

INTEGRATING MAQASID SYARIAH WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Article history

Received date : 3-8-2026
Revised date : 4-8-2026
Accepted date : 8-9-2026
Published date : 21-9-2026

To cite this document:

Shahri, M. H., Mohd Rozi, M. A. J., Ramli, M. S., & Hassan, M. (2026). Integrating Maqasid Syariah with the Sustainable Development Goals in higher education. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 11 (86), 982 – 995.

Abstract: *Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly positioned as key drivers of global sustainability through their alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, sustainability initiatives in universities may remain fragmented and focused on compliance, measurement, and technical implementation, with insufficient attention to ethical and value formation. This conceptual paper aims to examine how Maqasid Syariah can complement the SDGs and to propose a framework for integrating ethical foundations with sustainability implementation in higher education. The paper adopts a conceptual synthesis approach based on selected scholarly literature and authoritative policy documents concerning Maqasid Syariah, the SDGs, Education for Sustainable Development, and sustainability in higher education. The resulting framework positions Maqasid Syariah as the ethical foundation, higher education as the implementation platform, and the SDGs as the operational framework. The paper contributes a multi-level conceptual model that moves beyond descriptive alignment towards a more actionable approach to Maqasid–SDG integration in higher education.*

Keywords: *Higher Education; Maqasid Syariah; Sustainable Development Goals*

Introduction

Global sustainability challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequality have intensified the need for systemic transformation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a universal framework for addressing these challenges through measurable targets and coordinated global action (United Nations, 2015). Higher education institutions play a central role in this agenda by generating knowledge, shaping values, and developing future leaders (Leal Filho et al., 2019).

However, sustainability integration in higher education remains largely fragmented and operationally driven. Recent studies indicate that universities often adopt compliance-oriented approaches focused on reporting and technical indicators rather than deep value transformation (Lozano et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2024). This results in limited behavioural and ethical impact on students.

Given these limitations, there is a growing need for a stronger ethical foundation to guide sustainability education. This paper proposes that Maqasid Syariah offers a comprehensive value-based framework capable of enhancing sustainability integration in higher education by aligning ethical principles with global development goals. The proposed approach treats Maqasid Syariah and the SDGs as complementary rather than competing frameworks: Maqasid Syariah provides the ethical rationale, while the SDGs provide operational goals and targets that can be translated through higher education institutions.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the conceptual complementarity between Maqasid Syariah and the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of higher education.
2. To synthesise the literature on ethical sustainability, Education for Sustainable Development, Maqasid Syariah, and higher education transformation to identify key integration themes.
3. To propose a multi-level conceptual framework that connects Maqasid ethical principles, SDG dimensions, and higher education functions to support sustainable and ethically responsible graduate outcomes.

Literature Review

SDGs: Conceptual and Educational Limitations

The Sustainable Development Goals are widely recognised as a comprehensive global framework encompassing 17 goals and 169 targets aimed at addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges (United Nations, 2015). Within higher education, SDGs have been integrated into curricula, institutional strategies, and research agendas.

However, SDG implementation in higher education is predominantly instrumental and performance-driven. Universities tend to prioritise measurable outputs such as rankings, reporting metrics, and sustainability indicators (Lozano et al., 2015). While this enhances accountability, it

often reduces sustainability to a managerial exercise rather than a transformative educational process.

Moreover, SDG-based education may emphasise knowledge and awareness without sufficiently addressing value internalisation and behavioural change. Students may understand sustainability concepts yet struggle to translate that knowledge into sustained action. This concern is consistent with evidence that ethical behaviour among students cannot be assumed simply from their educational exposure, highlighting the importance of deliberately cultivating values that guide behaviour (Ahmad et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2024).

The SDG framework is also intentionally adaptable across diverse global and socio-cultural contexts. While this inclusivity supports broad international adoption, it leaves room for institutions to articulate the ethical principles that should guide local interpretation and implementation. In higher education, where value formation is part of the educational mission, this creates an opportunity to complement the SDGs with a coherent ethical framework.

Thus, the literature suggests that while SDGs are effective as operational and policy frameworks, they require complementary ethical systems to achieve meaningful transformation in higher education.

Maqasid Syariah: Conceptual Strengths and Limitations

The concept of Maqasid Syariah has progressively evolved from its origins as a classical legal doctrine into a contemporary framework for addressing complex socio-economic, ethical, and environmental challenges. It is widely acknowledged as a comprehensive system intended to safeguard human well-being through the preservation of five fundamental necessities, namely religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth (Kamali, 2008).

Contemporary scholarship identifies several significant strengths of Maqasid Syariah. Firstly, it provides a normative ethical foundation rooted in principles such as justice, accountability, moderation, and social responsibility (Auda, 2008). Secondly, maqasid adopts a teleological orientation that emphasises the achievement of beneficial outcomes and the promotion of human welfare, rather than adherence to rigid legal formalism alone. Thirdly, it advances a holistic worldview that integrates spiritual, social, economic, and environmental dimensions of human existence, thereby offering a multidimensional approach to sustainable development and societal well-being (Bashori et al., 2024).

Despite these strengths, the literature also highlights several critical limitations. A substantial portion of maqasid scholarship remains predominantly theoretical and abstract, with limited empirical application within institutional and organisational contexts (Saiman, 2024). In many instances, maqasid functions primarily as a conceptual or philosophical justification rather than as an operational framework capable of informing policy formulation, governance structures, or educational practices.

Accordingly, although Maqasid Syariah provides a robust ethical and philosophical foundation, its practical relevance in contemporary institutional contexts may be strengthened through integration with applied global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Such integration may enhance its operational applicability, measurable impact, and contribution towards sustainable institutional transformation.

Integration of Maqasid Syariah and SDGs: Toward a Unified Ethical–Operational Framework

Recent scholarship indicates an increasing convergence between Maqasid Syariah and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in their shared commitment to holistic human development, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Both frameworks adopt a multidimensional conception of well-being that extends beyond purely economic indicators to encompass social equity, ecological balance, and long-term human flourishing (Dariah et al., 2016).

From a conceptual standpoint, Maqasid Syariah provides a teleological and value-oriented framework, whereas the SDGs function as a policy-driven and target-based system. This distinction is significant. The SDGs specify the desired developmental outcomes through 17 goals and 169 targets, while remaining normatively adaptable to diverse global and socio-cultural contexts (United Nations, 2015). In contrast, Maqasid Syariah articulates the ethical rationale underpinning such goals by grounding them in normative principles such as justice (‘adl), balance (mizan), and responsibility (amanah) (Auda, 2008; Kamali, 2008).

Recent empirical and conceptual studies further substantiate this alignment. For example, Aziz et al. (2024) demonstrate that maqasid principles correspond closely with several SDG domains, particularly those relating to poverty eradication (SDG 1), quality education (SDG 4), and climate and environmental sustainability (SDG 13). These findings suggest that maqasid may serve as an ethical and philosophical foundation capable of strengthening the normative dimensions of sustainable development initiatives.

Nevertheless, despite these developments, the existing literature reveals several critical limitations.

First, much of the current scholarship remains conceptually descriptive rather than analytically integrative. Existing studies frequently emphasise the similarities between Maqasid Syariah and the SDGs without developing systematic frameworks capable of translating these conceptual alignments into operational strategies and measurable practices (Shalghoum et al., 2025). Consequently, the literature remains fragmented and lacks practical coherence.

Second, there is a prevailing tendency to adopt a one-directional integration approach in which Maqasid Syariah is employed primarily to “Islamise” the SDGs, rather than facilitating a reciprocal and dialogical engagement between the two frameworks. Such an approach constrains the potential for deeper theoretical synthesis and mutual enrichment (Kurniawan, 2025). A more comprehensive perspective would position Maqasid Syariah and the SDGs as complementary systems, with the

former providing ethical and philosophical grounding, and the latter offering structured implementation mechanisms and measurable developmental targets.

Third, empirical validation of maqasid–SDG integration remains limited. Although recent studies have proposed integration indices and measurement instruments linking maqasid performance indicators with SDG outcomes (Effendi, 2024; Khan, 2019), these models remain at an early stage of development and have yet to achieve widespread institutional application, particularly within higher education settings.

Furthermore, the application of maqasid–SDG integration in higher education institutions remains insufficiently explored. Existing studies predominantly focus on sector-specific contexts such as Islamic finance, governance, or public policy, with comparatively limited attention given to the operationalisation of this integration within university governance, curriculum design, research culture, and campus sustainability practices (Saiman, 2024). This represents a significant gap in the literature, given the strategic role of higher education institutions in cultivating future sustainability leaders and shaping societal transformation.

Taken together, the literature suggests that although Maqasid Syariah and the SDGs exhibit substantial conceptual alignment, their integration remains nascent, fragmented, and insufficiently operationalised. There is therefore a pressing need for a structured and context-specific framework capable of bridging ethical principles with practical sustainability implementation, particularly within higher education systems.

In response to this gap, the present study proposes an integrated maqasid–SDG framework that positions higher education institutions as mediating platforms through which ethical values may be translated into practical sustainability outcomes. In doing so, the study advances the discourse beyond conceptual alignment towards a more systematic and actionable model of integration.

Research Gap Statement

Despite the growing literature on sustainability in higher education and the increasing recognition of Islamic ethical frameworks, three gaps remain particularly relevant to this conceptual study.

First, sustainability implementation in higher education is often dominated by technocratic and instrumental approaches. Institutional reporting, rankings, and measurable indicators can strengthen accountability, but may not adequately address transformative learning, ethical commitment, and behavioural change (Lozano et al., 2015; Algers, 2020; Peters et al., 2024).

Second, although Maqasid Syariah provides a comprehensive ethical framework for human well-being, its application in higher education remains under-operationalised. Existing scholarship frequently treats maqasid as a conceptual or normative justification without sufficiently translating its principles into governance, curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional practice (Saiman, 2024).

Third, existing attempts to integrate Maqasid Syariah with the SDGs remain fragmented and frequently descriptive. Although studies demonstrate conceptual alignment between maqasid

principles and SDG domains (Dariah et al., 2016; Aziz et al., 2024; Kurniawan, 2025), there is limited development of multi-level higher education frameworks that connect ethical foundations, operational targets, and institutional mechanisms (Shalghoum et al., 2025; Effendi, 2026).

These gaps indicate the need for a framework that moves beyond parallel or descriptive discussions towards systemic integration, in which ethical values inform institutional strategies and global sustainability targets are translated into meaningful educational and campus practices.

This study responds by proposing a Maqasid-based sustainability framework that integrates ethical foundations, operational SDG dimensions, and higher education processes. The framework is intended as a conceptual basis for future validation, curriculum mapping, institutional assessment, and empirical investigation.

Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual synthesis approach rather than an empirical research design. The purpose is to integrate and organise existing conceptual and scholarly insights to develop a coherent framework for higher education. The literature base comprises selected scholarly works on Maqasid Syariah, sustainable development, Education for Sustainable Development, transformative learning, and sustainability in higher education, together with authoritative documents from the United Nations and UNESCO.

The synthesis was conducted thematically. Four themes were used to organise the literature: (1) Maqasid Syariah as an ethical and value-based foundation; (2) the SDGs as an operational framework of goals and targets; (3) higher education functions through governance, curriculum and teaching, pedagogy and assessment, and campus practice; and (4) expected transformative outcomes in knowledge, values, behaviour, and social responsibility. The five necessities of Maqasid Syariah were then conceptually mapped against relevant SDG dimensions and higher education functions. This process informed the proposed framework and the recommendations presented in the paper.

The resulting framework is therefore interpretive and conceptual rather than causal. It does not claim that Maqasid–SDG integration automatically produces measurable sustainability outcomes. Instead, it provides a structured model that can guide future expert validation, curriculum mapping, case study analysis, and empirical testing.

Discussion

Bridging Ethical and Operational Frameworks

The integration of Maqasid Syariah and the Sustainable Development Goals addresses a fundamental limitation in contemporary sustainability discourse: the separation between ethical reasoning and operational implementation. While the SDGs provide a comprehensive set of measurable targets and indicators, they are often criticised for their normative neutrality and technocratic orientation, which can reduce sustainability to a managerial and compliance-driven exercise (United Nations, 2015).

Recent studies argue that this technocratic emphasis risks undermining the transformative potential of sustainability education, as it prioritises quantifiable outcomes over moral and behavioural change (Lozano et al., 2015; Algers, 2020). In contrast, *maqasid syariah* offers a normative ethical framework grounded in justice (*adl*), balance (*mizan*), and stewardship (*khalifah*), which provides a compelling moral rationale for sustainability (Auda, 2008; Kamali, 2008).

Scholars increasingly highlight that sustainable development cannot be achieved through technical solutions alone but requires value-based transformation that reshapes individual and institutional behaviour (Leal Filho et al., 2019). In this regard, *maqasid syariah* complements the SDGs by addressing the “why” dimension of sustainability, ensuring that actions are guided by ethical commitments rather than purely instrumental goals.

Moreover, integrating *maqasid* with SDGs enables a bidirectional framework in which ethical principles inform policy decisions, while global targets provide measurable pathways for implementation. This aligns with recent calls for integrating normative ethics into sustainability governance, particularly in non-Western contexts where indigenous and religious frameworks play a significant role in shaping societal values (Khan, 2019; Kurniawan, 2025).

Thus, the *maqasid*-SDG integration represents not merely a conceptual alignment but a paradigm shift from technocratic sustainability to ethically grounded transformation.

The proposed framework also extends previous *Maqasid*–SDG models by placing higher education at the centre of implementation. Earlier work has demonstrated conceptual synergies between *maqasid* principles and the SDGs (Dariah et al., 2016; Aziz et al., 2024), while more recent studies have examined sector-specific applications or the role of faculty in advancing the SDGs (Kurniawan, 2025; Shalghoum et al., 2025; Effendi, 2026). The present framework adds a multi-level higher education architecture that connects ethical foundations with governance, curriculum, pedagogy, campus practice, and graduate outcomes. Its novelty therefore lies not simply in identifying similarity between the two frameworks, but in specifying how higher education can mediate their integration.

Toward a Maqasid-Based Sustainability Model

Building on this integration, a *maqasid*-based approach offers a transformative model of sustainability education that extends beyond compliance-oriented practices. Contemporary higher education research emphasises the need for transformative learning, where students develop critical thinking, ethical awareness, and the capacity for responsible action (Mezirow, 2000; Algers, 2020).

A *maqasid*-based model contributes to this transformation in three key ways.

First, it embeds ethical reasoning into sustainability education. Unlike conventional models that prioritise technical competencies, *maqasid*-oriented education emphasises moral accountability

and purpose-driven action. This aligns with recent findings that ethical engagement is a critical determinant of sustainable behaviour (Boni et al., 2020).

Second, it integrates sustainability competencies with value-based learning. Research on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) identifies key competencies such as systems thinking, anticipatory skills, and normative competence (UNESCO, 2020). Maqasid syariah enhances these competencies by grounding them in ethical principles, thereby strengthening their relevance and applicability.

Third, it promotes experiential and transformative learning approaches. Studies indicate that sustainability education is most effective when students engage in real-world problem-solving and reflective practice (Leal Filho et al., 2019). A maqasid-based framework encourages this by linking ethical values with practical actions, such as community engagement, environmental stewardship, and social innovation.

Importantly, this model addresses a major gap identified in recent literature: the disconnect between sustainability knowledge and behavioural change (Peters et al., 2024). By integrating ethical, cognitive, and experiential dimensions, a maqasid-based approach fosters holistic learning outcomes that align knowledge with action. This emphasis on translating educational values into student behaviour is particularly important given evidence of ethical behaviour challenges among students in higher education settings (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Institutional Implications

The integration of maqasid syariah and SDGs has significant implications for higher education institutions, particularly in terms of governance, curriculum design, and campus practices. The framework treats these functions as interconnected rather than isolated interventions.

At the governance level, a maqasid-based approach supports value-driven institutional leadership. Universities are increasingly expected to act as sustainability leaders, yet many lack a coherent ethical framework to guide decision-making (Lozano et al., 2015). The importance of embedding ethical and Islamic values within higher education practices is also evident in Shahri (2024), who highlights the need for educational practices to remain aligned with principles such as fairness, transparency, and ethical responsibility. Maqasid principles can therefore inform institutional missions, sustainability policies, partnerships, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms.

At the curriculum level, this integration encourages interdisciplinary and holistic education. Sustainability challenges are inherently complex and require knowledge that transcends disciplinary boundaries. Recent studies emphasise the importance of integrating ethics, science, and social perspectives within higher education curricula (UNESCO, 2020; Algers, 2020). A maqasid-based framework facilitates this integration by providing a unifying ethical lens across disciplines.

At the practice level, universities can operationalise sustainability through campus-based initiatives and living laboratories. Research demonstrates that campus environments play a crucial

role in shaping student behaviour and sustainability engagement (Leal Filho et al., 2019). By aligning campus practices with maqasid principles such as environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and resource justice HEIs can create immersive learning environments that reinforce sustainability values.

Furthermore, this integration enhances the role of universities as agents of societal transformation. Rather than functioning solely as knowledge providers, HEIs can act as platforms for ethical leadership and sustainable innovation. This aligns with global calls for higher education to contribute more actively to achieving the SDGs through both knowledge production and value formation.

Recommendations

To operationalise the integration of Maqasid Syariah and the Sustainable Development Goals within higher education, this study proposes four interrelated strategic directions. Together, they translate the framework into institutional governance, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and campus practice and culture.

Institutional Integration: Embedding Ethical Foundations in Governance

Higher education institutions should embed Maqasid Syariah principles into governance structures and sustainability strategies so that institutional decision-making is guided by ethical considerations rather than solely by performance metrics. Sustainability charters, strategic plans, partnership policies, resource-allocation decisions, and key performance indicators can incorporate both relevant SDG targets and ethical principles such as justice (adl), stewardship (khalifah), balance (mizan), and responsibility (amanah). This approach can help shift sustainability from a compliance exercise towards a value-driven institutional commitment.

Recent studies highlight that university sustainability initiatives may be influenced by external pressures such as rankings, accreditation, and reporting frameworks (Lozano et al., 2015). A Maqasid-informed governance approach can complement these mechanisms by requiring institutions to consider long-term human and societal well-being alongside measurable performance.

At the policy level, HEIs can establish cross-faculty sustainability committees, ethical sustainability indicators, stakeholder-engagement mechanisms, and periodic reviews that assess both SDG progress and the values underpinning institutional decisions.

Curriculum Reform: Integrating Sustainability and Ethical Reasoning

Curriculum transformation is essential for bridging the gap between sustainability knowledge and value internalisation. Universities should adopt an integrated curriculum model that combines SDG competencies with maqasid-based ethical reasoning across disciplines. This approach is consistent with the broader argument that higher education should integrate contemporary educational developments with ethical, cultural, and religious values to ensure that educational transformation remains socially responsible (Shahri, 2024)

Current research indicates that sustainability education can remain compartmentalised and may emphasise technical knowledge without sufficiently addressing behavioural change (Peters et al., 2024; Leal Filho et al., 2019). Integrating Maqasid Syariah provides an ethical lens for discussing responsibility, justice, stewardship, intergenerational well-being, and the consequences of institutional and professional decisions.

For example, courses in business, engineering, law, health, and social sciences can connect disciplinary knowledge with relevant SDG challenges and Maqasid principles. Curriculum mapping can identify where students encounter sustainability knowledge, ethical reasoning, reflective learning, and opportunities for action. This supports the ESD emphasis on critical thinking, normative reasoning, systems thinking, and action-oriented learning (UNESCO, 2020).

By aligning SDG competencies with Maqasid principles, HEIs can foster a more holistic educational experience that integrates knowledge, values, and action.

Pedagogical and Assessment Transformation: Moving from Knowledge to Action

Pedagogy should provide students with opportunities to apply sustainability concepts to authentic problems and to reflect on the ethical dimensions of their decisions. Problem-based learning, case analysis, service learning, community projects, reflective activities, and interdisciplinary projects can connect SDG competencies with Maqasid-based ethical reasoning. This approach is consistent with transformative learning, which emphasises critical reflection and changes in frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000).

Assessment should similarly recognise more than factual knowledge. Where appropriate, institutions can assess students through reflective journals, project portfolios, sustainability proposals, community-based projects, and other authentic tasks that demonstrate the integration of knowledge, values, and responsible action. Such assessment practices can help address the knowledge–behaviour gap identified in sustainability education literature.

Campus Practice and Institutional Culture: Creating a Living Sustainability Environment

HEIs should align campus operations with the values taught in the curriculum. Energy and resource management, waste reduction, sustainable procurement, inclusive facilities, community engagement, and responsible use of institutional resources can serve as practical applications of SDG targets and Maqasid principles. Students can participate in campus sustainability projects and community partnerships so that sustainability becomes part of everyday institutional culture rather than an abstract classroom topic.

A whole-institution approach also requires consistency between what the university teaches and what it practises. When governance, curriculum, assessment, campus operations, and community engagement reinforce the same ethical and sustainability priorities, students are more likely to encounter sustainability as a lived institutional value.

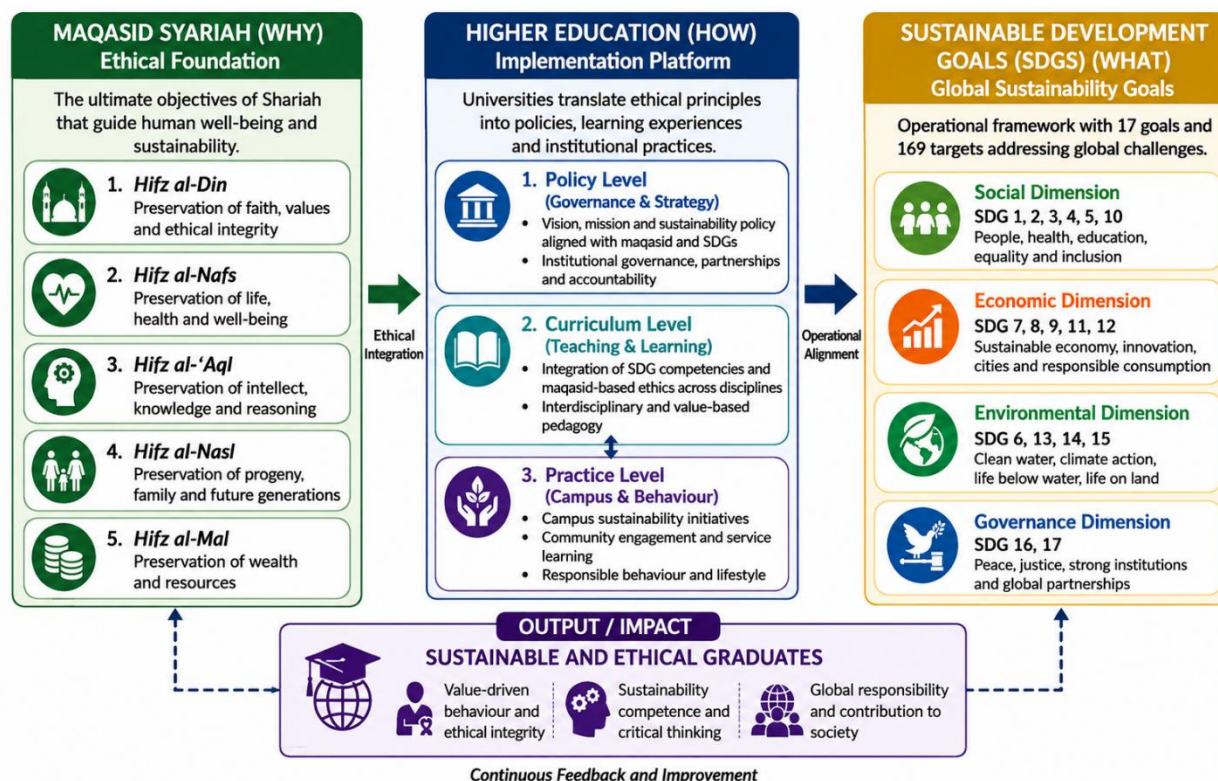


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Integrating Maqasid Syariah and SDGs in Higher Education.

Source: Authors' own framework.

Synthesis of Recommendations

Taken together, the four recommendations highlight the need for systemic and multi-level transformation in higher education. Rather than isolated interventions, the integration of Maqasid Syariah and SDGs requires coordinated efforts across governance, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and campus practice and institutional culture. This whole-institution orientation is consistent with sustainability approaches that seek alignment across teaching, research, operations, and stakeholder engagement (Lozano et al., 2015; Algers, 2020).

The framework therefore treats higher education as a mediating platform: ethical principles provide direction, institutional processes provide mechanisms for action, and SDG targets provide an operational reference for sustainability outcomes. Continuous monitoring and reflection can then inform institutional improvement and future refinement of the framework.

Overall, the recommendations reinforce the whole-institution principle: sustainability should be embedded in teaching, research, governance, operations, and stakeholder engagement rather than treated as a separate institutional activity (Lozano et al., 2015; Algers, 2020).

Conclusion

The integration of Maqasid Syariah and the Sustainable Development Goals provides a coherent conceptual basis for bridging ethical foundations and operational sustainability agendas in higher education. The SDGs offer a globally recognised structure of goals and targets, while Maqasid Syariah provides an ethical rationale grounded in human well-being, justice, responsibility, and stewardship. The proposed framework positions higher education as the platform through which these two dimensions can be connected.

The study contributes by moving beyond a descriptive comparison of Maqasid Syariah and the SDGs towards a multi-level higher education model. The framework links five Maqasid necessities with relevant sustainability dimensions and connects them to governance, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and campus practice. In this model, ethical reasoning addresses the “why”, higher education processes address the “how”, and the SDGs provide the “what” of sustainability action.

The framework nevertheless has limitations. It is conceptual and based on synthesis of selected literature and policy documents; it does not provide empirical evidence of causal relationships or demonstrate implementation outcomes in a particular institution. The proposed correspondences between Maqasid dimensions and SDGs should therefore be understood as conceptual rather than as fixed equivalences.

Future research should validate the framework through expert review and Delphi studies, map it against existing university curricula and sustainability policies, examine its application through institutional case studies, and develop appropriate indicators for assessing ethical and sustainability outcomes. Empirical testing can subsequently determine whether the proposed integration contributes to measurable changes in student competencies, behaviour, institutional culture, and sustainability performance. Such work would strengthen the practical and scholarly value of Maqasid–SDG integration in higher education.

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