



Integrating Prophetic Metaphors into the Development of Islamic Education Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how prophetic metaphors derived from the sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) can inform the development of Islamic education curriculum. These metaphors reflect both conceptual and spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning, offering culturally and theologically grounded insights for curriculum design. Using a qualitative approach and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the study analyzed selected hadiths related to education. Identified metaphors were categorized into transmissive, constructivist, and moral-spiritual orientations, and interpreted for their curricular implications. Findings reveal that prophetic metaphors frame teaching and learning through vivid imagery such as teaching as nurturing, learning as a journey, teaching as reflection, and learning as inner struggle. These metaphors embody values central to Islamic educational philosophy, including compassion, critical thinking, lifelong learning, and God-consciousness. Integrating such insights can enrich curriculum development by aligning pedagogical approaches with Islamic ethical and epistemological foundations. Although limited to textual analysis, this study offers a foundation for further exploration of how prophetic metaphors might inform instructional practices in contemporary Islamic education. Future research may apply these insights in school or university settings to assess their impact on learners. By bridging classical Islamic sources with contemporary educational theory, this study contributes to the discourse on faith-integrated pedagogy and curriculum development. It presents an original framework that supports the creation of spiritually rooted, learner-centered curricula designed to cultivate both knowledge and character in alignment with prophetic guidance.

KEYWORDS

Prophetic tradition; metaphor; Islamic education; curriculum development; pedagogy; Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

INTRODUCTION

Metaphor functions as a powerful linguistic and cognitive tool that plays a pivotal role in shaping the teaching and learning experience. It has been identified as a framework for conceptualizing pedagogical processes (Sun, 2019), a medium for interpreting feedback (Jensen et al., 2021), and a reflection of educators' and learners' beliefs (Kahriman et al., 2024). Although often operating below the level of conscious awareness (Steen, 2011), metaphors profoundly influence how individuals understand and engage with educational concepts. Metaphors help articulate abstract ideas—such as teaching and learning—through more tangible, concrete expressions, thereby enhancing comprehension and shaping behavior (Thibodeau et al., 2019). Given the inherent complexity of educational processes, metaphors are indispensable in fostering meaningful dialogue and understanding (Martin Hard et al., 2021). Illustrative examples such as viewing a school as a “garden” or alternatively as a “prison” demonstrate how metaphorical framing can significantly influence pedagogical attitudes and classroom practices (Lynch & Fisher-Ari, 2017).

The abstract notion of teaching is often conceptualized by pre-service teachers as the mere transmission of knowledge (Morrison & Jacobsen, 2023). Within this framework, teaching is perceived as a unidirectional process wherein information flows from teacher to student (Kahriman et al., 2024). While this traditional metaphor of teaching-as-transmission has long been embedded in educational discourse, some scholars contend that it may no longer suffice in fostering the kind of learner empowerment required in the 21st century. Contemporary pedagogical perspectives increasingly advocate for a more dynamic metaphor—teaching as the co-construction of knowledge. This paradigm emphasizes collaborative engagement, where learners actively participate in meaning-making through social interaction and joint intellectual efforts. Such an approach resonates with Vygotskian theory, which posits that learning emerges initially through social interaction before being internalized at the individual level (Marginson & Dang, 2017; Walqui, 2006). The true development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual (Servant-Miklos & and Noordegraaf-Eelens, 2021). This perspective underscores the importance of cultivating interactive learning environments that promote reciprocal dialogue between teachers and students, as well as among peers, to facilitate deeper cognitive development.

Exploring metaphors in prophetic traditions is vital, as hadiths—Islam's second key source—offer implicit insights into teaching and learning. Metaphor analysis helps uncover and articulate these tacit educational concepts. (Kahriman et al., 2024). Teaching is a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be fully captured by a single metaphor (Panayiotou et al., 2021). Within educational contexts, metaphors serve as potent tools for articulating underlying beliefs about teaching and learning (Mao et al., 2022). Furthermore, both theoretical discourse and empirical studies underscore the significance of metaphors as essential cognitive and communicative instruments in meaning-making processes (Tao et al., 2024).

Prior research has consistently identified a range of metaphors related to teaching and learning. In the broader context of learning, common metaphors include learning as acquisition, knowledge creation, and participatory engagement (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). Conceptual metaphors shape how teachers and students behave and interact, as metaphors go beyond rhetoric—they deeply influence cognition and perception (Fan, 2018). Teachers who view teaching as transmission tend to use didactic methods, while those who see it as co-construction promote active participation, dialogue, and collaborative learning.

A substantial body of literature has explored metaphors related to teaching and learning across diverse educational contexts e.g., (Blau et al., 2018; Liao & Li, 2023; Neuman & Guterman, 2022; Paavola et al., 2004; Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Wegner et al., 2020). Within pedagogical discourse, metaphors serve as powerful tools for articulating implicit beliefs and assumptions about educational practices and conceptualizations (Wegner et al., 2020). Despite the extensive scholarship in this area, research focusing specifically on metaphors of teaching and learning within the realm of Islamic education—particularly those embedded in the prophetic traditions (hadiths)—remains relatively underexplored (El-Sharif, 2018; Salman & Al- Azzawi, 2021). Investigating such metaphors is not only academically enriching but also spiritually significant, as it provides insight into pedagogical concepts rooted in one of Islam’s primary sources of guidance. For Muslims, following the Sunnah is central to religious and moral life. Understanding educational metaphors in hadiths can reveal pedagogical principles rooted in Islamic epistemology and values. (Kodir, 2023).

Teaching has been conceptualized through metaphors like transmission, persuasion, and nurturing, while learning is framed as acquisition, growth, or construction. Traditional views often use metaphors like “spoon feeding” and “regurgitation,” suggesting passive learning. (Liao & Li, 2023). In contrast, constructivist perspectives align more closely with metaphors of “construction” and “growth,” emphasizing active engagement and personal meaning-making in the learning process (Zajda, 2021). In the context of higher education, (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001) identified a diverse range of metaphors reflecting educators' beliefs about their roles, including facilitator, mentor, coach, tour guide, social worker, performer, lamplighter, and team leader. These metaphors highlight the multifaceted nature of teaching in university settings, where instructors often navigate a spectrum of roles to support student learning and development.

Although well-studied in Western pedagogy, metaphors drawn from Islamic sources—particularly the prophetic traditions (hadiths)—remain significantly underexplored. These traditions, however, contain a rich tapestry of pedagogical expressions that are deeply rooted in the values, epistemology, and ethical principles of Islam. While scholars have analyzed metaphors of teaching and learning in various secular and religious contexts, few have systematically examined how the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) employed metaphorical language and strategies in his educational engagements. This gap is especially important within the field of Islamic education, which increasingly seeks to align curriculum design with both

contemporary pedagogical theory and classical Islamic heritage.

Bridging this gap, the present study focuses on the prophetic traditions as a valuable source of metaphorical insight into teaching and learning. By applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), it aims to uncover how metaphors embedded in hadiths can inform curriculum development in Islamic educational contexts. This inquiry not only contributes to the theoretical discourse on metaphor and pedagogy but also provides culturally grounded frameworks for faith-integrated curriculum design. In doing so, it advances the conversation from general metaphor theory toward a more contextualized understanding of metaphor in Islamic educational thought and practice.

Based on the gaps identified in previous scholarship, this study aims to explore how prophetic metaphors embedded in hadith can inform the development of Islamic education curriculum. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions:

1. What conceptual metaphors of teaching and learning are embedded in selected prophetic traditions (hadiths)?
2. How do these metaphors reflect and support the pedagogical principles and values of Islamic education?
3. In what ways can these metaphors be integrated into curriculum development to align educational practices with Islamic epistemology and ethics?

Despite growing interest in metaphor analysis within education studies, little attention has been given to how prophetic traditions—particularly hadiths—can contribute to educational theory and curriculum development. Prior studies have either focused on secular metaphor frameworks or treated religious metaphors as peripheral, without examining their potential for informing structured learning design. This oversight is especially significant in the context of Islamic education, where instructional content, pedagogy, and ethical formation are intimately tied to religious texts. This study addresses this gap by exploring metaphors in hadiths that relate to teaching and learning, with the goal of informing curriculum development in the field of Islamic education. Specifically, the focus is on curriculum for Islamic education courses (*Pendidikan Agama Islam / PAI*) at both school and university levels, rather than on the broader national curriculum or traditional Islamic boarding school models. These curricular frameworks aim to cultivate Islamic knowledge, ethical character, and spiritual consciousness in learners, and are therefore well-positioned to benefit from insights rooted in prophetic pedagogy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining metaphor

Metaphor has been defined by numerous scholars as a cognitive-linguistic tool that enables the expression of abstract or complex ideas through more concrete and familiar concepts (Jin, 2024; Steen, 2011). From a cognitive semantic perspective, metaphor is understood as “a cross-domain mapping that is pervasive in our thought and reflected in our daily use of language” (Carino, 2025). In the context of education, metaphor describes as the act of seeing, describing,

or interpreting unfamiliar educational phenomena, events, or actions in terms of more familiar ones—for example, portraying teachers as guides or learning as an uphill battle (Csorba, 2015). Metaphors may take various forms, ranging from single lexical items to more extended expressions such as idioms, collocations, proverbs, allegories, or even entire imaginative texts (Cserép, 2008).

Metaphors play a crucial role in human cognition and communication by simplifying complex experiences and making them more accessible (Martin Hard et al., 2021; Thibodeau et al., 2019). They serve as interpretive frameworks that shape how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences (Pejić Bach et al., 2024). Because metaphors draw from domains that are familiar to the speaker and listener, they enhance comprehension and communicative efficiency, often carrying persuasive power (Thibodeau et al., 2019). For instance, in political discourse, metaphors such as “our own home” may be employed to encourage affiliation with a particular political party, mapping the comfort and familiarity of domestic space onto the abstract concept of political identity (Taylor, 2021). In educational settings, metaphors such as “teaching as knowledge transmission” similarly influence pedagogical roles—positioning teachers as the primary sources of knowledge and students as passive recipients.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The release of *Metaphors We Live By* represented a major turning point in the emergence of CMT, which has since had a significant impact on research in fields such as linguistics, politics, and education (Steen, 2011). Rather than viewing metaphors as mere rhetorical flourishes, CMT highlights their role as fundamental cognitive instruments that shape human perception, reasoning, and lived experience (Forceville, 2009). This framework situates metaphor within the domain of core cognitive processes, thereby emphasizing its centrality to human thought (Phyo et al., 2023). A conceptual metaphor, in this view, involves making sense of an abstract domain through the lens of a more concrete one (Kövecses, 2017).

In CMT, metaphors involve mappings between a source domain—often concrete and familiar—and a target domain that is abstract or complex (Thibodeau et al., 2019). For instance, in political discourse, the metaphor “*draining the swamp*” utilizes *swamp* (source domain) to conceptualize the *U.S. government* (target domain), framing the latter as corrupt or entangled. The selection of source domains typically relies on culturally salient concepts familiar to the audience, which may vary across socio-cultural contexts, though some conceptual mappings appear to be cross-culturally pervasive (Thibodeau et al., 2019; Yu & Huang, 2019). Metaphors emerge from diverse sources such as media discourse, educational experiences, and personal interpretation (Kövecses, 2017). Drawing on this premise, the current study investigates the metaphors of teaching and learning embedded in selected hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), with attention to both their thematic content and the pedagogical techniques they convey. One illustrative example involves a well-known narration in which the Prophet directs a Muslim to repeat his prayer several times due to its initial invalidity. This instance suggests an underlying metaphor of learning as a process of repeated practice. In

parallel, it also reveals a metaphor for teaching as the facilitation of guided repetition, where the teacher supports learners in attaining proficiency through iterative engagement.

While CMT has been widely applied in secular educational and linguistic research, its application in religious and faith-based educational contexts remains limited (Al-Zair, 2024; Walshe, 2020; Zhang, 2021). This study adapts CMT by situating metaphor analysis within the ethical, epistemological, and spiritual dimensions of Islamic education. Unlike secular metaphor analysis that focuses primarily on cognition and discourse, this study critically engages with metaphors in hadith to reveal their pedagogical significance in nurturing spiritual awareness, moral responsibility, and divine consciousness. Thus, CMT is not used merely as a tool to identify metaphorical mappings, but as an interpretive lens to examine how prophetic metaphors transmit not only knowledge, but also values, character, and religious intentionality. This adaptation enables a richer understanding of how metaphors function within Islamic educational discourse and how they can inform faith-integrated curriculum development

Metaphors about teaching and learning from Western perspective

A broad spectrum of metaphors has been employed within Western educational traditions to conceptualize the processes of teaching and learning, encompassing both transmissive and constructivist orientations. These metaphorical frameworks often reveal the underlying pedagogical beliefs that shape instructional approaches. A comprehensive review of studies investigating such metaphorical conceptions was conducted, illustrating the variety and depth of metaphorical expressions used to characterize educational practice. An overview of these metaphors is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

Some previously reported metaphors for teaching and learning

Type of metaphor	Metaphor	Research studies
Epistemological metaphors	Learning as a process of receiving knowledge. Knowledge as objects Mind as a container	(Ødegaard & Myrstad, 2019; Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005)
Construction metaphors	Learning as pulling it all together. Learning as building understandings. Learner is a builder	(Sfard, 2015; Wang, 2022)
Coaching metaphors	Teacher as coach. Learner as a player	(Passmore, 2022)
Acquisition and participation metaphors	Learner as a sponge, a collector. Learner as contributor. Learner as participant	(Sfard, 2015)
Interaction, change, and persuasion metaphors	Teaching as persuasion. Learning is a process of conceptual change. Learning as growth	(Ferrari, 2018; Rossi & Macagno, 2021)
Metaphors that cite teachers and learners as artists	Learning as creative construction and personal enlightenment. Teacher as performer	(M. Tao, 2017)

Metaphorical thinking serves as a crucial cognitive tool in framing how teaching and learning are understood. By enabling novel perspectives, drawing insightful comparisons, highlighting unnamed phenomena, and enhancing clarity and engagement, metaphors contribute significantly to educational discourse (Lim et al., 2022). They function as bridges between abstract concepts and lived experiences, allowing both educators and learners to interpret and reflect on educational practices in more meaningful and relatable ways. A substantial body of research has examined metaphors related to teaching and learning (e.g., (Kosimov, 2024) revealing a spectrum of metaphorical constructs aligned with different educational paradigms.

For instance, in the context of teaching, metaphors such as *teaching as transmission*, *teaching as nurturing*, *teaching as guiding*, and *teaching as coaching* have emerged as dominant themes across various studies. These metaphors not only shape how educators perceive their roles but also inform the pedagogical strategies they employ in the classroom.

While the use of metaphors in Western educational discourse has been extensively studied, the exploration of metaphors in the context of Islamic curriculum development remains relatively limited. Recent scholarship has begun to highlight the need for integrating culturally rooted pedagogical frameworks into curriculum design—particularly within Islamic education (Adam, 2021; Harb, 2017; Lynch & Fisher-Ari, 2017). Prophetic metaphors, when systematically analyzed, offer not only linguistic richness but also deep epistemological and ethical insights that can guide the aims, content, and methods of instruction in Islamic educational settings. These metaphors, embedded in hadiths, encapsulate values such as humility, perseverance, responsibility, and divine orientation—values that are central to Islamic educational philosophy. Therefore, engaging with prophetic metaphors is not merely an interpretive endeavor but a meaningful step toward formulating curricula that harmonize religious tradition with pedagogical innovation.

Prophetic Traditions/Hadith and metaphors

Prophetic traditions, or hadiths, constitute a vital source of Islamic guidance and serve as a foundational reference for Muslims worldwide in all aspects of life. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) employed a variety of teaching strategies to convey Islamic principles, employing methods that were not only instructional but also deeply transformative. His pedagogical approaches played a pivotal role in inspiring individuals to embrace Islam during the early days of his prophethood. As noted by (Anggraeni & Ilahi, 2023), hadiths are rich with metaphorical expressions that serve various rhetorical and pedagogical purposes, including disambiguation, emotional appeal, and implicit warning. These metaphors function primarily as persuasive tools, designed to facilitate understanding of Islamic laws, rituals, and prohibitions.

One illustrative example is a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) compares life on earth to a traveler resting briefly under a tree during a long journey. This narration, reported by ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar and recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari* (No. 6416), reflects the metaphorical understanding of life as a transient phase within a much longer spiritual journey.

From the perspective of CMT, this hadith presents a mapping between the abstract domain of *life on earth* and the concrete domain of *a short rest during a journey*. The metaphor draws upon a universally relatable experience—traveling and taking rest—to communicate the transient nature of worldly life. The underlying message is one of preparation: just as a traveler prepares for the next leg of a long journey, humans are urged to prepare for the hereafter. The final destination, whether paradise or hell, depends on how one utilizes their brief time on earth.

Conceptually, this hadith reflects several pedagogical metaphors: *teaching as nurturing*, *teaching as conceptual thinking*, *teaching as exemplification*, and *teaching as motivation*. The Prophet's teaching in this instance goes beyond explanation; it engages the listener emotionally and spiritually, encouraging reflection, readiness, and moral responsibility. His use of familiar imagery to explain abstract religious concepts exemplifies how effective metaphors can shape cognition and guide behavior. This aligns with (Hanic et al., 2020) assertion that “metaphors facilitate the communication of ideas and are a powerful tool allowing for the interpretation of metaphors to be used in order to gain direct insight into the participants’ thoughts and beliefs” (p. 167). Accordingly, this study seeks to further explore and analyze selected prophetic traditions to uncover the metaphors of teaching and learning employed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), thereby enriching our understanding of Islamic pedagogical thought through the lens of metaphor theory.

Metaphors as Conceptual Foundations in Curriculum Design

In curriculum theory, metaphors do not merely describe content delivery but shape how learning is conceptualized and organized. For example, metaphors such as “curriculum as a journey” (Chimbi & Jita, 2021) or “teaching as storytelling” (Lynch & Fisher-Ari, 2017) reflect the underlying epistemologies and values embedded in educational design. These metaphors guide what counts as knowledge, how learning occurs, and the role of the teacher.

In the context of Islamic education, curriculum is not only a tool for knowledge transmission but a framework for ethical and spiritual development (Hashim, 2004; Al-Attas, 1991). However, theoretical engagement with Islamic curriculum has often focused on content (ta’lim) rather than pedagogical philosophy. By exploring prophetic metaphors embedded in hadith, this study offers insight into how Islamic curriculum might be reimagined to reflect epistemological values such as divine accountability, communal guidance, and moral formation. These metaphors can inform not only the content but the underlying structure, objectives, and relational dynamics within Islamic pedagogy.

METHODS

Research design

This study employed a qualitative approach to analyze the conceptual metaphors of teaching and learning embedded in selected prophetic traditions (hadiths). The objective of this study is to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret prophetic metaphors related to teaching

and learning, and to analyze their potential contribution to curriculum development in Islamic education.

Sample

The primary data consisted of ten hadiths selected from *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, which are widely recognized in Islamic scholarship for their authenticity (*ṣaḥīḥ status*). The selection process was guided by purposive sampling, focusing on hadiths that explicitly or implicitly convey educational interactions between the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions. The inclusion criteria were: i) the presence of pedagogical elements (e.g., teaching method, learner engagement, or instructional intent), ii) textual clarity enabling metaphorical interpretation based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), and iii) thematic relevance to core concepts of teaching and learning in Islamic education.

Data and Sources of Data

Data were drawn from canonical hadith collections and supported by classical hadith commentaries. Inclusion criteria included: (i) presence of pedagogical elements, (ii) textual clarity for metaphorical interpretation via CMT, and (iii) thematic relevance to Islamic education. A hadith scholar was consulted to confirm the validity and thematic suitability of each selected narration. This ensured that the chosen hadiths were not only authentic, but also pedagogically rich and contextually meaningful for the study's aims. The sample was finalized to provide a manageable yet conceptually diverse set of metaphors reflecting both teacher and learner perspectives within Islamic educational discourse.

Data Collection

Textual analysis was carried out on selected hadiths. In addition, a Focus Group Interview (FGI) involving Islamic education experts was conducted to explore the perceived relevance and applicability of the identified metaphors in curriculum development. A coding framework was developed based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), informed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The coding structure was reviewed by two experts in Islamic education and qualitative research to ensure content validity. To ensure credibility, multiple strategies were employed: expert consultation, triangulation with commentaries, and member checking with FGI participants. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the analysis process to monitor researcher interpretation.

Given the interpretive nature of this study and the religious significance of the hadith texts, we acknowledge the potential for researcher bias in metaphor identification and thematic interpretation. To address this, several strategies were employed to enhance analytical rigor and trustworthiness. First, the metaphor analysis was conducted collaboratively by the authors and subjected to iterative peer debriefing involving two Islamic education scholars not involved in the initial coding. Second, to avoid imposing modern educational assumptions on classical texts, interpretations were consistently cross-referenced with classical hadith commentaries and verified through consultation with a certified hadith expert. Finally, we maintained a reflexive stance throughout the analysis, recognizing our own positionality as Muslim educators

and scholars. This reflexivity was essential to balancing scholarly objectivity with respectful engagement with sacred texts. While interpretation remains a human endeavor, these measures were taken to mitigate subjectivity and ensure faithful representation of the pedagogical insights embedded in the hadith

Data Analysis

The analysis employed a data-driven meta-linguistic approach, which in this context refers to a grounded method of interpreting textual and verbal data by identifying metaphorical expressions without relying on pre-established coding categories. First, the hadith texts and FGI transcripts were subjected to repeated close readings to identify metaphorical language that aligns with the basic structure of conceptual metaphors—mapping abstract domains (e.g., knowledge, spiritual struggle) onto concrete domains (e.g., journey, cultivation). Explicit metaphors (e.g., direct analogies or similes) were identified through keyword-based searches, while implicit metaphors were inferred from narrative context, analogical reasoning, or pedagogical framing used in the hadiths or described by the participants. The coding process followed iterative thematic analysis, involving open coding, axial categorization of metaphor themes (e.g., nurturing, reflection, responsibility), and cross-validation through peer debriefing with two Islamic education scholars. This analytic procedure ensured that metaphor identification was systematic, interpretive, and culturally contextualized, enabling deeper insights into the pedagogical essence of the selected hadiths.

Following CMT, the analysis proceeded through several systematic stages. First, the target domains in each hadith were identified. Second, explicit metaphorical expressions were extracted directly from the text, while implicit metaphors were inferred from the narrative structure and delivery methods employed by the Prophet. Third, the metaphors were categorized into two primary domains: teaching and learning. Finally, the most prominent and recurrent metaphors were isolated and examined in detail.

Throughout the analysis, special attention was given to identifying patterns of metaphorical mapping between abstract concepts (e.g., life, knowledge, spiritual preparation) and more concrete domains (e.g., journey, construction, cultivation). Notably, many metaphorical expressions converged on the overarching theme of *life as a journey*, reinforcing the enduring influence of this conceptual frame in Islamic pedagogy.

RESULTS

The results are presented in alignment with the research questions formulated earlier. Each metaphor identified is categorized based on its pedagogical function, its conceptual basis, and its relevance to curriculum development within Islamic education. The following results are drawn from the analysis of ten hadiths identified through purposive sampling. While some of the metaphorical patterns identified echo those found in existing literature, the metaphors discussed here are based on original textual analysis of primary sources using a CMT-based coding framework

Learning Metaphors from the Texts (*Matan*) of Hadiths.

Learning as a journey

The widely cited saying “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave,” though not authenticated in major hadith collections, illustrates the metaphor *learning is a journey*. Viewed through CMT, it maps the human lifespan onto a traveler’s path, emphasizing lifelong learning as a continuous process requiring time, effort, and intellectual commitment (Xu et al., 2017). Just as travelers encounter obstacles along their path, learners must also navigate various challenges—cognitive, emotional, and contextual—which are framed as natural and integral to the process (Harris & Walling, 2017). This metaphor emphasizes lifelong learning as an enduring commitment and situates the pursuit of knowledge as a dynamic, evolving, and goal-oriented endeavor (Li, 2022).

Learning as an investment

The metaphor “*learning as an investment*” is clearly embedded in the prophetic tradition, “*Whoever follows a path in search of knowledge, Allah will make easy for him the path to Paradise*” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 2699). This hadith juxtaposes two key conceptual domains: *the path in search of knowledge* and *the path to Paradise*. Under CMT, the hadith frames learning as a spiritual investment, linking the pursuit of knowledge in this life to the reward of Paradise. It emphasizes the enduring value of learning as both a temporal effort and a path to transcendent fulfillment. (Bratianu, 2018). Thus, understanding the underlying metaphor enhances the motivational force of the hadith by framing learning as both a worldly and eternal investment (Hu, 2023).

Learning as a process of receiving knowledge

In this hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) underscores the importance of individual agency in the learning process. Learners are encouraged to take an active role by willingly attending learning forums where knowledge is acquired (Sewagegn & Diale, 2019). In Islamic thought, seeking knowledge is spiritually meaningful and divinely rewarded. Through CMT, this is framed as *learning as a divinely rewarded journey*, where each step reflects personal and spiritual growth (Choudhary & Prabha, 2023). This metaphor reinforces the notion that learning is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a moral and religious endeavor (Shekitka, 2022). As such, students are motivated to view learning as a purposeful and worthwhile commitment, one that brings both worldly and spiritual benefits.

Learning is a process of conceptual change

The hadith, “Whoever seeks knowledge that should be sought for the sake of Allah Almighty, but only to gain some worldly benefit, he will never know the fragrance of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection” (narrated by Abū Dāwūd, 3664), offers a profound ethical orientation to the pursuit of knowledge.

Contrasting with neoliberal views of learning as skill acquisition for economic gain, the prophetic tradition presents *learning as a path to divine proximity*, emphasizing education as a devotional act aimed at spiritual growth and self-betterment (Spiel et al.,

2018). Thus, learning becomes a sacred endeavor in which any knowledge that benefits the individual and contributes positively to society (Roche, 2018) is considered valuable—provided it is pursued with sincere intention for the sake of Allah. This perspective invites a reimagining of.. educational aims, prioritizing ethical and spiritual dimensions alongside intellectual growth (Moulin-Stožek, 2020).

Learning as doing

The prophetic tradition, *“Whoever calls to guidance will have a reward similar to those who follow him, without their reward being diminished in the slightest. And whoever calls to misguidance will bear a sin equivalent to those who follow him, without their sin being diminished at all,”* as narrated by Imam Muslim (Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 2674), can be understood as conveying several rich metaphorical insights into the nature of learning. These include metaphors such as *“learning is doing,” “learning is taking responsibility,”* and *“learning is the realization of what has been learned.”* Through the lens of CMT, this hadith implies that *learning is doing, learning is taking responsibility, and learning is realizing what has been learned* (Skulmowski, 2024). The hadith highlights that knowledge does not exist in isolation but must be enacted and shared, with the learner becoming an agent of either positive or negative influence (Niemelä, 2022). “Learning is doing” emphasizes that knowledge must be translated into action; “learning is taking responsibility” points to the moral accountability associated with disseminating what one knows; and “learning is realizing” underscores the idea that true learning is only complete when internalized knowledge is manifested in behavior (Driessnack et al., 2022).

Learning (good) as an ongoing inquiry

The hadith, *“The believer is never satisfied from learning good until he arrives in Paradise”* (narrated by al-Tirmidhī, 2686), metaphorically portrays *learning as a continuous and intrinsically motivating journey*. CMT frames acquiring beneficial knowledge as a lifelong psychological and spiritual journey—an endless pursuit that continues until the afterlife. The hadith portrays learning as ongoing devotion, offering intrinsic fulfillment and divine reward, with each discovery inspiring continued inquiry and engagement (Alabi, 2024). The framing of knowledge as *“something good”* emphasizes not just intellectual enrichment, but moral and spiritual elevation. In this view, the believer's learning is sustained by the understanding that every sincere effort to gain beneficial knowledge is valuable (Ben-Eliyahu, 2021) and rewarded by Allah. Thus, this hadith reinforces the idea that for a Muslim, learning is a sacred, continuous journey fueled by both curiosity and faith.

Teaching Metaphors from the Ways of the Hadiths Erected

Teaching as questioning and answering (Q&A)

The metaphor *“teaching as questioning and answering”* is clearly reflected in the pedagogical methods employed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). A common instructional strategy used by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was to initiate learning through questions posed to his companions. For example, when teaching about the virtues of charity and humility, the Prophet

once asked, “*Do you know who the bankrupt is?*” His companions replied based on their worldly understanding, saying, “*The bankrupt among us is the one who has no money or property.*” The Prophet then clarified, “*The bankrupt in my nation is the one who comes on the Day of Judgment with prayer, fasting, and charity, but also having insulted others, falsely accused, consumed wealth unjustly, shed blood, or beaten others...*” (Narrated by Muslim, No. 2581). This dialogic approach not only stimulated critical thinking but also modeled the metaphor “*teaching as reflection and guided discovery* (Ramma et al., 2020).”. His companions responded one by one, offering answers based on their understanding and reasoning. Only after listening to their responses did the Prophet provide the correct or intended answer, thereby guiding them toward deeper reflection and insight.

While not overtly metaphorical, the Prophet’s dialogic teaching reveals an implicit metaphor under CMT: *teaching as interactive inquiry*, where knowledge is co-constructed through questioning and reflection (Lumpkin, 2020). This pedagogical metaphor emphasizes that effective teaching involves not merely delivering information, but engaging learners in critical thinking through dialogic interaction (Lumpkin, 2020). The Prophet’s approach models a learner-centered methodology that fosters active participation, promotes self-reflection, and encourages the co-construction of knowledge—principles that remain relevant to contemporary educational theory and practice.

Teaching as nurturing

The metaphor “*teaching as nurturing*” can be elicited from the hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “*I am to you like a father teaching his child. When one of you goes to relieve himself, he should not face the qiblah nor turn his back to it...*” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, Hadith No. 8). The Prophet’s approach reflects the metaphor *teaching as nurturing*, portraying the teacher as a caring guide who fosters both the moral and intellectual growth of learners, much like a parent.

Under CMT, *teaching as nurturing* maps caregiving onto teaching, where the educator fosters not just knowledge acquisition but also character and ethical development. (Guo et al., 2025; Hamakali & Josua, 2023) This metaphor reinforces the idea that teaching in the prophetic tradition is holistic. It involves patience, compassion, guidance, and continuous encouragement—qualities that foster not only cognitive development but also spiritual and moral formation (Bradshaw et al., 2022; Namgung & Lee, 2024). The Prophet’s teaching method was deeply relational, emphasizing emotional bonds and a personal sense of care, which further supports the nurturing metaphor as a central feature of Islamic pedagogy.

Teaching as persuasion

The metaphor *teaching as persuasion* is reflected in the Prophet’s use of reasoning, emotional appeal, and storytelling—guiding understanding through empathy, reflection, and wisdom rather than imposition. CMT frames *teaching as persuasion* by mapping persuasion onto teaching, where the teacher acts as a guide—shaping understanding through reasoning, emotional connection, and encouragement. (Ulferts et al., 2021). This approach highlights

teaching as persuasion as a respectful, dialogic process that invites learners toward truth through compassion, clarity, and sincere engagement—reflecting the Prophet’s educational ethos (Thani et al., 2021).

Teaching as reflection together

The metaphor *“teaching as reflection together”* is vividly illustrated in an event following a battle, when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), while returning with his companions, remarked: *“Our struggle in the war against enemies is not the greater jihad. The greater jihad is to struggle with the insidious suggestions of our own soul.”* In this moment, the Prophet engaged not in direct instruction, but in collective reflection—reframing the nature of struggle and guiding his companions toward a deeper, internalized understanding of jihad.

Under CMT, the hadith maps *jihad* onto internal ethical reflection, framing *teaching as shared reflection*, where teacher and learners engage in collective moral and spiritual inquiry (Lynch & Fisher-Ari, 2017). This interaction highlights several key pedagogical functions: teaching as a dialogical act, reflection as a means of meaning-making, and collective memory as a resource for ethical transformation (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019; Omodan & Addam, 2022). By situating the reflection in a shared historical experience (post-battle), the Prophet modeled a teaching method that moves beyond transferring knowledge—it facilitates communal introspection, reminding Muslims of the continuous inner jihad required to uphold divine teachings in daily life, such as overcoming resentment, practicing patience, and forgiving others. Hence, the metaphor *“teaching as reflection together”* emphasizes the relational and introspective dimensions of prophetic pedagogy (Mujrai, 2025).

Teaching as providing best practices

The metaphor *“teaching as providing best practices”* is vividly illustrated in the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) actions, particularly in the well-known account where he regularly fed a blind Jewish man who consistently spoke ill of him. Without revealing his identity, the Prophet continued this act of kindness, modeling patience, humility, and ethical behavior. Only after the Prophet’s death did the man discover who had been feeding him, prompting reflection and transformation.

Viewed through the lens of CMT, this narrative maps the *source domain of exemplary action*—demonstrating the highest moral standard—onto the *target domain of teaching*. In this framework, the Prophet’s behavior functions as a silent but potent form of instruction. Instead of correcting the man’s misconceptions through direct argument, the Prophet used consistent, compassionate action as an educative tool—conveying that *the best teaching is often embodied rather than spoken* (Thani et al., 2021). This metaphor emphasizes that in prophetic pedagogy, *actions are lessons*, and *practice precedes preaching*. Teaching is not limited to verbal explanation or doctrinal instruction; it includes the lived example of ethical behavior that others can observe, learn from, and emulate (Biesta, 2023). Such best practices serve as enduring, persuasive models for learners, especially in contexts where resistance to verbal teaching may exist.

These metaphors—reflecting concepts such as nurturing, guidance, struggle, and communal responsibility—correspond to key dimensions of Islamic educational values and illustrate how prophetic metaphors may inform culturally grounded curriculum design. The metaphors revealed through the analysis emphasize both affective and cognitive dimensions of teaching and learning, suggesting their potential role in shaping Islamic curriculum objectives and pedagogical strategies.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a rich diversity of metaphors for teaching and learning embedded in the prophetic traditions (hadiths), both in their textual content and in the ways the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) delivered his teachings. These metaphors span across two major educational paradigms—conventional and constructivist—suggesting that the Prophet’s approach to education was holistic, flexible, and deeply attuned to the learner’s spiritual and intellectual needs. This aligns with the argument that relying exclusively on a single educational metaphor or paradigm can be limiting or even counterproductive (Lynch & Fisher-Ari, 2017). The coexistence of both paradigms in prophetic pedagogy indicates that effective teaching may require a dynamic balance between knowledge transmission and knowledge construction (Kulikovskikh et al., 2020).

From the conventional paradigm, metaphors such as *“learning is receiving knowledge”*, *“teaching is transmission”*, and *“teaching is providing best practices”* reflect structured, teacher-centered approaches where the learner is guided authoritatively. These metaphors emphasize the responsibility of the teacher to convey accurate knowledge and of the learner to accept and implement it. In Islamic pedagogy, this is consistent with the reverence for the Prophet as the teacher, whose teachings are seen as authoritative and divinely guided (Ahmed, 2019).

From a curriculum development perspective, these prophetic metaphors do more than illustrate educational interactions—they provide foundational concepts for structuring learning experiences that are spiritually, ethically, and intellectually coherent. For example, the metaphor of *“teaching as nurturing”* supports the integration of affective and moral development into curriculum objectives, while *“learning as a journey”* emphasizes the importance of lifelong, reflective engagement (Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2024). These metaphors serve as culturally embedded models for aligning pedagogical strategies with Islamic epistemological values (Zibin & Solopova, 2024). Therefore, integrating them into curriculum design can enable educators to formulate learning outcomes, instructional methods, and assessment frameworks that are not only effective but also transformative in guiding students toward holistic human development rooted in Islamic principles.

On the other hand, constructivist metaphors such as *“learning is practicing”*, *“learning is reflecting”*, *“teaching is questioning and answering”*, and *“teaching as reflection together”* highlight the importance of interaction, critical thinking, and personal engagement with knowledge (Misra & Vaishali, 2020). These metaphors reflect a dialogical and learner-centered

approach where meaning is co-constructed, and understanding is deepened through active participation. For example, the Prophet's method of asking companions questions before providing explanations encourages learners to think independently and engage cognitively before receiving clarification—an approach consistent with Vygotskian notions of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (Margolis, 2020).

A particularly distinctive dimension of the metaphors from hadiths is the integration of moral and spiritual dimensions into the educational process. Metaphors such as *"teaching is nurturing a generous soul"*, *"learning is an inner struggle"*, and *"teaching is forgiving"* emphasize that education in Islam is not merely about cognitive development but also about spiritual formation and moral excellence (*ihsān*) (Chanifah et al., 2021). This ethical-spiritual orientation is often absent in secular educational metaphors but is central to prophetic teaching, where *adab* (discipline, respect, and ethics) is as crucial as knowledge. Moreover, the use of metaphor itself is pedagogical. It provides conceptual scaffolding for abstract ideas by linking them with concrete experiences familiar to the learners. This is evident in hadiths such as *"seeking knowledge is a journey"* or *"knowledge is like rain"*, where the Prophet draws on daily life experiences (e.g., traveling, farming) to make abstract spiritual or epistemological concepts accessible (Thani et al., 2021; Zieba, 2021). Such metaphors not only facilitate understanding but also enhance retention and emotional engagement with the message.

This study also confirms that many of the metaphors identified align with those reported in previous research e.g., (Tzur & Hunt, 2022)), such as *"learning is a process of conceptual change"*, *"teaching is persuasion"*, and *"learning is building understanding."* However, what distinguishes the metaphors in prophetic traditions is their deeply ethical and theocentric foundation. Learning is not only a personal or social endeavor—it is a divine journey, an act of worship, and a moral responsibility (Kühnen, 2020; Raba' & Harzallah, 2018). Additionally, the Prophet's pedagogy underscores the importance of learner intention (*niyyah*) and sincerity (Fitri, 2021). For instance, the hadith stating that those who seek knowledge for worldly gain rather than for Allah's sake will not smell the fragrance of Paradise introduces a metaphor where *learning becomes a test of the heart's orientation*, reaffirming that intention shapes the value and outcome of the educational process. In summary, this study demonstrates that metaphors derived from prophetic traditions offer a multidimensional model of teaching and learning. They encompass cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of education, integrating both traditional/conventional and constructivist paradigms within a unified Islamic worldview. Thus, incorporating these metaphors into contemporary educational discourse can enrich teaching practice, especially in Islamic education settings, by providing meaningful frameworks rooted in cultural and religious tradition.

These metaphors are not limited to the content of Islamic lessons but offer conceptual guidance for structuring curriculum holistically. For instance, the metaphor of teaching as nurturing can inform learning outcomes focused on moral development; the metaphor of learning as a journey may shape spiral curriculum design and differentiated pacing; and the

metaphor of inner struggle can guide formative assessment practices that emphasize ethical growth over rote performance. Thus, prophetic metaphors can serve as underlying pedagogical paradigms, influencing not only what is taught (content) but how it is taught (methods), how success is defined (assessment), and what learners are expected to become (outcomes).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the conceptual metaphors of teaching and learning embedded in the prophetic traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The findings reveal a rich array of metaphors—such as *teaching as nurturing*, *learning as a journey*, and *learning as inner struggle*—that reflect both traditional and constructivist paradigms. These metaphors serve as culturally grounded and spiritually resonant frameworks that can significantly enrich Islamic curriculum development. By shifting the focus from mere transmission of knowledge to the holistic transformation of the learner, these insights support intellectual growth, moral formation, and spiritual consciousness. Furthermore, they offer practical direction for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers aiming to integrate Islamic values within contemporary educational systems. The Prophet's diverse teaching strategies—ranging from dialogic questioning and guided repetition to moral modeling—demonstrate that effective pedagogy is adaptive, relational, and ethically driven. Metaphors found in hadiths remain highly relevant today, offering timeless principles for designing value-based, learner-centered education. Future research should continue to explore metaphorical constructs from broader Islamic sources, including the Qur'an and classical scholarship, and investigate their application in teacher training, classroom practices, and curriculum innovation. These metaphors are enduring cognitive tools that bridge faith and education in meaningful ways.

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