

Recontextualizing Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's Educational Philosophy for AI Ethics and Education

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Abstract

The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI in educational contexts, raises epistemological and ethical questions concerning how knowledge is produced, evaluated, and used. This study recontextualizes Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's philosophy of education as a framework for examining these challenges. Employing qualitative library research, the study combines hermeneutic interpretation, conceptual analysis, and philosophical recontextualization. Azad's Tarjuman al-Qur'an and India Wins Freedom are examined alongside selected works on information philosophy, Islamic epistemology, AI ethics, and AI in education. The analysis reconstructs key dimensions of Azad's epistemology concerning reason, revelation, knowledge, moral responsibility, and human development, and subsequently brings them into dialogue with contemporary challenges associated with AI-mediated education. The analysis suggests that computational efficiency and functional performance alone are insufficient criteria for educational knowledge and judgment. Based on this conceptual correspondence, the study develops a Synthetic Epistemology Model comprising three interconnected dimensions: technological intelligence, ethical judgment, and spiritual/value-oriented consciousness. The model positions AI as a technological instrument whose educational significance depends on human interpretation, ethical oversight, and the purposes guiding its use. The study does not claim that Azad anticipated contemporary AI; rather, it proposes a normative recontextualization of his epistemological principles for current educational challenges. The study contributes a philosophical framework for integrating technological capability with critical reasoning, ethical responsibility, and human development in AI-mediated education.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, developments in artificial intelligence (AI) have increasingly influenced how knowledge is produced, accessed, evaluated, and circulated, raising important epistemological questions about the relationship between human cognition and computational systems. This development is not merely technological but also epistemological, insofar as AI-mediated systems increasingly participate in processes traditionally associated with human knowledge production and validation. Floridi (2025) conceptualizes this broader transformation in terms of the changing informational environment in which human and artificial agents interact, highlighting the growing role of digital infrastructures and algorithmic systems in shaping how information acquires meaning and epistemic value. In education, these developments have significant epistemic implications, particularly as generative AI, automated information processing, and algorithmic recommendation systems become increasingly involved in learning and knowledge-production practices. Rather than suggesting that human critical reflection has been replaced by machine processing, this development raises a more specific question: how should the relationship between computationally generated information and human judgment be understood within educational epistemology? Floridi's discussion of the emerging informational environment provides an important contemporary context for examining this question, while also creating space for a philosophical engagement with alternative conceptions of knowledge that place human judgment, ethical responsibility, and the unity of knowledge at the center of education (Floridi, 2025).

From the perspective of the philosophy of education, this transformation gives rise to a fundamental crisis, namely the loss of the moral and teleological dimensions of the learning process. Geoffrey notes that "AI in education tends to focus students on becoming data producers rather than seekers of meaning" (Geoffrey, 2024). This represents a form of the instrumentalization of epistemology, in which knowledge is regarded as valuable only insofar as it can be used for productivity.

As Geoffrey points out, AI has brought about an "epistemic restructuring" in education, namely a shift from a reflective model of learning to an "informative" one, in which students are regarded as inforgs (informational organisms) conditioned for efficiency rather than contemplation (Geoffrey, 2024). Within this context, Azad's philosophy can be interpreted as a critique of the datafication tendency in education, which erodes the moral and spiritual dimensions of knowledge. Thus, this study is not merely retrospective toward Azad's intellectual legacy but also prospective, proposing a new epistemological model capable of bridging the gap between algorithmic epistemology and spiritual-rational epistemology.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative philosophical research design combining philosophical recontextualization, hermeneutic interpretation, and critical-conceptual analysis to reinterpret Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's philosophy of education in relation to contemporary epistemological and ethical challenges associated with artificial intelligence (AI). Philosophical recontextualization is understood in this study as a systematic interpretive procedure through which historically situated philosophical concepts are reconstructed from their original textual context and subsequently brought into dialogue with contemporary problems without attributing those problems directly to the historical thinker. This approach enables the study to move beyond a purely historical description of Azad's thought while maintaining a distinction between historical interpretation and contemporary normative reconstruction (Gadamer, 2004; Kaelan, 2005; Rahaman, 2022). The contemporary relevance of this approach is further supported by recent scholarship examining the relationship between Islamic intellectual traditions, education, and emerging technological transformations (Asyibli et al., 2025; Rahaman, 2022).

The study uses a qualitative library research design, with textual interpretation, conceptual analysis, comparative reading, and philosophical reasoning as the principal analytical strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kaelan, 2005). The primary corpus consists of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* (1962) and *India Wins Freedom* (1959), selected because these works provide important evidence for reconstructing his intellectual, theological, educational, and humanistic perspectives. *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* is examined particularly for its treatment of revelation, reason, knowledge, human responsibility, and the moral purposes of religious understanding, while *India Wins Freedom* is used as a complementary source for understanding Azad's broader intellectual and educational orientation. These primary texts are supplemented by relevant educational and intellectual writings by Azad where necessary to clarify concepts that cannot be adequately reconstructed from the two principal works alone. The selection of the primary corpus follows three criteria: textual relevance to knowledge and education, direct authorship or reliable attribution to Azad, and availability of a verifiable edition or translation.

The primary corpus is examined in dialogue with contemporary philosophical and ethical literature concerning digital epistemology and artificial intelligence. These include Luciano Floridi's *The Philosophy of Information* (2013) and *The Logic of Information* (2019), Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *Knowledge and the Sacred* (1989), and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (2014). These works are not treated as evidence of Azad's historical position but as comparative philosophical frameworks for identifying convergences and divergences concerning knowledge, truth, rationality, spirituality, and the ethical purposes of knowing. The contemporary policy corpus includes UNESCO's Recommendation on

the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research (2023), and relevant OECD publications. These policy documents provide contextual evidence concerning current ethical and educational challenges associated with AI rather than serving as direct theoretical sources for Azad's epistemology.

The analysis integrates hermeneutic interpretation and critical-conceptual synthesis (Gadamer, 2004; Kaelan, 2005). The hermeneutic procedure follows the principle that a philosophical text must be interpreted in relation to its historical, linguistic, theological, and intellectual context rather than retrospectively imposed with contemporary meanings (Gadamer, 2004). Accordingly, the analysis first reconstructs the meanings of Azad's concepts within their textual context before examining their possible relevance to contemporary AI-related educational problems.

The principal interpretive questions are: (1) What does Azad identify as the sources and purposes of knowledge? (2) How does he relate reason, revelation, and human intellectual development? (3) What relationship does he establish between knowledge and moral responsibility? and (4) What conception of human development emerges from his educational and theological writings? These questions provide the basis for identifying the concepts that are subsequently recontextualized.

The conceptual analysis proceeds by identifying and mapping recurring concepts within the primary texts. The principal units of analysis are conceptually significant passages addressing reason (*'aql*), revelation (*wahy*), wisdom (*hikmah*), knowledge, moral responsibility, human development, and the relationship between different forms of knowledge. Each passage is recorded according to its textual location, immediate context, conceptual meaning, and relevance to the research questions. The concepts are then compared with contemporary AI-related concerns, including dependence on AI-generated information, algorithmic decision-making, human oversight, technological efficiency, and the ethical purposes of AI-supported education. This procedure follows the logic of critical-conceptual synthesis, in which concepts from different intellectual frameworks are compared without assuming that they are historically or philosophically identical (Kaelan, 2005).

Philosophical recontextualization is conducted through three analytical movements. First, historical-textual reconstruction establishes what can legitimately be attributed to Azad on the basis of the primary corpus. Second, conceptual comparison identifies points of correspondence, tension, and difference between Azad's epistemological concepts and contemporary discussions of AI, digital knowledge, and ethics. Third, normative reconstruction develops propositions concerning how Azad's epistemological principles may inform contemporary educational responses to AI. The third stage is explicitly treated as an interpretive extension of Azad's thought rather than as evidence that Azad anticipated artificial

intelligence. This distinction is essential for preventing anachronistic appropriation of historical concepts (Gadamer, 2004).

The proposed Synthetic Epistemology Model is formulated from the conceptual relationships identified through these stages. The movement from textual evidence to model construction follows a traceable analytical sequence: primary textual concept → reconstructed epistemological principle → contemporary AI-related problem → conceptual correspondence → model proposition. For example, Azad's treatment of reason and intellectual inquiry is examined in relation to the problem of uncritical reliance on AI-generated information; his emphasis on moral and theological orientation is considered in relation to questions of human responsibility and AI governance; and his broader conception of knowledge and human development is recontextualized in relation to the educational tendency to prioritize computational efficiency. On this basis, the model synthesizes three interconnected dimensions: technological intelligence, ethical judgment, and spiritual/value-oriented consciousness (Bostrom, 2014; Nasr, 1989; al-Attas, 2014).

To strengthen conceptual validity, the study uses comparative theoretical corroboration rather than theoretical triangulation in the conventional empirical sense. Azad's concepts are compared with the philosophical positions of Floridi, Nasr, and al-Attas and with contemporary AI-ethics frameworks from UNESCO and the OECD. Corroboration is understood as convergence around a conceptual problem, whereas divergence is retained when frameworks differ in their epistemological assumptions or normative commitments. The principal criteria of validity are therefore textual fidelity, logical coherence, explanatory usefulness, and normative adequacy. Textual fidelity requires that interpretations remain grounded in identifiable passages from Azad's corpus; logical coherence requires that the model propositions follow consistently from the reconstructed concepts; explanatory usefulness concerns the model's ability to illuminate specific AI-related educational dilemmas; and normative adequacy concerns the ethical defensibility and contextual appropriateness of the resulting recommendations (Gadamer, 2004; Kaelan, 2005).

The research procedure therefore consists of three principal stages: (1) Textual Identification, involving the selection, classification, and contextual reading of primary and secondary sources; (2) Conceptual Reconstruction, involving the coding and mapping of Azad's epistemological concepts and their comparison with contemporary AI-ethics problems; and (3) Philosophical Recontextualization, involving the development of normative propositions and the formulation of the Synthetic Epistemology Model. The model is subsequently examined against concrete educational dilemmas, including algorithmic assessment and generative-AI-supported learning, to assess its explanatory usefulness and practical implications.

This methodological approach is appropriate because the research question concerns the philosophical meaning and contemporary relevance of Azad's

epistemology rather than the measurement of an empirical educational effect. The study therefore does not claim to demonstrate that AI has universally transformed the epistemological foundations of education or that Azad directly anticipated contemporary AI. Instead, it reconstructs Azad's epistemological principles from his texts and critically recontextualizes them in dialogue with contemporary debates on AI, education, knowledge, and ethics. In this sense, the study contributes a conceptual framework for considering how technological intelligence may be integrated with ethical judgment and human development while remaining attentive to the historical specificity of Azad's thought and the plurality of contemporary educational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gadamer, 2004; UNESCO, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Azad's Epistemology to an AI-Epistemological Problem

The textual analysis indicates that Azad's conception of knowledge connects intellectual inquiry with revelation, moral responsibility, and human development (Azad, 1962). Rather than treating these elements as isolated concepts, the analysis identifies an integrative epistemological principle: knowledge acquires educational significance not merely through its capacity to provide information, but through its relationship to truth, ethical judgment, and human formation. This reconstruction provides the primary textual basis for recontextualizing Azad's thought in relation to contemporary AI-mediated education.

The relevance of this principle becomes clearer when considered alongside the growing use of generative AI and large language models in educational practices. These systems can process extensive datasets and generate sophisticated outputs, but functional performance should not automatically be equated with human-like semantic or intentional understanding. This distinction remains philosophically contested (Desai et al., 2022). The analytical issue, therefore, is not whether AI can produce information, but whether computationally generated information is sufficient to constitute educational knowledge without human interpretation, evaluation, and ethical judgment.

This comparison reveals a conceptual tension between computational capability and epistemic responsibility. Floridi's philosophy of information emphasizes the changing informational environment in which human beings increasingly interact with computational systems (Floridi, 2013). Azad's epistemological perspective adds a different dimension by connecting knowledge with moral purpose and human development (Azad, 1962). The two perspectives are not identical: Floridi provides a framework for understanding information and its ethical environment, whereas Azad provides a theological-humanistic conception of the purpose of knowledge. Their dialogue therefore allows the present study to identify a specific analytical gap: technological systems can expand the capacity to

produce and process information, while the responsibility for determining its meaning, value, and educational purpose remains a human question.

Azad in Dialogue with Contemporary Epistemological Perspectives

The analysis does not treat Azad's epistemology as a complete or universally applicable solution to AI-related educational challenges. Its contribution becomes clearer when placed in dialogue with other intellectual perspectives. Nasr's critique of modern knowledge emphasizes the separation of knowledge from its spiritual and metaphysical foundations, while al-Attas similarly stresses the relationship between knowledge, worldview, and ethical formation (Nasr, 1989; al-Attas, 2014). These perspectives converge with Azad in challenging a purely instrumental conception of knowledge, but they differ in intellectual emphasis and historical context.

Azad is particularly useful for the present study because his intellectual project connects Islamic principles with modern intellectual inquiry, education, social reform, and human development.

This makes his epistemology relevant to the specific problem examined here: how educational knowledge can remain connected to human and ethical purposes while increasingly mediated by computational systems. Nevertheless, this relevance should be understood as a contemporary reconstruction rather than evidence that Azad anticipated AI.

The comparison also reveals an important limitation. Azad's theological conception of knowledge cannot simply be transferred into plural educational environments without interpretation and adaptation. Unlike contemporary AI-ethics frameworks, his epistemology was not developed to address algorithmic bias, automated decision-making, data governance, or generative AI. Consequently, Azad's thought is most useful as a philosophical resource for questioning the purposes and assumptions underlying AI-mediated education, rather than as a ready-made technical or policy framework.

From Conceptual Analysis to the Synthetic Epistemology Model

Based on the preceding textual and comparative analysis, the study develops the Synthetic Epistemology Model. The model is not presented as an empirical theory but as a conceptual reconstruction derived through the following analytical sequence:

Azad's epistemological concepts → reconstructed principles of knowledge → contemporary AI-related problems → conceptual correspondence → model propositions.

Three interconnected dimensions emerge from this analysis. First, technological intelligence recognizes the computational capacity of AI to process information and support educational activities. Second, ethical judgment represents the human capacity to evaluate the accuracy, consequences, and appropriateness of AI-generated information and decisions. Third, spiritual/value-oriented

consciousness places knowledge within broader questions of meaning, responsibility, human dignity, and purpose. The model therefore does not oppose technological intelligence to human intelligence; rather, it proposes that technological capability requires ethical and purposive human mediation.

The analytical significance of the model lies in its attempt to distinguish between the production of information and the formation of knowledge. AI can contribute substantially to the former, while the latter involves processes of interpretation, evaluation, contextualization, and responsible judgment. In this sense, Azad's epistemology provides a philosophical basis for questioning whether educational success should be measured exclusively through computational efficiency or competency outputs.

Critical Implications for AI-Mediated Education

The implications of the model should be understood as normative directions derived from philosophical analysis, not as empirically validated prescriptions. Three areas are particularly relevant.

First, AI-Ethics Curriculum Design. The analysis suggests that AI literacy should extend beyond technical competence to include ethical inquiry. Students may need to examine how AI-generated outputs are produced, what assumptions and limitations may underlie them, and how their reliability and consequences should be evaluated. This extends contemporary human-centered approaches to AI ethics by emphasizing the relationship between technological literacy and moral judgment. However, implementation would require adaptation to disciplinary, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Second, Reorientation of Educational Objectives. Azad's conception of knowledge raises a critical question concerning the dominance of measurable competencies and outputs in AI-mediated education. The implication is not that competency-based education should be abandoned, but that technical competence may need to be complemented by critical reflection, ethical reasoning, and broader forms of human development. The concept of *tanwīr al-nafs* is therefore employed as an interpretive concept within Azad's intellectual framework rather than as a universal educational prescription.

Third, Rehumanization of Digital Systems. The analysis indicates that AI-supported education requires meaningful human involvement in interpretation, evaluation, and consequential decision-making. This does not mean that AI should be rejected or placed under unrestricted human control. Rather, the issue concerns appropriate forms of human oversight, accountability, and judgment. In dialogue with Floridi's information ethics (Floridi, 2019), rehumanization can therefore be understood as maintaining the connection between computational capability and human purposes rather than treating technological efficiency as an educational end in itself.

These implications also reveal the limits of the proposed model. Azad's epistemological framework provides a strong basis for emphasizing meaning, ethical responsibility, and human development, but it does not by itself resolve contemporary technical problems such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, model transparency, or institutional governance. Such issues require engagement with computer science, policy studies, AI ethics, and empirical educational research. The contribution of Azad's perspective is therefore primarily philosophical: it helps clarify the purpose and ethical orientation of AI-mediated education rather than providing a comprehensive solution to all of its technological problems.

Discussion: Why Azad Matters for AI-Mediated Education

The preceding analysis suggests that the distinctive contribution of Azad's perspective lies not in offering a technical theory of AI but in challenging the reduction of educational knowledge to information processing and measurable performance. Compared with information-centered approaches, Azad places stronger emphasis on the relationship between knowledge, moral responsibility, and human formation (Azad, 1962). In dialogue with Nasr and al-Attas, this provides a broader Islamic epistemological critique of instrumental approaches to knowledge (Nasr, 1989; al-Attas, 2014). In dialogue with Floridi and contemporary AI-ethics frameworks, it contributes a stronger emphasis on the ethical and purposive dimensions of educational knowledge (Floridi, 2013, 2019).

Nevertheless, this does not establish Azad as universally superior to other approaches. His framework is historically and theologically situated, and its application to contemporary plural educational systems requires further philosophical and empirical examination. Its specific value for this study lies in providing a coherent conceptual basis for asking a question that technical approaches alone may not fully address: what should knowledge serve when its production and processing are increasingly mediated by artificial intelligence?

Thus, the Synthetic Epistemology Model should be understood as a philosophical bridge rather than a final educational prescription. It brings technological intelligence into dialogue with ethical judgment and spiritual/value-oriented consciousness while preserving the need for human agency and critical evaluation. The model's principal contribution is consequently to reframe AI in education not simply as a question of technological efficiency, but as a question concerning the meaning, purpose, and responsible use of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's historically situated conception of knowledge can be recontextualized to critically examine selected epistemological and ethical challenges arising from AI-mediated education. The analysis does not suggest that Azad anticipated artificial intelligence or that his

philosophy provides a comprehensive solution to contemporary AI-related problems. Rather, through textual reconstruction and philosophical dialogue with contemporary perspectives, the study demonstrates that Azad's conception of knowledge provides a useful conceptual resource for questioning the reduction of educational knowledge to information processing and measurable computational performance.

The findings show that Azad connects knowledge with reason, revelation, moral responsibility, and human development. When placed in dialogue with contemporary AI and information-ethical perspectives, this conception highlights an important distinction between the production of information and the formation of knowledge. AI can significantly enhance the capacity to process information and support educational activities, but its outputs still require human interpretation, contextualization, evaluation, and ethical judgment. In this respect, Azad's epistemology contributes a humanistic and value-oriented dimension to discussions of AI-mediated education.

Building on this analysis, the study proposes a Synthetic Epistemology Model consisting of three interconnected dimensions: technological intelligence, ethical judgment, and spiritual/value-oriented consciousness. The model does not reject technological intelligence or treat AI as inherently incompatible with human knowledge. Instead, it proposes that computational capability should remain connected to human agency, ethical responsibility, and purposive judgment. The model therefore functions as a conceptual and normative framework rather than an empirically validated educational theory.

The study also identifies important limitations. Azad's epistemological framework emerged within a particular theological, historical, and intellectual context and cannot be directly transferred to contemporary plural educational environments without interpretation and adaptation. Moreover, his thought does not independently resolve technical and policy challenges such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, model transparency, automated decision-making, or institutional AI governance. Addressing these issues requires further engagement with AI ethics, computer science, policy studies, and empirical educational research.

Ultimately, the contribution of this study lies in reframing the question of AI in education from one of technological capability alone to one of knowledge, human agency, ethical responsibility, and educational purpose. Azad's thought offers a philosophical basis for maintaining the connection between knowledge and human formation in an increasingly AI-mediated educational environment. The Synthetic Epistemology Model consequently provides a starting point for further interdisciplinary research into how technological intelligence can be integrated with ethical judgment and value-oriented consciousness without reducing education to computational efficiency.

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