

Virtual Learning in Islamic Higher Education: Adapting Prophetic Pedagogy to Digital Platforms

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Abstract:

The rapid digital transformation in higher education has presented Islamic academic institutions with both opportunities and challenges in delivering quality instruction. This study examines the adaptation of Prophetic Pedagogy, educational principles derived from the teaching methods of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), to virtual learning environments within Islamic higher education. Prophetic Pedagogy emphasizes moral embodiment, patience, repetition for reinforcement, learner-centered engagement, contextualization of knowledge and holistic character development. Drawing on contemporary literature and case studies from institutions such as Al-Mahdi Institute (UK) and Bayan Islamic Graduate School (USA), the paper outlines strategies for translating these timeless pedagogical values into effective online practices. It explores how digital platforms can support interactive learning, community building and moral formation, while addressing common challenges such as maintaining student engagement and ensuring equitable access to technology. The analysis demonstrates that thoughtful integration of Prophetic Pedagogy into digital course design can produce not only intellectually capable graduates but also morally grounded and socially responsible individuals. Recommendations include blended instructional models, multimodal content reinforcement, reflective and character-based assignments and faculty development programs to cultivate educators as role models in virtual spaces. By aligning technological tools with the ethical and spiritual goals of Islamic education, institutions can preserve the integrity of traditional scholarship while expanding its reach to diverse and global audiences. This approach ensures that virtual learning in Islamic higher education remains both pedagogically effective and authentically rooted in the prophetic model.

Keywords: *Virtual learning, Islamic higher education, Prophetic Pedagogy, online teaching, digital Islamic education*

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1. Introduction

The digital revolution has redefined the modes of knowledge dissemination in higher education, enabling learning to transcend geographical boundaries and temporal constraints. In recent years, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities and seminaries across the globe have shifted toward virtual learning environments, integrating online platforms, learning management systems and digital communication tools into their pedagogical frameworks.³ This transformation has not spared Islamic higher education institutions, which now face the dual challenge of maintaining academic rigor and preserving the spiritual and ethical integrity of traditional Islamic scholarship in a virtual context.

Historically, Islamic education has been deeply rooted in *ta'lim* (instruction) and *tarbiyah* (moral and spiritual nurturing), often facilitated through close physical interaction between teacher and student in settings such as the *madrassa*, mosque and scholarly circles (*halqāt al-'ilm*). This model finds its highest exemplar in the *Prophetic Pedagogy*, derived from the teaching methods of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who combined the transmission of knowledge with character formation, community engagement, and contextual relevance.⁴ His pedagogical principles; embodiment, repetition for clarity, dialogical interaction and the integration of moral and intellectual training, were central to producing not only learned individuals but also ethically responsible members of society.

The migration of this pedagogical heritage into digital spaces raises significant questions: How can the essence of Prophetic Pedagogy be retained when direct physical presence is replaced by virtual interaction? How can educators ensure that the holistic aims of Islamic higher education; knowledge acquisition, spiritual refinement and ethical transformation, are not compromised by technological mediation?

This study seeks to address these questions by examining the potential of adapting Prophetic Pedagogy to contemporary digital platforms. By reviewing current virtual learning practices in Islamic higher education and aligning them with prophetic teaching principles, it aims to develop a framework for an authentically Islamic yet

³. Ahmad, Nisar, and Muhammad Usman Khalid. 2024. "Digitalization of Religious (Islamic) Education: Bridging Tradition and Innovation for Global Learning." *ĪQĀN – Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 6 (2): 35–54. <https://iqan.com.pk/index.php/iqan/article/view/448>

⁴. Fatima, Tehreem, and Aqsa Tasgheer. 2022. "Prophetic Instructional Strategies: A Pedagogical Framework for the Contemporary Academics." *Journal of Islamic and Religious Studies*. p.17-34 jirs.uoh.edu.pk

technologically competent model of online education. In doing so, it bridges the gap between tradition and innovation, ensuring that Islamic scholarship retains its spiritual depth while embracing the possibilities of a globally connected learning environment.

2. Prophetic Pedagogy: Foundations and Contemporary Significance

Prophetic Pedagogy refers to the educational philosophy and instructional methods inspired by the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In Islamic tradition, the Prophet is regarded not only as the conveyor of divine revelation but also as the *mu'allim* (teacher) and *murabbi* (nurturer), whose approach to education was holistic, aiming at the intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation of learners.⁵ The Qur'an itself affirms this role:

*"Indeed Allah conferred a great favor upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom."*⁶

This verse encapsulates the threefold function of the Prophet as educator, purification (*tazkiyah*), transmission of divine knowledge (*ta'lim*), and imparting wisdom (*hikmah*). Among the hallmarks of Prophetic teaching were embodiment, the alignment of the teacher's conduct with the values taught. The Prophet's wife, 'Ā'ishah (RA), famously said,

*"His character was the Qur'an."*⁷

Clarity and repetition were also central; the Prophet would repeat important statements three times to ensure understanding.⁸ Contextualization was evident in his adapting lessons to each learner's background and readiness, as in the hadith where he responded differently to various people asking about the best deed, tailoring advice to their circumstances.⁹

The Prophet's pedagogy also emphasized interactive dialogue, using questions to provoke thought, as when he asked, *"Shall I not inform you of the greatest of the major sins?"* and engaged the companions in reflection before answering.¹⁰ Gradualism (*tadarruj*) in teaching was practiced to accommodate learners' capacity, echoing the Qur'anic principle:

⁵. Fatima and Tasgheer, *Prophetic Instructional Strategies: A Pedagogical Framework for the Contemporary Academics*, p. 19

⁶. Āl Imrān, 3:164

⁷. Muslim, *al Jami al Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Ṣifat al-Munāfiqīn, Riyadh: Darussalam, Hadith No.746

⁸. Bukhārī, Muhammad bin Ismā'il, *al Jami al Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-'Ilm, Riyadh: Darussalam, Hadith No. 95

⁹. Muslim, *al Jami al Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Īmān, Hadith No.137

¹⁰. Bukhārī, *al Jami al Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Adab, Hadith No.6273

“And We have sent it [the Qur’an] down in stages so that We may strengthen your heart thereby.”¹¹

Contemporary scholarship highlights the enduring relevance of these principles. In modern educational theory, learner-centered approaches, formative assessment and experiential learning resonate strongly with the Prophetic model.¹² Within Islamic higher education, these pedagogical values offer a framework that integrates academic excellence with ethical and spiritual development.¹³

In the digital age, where virtual platforms mediate most teacher–student interactions, the challenge lies in translating these timeless principles into online pedagogical strategies without losing their moral and interpersonal depth. Doing so requires a conscious effort to integrate prophetic values into curriculum design, assessment methods and modes of virtual engagement, ensuring that the educational process remains transformative rather than merely informational.

3. Virtual Learning in Islamic Higher Education: Current Landscape

The landscape of Islamic higher education has undergone profound change over the past two decades, driven by advances in educational technology, global connectivity and most recently, the necessity of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While traditional modes of instruction in Islamic seminaries (*madāris*) and universities have historically emphasized face-to-face interaction—rooted in the *ijazah* system and the personal transmission of knowledge—the migration to virtual environments has required institutions to rethink delivery methods, assessment strategies and community engagement without compromising the authenticity of Islamic scholarship.¹⁴

Several institutions exemplify the integration of virtual learning into Islamic higher education. Al-Mahdi Institute (UK), originally grounded in a traditional Shi‘a seminary curriculum, transitioned to fully online delivery during the pandemic. Since September 2022, its “Hawza Programme” has continued via pre-recorded lectures, live classes and digital reading resources, culminating in eligibility for an MA in Islamic Studies in partnership with the University of Birmingham.¹⁵

¹¹. Al Furqān, 25:32

¹². Niyozov, Sarfaro, and Nadeem Memon. 2011. *Islamic Education and Islamization: Evolution of Themes, Continuities and New Directions*. Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 31, no. 1 (March): 5–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2011.556886>.

¹³. “Laying Foundations for Islamic Teacher Education.” MDPI, *Reflexive Turn, Pedagogical Turn*, etc. [MDPI](https://doi.org/10.3390/1000000000000000)

¹⁴. Ahmad and Khalid 2024, p.35-54

¹⁵. Al-Mahdi Institute. 2023. “Hawza Programme.” Accessed August 15, 2025. <https://almahdi.edu/hawza-programme>.

In the USA, Bayan Islamic Graduate School has developed *Bayan On-Demand*, an online subscription platform offering over 350 hours of high-level Islamic studies content; identical to degree-course materials, covering subjects like Prophetic Biography (*Sīrah*) and the Prophetic Model of Ministry. As of 2024, the platform serves thousands of subscribers globally, reflecting a growing appetite for academically rigorous yet accessible Islamic learning.¹⁶

Beyond these institutional examples, research in Pakistan and Southeast Asia highlights the benefits of virtual learning for Islamic education: increased accessibility, flexibility, and opportunities for global scholarly exchange.¹⁷ However, studies also caution against potential drawbacks, such as diminished spiritual ambiance, reduced teacher–student bonding, and inequities in digital infrastructure.¹⁸

The shift toward virtual learning in Islamic higher education is not merely a technological adjustment, it represents a structural transformation of pedagogy and institutional identity. While modern platforms offer unmatched scalability and flexibility, they risk detaching learning from the relational, spiritual and communal qualities emphasized in the Prophetic model. Thus, these platforms must not simply “host” Islamic education but actively embody its epistemological and ethical commitments. This requires intentional design choices, such as incorporating live mentorship, fostering digital *halaqāt* and embedding moral-spiritual reflection into online modules, to ensure that virtual Islamic education remains a holistic and transformative process rather than a transactional one.

4. Integrating Prophetic Pedagogy in Virtual Environments

The transition from face-to-face Islamic instruction to virtual classrooms presents both opportunities and risks. While digital platforms allow unprecedented reach, they can also dilute the relational depth that is central to Prophetic Pedagogy. To safeguard the spiritual, ethical and intellectual aims of Islamic higher education, educators must adapt core Prophetic methods to the realities of online learning. This adaptation is not merely about using technology as a delivery tool but about infusing virtual spaces with the same sincerity (*ikhhlās*), moral modeling and contextual relevance that characterized the Prophet’s teachings.

¹⁶. Bayan Islamic Graduate School. 2024. “Bayan On-Demand.” Accessed August 15, 2025. <https://www.bayanonline.org/on-demand>.

¹⁷. Noh, Mohd Roslan, and Mohd Kamal Hassan Mamat. 2022. “Online Islamic Studies during COVID-19: Opportunities and Challenges.” *International Journal of Islamic Education* 4 (1): 1–15.

¹⁸. Rahman, Fadzli Adam. 2021. “Virtual Classrooms and the Spiritual Dimension of Islamic Education.” *Journal of Islamic Pedagogy* 3 (2): 77–91

4.1 Embodiment in Digital Delivery:

The Prophet (PBUH) taught by example, embodying the very values he preached. The Qur'an describes him as “*an excellent example for those who hope in Allah and the Last Day*”.¹⁹ In virtual learning, embodiment translates into the educator's online demeanor—displaying patience, humility, and ethical integrity in all interactions. Even in asynchronous formats, educators can model this through respectful communication, timely feedback, and consistent moral framing in discussions.²⁰

4.2 Repetition and Clarity in Online Content:

The Prophet often repeated key statements three times for emphasis.²¹ In virtual contexts, this can be operationalized by reinforcing core ideas across different media—video lectures, slides, and discussion forums. Studies in educational technology confirm that multimodal reinforcement enhances retention in online environments.²²

4.3 Interactive, Student-Centered Engagement:

The Prophetic method was dialogical rather than monological. He asked companions thought-provoking questions before delivering answers.²³ Online, this spirit can be preserved through live Q&A sessions, interactive polls and collaborative projects. Research in Islamic pedagogy shows that active participation fosters both intellectual mastery and moral reflection.²⁴

4.4 Holistic Development and Reflection:

Prophetic Pedagogy aimed to nurture the *'aql* (intellect), *qalb* (heart), and *nafs* (self). The Qur'an encourages believers to “*reflect, O you of insight*”.²⁵ Virtual learning can integrate reflective journals, peer mentoring, and online service-learning projects to foster spiritual and ethical growth alongside academic progress.²⁶

4.5 Contextualization and Relevance:

The Prophet tailored his instruction to individual needs, as seen when different companions received different answers to the “best deed” question.²⁷ Online educators can follow this example by offering differentiated assignments, adaptive learning

¹⁹. Al Ahzāb, 33:21

²⁰. Fatima and Tasgheer 2022, p.17-34

²¹. Bukhārī, *al Jami al Ṣaḥīḥī*, Kitāb al-ʿIlm, Hadith No.95

²². Ahmad and Khalid 2024, p. 17-34

²³. Bukhārī, *al Jami al Ṣaḥīḥī*, Kitāb al-Adab, Hadith No.6273

²⁴. Niyozov and Memon 2011

²⁵. Al Hashr, 59:2

²⁶. “Laying Foundations for Islamic Teacher Education.” *MDPI, Reflexive Turn, Pedagogical Turn*, etc. [MDPI](#)

²⁷. Muslim, *al Jami al Ṣaḥīḥī*, Kitāb al-Īmān, Hadith No.137

modules and culturally relevant case studies. This personalization ensures that Islamic knowledge remains connected to students' lived realities.

Adapting Prophetic Pedagogy to virtual environments is not an act of dilution but of renewal (*tajdīd*). It requires intentionality; designing courses where the medium supports rather than compromises the message. By aligning technological tools with the Qur'anic and Prophetic vision of education, Islamic higher education can sustain its dual mission: preserving the integrity of tradition and meeting the demands of contemporary learners in a globalized, digital era.

5. Conclusion

The evolution of Islamic higher education into virtual spaces is not merely a technological shift but a pedagogical transformation. While the medium of instruction has changed, the essential mission remains the same: to cultivate knowledgeable, morally upright, and spiritually conscious individuals. Prophetic Pedagogy—rooted in embodiment, repetition for clarity, dialogical engagement, contextual relevance and holistic moral development, provides a timeless framework for achieving these aims. The Qur'anic portrayal of the Prophet as a teacher who purifies, instructs and imparts wisdom and the Prophetic model of adapting lessons to learners' capacities remain as relevant in the digital age as they were in the mosque of Madinah.

Integrating these principles into virtual environments demands intentional instructional design, ethical commitment from educators and technological adaptability. Institutions must ensure that online education does not become a mere transmission of information, but a transformative process fostering intellectual depth, moral refinement and community engagement. This requires faculty training in digital pedagogy, curricular designs that emphasize interaction and reflection and platforms that allow for personalization and mentorship.

If embraced thoughtfully, digital platforms can extend the reach of Prophetic Pedagogy beyond geographical and cultural boundaries, creating global communities of learning anchored in the Qur'anic and Prophetic ethos. In doing so, Islamic higher education will not only preserve its heritage but also harness the opportunities of the modern age, ensuring that the light of prophetic guidance continues to illuminate minds and hearts in the twenty-first century.

6. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of Prophetic Pedagogy and its application to virtual learning in Islamic higher education, the following recommendations are proposed:

- a. Educators should be trained not only in technological skills but also in strategies to embody prophetic teaching values, such as patience, humility and clarity in online environments.
- b. Digital course materials should explicitly incorporate scriptural guidance to reinforce the spiritual and ethical dimensions of knowledge ensuring that virtual classes retain a distinctly Islamic ethos.
- c. Combining synchronous (live) and asynchronous (recorded) components allows for repetition, reflection and flexibility, aligning with the Prophetic practice of reinforcing core teachings.
- d. Use online discussion boards, breakout sessions and collaborative assignments to replicate the Prophet's dialogical method of engaging learners.
- e. Assign digital reflective journals, case studies and community service projects that promote moral and spiritual growth alongside academic achievement.
- f. Create structured teacher–student mentoring models within online platforms to preserve the personal guidance that has been a hallmark of Islamic scholarship since the earliest generations.

By implementing these measures, Islamic higher education institutions can ensure that virtual learning environments are not only academically rigorous but also spiritually enriching, thereby fulfilling the holistic mission of Islamic education in the modern era.