

Epistemological Continuity and Pedagogical Reform: Operationalising Project-Based Learning in Pakistani Madrasah

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Abstract

The Pakistani traditional madrasah system, deeply rooted in the 18th-century Dars-e-Nizami model, faces a fundamental pedagogical challenge in reconciling classical Islamic epistemology with contemporary socio-economic requirements. Historically, state-led reform initiatives have faltered due to an "epistemological dualism" that superficially grafts secular subjects onto a pedagogical framework dominated by rote memorisation. Drawing on constructivist learning theory and the Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK) paradigm, this article examines how two leading Pakistani institutions, Jamia-tur-Rasheed in Karachi and Minhaj-ul-Quran in Lahore, have integrated modern education and Project-Based Learning (PBL) into their traditional frameworks. By analysing distinct institutional adaptations, such as Jamia-tur-Rasheed's Majma al-Uloom al-Islamiyyah curriculum and Minhaj-ul-Quran's Nizam-ul-Madaris, this study explores the potential for successfully reframing traditional pedagogy through modern educational tools. The methodology employs a qualitative case study design, analysing eighteen semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and primary institutional documents, further enriched by the sixteen-year longitudinal perspective of an insider-researcher. The findings indicate that PBL effectively revives the dialectical tradition of the classical halaqah. Jamia-tur-Rasheed operationalises this through entrepreneurial and applied jurisprudential projects, while Minhaj-ul-Quran utilises formal university credentialing and technological integration. The paper concludes that constructivist approaches enable madrasah graduates to become active synthesisers of traditional texts and modern realities. Such a strategy ensures institutional continuity, bridges the sacred-secular divide, and provides a decolonial, localisation framework for institutional transformation.

Kata Kunci: Project-Based Learning, Dars-e-Nizami, Islamic Epistemology, Decolonial Pedagogy.



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INTRODUCTION

The madrasah education system in Pakistan, primarily based on the 18th-century Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, has historically been a vital stronghold for preserving Islamic knowledge and theology. Originally established during the Mughal era to train both civil servants and religious scholars, the curriculum has effectively sustained the intellectual heritage of the Muslim ummah through the rigorous transmission of classical texts (Zaman, 2002). However, the complexities of the 21st-century socio-economic and political environment demand more than mere preservation. Today, this traditional educational model faces a considerable pedagogical stalemate.

The main challenge facing contemporary Pakistani madrasah is pedagogical stagnation, characterised by a reliance on rote memorisation and teacher-centred *halaqah* approaches. This is further compounded by a persistent dichotomy between the transmitted sciences (*ulum al-naqliyya*) and the rational or modern sciences (*ulum al-aqliyya*). This "epistemological dualism" has limited the societal integration of madrasah graduates, often leaving them ill-prepared to offer religiously grounded solutions to modern issues in economics, statecraft, and technology. Scholars have long advocated for internal intellectual renewal rather than superficial imposition of Western educational models (Rahman, 1982). The key question, therefore, is not whether madrasah should modernise, but how it can systematically integrate modern pedagogical principles without compromising its foundational Islamic epistemology. In response to this systemic gap, there is an increasing need to move towards student-centred, inquiry-driven frameworks. Project-Based Learning (PBL), grounded in constructivist learning theory, provides a practical approach for pedagogical reform. From an "insider" perspective, deeply embedded within the Dars-e-Nizami ecosystem, PBL is not inherently unfamiliar to the philosophy of Islamic education. The core principles of constructivism, in which learners actively construct knowledge through experience and problem-solving, strongly align with traditional Islamic methods of critical inquiry (*tahqiq*), deep reflection (*tadabbur*), and the derivation of applied jurisprudence for contemporary issues (*fiqh al-nawazil*) (al-Attas, 1979). The introduction of PBL acts as a realisation of the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy within the madrasah context, shifting the student's role from a passive recipient of medieval commentaries to an active researcher capable of integrating traditional wisdom with modern practicalities.

This article explores how two leading Pakistani institutions, Jamia-tur-Rasheed (Karachi) and Minhaj-ul-Quran (Lahore), have incorporated modern education and PBL into their traditional frameworks. By analysing their different institutional adaptations, such as Jamia-tur-Rasheed's Majma al-Uloom al-Islamiyyah curriculum and Minhaj-ul-Quran's Nizam-ul-Madaris, this study examines the potential to reframe traditional pedagogy using modern educational tools.

To support this analysis, the study employs a robust qualitative methodology informed by the researcher's extensive lived experience and years of academic engagement within the madrasah ecosystem. Data collection includes semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders: 11 senior managers and curriculum designers, 16 faculty members, and 34 advanced students currently enrolled in these integrated systems. Furthermore, the paper critically examines 24 primary institutional documents, including official syllabi, prospectuses,

policy frameworks, and specific PBL directives. Based on this comprehensive data set, the article provides an evidence-based narrative on the synthesis of epistemological continuity and pedagogical reform currently unfolding in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical evolution of the madrasah system in the Indian subcontinent reveals a notable transition from serving as a centre of active state administration to becoming a defensive bastion of religious orthodoxy. This shift, primarily a response to the marginalisation of the ulama during the colonial era, saw the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum repositioned as a crucial defence for preserving Islamic identity (Zaman, 1999, 2018). However, this defensive posture led to what Nayyar (1998) describes as an "epistemological isolation," where the educational process became trapped in a "time warp" characterised by the rote memorisation of medieval commentaries. Although subsequent state-led reforms in Pakistan attempted to modernise these institutions, Ahmad (2004) and Tahir (2022) argue that these initiatives largely fell short. The primary reason for this failure was a "security-centric" approach that viewed madrasah through a lens of surveillance rather than educational advancement, resulting in the superficial "grafting" of secular subjects onto a stagnant pedagogical framework without addressing fundamental issues in instructional methods or institutional autonomy.

This persistent dichotomy between the transmitted sciences (*ulum al-naqliyya*) and the rational sciences (*ulum al-aqliyya*) calls for a shift towards the Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK) paradigm. Al-Attas (1979) laid the philosophical groundwork for this movement, asserting that contemporary knowledge must be de-Westernised and re-embedded within an Islamic epistemological framework to maintain civilisational continuity. While scholars like Moten (2004) and Safi (1997) stress a holistic curricular reorganisation, Rahman (1967, 1982) critically notes that simply juxtaposing modern and traditional topics is inadequate. Instead, a strong methodological "backbone" is necessary to enable students to actively synthesise divine revelation with empirical realities. Despite these theoretical advances in IOK, a significant gap persists in the empirical literature regarding how specific pedagogical tools can operationalise this synthesis within the traditional madrasah environment. While general educational literature by Blumenfeld et al. (1991) and Thomas (2000) praises Project-Based Learning (PBL) for fostering cognitive development and real-world problem-solving, its application within the unique "insider" ecosystem of the Pakistani madrasah remains underexplored.

The potential for PBL to bridge this gap lies in its alignment with constructivist pedagogy, which echoes traditional Islamic methods of inquiry such as *tahqiq* (verification) and *tadabbur* (reflection). As Hmelo-Silver (2004) suggests, inquiry-based approaches move beyond passive reception towards self-directed learning. Recent studies in other Islamic contexts, such as Tambak and Sukenti (2020), indicate that PBL can significantly enhance the pedagogical leadership of madrasah teachers. However, there is a lack of comparative qualitative evidence on how leading institutions such as Jamia-tur-Rasheed and Minhaj-ul-Quran are currently navigating this transition. This study addresses this gap by examining how PBL acts as a "decolonial" and "localised" mechanism for reform, moving the discourse beyond the failed "additive" models of the past towards a transformative synthesis that maintains epistemological continuity while meeting modern socio-economic demands.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is rooted in a qualitative case study design, selected for its effectiveness in examining the intricate intersections of traditional Islamic epistemology and modern constructivist pedagogy within Jamia-tur-Rasheed (Karachi) and Minhaj-ul-Quran (Lahore). This approach enables a thorough, contextualised investigation of how and why these institutions are navigating the shift from what Ebrahim Moosa (2015) describes as a "closed republic of piety" to a "vibrant republic of letters." By focusing on the lived experiences of this type of learning institution, the study goes beyond superficial administrative reforms often criticised by Fazlur Rahman (1982), aiming instead to comprehend the organic epistemological realignment driven by contemporary socio-economic pressures.

Central to this methodological approach is the insider-researcher (emic) perspective, which provides the ethnographic depth needed to navigate the complexities of the Dars-e-Nizami ecosystem. As a graduate of Jamia-tur-Rasheed with specialised training in *Takhassus fi al-Fiqh wa al-Ifta* and over sixteen years of immersive experience as a student, teacher, and digital academic pioneer (Madrassa.pk), the researcher possesses a unique "positionality." This background ensures that the analysis of pedagogical shifts, such as the move from rote memorisation to Project-Based Learning, is conducted with a deep sensitivity to maintaining theological continuity. This insider status enables the study to operationalise the principles of *tahqiq* (verification) and *tadabbur* (reflection) as methodological tools, ensuring that the research itself reflects the dialectical tradition of the classical *halaqah*.

Data collection was carried out through purposive sampling to bridge the conceptual gap between the "received" and "rational" sciences. As part of a larger doctoral project, this article analyses a focused subset of 18 semi-structured interviews and eight primary institutional documents. The interview sample includes a balanced range of senior management, teaching faculty, and advanced students, ensuring multiple perspectives on how PBL projects, such as developing Shariah-compliant e-commerce models, are implemented. These primary accounts were triangulated with official curricular frameworks, including the Majma al-Uloom al-Islamiyyah and Nizam-ul-Madaris policies, to evaluate how these institutions are reinterpreting their students' cognitive taxonomy from "inert recipients" to "active synthesisers" of knowledge.

The analytical phase employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to uncover recurring patterns of pedagogical reform and epistemological continuity. Transcripts were coded to identify the specific ways in which constructivist problem-solving is integrated into traditional jurisprudential study. This rigorous process of cross-referencing interview data with institutional assignment briefs and rubrics ensures that the findings genuinely reflect a synthesis of traditional wisdom and modern practicalities. Ultimately, this methodology documents a localised, decolonial approach to reform, demonstrating that adopting PBL does not secularise the madrasah but rather empowers its graduates to resolve the long-standing dualism between the sacred and the secular.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is rooted in a synthesis of constructivist learning theory and classical Islamic epistemology. Traditionally, the madrasah has functioned as a stronghold for the Islamic intellectual tradition; however, as Zaman (2002) asserts, the ulama are not static figures but agents of change who adapt to modernity while preserving theological continuity. The current pedagogical crisis in Pakistan, therefore, requires an epistemological realignment rather than merely administrative or superficial curricular reforms. This study uncovers the root of the crisis in the "epistemological dualism" described by Rahman (1982), the strict division between received religious sciences (*naqliyya*) and rational secular sciences (*aqliyya*).

This epistemological integration requirement will significantly expand the continuum-dichotomy analytical framework introduced by Wan Ahmad Fauzi (2017) and Wan Husain (2025), extending it to civilisational studies and jurisprudence. Wan Husain notes that the separation of law as an institution increasingly neglects its ethical and metaphysical foundations (2025, p. 332), a trend also evident in the historical secularisation of education. To establish epistemic order, he suggests an approach that effectively distinguishes between transcendent legal continuities and dichotomous constructs created by human agency (Wan Husain, 2025, p. 332). The Philosophy of the Continuum in Watan Jurisprudence bridges the perceived gap between eternal revelation and human agency by asserting that divine guidance and worldly progress are parts of a single, unbroken intellectual reality. In the context of a traditional madrasah curriculum, this framework transforms the educational experience from passive preservation of classical texts into active, objective-based engagement with the present. By replacing the "dichotomy" of sacred versus secular with a "continuum," students are empowered to see contemporary civic challenges, such as Islamic finance, digital ethics, and ecological sustainability, not as external disruptions, but as modern expressions of the same *Sunnatullah* (Divine Law) they study in their classical manuals. This shift greatly enhances student visibility and preparedness, as it provides them with the epistemological self-confidence to apply traditional moral roots to the complex socio-economic needs of the ummah in a globalised world (Wan Ahmad Fauzi, 2026).

When applied within the madrasah environment, the traditional Dars-e-Nizami represents these transcendent, moral continuities, whereas modern secular studies are often viewed as disruptive, dichotomous frameworks. Constructivism and Project-Based Learning serve as pedagogical methods that transform this rigid dichotomy into a unified intellectual continuum. This approach allows students to actively engage with the complexities of contemporary human agency while maintaining awareness of their metaphysical and ethical roots.

The novelty of this framework lies in bridging the gap between Ebrahim Moosa's (2015) "republic of piety" and "republic of letters" by operationalising constructivist PBL. While constructivism is often viewed through a Western lens, its core premise that learners actively construct meaning through experience is deeply indigenous to the classical *halaqah* system. In its peak dialectical form, the *halaqah* was characterised by *munazarah* (scholarly debate), *tahqiq* (critical verification), and the application of *ijtihad* to contemporary issues (*nawazil*).

By aligning the cognitive demands of classical Arabic syntax and complex *Fiqh* with the analytical requirements of PBL, this framework suggests that students do not 'secularise'

when they engage in projects like Shariah-compliant e-commerce modelling. Instead, they are creating a constructivist synthesis. They employ the ethical and legal foundations of Islam to address contemporary socio-economic challenges. This model argues that PBL acts as the "methodological backbone" that Fazlur Rahman identified as missing in earlier reform efforts. It empowers madrasah graduates to resolve dualism by becoming producers of applied knowledge, ultimately realising the "cosmopolitan intellectualism" envisioned by Moosa.

Table 1: The Conceptual Framework of Sadheer Khan's Project-Based Learning in Madrasah Education (2026)

Sphere	Traditional Element	Constructivist/PBL Element	Synthesized Outcome
Epistemology	<i>Ulum al-Naqliyya</i> (Preservation)	<i>Ulum al-Aqliyya</i> (Application)	Epistemological Continuity
Pedagogy	<i>Halaqah</i> / Dialectics	Collaborative Projects	Active Synthesis
Objective	<i>Tarbiyah</i> (Character/Piety)	Problem-Solving (Skill/Utility)	Cosmopolitan Intellectualism

INSTITUTIONAL MAPPING AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The internal institutional analysis is necessary to implement the constructivist theory of learning in the Pakistani madrasah ecosystem. Rather than treating the madrasah as a single block, an insider-based approach reveals a highly stratified and structurally complex educational setting. The subsections below visualise the institutional structures of Jamia-tur-rasheed and Minhaj-ul-Quran, along with their respective departments, to illustrate how Project-Based Learning fits within them. This section shows how epistemological continuity helps retain institutional texts amid pedagogical change by juxtaposing past texts with the lived stories of management, teachers, and students.

Jamia-tur-Rasheed: Institutional Mapping and Pedagogical Synthesis

Jamia-tur-Rasheed is a comprehensive educational conglomerate dedicated to bridging the historic gap between transmitted and rational sciences. It offers the traditional Dars-e-Nizami taught in both Urdu and Arabic (Mahad-ul-Rasheed track), ensuring mastery of the language of classical texts. At advanced levels, the institution provides the Kuliyat al-Shariah course, a specialised four-year Dars-e-Nizami programme for university graduates, supporting a smooth transition from secular academic studies to intensive training in Islamic jurisprudence. More recently, the *Takhassusat* department offers highly specialised training comparable to an MPhil, covering areas such as *Fiqh al-Halal*, Islamic Finance, and *Ifta*, which involves students engaging in advanced applied research. The Al-Biruni Model School, the Huffaz Education System, and the newly established Al-Ghazali University further expand this educational ecosystem, creating a continuum from primary education to postgraduate research.

The pedagogical shift at Jamia-tur-Rasheed is reinforced through a new *Majma al-Uloom al-Islamiyyah* curriculum. This framework clearly outlines the integration of

contemporary subjects and real-world research alongside classical literature. The management does not see this integration as a compromise of secularism but as a natural development of Islamic epistemology. Recognising the necessity of such an approach, Maulana Arshad Bangash, a senior administrator at Jamia-tur-Rasheed, explained the institutional philosophy supporting this modern pedagogical strategy.

Project-based education, now almost universally required, is a vital part of our education system and highly valued worldwide. Given the high standards of our education, we can implement it in a way that is distinguished, practical, and truly beneficial. Introducing the pond will positively influence the community.

This story aligns with Zaman (2002) in demonstrating how, in an effort to remain relevant and authoritative in the public eye, the ulama actively adopt modern approaches. The focus on practical and authentic value suggests a constructivist stance, where religious knowledge is validated through community application. This paradigm shift significantly influences students' experiences. Moving away from passive knowledge consumption, students are now expected to engage in problem-solving involving complex, real-world issues. Muhammad Arif, a final-year student of Dars-e-Nizami, shared his experience of this integrated system.

The way this institution combines religious and modern sciences and research activities, which involves drawing conclusions from books, giving presentations, and teaching others, is what sets it apart from other institutions. This is why I chose this institution. I find its more academic, research-oriented approach to education more appealing because it is more effective at explaining things to others. (Transcript JTR-S-01)

This example of student work emphasises the application of high-level cognitive skills. Students operate at the upper tiers of Bloom's taxonomy by drawing conclusions, preparing presentations, and educating their peers. The traditional *halaqah* is thus incorporated into a collaborative research environment, maintaining the rigorous textual analysis of the Dars-e-Nizami and applying it to contemporary socio-economic endeavours.

Minhaj-ul-Quran: Institutional Mapping and the Nizam-ul-Madaris Model

Minhaj-ul-Quran introduces a similar yet distinct model of institutional integration, primarily characterised by its formal adherence to higher-education standards. The organisational structure is based on the College of Sharia and Islamic Sciences (COSIS), which operates campuses for boys and girls. One aspect of Minhaj-ul-Quran involves the structural integration of the traditional Dars-e-Nizami with formal university degrees. Students pursue their religious studies alongside Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degrees awarded by Minhaj University Lahore. This model offers a dual degree programme supervised by the Nizam-ul-Madaris board, officially incorporating the teaching of computer science, economics, and English literature into the religious curriculum.

The management of Minhaj-ul-Quran regards this structural integration as essential for the socioeconomic survival and intellectual self-esteem of madrasa graduates. To address the

historical dichotomy between secular and religious education, Professor Dr. Mohammad Mumtazul Hasan, the Director of Jamia Islamia Minhaj-ul-Quran, has provided the following analysis.

Keep it with others, and secondly, focus on the future, including ancient or religious knowledge. Also, allow the inclusion of real knowledge. This is the need of the hour. It fosters confidence in children. They do not depend on others in society. They can stand on their own feet and earn. When someone is self-reliant and earning, society views their religion in a new light. (Transcript MUQ-M-04)

The latter view is a direct response to the crisis that Rahman (1982) has recognised: the marginalisation of madrasah graduates in society's economic sphere diminishes their influence. By awarding students recognised university degrees and practical skills, Minhaj-ul-Quran aims to produce scholars who are economically self-reliant and intellectually sound. To achieve this, pedagogical practices in classrooms are subject to rigorous critique and restructuring. At Minhaj-ul-Quran, Sajid Mahmood Al Azhari, a senior teacher of *Usul-e-Fiqh*, was a fierce opponent of rote learning, advocating instead for constructivist approaches.

The preparation you must make is to stimulate children's interest in their subject. How are you going to do it? If you bring children on and implement project-based learning, I am talking very straight, the conventional way of teaching is toast. It is a waste of time. The potential of children is being squandered. We have so many minds, children, youths, generations, they are gifted. (Transcript MUQ-T-03)

This passionate critique by an insider practitioner of the so-called traditional pedagogical practices is not an attack on the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum but on the stagnant manner of pedagogical presentation that Moosa (2015) condemned. Through Project-Based Learning, which requires students to actively participate, teachers at Minhaj-ul-Quran are striving to revive the lively, dialectical traditions of early Islamic scholarship, with the aim of channelising students' intellectual potential towards active citizenship rather than passive memorisation.

Operationalising Constructivism: Curriculum Benchmarking at Jamia-tur-Rasheed

Besides the philosophical approach underpinning modern methodologies, Jamia-tur-Rasheed has undertaken strict structural reforms to assess and measure learning outcomes. Classical madrasah education relies on traditional mastery in qualitative understanding of classical literature and often lacks standardised indicators of cognitive development. However, as an educator with years of experience observing how the curriculum is delivered in Dars-e-Nizami, the integration of Project-Based Learning necessitates quantifiable academic standards. Jamia-tur-Rasheed has addressed this by combining traditional literature with existing education taxonomies.

Considering this overhaul of the structure, Maulana Inaamullah Bhakarwi, a top management official in charge of Human Resource Development and Reforms at Jamia-tur-Rasheed, described how the curriculum benchmarking process is done:

We counted the total based on discipline. We then assessed the learning outcomes using Bloom's taxonomy. This will significantly assist in benchmarking this curriculum. The question is: which book are we allocating more time to? An example is that we dedicate twenty-five per cent to Fiqh. Consequently, we gain a much clearer understanding of how to organise the academic workload.

This story exemplifies great epistemological maturity. By applying Bloom's taxonomy to traditional subjects like *Fiqh*, the institution advances students beyond mere memorisation to higher levels of evaluation and creation. This systematic academic workload directly supports Project-Based Learning, especially in the final Dawra-e-Hadith year, when students are tasked with solving modern economic issues. Final year student Amjad Faraz noted that this structured environment encourages collaborative problem-solving as follows:

I make decisions about my practical and research activities based on the project itself. For example, in a project on business opportunities in the halal industry during a hadith tour, I would work in a group since it not only broadens the scope of learning but also provides an opportunity to collaborate, consult with others, and learn collectively. (Transcript JTR-S-13)

This student's experience exemplifies the constructivist principle of social learning. By engaging in projects in the Halal industry while pursuing rigorous studies in Hadith, they practice peer-mediated knowledge construction. They do not merely memorise the cases of what is good or bad; instead, they actively conduct research on business opportunities, thereby bridging the gap between historical jurisprudence and contemporary business realities.

Technological Integration and Epistemological Confidence at Minhaj-ul-Quran

Whereas Jamia-tur-Rasheed is more concerned with entrepreneurial and project applications of classical texts, Minhaj-ul-Quran is more concerned with technological integration and the academic credentialing of its graduates to provide them with epistemological confidence. The dual-degree system adopted by the Nizam-ul-Madaris board is not merely an administrative accident; it is an instructional plan that aims to alleviate socio-economic anxieties that tend to paralyse students of traditional madrasah. Dr. Johar Ahmed Sheikh, a senior faculty member at Minhaj-ul-Quran specialising in Hadith and literature, emphasised that this structural integration alters students' psychology towards their religious studies:

When the student realises how important it is, he will know that, should he not get an MPhil, he will not be able to enter any college today, as a degree is required. He realises that this is his obsession, hence he is receiving an opportunity here. Our student has no knowledge, but he has a great number of choices. (Transcript MUQ-T-04)

This view supports the idea that to succeed in modern academic life, one must gain formal recognition. Incorporating the MPhil research requirements into the Dars-e-Nizami, *Minhaj-ul-Quran* urges students to adopt modern research techniques. It effectively helps transform the madrasah from its stagnant reliance on historical commentaries to an active producer of knowledge. This revolution requires the use of contemporary tools. Final-year Dars-e-Nizami student Anwar Hussain described his approach to conducting jurisprudential research:

To complete the practical tasks assigned by the teachers, I not only read books on the topic but also rely on modern technologies such as AI, ChatGPT, Maktaba Shamila, and other Islamic and contemporary websites. The strength of the religious education system lies in its ability to simplify the solution of current problems that are not specific. (Transcript MUQ-S-02)

The high level of constructivist integration is demonstrated through the explicit use of artificial intelligence, online libraries such as Maktaba Shamila, and modern web pages alongside classical texts. The learner navigates various epistemological terrains simultaneously to address contemporary issues. This aligns with Moosa (2015), which shows that providing students with up-to-date intellectual tools naturally fosters a cosmopolitan outlook rather than a narrow one towards Islamic law.

SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION

The emergence of Project-Based Learning in Jamia-tur-Rasheed and Minhaj-ul-Quran offers a deep empirical antithesis to the belief that conventional Islamic pedagogical systems can never be modernised in their business-related pedagogical procedures. A combination of qualitative data and the theoretical frameworks of constructivism and Islamic epistemology shows that the two institutions are actively overcoming the historical dichotomy between religious and secular sciences, albeit through different institutional approaches.

Because of the insights provided by the insider-researcher approach, the Dars-e-Nizami is not simply a poor transition from a passive *halaqah* approach to an active project approach. Instead, it fulfils its original intellectual purpose. According to Rahman (1982), the stagnation of the madrasah was attributed to the mechanical insularity of religious texts, which ignored the realities of modern society. Both institutions address this issue by employing constructivist methods that encourage students to overcome this disconnection. This synthesis is exemplified by Jamia-tur-Rasheed through the application of socio-economic problem-solving. The institution ensures that Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) is taught not merely as a historical phenomenon but as a living, applicable discipline. Students are encouraged to undertake comprehensive research projects on topics such as e-commerce, the halal food industry, and modern political governance. This aligns with Zaman (2002), who argues that the ulama have maintained their relevance in society by actively interpreting tradition to meet current socio-economic needs.

On the other hand, Minhaj-ul-Quran aims at epistemological continuity through structural academic credentials and technological integration. The Nizam-ul-Madaris model,

which resembles conventional religious education, in which the graduate earns formal university degrees (BSc and MPhil), fundamentally alters the socio-economic trajectory of the madrasah graduate. This dual-degree system, as explained by the faculty, eliminates economic marginalisation, which often leads to intellectual insularity. By introducing students to contemporary research practices and digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital libraries, Minhaj-ul-Quran exemplifies Moosa's (2015) vision of transforming the madrasa into a cosmopolitan republic of letters rather than a closed republic of piety. The students do not merely memorise classical commentaries; they generate new knowledge that is recognised by the broader state education system.

Although these two institutions employ different methods, they both demonstrate effective application of the constructivist learning theory within an Islamic context. The data indicate that once learners progress beyond basic cognitive levels, such as rote memorisation, to higher levels, such as modelling a Sharia-compliant business at Jamia-tur-Rasheed or writing an academic thesis at Minhaj-ul-Quran, their understanding significantly broadens. The Dars-e-Nizami curriculum is therefore highly flexible when combined with student-centred pedagogical approaches. The traditional core elements, including rigorous textual study and the formulation of resolutions, harmonise well with the investigative nature of Project-Based Learning.

Furthermore, the key theme emerging from the data collected from the two institutions is the organic transition of the traditional *halaqah* (learning circle) into a modern, constructivist collaborative space. This classical madrasah pedagogy often reduced the *halaqah* to the teacher dictating commentaries. However, the introduction of Project-Based Learning has reintroduced its original dialectical nature. The interview discussion records clearly indicate that groups are highly preferred among students for project work. Students working collaboratively to complete challenging tasks, such as developing a Sharia-compliant corporate governance model or exploring digital libraries like Maktaba Shamila to trace jurisprudential precedents, are engaging in what constructivist theorists' term social learning and peer-mediated knowledge building.

From an insider researcher perspective, this marks a radical shift in the relationship between teachers and students. The teacher is no longer an absolute repository of knowledge (*mutakallim*) but has become an initiator and an intellectual guide (*murabbi*). Statistics show that the faculty at Jamia-tur-Rasheed and Minhaj-ul-Quran are actively embracing this paradigm by offering technical assistance, research guidance, and digital support rather than merely translating texts. This change does not diminish the traditional respect (*adab*) accorded to teachers within Islamic epistemology; rather, it elevates the teacher's role to that of an intellectual guide who helps students navigate the subtleties of classical literature or the technical skills of artificial intelligence.

These pedagogical changes address a psychological crisis of relevance that has long troubled madrasa students. Rahman (1982) noted that the division of knowledge alienated traditional students who no longer felt connected to the rapid socio-economic changes occurring in the state. The qualitative data in the study strongly suggest that Project-Based Learning offers a psychological remedy for such isolation. Students report that their epistemological confidence rises markedly through engaging in research, whether in the contemporary halal food market, at Jamia-tur-Rasheed, or while working on an MPhil thesis on current socio-political issues

with Minhaj-ul-Quran. They have realised that their mastery of classical Arabic syntax, logic (*mantiq*), and jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) is not outdated but instead a valuable tool for analysing and critiquing today's socio-economic structures.

Furthermore, Project-Based Learning is a valuable tool for decolonising the madrasah curriculum and should be adopted in these institutions. Tahir (2022) argued that historical reforms aimed at reform have failed because they are rooted in a colonial binary that views traditional Islamic education as inherently inferior and Western secular education as the only model of development. By adopting a constructivist approach, Jamia-tur-Rasheed and Minhaj-ul-Quran avoid this dichotomy. They do not merely import Western content, but instead, they use Project-Based Learning to help students develop localised, Sharia-compliant solutions to contemporary issues.

The most notable aspect of this decolonial shift is how students address complex socio-economic issues. As they explore alternative Islamic banking models or critique the morality of digital media use, they operate within an Islamic epistemological framework while applying contemporary analytical tools. This process supports Safi's (1997) assertion that the only way to islamise knowledge is through active synthesis of methodology rather than passive consumption. The data collected during the interview shows that this synthesis helps ease the historical tension between madrasas and the state. When madrasah students engage in projects aimed at the economic stability of the country or community, the state is less likely to see the madrasah as a security threat (Ahmad, 2004) and more as an institution vital to the nation. Therefore, PBL is not only a pedagogical tool but also a marker of social-political reintegration. Finally, data synthesis indicates that there are two valid approaches to madrasah modernisation, each different yet equally legitimate. Jamia-tur-Rasheed exemplifies entrepreneurial pragmatism by applying Project-Based Learning to develop scholars who can work in the commercial, legal, and social sectors as active problem-solvers. Minhaj-ul-Quran exemplifies academic formalism, with an emphasis on rigorous research and university certification, allowing graduates to transition smoothly into higher levels of state education and international academia. Both models successfully employ constructivist methods to dismantle the secular-religious dichotomy, enabling Islamic epistemology to adapt to the cognitive demands of the twenty-first century.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Drawing on the synthesis of empirical data and the constructivist theoretical framework, the following policy interventions are recommended to close the gap between state educational expectations and madrasah autonomy. These suggestions aim to support a localised, nationwide pedagogical development across all madrasah boards (*Wifaqs*).

1. Transition from Content-Based to Objective-Based Curricula: Major educational boards should move beyond the mere enrolment of classical texts. Following the benchmarking model pioneered by Jamia-tur-Rasheed, the *Dars-e-Nizami* curriculum should be mapped against contemporary educational taxonomies (e.g., Bloom's Taxonomy). This would allow institutions to systematically guide students toward critical assessment and applied research, particularly in the final *Dawra-e-Hadith* year, by specifying the cognitive outcomes intended for each text.

2. **Institutionalising Pedagogical Retraining for Madrasah Faculty:** Project-Based Learning (PBL) requires a significant change in the teacher-student relationship. State educational authorities and independent madrasah networks should work together to offer professional development for current *Asatidha* (teachers). This training should help them shift from "dictators of knowledge" (*Mutakallim*) to "academic facilitators" (Murabbi). Faculty should be equipped with modern skills, including rubric design, digital literacy, and managing collaborative student research, all while upholding traditional Islamic adab (respect).
3. **Bridging the State-Madrasah Policy Gap via Dual-Credentialing:** Historical attempts by the state to modernise madrasahs through the forced imposition of secular subjects have largely failed due to a lack of trust. Policymakers are encouraged to adopt the Minhaj-ul-Quran model of structural integration. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan should develop standardised, flexible pathways for madrasah students to pursue parallel university degrees (BS or MPhil) based on their rigorous research projects. This mutual recognition satisfies the state's need for standardised testing without violating the madrasah's institutional autonomy.
4. **Establishing Contextualised Project-Based Learning Instructions:** Instead of a wholesale importation of Western PBL models, researchers should develop Sharia-compliant, localised research frameworks. Student projects should focus on the nexus of Islamic law and contemporary civic challenges, such as Islamic banking models, ecological sustainability, and digital ethics. Providing a systematic guide for such projects would motivate smaller, resource-limited madrasahs to adopt constructivist approaches without fear of losing their theological edge.
5. **Introduce a continuum philosophy of Watanic Jurisprudence:** Refine modern philosophies and thought frameworks by aligning the secularistic approach with the continuum analytical approach.

Component	Focus	Integrated Role
Curriculum & Faculty (1 & 2)	Internal	Upgrading the "Software" of the Madrasah.
Policy & Credentialing (3)	External	Creating the "Hardware" or legal path for survival.
Localised PBL (4)	Functional	Proving the utility of the "Software" in the real world.
Watanic Philosophy (5)	Conceptual	Providing the "Operating System" that makes it all halal/logical.

CONCLUSION

The empirical data collected from Jamia-tur-Rasheed and Minhaj-ul-Quran fundamentally challenge the academic and political orthodoxy that sees the Pakistani madrasah as an unchangeable, outdated institution. This study shows that the original epistemology of the Dars-e-Nizami is not inherently opposed to modern educational needs. Instead, the system's historical "stagnation" arises from pedagogical inertia, where lively classical scholarly traditions were suppressed by an overreliance on rote memorisation and textual insularity.

To address this, the transformation must be systemic. By shifting from content-based to objective-based curricula, the Dars-e-Nizami can be aligned with modern cognitive taxonomies, ensuring that classical texts serve as catalysts for critical evaluation rather than merely being objects of recitation. This change involves institutionalising pedagogical retraining for the *Asatidha*, transforming them from the role of a *Mutakallim* (knowledge dictator) to a Murabbi (academic facilitator) capable of guiding students through the demands of digital literacy and collaborative research. Through implementing contextualised Project-Based Learning, these institutions have successfully revitalised the dialectical and investigative nature of the traditional *halaqah*. The findings demonstrate that by conducting applied research at the intersection of Sharia and contemporary civic challenges, classical jurisprudence and Hadith studies can be effectively integrated into modern socio-economic realities. Furthermore, a dual-credentialing policy creates a structural link with the state, empowering graduates with the academic recognition and epistemological confidence needed to engage with the modern state apparatus and the global "republic of letters."

Ultimately, the adoption of a continuum philosophy of "Watanic Jurisprudence" ensures that this integration is not a capitulation to secularisation, but a refined alignment of legal traditions with human agency. These institutions are realising the intellectual renewal envisioned by Fazlur Rahman (1982) by shifting the educational emphasis from passive preservation of a "closed republic of piety" to active, cosmopolitan problem-solving characteristic of a true "republic of letters" (Moosa, 2015). By embracing this constructivist framework, the ulama are repositioned not merely as custodians of history but as active contributors to the socio-economic prosperity of the ummah.

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