

AT-TAALLUM TULA AL-H AYAH AND LIFELONG LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE AND SCOPE OF LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The similarity of meaning between At-Ta'allum Tūla al-H ayāh and lifelong learning often places the two as equivalent concepts, even though terminological equivalence does not necessarily indicate similarity in conceptual structure. This study aims to analyze and compare the structure and scope of the two concepts to identify their convergence and differentiation areas. The research uses Integrative Literature Review (ILR) with a comparative conceptual analysis approach to relevant literature and seminal sources that underlie the development of concepts. The analysis is focused on continuity, learning space, orientation, epistemology, and spirituality. The results show three layers of conceptual relationships, namely semantic equivalence, functional convergence, and epistemic-normative distinctiveness. Both converge on learning sustainability, the breadth of learning space, and the function of human development, but show distinctions in epistemological architecture and normative orientation. Lifelong learning thrives in a plurality of orientations and learning contexts, whereas At-Ta'allum Tūla al-H ayāh places the sustainability of learning in the integration of Islamic knowledge, values, and spiritual orientation. This finding confirms that At-Ta'allum Tūla al-H ayāh is not merely a terminological equivalent or an antithesis of lifelong learning, but a construction that shares a universal core but has a distinctive character in its epistemological-normative foundation.

At-Ta'allum Tūla al-H ayā h; lifelong learning; Islamic education; epistemology; lifelong learning.

INTRODUCTION

Social changes, the development of digital technology, knowledge mobility, and the transformation of the world of work have shifted the conventional boundaries of education. Learning can no longer be understood as an activity that takes place only at a certain phase of life or stops when a person completes formal education. Knowledge, skills, and competencies are constantly being updated, so the ability to learn continuously is an important part of human capacity to face change. The idea gained an important foothold in the global educational discourse through the report *Learning to Be* which placed education as a process inherent in the whole of human life (Faure et al., 1972). This perspective is then enriched through *Learning: The Treasure Within*, which places *learning throughout life* as a fundamental principle of education and articulates it through four pillars: *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together*, and *learning to be* (Delors et al., 1996). Thus, lifelong learning develops not just as an extension of the duration of education, but as a paradigm shift regarding the relationship between learning and life.

This development gave birth to an increasingly comprehensive *conception of lifelong learning*. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL, 2022) defines *lifelong learning* as an integration between learning and life that includes learning activities for all age groups, takes place in all life contexts, and is implemented through various modalities to meet the diversity of learning needs. This concept includes all age groups, all levels of education, various forms of formal, non-formal, and informal learning, a variety of learning spaces, and different learning objectives. This perspective shows that *lifelong learning* is not synonymous with learning activities until old age. It is an educational architecture that

places families, educational institutions, communities, workplaces, and various living environments as part of the learning ecosystem. Therefore, *the lifelong* dimension that emphasizes the sustainability of time is intertwined with *the life-wide* dimension that expands the space for learning to take place (UIL, 2022).

The expansion of meaning also changes the orientation of lifelong learning. UNESCO (2015) places adult learning and education as core components of *lifelong learning* related to individual capacity development, employment, social participation, active citizenship, and community development. Furthermore, UIL (2020) emphasized the importance of building a culture of lifelong learning that is holistic and rooted in the recognition that learning has an individual and collective dimension. Thus, contemporary *lifelong learning* has a broad conceptual structure: it answers not only when humans learn, but also where learning takes place, how learning is done, what capacities are developed, and for what purposes learning is done. This complexity is what makes *lifelong learning* more appropriately understood as a paradigm rather than just a principle of sustainability of learning activities.

The idea of learning sustainability has also gained an important place in the discourse of Islamic education. Huda (2019) shows that education in an Islamic perspective is not limited to school education, but lasts throughout life and is related to the development of human potential. In the perspective of hadith, Adilan and Mu'min (2024) found that continuous learning has relevance to Islamic education, not only in the mastery of religious knowledge but also in the development of knowledge that provides benefits for human life. Meanwhile, Habibah and Yuni W. (2024) brought together the concept of *lifelong learning* with the perspective of the Qur'an and *self-directed learning*, by showing the relevance of learning sustainability to the formation of independent, flexible, and ever-developing individuals. These findings show a conceptual area that brings together the tradition of Islamic education with contemporary discourses on lifelong learning.

The development of cutting-edge research has even moved towards more applicable formulations. Nik Abdullah, Nordin, and Abdullah (2024), through an article in *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, developed a *Qur'ānic-based lifelong learning* framework for elderly learners. The framework integrates the principles of the Qur'an and hadith with the physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development needs of elderly learners. This study is important because it shows that Islamic-based lifelong learning can be developed further than just normative legitimacy regarding the obligation to seek knowledge. It can be translated into an educational framework that has specific goals, learner characteristics, needs, environment, and orientation (Nik Abdullah et al., 2024). This development also shows that *the discourse of lifelong learning* in Islamic education is starting to move from normative proof to model construction and implementation.

In the discourse of Islamic education, the idea of lifelong learning can be represented through the term *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh*. Semantically, the term has a strong affinity with *lifelong learning* because both refer to the sustainability of learning activities throughout human life. This similarity explains why various studies use *lifelong learning* to articulate Islamic ideas about the sustainability of seeking knowledge (Huda, 2019; Habibah & Yuni W., 2024; Adilan & Mu'min, 2024). At a terminological level, both can even appear to be equivalent concepts: *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* means lifelong learning, while *lifelong learning* also refers to lifelong learning.

However, semantic equivalence does not automatically imply conceptual equivalence. A concept is not only formed by the literal meaning of the term used, but also by the knowledge system that gives birth to it, the view of humans and science, the orientation of learning, the space in which education takes place, the relationship of the individual with society, and the ultimate goal of the learning process. *Lifelong learning* as it develops in contemporary educational discourse has a structure that includes personal, social, professional, civic dimensions, and the ability to adapt to change (UNESCO, 2015; UIL, 2020, 2022). Meanwhile, the study of Islamic education connects the sustainability of learning with the scientific and spiritual dimensions and their benefits for human life (Huda, 2019; Adilan & Mu'min, 2024; Nik Abdullah et al., 2024). The similarity in the temporal dimension—that learning lasts a lifetime—is therefore not enough to conclude that the two have identical epistemological constructions, orientations, and scopes.

This is where the academic problem of this research is placed. A number of previous studies have tried to show the suitability and relevance of *lifelong learning* with Islamic education. Huda (2019) describes *lifelong education* in an Islamic perspective; Habibah and Yuni W. (2024) analyze it through the perspective of the Qur'an and *self-directed learning*; Adilan and Mu'min (2024) examine it through the perspective of hadith and its relevance in modern life; while Nik Abdullah et al. (2024) have developed a Qur'an-based lifelong learning framework for the elderly group. These studies provide an important foundation, but at the same time leave a more fundamental question: does the similarity of meaning between *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* and *lifelong learning* also mean similarities in conceptual structure and scope? This question is important because the use of both terms on an equivalent basis without conceptual examination has the potential to simplify the character of each paradigm.

This problem requires a shift in the focus of analysis. The research question no longer stops at "does Islam teach lifelong learning?", because previous literature has provided a strong enough basis to answer it (Huda, 2019; Habibah & Yuni W., 2024; Adilan & Mu'min, 2024). A more substantive question is how the conceptual structure of lifelong learning is constructed in both traditions. The analysis needs to be directed at a number of domains that allow comparisons to be carried out in a balanced manner, including epistemological foundations, conceptions of human beings as learners, learning orientation and goals, temporal dimensions, learning spaces and modalities, the relationship between individual development and social life, and the position of knowledge in human life. Through these domains, similarities are not assumed as identities, nor are differences established before the analysis is performed.

Such an approach allows *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* and *lifelong learning* to be placed as two semantically intersecting constructions but conceptually still need to be tested. The results of the analysis can show a region of convergence, a region of distinction, or a certain structure that only has a strong emphasis on one of the concepts. This position is more proportionate than the two extreme tendencies: regard *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* as merely an Arabic translation of *lifelong learning*, or instead claim the two are completely different simply because they were born of different intellectual traditions. Conceptual analysis is needed to determine the boundaries of such encounters and distinctions based on the literature evidence.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze and compare the conceptual structure

and scope of *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* and *lifelong learning* through the examination of epistemological foundations, learner conceptions, orientation and goals, temporal dimensions, learning spaces and modalities, as well as individual and social dimensions of both. The novelty of the research lies in the shift from an affirmative-normative approach that primarily seeks the legitimacy or suitability of *lifelong learning* with Islam to an analysis of the relationship between semantic equality and conceptual equality. Through this analysis, the research is expected to produce a conceptual map of the convergence and distinction of the two paradigms as well as provide a more precise theoretical basis for the development of lifelong learning in Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses Integrative Literature Review (ILR) with a *comparative conceptual analysis* approach to analyze the conceptual structure and scope of *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* and *lifelong learning*. The ILR was chosen because it allows relevant literature to be critically reviewed and synthesized to generate new perspectives and conceptual understandings (Torraco, 2016; Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020). The literature was searched through Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ERIC, and Dimensions with a combination of the keywords "*lifelong learning*", "*lifelong education*", "*Islamic education*", "*Islamic lifelong learning*", "*Qur'an*", "*Hadith*", "*التعلم مدى الحياة*", and "*At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh*". Sources are prioritized in *peer-reviewed articles* for the period 2016–2026 as well as relevant institutional documents. The selected literature was analyzed based on epistemological foundations, learners' conceptions, learning orientation and objectives, temporal dimensions, learning spaces and modalities, and individual and social dimensions. The findings were further synthesized comparatively to identify convergent, intersecting, and distinguishing aspects, so that it could be known whether the semantic equivalence of *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* and *lifelong learning* also indicate equivalence in its conceptual structure and scope.

RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Semantic Equivalence and Conceptual Equivalence Limits

The results of the literature synthesis show that *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* and *lifelong learning* meet on the same semantic core, namely the continuity of learning throughout human life. In contemporary discourse, *lifelong learning* is no longer understood as an extension of the formal education period, but as an integration between learning and life that includes all age groups, educational levels, learning modalities, learning spaces, and diversity of goals (UIL, 2022). In contemporary Arabic terminology, UNESCO uses the term *al-ta'allum madā al-ḥ ayāh* (التعلم مدى الحياة) and also the phrase *al-ta'allum ṭawāla al-ḥ ayāh* (التعلم طوال الحياة) to articulate the idea (UIL, 2026). This confirms that at the linguistic level, the idea of lifelong learning has a relatively direct equivalent in Arabic.

A similar convergence is found in the Islamic educational literature. Huda (2019) shows that education from an Islamic perspective does not stop at school education, while Habibah and Yuni W. (2024) connect learning sustainability with the perspective of the

Qur'an and *self-directed learning*. Adilan and Mu'min (2024) place the search for knowledge as a sustainable activity that remains relevant in modern life. At a more applicable level, Nik Abdullah et al. (2024) developed *Qur'ānic-based lifelong learning* for the elderly group, which at the same time affirms that the sustainability of learning remains relevant in the later phases of life. Thus, in the temporal dimension of continuity, no substantive distinction is found: both constructions reject restrictions on learning based on age and level of education.

However, these similarities do not automatically result in a conceptual identity. The *lifelong learning* literature shows that this concept develops across a broad spectrum of thought. Elfert (2019) shows the tension between rights-based approaches and development and skill orientation, while Lee (2022) shows the strong humanistic heritage of *self-learning* and *self-fulfilment* in the development of *lifelong learning*. Therefore, *lifelong learning* itself is not a single construction that is only oriented to work or *human capital*. It contains humanistic, social, democratic, professional, and transformative dimensions. The findings resulted in the study's initial proposition: *semantic equivalence does not necessarily constitute conceptual equivalence*. Equality of terms only explains that the two concepts share ideas about the sustainability of learning; He has not explained whether the two have the same epistemology, value structure, and goal orientation.

Functional Convergence: Lifelong and Lifelong Learning

Analysis of the scope actually shows a high degree of convergence. UIL (2022) places formal, non-formal, and informal learning as well as family, community, workplace, and various living environments as part of *lifelong learning*. This concept therefore has two interconnected axes: *lifelong* which designates temporal continuity and *life-wide* which indicates the breadth of the learning space.

The structure has a strong wedge with lifelong learning in Islamic education. Huda (2019), Habibah and Yuni W. (2024), and Adilan and Mu'min (2024) do not limit the process of acquiring knowledge to formal educational institutions. Nik Abdullah et al. (2024) even show how the physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual needs of older groups can be accommodated in the design of continuous learning. Thus, life is not only a time span of learning, but also a space for learning.

Convergence is also found in learning functions. The *lifelong learning* literature shows that learning is not solely directed at mastering professional competencies. Rüber et al. (2018) show the *civic returns* of adult learning, Elfert (2019) links it to rights and participation, while Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020) show the transformative capacity of lifelong learning through critical reflection. McGrath and Deneulin (2021) extend it to social transformation and *human flourishing*. This means that *lifelong learning* contains an individual as well as a social orientation. These findings drop the simple dichotomy that *lifelong learning* is only competency-oriented, while Islamic education is oriented towards human formation. Both have an interest in individual development and social life. Therefore, continuity, breadth of space, and the function of human development are areas of convergence, not areas of distinction.

Epistemological Distinction: How Knowledge Is Placed

More substantive distinctions are found when analysis moves from the space of acquiring knowledge to the status and orientation of knowledge. *Lifelong learning* develops in a plural epistemological environment. It can be articulated through humanistic, democratic, transformative, social, professional, and economic approaches. Elfert (2019) shows the existence of orientation contestation in *the lifelong learning* agenda, while Lee (2022) shows how the idea of *self-fulfilment* humanistic then interacts with the development of neoliberal discourse. Thus, there is no single epistemological foundation that binds all manifestations of *lifelong learning*.

The structure of Islamic education shows a different configuration. The epistemology of Islamic education does not negate relationships, experience, or empirical knowledge, but places it in relation to Islamic revelation and value systems. Nurdin et al. (2019) show the position of epistemology as the basis for the construction of Islamic education, while Ainuri and Wijaya (2021) show the interconnectedness of *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani* patterns in understanding knowledge. Budianto and Fadholi (2021) also place epistemological issues as a fundamental part of the construction and renewal of Islamic education.

This distinction does not mean that *lifelong learning* is secular while *At-Ta'allum Tūla al-H ayāh* is religious. Such categorization is too binary and does not reflect the complexity of the literature. The difference is more precise in the epistemological architecture: *lifelong learning* allows for a plurality of sources of legitimacy and learning orientation, while *lifelong learning* within the framework of Islamic education places a plurality of knowledge in normative relation to Islamic revelation, ratios, experiences, and values.

Therefore, the distinguishing question is no longer "*where does man get knowledge from?*", because both recognize the diversity of learning sources and experiences. A more fundamental question is "*in what epistemological framework is knowledge interpreted, assessed, and directed?*" It is at this point that conceptual distinctions begin to become substantive.

Spirituality as an Embedded Orientation, Not a Single Differentiator

The analysis yields important findings that at the same time correct the possible dichotomy between the two concepts. Spirituality is not the exclusive character of *lifelong learning* in Islam. Contemporary adult education and *lifelong learning* literature also gives place to spirituality, the meaning of life, self-transformation, and *human flourishing*. Tisdell (2023) links spirituality to *transformative learning* and creativity, while Kroth et al. (2024) explicitly place spirituality at the center of *lifelong learning*. McGrath and Deneulin (2021) also demonstrate the relevance of religious communities in *lifelong learning* for social transformation.

Therefore, the existence of spirituality cannot be used as a binary differentiator. A more appropriate distinction is found in the position of spirituality in the conceptual structure. In *lifelong learning*, spirituality can be one of the important dimensions according to the perspective, community, or needs of the learner, but it is not a universal normative element for the entire construction of *lifelong learning*. In Islamic education, on the other hand, the spiritual dimension is structurally connected to the way in which knowledge and educational processes are interpreted. Nik Abdullah et al. (2024), for example, do not place

spiritual growth as an additional element, but as one of the explicit goals of the *Qur'ānic-based lifelong learning* framework.

Thus, the distinction is not spiritual versus non-spiritual, but *contextually incorporated spirituality* versus *epistemically embedded spirituality*. This formulation is more precise because it recognizes the breadth of *lifelong learning* while explaining the character of lifelong learning within the framework of Islamic education without building artificial opposition.

Conceptual Structure Mapping

The results of the comparative conceptual analysis can be condensed into the following five main domains.

Table 1. The Conceptual Structure of *Lifelong Learning* and *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh*

Dimensions	Lifelong Learning	At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ isā h	Relationship
Continuity	Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning	Convergence
Space	Formal, nonformal, informal, and life	Learning beyond formal institutions	Convergence
Orientation	Capacity, transformation, participation, flourishing	Knowledge, self-development, and usefulness	Sliced
Epistemology	Plural and contextual	Revelation, ratio, and experience within the framework of Islamic values	Distingtif
Spirituality	Contextual and can be an important orientation	Integrated in epistemological-normative structures	Sliced–distinctive

The matrix shows a consistent pattern: the closer the analysis is to the temporal and functional dimensions, the higher the degree of convergence; the deeper the analysis moves towards epistemological and normative structures, the clearer the distinction. The relationship between the two is thus not in the form of a categorical opposition, but a *layered conceptual distinctiveness*.

The Three-Layer Model: Research Conceptual Findings

Based on the overall synthesis, this study resulted in a three-layered model of the conceptual relationship between *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* and *lifelong learning*.

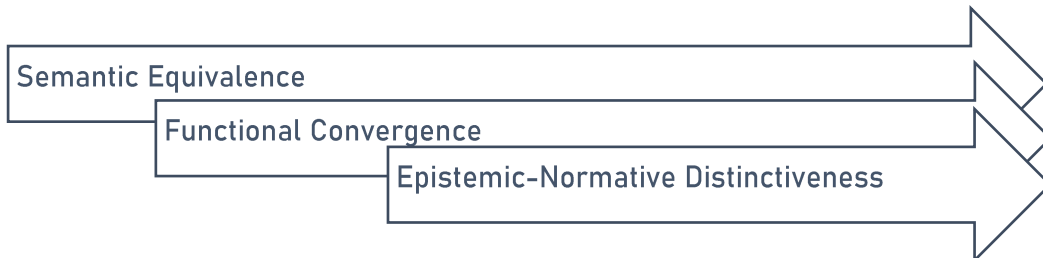
First layer: *Semantic Equivalence*. Both concepts share a semantic core in the form of sustainability of lifelong learning. In this layer the level of equality is high.

The *second* layer: *Functional Convergence*. Similarities extend to learning spaces and functions. Both recognize formal, non-formal, and informal learning; human capacity development; self-transformation; social relevance; as well as learning that goes beyond educational institutions. In this layer, the difference is more in the form of variation in emphasis than structural distinction.

The *third* layer: *Epistemic-Normative Distinctiveness*. Distinction becomes stronger when learning activities are placed within knowledge and value systems. *Lifelong learning* allows for a plurality of humanistic, social, professional, transformative, economic,

and spiritual orientations (Elfert, 2019; Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020; Lee, 2022; Tisdell, 2023; Kroth et al., 2024). In *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh*, the diversity of learning activities and objectives is placed in an epistemological architecture that integrates the knowledge, values, and spiritual orientation of Islamic education.

The relationship can be formulated as:



This three-layer model is the main conceptual finding of the research. The findings explain why two terms that literally refer to almost the same phenomenon should not be treated as completely identical conceptual constructions. At the same time, this model prevents the formation of a simplistic Islamic-Western dichotomy, because the analysis instead finds a wide area of convergence.

These findings build on previous research in three stages. Huda (2019), Habibah and Yuni W. (2024), and Adilan and Mu'min (2024) mainly show the compatibility of lifelong learning with an Islamic perspective. Nik Abdullah et al. (2024) move further towards applicative construction through *Qur'ānic-based lifelong learning*. This research takes the next position, namely conceptual differentiation, by mapping at which layer the two paradigms are equivalent and at which layer the equality ends.

Thus, the contribution of the research does not lie in the claim that Islam has preceded *lifelong learning*, nor in the attempt to contradict the two educational traditions. Its contribution lies in the explanation that lifelong learning equity is gradual and layered. From this, the theoretical proposition of the research can be formulated:

The more lifelong learning is analyzed on the temporal-functional dimension, the stronger the convergence between *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* and *lifelong learning*; conversely, the more the analysis moves towards the epistemological-normative dimension, the stronger the conceptual distinction between the two.

This proposition provides important implications for the development of Islamic education. *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* does not need to be built by rejecting *lifelong learning* or simply replacing the terminology with Arabic. Learning continuity, spatial breadth, adaptability, self-transformation, social participation, and *human flourishing* can be placed as converging universal areas. Its conceptual identity is formed when the entire process is placed in the epistemological-normative architecture of Islamic education. Thus, the character of *At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh* is not primarily determined by how long, where, or through what a person learns, but by the framework of knowledge, values, and goals that give meaning to the process of learning throughout his life.

CONCLUSION

At-Ta'allum Ṭūla al-Ḥ ayāh and *lifelong learning* converge on the universal idea that learning lasts a lifetime, but such semantic similarities do not make the two completely

identical. Comparative synthesis finds three layers of relationships, namely *semantic equivalence*, *functional convergence*, and *epistemic-normative distinctiveness*. Both converge on the continuity, breadth of space, and function of human development, but show a distinction in epistemological foundations and value orientation. *At-Ta'allum Tūla al-Ḥayāh* is therefore not just the Arabic equivalent of *lifelong learning* or its antithesis, but the construction of lifelong learning that acquires a distinctive character through the integration of Islamic knowledge, values, and spiritual orientation. These findings confirm that the closer the analysis is to the temporal-functional dimension, the stronger the convergence; the more it moves towards the epistemological-normative dimension, the clearer the distinction.

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