

Aligning Humanistic Psychology and Islamic Education: A Theoretical Dialogue between Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow

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Abstract: Contemporary Islamic education faces the challenge of addressing students' psychological needs while preserving its moral and theological foundations amid the growing influence of Western humanistic psychology. This study critically examines the theoretical relationship between the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow and Islamic education through a philosophical dialogue approach. Using qualitative library research, the study analyzes 54 reputable sources published between 2021 and 2025 and indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and SINTA. The analysis employs thematic reduction and integrative synthesis to identify convergences, tensions, and mechanisms of conceptual reconstruction. The findings indicate that humanistic principles such as empathy, learner-centered learning, and intrinsic motivation possess strong pedagogical relevance but require a transcendental value framework to avoid normative limitations. Through critical reconstruction, self-actualization is reoriented toward the formation of the complete human being, while unconditional positive regard is reframed within the ethical principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil. The study concludes that the Islamic-humanistic framework functions as a pedagogical bridge between psychosocial well-being and spiritual objectives, with broader implications for SDG 4 and SDG 16.

Keywords: humanistic psychology; insan kamil; Islamic-Humanistic pedagogy; Islamic education; self-actualization

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education faces a dual pressure between the demands of measurable academic achievement and the need for holistic student development. The learning orientation tends to be instrumental, focusing on cognitive achievement and standardized assessments, often neglecting relational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. As global attention to mental health increases, schools are expected to serve as both learning spaces and psychosocial support environments. This condition aligns with the SDG 4 agenda, which emphasizes inclusive and quality education, thereby driving the need for pedagogical models that can integrate academic, psychological, and value-based dimensions holistically (Soneson et al., 2020; Joseph, 2021; UNESCO, 2021).

The growing challenges related to adolescent well-being and the quality of learning underscore the need to adopt a humanistic educational approach. International evidence indicates high levels of academic stress, performance anxiety, and relational vulnerability among students, conditions that are further intensified by digital-era disruptions to attention and teacher-student relationships. In line with the sustainable development agenda—particularly SDG 16—education is increasingly expected to cultivate empathy, dialogue, and self-regulation alongside academic competencies. These demands expand the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) beyond the transmission of doctrinal knowledge toward the holistic formation of moral, emotional, and spiritual dispositions. Accordingly, humanistic pedagogy provides a relevant foundation for integrating cognitive learning with character development and spiritual growth (Boccacci, 2024; UNESCO, 2021).

In educational practice, including religious education, instruction often prioritizes content delivery, memorization, and outcome-based assessment, thereby overlooking students' inner experiences and psychological needs. This issue is paradigmatic in nature, as learning is reduced to the transmission of information rather than understood as a process of self-transformation. In religious education, the transcendental mission is frequently not supported by pedagogical strategies that foster personal engagement and value internalization. Studies on meaningful learning emphasize the importance of classroom climate, learner autonomy, and the educator's role as a facilitator of human development. At the same time, the uncritical application of Western educational theories raises conceptual concerns, underscoring the need for a critical and context-sensitive theoretical dialogue (Scholtz, 2024; Agbaria, 2024).

Humanistic psychology conceptualizes education as a process of personal growth shaped by meaningful relationships and the fulfillment of basic human needs. Rogers emphasizes learner-centered pedagogy grounded in empathy and positive acceptance, while Maslow positions the satisfaction of fundamental needs as a prerequisite for self-actualization. These ideas promote empowering learning practices, foster intrinsic motivation, and support the creation of nurturing learning environments. However, a purely psychological application of humanism risks overlooking normative concerns, particularly regarding the purpose of self-actualization and the ethical limits of acceptance. These issues are

especially salient in the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), where educational aims are situated within a moral and theological framework (Joseph, 2021; Renger & Macaskill, 2021; Scholtz, 2024).

From its earliest foundations, Islamic education has emphasized the formation of holistic human beings encompassing intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. Through the concepts of *tarbiyah*, *ta'dīb*, and *ta'līm*, education is positioned as a holistic process that prioritizes ethical formation and devotion to God rather than the mere transmission of knowledge. Contemporary scholarship frames Islamic education as values-based education that remains relevant in pluralistic societies, while also highlighting tensions between liberal-secular frameworks and theological principles. Studies on humanistic hermeneutics of the Qur'an further indicate that Islam accommodates a form of humanism grounded in *tawhīd* with clearly defined epistemological boundaries. This intellectual framework provides a foundation for examining the relevance of Carl Rogers' and Abraham Maslow's theories within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) (Mostfa, 2024; Agbaria, 2024).

The primary challenge in integrating humanistic psychology with Islamic education lies in the paradigmatic difference between Western humanism, which is anthropocentric, and Islamic education, which is theocentric. Uncritical interpretations of self-actualization and unconditional acceptance risk conflicting with Islamic ethical principles. Consequently, meaningful integration requires conceptual reconstruction that situates autonomy within the framework of devotion to God and moral responsibility. Contemporary scholarship in religious education underscores the need for deliberative pedagogy that combines reflection, values, and responsible freedom, indicating that theoretical dialogue must be dialectical and context-sensitive rather than assimilative (Abdul-Jabbar & Makki, 2024; Ulfat, 2024).

The novelty of this study lies in its operational linkage between the synthesis of Islam and humanism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 and SDG 16 emphasize inclusive education, humanizing learning environments, and the cultivation of empathy, dialogue, and moral responsibility – principles that align with Rogers' emphasis on the importance of a supportive social environment for learning. While Islamic education possesses a strong value foundation grounded in *tawhīd*, *adab*, and *akhlāq*, it requires more applied pedagogical strategies to effectively engage students' emotional dimensions. Accordingly, the conceptual integration of Rogers' and Maslow's theories with the theocentric principles of Islam serves as a connecting pathway for explaining how religious education can contribute to SDG achievement through the strengthening of psychosocial well-being and transcendental character formation (Joseph, 2021; UNESCO, 2021).

This study examines efforts to harmonize anthropocentrically oriented humanistic theory with *tawhīd*-based Islamic education without reducing either framework. The predominance of cognitively instructional approaches in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) indicates insufficient attention to students' psychological needs, which play a crucial role in the internalization of values. The study aims to map the educational relevance of Rogers' and Maslow's

concepts, examine their points of convergence and tension with the principles of *tarbiyah*, *ta'dīb*, and *ta'līm*, and formulate operational mechanisms for synthesizing Islam and humanism within IRE. Such integration is made possible through the reconstruction of self-actualization and unconditional acceptance within the frameworks of *insān kāmil* and *amar ma'rūf nahi munkar*, aligning with national agendas on human resource development and character education (Agbaria, 2024; Nasution & Suyadi, 2020; Subu et al., 2022).

To date, the humanistic approach in Islamic education has largely remained methodological in nature and has not extended to a philosophical reconstruction. While studies on reflective pedagogy and humanistic hermeneutics have continued to develop, they have yet to produce an operational framework that critically examines their compatibility with *tawhīd*. The primary gap lies in the limited exploration of the anthropocentric-theocentric tension and the absence of systematic critical filtering of Rogers' and Maslow's concepts. Consequently, further research is needed to map these conceptual differences and to formulate a synthesis that can be subjected to rigorous academic examination (Abdul-Jabbar & Makki, 2024; Mostfa, 2024; Nasution & Suyadi, 2020).

This study develops an integrative framework that critically situates the ideas of Rogers and Maslow within the theology of Islamic education. While humanistic psychology emphasizes the role of social environments and authentic relationships in human growth, Islamic education highlights *adab*, learning communities, and moral authority. However, analytical tools that explicitly link students' psychological needs with the goal of holistic human formation remain limited. Accordingly, this study proposes a comparative map and an Islamic-humanistic synthesis mechanism that explains the causal relationship between the fulfillment of basic needs, empathy, and acceptance, and the internalization of moral and spiritual values in contemporary Islamic education (El Hour, 2025; Renger & Macaskill, 2021; Scholtz, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research. Data were collected from the Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and SINTA databases, covering publications published between 2021 and 2025. The literature search was conducted using keywords such as *humanistic psychology*, *Islamic education*, *Carl Rogers*, *Abraham Maslow*, and *insān kāmil*.

The inclusion criteria comprised reputable peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and dissertations that conceptually address humanistic psychology and Islamic education, while non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded. The selection process resulted in 54 documents that were subjected to in-depth analysis.

Data analysis was carried out through thematic analysis and theoretical dialogue by adapting Miles and Huberman's model for textual data, which includes concept reduction, thematic categorization, and integrative synthesis. Data validity was ensured through source credibility, reference triangulation, and argumentative consistency (Mahmoodi et al., 2025).

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Foundational Concepts of Humanistic Psychology

The humanistic theories developed by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow are grounded in ontological assumptions that view human beings as entities inherently endowed with positive capacities for growth and development. This perspective positions learners as active agents in the educational process, possessing internal capabilities to direct their own growth when supported by a conducive environment. Accordingly, education is understood not merely as a mechanism for knowledge transmission, but as a pedagogical relationship that facilitates the actualization of individual potential through meaningful and contextual learning experiences (Joseph, 2021).

Rogers consistently emphasized learner-centered education as the core of humanistic pedagogy. From this perspective, learning effectiveness is largely determined by the quality of the relationship between educators and learners, particularly through empathy, educator authenticity, and unconditional positive regard, which foster a sense of psychological safety and trust within the learning process. These psychological conditions enable active and reflective learner engagement, allowing learning to function not only as an informative process but also as a transformative one (Prajoko & Abrori, 2021).

The self-actualization orientation at the core of humanistic psychology reveals normative limitations when applied within faith-based educational contexts. An emphasis on the fulfillment of individual potential risks positioning psychological well-being as the ultimate educational goal if it is not framed within a transcendental value system that defines both the purpose and boundaries of self-development. This condition underscores the need for an additional normative framework to ensure that the contributions of humanistic psychology remain aligned with the moral and social aims of values-based education (Renger & Macaskill, 2021).

Principles of Islamic Education

Islamic education is consistently oriented toward the formation of the *insān kāmil* (the complete human being), understood as an individual who develops in a balanced manner across intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. Accordingly, the acquisition of knowledge is not separated from character formation and transcendental awareness. This orientation is reflected in the core concepts of *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dīb*, which function as the conceptual pillars of Islamic education. *Tarbiyah* emphasizes the gradual, contextual, and continuous development of learners' potential; *ta'lim* positions knowledge as meaningful learning imbued with ethical orientation; and *ta'dīb* focuses on the internalization of *adab* and moral responsibility. Based on these three concepts, learning is understood as a process of self-transformation that integrates knowledge, values, and spirituality, rather than as a purely technical or instructional activity. Conceptually, educators are positioned as *murabbī*, whose role extends beyond knowledge transmission to include ethical exemplarity and moral guidance through educational relationships grounded in role modeling, empathy, and moral responsibility (Agbaria, 2024).

The fundamental difference between Islamic education and Western humanistic approaches lies in their ontological orientation and ultimate educational goals. Islamic education is firmly grounded in *tawhīd*, which places God at the center of value orientation and human life, thereby directing the development of human potential toward devotion to God and the realization of moral responsibility in social life. Education, in this perspective, does not function merely to actualize individual potential, but to form individuals who are conscious of ethical and transcendental dimensions in every aspect of their lives (Winings, 2021).

Criticism of modern education for its excessive emphasis on rationalism at the expense of spiritual dimensions is also articulated in the journal *"Comparison between Islamic Educational Philosophy and Secular Western Educational Philosophy: Ahmad Tafsir's Perspective,"* which argues that the loss of spiritual grounding has led Western education to fall short in forming holistic human beings (Refrinur & Fauzi, 2025).

Freedom of learning and self-development in Islamic education is not understood as absolute freedom, as in some Western humanistic approaches, but rather as freedom framed by ethical values and religious commitments. Learner autonomy is positioned proportionally as a means to cultivate responsibility, moral maturity, and social awareness, rather than as the ultimate goal of education. In this regard, Islamic education possesses inherent normative mechanisms that guide the learning process to remain within established ethical and value-based boundaries (Talbot, 2025; Biesta et al., 2022).

Within the theoretical landscape of Islamic education, the theocentric orientation is positioned as a foundation for character formation and social cohesion. Education rooted in *tawhīd* not only cultivates personal piety but also promotes social piety through the development of empathy, justice, and responsibility toward the broader social environment. This contribution of values-based education to social harmony aligns with global perspectives that regard education as a means of forming ethically grounded and peace-oriented citizens (UNESCO, 2021).

Islamic education faces challenges in optimizing psychological and relational dimensions within pedagogical practice in modern educational contexts. A strong emphasis on normative and cognitive aspects has not always been balanced by pedagogical approaches that systematically address students' emotional and psychosocial needs. The quality of pedagogical relationships, psychological safety, and students' emotional well-being are essential prerequisites for meaningful and sustainable learning (El Hour, 2025).

Therefore, there is a need to strengthen pedagogical strategies that are more responsive to students' psychological and relational dynamics without shifting the theocentric orientation that characterizes Islamic education. Integrating approaches that emphasize empathy, the quality of educator-student relationships, and support for psychosocial well-being can enhance learning processes and the internalization of values. In this way, Islamic education can maintain its *tawhīd*-based foundation while effectively responding to

contemporary educational demands that emphasize meaningful learning and student well-being.

Theoretical Dialogue of Humanistic Psychology and Islamic Education

This theoretical dialogue reveals points of convergence between humanistic psychology and Islamic education in their shared orientation toward human potential development, humane educational relationships, and the rejection of repressive pedagogical practices. Both paradigms emphasize the importance of safe, meaningful, and dialogical learning environments as prerequisites for optimal student development. These commonalities indicate that both humanistic psychology and Islamic education conceptualize education as a relational process that engages human dimensions, rather than as a purely technical or instructional activity (Cheung, 2025).

Nevertheless, a fundamental difference emerges in the orientation of educational goals. Humanistic psychology is grounded in an anthropocentric paradigm that places human beings at the center of meaning and developmental purpose, directing educational relationships toward the facilitation of freedom, self-expression, and personal growth. From this perspective, learner-centered education emphasizes empathy, acceptance, and the quality of relationships as the primary determinants of learning effectiveness, with educators positioned as facilitators of individual development (Prajoko & Abrori, 2021).

This divergence in orientation becomes more pronounced in Maslow's concept of self-actualization, which is presented as the pinnacle of human development. Self-actualization is understood as the full realization of individual potential achieved through the gradual fulfillment of basic human needs. However, when applied literally within faith-based educational contexts, this concept risks reducing educational goals to individual psychological well-being alone, without reference to transcendental values that define the meaning and boundaries of self-development (Maslow, 1970).

Accordingly, through critical dialogue, self-actualization is reoriented toward the formation of the *insān kāmil*, and the principle of acceptance is framed within the ethical framework of *amar ma'rūf nahi munkar*. This approach allows empathy, freedom, and the development of human potential to be maintained while remaining bounded by moral responsibility and a theocentric orientation. The resulting integration is dialectical rather than assimilative, as it acknowledges paradigmatic differences while formulating conceptual points of convergence that preserve the theocentric coherence of Islamic education (Mostfa, 2024).

Table 1. Thematic Synthesis Matrix between Western Humanistic Psychology and Islamic Pedagogy

Western Humanistic Dimension	Key Concept	Equivalent in Islamic Pedagogy	Synthetic Reconstruction
Human Ontology	Human as the center of actualization	Human as servant (<i>'abd</i>) and vicegerent (<i>khalifah</i>)	Autonomy reframed within servitude to God
Educational Goals	Self-actualization	<i>Insān kāmil</i> (the complete human being)	Self-actualization redirected toward moral-spiritual perfection
Educational Relationship	Unconditional positive regard	<i>Amar ma'rūf nahi munkar</i>	Empathy combined with moral responsibility
Learning Motivation	Intrinsic and autonomous	<i>Niyyah</i> (intention) and sincerity (<i>ikhlas</i>)	Intrinsic motivation grounded in transcendent values
Role of the Educator	Non-directive facilitator	<i>Murabbi</i> and moral exemplar	Value-oriented facilitator with ethical authority
Learning Environment	Safe, supportive, non-judgmental	Civilized <i>majlis al-'ilm</i>	Empathic yet norm-guided learning environment
Social Orientation	Supportive, non-judgmental	Communal ethics and moral accountability	Norm-guided and empathic social environment

This figure presents a thematic synthesis matrix that maps the conceptual dialogue between Western humanistic psychology and Islamic pedagogy across seven core educational dimensions. The matrix illustrates points of convergence and divergence between anthropocentric concepts—such as autonomy, self-actualization, and empathetic educational relationships—and the theocentric foundations of Islamic education that emphasize devotion, moral responsibility, and the formation of the complete human being. The resulting synthesis demonstrates that humanistic principles are not rejected but critically reoriented within a transcendental value framework, yielding an educational model that affirms students' potential and freedom while maintaining ethical, spiritual, and social orientations.

Conceptual Implications for Islamic Religious Education

Islamic-humanistic integration has significant conceptual implications for the development of contemporary Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Humanistic approaches are not positioned as an antithesis to *tauḥīd*-based education, but rather as pedagogical resources that can be selectively and critically integrated.

IRE is thus understood as a pedagogical space that emphasizes not only normative compliance but also reflective experience and the holistic development of human potential within a framework of transcendental values (Algurén, 2025).

Integrating humanistic approaches within a theocentric orientation allows Islamic Religious Education (IRE) to move beyond cognitively instructional delivery of religious content. Emphasis on empathy, dialogue, and attention to students' psychological needs creates space for more meaningful and reflective learning experiences. Islamic values are not merely taught as a set of rules, but are internalized through pedagogical processes that respect learners as subjects and attend to their emotional dynamics, thereby enabling deeper character formation and spiritual development (Ulfat, 2024).

The strengthening of educators' roles in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is reflected in a shift from functioning primarily as transmitters of doctrine toward serving as facilitators of values and companions in students' emotional development. Educational relationships are constructed in dialogical and supportive ways to foster psychological safety as a prerequisite for effective and sustainable learning. This approach aligns with global perspectives that emphasize the importance of pedagogical relationship quality in supporting student well-being and the meaningfulness of learning processes (UNESCO, 2021)

The Islamic Religious Education (IRE) model grounded in Islamic-humanistic integration carries theoretical implications for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 and SDG 16. By strengthening psychosocial well-being, social empathy, and a culture of dialogue through learning rooted in transcendental values, this model contributes to inclusive, peaceful, and socially cohesive education. Accordingly, IRE functions not only as a normative religious instrument but also as a strategic space for holistic human development that is responsive to the global challenges of the twenty-first century (Boccacci, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that integrating the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow into Islamic education requires critical theoretical reconstruction rather than direct adoption. Humanistic principles such as empathy, supportive educational relationships, and attention to psychological needs hold pedagogical relevance within Islamic Religious Education (IRE), yet remain insufficient when detached from a theocentric value orientation. Through conceptual synthesis, self-actualization is reoriented toward the formation of the *insān kāmīl*, while empathetic approaches are framed within the ethical principle of *amar ma'rūf nahi munkar*. The resulting Islamic-humanistic framework bridges psychosocial well-being and spiritual development without compromising the *tawhīd*-based foundation of Islamic education. Moreover, this synthesis carries implications for strengthening inclusive education and peace-oriented character formation, as reflected in SDG 4 and SDG 16. Further research is recommended

to empirically examine the application of this framework across diverse educational levels and contexts.

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