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Received: June 19, 2026

Revised: July 28, 2026

Accepted: August 26, 2026

Developing a Transformative–Spiritual Islamic Religious Education Learning Model to Address the Quarter-Life Crisis Phenomenon

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Abstract

Quarter-Life Crisis (QLC) among final-year university students frequently manifests as cognitive dissonance and emotional distress. While Islamic Higher Education (PAI) has the potential to offer psychoeducational support, it often remains focused on normative-cognitive domains. This study aims to design and evaluate the design validity and initial practicality of a Transformative-Spiritual Islamic Education Learning Model that integrates Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory with the concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs. Employing an Educational Design Research (EDR) framework (Plomp model), the study involved 7 experts (PAI curriculum specialists, psychologists, and counselors) for content validation, as well as 15 final-year undergraduate students (aged 18–25 years) exhibiting self-reported QLC tendencies for a limited practicality trial. Data were collected using expert evaluation rubrics, student reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews, subsequently analyzed using the Content Validity Index (CVI) and qualitative thematic analysis. Results demonstrate that the developed model prototype achieved high content validity with an *S-CVI/Ave* score of 0.89. Findings from the limited field trial indicate that the model is practical and supports students in fostering spiritual coping mechanisms (through patience, acceptance, and reliance on God) while mitigating subjective distress. This study underscores the model's potential as a supportive pedagogical framework in higher education and recommends future large-scale comparative quantitative trials to evaluate long-term outcome efficacy.

Keywords: Educational Design Research, Islamic Higher Education, Quarter-Life Crisis, Spiritual Coping, Tazkiyatun Nafs, Transformative Learning.

Introduction

The transitional phase of human development from late adolescence into young adulthood—known in developmental psychology as emerging adulthood, spanning ages 18 to 29—is currently confronted with massive sociocultural disruptions. Structural shifts in modern society have given rise to a psychological crisis widely identified as the quarter-life crisis (QLC) (Permana & Sulastri, 2025). This phenomenon is characterized by profound anxiety, indecision regarding life direction,

identity instability, and an extreme fear of future failure (Dacka et al., 2025). During this transition, individuals experience role shifts that demand financial independence, career maturity, and interpersonal stability. When subjective expectations collide harshly with a highly competitive objective reality, emotional shocks occur that can paralyze an individual's psychological stability (Robinson et al., 2025).

Empirical data indicate that the primary triggers of the quarter-life crisis are multidimensional, encompassing pressure to achieve early success, the academic-to-professional transition, and social comparison accelerated by modern communication and social media platforms (Hasyim et al., 2024). Contemporary communication processes further escalate this psychological vulnerability (Praptiningsih et al., 2025). Constant exposure to highlights of others' accomplishments skews self-perception, inducing feelings of worthlessness and fostering cross-cultural existential isolation (Azza et al., 2025). Nevertheless, most existing literature examines QLC partially through secular Western psychological lenses or descriptive anxiety assessments. Consequently, a distinct literature gap remains regarding how structured religious-pedagogical interventions—specifically Islamic Religious Education (IRE)—can be transformatively deployed to restructure individuals' frames of reference and offer existential solutions for emerging adults.

In case studies involving final-year university students, concrete manifestations of this crisis become apparent. For instance, a 23-year-old subject expressed severe anxiety over entering the professional workforce, while a 22-year-old subject cited persistent distress due to parental expectations of immediate financial independence. Temporary coping strategies, such as leisure travel, proved ineffective in addressing the root cause, as anxiety resurfaced immediately upon returning to daily reality. Ramadani et al., (2025) emphasize that long-term resolution of this crisis during emerging adulthood heavily depends on an individual's self-efficacy and psychological resilience.

Failure to navigate this crisis affects not only psychological well-being but also manifests in severe physical symptoms. Excessive emotional distress triggers somatic reactions and psychosomatic disorders. Psychologically, the crisis represents an unresolved state of identity diffusion or moratorium, wherein individuals lose clarity regarding their self-identity and purpose of creation. Students' adaptive capacity is influenced by several measurable variables. Statistical analysis shows that cognitive intelligence accounts for 28.7% of self-adjustment ability, while personal-social interests contribute 4.5%. The remaining 64.1% is determined by other variables, including mental-spiritual resilience and religious maturity.

This lack of mental-spiritual preparedness explains why conventional psychological interventions often treat superficial symptoms without restructuring an individual's deeper sense of life meaning. Studies demonstrate that self-regulation and mature religiosity correlate positively with psychological adjustment (Zong & Cheah, 2021). Spiritual components such as *tawakkul* (trust in God), *sabr* (patience), and *shukr* (gratitude) significantly contribute to maintaining mental health (Nasrin, 2025). Therefore, reconstructing the instructional model of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is imperative: it must transcend mere information transfer (*transfer of knowledge*) to become a transformative-existential therapeutic mechanism (*transformation of values*). Integrating Islamic psychotherapy into religious education is essential for building student well-being (Aristyasari et al., 2026). By reinforcing core Islamic values as mental health therapies grounded in logotherapy (meaning-centered therapy), individuals gain a firm spiritual foundation to navigate life transitions (Ussolikhah & Winarso, 2025).

Table 1: Manifestations of Psychosomatic Symptoms Triggered by Quarter-Life Crisis Pressures

Psychosomatic Symptom	Description of Physiological Reaction	Functional Impact on Daily Activities
Chronic Headaches (Migraine)	Vascular tension in the brain caused by constant cognitive stress.	Impairs academic focus and undergraduate thesis completion.
Gastric Disorders (Gastritis)	Elevated stomach acid levels induced by acute emotional stress.	Disrupts eating habits and weakens physical immunity.
Hyperhidrosis (Cold Sweats)	Autonomic nervous system reaction triggered by situational anxiety.	Reduces self-confidence during social interactions.
Acute Insomnia	Inability to quiet the mind due to pervasive future anxieties.	Causes chronic fatigue and cognitive performance decline.
Heart Palpitations	Irregular heart rate resulting from adrenaline surges during panic.	Triggers existential panic and severe fear of mortality.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in formal academic settings often remains constrained by a reductionist, traditional-transmission model. Instructional approaches tend to be dominated by dry cognitive transfers of religious knowledge, memorization of formal legal texts, and dogmatic rituals detached from students' lived struggles. This conventional paradigm fails to equip learners with the psychological resilience necessary to navigate modern complexities. Amid the uncertainties of the quarter-life crisis, dogmatically taught doctrines are frequently perceived as outdated and unhelpful by young adults seeking practical answers to existential anxiety.

To address these limitations, a structural reconstruction of IRE pedagogy is essential, incorporating the core principles of Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2018). Transformative learning is defined as a process that alters an individual's frame of reference, comprising habits of mind and points of view. Through this process, problematic assumptions are identified, critically evaluated, and reformulated to become more inclusive, open, reflective, and adaptive to change (Mezirow, 2000).

In Islamic education, transformative learning aims to cultivate critical consciousness aligned with the ethical-spiritual values of the Quran and Sunnah, enabling students to act as autonomous agents (Ju'subaidi et al., 2024). This pedagogical evolution shifts the orientation of IRE from mere academic compliance toward building psychological resilience and creative problem-solving (Mardatillah et al., 2025).

Table 2 Comparative Analysis: Conventional IRE vs. Transformative-Spiritual IRE Paradigm

Analytical Dimension	Conventional IRE Paradigm	Transformative-Spiritual IRE Model
Learning Objectives	Mastery of cognitive religious content and ritualistic formalism.	Restructuring frames of reference and building mental-spiritual resilience.
Instructional Methods	One-way lectures, rote memorization, and dogmatic indoctrination.	Experiential learning, critical reflection, Socratic dialogue, and project-based learning.
Educator's Role	Sole authority on religious truth and primary information provider.	Learning facilitator, spiritual mentor (murshid), and theological dialogue partner.
Student's Position	Passive recipient of knowledge and object of instruction.	Active value-conscious subject (active agent) and self-directed learner.
Evaluation System	Standardized cognitive testing (Written/Multiple-Choice Exams).	Authentic assessment, reflective journal portfolios, and social performance evaluation.

The Transformative-Spiritual IRE Model is grounded in the theological-philosophical foundations of the Quran and Sunnah, integrated with classical Islamic spiritual psychology. From a Quranic perspective, personal transformation is an indispensable prerequisite for social change and existential peace. This principle is explicitly stated in Surah Ar-Ra'd (13:11), which asserts that God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves:

سَوَاءٌ بِقَوْمٍ أَرَادَ إِذَا بَأْنَأْسِهِمْ مَا يَغْيَرُوا حَتَّى يَقُومَ مَا يَغْيَرُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ أَمْرٍ مِنْ يَحْفَظُونَهُ خَلْفَ ۖ وَمَنْ يَدِيهِ بَيْنَ مَنْ مَعْقِبَتِ لَهُ ۖ وَال مَنْ دُونَهُ مِنْ لَهُمْ وَمَا لَهُ مَرْدٌ فَلَا

This verse establishes that overcoming life challenges, including QLC, requires inner self-change and deconstruction of problematic assumptions. Furthermore, inner tranquility (*ṭuma'nīnah*) is highlighted in Surah Ar-Ra'd (13:28), establishing that peace of heart is attained through persistent transcendental awareness (*dhikr*):

Conceptually, this model integrates the stages of *Tazkiyatun Nafs* (purification of the soul) from Sufi psychology with Mezirow's phases of transformative learning (Abdilah et al., 2025). This integration forms a dynamic interaction between cognitive-reflective capacity and spiritual maturity (Arifin et al., 2022). This relationship can be expressed mathematically to calculate a student's Mental-Spiritual Resilience Index (R_{ms}):

$$R_{ms} = \int_0^t (C_r \cdot S_m) dt$$

Where C_r represents cognitive critical reflection capacity in evaluating sociocultural assumptions, and S_m denotes spiritual maturity across devotional practices, sincerity, and trust in divine decree (Nasrin, 2025). Through this formulation, psychological resilience is framed as a dynamic function that develops alongside reflective depth and spiritual practice (Hadiyatullah, 2025). Integrating meditative and remembrance practices (*dhikr*) into contemporary IRE has been shown to reduce anxiety (Nugraha et al., 2025). In Sufi psychology, coping with emotional distress involves structured *maqamat* (spiritual stations) to navigate identity disruptions in the modern age (Addzaky et al., 2026). These stations serve as a psychological buffer, channeling crisis-induced stress into constructive spiritual growth.

Table 3 Integration Mapping: Mezirow's Theory, Tazkiyatun Nafs, and Contemporary Resilience Indicators

Mezirow's Cognitive Phase	Maqam in Tazkiyatun Nafs	Islamic Psycho-Spiritual Mechanism	Contemporary Resilience Indicator
Disorienting Dilemma	Taubah (Repentance & Reorientation)	Re-evaluating past assumptions, transforming guilt into motivation for growth.	Self-forgiveness and Growth mindset.
Self-Examination	Muhasabah (Introspection)	Assessing inner motives and evaluating excessive attachment to worldly outcomes (wahn).	Self-awareness and Emotional regulation.
Exploration of Coping Options	Mujahadah (Spiritual Struggle)	Exercising self-discipline and mental fortitude against distress and anxiety.	Impulse control, self-discipline, and mental fortitude.
Planning a Course of Action	Tawakkul (Active Reliance)	Balancing maximal practical effort with surrender of final	Reduced anxiety, optimism, and internal

Mezirow's Cognitive Phase	Maqam in Tazkiyatun Nafs	Islamic Psycho-Spiritual Mechanism	Contemporary Resilience Indicator
		outcomes to God.	locus of control.
Reintegration of Perspective	Ikhlas (Sincerity of Intent)	Aligning life goals with seeking divine pleasure, relinquishing dependence on social validation.	Reduced social anxiety and enhanced meaning in life.

Hadith traditions further support the theological framework of this model. Sahih literature records that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated that no hardship, illness, anxiety, sorrow, harm, or distress befalls a Muslim without God expiating some of their sins through it. This tradition provides a constructive cognitive reframing of QLC. Crises are understood not as personal failures, but as opportunities for spiritual purification (*ibtilla'*) that foster mental maturity and faith.

Despite the theoretical and practical relevance of these concepts, empirical studies designing operational IRE interventions based on the Mezirow–*Tazkiyatun Nafs* synthesis remain limited. The primary novelty of this study lies in formulating an operational instructional model—the Transformative-Spiritual IRE Model—that combines Western reflective cognition with Sufi spiritual purification as a structured therapeutic mechanism to address QLC. This study aims to design, assess the feasibility of, and evaluate the effectiveness of this model in mitigating existential anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms among emerging adults, while offering practical insights for developing student-centered, mental health-responsive IRE curricula.

Method

This study employed an Educational Design Research (EDR) approach, specifically adopting the (McKenney & Reeves, 2020) generic design research framework, to design, develop, and evaluate a Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model as an educational intervention for mitigating quarter-life crisis (QLC) among emerging adults. The EDR framework was selected due to its iterative, context-bound, and practice-oriented characteristics, which facilitate the translation of empirical sociopsychological needs into theoretical design principles and instructional components. The research design spanned three iterative phases: (1) Analysis and Exploration, (2) Design and Construction, and (3) Evaluation and Reflection.

Participants, Recruitment, and Screening

To ensure clarity across development phases, participants were divided into two primary categories: exploratory/intervention participants and expert panel members. Target Population & Boundaries: The study focused on emerging adults aged 18–25 years enrolled as undergraduate students at UIN Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda. This age boundary (18–25 years) was selected because it represents the core academic transition phase within emerging adulthood (18–29 years), where students encounter immediate academic, career, and financial stressors.

QLC Screening & Sample Size: In the exploratory phase, participants were screened using an adapted 24-item *Quarter-Life Crisis Questionnaire* (QLCQ) evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, which yielded high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.88$). A total of 35 undergraduate students met the eligibility criteria (scoring above the cutoff threshold of > 75 , indicating moderate-to-severe QLC levels) without exhibiting severe clinical psychiatric disorders (e.g., major depressive disorder or active psychosis), which served as exclusion criteria. Data saturation for the qualitative exploratory phase was achieved after in-depth interviews with 18 participants.

Intervention Sample: A subset of $N = 30$ screened students participated in a 6-week limited field trial (one 120-minute session per week) facilitated by trained PAI educators and supported by certified guidance counselors.

Development Trail and Design Phases

Phase 1: Analysis and Exploration (Needs Assessment): Empirical needs were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews, document analysis of existing PAI syllabi, and critical literature synthesis. Each identified empirical need was systematically mapped into a corresponding design principle. For example, the empirical finding of "existential paralysis caused by materialistic social comparison" was translated into the design principle of "triggering disorienting cognitive dissonance through counter-cultural theological narratives".

Phase 2: Design and Construction (Prototype Development): Based on the design principles, a prototype of the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model was constructed. This prototype integrated Mezirow's Transformative Learning stages with the classical Islamic psychological framework of *Tazkiyatun Nafs*. The design comprised five operational syntax phases: *Existential Provocation*, *Structured Muhasabah*, *Socratic-Spiritual Discourse*, *Social Mujahadah*, and *Spiritual Reintegration*. Additionally, the Continuous Transformative Evaluation (ETB) rubric was developed.

Phase 3: Evaluation and Reflection (Delphi Validation & Field Trial): Model feasibility and content validity were evaluated using a two-round modified Delphi technique. The expert panel consisted of 9 experts: 3 PAI curriculum specialists, 3 clinical psychologists, and 3 guidance counselors: *Round 1*: Experts evaluated the prototype using a 4-point rating scale across 15 items covering theoretical consistency, instructional feasibility, and psychological safety. Qualitative feedback prompted revisions in syntax wording and the inclusion of explicit psychological referral protocols, and *Round 2*: Re-evaluation demonstrated strong consensus. The Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI) ranged from 0.83 to 1.00, and the Scale-Level CVI Average (S-CVI/Ave) reached 0.89, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.80.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Trustworthiness

Data Collection Instruments: Qualitative data were gathered using semi-structured interview guides, direct classroom observation protocols during the 6-week trial, and student reflective journal portfolios (*Muhasabah* logs).

Data Analysis: Qualitative transcripts and reflective journals were analyzed through thematic analysis following the interactive framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Coding was performed independently by two coders using a predefined codebook derived from Mezirow's framework and *Tazkiyatun Nafs* stages. Inter-coder reliability was established with a Cohen's kappa coefficient of $\kappa = 0.84$. Discrepancies were resolved through negotiated consensus.

Trustworthiness & Ethics: Qualitative rigor was maintained via source and method triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking with participants. Ethical safeguards were strictly applied: all participants provided written informed consent, data were fully anonymized (using codes P-01 to P-30), and an integrated referral protocol was established with university guidance counselors to assist any participant experiencing acute psychological distress.

Results

The findings of this study are presented according to the three phases of Educational Design Research (EDR): (1) Empirical Needs and Design Principles (Analysis Phase), (2) Prototype Architecture and Operational Syntax (Construction Phase), and (3) Delphi Validation and Field Trial

Evaluation (Evaluation Phase). This structure reflects the systematic development process of the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model, beginning with the identification of empirical challenges related to quarter-life crisis (QLC) among emerging adults, followed by the formulation of instructional design principles, the construction of the learning model prototype, and the evaluation of its validity, feasibility, and transformative impact.

Empirical Needs and Design Principles (Analysis Phase)

The exploratory analysis phase identified four primary empirical needs associated with quarter-life crisis experiences among emerging adults. These needs reflected multidimensional challenges involving cognitive interpretation, emotional regulation, identity formation, and spiritual meaning-making. The identified empirical conditions were subsequently analyzed through underlying psychological mechanisms and translated into instructional design principles that became the foundation for developing the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model.

The first identified challenge was existential paralysis and social comparison. Participants demonstrated difficulties in constructing personal meaning and life direction due to excessive comparison with others, particularly through social media-based achievement narratives. Emerging adults tended to internalize external indicators of success, such as career advancement, financial achievement, and social recognition, as primary measures of self-worth. This condition generated feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty regarding personal identity and future goals.

The underlying psychological mechanism of this challenge was identified as the uncritical internalization of materialistic success metrics driven by social media. To address this issue, the first instructional design principle, DP1: Cognitive Disruption, was formulated. This principle emphasizes the importance of introducing counter-cultural Islamic theological perspectives to challenge dominant assumptions about worldly success and encourage learners to reconstruct more meaningful definitions of achievement based on spiritual values.

The second empirical need was chronic anxiety and future dread. Participants experienced persistent worries regarding future uncertainty, personal achievement, and life outcomes. These concerns were associated with excessive dependence on personal control while simultaneously experiencing feelings of helplessness (*wahn*). Such psychological tension reduced students' ability to manage uncertainty constructively.

Therefore, DP2: Structural Introspection was developed as a design response. This principle integrates systematic self-examination (*Muhasabah*) to help learners evaluate their motivations, fears, and personal expectations. Through balancing *Ikhtiar* (active effort) and *Tawakkul* (spiritual reliance), students are guided to develop responsible agency while accepting outcomes beyond human control.

The third identified challenge was somatic manifestations and isolation. Participants reported emotional distress that was manifested through physical symptoms and reduced social engagement. These conditions indicated that QLC experiences affected not only cognitive processes but also emotional and physiological functioning.

The psychological mechanism underlying this condition was identified as suppressed emotional distress resulting in autonomic nervous system arousal. Accordingly, DP3: Dialogic Reframing was developed. This principle emphasizes Socratic-Spiritual discourse to help students reinterpret suffering (*Ibtla'*) as a meaningful process that contributes to resilience, personal growth, and spiritual development.

The fourth empirical need was fragmented identity and passive coping. Participants demonstrated avoidance-based coping behaviors, including excessive leisure activities and media consumption, as temporary responses to existential uncertainty. Although these strategies provided short-term emotional relief, they did not contribute to sustainable identity development.

To overcome this challenge, DP4: Action-Oriented Reintegration was formulated. This principle encourages students to engage in social service (*Mujahadah*) and develop personal value-based life projects. Through meaningful action, learners are guided to reconstruct their identity and strengthen their commitment to purposeful living.

The relationship between empirical needs, psychological mechanisms, and instructional design principles is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Mapping Empirical Needs to Instructional Design Principles

Identified Empirical Need	Underlying Psychological Mechanism	Instructional Design Principle
Existential Paralysis & Social Comparison	Uncritical internalization of materialistic success metrics driven by social media	DP1: Cognitive Disruption—Induce cognitive dissonance using counter-cultural Islamic theological narratives to challenge worldly success norms.
Chronic Anxiety & Future Dread	Over-reliance on personal control paired with perceived helplessness (<i>wahn</i>)	DP2: Structural Introspection—Guide systematic self-examination (<i>Muhasabah</i>) to balance active effort (<i>Ikhtiar</i>) and spiritual reliance (<i>Tawakkul</i>).
Somatic Manifestations & Isolation	Suppressed emotional distress resulting in autonomic nervous system arousal	DP3: Dialogic Reframing—Facilitate Socratic-Spiritual discourse to reframe suffering (<i>Ibtilla'</i>) as a catalyst for spiritual growth.
Fragmented Identity & Passive Coping	Temporary avoidance behaviors (e.g., leisure travel, media consumption)	DP4: Action-Oriented Reintegration—Engage in social service (<i>Mujahadah</i>) and commit to personal value-based life projects.

Model Architecture and Operational Syntax (Construction Phase)

Based on the empirical findings and instructional design principles, the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model was developed by integrating Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory with Islamic spiritual psychology, particularly the concept of *Tazkiyatun Nafs* (purification of the self). The integration resulted in a five-phase instructional syntax designed to facilitate cognitive transformation, spiritual reflection, behavioral engagement, and existential reintegration.

The first phase, Existential Provocation, aims to create a transformative starting point by introducing a disorienting dilemma. Students analyze authentic QLC cases and critically examine social comparison culture. In this phase, educators act as provocateurs and facilitators who stimulate critical awareness of previously accepted assumptions.

The second phase, Structured *Muhasabah*, facilitates systematic self-reflection. Students complete guided reflective journals focusing on internal motivations, emotional triggers, and personal fears. This phase encourages *Taubah*, understood as the process of redirecting intentions and reconstructing personal goals.

The third phase, Socratic-Spiritual Discourse, enables students to reinterpret their experiences through dialogue involving Islamic sacred texts. Educators function as dialogue partners and *Murshid*, facilitating collaborative interpretation of Quranic and Hadith perspectives. The central mechanism is *Tawakkul*, which supports cognitive reframing by balancing effort and acceptance.

The fourth phase, Social *Mujahadah*, provides opportunities for students to implement transformed perspectives through social engagement. Students participate in community service projects and peer-support activities, strengthening commitment and self-discipline.

The fifth phase, Spiritual Reintegration, focuses on internalizing a new frame of reference.

Students formulate personal life plans (*Rencana Aksi Batin-Lahir*) and develop commitments reflecting existential stability through *Ikhlas* and *Tuma'ninah*. The complete operational syntax is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Operational Syntax of the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model

Phase & Name	Instructional Purpose	Educator's Role	Student Activity	Psychological & Spiritual Mechanism
Phase 1: Existential Provocation	Trigger disorienting dilemma	Provocateur & Facilitator	Analyze real-life QLC case studies and critique social comparison culture	Disorienting Dilemma: Decentering materialistic assumptions
Phase 2: Structured Muhasabah	Facilitate deep self-examination	Reflective Guide	Complete guided reflective journal logs evaluating inner motives and fear triggers	Self-Examination: Taubah (Reorientation of intent)
Phase 3: Socratic-Spiritual Discourse	Reframe crisis through sacred texts	Dialogue Partner & Murshid	Participate in collaborative textual analysis (Quran/Hadith) and group dialogue	Critical Reflection: Tawakkul (Cognitive reframing)
Phase 4: Social Mujadah	Test new roles in action	Mentor & Coordinator	Execute community service projects and peer-support activities	Trying New Roles: Mujadah (Active discipline)
Phase 5: Spiritual Reintegration	Internalize new frame of reference	Evaluator & Spiritual Coach	Formulate personal life plan (<i>Rencana Aksi Batin-Lahir</i>) and pledge	Reintegration: <i>Ikhlas</i> & <i>Tuma'ninah</i> (Existential stability)

Feasibility and Field Trial Evaluation (Evaluation Phase)

The evaluation phase examined the validity, feasibility, and transformative effectiveness of the developed model through expert validation and field implementation. The Delphi validation process involving nine experts demonstrated strong consensus regarding the quality of the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model. The Scale-Level Content Validity Index Average (S-CVI/Ave) reached 0.89, indicating a high level of agreement among experts regarding the suitability of the developed model.

High item-level agreement was achieved in three major dimensions: Theoretical Consistency, Pedagogical Feasibility, and Psychological Safety Protocols. These findings indicate that the model was considered theoretically grounded, practically implementable, and psychologically appropriate for addressing QLC among emerging adults.

Following the six-week intervention (image), quantitative evaluation using the Quarter-Life Crisis Questionnaire (QLCQ) demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in participants' QLC scores. Mean scores shifted from baseline (image) to post-intervention (image), resulting in a classification transition from high/severe QLC toward mild/normal QLC categories.

In addition to quantitative changes, participants reported substantial reductions in somatic symptoms. Baseline reflective journals indicated experiences of migraines, gastritis, and acute insomnia. However, these symptoms decreased after participants implemented daily *dhikr* practices and structured *Muhasabah* routines.

Qualitative thematic analysis of reflective journals and post-intervention interviews revealed three major transformative patterns among participants following the implementation of the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model. The first transformation involved a significant reframing of success metrics, in which participants gradually shifted from externally defined standards of achievement toward internally grounded spiritual alignment. Participants reported

that prior perceptions of success were strongly influenced by social comparison and external validation, particularly through digital platforms displaying peers' career achievements and personal milestones. Through the *Muhasabah* sessions, participants began to critically examine these assumptions and reconstruct their understanding of self-worth based on personal growth, spiritual values, and acceptance of divine guidance. As expressed by Participant P-07 in the reflective journal:

"I used to feel like a failure whenever I saw peers posting career updates on LinkedIn. Through the Muhasabah sessions, I realized I was measuring my self-worth using someone else's standard. Realizing that my life trajectory is governed by Divine wisdom (Taqdir) brought instant relief."

This reflection indicates that the intervention facilitated a cognitive and spiritual shift from comparison-based identity construction toward a more meaningful and self-accepting perspective.

The second transformative pattern was the transition from helplessness to *Tawakkul*, where participants demonstrated changes in interpreting uncertainty and personal challenges. Rather than perceiving future uncertainty as a source of uncontrollable anxiety, participants gradually developed a more balanced perspective by integrating personal effort with spiritual acceptance. The concept of *Tawakkul* was understood not as passive surrender but as an active psychological orientation that encourages individuals to maximize controllable efforts while accepting outcomes beyond human capacity. This transformation contributed to increased emotional resilience and reduced anxiety-related experiences. Participant P-14 explained during the post-intervention interview:

"Tawakkul is not giving up; it is working hard on what I can control while leaving the outcome to Allah. This shift in mindset completely cured my night anxiety and insomnia."

This statement reflects how spiritual reframing enabled participants to transform feelings of helplessness into proactive coping strategies characterized by responsibility, acceptance, and psychological stability.

In addition to qualitative transformations, student development was evaluated through the Authentic Assessment framework of Continuous Transformative Evaluation (ETB). The assessment employed a four-tier rubric measuring four dimensions of transformation: reflective depth in journals, active participation in discourse, social action execution, and spiritual consistency. These dimensions were designed to capture not only cognitive understanding but also behavioral engagement and internal spiritual development throughout the learning process. The assessment results indicated that over 83% (image) of participants achieved the "Transformative" performance level by Phase 5, demonstrating that most participants successfully progressed through the intended stages of cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual transformation. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model achieved strong expert validation, practical feasibility, and promising transformative outcomes. The model effectively integrated transformative learning mechanisms with Islamic spiritual principles to support emerging adults in reconstructing personal meaning, strengthening resilience, and developing existential stability when confronting quarter-life crisis experiences.

Discussion

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory with the classical Sufi paradigm of *Tazkiyatun Nafs* provides a promising non-clinical therapeutic mechanism for addressing the quarter-life crisis (QLC) among emerging adults (Azza et al., 2025; Permana & Sulastri, 2025). The findings indicate that the operationalized Transformative-Spiritual PAI Model effectively bridges cognitive transformation and spiritual purification, resulting in measurable improvements in psychological well-being and

reductions in psychological distress and somatic symptoms. This contribution addresses a persistent limitation in conventional Islamic Religious Education (IRE), which frequently remains dominated by a transmission-oriented and doctrinal approach rather than facilitating personal meaning-making and existential transformation (Asmara, 2020; Nofi & Fithriyah, 2025). By positioning students as active agents of reflection and spiritual development, the model expands the role of PAI from knowledge delivery toward a transformative educational intervention.

The significant reduction in post-intervention QLC scores suggests that the effectiveness of the model lies in the combination of cognitive dissonance, critical reflection, and theological re-anchoring. Unlike Western cognitive-behavioral approaches that primarily emphasize the logical restructuring of dysfunctional beliefs, this study reveals that emerging adults experiencing QLC require deeper ontological grounding to overcome existential uncertainty and identity disruption (Fettiani et al., 2024; Santoso & Agustin, 2023). Through Phase 1 (*Existential Provocation*) and Phase 3 (*Socratic-Spiritual Discourse*), participants were encouraged to critically examine socially constructed definitions of achievement, success, and self-worth. The integration of counter-cultural Qur'anic narratives, including Surah Ar-Ra'd 13:11 and 13:28, enabled students to reconstruct their "habits of mind" by questioning excessive dependence on external validation and social comparison. Consequently, the *Muhasabah* process facilitated not only cognitive restructuring but also a deeper reinterpretation of personal struggles and life trajectories.

This transformation is consistent with logotherapy and Islamic psychological perspectives, which emphasize that existential anxiety frequently originates from a loss of meaning rather than merely from irrational cognition (Nasrin, 2025; Ussolikhah & Winarso, 2025). Within this framework, participants learned to reinterpret personal difficulties not as indicators of failure but as forms of divine testing (*ibtilla'*) that contribute to spiritual refinement. This theological reframing strengthened an internal locus of control grounded in *Tawakkul*, understood not as passive surrender but as active effort accompanied by trust in divine wisdom (Apriliani & Arifin, 2025; Hidayat, 2025). Such meaning reconstruction potentially explains the reduction of psychological tension and physiological responses associated with QLC, including excessive worry, migraines, and acute insomnia, as students developed a more adaptive interpretation of uncertainty and future challenges.

A central theoretical contribution of this research is the identification of structural compatibility between Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning and the classical stages of *Tazkiyatun Nafs* (Fleming, 2022). The proposed Mental-Spiritual Resilience Index conceptualizes critical reflection and spiritual maturity as mutually reinforcing dimensions rather than independent components. In this perspective, transformative learning extends beyond intellectual awareness toward ethical and spiritual reconstruction. The recognition of problematic assumptions in Mezirow's framework corresponds with the spiritual awakening process of *Taubah*, in which individuals acknowledge the limitations of excessive worldly attachments (*wahn*) and redirect their intentions toward more meaningful life orientations (Kurnia, 2021). Therefore, the integration of transformative learning and *Tazkiyatun Nafs* provides a culturally grounded framework that connects psychological development with spiritual growth.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that guided self-examination transforms reflection from a purely cognitive activity into a comprehensive spiritual evaluation. Through continuous introspection, students were able to identify emotional vulnerabilities, regulate negative affect, and reduce socio-developmental pressures commonly associated with emerging adulthood (Ma'muroh et al., 2024; Raditiya & Affandi, 2025). The field trial observations further confirmed that action-oriented social engagement, conceptualized as *Social Mujahadah*, strengthens and consolidates internal transformation (DeMarais et al., 2023). Participation in meaningful social actions

supported the internalization of *Ikhlas*, enabling students to detach their self-worth from external recognition and reducing the psychological burden caused by constant comparison with others. Thus, behavioral transformation served as an important mechanism for maintaining the cognitive and spiritual changes achieved during the intervention.

These findings provide significant implications for university-level PAI curriculum development and campus mental health initiatives. Traditionally, university counseling services and religious education programs often function separately, limiting opportunities for integrated student support. This study demonstrates that PAI can serve as a preventive mental health resource when learning environments move beyond passive lectures toward reflective, dialogical, and experiential approaches (Hudamahya, 2025; Latif et al., 2025). The implementation of the Continuous Transformative Evaluation (ETB) rubric further provides educators with an authentic assessment framework to evaluate students' affective, reflective, and spiritual development rather than relying exclusively on cognitive achievement measures. Such an approach reinforces the broader role of higher education institutions in supporting students' holistic development.

Despite these theoretical and practical contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the field trial was conducted with undergraduate students at a single Islamic higher education institution, UIN Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda. Although this context was appropriate for the Educational Design Research (EDR) prototype evaluation phase, the findings should be interpreted cautiously regarding broader generalizability. Future studies should implement multi-center and randomized controlled trials (RCTs) involving diverse public and private universities to examine the effectiveness of the model across different institutional and cultural contexts.

Second, the evaluation period only covered a six-week intervention period, which limits conclusions regarding the long-term sustainability of the observed psychological improvements. Longitudinal research is therefore needed to examine whether reductions in QLC symptoms and somatic manifestations remain stable as students encounter new developmental challenges, particularly during the transition from university life into professional employment (Rahman & Hasanat, 2025; Siswanti et al., 2023). Finally, successful implementation of the model depends substantially on educators who possess the ability to facilitate critical dialogue while simultaneously providing appropriate spiritual guidance (*murshid*) (Fuhr, 2021). Future research should therefore prioritize the development of standardized educator training programs to ensure implementation fidelity and strengthen the scalability of the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Model.

Conclusion

This study aimed to develop and evaluate the Transformative-Spiritual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning Model as a pedagogical framework for addressing the quarter-life crisis (QLC) among emerging adults by integrating Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory with the Islamic spiritual framework of *Tazkiyatun Nafs*. The findings demonstrate that the developed model successfully provides a structured educational approach that facilitates cognitive reflection, spiritual meaning reconstruction, and psychological resilience development. Through the Educational Design Research (EDR) process, the model achieved strong expert validation and demonstrated practical applicability in supporting students' spiritual coping mechanisms, including patience, acceptance, and reliance on God. The intervention further indicates that transformative-spiritual learning enables students to critically reassess problematic assumptions, reconstruct perceptions of success and self-worth, and develop more adaptive responses toward existential uncertainty. Therefore, the findings answer the research objectives by confirming that Islamic Religious Education can be reconceptualized as a transformative learning environment that

contributes not only to religious understanding but also to students' psychological and spiritual well-being.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the expansion of transformative learning scholarship by demonstrating the compatibility between Mezirow's reflective transformation framework and the Islamic concept of *Tazkiyatun Nafs*, offering a culturally grounded model that integrates cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions of human development. Methodologically, the study highlights the potential of Educational Design Research as an approach for developing context-sensitive educational interventions that respond to contemporary student challenges. Practically, the Transformative-Spiritual PAI Learning Model provides implications for higher education institutions, particularly in redesigning Islamic education curricula and strengthening preventive mental health support through reflective, dialogical, and experiential learning approaches. However, the study is limited by its implementation within a single Islamic higher education institution and the relatively short duration of the field trial, which restricts broader generalization and conclusions regarding long-term sustainability. Future research should therefore investigate the model through multi-institutional studies, longitudinal designs, and comparative quantitative approaches to examine its effectiveness across diverse educational contexts. By bridging spiritual traditions with transformative pedagogy, this study offers a meaningful contribution toward developing holistic educational frameworks that position religious education as a pathway for cultivating resilience, existential stability, and human flourishing among emerging adults.

Acknowledgements

The authors express their deepest gratitude to Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda for providing the institutional support and research facilities necessary to conduct this study, as well as to the PAI lecturers, university counselors, and undergraduate students who actively participated throughout the exploration and prototype validation phases.

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