

The Integration of Prophetic Sunnah and Soft Skills in Patient Care: A Contemporary Perspective in Modern Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) provides a timeless model of compassionate, ethical, and emotionally intelligent behavior that closely aligns with the soft skills essential in modern patient care. As healthcare increasingly recognizes the value of empathy, communication, respect, and moral integrity, the Prophetic tradition offers an authentic framework for integrating spiritual and ethical dimensions into professional practice. The purpose of this conceptual review is threefold: (1) to clarify how soft skills manifest in healthcare as distinct from other contexts; (2) to map these soft-skill domains onto the ethical-behavioural framework of the Prophetic Sunnah; and (3) to propose a conceptual framework for integrating Prophetic traits and values into healthcare education and practice, particularly within Muslim-majority contexts.

Methods: To achieve these aims, a narrative review of literature published between 1999 and 2025 was conducted, drawing from healthcare, psychology, and Islamic literature sources. Relevant classical and contemporary references were synthesised to establish conceptual linkages between soft skills and Prophetic characteristics such as *rahmah* (compassion), *amanah* (trust), *adab* (respect), *hikmah* (communication), and *sabar* (patience).

Results: The findings highlight how the Prophetic Sunnah complements the healthcare competencies and provides a culturally and spiritually grounded approach to soft-skills development. Embedding these values in healthcare education can strengthen moral resilience, enhance patient-centered care, and reinforce professional identity among Muslim healthcare providers.

Conclusion: This review concludes that integrating Prophetic-based soft skills within healthcare training represents not only a moral imperative but also a pathway toward more holistic, compassionate, and ethically coherent healthcare systems.

Keywords: Prophetic sunnah; Soft skills; Healthcare; Patient-centered care

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INTRODUCTION

Modern healthcare is rapidly evolving beyond the mastery of clinical procedures and biomedical knowledge, requiring healthcare professionals to deliver holistic, patient-centred care grounded in both competence and compassion. Central to this transformation is the growing recognition that soft skills non-technical interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies such as empathy, effective communication, teamwork, ethical decision-making, and problem-solving are fundamental to ensuring quality and safety in patient care. Unlike their application in business or corporate contexts, where soft skills emphasise leadership, negotiation, and productivity, in healthcare these skills are inherently relational, focusing on therapeutic communication, patient trust, emotional support, shared decision-making, cultural sensitivity, and moral responsibility. From an Islamic perspective, these values align closely with the Prophetic Sunnah, which exemplifies compassion (*rahmah*), patience (*sabr*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and respect (*adab*) qualities essential for ethical and effective caregiving. Thus, integrating the Prophetic model with soft skills development is vital in cultivating well-rounded graduate nurses who are both clinically competent and spiritually grounded, ready to meet the multidimensional demands of modern healthcare delivery systems (1,2).

Unlike other sectors where soft skills may enhance customer satisfaction or workplace efficiency, in healthcare, poor soft-skill performance can lead to medical errors, diminished patient adherence, lower satisfaction, and compromised safety (3,4). Thus, healthcare soft skills are embedded in clinical practice interacting with patients, families and multi-disciplinary teams in high-stakes, often vulnerable situations rather than just ancillary add-ons.

Recent studies showed that in nursing and other health professions, soft skills encompass intrapersonal traits (such as self-awareness, adaptability, resilience), interpersonal behaviours (such as active listening, empathy, clear communication), and team/organisational competences (such as leadership, collaboration, ethical responsibility) (2,5). For example, a previous study described that "Soft skills in nursing include the intrapersonal attributes, interpersonal skills, and creativity of the nurse, which, when combined with professionalism, teamwork, and effective communication skills,

improve the quality of nursing care and client satisfaction" (2).

Moreover, a scoping review in medical radiation science highlighted how communication, empathy and teamwork core soft skills directly influence patient interactions, collaborative practice and care quality (6,7). The life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provide a comprehensive model of moral, emotional and relational competencies such as compassion (*rahmah*), patience (*sabr*), respect (*adab*), trustworthiness (*amanah*) and consultation (*shura*) which align closely with health-care soft skills. These Prophetic attributes transcend cultural and temporal contexts and offer a unique lens through which to view and cultivate soft skills in Muslim-dominated healthcare settings.

Therefore, the purpose of this conceptual review is to: (a) clarify how soft skills manifest in healthcare as distinct from non-health settings; (b) map these soft-skill domains onto the ethical-behavioural framework of the Prophetic Sunnah; and (c) propose a conceptual framework for integrating Prophetic traits and values into healthcare education and practice, particularly within Muslim-majority contexts. To achieve this, a narrative review was conducted of current healthcare literature on soft skills (1999 - 2025) and Islamic ethics/Prophetic behaviour, synthesising findings to generate the framework. The major conclusion is that embedding Prophetic-based values into healthcare soft-skills education not only supports improved patient-centred outcomes but also reinforces professional identity, moral resilience and culturally congruent care.

Conceptualizing Soft Skills in Healthcare

Soft skills in healthcare refer to a set of non-technical interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies that enhance communication, empathy, teamwork, problem-solving, and ethical decision-making in clinical practice (8,9). These skills are essential for promoting patient safety, building trust, and delivering holistic, person-centred care. Unlike in business contexts where soft skills focus on persuasion, negotiation, and leadership healthcare soft skills prioritise compassion, therapeutic communication, emotional support, and respect for patients' dignity (2).

In clinical environments, soft skills bridge the gap between technical procedures and human interaction. They are especially vital in high-

stakes situations such as emergency or critical care settings, where clear communication, empathy, and teamwork directly influence patient outcomes (10). Research consistently shows that healthcare providers with well-developed soft skills demonstrate improved decision-making under pressure, greater patient satisfaction, and stronger interdisciplinary collaboration (6).

Beyond interpersonal abilities, critical, reflective, and open-minded thinking form an essential dimension of healthcare soft skills. These cognitive processes enable professionals to integrate evidence-based reasoning with ethical sensitivity, empathy, and situational awareness (11,12). Critical thinking thus supports moral judgement, adaptive communication, and effective problem-solving, particularly in complex or ethically challenging clinical scenarios.

According to previous studies, soft skills can be further categorized into: communication skills (CS), social skills and responsibilities (SSR), critical thinking skills (CTS), problem-solving skills (PSS), teamwork skills (TS), leadership skills (LS), professional and ethical decision-making skills (PEDMS), numeracy skills (NS), and interpersonal skills (IS). These dimensions are comprehensive and serve as a scaffold for developing emotionally intelligent and ethically grounded healthcare providers (7,13). The integration of these skills into curriculum design and competency-based assessments is increasingly seen as necessary to ensure graduates are prepared for the interpersonal and ethical demands of clinical practice.

Furthermore, numerous studies show that patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment plans, and overall health outcomes improve significantly when healthcare providers demonstrate strong soft skills (12,14). As a result, soft skills are now embedded into global healthcare competency frameworks and are a key area of focus in continuous professional development and medical education reforms.

Thus, integrating these competencies into the healthcare curriculum and continuous professional development programs ensures that practitioners are not only clinically proficient but also capable of delivering care with empathy, respect, and moral integrity qualities central to the ethos of modern patient-centred care.

The Sunnah as an Ethical Framework

The *Sunnah* refers to the teachings, practices, and moral example of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, encompassing his sayings (*hadith*), actions, approvals, and personal qualities that serve as a practical interpretation of the Qur'ān and a comprehensive guide for ethical conduct (15,16). Within Islamic thought, the *Sunnah* functions not merely as a record of prophetic traditions but as a dynamic moral framework that shapes behavior, character, and social responsibility across all human interactions, including caregiving and healing (17).

The *Sunnah* emphasizes foundational virtues such as *rahmah* (compassion), *sabr* (patience), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *adab* (respect), and *husn al-khuluq* (good character). These are not abstract ideals, but embodied actions consistently demonstrated by the Prophet ﷺ in his interactions with others. He visited the sick, comforted the distressed, and expressed empathy toward all beings regardless of faith or status reflecting a holistic concern for physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being (18). For instance, his guidance to “make things easy and do not make them difficult” reflects an approach consistent with today’s patient-centred and compassionate care models (19).

From a healthcare perspective, the *Sunnah* offers an ethically grounded framework that parallels the modern understanding of soft skills. Prophetic attributes such as *rahmah*, *hikmah* (wisdom), and *shūrā* (consultation) correspond to contemporary competencies of empathy, sound judgment, and collaborative decision-making (20). Similarly, *amanah* and *‘adl* (justice) resonate with professional integrity and ethical accountability key dimensions of medical professionalism (17). Thus, the *Sunnah* can be conceptualized as an early, divinely guided model for moral intelligence and emotional literacy, providing timeless relevance to healthcare ethics.

Integrating Prophetic virtues into modern medical and nursing education can enrich professional formation by cultivating both technical competence and spiritual consciousness. As noted by previous studies, Islamic ethical teachings offer actionable principles mercy, justice, trust, and service that reinforce human dignity and compassion in clinical encounters (15,18). When aligned with evidence-based practice, these principles guide healthcare providers toward ethically sound, empathetic, and culturally congruent care.

Integration of Sunnah into Soft Skills Education

In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition that soft skills play an essential role in healthcare education and must be developed alongside other professional competencies (8). Empirical findings by previous studies demonstrated the effectiveness of embedding soft skills training into structured clinical assessments in undergraduate nursing programs (7,13). These studies highlighted that assessment tools should go beyond technical proficiency and incorporate communication, empathy, ethical conduct, and teamwork principles deeply rooted in the Prophetic Sunnah.

Integrating the Sunnah into soft-skills education requires teaching strategies that align character formation with clinical competence. Examples include reflective learning modules encouraging students to examine their actions through Prophetic values, role-play simulations based on real-life scenarios from the Prophet's life, and professionalism workshops that emphasise amanah (trust), ihsan (excellence), and sabr (patience). These strategies promote a values-based educational approach that nurtures moral resilience and emotional intelligence (17).

Nevertheless, several challenges remain. Faith-based integration can face institutional resistance, varying interpretations, or superficial application when educators lack sufficient training. There is also the danger of reducing spiritual values to observable behaviours without encouraging genuine internalisation. Thus, implementation must be context-sensitive and inclusive, maintaining academic rigour while reflecting the ethical integrity of the Sunnah.

Prophetic Qualities and Their Relevance to Soft Skills

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, revered as the final messenger of Islam, exemplified the highest standards of moral and interpersonal conduct. His character represents not only a spiritual and ethical ideal but also a humanistic model for healthcare professionalism. In the clinical context, his teachings mirror many of the soft skills now recognized as essential for patient-centered care, including empathy, respect, communication, and ethical responsibility.

This paper proposes a conceptual model grounded in the Prophetic Sunnah, structured around the following core domains:

- **Compassion (Rahmah):** The Qur'an declares, "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds" (Al-Anbiya' 21:107). The Prophet's life exemplified deep empathy toward the sick, the elderly, and the poor qualities that align with contemporary healthcare principles of compassionate care and empathy-driven communication.
- **Respect (Adab):** He treated every individual with dignity regardless of social status or background, saying, "The most beloved of people to Allah are those who bring the most benefit to others" (al-Mu'jam al-Awsat, 5787). This underscores respect and equity, which are essential for patient-centered care and cultural competence.
- **Communication (Hikmah):** The Prophet's speech was characterized by clarity, truthfulness, and wisdom. As the Qur'an enjoins, "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction" (An-Nahl 16:125). Effective communication an essential soft skill promotes understanding, shared decision-making, and patient trust.
- **Patience (Sabr):** His endurance in the face of hardship, as praised in Surah Al-Ahqaf (46:35), reflects emotional stability and stress management, crucial for healthcare providers dealing with demanding and emotionally charged situations.
- **Responsibility (Amanah):** The Prophet stated, "Every one of you is a shepherd, and every one of you will be asked about his flock" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 893, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1829). This hadith embodies professional accountability, integrity, and trustworthiness core elements of healthcare ethics.

These Prophetic attributes align with the WHO-recommended life skills decision-making, critical thinking, empathy, stress management, and effective communication (21). They also correspond with structured nursing education curriculum assessment proposed by previous studies, demonstrated that integrating soft skills into nursing curricula enhances students' clinical communication and ethical awareness (7,13). Their studies emphasized embedding soft skill assessment within Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) to ensure measurable learning outcomes and sustainable skill development across training phases.

Further, additional Prophetic qualities resonate with specific domains of soft skills and their practical application in healthcare education and practice, as illustrated in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Mapping Prophetic Qualities to Soft Skills and Their Application in Healthcare Practice

Prophetic Traits	Relevant Soft Skill Domains	Application in healthcare education and practice	Integrated Prophetic Values
Honesty and Integrity	Professional and Ethical Decision-Making Skills (PEDMS)	Promoting transparency, ethical reflection, and moral reasoning in simulation-based assessments.	<i>Amanah</i>
Justice and Fairness	Leadership skills (LS) and interpersonal skills (IS)	Encouraging equitable care and unbiased clinical judgment.	<i>Adab</i>
Humility and Modesty	Communication skills (CS) and Leadership Skills (LS)	Enhancing teamwork, empathy, and self-awareness among trainees.	<i>Rahmah</i>
Perseverance and Patience	Critical Thinking skills (CTS) and problem-solving skills (PSS)	Supporting emotional intelligence and coping strategies in challenging clinical scenarios.	<i>Sabar</i>
Forgiveness and Tolerance	Teamwork skills (TS) and social skills and responsibilities (SSR)	Improving interprofessional collaboration and conflict resolution.	<i>Hikmah</i>
Commitment to Knowledge	Problem-Solving (PSS) and numeracy skills (NS)	Encouraging reflective learning, continual improvement, and evidence-based practice.	<i>Hikmah and Amanah</i>

Collectively, these qualities form a spiritually enriched foundation for soft skills, demonstrating that the Prophetic Sunnah provides a timeless, holistic framework for nurturing professionalism and compassion in healthcare. Integrating such values into modern healthcare education ensures not only technical excellence but also the moral and emotional maturity necessary for patient-centered care.

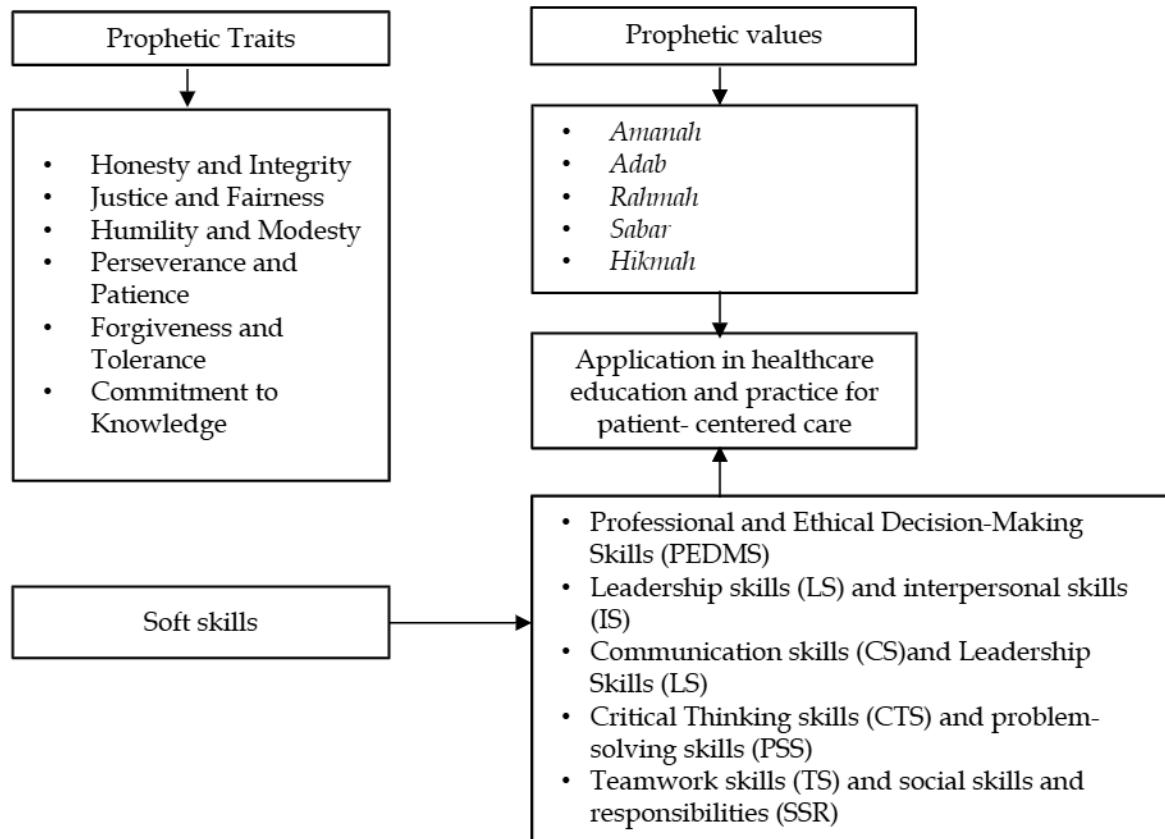
The conceptual framework as in **Figure 1** illustrates how Prophetic values can be systematically embedded within structured healthcare education through simulation-based learning, reflective practice, and ethical assessment. By linking Islamic moral teachings with evidence-based educational strategies (13), this integration encourages a decolonized, value-driven approach to healthcare professionalism one that harmonizes spiritual, ethical, and technical competencies. This framework provides a foundation for future curriculum development and empirical testing to assess its feasibility and effectiveness in producing holistic healthcare providers.

Contextual Applications in Muslim-Majority Nations

In Muslim-majority nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan, there has been a growing effort to harmonize Islamic values with modern

healthcare education and practice. Islamic-based institutions such as the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), the Muhammadiyah healthcare network in Indonesia, and the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) in Pakistan have pioneered initiatives that embed Islamic ethics and Prophetic values into their healthcare curricula, teaching, and clinical governance frameworks (22–24). These institutions provide practical models for operationalizing the conceptual framework proposed in this review.

In Malaysia and Indonesia, nursing and medical programs include modules on Islamic professionalism, ethics, and patient-centered communication, emphasizing *rahmah* (compassion), *amanah* (trust), and *ihsan* (excellence) as core professional virtues. In Pakistan, similar integration occurs through medical ethics courses grounded in Islamic jurisprudence, as promoted by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) and by Islamic universities that embed *akhlaq*-based leadership and community health engagement into training programs (24). Such models demonstrate how Prophetic values can be systematically embedded into healthcare education to reinforce both moral integrity and technical competence.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Soft Skills Integration Grounded in the Prophetic Traits and Values

These initiatives also bridge the gap between faith identity and professional integrity, enabling culturally congruent and spiritually sensitive care that resonates with patients' values and beliefs. Consequently, Muslim-majority countries are uniquely positioned to lead the global movement toward holistic, spiritually informed, and ethically grounded healthcare models that align with international competency standards while preserving religious authenticity.

However, despite these achievements, several challenges remain such as the lack of standardized frameworks for assessing soft skills from an Islamic perspective, limited empirical validation of outcomes, and variations in institutional capacity to train educators who can effectively integrate religious and clinical pedagogy. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure the consistent and scalable implementation of Sunnah-based soft skills education across diverse healthcare systems.

DISCUSSION

The convergence of the Prophetic Sunnah and soft skills education presents a transformative paradigm for healthcare. In an era dominated by

technological advancement, the Prophet's ethical and relational example offers a counterbalance that centers on empathy, humility, and human dignity. Numerous studies support that patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment, and clinical outcomes improve when healthcare providers demonstrate strong interpersonal skills (25,26). Similarly, studies also found that embedding soft skills evaluation into structured clinical assessments significantly enhances students' professional communication, empathy, and ethical sensitivity (7,13). These findings substantiate the relevance of integrating Prophetic virtues such as *rahmah* and *hikmah* into contemporary healthcare training (27,28).

The proposed Prophetic-based conceptual model offers a culturally grounded and spiritually enriched approach to soft skills education. Yet, several considerations must be acknowledged. First, not all healthcare contexts or cultural settings may be receptive to overtly faith-based models, particularly in pluralistic societies where religious diversity is pronounced. Second, there is a risk of idealizing moral traits without sufficient pedagogical support to ensure consistent behavioral change among learners. Third, implementing such models requires educators who are both clinically competent and religiously

literate an integration that is not yet widely available.

While these limitations exist, they also highlight areas for future inquiry. Empirical studies are needed to evaluate the adaptability of Sunnah-based training across various healthcare systems, its impact on interprofessional collaboration, and its influence on measurable patient-centered outcomes. Furthermore, the inclusion of Islamic ethical frameworks should not be viewed as exclusionary but rather as complementary to universal humanitarian values shared across traditions.

Finally, the concept of decolonization in healthcare ethics deserves clarification. Here, it refers to the process of reclaiming culturally authentic knowledge systems such as Islamic moral frameworks and integrating them alongside global biomedical ethics. This approach challenges Western-dominant paradigms by recognizing the legitimacy and richness of local, faith-informed traditions that align with holistic care philosophies. As previous studies argue, such integration not only diversifies epistemic perspectives but also nurtures moral consciousness and professional identity among healthcare practitioners (25,28).

CONCLUSION

The Prophetic Sunnah offers a timeless and universal foundation for cultivating the soft skills essential to modern healthcare. Through *rahmah* (compassion), *sabr* (patience), *hikmah* (wisdom), *amanah* (trust), and *adab* (respect), Prophet Muhammad ﷺ exemplified the moral integrity and interpersonal excellence that remain central to effective patient care.

This review underscores the potential of integrating Prophetic ethics into healthcare education to nurture professionals who are not only clinically competent but also spiritually and morally attuned. When aligned with evidence-based educational methods such as simulation, reflective practice, and structured assessment, these values form a comprehensive framework that bridges science and spirituality (13).

Ultimately, sustained collaboration among Islamic scholars, educators, and healthcare leaders is vital to operationalize this framework. By doing so, Muslim-majority institutions can contribute to a decolonized, ethically grounded, and patient-centered healthcare paradigm one that honors both divine guidance and human compassion,

fostering excellence and integrity in the service of humanity.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review is conceptual and interpretive in nature; therefore, it does not include empirical data to test the proposed model. While existing literature supports the relevance of soft skills and ethical training in healthcare, there remains a scarcity of studies explicitly linking these competencies with Prophetic teachings in measurable educational contexts. Additionally, the diversity of interpretations across Islamic schools of thought may lead to variations in how Prophetic values are operationalized in curricula.

Future research should aim to:

1. Empirically test the proposed conceptual model within healthcare training programs across Muslim-majority and multicultural contexts.
2. Develop validated assessment tools for measuring Sunnah-based soft skills such as compassion, trustworthiness, and ethical judgment.
3. Explore cross-disciplinary collaborations between Islamic scholars, educators, and medical professionals to co-design contextually relevant curricula.
4. Evaluate the long-term effects of faith-integrated soft skills education on patient satisfaction, professional conduct, and workplace culture.

Addressing these areas would strengthen the evidence base and enhance the scalability of the proposed framework for global healthcare systems.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

TSSJ: Conceptualized the study, conducted data synthesis, developed the conceptual framework, and led the manuscript writing and final revision.

MSN: Provided conceptual guidance and contributed to manuscript refinement.

CACA: Contributed to the literature review and aligned the conceptual framework with healthcare education perspectives.

RMI: Assisted in data extraction, manuscript formatting, and referencing.

MKCH: Contributed to the contextual analysis of Islamic literature and healthcare practice, ensuring scholarly accuracy in religious and ethical components.

KKW: Contributed to the review and synthesis of healthcare practice literature.

HA: Supported comparative contextualization and integration of Islamic perspective

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