



## The Relevance of Progressive Education to Islamic Education in the Millennial Era

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**Abstract:** This study explores the relevance of progressive education principles to Islamic education in addressing the challenges of the millennial era. Using a qualitative literature review and content analysis approach, the research applies John Dewey's progressive educational theory as the primary framework. Findings reveal that the core principles of progressive education, including democratic learning, problem-solving, and experiential knowledge, align closely with Islamic education's objectives. These principles emphasize student-centered learning, integration of real-life experiences, and the harmonious development of intellectual and spiritual capabilities. The study highlights the potential of progressive Islamic education to merge traditional values with modernization, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability in students. By integrating democratic values, collaborative learning, and problem-solving skills, Islamic education can remain dynamic and relevant to the rapidly evolving global context. This research contributes to the discourse on educational reform, demonstrating how Islamic education can adapt to contemporary challenges while preserving its foundational ethos.

## INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of education today are becoming increasingly complex, reflecting the rapid changes of our times (Hadar et al., 2020; Hadi, 2018; Hutabarat et al., 2023; Kee, 2021; Nafsaka et al., 2023). Various paradigm shifts and updates in the millennial era are significantly impacting the educational landscape (Baharuddin et al., 2024; Bakar, 2021; Dániel Gergő, 2016; McHaney & Daniel, 2023). In this context, there is an urgent need for the Islamic Education sector to address critical aspects, such as vision, mission, teaching and learning processes, curriculum, media, infrastructure, management, evaluation, the quality of graduates, and educational goals (As'ad, 2021; Ignatius Septo Pramesworo et al.,

2023; Muhammad & Nugraheni, 2022; Nor et al., 2024; Rodliyah, 2022). This necessitates innovation, development, and careful planning to ensure that Islamic Education remains effective and continues to contribute to the preparation of future human resources (Putra et al., 2024; Shofiyyah et al., 2023). Moreover, it is essential to establish priorities that will enable success in an increasingly competitive millennial era (K. S., 2023).

In addition, practical challenges demand immediate attention, such as how Islamic educational institutions can effectively integrate progressive education principles while maintaining adherence to Islamic values (Brooks et al., 2020; Ignatius Septo Pramesworo et al., 2023). The rapid advancement of digital technology and its integration into the

learning process has created a gap between traditional pedagogical methods and the expectations of modern students (Alenezi et al., 2023; Haleem et al., 2022). The lack of adequate teacher training and resources to adopt innovative strategies further exacerbates this problem. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to prepare students with critical thinking skills, adaptability, and global competencies, which are essential in a highly interconnected world. These issues underline the importance of re-examining the foundations of Islamic education and aligning them with modern approaches like progressive education to address these pressing challenges.

In the context of Islamic education in the millennial era, educators and scholars are encouraged to continuously improve and evaluate their methods (Basir et al., 2021; Fathuddin et al., 2023). However, a review of educational practices reveals a complex array of perspectives. One relevant approach to consider is progressive education, which aligns well with the needs of the current era. Progressive education emphasizes innovation and adaptation, responding meaningfully to global changes.

This approach focuses on the development of students through creative, active, and dynamic learning experiences, coupled with self-discipline and moral control. In the millennial era, education is grounded in three key categories of variables: perception and manipulation, creative intelligence, and social intelligence (Arifin et al., 2024; Tlili et al., 2022).

The variable of perception and manipulation refers to abilities involving both gross and fine motor skills, as well as the execution of tasks within a confined physical space. Creative intelligence encompasses artistic expression, originality, and intellectual property rights. Lastly, social intelligence includes skills such as negotiation, persuasion, social perception, and

empathy (Holm-Hadulla & Wendler, 2022; Sharma et al., 2023).

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Progressive Islamic education is designed to adapt to the ongoing changes and challenges of our time. With each generational shift, the educational approaches utilized evolve, as reflected in the well-known saying, "Educate your children according to the times." In the context of today's millennial era, progressive education advocate Ivan Illich posits that education should not only promote the active, creative, and dynamic nature of students but also integrate moral guidance and religious education (Muthohar et al., 2023). This article aims to analyze John Dewey's educational theories and their relevance to Islamic education in the current millennium.

Before discussing the foundations of the theory of progressive education, Knight's theory offers perspectives on the principles of progressivism. First, the educational process should originate from and be directed toward children (students). Second, the subjects in education are active rather than passive. Third, the role of teachers should be that of executors, counselors, and evaluators, rather than authoritarian figures limited to merely directing the classroom. Fourth, the school environment should serve as a miniature of the larger community. Fifth, classroom activities should focus on problem-solving rather than artificial methods for teaching learning materials. Finally, the school environment should

ideally be positively democratic and cooperative.

John Dewey, a prominent figure in the progressivist school of thought, advocated for an educational approach that opposed traditionalism. His followers saw education as a dynamic movement and a collective resistance to conventional methods. Progressivism was influenced by European naturalists, particularly Pestalozzi and Rousseau, which led to an understanding that Dewey's philosophy aligns with pragmatic instrumentalism. This perspective is grounded in Freudian and neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theories, as well as the ideas of American socio-political thinkers of the time (Akbar Islamy et al., 2024).

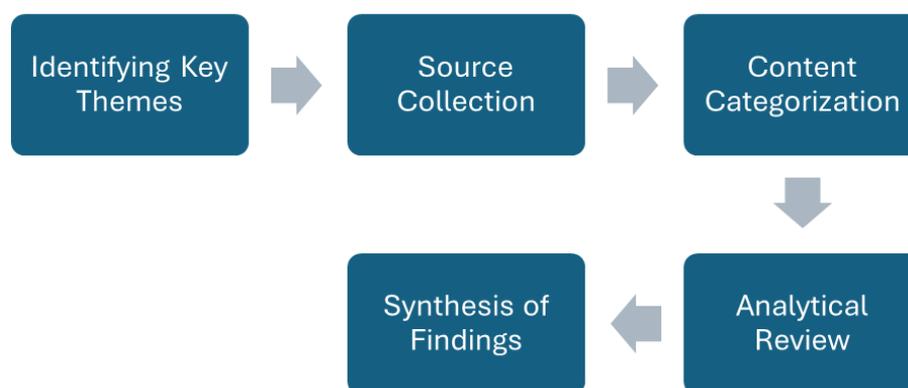
The expected benefits of this research include providing a theoretical framework for enhancing Islamic education through progressive principles, offering practical recommendations for educators to improve teaching practices, and contributing to the broader discourse on modernizing Islamic education to meet global demands. Ultimately, this study aspires to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, ensuring that Islamic education remains relevant and impactful in shaping future generations.

## METHOD

The method employed in this study is a literature review, specifically utilizing a content analysis approach to examine findings from various prior studies. This research process involves understanding, collecting, and analyzing information from a wide range of sources, including books, dissertations, theses, articles, and other relevant materials.

The literature review provides a theoretical foundation that supports the development of the conceptual framework for this research. The aim is to identify gaps in the findings of previous studies. The author follows a structured process that includes tracing sources, analyzing them, selecting relevant materials, and drawing conclusions.

The sources included in this study were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the discourse on progressive and Islamic education. Primary criteria for selection include peer-reviewed journal articles, reputable books, and studies explicitly discussing John Dewey's educational theories, progressive education, and their relevance to Islamic education. Each source was critically evaluated to ensure its validity and reliability in supporting the analysis.



**Figure 1.** Systematic Research Procedure for Analyzing Progressive and Islamic Education.

Figure 1 outlines the systematic research procedure in five stages. It begins with Identifying Key Themes

through an initial literature review to establish the study's focus. Next is Source Collection, where relevant

materials are gathered from credible sources. Content Categorization organizes the data into thematic clusters, such as philosophical principles and teaching methods. During Analytical Review, connections between Dewey's progressive philosophy and Islamic education are examined. Finally, the Synthesis of Findings integrates the insights into a coherent framework, addressing the research objectives and advancing academic discourse.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Concept of Progressive Education Theory

John Dewey, as the figure who initiated the theory of progressivist education, emerged as a prominent educational thinker in America during the 20th century. His research and ideas addressed key issues related to practical education and its implementation in schools. Dewey emphasized the importance of a democratic, anti-authoritarian, and open educational process, advocating for a dialogical space between students to foster communicative learning. This perspective aligns with the thoughts of M. Athiyah al-Abrasyi, who introduced the concept of 'liberation education' within 'al-Tarbiyah al-istiqlaliyah.' This principle encourages students to embrace their qualities and abilities, forming the foundation of self-confidence and trust in their reasoning and intellect (Nata, 2022; Suratullah et al., 2023).

According to a key concept in one of the modern schools of education, progressive education emphasizes that ideal learning should be student-centered. This approach encourages teachers to stimulate learning by fostering an environment of active participation and cultivating students' curiosity. In reality, learning would be ineffective if it occurs in only one direction. However, the essence of progressive education aligns with the

constructivist approach, where students actively construct their knowledge based on personal experiences and foundational thinking (Akbar Islamy et al., 2024).

Professor Arief Rahman, M.P., argues that the significance of Islamic education in today's digital era is closely connected to the role of teachers as educators. Given the ongoing revolution in education and the integration of digital technologies, teachers must adapt to the rapid access to digital information available to students in the current millennial generation (Nata, 2022).

While there are both advantages and disadvantages to this situation, it is crucial to find solutions to the complex problems faced. In response to global changes, progressivism in education has emerged, particularly in addressing the challenges encountered by Muslims. The principles of progressive thinking in Islamic education involve reforms within Islamic educational institutions, encompassing various fields such as social sciences, social order, and economics. The primary objective is for Islamic education to remain adaptable to the changing times while effectively incorporating the values inherent in Islamic religious norms and ethics (Mala & Hunaida, 2023; Mujahid, 2021).

### Progressive Islamic Education

The core of progressive Islamic education, as articulated by Fazlur Rahman in his book *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1984), merges traditional Islamic values with the principles of progress, renewal, and modernization. This approach not only emphasizes the study of Islam but also integrates the development of technology, skills, and scientific knowledge that meet contemporary needs. It harmonizes reason and revelation within the educational curriculum, underscoring the importance of balancing religious knowledge with

general knowledge in the process of educating the younger generation (Abdul-Jabbar & Makki, 2024).

In light of the current challenges and obstacles facing Islamic education, educators and thinkers must adopt innovative strategies. Failure to do so may result in stagnation, which could lead to the decline of Islamic education. Therefore, the development of progressive strategies in Islamic education is essential to address the realities of the millennial era and the rapidly evolving landscape of globalization (Fitryansyah & Sofiyati, 2024; Uyuni & Adnan, 2024).

According to Hasan Langgung, Islamic education fundamentally supports the principle of democratic learning, which aligns with the philosophy of *tawazun* (balance and equality). This principle emphasizes that education should avoid inequality, disparities, and extreme discrimination. Today, the landscape of Islamic education is diverse, largely due to the impact of innovative programs that have been implemented through diligent efforts. Educational institutions in Indonesia, such as madrasahs and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), which are equivalent to junior and senior high schools, have successfully integrated religious and secular education. Furthermore, state universities like UIN and IAIN have been implementing the integration of religious and general education for decades (Muhsin et al., 2024).

The field of Islamic education has demonstrated its capacity to influence various dimensions of education, including its orientation, structure, attitudes, and curriculum. This influence arises from both internal and external factors within the Muslim community. The objective is to foster a shift in perspective, mindset, and response among Muslims as they navigate the progress and challenges of the future. Ideally, if Islamic education continues to

be integrated into the educational landscape both now and in the future, it will be able to effectively address these needs (Hadi, 2018).

### **The Relevance of John Dewey's Progressive Education to Islamic Education in the Millennial Era**

One of the key ideas Dewey encountered during his time at Hopkins University was the concept of child development and adolescence as the foundation for determining appropriate teaching methods. This idea was significantly influenced by G. Stanley Hall (1844–1922), who was then a high school teacher in Oil City, Pennsylvania. Dewey, who studied under Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914), also gained insights from William James (1842–1910) at Harvard University. A central motivation for Dewey was to propose the philosophical foundation of pragmatism as a counter to Herbert Spencer's associationist theory, which posited that learning is shaped by habits. James emphasized the necessity of studying children's nervous systems to understand the development of good habits, advocating for habits that emerge from thoughtful reflection rather than rote verbal instruction.

Dewey later taught at the University of Michigan (1884–1894), and in 1894, he joined the University of Chicago as a professor of philosophy, psychology, and education. It was during his tenure in the Midwest—a region undergoing significant social and cultural transition—that Dewey further developed his educational theories (Takyi Mensah et al., 2023; Thomassen & Jørgensen, 2021). The perspective of progressive education views traditional methods as forms of external coercion. Dewey characterized education based on such coercion as stifling, contrasting it with approaches that foster individuality and personal expression. The early 20th century witnessed the emergence of this movement, shaped significantly by

child-centered principles (Mala & Hunaida, 2023).

Over time, curriculum theory has shifted from an emphasis on organizational structures to a focus on addressing the psychological needs of children. Today, children are at the center of educational practices (Birhan et al., 2021; Gray & Woods, 2022). Each child develops through interactions with their environment, which are shaped by their cognitive processes (Evans, 2021).

John Dewey was a proponent of the dual knowledge theory advanced by William James. In his 1934 work *Art as Experience*, Dewey employed James's theory extensively to explain how the self and the environment are transformed through the interplay of controlled rational activities and receptive experiences. This interplay suggests that understanding emerges from the interaction between actions and mental imagery formed during the cognitive process. Until an individual achieves a sense of satisfaction with their perception of an activity, they will continue to refine and reshape that perception. This iterative process persists until an experience is fully integrated, encompassing internal and external judgments as well as direct perception.

Dewey's contributions to education began with the establishment of a laboratory school at the University of Chicago in 1896, marking the beginning of his progressive education movement. This approach regarded students as whole individuals, with teaching materials derived from their experiences and aligned with their interests and needs.

A key distinction in Dewey's progressivism, particularly in epistemology, lies in the differentiation between knowledge and truth. Knowledge is understood as a collection of effects and descriptions derived from experience, ready to be utilized. In terms of axiology, Dewey does not explicitly

separate intrinsic and instrumental values, emphasizing instead that values possess social qualities. This perspective underscores the interplay between the individual and society (Fuerstein, 2021).

Dewey's teachings on progressive education can be summarized as follows:

1. Children must be given the freedom to develop naturally.
2. To stimulate students' interest, they should be encouraged to engage in hands-on experiences.
3. Teachers must adopt the role of researchers, guiding students' learning activities by participating in play, providing examples, sparking creativity, and more.
4. Strong cooperation among schools, families, and communities is essential. Creating a conducive environment for education nurtures students' talents and interests effectively.
5. Progressive schools should serve as laboratories for pedagogical reform and experimentation.
6. The curriculum should be flexible, child-centered, and experience-based, prioritizing subjects that are relevant and engaging over those that are merely informational.

Education holds a central role in Dewey's philosophy, particularly as a means of instigating societal change and renewal. Dewey believes that education enhances individuals' courage and constitutional intelligence. He underscores the importance of cultivating awareness of fundamental rights and obligations, particularly the right to education (Robinson et al., 2020).

In the context of the millennial era, the relevance of Islamic education in Indonesia is reflected in ongoing efforts toward renewal. "Renewal" entails replacing outdated ideas with new ones and reformulating concepts to adapt to contemporary challenges. This process is more about shifts in traits or

circumstances than introducing an entirely new discipline. However, as this renewal process engages with various theories, it has evolved into a distinct field contributing significantly to Islamic education, ultimately modernizing it (Nata, 2022).

The renewal of Islamic education incorporates a range of ideas that have significantly influenced the dynamic and progressive development of Islamic education management. This transformation necessitates modern institutional adaptations to address the challenges posed by globalization and modernization. Muhammad Abduh emphasized that modern education represents an effort to integrate essential aspects of Western science and technology into Islamic life while preserving the core ethos of traditional Islamic teachings (Rahman, 2017).

The primary objective is to achieve a harmonious balance between the development of modern Western sciences and classical Islamic knowledge. This balance is crucial for modernizing adult Islamic education management. The ultimate goal is to cultivate an Islamic ethos that embodies intellectual excellence and professional maturity while remaining firmly grounded in traditional teachings (Rahman, 2017).

A key strategy of Islamic education is its continuous nature, transcending space and time. The essence of Islamic education aligns with the concept of lifelong learning, as highlighted in the Qur'an: "And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty [of death]" (QS. Al-Hijr: 99). This principle underscores that the pursuit of knowledge must extend throughout one's life. Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad emphasized lifelong learning, stating that knowledge should be sought "from the cradle to the grave."

This concept emphasizes the importance of experience as a

foundation for educational content. In Islam, learning through experience is reinforced by Qur'anic verses encouraging reflection and self-improvement for the future (Muzakki et al., 2022).

This study explores the concept of lifelong education through the lens of John Dewey, who argued that "life is education" or "education is life itself." However, Dewey's educational philosophy does not aim to bring students closer to God (Mualifah, 2016).

John Dewey defines education as a process aimed at renewing the entire cultural structure, emphasizing the maintenance and development of skills, arts, and sciences (Takyi Mensah et al., 2023). Dewey's principles are highly relevant to Islamic education, which is shaped by reformist theories and has significant developmental potential. In the context of lifelong education, Dewey asserts that life itself is education, or that education is life. However, it is important to note that Dewey's educational approach does not aim to bring students closer to God (Mualifah, 2016).

In the millennial era, often referred to as the postmodern era, Fathur Rahman identifies three key factors that serve as turning points for Islamic education. First, contemporary education emphasizes the recognition and appreciation of the diversity of knowledge, acknowledging that knowledge is dynamic and influenced by cultural, social, and individual contexts. This approach encourages the development of critical thinking skills and discussions grounded in factual evidence rather than assumptions. Second, current teaching methods are active and student-centered, emphasizing democratic approaches, problem-solving, and the use of interactive, simulated, and collaborative techniques. These methods are tailored to students' educational levels, ensuring that learning experiences are both

relevant and impactful. Third, the integration of media and information and communication technology (ICT) is essential in enhancing students' learning processes. Interactive and engaging digital resources not only prevent monotony but also assist students in acquiring new knowledge, revisiting prior lessons, and building social networks through engaging educational content.

Fathur Rahman further argues that postmodernism, as an intellectual movement, challenges established paradigms of modern thought. While this perspective has faced criticism for potentially leading to restrictive ways of thinking, it also sparks important discussions on the direction of human thought and education (Rahman, 2017). In an increasingly standardized era, education emphasizes pluralistic diversity, adaptability to change, and collaboration. These elements aim to equip students with the complex skills needed to navigate contemporary challenges (Hutabarat et al., 2023). However, mastering information technology alone is insufficient to build resilience against the challenges of change. Experience plays a crucial role in all domains, as problem-solving, critical reading, and creative thinking are essential competencies that contribute to individual success. These principles closely align with John Dewey's philosophy of progressive education, which emphasizes experience as the foundation for meaningful learning.

Dewey's ideas on progressive education can be integrated into Islamic education in the millennial era in several ways. First, education should go beyond theoretical knowledge and be connected to real-life experiences. Reflective learning, which links abstract concepts to practical situations, is critical, especially in Islamic education, where literacy and the practical application of values are emphasized. Teachers play a vital role in creatively employing

strategies, approaches, and learning models that are relevant and effective. This idea is supported by the Qur'anic verse: *"The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed that produces seven ears; in every ear, there are a hundred seeds. Allah multiplies the reward for whomever He wills. And Allah is All-Encompassing and All-Knowing"* (QS Al-Baqarah [2]: 261).

This verse reflects the importance of practicing values such as *infaq* (charity) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Second, Dewey emphasizes active, innovative, and collaborative learning, where teachers stimulate students to think critically and engage actively and collaboratively, both physically and mentally. This approach can be applied through inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and hands-on experiments, enabling students to effectively understand and internalize knowledge.

The integration of Dewey's progressive education principles into Islamic education offers great potential for addressing the challenges of the millennial era. By emphasizing reflective, collaborative, and experience-based learning, Islamic education can equip students with critical thinking skills, adaptability, and resilience necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern world while preserving the core values of Islamic teachings.

The relevance of Dewey's educational principles can also be found in Islamic teachings, supported by Qur'anic verses. For instance, QS Al-Qasas (28:34) states: *"And my brother Aaron is more fluent in speech than I, so send him with me as a helper to confirm my words. Indeed, I fear that they will deny me."* This verse demonstrates that Prophet Moses, with Allah's permission, was assisted by Prophet Aaron, who acted as his spokesperson. Similarly, QS Thaha (20:29–33) recounts Moses's prayer: *"And appoint for me a helper*

*from my family, Aaron, my brother. Strengthen me through him and let him share my task, so that we may glorify You much.*" This reflects Prophet Moses's request for divine assistance in fulfilling his mission of *da'wah*.

In the context of contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia, the 2013 curriculum and the newly implemented independent curriculum aim to achieve several learning objectives. These include portfolio development and collaborative learning projects, which align with Dewey's theories. However, despite these advancements, students often lack motivation for active participation in learning (Chamisah, 2024).

The third principle of Dewey's educational philosophy—democracy in education—prepares students to participate actively in a democratic society. According to Dewey, education should instill democratic values, encouraging students to engage as responsible members of their communities. This is achieved by fostering an educational environment that promotes deliberative dialogue and decision-making processes reflective of democratic principles. Islamic education has long emphasized deliberation (*shura*) and consensus, which resonate with Dewey's democratic ideals. Key Islamic values supporting democracy include justice, as highlighted in QS An-Nisa (4:135), QS Al-Maidah (5:8), and QS Al-Hujurat (49:9); freedom, as mentioned in QS Al-Baqarah (2:44) and QS An-Nur (24:61); and equality, reflected in QS Al-Baqarah (2:21) and QS Gafir (40:40). The principles of deliberation and tolerance are underscored in QS Al-Imran (3:159), QS Ash-Shura (42:38), and QS Al-Kafirun (109:6) (Matawang, 2024).

The fourth principle, problem-solving, is central to Dewey's philosophy, which emphasizes equipping students with the ability to identify, analyze, and resolve issues

effectively. Dewey argued that solving real-life problems helps students develop critical thinking skills and prepares them for life's complexities. In the context of Islamic education, this principle aligns with the process of *ijtihad*—providing practical and adaptive solutions to contemporary challenges. QS Az-Zumar (39:18) reinforces this perspective: "[They are] those who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones Allah has guided, and those are people of understanding." Similarly, QS Al-Kahf (18:82) demonstrates the importance of problem-solving and divine wisdom in addressing challenges (Ma'ruf, 2021).

Continuous education, according to Dewey, is inherently interactive and deeply connected to the surrounding environment. Education should not be isolated from students' daily lives but rather integrated into both formal and informal settings. This approach ensures that learning remains relevant and meaningful, enabling students to engage in lifelong learning. In Islamic education, the environment is categorized into three types: the family, school, and community. The family environment is referenced in QS At-Tahrim (66:6) and QS Ar-Rum (30:21). The school environment is emphasized in QS Ali Imran (3:39) and QS Al-A'raf (7:169), while the community environment is addressed in QS Ali Imran (3:104). By integrating these environments, Islamic education fosters holistic learning experiences (Batula, Abu Warasy et al., 2024).

The integration of Dewey's educational principles with Islamic education provides a dynamic framework for students' developmental potential. Dewey's emphasis on democracy, problem-solving, and experiential learning aligns closely with Qur'anic teachings, demonstrating the theoretical compatibility between progressive education and Islamic values. This synthesis highlights the

relevance of Islamic education in addressing contemporary challenges while preserving its foundational principles.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the principles of John Dewey's progressive education exhibit significant alignment with the values and practices of Islamic education, particularly in addressing the challenges of the millennial era. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating student-centered learning, fostering moral and ethical development, and adapting teaching methodologies to accommodate technological advancements and the demands of globalization. These alignments demonstrate that progressive education offers a comprehensive theoretical and practical framework for modernizing Islamic educational practices. For future applications, Islamic educational institutions are encouraged to adopt and adapt progressive educational strategies, such as active and collaborative learning models, to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability among students. Teacher training programs should prioritize innovative and contextually relevant pedagogical approaches that align with Islamic principles. This approach ensures that Islamic education remains dynamic, relevant, and capable of preparing students to navigate the complexities of contemporary society while maintaining a strong foundation in Islamic values. By effectively bridging tradition and modernity, progressive Islamic education holds significant potential to address contemporary educational challenges, contributing to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of future generations. The integration of these principles underscores the enduring relevance of Islamic education in shaping individuals who are prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving world while

upholding the ethical and moral values central to the Islamic tradition.

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