Tarbawiyah : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan
(e-ISSN) 2579-325X; (p-ISSN) 2579-3241
https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/index.php/tarbawiyah/
Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan (FTIK), Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Jurai Siwo Lampung, Indonesia.

A Transformative Learning Model Prototype for Strengthening Master's Students' Academic Culture in Islamic Education

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Article Information

Article history:
Received
August 4, 2026
Revised
November 4, 2026
Accepted
November 5, 2026

Abstract

Master's programs in Islamic Education require critical reasoning, ethical writing, inquiry, and knowledge dissemination, yet these practices are not consistently embedded in everyday coursework. This article reports two components of a larger 2024 development study: an empirical needs analysis and literature-based theoretical development culminating in a transformative learning model prototype. The four-month study in the Master's Program in Islamic Education, now Universitas Islam Negeri Jurai Siwo Lampung, involved two classes with 26 students; eight coded informants were interviewed, and 22 group papers (11 per class) had similarity reports. The lead researcher's preceding two-year role as lecturer and program secretary was treated as contextual familiarity rather than an additional dataset. Needs analysis combined observation, interviews, curriculum and assignment documents, and similarity reports; prototype construction relied on focused literature synthesis. The analysis showed uneven participation, task-driven reading, no reported course-based scholarly publication, and 14 of 22 papers with similarity above 50%. Theoretical synthesis produced a six-phase prototype integrating problematization, ethical inquiry, investigation, critique, revision and dissemination, and reflective transfer. The prototype is a literature-grounded conceptual design, not evidence of effectiveness. It offers a testable framework for strengthening academic thinking, morality, and activity and should next undergo expert validation and staged field testing.

Keywords: *Academic Culture; Islamic Higher Education; Master's Students; Model Prototype; Transformative Learning*.

How to cite: Masykurillah; Astuti, Sri Andri; Qomarudin, A. *A Transformative Learning Model Prototype for Strengthening Master's Students' Academic Culture in Islamic Education*, Volume 10, Issue 02, July-December 2026; 174-194; https://doi.org/10.32332/tarbawiyah.v10i2.14731

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INTRODUCTION

Academic culture refers to the recurring ways a university community thinks, uses evidence, acts ethically, and participates in scholarly work. It is therefore broader than grades or publication counts. In this article, academic culture is organized into three connected domains: academic thinking (critical, creative, and scientific reasoning), academic morality (honesty, perseverance, independence, respect, and collaboration), and academic activity (reading, writing, inquiry, research, and publication). Research on academic and research culture likewise emphasizes shared norms, institutional

arrangements, collaboration, resources, and everyday scholarly practices (Dina et al. 2023; Pedraja-Rejas et al. 2022; Roberts et al. 2025).

The issue is especially important in a Master's Program in Islamic Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI). The program expects graduates to become academics, researchers, and educational consultants who can develop PAI knowledge, solve complex educational problems, produce scholarly work, and communicate it responsibly. The 2024 research report, however, documented a gap between these formal expectations and students' routine learning practices. Classroom discussion was often dominated by recurring speakers, reading tended to be tied to assignments or examinations, papers were commonly treated as end-products for presentation, and no interview informant reported scholarly publication from course work. These patterns indicate a need to strengthen the learning process through which master's-level academic habits are repeatedly practised rather than merely stated as outcomes.

Existing approaches address adjacent parts of the problem but leave different instructional gaps. Research-culture frameworks identify organizational dimensions and can diagnose climate, support, collaboration, and integrity, yet they do not specify a semester-long learning sequence for master's students (Pedraja-Rejas et al. 2022; Roberts et al. 2025). Educative integrity approaches teach source use, writing conventions, and shared responsibility, but their primary object is responsible conduct rather than the integrated development of reasoning, moral responsibility, inquiry, revision, and dissemination (Fudge et al. 2022; Kerubo and Oliver 2025; Kuzmenko et al. 2024). Research problem, and project based approaches organize questions, authentic problems, and cumulative products, but do not by themselves secure ethical authorship, an Islamic humanistic orientation, or traceable movement from a diagnosed cultural gap to a complete course design (Guo et al. 2020; Mallinson 2018; Mora-Menjura and Olaya-Mesa 2023). Transformative learning explains critical reframing, but it is not a domain specific workflow for PAI scholarship (Southworth 2022; Stuckey et al. 2022).

Learning design is important because academic culture is repeatedly enacted through tasks, dialogue, feedback, assessment, and participation. Policies and quality systems remain necessary, but they do not by themselves determine what students do when reading a source, challenging an interpretation, planning an inquiry, or revising a manuscript. Institutional culture and outcome-based curriculum arrangements become educationally meaningful only when they are translated into recurring learning practices. Reflective learning likewise becomes consequential when students encounter structured experiences, interpret them with guidance, and connect them to future action (Tiao et al. 2024). A humanizing approach therefore recognizes master's students as developing knowledge producers while maintaining demanding standards of evidence, reciprocity, and responsibility (Gayles 2023). The design problem is thus not simply to ask students to be more academic, but to make advanced scholarly conduct visible, learnable, supported, and assessable across the semester.

Transformative learning offers a clear explanation of change through critical reflection, dialogue, perspective taking, and action (Southworth 2022; Stuckey et al. 2022). For Islamic education, that mechanism needs an ethical direction. An integrative Islamic humanistic orientation connects intellectual development with tawhid, human dignity, amanah, justice, beneficial knowledge, and responsibility (Mujahid and Muqowim 2026). Supporting literature on academic literacies, inquiry, problem/project work, feedback, and constructive alignment can then be used as design resources. In this

article these strands are not separate research questions; they are literature-based supports for building one coherent prototype. For clarity, evaluative judgement means students' capacity to judge the quality of work against explicit criteria, while constructive alignment means the deliberate alignment of intended outcomes, learning activities, and assessment.

A prototype also needs to turn broad principles into a clear learning design. Authentic educational problems can initiate inquiry; research activities can discipline the collection and interpretation of evidence; project work can give scholarship a cumulative product and a real audience; collaborative critique can expose assumptions; and reflection can connect intellectual decisions with ethical consequences. Graduate project-based learning has linked research with community engagement and has been used to strengthen university research culture (Mallinson 2018; Mora-Menjura and Olaya-Mesa 2023). In Indonesian Islamic education, active and contextual approaches have also supported higher-order thinking and meaningful participation (Hidayat and Syahidin 2019; Nasution and Suyadi 2020). Tarbawiyah studies further show that project stages require deliberate scaffolding and that Islamic education needs adaptive, transformative responses to changing contexts (Amrullah et al. 2025; Saipullah et al. 2026). A paper, discussion, or project is therefore not transformative by label; its value depends on the quality of the problem, evidence, feedback, revision, ethical safeguards, and scholarly communication.

The study therefore makes two distinct, bounded contributions. Its empirical contribution is a triangulated diagnosis of four priority needs in one PAI master's program: clearer differentiation of master's-level intellectual work, explicit ethical-authorship support, sustained reading and inquiry routines, and course products that proceed through critique, revision, and responsible dissemination. Its design contribution is a traceable translation of those needs into mechanisms and components of a six-phase prototype. The prototype does not claim a new constituent theory; it extends the cited approaches by integrating transformative reframing, Islamic humanistic ethics, academic literacies, inquiry, feedback, evaluative judgement, constructive alignment, and self-regulation in one need-to-mechanism-to-design chain. The originality lies in this functional integration and explicit traceability, not in claiming effectiveness before validation and field testing.

The empirical claim is limited to what the four-month needs analysis documented, whereas the conceptual claim is limited to the literature-derived prototype. Expert validation, implementation, and later evaluation from the broader development study remain outside the present article. Accordingly, the questions are deliberately separated by evidence type. The empirical question is: (1) What priority needs emerge from the gap between the academic culture expected of PAI master's students and the practices documented in the needs analysis? It is answered only from observation, interviews, and documents. The design question is: (2) How can those empirically established needs be connected with mechanisms from relevant literature and translated into an initial transformative learning prototype? It is answered through the need-mechanism-design trace and the resulting prototype, not through claims about field effects.

METHOD

The article intentionally extracts only two components from the larger 2024 development report. The first is the needs analysis. The second is theoretical

development and construction of an initial prototype through literature study. In ADDIE terms, the article is limited to Analyze and Design; expert validation, implementation, evaluation, and effectiveness testing are outside its scope. This boundary is important because the broader research report contains later development activities that are not reported as findings in this article (McKenney and Reeves 2018).

The formal needs analysis period lasted four months in the postgraduate Master's Program in Islamic Education, now UIN Jurai Siwo Lampung (the 2024 source report records the research locus under the former IAIN Metro designation). Two intact classes were observed, comprising 26 students, most of whom were practising teachers. The interview appendix documents eight coded informants (MPAI-01 to MPAI-08). The assignment corpus contains 22 group papers with similarity reports, comprising 11 group papers from each class rather than 22 individual student submissions. Needs data came from classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, graduate and course outcome documents, learning materials, student assignments, and similarity reports. Similarity percentages were used only as indicators of text overlap and source use support needs, not as automatic proof of plagiarism.

Data collection used four complementary instruments. A structured observation protocol recorded the organization of discussion, distribution of participation, use of evidence, forms of questioning, and follow-up to critique. Semi-structured interviews examined reading routines, differences between undergraduate and master's learning, research and writing experience, feedback, publication, professional workload, and academic integrity. A document review checklist examined the alignment of graduate outcomes, course outcomes, learning activities, assignments, and assessment with the three academic-culture domains and recorded source-use patterns in course papers and their similarity reports. A literature extraction matrix then recorded each source's context, construct, proposed learning mechanism, relevant evidence, and possible design implication. Because these were qualitative instruments rather than psychometric scales, content quality was supported through indicator to question mapping, removal of overlapping prompts, cross source checking, and an auditable evidence trail.

Analysis proceeded in linked cycles. Needs data were segmented into meaning units and examined through directed reflexive thematic analysis, that is a qualitative approach in which predefined domains guide attention while the researcher reflexively interprets patterns emerging from the data combining the study's predefined dimensions with patterns emerging from interviews, observations, and documents (Braun and Clarke 2021). Evidence was compared across sources and organized as ideal-actual gaps. A need was treated as a priority when it was supported by more than one empirical stream and was consequential for the master's level outcomes. The literature was then read through a claim-evidence-mechanism-design matrix: each proposed response had to be connected to a mechanism supported by relevant scholarship rather than added because a method appeared fashionable. Finally, the prioritized needs and theoretical mechanisms were traced into the prototype's learning phases, social system, lecturer response, support system, assessment evidence, and intended academic culture targets. This process establishes conceptual traceability; it does not substitute for expert validation or later field testing.

The lead researcher also had approximately two years of prior engagement as lecturer and program secretary. That longer role provided contextual knowledge, but

also created a risk of role related interpretation and socially desirable responses. To keep the evidence boundary clear, the two-year experience was treated as sensitizing context; formal claims were anchored in the documented four-month needs analysis corpus and cross checked across observation, interviews, and documents. Needs data were reduced, displayed, compared, and interpreted as ideal-actual gaps. The theoretical development stage then used a focused literature synthesis to identify mechanisms relevant to each priority need and translate them into model components. The resulting prototype was assessed only for internal conceptual coherence in this article; it was not implemented or tested for effectiveness.

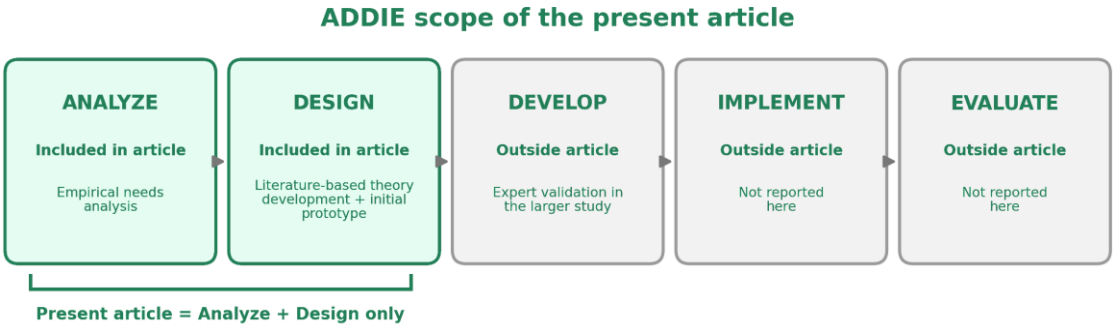


Figure 1. ADDIE diagram showing the scope of this article within the larger development study

Only Analyze and Design are reported in this article: Analyze covers the empirical needs analysis, while Design covers literature based theoretical development and construction of the initial prototype. Develop (including expert validation in the larger study), Implement, and Evaluate remain outside the present article. The arrows show the sequence of the broader ADDIE study, but only the first two stages supply claims in this manuscript; the later stages are displayed solely to mark the article's boundary.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The answer to Question 1 is presented first as an empirical needs analysis based on triangulated observation, interview, and documentary evidence. The answer to Question 2 follows as a design derivation that traces each priority need to literature-supported mechanisms and then to prototype components. The first answer reports field patterns; the second reports a conceptual design output. Neither the prototype nor its intended effects are treated as implementation findings. Interpretive comparison with prior scholarship is reserved for the Discussion.

The program documents set a demanding normative standard: PAI master's graduates are expected to act as academics, researchers, and educational consultants; develop knowledge through research; construct logical, critical, systematic, and creative arguments; work independently and collaboratively; respect original ideas; prevent plagiarism; and communicate scholarly work. In the analytic framework, these expectations converge in academic thinking (critical, creative, scientific, systematic, and interdisciplinary reasoning), academic morality (honesty, perseverance, autonomy, respect, collaboration, and responsibility), and academic activity (reading, source-based writing, inquiry, research, revision, and dissemination). The empirical issue is therefore

not the absence of an academic ideal in the curriculum but whether routine learning consistently enacts it.

Answer to Question 1: empirical priority needs. Across the two classes, observation recorded a similar dominant pattern: discussion usually followed presentation and question and answer formats, active contributions repeatedly came from the same students, source comparison was limited, and papers were not routinely revised after critique. Interviews clarified how students experienced that pattern. MPAI-01 described the paper presentation routine as insufficiently different from undergraduate study; MPAI-02 linked episodic reading to task deadlines; and MPAI-08 described anxiety about paraphrasing, citation, and similarity reports. Each excerpt is treated as an individual account, not as proof of a theme on its own. The themes were retained because they converged with observations in both classes and with documentary evidence on assignment design, group paper similarity reports, and the absence of a routine revision dissemination pathway. The interview excerpts below are translated from Indonesian.

> *"If we only write a paper and then present it, it still feels like the undergraduate pattern. What I need is guidance on how to read sources, compare viewpoints, and then build my own argument." (MPAI-01, translated from Indonesian)*

> *"I often read only when an assignment is close. If there were a weekly reading log and the lecturer checked the process, perhaps we would be more regular and would not pile up the work at the end." (MPAI-02, translated from Indonesian)*

> *"I am not unwilling to write, but I am often afraid of doing it incorrectly. If we are taught paraphrasing, citation, and how to improve a Turnitin report from the beginning, I would be more confident." (MPAI-08, translated from Indonesian)*

Variation and qualifying cases narrowed the interpretation. MPAI-03 regarded discussion as potentially productive when roles and evidence were structured; MPAI-04 reported ready access to digital sources and attempted to use journal articles; and MPAI-05 and MPAI-07 viewed professional or historical experience as material for inquiry. Observation also recorded respectful disagreement and existing collaboration, while curriculum documents already permitted student centred, case, and project-based work. These cases contradict any claim that students lacked motivation, sources, collegiality, or institutional expectations. The cross-source interpretation is more specific: resources and positive practices existed, but they were unevenly distributed and were not yet organized into a recurrent, accountable cycle of reading, inquiry, authorship, critique, revision, and dissemination.

Documentary evidence added a distinct source use signal. The report records 22 group paper similarity reports: 11 papers from Class A and 11 from Class B; n therefore denotes group papers, not the number of individual students. The original report transcribed rounded class means of 64% and 53%. Recalculation from the 22 listed values produces means of 63.9% for Class A, 53.5% for Class B, and 58.7% overall. Fourteen papers (63.6%) exceeded 50%. The recalculated one-decimal values are used in Table 1 for internal consistency. They indicate text overlap and a need for source use support, not automatic proof of plagiarism.

Table 1. Recalculated similarity-report data used in the needs analysis

Data set	n (group papers)	Similarity values (%)	Recalculated mean (%)	Papers >50%
Class A	11	81, 26, 75, 84, 39, 61, 58, 82, 81, 37, 79	63.9	8/11
Class B	11	22, 71, 62, 77, 90, 11, 78, 31, 49, 10, 87	53.5	6/11
Combined	22	–	58.7	14/22

On this basis, the empirical answer comprises four interdependent needs: clearer differentiation of master's level intellectual work, explicit support for ethical authorship, continuous reading and inquiry routines suited to a teacher-practitioner cohort, and course products that proceed from presentation to critique, revision, and responsible dissemination. Their interdependence matters: uneven discussion limits argument practice; task driven reading narrows the evidence base; weak source use routines constrain ethical authorship; and papers that end with presentation provide no structured reason to revise claims. Workload and uneven prior research preparation intensify these connections. The required response is therefore a cumulative sequence rather than isolated remedial activities.

Table 2. Normative. empirical gaps and priority design needs

Master's level expectation	Pattern identified in needs analysis	Interpreted gap	Priority design requirement
Critical, creative, scientific, and interdisciplinary development of PAI knowledge	Discussion was largely question-and-answer exchange; the same students repeatedly spoke, and theoretical comprehension outweighed analysis and synthesis.	The epistemic work of undergraduate and master's study was insufficiently differentiated; participation was uneven.	Use authentic problems, contestable claims, rotating scholarly roles, comparison of perspectives, individual accountability, and explicit theory development tasks.
Ethical, autonomous, and responsible scholarly authorship	Fourteen of 22 similarity reports exceeded 50%; the figures are diagnostic indicators of text overlap, not automatic evidence of plagiarism.	Source use, synthesis, paraphrasing, citation, authorial voice, and formative supervision required strengthening.	Integrate source mapping, annotated reading, paraphrasing/citation instruction, diagnostic similarity review, feedback, and obligatory revision.
Autonomous learning, research capability, and scholarly participation	Most students were practising teachers; interviews indicated task-driven reading and no reported scholarly publication from course work.	Academic activity was episodic and workload-sensitive; professional experience was not consistently converted into inquiry.	Use flexible milestones, practitioner-inquiry questions, weekly reading routines, individual research logs, peer review, and monitored self-regulation.

Master's level expectation	Pattern identified in needs analysis	Interpreted gap	Priority design requirement
Innovative, defensible, and disseminable scholarly work	Papers usually ended with classroom presentation; validation of claims, revision, and dissemination were not routine.	Course products rarely progressed from completion to accountable knowledge production.	Require a defensible research article, policy brief, learning design, or equivalent product supported by critique, revision, and dissemination.

Answer to Question 2: design derivation. The literature synthesis did not treat a preferred pedagogy as the answer. It tested each priority need against mechanisms and limitations in relevant scholarship. Transformative learning explains perspective revision; Islamic humanistic learning supplies ethical direction; academic literacies and scholarly socialization specify disciplinary reading and writing; research and inquiry organize evidence; problem and project work provide purpose and a cumulative product; feedback literacy and evaluative judgement support revision; and constructive alignment and self-regulation connect outcomes, activity, evidence, and monitoring. Table 3 records what each strand contributes, what it leaves unresolved when used alone, and how the prototype uses it.

Table 3. Theoretical synthesis and design translation

Theoretical strand	Mechanism relevant to the diagnosed need	Limitation if used alone	Translation into the prototype
Transformative learning (Southworth, 2022; Stuckey et al., 2022)	A problematic experience, perspective taking, critical reflection, rational dialogue, and action can expose and reconstruct habitual frames of reference	Reflection can remain private or rhetorical without disciplinary evidence and action	Begin with a master's level dilemma; document prior assumptions; confront alternative interpretations; justify a revised position; act through a scholarly product
Integrative Islamic humanistic learning (Masturin et al., 2022; Mujahid & Muqowim, 2026)	Links intellectual growth with tawhid, human dignity, amanah, justice, beneficial knowledge, and responsibility for the consequences of scholarship	Moral exhortation may remain detached from actual research decisions	Attach ethical questions to topic selection, treatment of sources and participants, representation of difference, authorship, collaboration, and dissemination
Academic literacies and scholarly socialization (Carter et al., 2021; Getahun et al., 2021)	Academic reading and writing are situated practices through which students acquire disciplinary voice, identity, and standards of evidence	Generic writing instruction may overlook the epistemology and discourse of PAI	Use annotated reading, argument and source maps, modelling of expert texts, research mentoring, peer review, and publication-oriented genre practice

Theoretical strand	Mechanism relevant to the diagnosed need	Limitation if used alone	Translation into the prototype
Research and inquiry based learning (Leite et al., 2023)	Students learn by formulating questions, investigating evidence, choosing methods, analysing data or texts, and validating claims	Inquiry can become technically procedural without a consequential problem or coherent product	Require an inquiry protocol, evidence trail, methodological justification, triangulation, and claim evidence reasoning chain
Problem and project based learning (Mallinson, 2018; Mora-Menjura & Olaya-Mesa, 2023)	Authentic problems generate purpose, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and a tangible product for a real audience	Projects may reward activity, division of labour, or presentation quality more than conceptual change	Use a complex PAI problem; preserve individual accountability; require research quality, critique, revision, validation, and dissemination
Feedback literacy and evaluative judgement (Carless & Boud, 2018; Tai et al., 2018)	Students learn to interpret standards, compare work, generate feedback, and make decisions about revision	Feedback remains inert when delivered after grading or when students cannot judge quality	Co-construct criteria, analyse exemplars, conduct structured peer review, compare drafts, respond to feedback, and submit a revision memorandum
Constructive alignment and self-regulated learning (Rodriguez-Gomez et al., 2024; Roßnagel, 2026)	Outcomes, activities, evidence, assessment, monitoring, and reflection become mutually reinforcing	Formal alignment may be procedural if students do not exercise agency	Map every phase to thinking, morality, and activity indicators; use milestones, learning logs, consultations, portfolios, and reflective self-assessment

The translation followed four explicit chains. First, uneven participation and weak master's level differentiation were linked to perspective taking, dialogic critique, and accountable scholarly roles, which appear in Phases 1 and 4. Second, episodic reading and weak source use were linked to academic literacies, inquiry, feedback, and evaluative judgement, which appear in source mapping, research logs, diagnostic similarity review, and revision across Phases 2, 3, and 5. Third, the teacher-practitioner context was linked to authentic problems and self-regulation, producing practitioner-inquiry questions and flexible milestones without lowering standards. Fourth, papers that stopped at presentation were linked to project purpose, critique, and public scholarship, producing a revised and disseminated product in Phases 4-6. This chain is the analytical answer to Question 2; the six-phase model is its design output.

From that synthesis, the prototype was organized into six phases: diagnose and problematize; frame inquiry and ethical commitment; investigate and triangulate; construct and critique; revise, validate, and disseminate; and reflect, commit, and

transfer. The detailed operations are summarized in Table 4 rather than repeated in a long narrative. The prototype also specifies a social system, lecturer response principles, support resources, assessment evidence, and intended instructional and nurturant effects.

Table 4. Operational architecture of the literature-based transformative learning prototype

Phase	Core learning operations	Required evidence and support	Principal academic-culture targets
1. Diagnose and problematize	Examine an authentic PAI problem, compare actual practice with master's outcomes, surface assumptions, and identify ethical stakes	Problem dossier, baseline self-assessment, initial position statement, lecturer modelling of critical questions	Intellectual curiosity, critical doubt, honesty about current capability, respect for affected perspectives
2. Frame inquiry and ethical commitment	Formulate questions, map concepts, plan sources/methods, distribute roles, and agree on integrity safeguards	Inquiry proposal, argument map, search protocol, role contract, ethics and authorship checklist	Scientific reasoning, creativity, independence, responsibility, fair collaboration
3. Investigate and triangulate	Read deeply, collect and analyse textual or empirical evidence, compare explanations, and keep an evidence trail	Digital library, annotated bibliography, research log, citation manager, consultation, data/source audit	Reading discipline, methodological rigour, perseverance, source honesty, interdisciplinary openness
4. Construct and critique	Develop claims and products, present reasoning, take alternative perspectives, review peers, and defend choices	Draft manuscript/product, claim evidence matrix, seminar, peer review rubric, lecturer probing and feedforward	Argumentation, evaluative judgement, respectful disagreement, communication, collaborative knowledge building
5. Revise, validate, and disseminate	Respond to critique, strengthen analysis, verify citations and claims, conduct integrity checks, and publish or present	Revision memorandum, validated final product, similarity report used diagnostically, repository/journal/seminar outlet	Authorial voice, accuracy, accountability, resilience, publication practice
6. Reflect, commit, and transfer	Revisit initial assumptions, evaluate growth and limitations, connect knowledge with Islamic ethical purpose, and plan continued scholarly action	Reflective synthesis, portfolio, individual and group commitments, follow-up research agenda	Metacognition, amanah, autonomy, humility, lifelong inquiry, contribution to the academic community

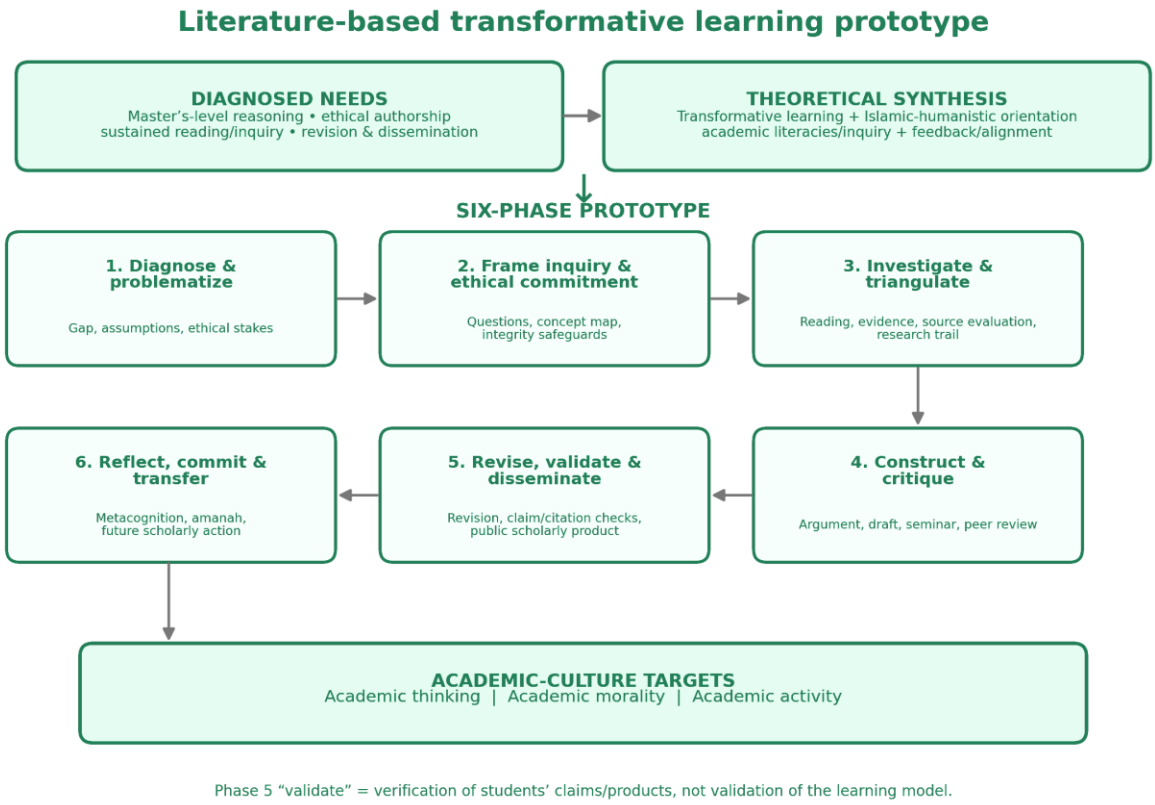


Figure 2. Infographic of the literature-based conceptual prototype for strengthening academic culture

The infographic traces the conceptual flow from diagnosed needs through theoretical synthesis to the six-phase prototype and its three academic culture targets. In Phase 5, "validate" means verifying students' claims and scholarly products; it does not mean that the learning model itself has been validated in this article. The infographic therefore represents a design logic, not a chronology of tested effects: diagnosed needs inform theoretical mechanisms, which are translated into sequenced learning activity and targeted academic-culture practices.

Within the prototype, students are positioned as investigators, authors, reviewers, and members of a developing scholarly community. The lecturer acts as designer of intellectual challenge, research mentor, dialogic critic, model of ethical reasoning, and guardian of standards. Support includes current literature, citation tools, reading and research logs, source and argument maps, peer-review protocols, integrity checklists, consultation, and rubrics. Assessment emphasizes questions, evidence, reasoning, originality, method, source ethics, collaboration, communication, revision, and dissemination rather than the appearance of a final paper alone.

The intended direct effects are stronger critical and scientific reasoning, research literacy, source based academic writing, methodological judgement, and readiness to produce defensible scholarly outputs. Intended nurturant effects include honesty, perseverance, autonomy, humility, respect for intellectual difference, collaborative responsibility, and an understanding of scholarship as service and amanah. These are design intentions derived from the literature and needs analysis; they are not measured outcomes of an implemented intervention.

DISCUSSION

The discussion interprets the needs-analysis findings and the literature-derived prototype without restating the descriptive results or treating the prototype as an implemented intervention.

Needs analysis and educational reality

The central interpretation is that the identified weakness in academic culture is better understood as a mismatch between ambitious master's-level outcomes and an instructional ecology that does not consistently require the practices through which those outcomes are learned. Academic culture is produced through expectations, disciplinary norms, relationships, incentives, and recurrent work, not personal attitude alone (Pedraja-Rejas et al. 2022; Roberts et al. 2025). Indonesian higher education research also shows that organizational culture affects criticality, originality, honesty, learning, research, and communication, while metric-oriented research cultures can weaken scholarly integrity (Adiprasetio 2026; Burhanuddin et al. 2024). The teacher-practitioner context is examined separately below so that the empirical pattern and its cohort specific design implications are not conflated.

Cohort composition creates a design constraint rather than a deficit explanation. Because most students were practising teachers, the model must accommodate professional workload, limited study time, and uneven prior research preparation without lowering master's level standards. Flexible milestones, practitioner-inquiry questions, protected individual accountability, rotating scholarly roles, and cumulative feedback are therefore design responses to the cohort profile. Employment is treated as a source of authentic educational problems and field knowledge that can be converted into evidence-generating inquiry. This keeps the response tied to documented constraints rather than attributing the gap to motivation alone, while preserving the distinction between contextual accommodation and reduced academic expectations.

Changing the label of a teaching method would therefore be insufficient. Discussion can be intellectually demanding when students must compare evidence and defend a position, while a project can remain superficial if work is divided mechanically and presentation replaces argument. Reviews of project-based learning report benefits for collaboration, problem solving, engagement, and application, but also show that task design, facilitation, assessment, and institutional context matter (Arantes Do Amaral 2025; Guo et al. 2020; Pevnaya et al. 2024). The central issue is therefore the intellectual demand built into the task, not the method label itself. A seminar, paper, or project becomes master's level work only when students must compare sources, justify methodological choices, defend warrants, and revise in response to critique; otherwise, an active format can reproduce the same descriptive learning pattern.

This shift must remain humanizing without making academic standards relative. Research on academic communities warns that rules of legitimacy and relations of power can exclude particular knowers (Gonzales et al. 2024). At the same time, not all claims are equally warranted. Transparent criteria, perspective-taking, structured dialogue, and reasoned defence can recognize students as developing knowledge producers while preserving accountability to evidence (Gayles 2023).

Scholarly identity is therefore treated as a participation problem rather than a status conferred by enrolment. Novice academic writers develop voice and legitimacy through repeated participation, feedback, and negotiation of disciplinary expectations (Juliaty 2019). Writing for publication is also conditioned by local linguistic,

institutional, and international settings (Getahun et al. 2021). In the prototype, these insights become observable design requirements: students must justify problems, build evidence trails, author claims, review peers, revise after critique, and communicate beyond the lecturer. Epistemic agency is therefore visible and assessable while remaining accountable to transparent criteria, method, source ethics, and evidence. This also separates identity development from publication counts: evidence of becoming a scholar lies in accountable participation in disciplinary practices, not merely in producing an output.

Transformative learning through an Islamic humanistic synthesis

Transformative learning supplies the main change mechanism. The discrepancy between being formally prepared as an academic or researcher and engaging in routines that seldom demand research-quality authorship can be used as a problem to be examined rather than concealed. Transformative learning research emphasizes disorienting situations, critical reflection, perspective-taking, dialogue, and action (Southworth 2022; Stuckey et al. 2022). In the prototype, students articulate assumptions, test them against evidence and alternative perspectives, revise questions and arguments, and demonstrate change through scholarly action. The mechanism is therefore a sequence of problematization, evidence-based dialogue, and action rather than reflection in isolation. What changes is not merely a stated attitude, but the basis on which students frame a problem, select evidence, justify a claim, and decide what to do next.

Operational evidence of transformation is necessary because reflection can otherwise remain retrospective description or agreement with the lecturer. Perspective-taking becomes consequential when it creates productive doubt and requires assumptions to be tested against alternative positions (Southworth 2022). Reflective learning becomes more defensible when interpretation is connected to future action (Tiao et al. 2024), while reflective assessment benefits from sufficiently fine-grained evidence of development (Merricks and Bitting 2026). The prototype therefore looks for observable traces such as revised questions, altered conceptual maps, stronger warrants, corrected source practices, documented responses to critique, and defensible next steps. This makes reflection analytically distinguishable from self-description and gives later testing a basis for examining changes in reasoning rather than only fluent reflective language.

Transformation is also social and disciplinary. Research culture depends on norms, leadership, collaboration, support, recognition, and opportunities to participate (Roberts et al. 2025), and the teaching-research nexus requires deliberate curricular arrangements (Leite et al. 2023). The Islamic-humanistic synthesis gives this process an ethical direction. Intellectual development is linked with tawhid, human dignity, amanah, justice, beneficial knowledge, and responsibility rather than separated from moral formation (Hanif et al. 2024; Masturin et al. 2022; Mujahid and Muqowim 2026). In practice, this means that topic selection, treatment of sources, representation of difference, authorship, collaboration, and dissemination are simultaneously scholarly and moral decisions.

This integration avoids two reductions: measuring academic culture only through cognitive performance or publications, and teaching integrity only through moral exhortation. Active and contextual Islamic education can strengthen participation and higher-order thinking when learners engage real problems (Hidayat and Syahidin 2019;

Nasution and Suyadi 2020), while transformative curriculum work in Indonesian Islamic higher education supports deeper learning linked with curriculum change (Pahrudin et al. 2026). Structured questioning can also combine active participation, critical thinking, and Islamic values (Sugiana et al. 2025).

The proposed literature-based prototype. The design assigns complementary functions rather than stacking method labels. Research and inquiry discipline movement from questions to evidence, problem orientation connects that inquiry to consequential PAI realities, and project orientation sustains a cumulative product for a real audience (Mallinson 2018; Mora-Menjura and Olaya-Mesa 2023). These vehicles are nested within the six-phase architecture and are governed by source ethics, individual accountability, critique, revision, and dissemination. The distinctive contribution is the need traced arrangement of those functions, not a claim that any one method is inherently transformative.

At master's level, theory development is operationalized as disciplined conceptual work rather than an expectation that every course-produce a grand new theory. Students compare constructs, expose assumptions, identify contextual limits, propose relationships, build conceptual models, or adapt explanations to PAI problems. Research logs, argument maps, source matrices, and claim evidence chains make this otherwise hidden reasoning inspectable. The emphasis is on relationships among concepts and the warrant for those relationships. Students must show why a conceptual distinction matters for the PAI problem being studied, what evidence supports or challenges it, and where the proposed explanation stops being defensible. These artefacts give lecturers a basis for formative intervention before final submission and distinguish theoretical development from source compilation.

Scaffolding is necessary because autonomy develops through supported participation, not the absence of guidance. Modelling, exemplars, milestone consultations, differentiated resources, and psychologically safe critique can reduce disparities in prior preparation and research experience. Research on learning cultures in Islamic institutions points to the need for pedagogical renewal and institutional support (Silahuddin et al. 2025). Tarbawiyah studies similarly show the importance of deliberately structured project stages and adaptive responses to changing contexts (Amrullah et al. 2025; Saipullah et al. 2026). For a teacher-practitioner cohort, flexible milestones can accommodate professional responsibilities without lowering evidentiary, authorship, or participation standards.

Academic integrity is where the three domains become inseparable. Similarity data concern academic activity because they reflect source handling, academic thinking because weak synthesis may reduce authorial reasoning, and academic morality because attribution is involved. Yet similarity is not equivalent to plagiarism; postgraduate understandings of plagiarism are shaped by prior educational history, language, intertextuality, and institutional instruction (Tran et al. 2022). An educative approach therefore combines explicit standards, writing competence, ethical commitment, and institutional support (Chokoraia 2023; Fudge et al. 2022; Kerubo and Oliver 2025; Kuzmenko et al. 2024). Supervision, research-data management, leadership, and research climate also influence responsible conduct (Abdelkreem et al. 2024; De Peuter et al. 2025). The prototype accordingly treats similarity checking as a diagnostic step followed by interpretation and revision (Zhang 2024).

The same logic applies to generative artificial intelligence. AI may support searching, language development, organization, or formative dialogue, but it can also obscure authorship, fabricate citations, homogenize voice, or outsource judgement. Current scholarship therefore emphasizes transparency, verification, and AI ethics rather than prohibition alone (Laflamme and Bruneault 2025; Mututa and Tomaselli 2025). Process artefacts such as notes, search logs, successive drafts, oral defence, and revision explanations can make authorship and learning more visible.

Feedback and evaluative judgement make standards usable. Students need opportunities to compare work with criteria and exemplars, generate and interpret feedback, and act on it (Carless and Boud 2018; Nicol 2021; Tai et al. 2018). The prototype therefore uses structured peer review, oral critique, feedforward, self-comparison, and a revision memorandum. The purpose is to turn standards into actions students can perform before grading. By comparing drafts with criteria, exemplars, peer work, and earlier versions of their own work, students generate information that can be used for revision rather than receiving feedback only as an end-point judgement.

Collaboration is treated as an accountable epistemic practice rather than simple task sharing. Roles, contributions, disagreement, and authorship must be visible; individual research logs and oral defence preserve personal responsibility, while peer review and joint products create interdependence. In PAI, where interpretive plurality may be important, respect is expressed by representing another position accurately, disagreeing through evidence, and responding to critique. Visible contribution records also help distinguish productive interdependence from uneven division of labour and make authorship decisions explicit before submission. Disagreement is treated as evidence generating dialogue rather than a threat to harmony. This makes collaboration both a moral practice and a mechanism for improving knowledge claims.

The social system is therefore part of the model rather than a neutral background. Students move among individual inquiry, small research teams, whole-class scholarly forums, and communication with readers or practitioners outside the classroom. The lecturer remains responsible for standards but responds by probing evidence, clarifying criteria, modelling ethical reasoning, inviting alternative interpretations, distinguishing error from misconduct, and requiring justified revision. This combination of high expectations and structured support is especially important for a cohort with unequal prior research experience. It allows autonomy to increase as capability becomes visible while keeping evidentiary and ethical standards stable. In this sense, the model is designed to cultivate a scholarly community of practice, not simply to sequence six classroom activities.

Finally, the model's assessment logic explains how desired outcomes can become recurrent academic habits. Each phase produces process evidence, questions, source maps, inquiry plans, research logs, drafts, peer reviews, revision memoranda, oral defence, and reflective synthesis rather than judging only the appearance of a final paper. Feedback literacy and evaluative judgement make standards usable because students compare work with criteria, exemplars, peers, and earlier versions of their own work. This traceability helps distinguish task completion from capability development and supports coherence between curriculum outcomes and classroom evidence (Romlah et al. 2025). It also gives lecturers a basis for formative intervention before errors in reasoning, source use, or authorship become fixed in the final submission.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

The empirical needs analysis is bounded by 26 students in two intact classes, eight documented interview informants, one master's program, and one representative disciplinary setting. The researcher's lecturer/program role may have influenced observation and responses; triangulation and the separation of formal four-month data from longer role-based familiarity reduce but do not remove this risk. Similarity percentages indicate text overlap, not plagiarism. Most importantly, the theoretical development and prototype in this article are literature-based; they establish conceptual plausibility, not feasibility or effectiveness. Subsequent research should therefore proceed through expert validation, limited trials, field testing, and comparative multi-institutional studies examining workload, equitable participation, implementation fidelity, reasoning, source practices, research activity, and the quality of scholarly products.

CONCLUSION

The needs analysis shows that the central problem is not the absence of ambitious master's-level outcomes but the incomplete translation of those outcomes into recurring academic practice. Across the two monitored classes, participation was uneven, reading was strongly task-driven, course papers commonly ended with presentation rather than a cycle of inquiry and revision, and no interviewed student reported publication arising from course work. Similarity-report patterns further indicated a need for stronger source selection, synthesis, paraphrasing, citation, and revision support, without treating similarity percentages as automatic evidence of plagiarism. Taken together, the findings mean that academic culture should be developed through structured opportunities to practise reasoning, ethical authorship, inquiry, critique, and scholarly communication rather than assumed to emerge simply because students are enrolled at master's level.

The article's contribution is a literature based transformative learning prototype that directly connects those diagnosed needs with a coherent learning design. The six phases move from problematization and ethical inquiry through investigation, critique, revision and dissemination, and reflective transfer. Conceptually, the prototype integrates transformative learning with an Islamic humanistic ethical orientation and with academic literacies, inquiry, feedback literacy, evaluative judgement, constructive alignment, and self-regulation. Practically, it clarifies student and lecturer roles, the support resources required, and the process evidence through which academic thinking, academic morality, and academic activity can be made visible and assessable. The contribution is therefore a transparent and testable design proposition for strengthening accountable knowledge production, not a claim that the prototype has already produced measurable effects. At program level, the same architecture can also support coordination across courses by making expectations for reading, inquiry, feedback, integrity, revision, and dissemination discussable rather than dependent on one lecturer. Publication remains an educational means rather than a metric end: scholarly outputs should demonstrate improved reasoning and responsible contribution, not merely increase counts.

The claims remain bounded by one master's program, two intact classes, eight documented interview informants, 22 group papers with similarity reports (11 from each class), and the lecturer-researcher's dual institutional role. The formal evidence base was limited to the four-month 2024 needs-analysis period; the preceding two years of

lecturer/program experience were used only as contextual familiarity. In addition, the theoretical development and prototype were produced through literature study and were not validated, implemented, or tested for effectiveness in this article. Subsequent research should therefore proceed through expert review, a limited feasibility trial, field testing, and comparative multi-institutional study, with attention to workload, equitable participation, implementation fidelity, reasoning, ethical authorship, research activity, unintended effects, and the quality of scholarly outputs.

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