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In Search of Bliss: A Qur'an- and Hadith-Based Framework for Happiness Education in Islamic Schools

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Abstract:
Islamic education aims not only at knowledge transmission but also at the formation of a person who attains sa'adah (felicity) in this world and the hereafter. Yet schools rarely translate the Qur'anic and prophetic guidance on happiness into explicit learning goals and practices. This study analyzes the Islamic conception of happiness and develops it into a framework for happiness education in Islamic schools. Using qualitative library research with a thematic (mawdu'i) approach, the study examines Qur'anic verses, hadith from Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, classical Islamic thought on education and felicity, and research on positive education and religiosity. The analysis identifies four interrelated dimensions of happiness: spiritual foundation, inner disposition, social engagement, and physical and lifestyle practice, all grounded in contentment (qana'ah) and trust in God (tawakkul). Each dimension is translated into learning objectives, learning activities, teacher roles, and school culture. The study contributes a conceptual framework that integrates Islamic values with insights from positive education, and proposes directions for empirical testing in Islamic schools.

Keywords: *happiness education, Islamic education, qana'ah, tawakkul, well-being*

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INTRODUCTION

Many societies continue to experience anxiety and dissatisfaction despite material progress, raising the question of where genuine happiness comes from. For education, this question is not only philosophical but practical. Schools shape the habits, values, and ways of interpreting life that students carry into adulthood. If schools teach students to measure success only through grades, careers, and possessions, they implicitly teach a narrow idea of what makes a life good. Islamic education, in contrast, has always claimed a broader aim: the formation of a person who attains felicity (*sa'adah*) in this world and the hereafter.

This broader aim is rooted in the classical Islamic understanding of education. Al-Attas (1980) describes education in Islam as *ta'dib*, the instilling of *adab* that places knowledge, the self, and God in their proper order. Halstead (2004) similarly explains that the Islamic concept of education encompasses intellectual, spiritual, and moral development, with the aim of producing a good person rather than merely a skilled worker. For al-Ghazali, felicity is attained through knowledge of the self that leads to knowledge of God, and through disciplining the self rather than through worldly gratification (al-Ghazali, trans. 2008). In this tradition, teaching about happiness is therefore not an addition to Islamic education but part of its core purpose.

In contemporary educational research, the idea that schools should teach well-being has been developed under the label of positive education. Seligman et al. (2009) argue that the skills of well-being, such as gratitude, resilience, and meaning, can and should be taught in schools alongside academic skills. Positive psychology research also suggests that a meaningful part of happiness is shaped by intentional activities, that is, the practices people choose to do (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The precise proportion once attributed to intentional activity, often summarized as "40 percent," has since been criticized as statistically unfounded (Brown & Rohrer, 2020), and its original authors

have revised how it should be interpreted (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2021). Even so, the broader point remains relevant to education: well-being can be cultivated through deliberate practice.

Positive education, however, is generally presented as value-neutral. It specifies practices but leaves open the question of the ultimate purpose that gives those practices lasting meaning. Comparative research shows that the Islamic conception of happiness differs from the predominantly hedonic Western model, emphasizing transcendence, nearness to God, and the hereafter rather than positive feeling alone (Joshanloo, 2013). Studies among Muslim students further indicate that religious commitment is related to happiness (Achour et al., 2017), and research published in this journal shows that Islamic education is associated with students' spiritual well-being (Rois et al., 2025). These findings suggest that, for Muslim learners, well-being education is likely to be more meaningful when it is grounded in an Islamic worldview.

At the heart of the Islamic view of happiness lies contentment (*qana'ah*). The Prophet ﷺ said, "He has tasted the sweetness of faith who is content with Allah as his Lord, Islam as his religion, and Muhammad ﷺ as his Prophet" (*Sahih Muslim*, 34). True wealth, in this view, is not abundance of possessions but sufficiency of the soul, and its foundation is complete trust in God (*tawakkul*). These concepts are already familiar in Islamic religious education, but they are usually taught as separate topics of creed or ethics rather than as an integrated pathway to well-being.

This study addresses that gap. Although the Qur'an and hadith contain extensive guidance on happiness, this guidance remains scattered across many verses and traditions and has rarely been organized into a framework that teachers can use. Accordingly, this study aims to (1) analyze the Islamic conception of happiness based on the Qur'an and authentic hadith; (2) organize this guidance into interrelated dimensions; and (3) translate these dimensions into a framework for happiness education in Islamic schools, covering learning objectives, learning activities, teacher roles, and school culture. Its novelty lies in moving from a theological description of happiness to an educational framework that dialogues with positive education.

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METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library-research design oriented toward conceptual analysis. Because the inquiry concerns normative and textual sources, a thematic interpretive method (*tafsir mawdu'i*) was adopted, in which verses and traditions sharing a common theme are gathered and read together to build an integrated understanding.

Primary sources consist of Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions from the canonical collections of *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*. English renderings of the Qur'an follow the Saheeh International translation, and hadith texts and numbering follow the Sunnah.com edition. Secondary sources consist of three groups of literature: (1) classical and contemporary Islamic thought on education and felicity (al-Attas, 1980; al-Ghazali, trans. 2008; Halstead, 2004); (2) research on happiness and religiosity (Achour et al., 2017; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Joshanloo, 2013; Koenig et al., 2012; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005); and (3) research on positive education and spiritual well-being in Islamic education (Rois et al., 2025; Seligman et al., 2009). Verses and hadith were included if they directly addressed happiness, contentment, gratitude, trust, brotherhood, or related states.

The combination of thematic interpretation and pedagogical translation reflects the dual aim of this study. Thematic interpretation is suited to identifying what the sources say about happiness as a whole, rather than in isolated verses. Pedagogical translation is needed because a theological description does not automatically tell teachers what to do in class. The study therefore moves in two steps: from texts to dimensions, and from dimensions to educational components. The study is limited to the canonical collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim for hadith, and to English-language and Indonesian-language secondary literature that was accessible to the authors.

Data were analyzed in four stages. First, *reduction*: relevant verses and traditions were collected and selected. Second, *thematic categorization*: the material was grouped into coherent dimensions. Third,

critical interpretation: the meaning of each dimension was drawn out and compared with research on happiness and religiosity. Fourth, *pedagogical translation*: each dimension was mapped onto the components of an educational framework, namely learning objectives, learning activities, teacher roles, and school culture, using Islamic educational theory and positive education as guides. Credibility was maintained by relying on canonical hadith collections, by cross-checking each interpretation against the textual evidence, and by distinguishing between what the sources state and what this study proposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented in four parts. The first part identifies key Qur'anic terms for happiness. The second part describes the four dimensions of happiness found in the Qur'an and hadith. The third part places these dimensions in dialogue with research on happiness and religiosity. The fourth part translates the dimensions into a framework for happiness education in Islamic schools.

Key Qur'anic Terms for Happiness

The Qur'an does not use a single word for happiness. Several terms describe related aspects of it. *Falah* refers to success in a comprehensive sense, as in "Certainly will the believers have succeeded" (Al-Mu'minun, 23:1). *Tuma'ninah* refers to tranquility of the heart: "Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured" (Ar-Ra'd, 13:28). *Hayatan tayyibah* refers to a good life in this world that is promised to those who combine faith and righteous action:

> "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do." (An-Nahl, 16:97)

Finally, *sa'adah* is the term used by classical scholars, including al-Ghazali, for ultimate felicity that unites this world and the hereafter (al-Ghazali, trans. 2008). Taken together, these terms show that happiness in Islam has three features that are relevant to education: it is holistic, involving belief, action, and inner state; it is attainable in this life but completed in the hereafter; and it is linked to effort, because it is promised to those who believe and act righteously. Happiness is therefore something that can be learned and cultivated, which makes it a legitimate object of education.

The Islamic Conception of Happiness: Four Dimensions

The analysis indicates that, in the Qur'an and hadith, happiness is not a passing feeling but a condition of the whole person that is cultivated through faith-based practice. The guidance can be organized into four interrelated dimensions: spiritual foundation, inner disposition, social engagement, and physical and lifestyle practice.

Spiritual Foundation: Seeking God, Trust, and Devotion

The foundational dimension places happiness in the relationship between the believer and God. The highest happiness is to seek the pleasure of Allah, which the Qur'an calls the "supreme success":

> "Allah has promised the believers—men and women—Gardens under which rivers flow … But the greatest bliss (happiness) is the Good Pleasure of Allah. That is the supreme success." (Al-Tawbah, 9:71–72)

Complementing this orientation is *tawakkul*, relying on God for sustenance, guidance, and relief. Recognizing divine power and accepting the Divine Decree free the heart from anxiety:

> "And whosoever puts his trust in Allah, then He will suffice him." (At-Talaq, 65:3)
>
> "And so many a moving (living) creature there is that carries not its own provision! Allah provides for it and for you …" (Al-'Ankabut, 29:60)

This foundation is nourished by engagement with revelation and beneficial knowledge. Reading the Qur'an with understanding strengthens faith and tranquility, for "when His Verses are

recited unto them, they increase their Faith" (Al-Anfal, 8:2). This is consistent with al-Ghazali's view that felicity is the fruit of self-knowledge that leads to knowledge of God (al-Ghazali, trans. 2008), and with Joshanloo's (2013) observation that, in the Islamic model, ultimate happiness is inseparable from the soul's nearness to God. For education, this dimension implies that knowledge of God is not only content to be memorized but a source of meaning that students can relate to their own lives.

Inner Disposition: Contentment, Gratitude, and Freedom from Comparison

The second dimension concerns inner states. Gratitude (*shukr*) is a principal source of tranquility, because the grateful servant recognizes that existence and sustenance depend wholly on God, and gratitude invites increase:

> "If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely My punishment is severe." (Ibrahim, 14:7)

Closely linked is the sufficiency of the soul, for "wealth is not in having many possessions, but rather (true) wealth is feeling sufficiency in the soul" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 6446). A further safeguard of contentment is freedom from worldly comparison. The Qur'an cautions against longing for the splendor granted to others (Ta-Ha, 20:131), and the Prophet ﷺ advised, "Look at those below you, and do not look at those above you, for this is better" (*Sahih Muslim*, 2963). Together, gratitude, sufficiency of the soul, and freedom from comparison form the psychological core of *qana'ah*. For students who live in a culture of constant comparison, including through social media, this dimension speaks directly to a familiar source of dissatisfaction.

Social Engagement: Brotherhood and Service

The third dimension extends happiness into the social sphere. Islam presents brotherhood and sisterhood as a source of security through both joy and sorrow, comparing the community to a single body:

> "Muslims (in their mutual love, care, and concern) are like one body; if the eye is sore, the whole body aches, and if the head aches, the whole body aches." (*Sahih Muslim*, 2586d)

Serving others and maintaining kinship ties are therefore part of well-being. Such striving in the path of God carries a promise of guidance: "As for those who struggle in Our cause, We will surely guide them along Our Way. And Allah is certainly with the good-doers" (Al-'Ankabut, 29:69). The social dimension turns personal contentment into communal solidarity. In a school setting, this dimension suggests that happiness is not only an individual achievement but something students build together through care for classmates and service to the community.

Physical and Lifestyle Practice: Rest, Lawful Provision, and Health

The fourth dimension recognizes the role of the body. The Prophet ﷺ preferred a simple and balanced life and apportioned his time among worship, public affairs, and personal matters. The lawfulness of provision is equally important, because the acceptance of supplication is linked to lawful sustenance:

> "… his diet is unlawful, his drink is unlawful … How then can his supplication be accepted?" (*Sahih Muslim*, 1015)

Physical strength also contributes to well-being; the Prophet ﷺ taught that "the strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, while there is good in both" (*Sahih Muslim*, 2664). This dimension shows that Islam does not demand renunciation of the world. It directs the lawful use of bodily and material means toward ultimate happiness. For education, it connects religious learning with health education, time management, and ethical consumption.

Dialogue with Research on Happiness and Religiosity

Read together, the four dimensions correspond to the domain that positive psychology calls intentional activity (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Where positive psychology recommends activities such as expressing gratitude, nurturing relationships, and pursuing meaningful goals, the Islamic framework provides corresponding practices: *shukr*, brotherhood and service, and striving for the

pleasure of God. The difference lies in their grounding. Secular interventions can raise well-being, but they leave the question of ultimate purpose open, whereas Islamic practices draw their meaning from *tawakkul* and orientation toward the hereafter (Joshanloo, 2013).

The correspondence is supported by empirical studies. The prophetic counsel to look at those less fortunate parallels gratitude interventions, in which deliberately counting blessings was found to raise subjective well-being and positive affect (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). The social dimension is mirrored by research linking religious involvement to better mental and physical health (Koenig et al., 2012) and religious commitment to happiness among Muslim students (Achour et al., 2017). At the same time, the Islamic framework adds elements that are often absent in secular accounts: lawful provision, the integration of bodily health into spiritual life, and the priority of divine pleasure over subjective pleasure.

This convergence also resonates with the classical synthesis of al-Ghazali, for whom bodily discipline, ethical refinement, and knowledge of God form a single path to felicity (al-Ghazali, trans. 2008). In this sense, the four dimensions are not a modern invention but a reorganization of an integrated view that has long existed in Islamic thought. What is new is placing this view in conversation with educational research, so that it can inform how schools design learning.

A further caution concerns sadness. Happiness education should not teach students that sadness is a sign of weak faith. The Qur'an records the grief of Prophet Ya'qub, who said, "I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah" (Yusuf, 12:86). This shows that sorrow is part of human experience and can be expressed within a relationship of trust in God. *Qana'ah* and *tawakkul* do not mean suppressing difficult emotions, but facing them with patience (*sabr*) and hope. Teachers should therefore present happiness education as a way of living meaningfully through both ease and hardship, not as a demand to appear happy at all times.

Two cautions are necessary. First, this study does not use the 40 percent figure as a precise measure, given the criticism of its statistical basis (Brown & Rohrer, 2020; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2021). The argument rests only on the more modest claim that intentional practice can influence well-being. Second, the correspondence between Islamic practices and positive psychology interventions should not reduce worship to a technique for feeling good. In the Islamic framework, the practices are first acts of devotion; their contribution to well-being is a fruit, not the purpose. This distinction is important for teachers, so that students do not learn to perform religious practices only for their psychological benefits.

A Framework for Happiness Education in Islamic Schools

The four dimensions can be translated into an educational framework. Islamic educational theory provides the purpose: *ta'dib*, the formation of a person of *adab* who knows his or her proper place in relation to God, the self, and others (al-Attas, 1980; Halstead, 2004). Positive education provides the insight that well-being can be taught explicitly and practiced regularly in schools (Seligman et al., 2009). Combining the two, the framework treats happiness as a set of dispositions and practices that students learn, practice, and reflect on, rather than as a feeling that is expected to arise by itself.

Table 1 presents the framework. For each dimension, it identifies the core Islamic concepts, a learning objective, examples of learning activities, the role of the teacher, and supporting elements of school culture. The activities are proposals derived from the analysis; they have not been tested in this study.

Table 1

Framework for Happiness Education in Islamic Schools

Dimension	**Core concepts**	**Learning objective**	**Example activities**	**Teacher role and school culture**

Spiritual foundation	Seeking the pleasure of Allah; *tawakkul*; engagement with the Qur'an	Students relate their goals and difficulties to trust in God	*Tadabbur* of selected verses (e.g., 65:3; 8:2); reflective writing on facing difficulties with *tawakkul*	Teacher models reflection on revelation; regular collective Qur'an recitation with brief reflection
Inner disposition	*Shukr*; *qana'ah*; freedom from comparison	Students practice gratitude and recognize the effects of comparison	Weekly *shukr* journal; discussion on social media comparison using *Sahih Muslim* 2963; *muhasabah* (self-reflection)	Teacher avoids ranking-based comparison; school recognizes effort and character, not only grades
Social engagement	Brotherhood; service; kinship ties	Students act with care toward peers and the community	Peer support groups; service-learning projects; family-related tasks on kinship	Teacher builds a caring classroom; school runs regular community service and anti-bullying programs
Physical and lifestyle practice	Balance of time; lawful provision; physical strength	Students manage time, health, and consumption responsibly	Daily schedule planning modeled on the prophetic balance; lessons on halal and ethical consumption; sport framed as care for the body	Teacher integrates religious and health education; school ensures rest time, healthy canteen, and physical activity

The four rows of Table 1 should be read as connected rather than separate. A *shukr* journal, for example, belongs to the inner disposition dimension, but it becomes deeper when students also reflect on verses about trust in God, share what they are grateful for with peers, and notice the blessings of health and rest. In practice, a single activity can touch several dimensions at once. The table separates them only to make the framework easier to plan and evaluate, while the underlying aim remains the integrated formation of the whole person.

The framework can be adapted to different levels of schooling. At the primary level, the emphasis can be on concrete and repeated practices, such as saying words of gratitude before and after activities, simple acts of help, and stories of the Prophet ﷺ that illustrate contentment. At the lower secondary level, students can begin keeping reflective journals and discussing comparison and envy among peers. At the upper secondary level, students can examine the verses and hadith more deeply through *tadabbur*, design service projects, and plan a balanced daily schedule. This gradual approach follows the principle that practices should be familiar before they are analyzed.

The framework also requires collaboration with families. Many of the practices, such as gratitude, care for kin, rest, and lawful provision, take place mostly at home. Schools can involve parents by sharing the focus of each dimension, suggesting simple practices for the family, and inviting parents to reflect with their children. Such collaboration helps ensure that what students learn at school is reinforced in daily life, and that happiness education does not conflict with the realities of students' homes.

Four pedagogical principles underlie the framework. First, *integration*: happiness education is not a separate subject but is woven into Islamic religious education, guidance and counseling, and school culture. Second, *practice before abstraction*: students first experience a practice, such as keeping a *shukr* journal for a week, and then reflect on the related verses and hadith, so that the concept is anchored in their own experience. Third, *intention*: teachers explain that the practices are acts of worship whose benefits for well-being are a gift from God, not the main reason for performing them. Fourth, *reflection*: each activity ends with *muhasabah*, in which students consider what changed in their thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

The framework also concerns teachers themselves. Teachers who are exhausted, anxious, or dissatisfied will find it difficult to model contentment and gratitude. In the Islamic tradition, the teacher is expected to be an example (*uswah*) whose conduct teaches as much as his or her words. Schools that adopt happiness education should therefore also attend to teachers' well-being, for example by building a collegial culture, recognizing teachers' efforts, and providing time for teachers' own spiritual reflection. Happiness education is more credible when it is lived by the whole school community.

Although the framework is centered on Islamic religious education, it can be connected with other subjects. Science lessons can relate the order of nature to reflection on the Creator, in line with the spiritual foundation dimension. Health and physical education can frame care for the body as part of the physical and lifestyle dimension. Social studies can explore poverty, consumption, and community service in relation to *qana'ah* and brotherhood. Such connections help students see that the Islamic view of happiness concerns all areas of life, not only religious lessons.

The framework also has implications for assessment. Because happiness is a disposition rather than a body of knowledge, written tests alone are not sufficient. Teachers can use reflective journals, observation of classroom behavior, peer feedback, and student portfolios to see whether students are developing gratitude, contentment, care for others, and a balanced lifestyle. These forms of assessment should be formative and non-punitive, so that students do not experience happiness education as another source of pressure.

Implications for Islamic Education

Three implications follow. First, for curriculum developers, the four dimensions offer a way to organize existing Islamic religious education content, such as creed, ethics, and worship, around a clear educational goal: the formation of students who are content, grateful, caring, and balanced. Many of the concepts are already present in the curriculum; what the framework adds is their connection to students' lived experience and well-being.

Second, for teachers and school counselors, the framework suggests that well-being interventions for Muslim students are likely to be more meaningful when they are religiously congruent, that is, when gratitude, contentment, and service are embedded within an explicit devotional rationale rather than presented as value-neutral techniques. This is consistent with

findings that religious commitment is related to happiness among Muslim students (Achour et al., 2017) and that Islamic education is associated with spiritual well-being (Rois et al., 2025). Teachers also need to model these dispositions, because students learn contentment and gratitude not only from lessons but from the adults around them.

For Islamic schools in Indonesia, including madrasahs and pesantren, the framework can be integrated into existing structures without adding new subjects. Religious education lessons can carry the conceptual content, guidance and counseling services can support reflection and personal difficulties, and school programs such as congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation, and community service can serve as the practice field. What is required is a shared understanding among teachers that these elements together serve the goal of forming students who are content, grateful, caring, and balanced.

At the school level, the implementation of the framework should be reviewed regularly. Schools can examine whether activities are carried out consistently, whether students and teachers find them meaningful, and whether the school culture supports or contradicts the values being taught. For example, a school that teaches freedom from comparison but publicly ranks students by grades sends a mixed message. Such reviews help schools align their practices with the goals of happiness education.

Third, for researchers, the framework yields measurable constructs, such as *qana'ah*, *shukr*, *tawakkul*, and prosocial religiosity, whose relationship with students' well-being can be tested. Future studies can develop and validate instruments for these constructs, and test the proposed activities through classroom action research or quasi-experimental designs in Islamic schools, madrasahs, and pesantren.

CONCLUSION

True happiness in Islam is not attained by acquiring wealth, fame, or status, but by harmonizing the well-being of body, heart, and soul through faith-based practice grounded in contentment and trust in God. This study has shown that the guidance of the Qur'an and authentic hadith can be organized into four interrelated dimensions: spiritual foundation, inner disposition, social engagement, and physical and lifestyle practice. As the Qur'an reminds, "whosoever turns away from My Reminder, verily for him is a life of hardship" (Ta-Ha, 20:124).

The main contribution of this study is the translation of these dimensions into a framework for happiness education in Islamic schools, which links Islamic concepts with learning objectives, activities, teacher roles, and school culture. The framework draws on the Islamic idea of education as *ta'dib* and on insights from positive education, while keeping worship as the purpose and well-being as its fruit.

As a conceptual study, its findings are interpretive. The proposed activities have not been tested, and their effects on students' well-being remain to be examined. Future research should develop instruments for the key constructs and test the framework empirically in different types of Islamic educational institutions.

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