the diffusion of secular assumptions that separate knowledge from values, and he identifies the recovery of *ta'aqqul* as part of the response.

Secondary elaboration and variation. Hashi (2015) reads Al-Attas's position as a recovery of the Qur'anic injunctions to reflect (*tafakkur*) and to use reason. Stapa (2012) locates *ta'aqqul* within the Islamization of knowledge project. Davids and Waghid (2016) place Al-Attas in dialogue with virtue epistemology. Zain (2018) applies the theme critically regarding text memorization. Assegaf (2019) draws out the curricular implication for inquiry. Gunagraha and Muttaqin (2025) extend the theme to science and religion integration.

Interpretive tension. Some secondary authors read Al-Attas's emphasis on *ta'aqqul* as a warrant for student-centered, inquiry-based pedagogy, while others insist that Al-Attas's epistemology remains teacher-authoritative and guided by tradition. Davids and Waghid (2016) caution against reading Al-Attas as endorsing a relativistic or purely student-centered approach.

Limits of the theme. The theme is well supported as a description of Al-Attas's position but less supported as a prescription for classroom practice, as the corpus contains no empirical study testing *ta'aqqul*-oriented pedagogy.

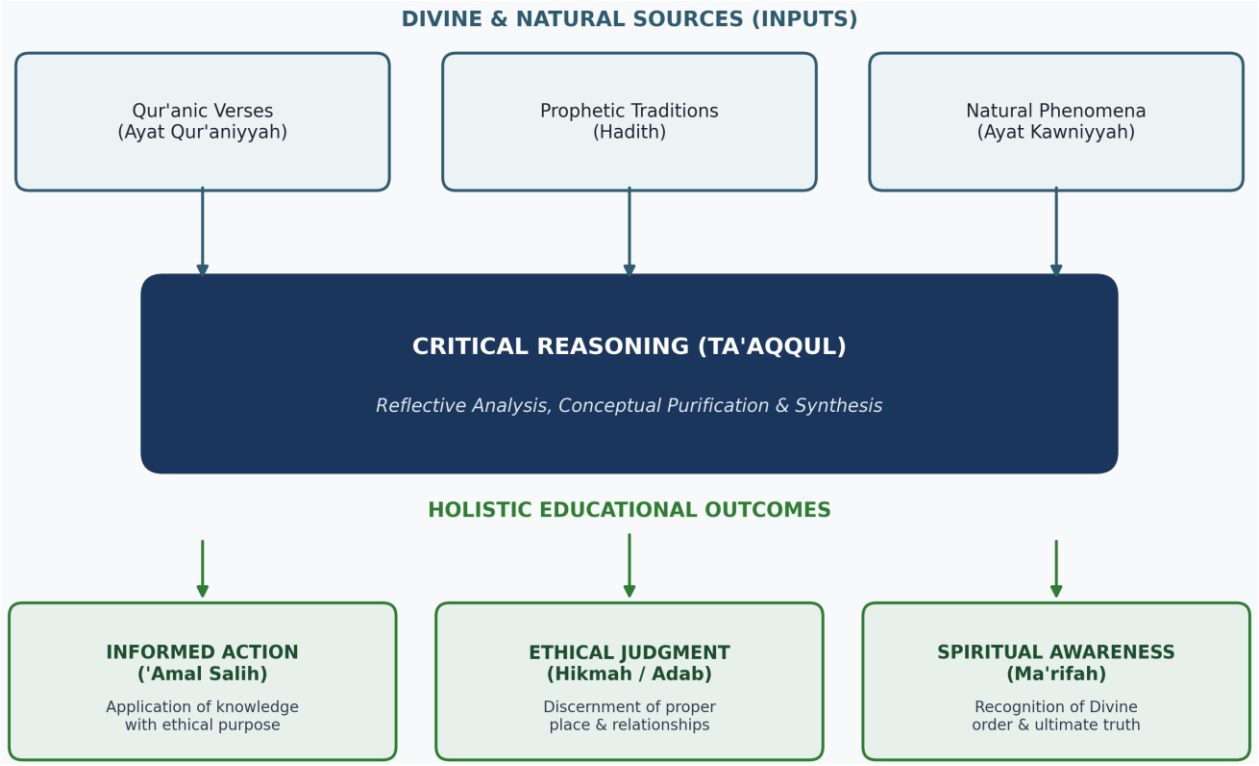


Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Shift from Rote Memorization to Critical Intellect Cultivation

Note. The model is the authors' synthesis of Theme One (Ta'aqqul). Arrows indicate conceptual flow from divine and natural inputs through critical reasoning (ta'aqqul) to three holistic educational outcomes ('amal salih, hikmah/adab, and ma'rifah).

Theme Two: Integration of Revealed Knowledge and Modern Sciences

Operational definition. The theme refers to Al-Attas's rejection of educational dualism and his insistence that all knowledge is unified under divine unity (*tawhid*).

Primary evidence. In Islam and Secularism, Al-Attas (1978) traces the process by which Western knowledge was divorced from values. In Islam and the Philosophy of Science, Al-Attas (1993) develops the argument that knowledge cannot be value-neutral and that classification must reflect the hierarchy of obligations (*fard 'ayn* and fard *kifayah*).

Secondary elaboration and variation. Hassan (2017) compares Al-Attas with al-Faruqi. Khalid (2018) explains the knowledge hierarchy. Nur (2019) applies the framework to curriculum reframing. Abdullah (2018) reports an Indonesian case study where teachers struggled beyond superficial verse citation. Muslih (2024) notes that conceptual ambition has not been matched by curriculum operationalization.

Interpretive tension. Some authors treat integration as adding Islamic references to existing subjects (weak/content reading), while Al-Attas's primary texts require reframing disciplines from an Islamic worldview (strong/epistemological reading).

Table 2

Proposed Curriculum Matrix Derived from the Integration Theme

Subject area	Conventional approach	Al-Attas-informed reframing	Design inference (status)
Biology	Evolution as random process; laws of nature as impersonal mechanisms	Evolution as God's creative pattern (*sunnatullah*) with purpose and order; laws of nature as signs (*ayat*) inviting reflection	Authors' construction; untested
Physics	Laws of nature as mechanical forces	Laws of nature as signs of God's consistency and wisdom; reflection leads to reverence	Authors' construction; untested
History	Linear progress driven by material and economic factors	Cyclical and linear patterns; moral lessons from the rise and fall of civilizations; divine justice in history	Authors' construction; untested
Economics	Utility maximization; rational self-interest; unlimited growth	Justice (*'adl*), prohibition of *riba*, *zakat* as redistribution, stewardship (*khalifah*) over resources	Authors' construction; untested

Note. The matrix is a preliminary design prototype. It is not a validated curriculum instrument.

Theme Three: Critique of Rigid Traditional Pedagogy

Operational definition. The theme refers to Al-Attas's critical stance toward the fossilization of inherited pedagogical methods, his distinction between immutable revelation and contingent transmission methods, and his critique of uncritical repetition (*taqlid*).

Primary evidence. In Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam, Al-Attas (1995) attributes civilizational decline to uncritical repetition rather than independent reasoning.

Secondary elaboration and variation. Firdaus (2020) elaborates the distinction between eternal revelation and contingent methods. Rashid (2018) rejects treating students as empty vessels. Davids and Waghid (2016) connect the critique to balanced teacher guidance. Lukens-Bull (2019) documents *bandongan* and sorogan in Indonesian *pesantren*. Assegaf (2019) reports progressive *pesantren* adopting discussion and problem-based learning.

Table 3

Pedagogical Spectrum Derived from the Critique of Rigid Pedagogy

Dimension	Rigid Traditional	Adaptive Traditional	Dynamic Integrative
Teacher Role	Transmitter of fixed content	Guide who models mastery & questioning	Facilitator of inquiry
Student Role	Passive recipient	Guided participant	Active inquirer
Textual Authority	Unquestioned	Authoritative but open to questioning	Authoritative & open to reinterpretation

Dimension	Rigid Traditional	Adaptive Traditional	Dynamic Integrative
Inquiry Position	Absent	Structured and guided inquiry	Student-initiated with guidance

Note. The spectrum is the authors' construction. Al-Attas's educational stance bridges the Adaptive Traditional and Dynamic Integrative paradigms by pairing teacher-guided textual authority with active student inquiry.

Theme Four: Centrality of Moral-Ethical Education (Ta'dib)

Operational definition. The theme refers to Al-Attas's positioning of *ta'dib*—the instilling of *adab*—as the essence of Islamic education, distinguishing it from *ta'lim* and *tarbiyah*. Primary evidence. In The Concept of Education in Islam, Al-Attas (1980/1999) argues that modern educational crisis is a crisis of *adab*: loss of recognition of proper order.

Secondary elaboration and variation. Firdaus (2020) grounds *adab* in divine moral order. Alim (2024) integrates knowledge, intention (niyyah), and action. Wan Daud (1998) explains soul discipline. Rosnani and Suhaimi (2019) describe Malaysian school implementation. Luthfi (2018) traces *ta'dib* to al-Zarnuji and al-Ghazali. Aziz (2025) and Zain (2025) contextualize *ta'dib* in modern schooling.

Table 4

Comparative Analysis of Three Paradigms of Moral Education

Criterion	Secular character education	Traditional Islamic moral instruction	Al-Attas's *ta'dib* framework
Justification	Social contract; universal human rights	Reward and punishment; obedience to divine commands	Recognition of proper order (*haqiqah*); prophetic example (*sunnah*)
Goal	Responsible citizenship; social harmony	Obedience to rules; avoidance of sin; ritual correctness	Cultivation of wisdom (*hikmah*); integrated personality (*insan adabi*)
Method	Stand-alone lessons; values clarification	Preaching; memorization of moral rules	Infused across subjects; teacher as model; reflective practice (*muhasabah*)
Locus of assessment	Observable behavior and attitudes	Ritual compliance	Observable behavioral and reflective proxies, with acknowledged evaluative limits
Possible limitation	Risk of relativism without transcendent foundation	Risk of external compliance without internal transformation	Requires highly trained teachers; difficult to assess quantitatively
Evidence base	Secondary literature on character education	Secondary literature on traditional instruction	Primary texts and secondary literature on *ta'dib*

Note. Ideal types based on literature synthesis.

Table 5

Preliminary Adab Assessment Rubric (Prototype)

Proxy indicator	Level 1: Emerging	Level 2: Developing	Level 3: Established	Evidence sources	Ethical note
Ethical reasoning in structured scenarios	Identifies the ethical issue but offers no reasoned resolution	Offers a reasoned resolution with limited awareness of competing values	Offers a reasoned resolution that integrates Islamic ethical principles and acknowledges competing values	Written scenario prompts; discussion records	Assesses reasoning, not moral character
Reflective writing on spiritual awareness	Describes religious practice without reflection on its meaning	Reflects on the personal meaning of religious practice but treats ethical actions and daily life applications as separate or theoretical.	Explicitly connects the spiritual purpose of religious practice to at least one concrete ethical choice or real-world social scenario analyzed in class.	Reflective journals; structured self-assessment	Assesses reflective articulation, not spiritual state
Demonstrated social responsibility	Participates in required activities without evident initiative	Initiates participation in some activities with teacher prompting	Initiates and sustains participation in service activities and articulates ethical rationale	Teacher observation; service records; self-report	Assesses observable behavior, not inner intention

Note. The rubric assesses observable proxies for adab-related learning, not internal states such as niyyah or ikhlas.

Relations Among the Four Themes

The four themes are not independent. Integration without critical intellect becomes dogmatic; critical intellect without *ta'dib* becomes arrogant; pedagogical renewal without moral grounding becomes aimless; moral education without intellectual rigor becomes sentimental.

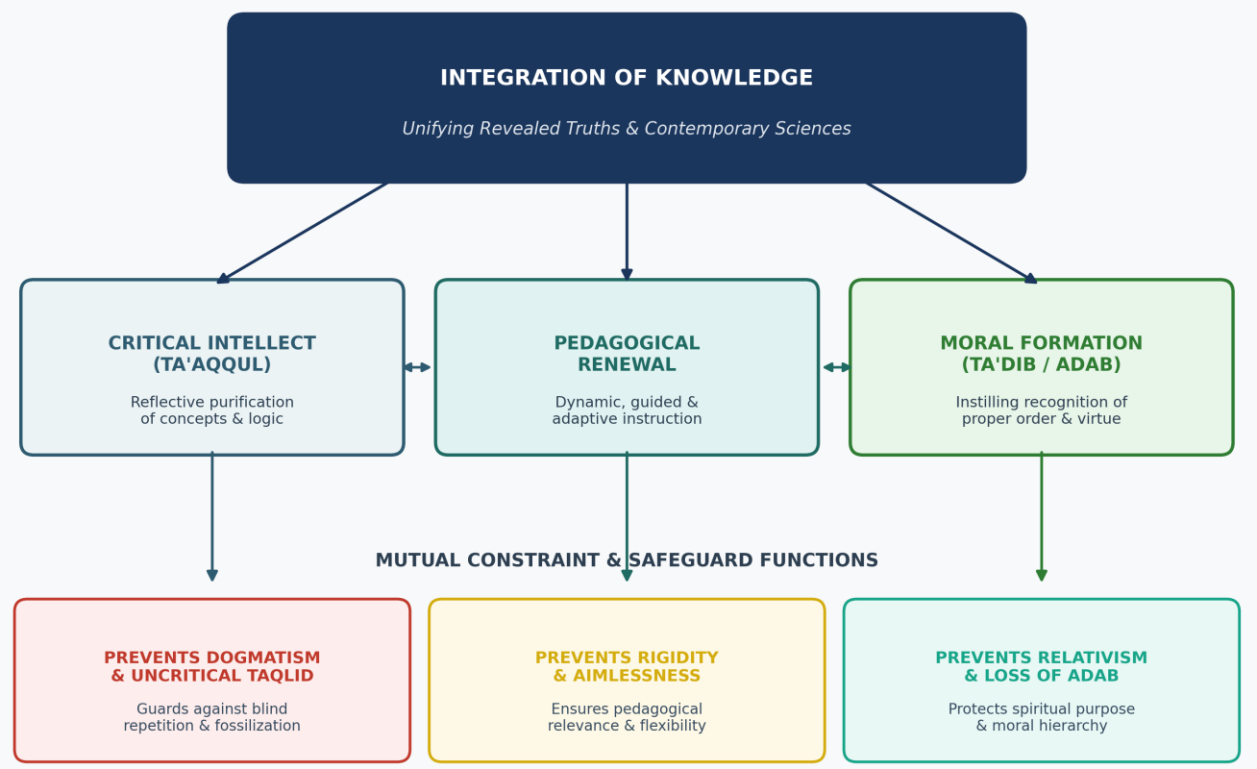


Figure 2

Conceptual Relations and Constraint Map Among the Four Themes

Note. Figure 2 positions Integration of Knowledge at the structural top solely to represent the curricular entry point for modern disciplines, while Ta'dib remains the normative teleological center of the entire framework.

Design Resources and Their Status

None of the three design resources is a finding of the corpus. Each is a construction derived from the themes. The curriculum matrix is a conversation starter for designers; the pedagogical spectrum is a heuristic for teacher reflection; the *Adab* Assessment Rubric is a prototype carrying ethical risks if used for summative evaluation.

Discussion

The discussion interprets the findings across eight analytical claims, examining how the proposed framework extends prior scholarship and addresses operational challenges in contemporary Islamic education.

Contribution Relative to Prior Scholarship

The literature on Al-Attas has been rich in exposition (Wan Daud, 1998; Stapa, 2012; Hashi, 2015; Firdaus, 2020) but thin in operational design. Empirical studies (Abdullah, 2018; Rosnani & Suhaimi, 2019; Hasan, 2020) report implementation hurdles without providing an adaptable design architecture. This study bridges exposition and practice by mapping Al-Attas's core concepts to concrete design decisions.

The Tension Between Ta'dib and Competency-Based Assessment

Competency-based assessment (CBA) fragments learning into discrete, measurable units, whereas *ta'dib* emphasizes holistic personal formation (*insan adabi*). CBA prioritizes

observable behavior, while *ta'dib* concerns internal states (*niyyah, ikhlas, taqwa*). This tension can be managed by integrating *adab* rubrics formatively, preserving protected non-assessed educational spaces, and providing professional development.

Conceptual Costs and Unresolved Questions

The framework presupposes a 'proper order' without resolving theological pluralism, remains silent on gender, disability, and inclusion, overlooks the political economy of school reform, and relies heavily on Southeast Asian reception contexts.

Dialogue with Alternative Frameworks

The framework converges with al-Faruqi's Islamization project in institutional ambition but focuses on classroom design tools; it aligns with Fazlur Rahman's (1982) critique of fossilization while grounding authority in Al-Attas's metaphysics; and it offers an alternative transcendent foundation to Western character education.

Propositions for Subsequent Research

Proposition 1. *Ta'dib* supplies normative orientation while *ta'aqqul* supplies the intellectual process; pursuing one without the other produces dogmatism or aimlessness.

Proposition 2. Epistemological integration faces greater teacher resistance than content addition.

Proposition 3. The CBA-*ta'dib* tension must be managed through formative tools that avoid grading inner conscience.

Proposition *4*. Framework transferability depends on local institutional autonomy and familiarity with Al-Attas.

Implications for Curriculum Design and Teacher Education

Curriculum design requires collaborative reframing protocols between subject experts and theologians. Teacher education must shift from method training to pedagogical judgment training along the spectrum.

An Agenda for Empirical Work

Subsequent research should follow a four-stage roadmap: (1) expert review and usability testing; (2) pilot studies in urban, rural, and *pesantren* madrasahs; (3) longitudinal quasi-experimental studies; and (4) psychometric validation of formative *adab* assessment instruments.

CONCLUSION

This study developed a preliminary conceptual framework translating Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas's educational philosophy into operational design resources. By organizing 42 corpus sources around four core pillars—critical intellect (*ta'aqqul*), epistemological integration, pedagogical renewal, and moral formation (*ta'dib*)—the study produced a curriculum matrix, a pedagogical spectrum, and an *adab*-assessment rubric prototype. The primary theoretical contribution lies in making the translational inferences visible and testable. While limited by its text-based nature and regional concentration in

Southeast Asia, the framework provides a structured foundation for expert review, teacher training, and staged empirical investigation in Islamic education.

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DECLARATIONS

Declaration Category	Statement Details
Use of AI Statement	The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used in the writing or analytical process of this manuscript.
Authors' Contributions	All authors All authors contributed substantially to this manuscript: Sa'dullah: Conceptualization, methodology design, corpus search and screening, initial data coding, and drafting the manuscript. Kholili Hasib: Data analysis, review of the coding framework and theme definitions, critical philosophical revision, and manuscript refinement. Ethem Gürhan: Conceptual validation, cross-contextual pedagogical review, critical revision, and final proofreading.
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