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Coping with AI: Islamic Principles for New Education Policy

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the landscape of higher education by influencing how knowledge is produced, transmitted, and evaluated. While AI promises efficiency and personalisation, it also generates ethical dilemmas related to privacy, autonomy, bias, and accountability. These concerns become more profound when considered through an Islamic lens that connects knowledge to morality, faith, and social responsibility. This policy brief develops an Islamic framework for coping with the challenges of AI in education policy by drawing on the higher objectives of Islamic law (Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah). The discussion revisits classical jurisprudential tools—maṣlaḥa (public welfare), qiyās (analogy), istihsān (juristic preference), and sadd al-dharaʿi (prevention of harm)—to reinterpret responsible innovation for the digital era. It argues that the integration of AI into education policy must preserve justice, compassion, and human dignity while advancing inclusive learning. The proposed framework highlights the potential of Islamic ethics to enrich global AI discourse by embedding spiritual accountability within educational governance.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Islamic Values; Education Policy; Ethics; Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah

1. INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of artificial intelligence technologies represents one of the most transformative forces of the twenty-first century. From adaptive learning platforms to automated grading and predictive analytics, AI now shapes decision-making in universities, ministries, and classrooms alike. Proponents view AI as a catalyst for innovation and inclusion, capable of addressing disparities in access and learning outcomes. Yet, the same systems also introduce new ethical risks—algorithmic bias, loss of privacy, and the reduction of education to measurable data [1,2]. As Chaudhary [3] notes, every technological wave compels societies to re-examine their moral assumptions and redefine what counts as progress.

For Muslim-majority societies, this challenge intersects with deeper questions of epistemology and faith. Knowledge in Islam is never value-neutral; it is tied to ʿilm nāfiʿ—beneficial knowledge that cultivates both intellect and virtue. The Qurʾān affirms this link between learning and moral consciousness: "Only those who have knowledge truly fear Allah" (35:28). Hence, education policy in the age of AI cannot be confined to technical performance but must ensure that innovation aligns with justice (ʿadl), mercy (raḥma), and stewardship (khilāfah). When technology undermines human dignity or widens inequity, it contradicts the very purposes (maqāṣid) that Islamic law seeks to protect.

Existing ethical frameworks for AI governance—such as those proposed by UNESCO [4] and the OECD [5] - offer valuable global principles including fairness, transparency, and human-centred design. However, they are predominantly rooted in secular humanism and seldom incorporate

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spiritual accountability. As Al-Jayyousi [6] observes, sustainability and innovation must be guided by moral purpose if they are to promote holistic development. Within Islamic scholarship, ethics emerges not from social consensus alone but from divine revelation, forming a moral compass that balances public interest (maṣlaḥa ʿāmmah) with individual rights (ḥuqūq al-ʿibād).

This policy brief argues that coping with AI requires re-centring education policy around Islamic principles that sustain the balance between technological progress and ethical integrity. It aims to review global and Islamic perspectives on AI ethics in higher education; explain how Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah can guide policy design for responsible AI adoption; and propose a framework for integrating these values into educational governance and curriculum reform.

1.1 Global AI Ethics in Education

The integration of AI into higher education has been driven by the promise of improving learning quality, efficiency, and access. AI-powered systems are increasingly used for student assessment, personalised learning paths, and curriculum analytics [7]. It is argued that artificial intelligence (AI) technology promotes lifelong learning, inclusive, and equitable quality Islamic education [8], students' progress [2], and educational assessment [1,9]. However, this optimism has been tempered by rising awareness of the risks AI poses—such as algorithmic bias, opaque decision-making, and privacy violations [1].

Global institutions have responded by proposing ethical frameworks. UNESCO [4] emphasises inclusivity, human rights, and transparency in the design and deployment of AI tools in education. Similarly, the OECD [5] recommends that educational technologies uphold fairness, privacy, and accountability, advocating what it calls "human-centred AI". These global frameworks, while valuable, rest primarily on secular humanist assumptions that prioritise autonomy and equality without necessarily addressing metaphysical or spiritual values. As a result, the ethical discourse on AI in education remains dominated by Western philosophies that separate moral reasoning from faith traditions.

1.2 Islamic Perspectives on AI and Education

Islamic scholarship has long viewed knowledge as a sacred trust (amānah) that binds moral responsibility to intellectual pursuit. In this view, technology must serve the public good and support the higher purposes (maqāṣid) of Shariah—namely the preservation of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth. Abdallah [10] argued that information and communication technologies should be governed by ethical norms derived from divine accountability, not only by social convention. This perspective places moral responsibility on the user and designer to ensure that technology upholds justice and human dignity.

In recent years, scholars have begun to explore AI through this moral framework. Alam, et al. [8] and Bukhori and Sain [9] highlight that AI can enrich Islamic education by enabling tailored instruction and global access to learning resources. Yet, they caution that uncritical adoption may perpetuate materialist worldviews detached from spirituality. Raquib et al. [11] similarly stress the need to embed maqāṣid-based ethics within AI governance to prevent injustice and safeguard human agency.

At the policy level, several Muslim-majority countries have taken steps toward aligning AI strategies with religious and cultural values. The UAE's AI Ethics Guidelines (2022) and Saudi Arabia's National Strategy for Data and AI (2020) both integrate principles of fairness, transparency, and privacy informed by Shariah. Gorian and Osman [12] note that these frameworks represent early attempts to localise AI ethics and resist uncritical imitation of Western paradigms. Such examples demonstrate that the Islamic world is not rejecting AI innovation but seeking to infuse it with moral and spiritual depth.

1.3 Identified Gaps in Scholarship

Despite growing interest, three key gaps persist in the existing literature on AI and Islamic education. First, AI ethics discussions remain largely technical and procedural, overlooking theological and moral dimensions [13]. Second, few models explicitly apply Islamic jurisprudential reasoning—such as qiyās (analogy) or istihsān (juristic preference)—to AI policymaking [14]. Third, little guidance exists for how universities and ministries of education can operationalise Islamic ethical principles within digital governance or curriculum design [15].

These gaps highlight the need for a more integrated model that merges Islamic jurisprudence, educational policy, and technological ethics. The present policy brief contributes to filling this void by framing AI ethics through Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah—a holistic system that connects moral purpose with practical governance.

2. ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW AND ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 The Concept of Knowledge and Moral Purpose

Islamic epistemology views knowledge as a pathway to moral transformation, not merely a tool for economic gain. The Qurʾān and Sunnah repeatedly link learning with taqwā (God-consciousness), suggesting that education must cultivate ethical awareness and compassion. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught that "the best among you are those who learn and teach knowledge," implying that teaching is both an intellectual and spiritual act. Al-Jayyousi [16] explains that in Islam, sustainability, knowledge, and morality are inseparable; technological advancement must always contribute to the wellbeing of people and the planet.

Within this worldview, AI becomes not only a tool but a test of stewardship (khilāfah). When used responsibly, AI can promote inclusion, equity, and efficiency. When misused, it can perpetuate injustice, marginalisation, or moral detachment. Education policy thus needs to establish safeguards that ensure AI advances maṣlaḥa (public welfare) and avoids mafsada (harm).

2.2 Uṣūl al-Fiqh as a Framework for Emerging Technologies

Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) offers a dynamic ethical methodology that allows for continuous reinterpretation of principles in new contexts. The field of uṣūl al-fiqh—the principles of jurisprudence—provides several tools that are directly relevant to AI governance. Kamali outlines key mechanisms such as qiyās (analogy), istihsān (juristic preference), istishāb (presumption of continuity), maṣlaḥa (public interest), and sadd al-dharā'i (blocking the means to harm). These tools ensure that decisions are both context-sensitive and morally anchored [18].

For example, maṣlaḥa demands that AI be employed in ways that enhance social justice and access to education, while sadd al-dharā'i cautions against technologies that enable discrimination or unethical surveillance. Together, these principles provide policymakers with a moral compass that blends flexibility with accountability.

2.3 Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah and the Ethics of Technology

The maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, or higher objectives of Islamic law, provide an overarching ethical framework for evaluating emerging technologies. Classical scholars like al-Ghazālī and al-Shāṭibī identified five universal purposes: preservation of religion (dīn), life (nafs), intellect (ʿaql), lineage (nasl), and property (māl). Contemporary scholars have extended these to include justice, dignity, and the environment. Elmahjub [17] emphasizes that maqāṣid-based reasoning allows Islamic ethics to respond to modern challenges without abandoning divine intent.

In the context of AI, these objectives imply specific obligations:

- Protecting faith and moral integrity by ensuring that technology strengthens, not undermines, ethical consciousness.
- Preserving human life and dignity through transparency, fairness, and non-discrimination.
- Safeguarding intellect by using AI to enhance critical thinking rather than replace human judgment.
- Securing property and economic equity through responsible data governance and equitable access to technology.

Hence, maqāṣid-based ethics present AI as a trust that must be used to advance human flourishing under divine guidance.

3. FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 Guiding Principles for Islamic Higher Education

Developing an ethical response to AI requires revisiting the philosophical foundations of Islamic education. The aim of learning is not only to acquire information but to nurture moral responsibility and societal wellbeing. Islamic thought envisions education as a process that harmonizes the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of the human being (insān kāmil). Consequently, educational policy in the era of AI must integrate ethical formation (tarbiyyah) with technological literacy.

Building on the principles derived from Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah, four interrelated values underpin a responsible approach to AI in Islamic higher education:

1. Responsibility (amānah) – Using AI as a trust that supports collective welfare and moral accountability.
2. Justice (ʿadl) – Ensuring fairness, transparency, and equitable access to AI technologies.
3. Compassion (raḥma) – Prioritizing human dignity and empathy in the design and application of AI tools.
4. Pursuit of Knowledge (ṭalab al-ʿilm) – Promoting curiosity, critical inquiry, and lifelong learning guided by ethical reflection.

These principles align closely with Qurʾānic ethics and form the moral architecture for educational innovation. They also provide the foundation for the framework illustrated in Figure 1, which captures the integration of moral and intellectual virtues necessary for ethical AI adoption in higher education. The figure conceptualizes four interconnected principles—responsibility, justice, compassion, and pursuit of knowledge—as the foundation for AI ethics in Islamic higher education. Together they form a holistic model where ethical consciousness and technological innovation reinforce one another.

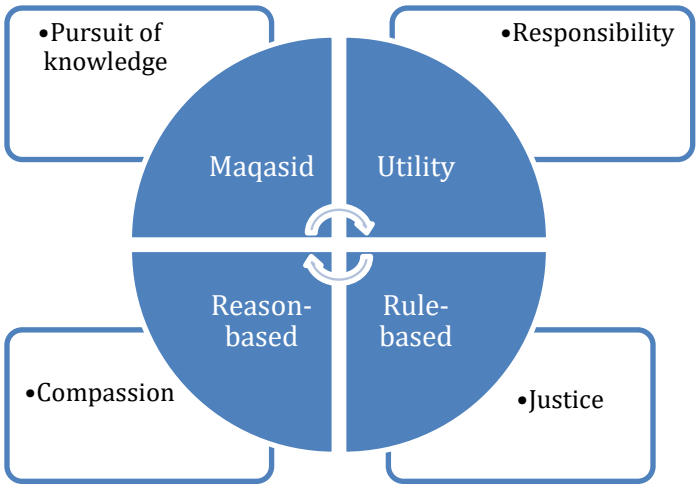

Figure 1. The key Islamic principles that underpin ethical AI in higher education.

3.2 Comparing Western and Islamic Ethical Paradigms

To understand the distinctiveness of Islamic ethical reasoning, it is useful to compare it with dominant Western AI ethics frameworks. While both traditions emphasize fairness, transparency, and accountability, their moral foundations differ significantly. Western frameworks are generally grounded in secular rationalism or utilitarianism, where the focus is on consequences and rights. Islamic ethics, however, derive from divine revelation, seeking harmony between worldly benefit and spiritual accountability [6].

The comparison in Table 1 highlights how these paradigms diverge in their treatment of justice, privacy, and the purpose of knowledge. The maqāṣid-based model goes beyond procedural fairness to affirm moral obligations rooted in faith and the collective good (maṣlaḥa).

Table 1 Comparison between Western and Islamic AI Ethics Frameworks

Ethical Dimension	Western AI Ethics	Islamic AI Ethics (Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah Approach)	Implication for Education Policy
Moral Foundation	Human autonomy and secular rationalism	Divine accountability and stewardship (khilāfah)	Policies should align AI use with ethical duty and spiritual growth
Justice and Fairness	Equality through procedural rules	Justice (ʿadl) as a divine command promoting social balance	Prioritise equity and protection from bias in algorithms
Privacy and Dignity	Legal protection of personal data	Privacy (ḥurma) as a sacred right and ethical obligation	Embed respect for dignity and consent in data governance
Purpose of Knowledge	Innovation and economic advancement	Knowledge (ʿilm) as a moral trust serving truth and virtue	Design curricula integrating ethics with AI literacy
Public Good	Utility and efficiency	Maṣlaḥa ʿāmmah—collective welfare guided by revelation	Assess educational technologies based on social and moral benefit
Human–Machine Relationship	Human-centred design	Technology as a servant to human intellect and faith	Ensure AI enhances, not replaces, moral reasoning

3.3 Operationalizing the Framework

To implement this ethical framework in practice, higher education institutions and policymakers can act on three interlinked levels:

1. Curricular Integration:
   AI ethics must be embedded across engineering, education, and humanities curricula. Courses should incorporate Islamic ethical reasoning alongside technical knowledge. This integration fosters critical reflection among students and prepares them to design and use technology responsibly.
2. Institutional Governance:
   Universities should establish ethics committees and data governance boards that align with Islamic principles of justice and transparency. Decision-making concerning AI tools—such as automated grading systems or learning analytics—should be guided by maqāṣid-based evaluation.
3. Community and Research Networks:
   Collaborative platforms involving scholars of Shariah, engineers, and policymakers are essential to advance interdisciplinary AI ethics research. Such networks can develop guidelines that contextualize global best practices within Islamic values, ensuring that moral reflection evolves alongside technological advancement.

When these elements work in synergy, Islamic higher education can lead the global discourse on responsible AI, offering a model that integrates faith, ethics, and innovation rather than treating them as separate domains.

4. POLICY DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Rethinking Educational Policy in the AI Era

Education policy must evolve to accommodate the transformative potential of AI while maintaining humanistic and spiritual dimensions. The Qurʾānic vision of knowledge situates learning as both a right and a moral duty. Consequently, AI should be used to support inclusion, creativity, and intellectual humility rather than to impose standardization. Sardar [19] argues that pluralistic futures require ethical frameworks that reflect civilizational diversity. Islamic education policy, therefore, has the opportunity to enrich global AI discourse by offering a spiritually anchored alternative that values balance (mīzān) over domination.

4.2 Ethical Governance and Social Justice

Ethical AI governance in education involves balancing innovation with protection against harm. As [17] explains, Islamic ethics emphasize the prevention of harm (dafʿ al-ḍarar) and the promotion of good (jalb al-manfaʿa). Policymakers should ensure that AI adoption addresses social inequities rather than deepening them. This includes equitable access to digital infrastructure, transparent algorithms, and fair opportunities for underrepresented groups.

Education ministries and accreditation agencies in Muslim countries can institutionalize maqāṣid-based standards in evaluating AI policies. Such measures align with the principle of ʿadl (justice) and reflect the moral responsibility (amānah) entrusted to educational leaders.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Artificial intelligence represents both a challenge and an opportunity for education systems across the Muslim world. While it offers new possibilities for access, personalisation, and efficiency, it also raises moral concerns about autonomy, surveillance, and justice. Coping with AI, therefore, requires more than technological adaptation; it calls for a renewal of ethical consciousness grounded in Islamic principles.

This policy brief has argued that Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah provides a comprehensive framework to navigate these complexities. The five universal objectives—preservation of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and property—offer timeless guidance for ensuring that innovation remains aligned with the divine purpose of education. By integrating values such as ʿadl (justice), amānah (responsibility), raḥma (compassion), and ʿilm (pursuit of knowledge), educational policy can respond to AI's disruptions while protecting human dignity and social harmony.

The comparative analysis of Western and Islamic ethical frameworks demonstrates that Islamic education policy brings a distinctive moral lens to AI governance. It situates technological advancement within a spiritual and communal context, reaffirming humanity's role as steward (khalīfah) rather than mere consumer. This perspective is not only relevant for Muslim societies but also contributes to global efforts to develop pluralistic, value-sensitive AI ethics.

Based on the discussion presented, several recommendations are proposed:

1. Integrate Islamic Ethics into Curriculum Design:
   Universities and teacher training institutions should include courses on AI ethics from an Islamic perspective, combining technical skills with moral reasoning and jurisprudential reflection.
2. Develop Institutional Frameworks for Ethical AI:
   Higher education institutions should establish Shariah-informed ethical review boards to guide the adoption of AI systems, focusing on privacy, fairness, and social welfare.
3. Foster Interdisciplinary Research Networks:
   Collaborative projects between Islamic scholars, engineers, and educators can produce guidelines for responsible AI consistent with maqāṣid al-sharīʿah and local educational needs.
4. Promote AI Literacy for Policymakers:
   Ministries of education should build capacity among policymakers to understand the ethical implications of AI and to formulate contextually relevant regulatory frameworks.
5. Encourage Global Dialogue:
   Muslim scholars and institutions should engage with international organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD to contribute Islamic perspectives to the global conversation on AI and ethics.

In summary, coping with AI from an Islamic perspective is not about rejecting technology but about reorienting its purpose. Education policy must ensure that AI remains a servant of human virtue, not a master of human destiny. Through ethical governance grounded in Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah, higher education can nurture a generation of learners who are both technologically competent and morally conscious, capable of shaping a future that reflects justice, compassion, and balance.

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