Pedagogical Mediation of Religious Authority in Islamic Education: Supporting Learners with Diverse Epistemic Readiness in Malaysian Fiqh Classrooms

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HOW TO CITE:

Ahmad Tarmizi Muhammad Khatib, Firdaus Khairi Abdul Kadir, Hailan Salamun, Muhamad Khairul Zakaria, Ismar Liza Mahani Ismail, and Aisyah Dollah Abdullah (2026). Pedagogical Mediation of Religious Authority in Islamic Education: Supporting Learners with Diverse Epistemic Readiness in Malaysian Fiqh Classrooms. International Journal of Special Education, 41(15s), 1022-1035

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Religious education requires teachers to balance authoritative disciplinary knowledge with learners' diverse cognitive, linguistic, and epistemic readiness. Although taqlid has been extensively discussed in Islamic jurisprudence, limited empirical research has examined how religious authority is pedagogically mediated for learners with different capacities to engage with legal evidence and juristic reasoning. Objective: This study investigated how Islamic Education teachers conceptualised and adapted the pedagogical use of taqlid in Malaysian fiqh classrooms. Method: An exploratory qualitative design involved eight experienced Islamic Education teachers in Terengganu, Malaysia, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. Results: Four themes emerged: legitimate reliance under limited epistemic readiness; instructional adaptation and protection from misinterpretation; balancing stability with learner dependency; and progression towards informed religious engagement.

Teachers used recognised religious authority as an adaptive pedagogical scaffold rather than as unconditional obedience. Conclusion: Pedagogical mediation can transform reliance on religious authority into developmentally responsive support. The study proposes the Adaptive Pedagogical Mediation of Religious Authority (APMRA) as a conceptual framework integrating inclusive education, adaptive pedagogy, instructional scaffolding, and Islamic epistemology.

Keywords: adaptive pedagogy; epistemic readiness; inclusive education; Islamic education; pedagogical mediation; religious authority

1. Introduction

1.1 Inclusive Learning and Learner Diversity

Inclusive education recognises learner diversity as an ordinary feature of every classroom rather than an exception requiring separate provision. Students differ in prior knowledge, cognitive readiness, language proficiency, learning pace, motivation, sociocultural experience, and capacity to engage with disciplinary knowledge. Educational quality therefore depends not only on access to schooling but also on whether teaching enables diverse learners to participate meaningfully and achieve shared learning goals (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2014; UNESCO, 2020).

Learner diversity extends beyond formally identified disabilities or special educational needs. Differences in conceptual readiness, disciplinary literacy, information processing, self-regulation, and epistemic confidence also influence classroom participation. Inclusive pedagogy consequently shifts attention from classifying learners according to perceived deficits towards designing instruction that anticipates variability and expands learning opportunities for all students (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Universal Design for Learning and differentiated instruction support this orientation by promoting flexible representation, engagement, assessment, and instructional support while retaining common curricular expectations (CAST, 2024; Tomlinson, 2017). These approaches establish an important principle for the present study: equitable learning does not require identical teaching but appropriately calibrated pathways towards shared educational outcomes.

1.2 Religious Education as Adaptive Teaching

These principles are particularly relevant to religious education, where learners encounter theological, ethical, textual, historical, and normative knowledge. Religious learning involves more than the acquisition of information; it requires engagement with interpretive traditions, moral reasoning, communal practices, and questions of authority that may shape personal identity and social conduct (Jackson, 2014).

The challenge is especially evident in fiqh education. Islamic legal knowledge is derived through interactions among Qur'anic interpretation, Prophetic traditions, Arabic language, legal maxims, jurisprudential methodology, and accumulated scholarly reasoning. Such complexity generally exceeds the independent interpretive capacity of school-aged learners. Islamic Education teachers must therefore translate specialised knowledge into instruction that is developmentally accessible without compromising its disciplinary integrity.

This role resembles adaptive pedagogy, in which explanations, representations, sequencing, cognitive demand, and instructional support are adjusted according to learners' readiness. Within this context, *taqlid* may be interpreted educationally as legitimate reliance on recognised scholarly authority by learners who have not yet developed sufficient competence for independent legal evaluation. The important pedagogical question is therefore not simply whether learners should follow authority, but how teachers mediate that authority to promote understanding, participation, and progressive intellectual development.

1.3 Research Gap

Research on inclusive education has established the importance of differentiation, instructional flexibility, and scaffolding for diverse learners. However, these principles have rarely been applied to religious subjects characterised by specialised interpretive traditions and recognised structures of scholarly authority.

Scholarship on *taqlid* has primarily examined its legal legitimacy, relationship with *ijtihād*, and historical role within Islamic jurisprudence (Hallaq, 2009; Kamali, 2003). This literature provides an essential disciplinary foundation but generally treats *taqlid* as a legal or epistemological issue rather than as a classroom process. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how teachers translate religious authority into developmentally appropriate instruction.

Islamic education research has also examined curriculum, moral development, identity formation, teacher professionalism, and general pedagogical practice (Abdullah, 2018; Halstead, 2004; Hashim & Langgulung, 2008). Nevertheless, relatively few empirical studies explain how teachers determine the amount of guidance, evidence, comparison, or learner autonomy appropriate at different stages of fiqh learning.

A methodological gap is also evident. Much of the literature on *taqlid* remains doctrinal or philosophical, while teachers' professional reasoning in authentic classrooms remains underexplored. The present study addresses these gaps by examining *taqlid* as a process of pedagogical mediation through which recognised religious authority is adapted according to learners' epistemic readiness.

The study develops the concept of Adaptive Pedagogical Mediation of Religious Authority (APMRA) to explain how teachers regulate instructional complexity, scaffold conceptual understanding, preserve disciplinary legitimacy, and support progression from structured reliance towards informed religious engagement.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study examined how Islamic Education teachers pedagogically mediated recognised religious authority when teaching fiqh in Malaysian secondary education. It did not evaluate the jurisprudential validity of particular legal positions. Instead, it investigated how authoritative knowledge was adapted to learners' conceptual and epistemic readiness.

The study pursued three objectives:

1. To examine how Islamic Education teachers conceptualise *taqlid* as pedagogical support for learners with different levels of epistemic readiness.
2. To identify the considerations influencing teachers' mediation of religious authority, including cognitive complexity, interpretive risk, curriculum demands, and classroom context.
3. To refine a conceptual framework explaining how religious authority, instructional adaptation, scaffolding, and learner readiness interact in inclusive fiqh learning.

The study addressed the following questions:

1. How do Islamic Education teachers conceptualise the pedagogical role of religious authority for learners with different levels of epistemic readiness?
2. What considerations influence teachers' adaptation of religious authority during fiqh instruction?
3. How does pedagogical mediation support progression from structured reliance towards informed engagement with Islamic legal reasoning?

2. Conceptual Foundations of Adaptive Pedagogical Mediation in Inclusive Islamic Education

2.1 Inclusive Education and Learner Diversity

Inclusive education is grounded in accessibility, participation, equity, and recognition of learner variability. Its focus has expanded beyond the physical placement of learners with identified disabilities towards the creation of instructional environments in which all students can participate meaningfully in common learning experiences (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2014; UNESCO, 2020).

This broader understanding recognises that learners differ in cognitive development, language, prior knowledge, motivation, cultural experience, disciplinary literacy, and confidence in using specialised knowledge. These differences should not be treated as fixed deficits. Instead, they require flexible teaching that expands available learning opportunities without separating students into rigid categories (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Universal Design for Learning promotes proactive flexibility through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (CAST, 2024; Meyer et al., 2014). Differentiated

instruction similarly encourages teachers to adjust content, process, learning support, and assessment according to readiness while preserving common curricular goals (Tomlinson, 2017). Both perspectives emphasise that accessibility concerns the design of instruction rather than the reduction of educational standards.

These principles are relevant to Islamic Education because learners may share a common curriculum while differing substantially in their readiness to understand religious texts, jurisprudential concepts, scholarly disagreement, and the methodological basis of legal rulings. Inclusive religious teaching therefore requires attention not only to general learning differences but also to variation in learners' preparedness to engage with specialised religious knowledge.

2.2 Adaptive Pedagogy and Instructional Scaffolding

Adaptive pedagogy refers to the continuous alignment of instructional decisions with learners' evolving readiness and understanding. Teachers regulate explanations, representations, sequencing, feedback, cognitive demand, and opportunities for independent engagement according to learners' progress (Corno, 2008). Adaptation therefore concerns the pathway through which knowledge becomes accessible, not the dilution of disciplinary content.

Differentiated instruction operationalises this principle by allowing students to pursue shared outcomes through varying levels and forms of support (Tomlinson, 2017). Teachers may simplify language without simplifying the underlying concept, sequence evidence progressively, provide additional examples, or vary the amount of guidance required to complete a task.

Instructional scaffolding explains how such support facilitates conceptual development. Drawing upon Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, scaffolding enables learners to undertake tasks beyond their current independent capability through structured assistance. Modelling, prompting, questioning, explanation, feedback, and guided practice are gradually adjusted as competence develops (Bruner, 1986; Wood et al., 1976).

Inclusive education establishes the commitment to equitable participation. Adaptive teaching determines how instruction responds to variability. Scaffolding provides the mechanism of temporary and contingent support. Pedagogical mediation connects these educational processes with the specialised knowledge, practices, and authority structures of a particular discipline.

2.3 Religious Authority and Epistemic Readiness in Islamic Education

Islamic jurisprudence recognises that individuals differ in their capacity to derive, evaluate, and apply legal rulings. *Taqlid* conventionally refers to reliance upon qualified scholarly judgement by those who do not possess the expertise required for independent *ijtihād* (Hallaq, 2009; Kamali, 2003). In educational contexts, however, its importance extends beyond legal classification.

Recognised religious authority can function as a pedagogical resource that provides learners with epistemic orientation, conceptual stability, and protection from premature or unsupported interpretation. Teachers do not merely transmit authoritative conclusions. They determine which explanations, sources, comparisons, and forms of reasoning are appropriate for learners at particular stages of development.

This study introduces epistemic readiness to describe learners' preparedness to engage responsibly with specialised disciplinary knowledge. It includes the capacity to understand foundational concepts, interpret religious evidence, recognise the limits of one's competence, distinguish credible expertise from unsupported claims, and appreciate legitimate jurisprudential disagreement.

Epistemic readiness is related to, but distinct from, general academic ability. A learner may read fluently or perform well in other subjects but remain unprepared to evaluate hadith authenticity, reconcile apparently competing evidence, understand legal methodology, or compare juristic positions. Conversely, a learner

with limited language proficiency may still demonstrate appropriate epistemic humility and responsible reliance upon credible authority.

Digital access intensifies this educational challenge. Learners can readily encounter Qur'anic verses, hadith, legal opinions, and religious debates without understanding their contexts or methodological foundations. Physical access to information does not therefore guarantee epistemic access to disciplinary meaning. Pedagogical mediation is required to transform exposure to religious information into responsible understanding.

2.4 Adaptive Pedagogical Mediation of Religious Authority

The Adaptive Pedagogical Mediation of Religious Authority framework integrates inclusive education, adaptive pedagogy, instructional scaffolding, and Islamic epistemology. It conceptualises recognised religious authority not as the endpoint of learning but as a legitimate disciplinary resource that teachers mediate according to learners' epistemic readiness.

APMRA begins with the recognition that specialised religious knowledge cannot always be approached through immediate independent interpretation. Learners initially require credible guidance that establishes conceptual security and accurate practice. Teachers then regulate instructional complexity through explanation, sequencing, examples, questioning, comparison, and gradual exposure to evidence.

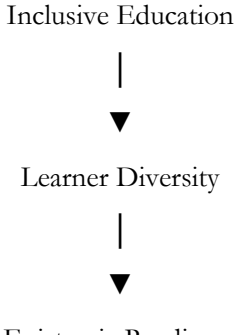
Instructional scaffolding provides the developmental mechanism within this process. Support is neither uniform nor permanently fixed. It is calibrated according to learners' progress, allowing movement from directive guidance towards increasingly informed engagement. In this sense, learner autonomy does not require the rejection of religious authority. It involves a transformed relationship with authority based on understanding, discernment, and responsible participation.

APMRA is not a jurisprudential theory determining the validity of *taqlid* or *ijtihād*. Nor is it a general theory of inclusive education detached from disciplinary context. Its novelty lies in integrating both fields to explain how authority-based knowledge can be made accessible to diverse learners while retaining its epistemic and disciplinary integrity.

Table 1. Conceptual Foundations of APMRA

Theoretical foundation	Core concept	Contribution to APMRA
Inclusive education	Learner diversity	Equitable participation in common learning
Adaptive pedagogy	Instructional adaptation	Responsive and differentiated learning pathways
Instructional scaffolding	Guided learning	Progressive conceptual development
Islamic epistemology	Recognised religious authority	Legitimate disciplinary guidance
APMRA	Theoretical integration	Inclusive and reflective religious learning

Figure 1. Conceptual Integration of APMRA



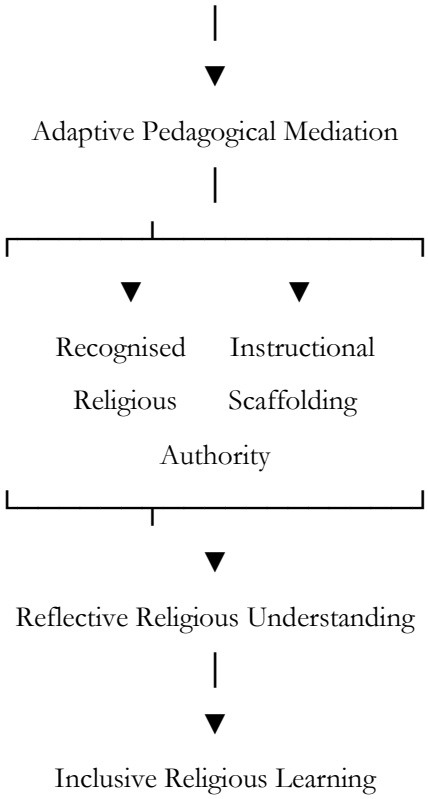


Figure 1 presents APMRA as a provisional conceptual framework. Inclusive education establishes learner diversity as the starting condition, while epistemic readiness identifies the disciplinary form of variability relevant to fiqh learning. Teachers mediate recognised religious authority through adaptive explanation and scaffolding, enabling learners to move towards reflective understanding and inclusive participation.

2.5 Conceptual Integration of APMRA

Inclusive education, adaptive pedagogy, instructional scaffolding, and Islamic jurisprudence have traditionally developed as separate bodies of scholarship. APMRA brings these perspectives together by arguing that recognised religious authority can operate as developmentally responsive instructional support when it is deliberately mediated by teachers.

The framework is provisional rather than predetermined. It offers a theoretical lens for examining how teachers assess readiness, regulate complexity, establish credible guidance, manage interpretive risk, and gradually expand learners' engagement with legal evidence. The empirical analysis therefore does not seek merely to confirm APMRA. It examines whether teachers' accounts support, modify, or extend its proposed components and relationships.

This conceptual integration guides the methodology and interpretation presented in the following sections.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm to understand how Islamic Education teachers constructed meaning, justified instructional decisions, and interpreted the pedagogical role of religious authority in authentic educational contexts. Interpretivism assumes that educational realities are socially constructed through experience, interaction, and professional reasoning rather than existing as a single objective phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

An exploratory qualitative design was used because limited empirical research has investigated the pedagogical mediation of *taqlid*. This approach enabled teachers to articulate their professional reasoning, instructional considerations, and classroom experiences in

greater depth than would be possible through predetermined quantitative measures.

The unit of analysis was teachers' pedagogical reasoning concerning how authoritative religious knowledge was adapted for learners with different levels of conceptual and epistemic readiness.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted in Terengganu, Malaysia, where Islamic Education has an established position within national and state-supported educational institutions. The state's association with the Shāfiʿī legal tradition and formal religious learning provided a relevant context for examining pedagogical engagement with recognised religious authority.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit information-rich participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Participants were required to:

1. teach fiqh or a closely related Islamic Education subject;
2. have at least five years of teaching experience;
3. have experience explaining legal rulings and religious evidence to secondary-level learners; and
4. consent to an in-depth interview.

Eight teachers with between five and fifteen years of experience participated. They represented government secondary schools and Kolej Yayasan Islam Terengganu.

Table 2. Participant Profile

Participant	Teaching experience	Institution	Subjects
P1	10 years	Secondary school	Fiqh and Qur'anic Studies
P2	8 years	Secondary school	Fiqh, Qur'anic Studies, and Tajwīd
P3	15 years	Kolej Yayasan Islam Terengganu	Fiqh and Arabic
P4	5 years	Kolej Yayasan Islam Terengganu	Fiqh
P5	14 years	Kolej Yayasan Islam Terengganu	Fiqh and Arabic
P6	7 years	Kolej Yayasan Islam Terengganu	Fiqh and Qur'anic Studies
P7	12 years	Kolej Yayasan Islam Terengganu	Fiqh
P8	15 years	Kolej Yayasan Islam Terengganu	Fiqh and Sīrah

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected between January and June 2024 through individual semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol covered four domains: understandings of *taqlid*; pedagogical reasoning concerning religious authority; adaptation according to learner readiness; and progression from guided reliance towards informed engagement with religious evidence.

Interviews lasted approximately sixty minutes and were conducted in Bahasa Melayu at participants' institutions. They were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Published quotations were translated into English while preserving their contextual and conceptual meaning.

3.4 Data Analysis

The transcripts were managed using NVivo 12 and analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis:

1. familiarisation with the data;
2. generation of initial codes;
3. construction of candidate themes;
4. review and refinement of themes;
5. definition and naming of themes; and
6. production of the analytical account.

Initial codes included learner readiness, recognised expertise, instructional clarity, interpretive risk, epistemic dependence, gradual explanation, curriculum constraints, and informed engagement. Related codes were grouped into higher-order categories and subsequently synthesised into themes.

Analysis remained primarily inductive. However, the provisional APMRA framework provided a sensitising lens for interpreting relationships among religious authority, learner readiness, instructional adaptation, and conceptual progression. Constant comparison was undertaken across participants to identify convergence, variation, and theoretically significant exceptions.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Reflexive Transparency

Credibility was strengthened through transcript verification, repeated comparison between coded extracts and complete transcripts, and iterative refinement of themes. Dependability was supported through an audit trail documenting coding decisions and theme development.

Confirmability was enhanced by distinguishing participants' accounts from the researchers' theoretical interpretations. Reflexive transparency was maintained by acknowledging the researchers' familiarity with Islamic jurisprudence and by separating classical jurisprudential concepts from empirical claims about classroom practice.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participants received written and verbal information about the study, confidentiality procedures, data use, and their right to withdraw.

Anonymised codes P1–P8 were used, and potentially identifying institutional information was removed or generalised. Audio files, transcripts, coding records, and analytical documents were stored securely and were accessible only to the research team.

4. Results

Thematic analysis generated four interrelated themes. The themes broadly corresponded with the principal components of the provisional APMRA framework while also refining its explanation of how learners progress from legitimate reliance towards informed engagement.

Table 3. Empirical Themes and APMRA Components

Theme	Principal finding	APMRA component refined
Theme 1	Legitimate reliance under limited readiness	Recognised religious authority
Theme 2	Readiness, clarity, and protection from misinterpretation	Epistemic readiness
Theme 3	Balancing stability and dependency	Adaptive pedagogical mediation
Theme 4	Progression towards informed engagement	Reflective religious understanding

4.1 Legitimate Reliance Under Limited Epistemic Readiness

Participants described *taqlid* as an appropriate pedagogical response when learners lacked sufficient disciplinary knowledge to evaluate Islamic legal evidence independently. Reliance on recognised authority was not interpreted as indiscriminate obedience but as developmentally appropriate support.

P1 explained:

"At the initial stage, students need to follow the views of teachers or recognised scholars because they do not yet possess sufficient knowledge to evaluate every piece of evidence relating to a particular religious ruling."

P4 similarly stated:

"Taqlid does not mean following any individual or group without distinction. Students need to refer to genuinely qualified individuals, such as recognised religious teachers and scholars."

Participants treated legitimate reliance as conditional upon two factors: learners' limited competence and the credibility of the authority being followed. Religious authority therefore functioned as an initial source of epistemic orientation and instructional security rather than a permanent substitute for understanding.

4.2 Learner Readiness, Instructional Clarity, and Protection from Misinterpretation

Participants reported substantial differences in learners' conceptual readiness, language proficiency, and ability to interpret legal evidence. These differences shaped decisions about explanatory complexity, sequencing, evidence, and instructional guidance.

P3 explained:

"We have to consider the students' level. Not all of them can immediately understand the evidence and the differences among scholars."

P7 highlighted the challenge created by digital information:

"Students can now find Qur'anic verses and hadith online very easily. Sometimes they see one piece of evidence and immediately assume that it gives the only correct ruling."

Learner readiness was therefore not an abstract characteristic but a practical determinant of teaching. Participants regulated cognitive complexity to prevent confusion and premature interpretation. Their accounts refine APMRA by showing that epistemic readiness includes the ability to contextualise evidence, distinguish qualified scholarship from unsupported claims, and recognise legitimate disagreement.

4.3 Balancing Instructional Stability and Learner Dependency

Participants acknowledged that recognised authority promoted clarity, consistency, and instructional stability. However, they also warned that prolonged dependence without explanation could restrict conceptual growth.

P2 stated:

"If students are only told to follow without being given any explanation, they may be able to perform the practice, but their understanding does not develop."

P5 similarly observed:

"Taqlid may be necessary at a certain stage, but if students remain dependent and are never guided to ask or understand the basis of a ruling, they become accustomed to accepting everything."

Teachers therefore distinguished temporary pedagogical dependence from permanent intellectual dependence. Authority remained educationally productive only when accompanied by increasing explanation, questioning, and understanding. This theme refines APMRA by identifying adaptive mediation as the process through which teachers balance epistemic security with conceptual progression.

4.4 Progressive Movement Towards Informed Religious Engagement

Participants described fiqh learning as a developmental process rather than an immediate transition to independent reasoning. Evidence and juristic comparison were introduced gradually according to learners' readiness.

P3 explained:

"When they understand the basic matter, we introduce the evidence little by little. We do not present everything at once because students have different levels of understanding."

P6 added:

"When they are ready, we explain why a ruling is adopted, what evidence supports it, and how scholars understand it."

Learners were not expected to function as independent jurists. Progression instead involved increasingly informed engagement with recognised authority through structured explanation, gradual exposure to evidence, and developmentally appropriate questioning. The endpoint was reflective participation within the

discipline rather than complete independence from expertise.

4.5 Synthesis of Empirical Refinements

The findings supported the principal components of the provisional APMRA framework but also produced three refinements.

First, recognised authority generated epistemic security by providing credible orientation during the early stages of learning. Second, epistemic readiness involved not only conceptual knowledge but also discernment concerning sources, expertise, interpretive limits, and legitimate disagreement. Third, autonomy in fiqh education was relational rather than absolute: learners became more reflective while continuing to recognise the role of qualified scholarship.

5. Discussion

5.1 Learner Readiness and Inclusive Education

The findings reinforce the inclusive education principle that learner variability should shape instructional planning rather than be treated as an exception (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; UNESCO, 2020). Participants did not assume that all students could engage with legal evidence, juristic disagreement, or abstract methodology at the same level. Instead, they adjusted instruction according to learners' existing understanding.

This approach reflects inclusive pedagogy because it expands access to common disciplinary knowledge without assigning learners to permanent ability categories (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Messiou, 2017). Learners received different levels of explanation and support, but the intended trajectory remained shared: accurate practice, conceptual understanding, and increasingly responsible engagement with fiqh reasoning.

The findings extend inclusive education into a disciplinary context where barriers arise partly from interpretive complexity. In fiqh learning, access cannot be defined merely as receiving the same text or explanation. Meaningful access requires support calibrated to learners' readiness to understand how religious knowledge is constituted, interpreted, and authorised.

5.2 Adaptive Pedagogy and Differentiated Instruction

Participants' practices reflected adaptive teaching as the continuous alignment of instruction with learners' development (Corno, 2008). Teachers varied the timing and complexity of evidence, explanation, comparison, and questioning while maintaining common educational goals.

This practice corresponds with differentiated instruction, which seeks equity through variation in instructional support rather than reduction of standards (Tomlinson, 2017). Participants did not simplify the intellectual integrity of fiqh. They modified the pathway through which students approached increasingly complex jurisprudential knowledge.

Their practices also correspond conceptually with UDL. Although participants did not report implementing UDL formally, they reduced learning barriers through flexible explanation, sequencing, repeated clarification, and graduated cognitive demand (CAST, 2024). The findings therefore demonstrate how adaptive and inclusive principles may be translated into subject-specific pedagogical decisions.

5.3 Pedagogical Mediation as Instructional Scaffolding

The reconceptualisation of *taqlid* as pedagogical mediation constitutes an important theoretical contribution. Participants used recognised authority as temporary and contingent support that enabled learners to participate before they possessed the competence required for more advanced reasoning.

This process resembles instructional scaffolding, in which teachers provide modelling, explanation, prompts, feedback, and structured guidance before progressively transferring greater responsibility to learners (Wood et al., 1976). It also reflects Vygotsky's (1978) view that learning develops through assisted performance within the Zone of Proximal Development and Bruner's (1986) emphasis on contingent guidance.

However, the findings modify conventional interpretations of scaffolding. In specialised authority-based disciplines, progression does not necessarily end in complete independence from expertise. Even knowledgeable learners may continue to rely on qualified scholars while developing greater capacity to evaluate reasoning and sources. Scaffolding therefore transforms the learner's relationship with authority from passive acceptance to informed and reflective reliance.

5.4 Epistemic Readiness as a New Dimension of Learner Diversity

The study extends inclusive education by proposing epistemic readiness as a distinct dimension of learner diversity. Existing literature has emphasised cognitive, physical, sensory, linguistic, behavioural, and social differences (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2014; Norwich, 2013). The present findings demonstrate that learners also differ in their preparedness to engage with the epistemic structures of specialised disciplines.

In fiqh education, epistemic readiness includes the ability to understand evidence, recognise scholarly expertise, appreciate interpretive methodology, distinguish credible sources from unsupported claims, and acknowledge legitimate disagreement. These capacities cannot be inferred solely from general intelligence, literacy, or academic performance. The concept is especially relevant in digital environments. Learners may possess immediate access to religious information without having the competence to interpret it responsibly. Inclusive religious education must therefore address not only access to information but also access to its disciplinary meaning.

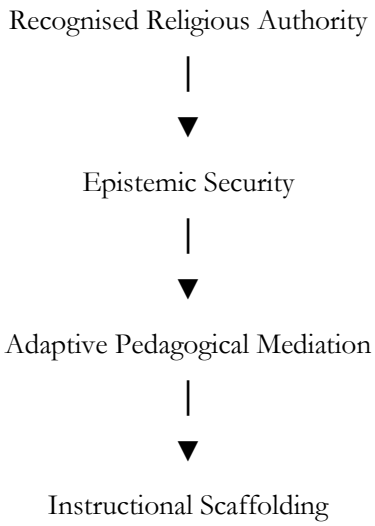
Epistemic readiness should not be treated as a fixed learner trait. It develops through participation, explanation, guided inquiry, reflection, and progressively demanding engagement. This developmental understanding prevents the concept from becoming another mechanism for categorising or excluding learners.

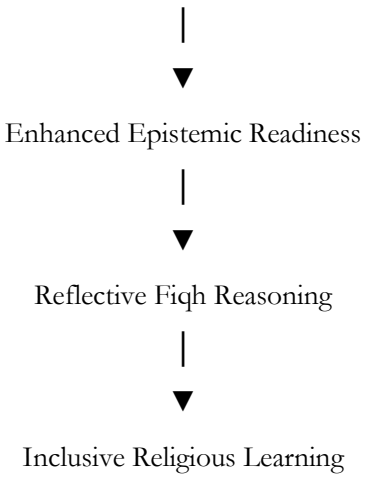
5.5 APMRA as a Middle-Range Theory

The empirical findings enable APMRA to be refined from a provisional conceptual framework into a potential middle-range theory. A middle-range theory explains a bounded class of educational phenomena through identifiable mechanisms without claiming universal applicability.

APMRA explains how recognised authority becomes educationally productive when mediated through adaptive teaching and instructional scaffolding. Its central mechanism is: recognised authority provides epistemic security; pedagogical mediation regulates instructional complexity; scaffolding develops epistemic readiness; and increased readiness enables reflective disciplinary engagement.

Figure 2. Mechanism of Adaptive Pedagogical Mediation





The framework rests on four propositions:

1. Recognised authority supports learning when learners lack the competence required for independent disciplinary judgement.
2. Authority becomes pedagogically productive only when teachers adapt its presentation to learner readiness.
3. Instructional scaffolding mediates the transition from dependent participation towards informed engagement.
4. Epistemic readiness enables reflective participation without requiring complete independence from disciplinary expertise.

APMRA is bounded by context. It is most relevant to disciplines in which knowledge depends on recognised expertise, specialised interpretive methods, and progressive apprenticeship. Beyond Islamic Education, it may offer analytical value for legal education, medical education, theological education, and other domains where learners must engage responsibly with authoritative knowledge before acquiring advanced evaluative competence.

The framework's transferability should nevertheless be treated cautiously. Its components and mechanisms require validation across educational systems, learner populations, religious traditions, and institutional contexts. APMRA should therefore be regarded as an empirically grounded middle-range proposition rather than a universally established theory.

5.6 Practical Implications

Teacher education programmes should prepare Islamic Education teachers to assess epistemic readiness, regulate instructional complexity, differentiate explanations, and scaffold engagement with religious evidence. Such preparation should combine disciplinary expertise with pedagogical knowledge.

Fiqh curricula should also be organised as a developmental continuum. Initial learning may emphasise accurate concepts and practice, followed by progressively deeper engagement with evidence, methodological reasoning, scholarly disagreement, and source evaluation.

Schools should encourage collaboration among Islamic Education teachers, special education specialists, learning-support personnel, counsellors, and curriculum leaders. This collaboration can help ensure that adaptations respond to cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and epistemic diversity without compromising disciplinary integrity.

Inclusive education policy should also recognise that learner variability extends across all curriculum domains. Subject-specific guidance is needed for disciplines in which access to knowledge depends on specialised terminology, interpretive traditions, and recognised authority.

6. Conclusion

1. Islamic Education teachers mediated recognised religious authority by adapting instructional support to learners' epistemic readiness. *Taqlid* functioned as

developmentally responsive support rather than unconditional obedience.

2. Effective fiqh instruction involved four interconnected processes: recognised religious authority, adaptive pedagogical mediation, instructional scaffolding, and reflective religious engagement.
3. The study extends inclusive education by identifying epistemic readiness as a dimension of learner diversity that shapes access to specialised disciplinary knowledge.
4. It also extends scaffolding theory by showing that autonomy in authority-based disciplines may involve progressively informed engagement with expertise rather than complete independence from it.
5. The APMRA framework explains how religious authority, epistemic security, adaptive pedagogy, scaffolding, and learner readiness interact to support inclusive fiqh learning.
6. Beyond Islamic Education, APMRA may inform the study of other specialised disciplines in which learners require mediated access to authoritative knowledge.

7. Recommendations

1. Teacher education institutions should strengthen training in adaptive pedagogy, epistemic-readiness assessment, differentiated instruction, and scaffolding within Islamic Education.
2. Curriculum developers should organise fiqh learning as a developmental continuum from foundational understanding towards informed engagement with evidence and juristic reasoning.
3. Schools should promote collaboration among Islamic Education teachers, special education specialists, learning-support personnel, counsellors, and curriculum leaders.
4. Policymakers should include subject-specific adaptive pedagogy in inclusive education policies, including guidance relevant to religious education.
5. Higher education institutions should examine the use of APMRA in teacher preparation, curriculum design, practicum experiences, and professional learning.
6. Future research should validate and refine APMRA across educational systems, learner populations, religious traditions, and authority-based disciplines using qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, longitudinal, and intervention designs.

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