

## A Curriculum-Based Islamic Framework for Ihsān and Career Development

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### ABSTRACT

Career development within many Muslim education systems is often treated as external to the curriculum, with emphasis placed on academic certification rather than formative educational processes. Such degree-centred approaches are increasingly inadequate in contemporary contexts marked by rapid socio-economic change and ethical uncertainty. This conceptual paper proposes a curriculum-based Islamic framework for career development grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah, positioning ihsān (excellence) as the ethical core of educational formation. Drawing on Islamic epistemology and curriculum theory, the paper reframes career development as a gradual process embedded within curriculum aims rather than a post-school concern. It introduces the ISIT framework, Intention (niyyah), Skill (mahārah), Integrity (amānah), and Reliance upon Allah (tawakkul) to conceptualise how curriculum can cultivate ethically grounded, competent, and responsible learners. The paper further clarifies the complementary roles of learners, parents, communities, and divine reliance in sustaining ihsān within career development. It argues that ihsān flourishes when responsibility is properly aligned and weakens when effort, guidance, or reliance is misplaced. The framework contributes to Islamic education by offering a coherent, faith-consistent curriculum lens for understanding career development as an educational outcome.

### 1. Introduction

Across many Muslim education systems, career development is commonly understood in narrow terms, often equated with academic certification, professional status, or access to formal employment. While such outcomes are not insignificant, this credential-centred orientation has increasingly proven insufficient in addressing the ethical, social, and existential dimensions of work in contemporary societies. Rapid socio-economic change, labour market instability, and shifting skill demands have exposed the limitations of treating career as a post-school concern detached from the formative purposes of education. In this context, learners may emerge academically qualified yet morally unprepared for responsible participation in professional life.

Islamic education, however, has historically articulated a broader and more integrated vision of educational purpose. Classical and contemporary scholars have emphasized that education in

### ARTICLE INFO

#### **Article history:**

*Received: December 25, 2025*

*Revised: December 30, 2025*

*Approved: January 1, 2025*

*Published: February 28, 2026*

#### **Keywords:**

*Islamic Education; Curriculum Studies; Ihsān; Career Development; Islamic Epistemology; Ethical Formation; Tawakkul.*

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Islam is concerned not merely with knowledge acquisition, but with the formation of the whole person, encompassing intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Al-Attas, 1999; Halstead, 2004). Central to this vision is the cultivation of *adab*, understood as right action grounded in right knowledge, which frames learning as a process of becoming rather than mere credential attainment. From this perspective, curriculum is not a neutral vehicle for content delivery, but a structured means through which dispositions, values, and responsibilities are formed.

Within curriculum studies more broadly, scholars have similarly argued that curriculum reflects societal values and visions of the kind of person education seeks to produce. Curriculum theorists have long noted that educational aims extend beyond technical competence to include ethical judgment, social responsibility, and purposeful engagement with the world (Biesta, 2015; Pinar, 2012). When viewed through this lens, career development can be understood as an educational outcome shaped gradually through curricular experiences rather than as a discrete decision made at the end of schooling. This understanding resonates strongly with Islamic educational philosophy, which rejects sharp separations between learning, character, and lived practice.

A particularly significant concept within Islamic ethical thought is *ihsān*, commonly understood as excellence grounded in consciousness of Allah. *Ihsān* represents the highest level of moral orientation, guiding individuals to perform actions with sincerity, quality, and accountability, even in the absence of external supervision. Islamic scholarship has consistently emphasized that *ihsān* applies to all domains of life, including work and livelihood, thereby providing a normative standard for professional conduct and responsibility (Kamali, 2008; Al-Ghazālī, 2004). Framing career development around *ihsān* therefore shifts attention from outcomes alone to the quality of effort, intention, and conduct that underpin occupational engagement.

Closely related to this ethical orientation is the Islamic concept of *tawakkul*, or reliance upon Allah. While *tawakkul* is a foundational element of Islamic spirituality, it is frequently misunderstood in ways that undermine educational effort and professional responsibility. Classical Islamic scholars have been clear that reliance upon Allah presupposes the taking of appropriate means, warning against *tawaakul*, which denotes passivity or neglect of responsibility under the guise of faith (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995). In educational and career contexts, confusion between these concepts can discourage perseverance, planning, and skill development, thereby weakening both moral agency and professional competence.

Against this conceptual background, this paper proposes a curriculum-based Islamic framework for *ihsān* and career development. Adopting a conceptual approach grounded in Islamic epistemology and curriculum theory, the paper argues that career development should be understood as a formative educational process embedded within curriculum aims rather than as a purely economic or individual pursuit. The framework integrates four interrelated elements—Intention (*niyyah*), Skill (*mahārah*), Integrity (*amānah*), and Reliance upon Allah (*tawakkul*)—and situates them within a broader ecology of responsibility involving learners, parents, communities, and divine reliance. By doing so, the paper seeks to contribute to Islamic education scholarship by offering a coherent lens through which curriculum can intentionally cultivate ethically grounded and responsible approaches to career development.

## **2. Nature and Approach of the Paper**

This paper adopts a conceptual and normative approach to examining career development within Islamic education, rather than an empirical or evaluative design. Conceptual papers play a critical role in educational scholarship by clarifying ideas, interrogating assumptions, and proposing

frameworks that guide understanding and practice, particularly in areas where empirical research alone cannot adequately address questions of values, purpose, and meaning. In curriculum studies, such work is especially important because curriculum is inherently normative, reflecting judgments about what knowledge is valuable and what forms of human development education ought to promote (Biesta, 2015; Pinar, 2012).

Within Islamic education research, conceptual inquiry is not only appropriate but often necessary, given that foundational questions are anchored in religious epistemology, ethical principles, and interpretive engagement with primary sources. Scholars of Islamic education have consistently argued that Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings provide normative orientations for education that cannot be reduced to measurable variables without loss of meaning (Al-Attas, 1999; Halstead, 2004). Consequently, this paper does not seek to test hypotheses or evaluate instructional interventions. Instead, it aims to articulate a coherent framework grounded in Islamic sources and informed by curriculum theory, offering a lens through which career development may be understood as an educational outcome.

The conceptual analysis undertaken in this paper draws primarily on Islamic epistemological sources, including the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, and classical Islamic scholarship, alongside contemporary literature in curriculum studies and education theory. This integrative approach reflects the long-standing Islamic scholarly tradition of engaging revealed knowledge in dialogue with reasoned inquiry. By situating career development within this dual intellectual heritage, the paper responds to calls for Islamic education scholarship that is both faith-grounded and intellectually rigorous (Kamali, 2008; Sahin, 2013).

Furthermore, the paper is guided by the understanding that frameworks proposed in conceptual studies are heuristic rather than prescriptive. The ISIT framework advanced in this paper is not presented as a fixed model to be mechanically applied across contexts. Rather, it functions as an interpretive tool designed to support reflection on curriculum aims, educational responsibilities, and ethical orientation in relation to career development. This aligns with curriculum theory perspectives that emphasize deliberation, interpretation, and contextual judgment over technical rationality (Schwab, 1978; Biesta, 2010).

Finally, by explicitly framing career development as a curricular concern, the paper deliberately shifts the locus of analysis away from labour markets or vocational policy toward educational purpose and formation. This positioning allows the discussion to remain focused on how curriculum can cultivate dispositions such as effort, integrity, and responsible reliance upon Allah, which are central to *ihsān*. In doing so, the paper contributes to Islamic education literature by offering a conceptual bridge between curriculum theory and ethical career formation, while remaining attentive to the limits of conceptual work and the need for future empirical and context-specific studies.

### **3. Conceptual and Theoretical Anchors**

The conceptual framework advanced in this paper is grounded in an Islamic understanding of knowledge, human purpose, and moral responsibility. Islamic epistemology does not treat knowledge as value-neutral or detached from lived practice; rather, it situates knowledge within a moral universe in which learning is oriented toward right action and accountability before Allah. The Qur'anic command to read in the name of Allah establishes knowledge as an act that is simultaneously intellectual and ethical, binding understanding to responsibility. Islamic scholars have long emphasized that the ultimate purpose of education is not the accumulation of

information, but the formation of persons who act rightly in accordance with divine guidance (Al-Attas, 1999; Al-Ghazālī, 2004).

Central to this epistemological orientation is the concept of *adab*, which refers to proper conduct grounded in proper knowledge. Al-Attas (1999) argues that the loss of *adab* represents a fundamental educational crisis, as it results in knowledge being pursued without moral direction. From a curriculum perspective, this implies that educational aims must explicitly address not only what learners know, but how they are disposed to act upon that knowledge. Career development, when viewed through this lens, cannot be separated from ethical formation, because the manner in which one seeks livelihood, exercises skill, and relates to others is inseparable from one's moral orientation.

In parallel, contemporary curriculum theory has increasingly emphasized that curriculum is inherently normative, reflecting judgments about what education is for and what kinds of persons societies seek to cultivate. Biesta (2015) identifies qualification, socialisation, and subjectification as key functions of education, highlighting that schooling always involves value-laden decisions about human formation. Similarly, Pinar (2012) underscores that curriculum is a moral and political text, shaping identities and futures rather than merely transmitting content. These insights align closely with Islamic educational thought, which has historically viewed curriculum as a means of shaping character, responsibility, and social contribution.

Within this combined Islamic and curriculum-theoretical framework, the concept of *ihsān* emerges as a critical anchor. *Ihsān*, commonly understood as excellence performed with awareness of Allah, represents the highest level of moral consciousness in Islamic ethics. Classical Islamic sources emphasize that *ihsān* extends beyond acts of worship to encompass all human actions, including work and livelihood. Al-Ghazālī (2004) situates *ihsān* within a broader ethical project aimed at disciplining the self and refining conduct, while contemporary scholars highlight its relevance to professional ethics and social responsibility (Kamali, 2008). As such, *ihsān* provides a normative standard against which career-related attitudes and practices can be evaluated.

Another essential conceptual anchor is the Islamic understanding of human agency in relation to divine reliance. The concept of *tawakkul* affirms trust in Allah while simultaneously affirming human responsibility to take appropriate means. Islamic scholars have consistently warned against *tawaakul*, which involves abandoning effort under the pretext of reliance upon Allah (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995). This distinction has direct implications for education and career development, as it shapes learners' attitudes toward effort, planning, resilience, and accountability. When curriculum fails to address this balance explicitly, learners may internalize distorted understandings of responsibility that undermine both excellence and ethical agency.

Taken together, these conceptual and theoretical anchors situate career development within a broader framework of moral formation, curriculum purpose, and Islamic ethical thought. They provide the intellectual foundation for the ISIT framework proposed later in this paper and justify treating career development as an educational outcome shaped by curriculum aims rather than as a purely economic or individual concern. By drawing on both Islamic epistemology and curriculum theory, the paper positions itself at the intersection of faith-based educational philosophy and contemporary discussions on the purposes of education.

#### **4. Curriculum as Formation in Islamic Education**

Within Islamic educational thought, curriculum is not merely a structured sequence of subjects or learning activities; rather, it represents an intentional process of formation aimed at shaping the learner's understanding, conduct, and orientation toward life. Classical Islamic

scholarship has consistently viewed education as a means of cultivating balanced individuals who are intellectually competent, morally grounded, and socially responsible. This holistic orientation implies that the curriculum must attend to the development of dispositions, values, and habits alongside knowledge and skills (Al-Attas, 1999; Halstead, 2004).

From this perspective, curriculum functions as a formative space in which learners gradually acquire ways of thinking, acting, and relating to the world. Islamic education has historically emphasized that learning should lead to responsible action (*'amal*) and upright character (*akhlaq*), rather than remaining at the level of abstract understanding. Al-Ghazālī (2004) underscores that knowledge divorced from ethical practice becomes a source of harm rather than benefit, reinforcing the view that curriculum must integrate moral purpose with intellectual development. When applied to career development, this insight suggests that preparation for work and livelihood cannot be postponed until after schooling, but must be embedded within the formative aims of education itself.

Contemporary curriculum theory supports this understanding by highlighting that curriculum inevitably communicates values and expectations about what constitutes worthwhile knowledge and desirable forms of human development. Biesta (2015) argues that education always involves choices about qualification, socialisation, and subjectification, meaning that curriculum shapes not only what learners can do, but who they become. Similarly, Pinar (2012) maintains that curriculum should be understood as a moral and autobiographical project through which learners make sense of their place in the world. These perspectives resonate strongly with Islamic educational philosophy, which has long rejected purely technical or instrumental views of schooling.

Within Islamic education, therefore, curriculum can be understood as a deliberate means of cultivating dispositions such as perseverance, responsibility, honesty, and service—qualities that are directly relevant to career development. When curriculum foregrounds these dispositions, it prepares learners to approach work not merely as a means of income, but as a domain of ethical engagement and contribution to society. Conversely, when curriculum is reduced to examination performance or credential accumulation, learners may struggle to translate academic success into meaningful and responsible career pathways.

Moreover, a curriculum-as-formation perspective aligns with Islamic teachings that emphasize gradual development and sustained effort. The Qur'anic emphasis on striving (*sa'y*) and accountability suggests that human development unfolds over time through consistent action and reflection. This has important implications for how career development is conceptualized in education. Rather than being framed as a single decision point, career development emerges as a cumulative outcome of educational experiences that shape learners' attitudes toward effort, excellence, and responsibility (Kamali, 2008).

In this light, treating career development as a curricular concern is neither an external imposition nor a departure from Islamic educational principles. Instead, it represents a continuation of the Islamic commitment to forming individuals who are capable of navigating worldly responsibilities while remaining ethically anchored. By situating career development within the formative aims of curriculum, Islamic education can respond more effectively to contemporary challenges without compromising its foundational values. This understanding provides a crucial bridge between the theoretical anchors discussed earlier and the ethical concept of *ihsān*, which will be examined in the following section.

## **5. Work, Vocation, and Seeking Allah's Bounty**

Islamic teachings present work and livelihood not as peripheral concerns, but as integral components of a meaningful and responsible life. The Qur'an consistently affirms the legitimacy and necessity of engaging in productive activity, explicitly linking worship with worldly effort. One of the most frequently cited verses in this regard instructs believers that once prayer is concluded, they should disperse through the land and seek the bounty of Allah (Qur'an 62:10). This directive establishes a clear relationship between spiritual devotion and economic engagement, rejecting any notion that faith requires withdrawal from worldly responsibilities.

Within Islamic thought, work is therefore understood as a form of moral action through which individuals fulfill their responsibilities to themselves, their families, and society. Classical scholars emphasized that seeking lawful provision (*rizq halal*) is itself an act of worship when undertaken with sincerity and ethical conduct. Al-Ghazālī (2004) notes that earning a livelihood through permissible means safeguards dignity and prevents dependence, while also enabling individuals to contribute to the welfare of others. This understanding positions career development not merely as a personal aspiration, but as a social and moral obligation shaped by educational formation.

The concept of vocation in Islam further reinforces this orientation. Rather than emphasizing occupational prestige, Islamic teachings prioritize usefulness, fairness, and social benefit. The Qur'an highlights human diversity in abilities and roles as part of divine wisdom, suggesting that variation in work and contribution is natural and purposeful (Qur'an 43:32). This perspective encourages an educational approach that values diverse forms of work, provided they are carried out with integrity and excellence. Consequently, curriculum that prepares learners for career development must move beyond narrow hierarchies of success and instead cultivate respect for ethical contribution across occupations.

Contemporary scholars of Islamic ethics have argued that this holistic understanding of work has significant implications for education. Kamali (2008) observes that Islamic ethical frameworks place strong emphasis on responsibility, trust, and public interest, all of which are relevant to professional conduct. When education neglects these dimensions, learners may approach careers in purely instrumental terms, prioritizing personal gain over ethical considerations. By contrast, curriculum that integrates moral purpose with preparation for work can help learners internalize a sense of vocation grounded in service and accountability.

Importantly, Islamic teachings also caution against both excessive attachment to worldly success and disengagement from effort. The balance between striving and humility is maintained through recognition that while human beings are commanded to work, ultimate provision rests with Allah. This balance prevents arrogance arising from success and despair arising from difficulty. As such, education that frames career development within this theological understanding equips learners with resilience and ethical clarity in the face of uncertainty.

Taken together, Islamic perspectives on work and vocation reinforce the argument that career development is inseparable from educational formation. Work is not simply a destination reached after schooling, but a continuation of the values, dispositions, and responsibilities cultivated through curriculum. This understanding prepares the ground for examining *ihsān* as the ethical principle that governs how work is performed and how careers are pursued, which is the focus of the next section.

## **6. *Ihsān* as the Ethical Core of Career Development**

At the heart of Islamic moral and educational thought lies the concept of *ihsān*, which represents the highest level of ethical and spiritual orientation. *Ihsān* is commonly defined as

excellence performed with consciousness of Allah, as articulated in the well-known Prophetic tradition describing *ihsān* as worshipping Allah as though one sees Him, and, if not, knowing that He sees all actions. This understanding establishes *ihsān* as an internal moral compass that guides behaviour even in the absence of external supervision. Within educational contexts, *ihsān* therefore functions as a principle that shapes how learners approach effort, responsibility, and quality in all domains of life, including career development (Al-Ghazālī, 2004; Kamali, 2008).

Unlike approaches to career development that emphasize outcomes such as income, status, or advancement, an *ihsān*-oriented perspective focuses on the quality of action and intention underlying professional engagement. Islamic scholarship has consistently emphasized that actions derive their moral worth from both intention (*niyyah*) and execution, suggesting that excellence is not accidental but cultivated through disciplined practice and ethical awareness. Al-Ghazālī (2004) argues that *ihsān* involves refining both the inner state of the individual and the outward performance of actions, thereby integrating character formation with practical competence. When applied to career development, this view reframes success as the ability to perform work conscientiously, competently, and responsibly, regardless of occupation.

The relevance of *ihsān* to work is further reinforced by Prophetic teachings that explicitly connect excellence to everyday tasks. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized that Allah loves excellence in all actions, indicating that ethical quality is not limited to acts of worship but extends to ordinary forms of labour and service. Contemporary scholars of Islamic ethics have interpreted this guidance as a call for professional integrity, diligence, and accountability across all sectors of work (Kamali, 2008). From a curriculum perspective, this implies that education should intentionally cultivate habits of precision, perseverance, and ethical self-regulation, rather than leaving these qualities to be developed incidentally.

*Ihsān* also serves an important regulatory function in contexts where external monitoring is limited or ineffective. Modern professional environments often involve autonomous decision-making, complex ethical dilemmas, and pressures that reward expediency over integrity. In such settings, reliance solely on rules or enforcement mechanisms may be insufficient. *Ihsān*, by contrast, operates as an internalized standard that motivates individuals to uphold ethical conduct even when compromise might go unnoticed. Educational processes that nurture *ihsān* therefore contribute to the development of morally resilient professionals capable of navigating ambiguity without sacrificing principles (Sahin, 2013).

Furthermore, framing career development around *ihsān* addresses a common tension between material success and moral accountability. Islamic teachings do not condemn the pursuit of worldly provision; rather, they insist that such pursuits be governed by ethical restraint and social responsibility. *Ihsān* ensures that ambition is tempered by humility and service, preventing career aspirations from devolving into self-centered competition. As such, *ihsān* aligns closely with the Islamic vision of balanced human development, in which professional competence and moral character reinforce rather than undermine one another.

In curricular terms, positioning *ihsān* as the ethical core of career development strengthens the argument that career readiness is not merely a technical outcome but a moral one. When curriculum explicitly recognizes *ihsān* as a guiding principle, it creates space for learners to reflect on why and how they work, not only on what they aim to achieve. This conceptual grounding prepares the way for examining how reliance upon Allah is properly understood and practiced in relation to effort and responsibility, which is the focus of the next section.

## 7. Tawakkul and Tawaakul in Educational and Career Decision-Making

The Islamic concept of tawakkul occupies a central place in discussions of faith, effort, and responsibility, yet it is frequently misunderstood in educational and career contexts. Tawakkul refers to conscious reliance upon Allah after taking appropriate and responsible means. It affirms trust in divine wisdom while simultaneously affirming human agency and accountability. Islamic scholars have consistently emphasized that tawakkul does not negate effort; rather, it presupposes it. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ clarified this balance succinctly through the instruction to tie one's camel and then trust in Allah, establishing a normative relationship between preparation and reliance (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995; Kamali, 2008).

In contrast, tawaakul represents a distorted understanding of reliance, characterized by passivity, neglect of effort, or avoidance of responsibility under the guise of faith. Classical Islamic scholarship has been explicit in rejecting tawaakul, warning that it undermines both ethical agency and divine trust. Ibn Taymiyyah (1995) argues that abandoning effort contradicts the Qur'anic emphasis on striving and accountability, rendering claims of reliance hollow. Within educational contexts, such misunderstandings can discourage perseverance, planning, and skill development, thereby weakening learners' capacity to engage responsibly with career preparation.

The distinction between tawakkul and tawaakul is particularly significant in career decision-making, where uncertainty, competition, and delayed outcomes are common. Learners may be tempted either to over-rely on personal effort, leading to anxiety and arrogance, or to disengage from preparation altogether, expecting outcomes without sufficient work. Islamic teachings reject both extremes. Proper tawakkul provides psychological balance by encouraging sustained effort while relieving individuals of the illusion of total control. This balance is essential for developing resilience in the face of academic and professional setbacks.

From a curriculum perspective, failure to address this distinction explicitly may result in learners internalizing conflicting messages about effort and faith. When curriculum emphasizes achievement without ethical grounding, learners may equate success solely with personal competence. Conversely, when religious discourse is detached from educational practice, learners may struggle to translate faith commitments into disciplined action. Integrating a sound understanding of tawakkul within curriculum aims helps learners reconcile faith with effort, ensuring that reliance upon Allah complements rather than replaces preparation (Sahin, 2013).

Moreover, tawakkul plays an important role in shaping ethical decision-making in professional life. Career paths often involve choices that require patience, delayed gratification, and moral courage. Tawakkul supports ethical consistency by anchoring decision-making in trust that ethical conduct will not ultimately result in loss, even when immediate outcomes appear uncertain. This orientation reinforces *ihsān* by motivating individuals to uphold integrity despite pressure to compromise.

In this sense, tawakkul functions not as a passive stance, but as an active ethical posture that sustains effort, humility, and perseverance. When properly understood and cultivated through the curriculum, tawakkul strengthens learners' capacity to navigate career development responsibly, without succumbing to fatalism or excessive self-reliance. This understanding provides a crucial conceptual bridge to the framework proposed in the following section, which integrates intention, skill, integrity, and reliance into a coherent curriculum lens for *ihsān*-oriented career development.

## 8. The ISIT Framework as a Curriculum Lens

Building on the preceding discussion, this paper proposes the ISIT framework as a conceptual lens through which curriculum can be understood as a formative space for *ihsān*-oriented career development. The framework integrates four interrelated elements, Intention (*niyyah*), Skill (*mahārah*), Integrity (*amānah*), and Reliance upon Allah (*tawakkul*), each of which is deeply rooted in Islamic ethical thought and educational philosophy. Rather than functioning as a checklist or instructional sequence, the ISIT framework offers a way of interpreting curriculum aims and learning experiences in relation to the moral and professional formation of learners.

Intention (*niyyah*) occupies a foundational position within the framework, reflecting the Islamic principle that actions derive their moral value from the purposes that motivate them. Islamic scholarship has consistently emphasized that intention shapes not only spiritual merit but also ethical orientation in worldly affairs (Al-Ghazālī, 2004). Within a curriculum context, this implies that education should create opportunities for learners to reflect on the purposes of learning and work, encouraging them to connect personal aspirations with service, responsibility, and lawful provision. When intention is neglected, career development risks becoming narrowly self-serving, detached from broader ethical commitments.

Skill (*mahārah*) represents the practical dimension of the framework and reflects the Islamic affirmation of competence and excellence in action. The Qur'anic description of the ideal worker as both capable and trustworthy underscores the importance of skill alongside moral character (Qur'an 28:26). From a curriculum perspective, this element highlights the necessity of sustained effort, discipline, and continuous improvement. Islamic ethics does not endorse reliance upon intention alone; rather, it demands that sincerity be accompanied by competence. A curriculum that fails to cultivate skill undermines *ihsān* by encouraging reliance on aspiration without preparation.

Integrity (*amānah*) forms the ethical backbone of the framework, emphasizing trustworthiness, accountability, and moral consistency. *Amānah* is a recurring theme in Islamic teachings, encompassing both personal conduct and social responsibility. Scholars have noted that *amānah* is essential for maintaining social trust and preventing harm in professional contexts (Kamali, 2008). When embedded within curriculum aims, integrity shapes how learners understand success, guiding them to value ethical consistency over short-term gain. This element also reinforces the idea that career development is inseparable from moral accountability.

Reliance upon Allah (*tawakkul*), the final element of the framework, situates human effort within a theological understanding of provision and outcome. As discussed earlier, *tawakkul* affirms trust in Allah after sincere effort has been exerted, protecting learners from both despair and arrogance. Within the ISIT framework, *tawakkul* functions as a stabilizing element that sustains motivation and ethical resolve, particularly in uncertain or challenging career pathways. Educational processes that cultivate *tawakkul* help learners interpret success and failure in ways that reinforce perseverance and humility (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995; Sahin, 2013).

Crucially, the ISIT framework emphasizes the interdependence of its elements. Intention without skill leads to ineffectiveness, skill without integrity risks harm, integrity without reliance may foster anxiety, and reliance without effort collapses into passivity. From a curriculum standpoint, this interdependence reinforces the need for balanced educational aims that address cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously. The framework therefore, aligns with curriculum theories that emphasize holistic formation rather than fragmented learning outcomes (Biesta, 2015; Pinar, 2012).

By functioning as a curriculum lens, the ISIT framework enables educators and policymakers to reflect on how learning experiences contribute to long-term career formation grounded in *ihsān*. It does not prescribe specific content or pedagogical strategies, but instead offers a conceptual structure for evaluating whether the curriculum supports the development of ethically grounded, competent, and resilient individuals. This framing prepares the ground for examining how responsibility for nurturing *ihsān* is distributed among learners, families, communities, and divine reliance, which is the focus of the following section.

### **9. Role Alignment in Nurturing *Ihsān***

The cultivation of *ihsān* in career development does not occur in isolation; rather, it emerges through the alignment of responsibilities across multiple actors within the educational ecosystem. Islamic educational thought has consistently emphasized that moral and professional formation is a shared responsibility involving the individual learner, the family, the community, and reliance upon Allah. When these roles are clearly understood and properly aligned, they reinforce one another. Conversely, when responsibilities are misplaced or neglected, the development of *ihsān* is undermined.

At the level of the individual learner, responsibility centers on intention, effort, and ethical self-regulation. Islamic teachings affirm that individuals are accountable for their choices and striving, as reflected in the Qur'anic assertion that human beings will only attain what they strive for (Qur'an 53:39). Within a curriculum context, learners are not passive recipients of instruction but active participants in their own formation. Educational processes that encourage reflection, perseverance, and self-discipline support learners in internalizing responsibility for their development. Without this personal engagement, curriculum aims related to *ihsān* and career formation remain abstract ideals rather than lived dispositions (Al-Ghazālī, 2004).

Parents occupy a formative role in shaping values, expectations, and attitudes toward work long before formal career decisions are made. Islamic scholarship places strong emphasis on parental responsibility for moral upbringing, recognizing the family as the first educational environment. Halstead (2004) notes that Islamic education extends beyond formal schooling to include the transmission of values and norms within the family. When parental guidance emphasizes integrity, lawful provision, and service, it reinforces curricular efforts to cultivate *ihsān*. However, when parental expectations prioritize status or material success without ethical grounding, learners may experience tension between educational values and familial pressures.

The broader community, including educational institutions and social structures, also plays a crucial role in sustaining *ihsān*. Islamic teachings emphasize collective responsibility (*fard kifāyah*) and the importance of just systems that reward honesty, competence, and effort. Kamali (2008) argues that ethical conduct is difficult to sustain in environments that normalize injustice or corruption. From a curriculum perspective, this highlights the importance of aligning educational messages with societal practices. When learners observe consistency between what is taught and what is valued in society, *ihsān* is reinforced; when inconsistency prevails, moral dissonance may emerge.

Finally, reliance upon Allah provides the spiritual foundation that integrates and sustains these human roles. *Tawakkul* does not replace effort, guidance, or social responsibility; rather, it situates them within a broader theological understanding of provision and outcome. By acknowledging divine sovereignty, learners and educators alike are reminded that success is not solely the product of personal or institutional control. This recognition fosters humility, resilience,

and ethical steadiness, particularly in the face of uncertainty or delayed outcomes (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995; Sahin, 2013).

When these roles are properly aligned, they create a supportive environment in which *ihsān* can flourish. Learners strive with sincerity, families reinforce ethical values, communities uphold just practices, and reliance upon Allah sustains moral resolve. When alignment is absent, however, responsibility may be displaced, learners may expect outcomes without effort, parents may externalize moral formation to schools, communities may reward expediency over integrity, or faith may be invoked to excuse inaction. Recognizing and addressing these misalignments is therefore essential for understanding how curriculum can meaningfully contribute to *ihsān*-oriented career development.

This analysis of role alignment sets the stage for considering the broader educational implications of the framework, particularly how curriculum can intentionally support ethical career guidance in Muslim contexts. The following section turns to these implications, highlighting the practical relevance of the conceptual framework without departing from its theoretical orientation.

## **10. Curriculum Implications for Career Guidance in Muslim Contexts**

Understanding career development as a curricular outcome rather than a post-school concern carries important implications for career guidance within Muslim education systems. When curriculum is viewed as a formative process, career guidance is no longer confined to isolated counseling sessions or final-year interventions. Instead, it becomes embedded within educational aims, learning experiences, and institutional values that shape how learners understand work, responsibility, and success over time. This perspective aligns with Islamic educational philosophy, which emphasizes gradual formation and the integration of values into everyday practice (Al-Attas, 1999; Halstead, 2004).

From a curriculum standpoint, career guidance informed by *ihsān* requires a shift away from narrow, outcome-driven models that prioritize immediate employability or status attainment. While practical considerations remain important, curriculum guided by *ihsān* foregrounds ethical purpose, responsibility, and service as central considerations in career decision-making. This does not diminish the importance of competence; rather, it situates skill development within a broader moral framework that encourages learners to pursue careers aligned with lawful provision and social benefit. Such an approach resonates with Islamic ethical teachings that link work to accountability and contribution rather than mere personal advancement (Kamali, 2008).

Moreover, embedding career guidance within curriculum supports coherence between educational messages and learners' lived experiences. When values such as integrity, perseverance, and reliance upon Allah are consistently reinforced across subjects, activities, and institutional culture, learners are more likely to internalize these dispositions. Biesta (2015) argues that education gains meaning when learners can relate curricular experiences to questions of purpose and identity. In Muslim contexts, this includes helping learners connect faith commitments with realistic pathways for participation in economic and social life.

Curriculum-based career guidance also helps address common tensions between aspiration and limitation. Learners frequently encounter constraints related to academic performance, economic resources, or social expectations. An *ihsān*-oriented approach encourages learners to approach such constraints with effort, reflection, and ethical clarity rather than frustration or disengagement. By emphasizing intention, effort, and trust in Allah alongside planning and skill development, curriculum can foster resilience and adaptability without promoting fatalism or undue anxiety (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995; Sahin, 2013).

Importantly, this perspective has implications for how educational institutions understand their responsibilities. Schools and universities operating within Muslim contexts are not merely providers of credentials but formative environments that shape learners' orientations toward work and society. When curriculum explicitly acknowledges this role, institutions are better positioned to support learners in navigating complex career landscapes while remaining ethically grounded. This requires consistency between institutional practices and educational values, as discrepancies can undermine the credibility of curricular messages related to *ihsān* and responsibility (Pinar, 2012).

Taken together, these implications suggest that effective career guidance in Muslim contexts depends less on isolated interventions and more on coherent curricular vision. By integrating *ihsān*, effort, integrity, and reliance upon Allah into curriculum aims, Islamic education can provide learners with a stable ethical foundation for career development that remains relevant across changing contexts. This analysis leads naturally to a broader discussion of the contributions and boundaries of the proposed framework, which is addressed in the following section.

### **11. Discussion: Contributions, Transferability, and Boundaries of the Framework**

The curriculum-based Islamic framework for *ihsān* and career development proposed in this paper contributes to Islamic education scholarship in several important ways. First, it offers a conceptual reframing of career development as an educational outcome shaped by curriculum aims rather than as a post-school or purely economic concern. This reframing responds to longstanding critiques within curriculum theory that caution against instrumental views of education that prioritize measurable outputs over formative purposes (Biesta, 2015; Pinar, 2012). By situating career development within the moral and ethical aims of education, the framework aligns career guidance with the broader objectives of Islamic education.

Second, the framework contributes conceptually by foregrounding *ihsān* as a unifying ethical principle that integrates intention, effort, competence, and responsibility. While *ihsān* has been widely discussed within Islamic ethics and spirituality, its explicit articulation as a guiding principle for curriculum-oriented career development remains limited in the literature. By linking *ihsān* to curriculum formation and professional orientation, the paper extends existing discussions of Islamic moral education into the domain of career development in a manner that remains faithful to Islamic epistemology (Al-Ghazālī, 2004; Kamali, 2008).

A further contribution lies in the clarification of *tawakkul* within educational discourse. Misinterpretations of reliance upon Allah can undermine educational effort and professional responsibility, particularly when *tawakkul* is mistaken for faith. By explicitly distinguishing these concepts and situating *tawakkul* within a curriculum framework, the paper addresses a recurring tension in Muslim educational contexts and provides conceptual tools for reconciling faith with disciplined action (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995; Sahin, 2013). This clarification has practical relevance for educators and policymakers seeking to promote resilience, perseverance, and ethical agency among learners.

In terms of transferability, the framework is intentionally designed to be adaptable across diverse Muslim educational contexts. Because it does not prescribe specific content, pedagogies, or assessment strategies, it can be interpreted and applied within varying institutional, cultural, and socio-economic settings. The ISIT framework functions as a heuristic that supports reflection on curriculum aims and educational responsibilities rather than as a uniform model for implementation. This openness enhances its relevance across different levels of education and across both formal and informal learning environments (Schwab, 1978).

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the boundaries of the framework. As a conceptual paper, this study does not provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the framework in practice. Nor does it address subject-specific pedagogical strategies or institutional constraints that may influence curriculum implementation. These limitations are not shortcomings but reflect the intended scope of conceptual scholarship, which aims to clarify ideas and propose directions for further inquiry rather than to offer definitive solutions (Biesta, 2010). Future research could build on this framework through empirical studies, policy analysis, or subject-based applications within specific educational contexts.

Additionally, while the framework is grounded in Islamic epistemology, its application requires careful contextualization to avoid superficial adoption. Educational systems operate within complex social, economic, and political environments, and curriculum reform cannot occur in isolation from these realities. As Pinar (2012) cautions, curriculum frameworks must be engaged thoughtfully, with attention to local meanings and institutional cultures. Recognizing these boundaries strengthens the credibility of the framework and underscores the need for reflective, context-sensitive application.

Overall, the discussion highlights that the proposed framework does not seek to replace existing career guidance practices but to enrich them by grounding career development within a coherent Islamic curriculum philosophy. By articulating clear contributions, acknowledging transferability, and recognizing limitations, the paper positions itself as a constructive contribution to ongoing conversations in Islamic education and curriculum studies.

## **12. Conclusion**

This paper set out to reconceptualise career development within Islamic education by situating it firmly within the formative purposes of curriculum. In contrast to approaches that treat career as a post-school outcome or a purely economic pursuit, the paper argued that career development should be understood as a gradual educational process shaped by curriculum aims, ethical orientation, and sustained formation. Grounded in Islamic epistemology and informed by curriculum theory, the proposed framework positions *ihsān* as the ethical core that unifies intention, competence, integrity, and reliance upon Allah.

By drawing on Qur'anic principles, Prophetic guidance, and classical Islamic scholarship, the paper demonstrated that Islamic teachings offer a coherent and balanced understanding of work, effort, and reliance. The clarification of *tawakkul* and its distinction from *tawaakul* was shown to be particularly significant for educational and career contexts, where misunderstandings can either undermine effort or foster undue anxiety. When properly understood, *tawakkul* supports disciplined striving while anchoring outcomes in trust in Allah, thereby reinforcing resilience and ethical consistency.

The ISIT framework was advanced as a conceptual curriculum lens rather than a prescriptive model. By integrating Intention (*niyyah*), Skill (*mahārah*), Integrity (*amānah*), and Reliance upon Allah (*tawakkul*), the framework offers a structured way of reflecting on how curriculum can intentionally contribute to *ihsān*-oriented career development. The analysis further highlighted that the cultivation of *ihsān* depends on the alignment of responsibilities among learners, parents, communities, and spiritual reliance, emphasizing that moral and professional formation is a shared endeavor.

In articulating curriculum implications and acknowledging the framework's boundaries, the paper underscored the value of conceptual scholarship in Islamic education. Rather than offering immediate technical solutions, the framework provides a principled foundation for reflection,

dialogue, and future inquiry. It invites educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers to reconsider how educational purposes are defined and how career development is implicitly shaped through curriculum choices.

Ultimately, this paper contributes to Islamic education scholarship by offering a faith-consistent, curriculum-based understanding of career development that foregrounds ethical formation alongside competence and effort. By framing career as a domain of *ihsān*, the framework affirms that meaningful and responsible engagement in work is not separate from Islamic educational aims but is one of their most important expressions in contemporary life.

Conflict of interest: No conflict of interest declared

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