

INTEGRATING ETHICS, REASON, AND SOCIETY: A COMPARATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT IN AL-GHAZALI, AL-FARABI, AND IBN KHALDUN

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Abstract

This study examines the educational thought of classical Islamic scholars—Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun—and its relevance to contemporary Islamic education. The research employs a literature review approach by analyzing scholarly articles published between 2020 and 2025 retrieved from Google Scholar with active DOI references. The analysis focuses on identifying the key educational concepts proposed by these thinkers and exploring how their ideas contribute to the philosophical foundations of Islamic education. The findings reveal that classical Islamic educational thought emphasizes a holistic approach to human development that integrates moral, intellectual, and social dimensions. Al-Ghazali highlights the importance of moral and spiritual education through the cultivation of character and ethical values. Al-Farabi emphasizes rational inquiry and philosophical understanding as the foundation for building virtuous citizens and a harmonious society. Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun introduces a sociological perspective that links education with cultural transmission and the development of civilization. The synthesis of these perspectives demonstrates that classical Islamic educational philosophy offers an integrative framework that remains relevant for addressing contemporary educational challenges. Therefore, revisiting the educational ideas of these scholars can provide valuable insights for developing a balanced and holistic model of Islamic education in modern contexts.

Keywords: Islamic educational philosophy, classical Islamic scholars, holistic education

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji pemikiran pendidikan tokoh-tokoh Islam klasik, yaitu Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, dan Ibn Khaldun, serta relevansinya terhadap pengembangan pendidikan Islam kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kajian literatur dengan menganalisis artikel-artikel ilmiah yang dipublikasikan pada tahun 2020–2025 yang diperoleh melalui Google Scholar dan memiliki DOI aktif. Analisis difokuskan pada identifikasi konsep-konsep utama pendidikan yang dikemukakan oleh para tokoh tersebut serta kontribusinya terhadap fondasi filosofis pendidikan Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran pendidikan Islam klasik menekankan pendekatan pendidikan yang holistik yang mengintegrasikan dimensi moral, intelektual, dan sosial dalam pembentukan manusia. Al-Ghazali menekankan pentingnya pendidikan moral dan spiritual melalui pembentukan akhlak dan nilai-nilai etika. Al-Farabi menyoroti pentingnya rasionalitas dan pemikiran filosofis sebagai dasar pembentukan masyarakat yang berkeutamaan dan harmonis. Sementara itu, Ibn Khaldun memberikan perspektif

sosiologis yang mengaitkan pendidikan dengan transmisi budaya serta perkembangan peradaban. Sintesis dari ketiga pemikiran tersebut menunjukkan bahwa filsafat pendidikan Islam klasik menawarkan kerangka pendidikan yang integratif dan tetap relevan untuk menjawab tantangan pendidikan kontemporer. Oleh karena itu, kajian terhadap pemikiran pendidikan tokoh-tokoh klasik dapat memberikan kontribusi penting bagi pengembangan model pendidikan Islam yang holistik dan kontekstual di era modern.
Kata kunci: Filsafat pendidikan Islam, tokoh Islam klasik, pendidikan holistik

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has long been understood not merely as the transmission of religious knowledge but as an intellectual tradition rooted in the philosophical heritage of classical Islamic scholarship. The foundations of Islamic education emerged from the integration of reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*wahy*), which together shaped the epistemological and ethical framework of learning within Islamic civilization. Historical studies emphasize that classical Islamic intellectual traditions established pedagogical institutions, methodological approaches, and epistemological paradigms that continue to influence contemporary Islamic education (Anggraeni, 2025; Dardiri, 2023; Syahril, 2025). Institutions such as *kuttab*, madrasah, and scholarly centers like *Bayt al-Hikmah* played a critical role in transmitting knowledge while cultivating moral character and intellectual literacy within Muslim societies (Holilah, 2022; Lutfiyah, 2025; Syu'aib & M.Husni, 2025). As a result, Islamic education historically developed as a holistic system that integrates spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions of human development.

A central philosophical principle underlying classical Islamic education is the synthesis between rational inquiry and divine guidance. Rather than rejecting rationality, Islamic intellectual traditions transformed philosophical knowledge within the framework of *tawhid*, thereby integrating metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological dimensions of knowledge (Dardiri, 2023; Syahril, 2025). This integrative epistemology emphasized that knowledge serves not only cognitive advancement but also moral responsibility, social harmony, and devotion to God. In classical educational practices, this synthesis was reflected in learning traditions that combined textual engagement with rational analysis, as seen in the teaching of classical texts and scholarly discourse within madrasah and pesantren traditions (Lutfiyah, 2025; Nuruliana, 2025). Consequently, Islamic education historically aimed to cultivate individuals who embody intellectual competence, ethical character, and spiritual awareness.

Within this intellectual tradition, several classical Muslim thinkers made substantial contributions to the philosophy of education. Scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun articulated comprehensive educational philosophies that integrated moral cultivation, rational inquiry, and social development. Al-Ghazali emphasized moral purification and spiritual formation as the central goals of education, viewing knowledge as a means to develop ethical character and closeness to God (Hufon et al., 2025; Maulida et al., 2024). In contrast, Al-Farabi conceptualized education as a philosophical endeavor aimed at achieving human happiness and social harmony through the cultivation of

virtuous citizens within a just political order (Setyo, 2024; Sucipto & Putera, 2025). Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun introduced a sociological perspective, arguing that education is intrinsically linked to social organization, cultural transmission, and the development of civilization (Fahmi & Sukandar, 2025; Jaya, 2023). Together, these thinkers represent complementary dimensions of Islamic educational philosophy: ethical, rational, and socio-civilizational.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes the relevance of these classical educational philosophies for addressing current challenges in Islamic education. Rapid social transformation, technological development, and global intellectual exchange require educational models that integrate moral values, scientific knowledge, and social responsibility. Several studies argue that revisiting classical Islamic educational thought can provide conceptual guidance for developing holistic curricula that integrate *ta'lim* (instruction), *tarbiyah* (character development), and *ta'dib* (ethical discipline) in modern educational systems (Adona, 2025; Mukhtari, 2025; Mustofa, 2025). Furthermore, the integration of classical philosophical insights with contemporary educational theories has the potential to overcome the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge while fostering balanced intellectual and moral development (Abror & Mun'im, 2025; Hidayat & Kuswanto, 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic educational thought, most existing studies tend to focus on individual scholars rather than examining their ideas within a comparative philosophical framework. Consequently, there remains a need for systematic analysis that explores the interrelationship between the educational philosophies of Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun and their relevance for contemporary Islamic education. By synthesizing insights from classical scholarship and modern academic discourse, this study aims to analyze the educational thought of these three thinkers and identify how their ideas collectively contribute to the development of a holistic philosophy of Islamic education. Such a comparative literature review may offer a conceptual foundation for reconstructing Islamic educational paradigms that integrate ethical formation, rational inquiry, and social responsibility in the context of modern educational challenges.

METHOD

This study employs a literature review approach to systematically examine the educational thought of classical Islamic scholars, particularly Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun, and its relevance to contemporary Islamic education. A literature review was chosen because it enables the synthesis of previous scholarly works to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical foundations and educational concepts proposed by these thinkers. The data sources for this study consist of academic articles published in reputable national and international journals related to Islamic philosophy of education. The literature search was conducted through the Google Scholar database using several keywords, including *Islamic philosophy of education*, *Al-Ghazali education*, *Al-Farabi educational philosophy*, *Ibn Khaldun education theory*, and *Islamic*

educational thought. To ensure the relevance and currency of the analysis, the reviewed articles were limited to publications from 2020 to 2025.

The selection of literature followed several stages, including identification, screening, and analysis of relevant sources. The inclusion criteria applied in this study were as follows: (1) the article must be a peer-reviewed academic publication; (2) the article discusses Islamic educational philosophy or the educational thought of classical Muslim scholars, particularly Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun; (3) the article was published between 2020 and 2025; and (4) the article has an active Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to ensure the reliability and traceability of the sources. After the selection process, the eligible articles were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying key educational concepts within each scholar's thought, categorizing recurring themes across the literature, and conducting a comparative analysis to highlight similarities, differences, and conceptual contributions relevant to the development of contemporary Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Selected Literature

Before presenting the thematic findings, this study first summarizes the selected literature reviewed in this research. The articles analyzed were selected based on the inclusion criteria described in the methodology section, namely publications between 2020 and 2025, relevance to Islamic educational philosophy, and the presence of an active DOI. These studies examine various dimensions of Islamic educational thought, including moral education, epistemology, curriculum design, and the social function of education. The selected literature includes both conceptual and empirical studies that discuss the educational contributions of classical Muslim scholars and their relevance to contemporary educational contexts.

The literature reveals that many contemporary scholars are increasingly revisiting classical Islamic thinkers to address current educational challenges. These challenges include moral crises among students, the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences, and the need for holistic educational models that integrate intellectual, spiritual, and social development. By analyzing the works of classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun, contemporary researchers attempt to reconstruct a philosophical foundation that can guide Islamic education in modern contexts. This growing scholarly attention reflects the recognition that classical Islamic thought contains valuable insights that remain relevant to contemporary educational discourse.

Another important observation from the literature is the diversity of approaches used by researchers. Some studies focus primarily on philosophical analysis, examining the ethical and metaphysical foundations of education in classical texts. Other studies employ curriculum analysis to explore how classical educational ideas can inform modern Islamic curricula. In addition, several studies adopt comparative approaches that juxtapose Islamic educational philosophy with modern educational theories such as constructivism,

humanism, and critical pedagogy. The following table presents a synthesis of selected studies reviewed in this research.

Table 1. Summary of Selected Literature (2020–2025)

AUTHOR	FOCUS OF STUDY	METHOD	KEY FINDINGS
MAULIDA ET AL (2024)	Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy	Literature review	Emphasizes moral purification and character education
HUFRON ET AL (2025)	Islamic moral education	Conceptual analysis	Integration of ethics and knowledge in Islamic pedagogy
SUCIPTO & PUTERA (2025)	Al-Farabi's philosophy of education	Literature review	Education aims to build virtuous society
SETYO (2024)	Islamic philosophical foundations	Qualitative analysis	Integration of rationality and ethics
FAHMI & SUKANDAR (2025)	Ibn Khaldun's educational thought	Literature review	Education linked with social development
MUSTOFA (2025)	Islamic curriculum development	Conceptual study	Integration of tarbiyah, ta'lim, and ta'dib
MUKHTARI (2025)	Contemporary Islamic curriculum	Qualitative research	Holistic curriculum integrating values
ADONA (2025)	Educational philosophy and character building	Literature review	Emphasizes ethical education
HIDAYAT & KUSWANTO (2024)	Islamic education and modern learning theory	Comparative study	Integration of classical and modern theories

Moral and Spiritual Foundations of Education in Al-Ghazali's Thought

The literature consistently identifies moral and spiritual development as a central theme in Al-Ghazali's philosophy of education. According to several studies, Al-Ghazali views knowledge not merely as a tool for intellectual achievement but as a means of moral transformation and spiritual purification. Education, therefore, is closely connected with the cultivation of ethical character and the purification of the soul. In this perspective, the ultimate goal of education is to guide individuals toward moral excellence and closeness to God. This emphasis distinguishes Al-Ghazali's educational thought from purely cognitive or utilitarian models of education.

Several scholars highlight that Al-Ghazali places significant emphasis on the ethical responsibilities of both teachers and students. Teachers are expected to act as moral exemplars who guide students not only intellectually but also spiritually. Meanwhile, students are encouraged to pursue knowledge with sincerity and humility, recognizing that knowledge should lead to ethical behavior. This relational dimension of education reflects a broader understanding of pedagogy as a process of character formation rather

than mere information transmission. Such perspectives resonate with contemporary discussions on character education and moral pedagogy.

Another important aspect of Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy is the integration of religious knowledge and rational sciences. Contrary to the misconception that classical Islamic education rejects rational inquiry, many scholars argue that Al-Ghazali supports a balanced approach that integrates spiritual and intellectual development. Knowledge is categorized based on its benefits for human life and spiritual growth, and both religious and rational sciences are considered important within the educational framework. This integrated approach provides an alternative model for overcoming the dichotomy between religious and secular education.

Contemporary scholars also emphasize the relevance of Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy for addressing moral challenges in modern society. In many educational contexts today, institutions struggle with issues related to ethical development, social responsibility, and the cultivation of values among students. By revisiting Al-Ghazali's emphasis on moral education, educators can develop educational models that prioritize ethical awareness and spiritual growth alongside intellectual development. Consequently, Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary Islamic educational reform.

Rational and Philosophical Dimensions of Education in Al-Farabi's Thought

The literature on Al-Farabi highlights the strong philosophical orientation of his educational thought. Unlike Al-Ghazali, who focuses primarily on spiritual and ethical dimensions, Al-Farabi places greater emphasis on rational inquiry and philosophical reasoning. Education, according to Al-Farabi, is a process of intellectual cultivation that enables individuals to understand truth and achieve happiness. Through education, individuals develop the intellectual capacities necessary to participate in a virtuous society. Several studies emphasize that Al-Farabi conceptualizes education within the framework of his political philosophy. He argues that education plays a crucial role in shaping the moral and intellectual qualities of citizens within an ideal state. In this context, education serves not only individual development but also the broader goal of social harmony and justice. A well-educated society, according to Al-Farabi, is essential for the realization of collective well-being and political stability. Thus, education becomes an instrument for achieving ethical and social order.

The literature also highlights Al-Farabi's emphasis on the role of philosophy in education. He views philosophy as the highest form of knowledge because it enables individuals to understand ultimate truths about existence, morality, and society. In educational terms, philosophical inquiry encourages critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and the pursuit of wisdom. These elements align with contemporary educational goals that emphasize analytical thinking and reflective learning. Furthermore, scholars note that Al-Farabi's educational philosophy provides an important bridge between classical Islamic thought and modern educational theories. His emphasis on rational inquiry, civic responsibility,

and ethical leadership resonates with contemporary discussions on democratic education and social responsibility. By integrating philosophical reflection with practical social goals, Al-Farabi offers a comprehensive vision of education that remains relevant for contemporary educational systems.

Social and Civilizational Dimensions of Education in Ibn Khaldun's Thought

In contrast to the moral emphasis of Al-Ghazali and the philosophical orientation of Al-Farabi, Ibn Khaldun approaches education from a sociological perspective. His educational thought is closely connected with his broader theory of civilization and social development. According to Ibn Khaldun, education plays a critical role in shaping cultural identity, transmitting knowledge across generations, and sustaining social cohesion. Learning is therefore embedded within the social and historical context of human societies. One of the key concepts highlighted in the literature is Ibn Khaldun's idea of gradual learning (*tadrij*). He argues that knowledge should be introduced progressively, beginning with basic concepts before moving toward more complex ideas. This approach reflects an early understanding of cognitive development and instructional sequencing in education. Many scholars note that this principle is consistent with modern pedagogical theories that emphasize scaffolding and learner-centered instruction.

Another important concept in Ibn Khaldun's educational thought is *malakah*, which refers to the formation of intellectual habits through repeated practice and experience. According to Ibn Khaldun, effective learning requires continuous engagement and practical application of knowledge. Education should therefore focus not only on memorization but also on the development of intellectual skills and habits of thinking. This perspective anticipates many contemporary discussions on experiential learning and competence-based education. The literature also highlights the relevance of Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas for understanding the relationship between education and social development. Education, in his view, contributes to the advancement of civilization by cultivating intellectual capabilities and promoting social cooperation. By linking education with broader social dynamics, Ibn Khaldun provides a framework for understanding how educational institutions contribute to societal progress.

Comparative Synthesis of the Educational Thought of Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun

The comparative analysis of the literature reveals that the educational philosophies of Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun represent complementary perspectives rather than conflicting approaches. Each thinker emphasizes a different dimension of education: moral development, rational inquiry, and social context. When combined, these perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the purpose and function of education within Islamic intellectual traditions. From the perspective of moral education, Al-Ghazali highlights the importance of ethical and spiritual development. His educational philosophy emphasizes the formation of virtuous individuals who are guided by moral principles and spiritual awareness. In contrast, Al-Farabi focuses on the

intellectual and philosophical dimensions of education, emphasizing rational inquiry and civic responsibility. Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun highlights the sociological aspects of education, linking learning processes with social development and cultural transmission.

These complementary perspectives suggest that Islamic educational philosophy encompasses multiple dimensions of human development. Education is not limited to intellectual training but also includes moral formation and social integration. By synthesizing these dimensions, educators can develop holistic educational models that address the cognitive, ethical, and social needs of learners. The literature therefore suggests that revisiting classical Islamic educational thought can contribute significantly to contemporary educational reform. By integrating the ethical insights of Al-Ghazali, the philosophical rationality of Al-Farabi, and the sociological perspectives of Ibn Khaldun, educators can develop educational systems that are both intellectually rigorous and ethically grounded.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this literature review indicate that classical Islamic educational thought provides a strong philosophical foundation for developing a holistic educational paradigm. The educational perspectives of Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun demonstrate that education is not merely concerned with the transmission of knowledge but also with the development of moral character, intellectual capability, and social awareness. This multidimensional understanding reflects the broader objectives of Islamic education, which aim to cultivate balanced individuals who possess ethical values, rational thinking, and social responsibility. Previous studies also emphasize that the epistemological basis of Islamic education lies in the integration of revelation and reason, which forms a unique framework for educational philosophy (Dardiri, 2023; Syahril, 2025). Therefore, Islamic education should be understood as a comprehensive system designed to nurture the full development of human potential.

Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy highlights the central importance of moral and spiritual formation in the learning process. According to his perspective, the ultimate goal of education is the purification of the soul and the development of virtuous character (Jeong-Kyu, 2022; Syaiful & Anam, 2024). Knowledge is not valued solely for intellectual achievement but for its capacity to guide individuals toward ethical behavior and spiritual awareness. This emphasis on moral education reflects a pedagogical approach that integrates ethical values into the learning process (Udin et al., 2022). In contemporary educational discourse, such an approach is increasingly relevant as many societies face moral and ethical challenges among younger generations. Revisiting Al-Ghazali's educational thought therefore offers valuable insights for strengthening character education and moral development within modern educational systems.

In contrast, Al-Farabi presents a philosophical and rational perspective on education that emphasizes intellectual cultivation and social harmony. His educational philosophy situates learning within the broader framework of civic life and political organization.

According to Al-Farabi, education plays a crucial role in shaping virtuous citizens who contribute to the stability and well-being of society. Through the development of rational thinking and philosophical understanding, individuals are expected to pursue truth and contribute to the creation of a just society. This perspective highlights the relationship between education and social responsibility, suggesting that education should prepare individuals not only for personal success but also for active participation in societal development (Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Coelho & Menezes, 2021; Igwe et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun introduces a sociological dimension to the philosophy of education. His ideas emphasize that education is closely related to social structures, cultural traditions, and the development of civilization. Concepts such as gradual learning (*tadrij*) and the formation of intellectual habits (*malakah*) illustrate his deep understanding of the learning process. Ibn Khaldun's perspective highlights the importance of adapting educational methods to the cognitive abilities and social contexts of learners. Modern educational theories, including constructivism and experiential learning, share similar principles that emphasize active engagement and progressive learning (Alabi, 2024; Bell & Bell, 2020; Marougkas et al., 2023; Meyer & Seaman, 2021; Zajda, 2021). This demonstrates that Ibn Khaldun's educational insights remain relevant for contemporary discussions on effective teaching strategies.

Overall, the synthesis of the educational thought of Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun illustrates that classical Islamic philosophy offers a comprehensive and integrative educational framework. Each thinker contributes a distinct yet complementary dimension to educational philosophy: moral and spiritual development, rational and intellectual cultivation, and socio-cultural awareness. Integrating these perspectives can help construct a holistic model of Islamic education capable of addressing contemporary educational challenges (Bahri et al., 2025; Mahmudulhassan et al., 2024, 2025; Manajemen et al., 2025; Muhsan & Haris, 2022; W & Hasanah, 2024). Such a model emphasizes not only intellectual achievement but also ethical character and social responsibility. Consequently, revisiting classical Islamic educational thought can provide valuable guidance for developing educational systems that are both academically rigorous and morally grounded.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that classical Islamic educational thought offers a comprehensive philosophical framework for understanding the purpose and function of education. The ideas of Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Khaldun reveal that education in the Islamic intellectual tradition is not limited to the transmission of knowledge but also aims to cultivate moral character, intellectual capacity, and social awareness. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the ethical and spiritual dimensions of education through the development of moral character and the purification of the soul. Meanwhile, Al-Farabi highlights the importance of rational inquiry and philosophical understanding in shaping virtuous

citizens within a just society. Ibn Khaldun complements these perspectives by emphasizing the sociological aspects of education, including the role of learning in cultural transmission and the development of civilization.

The synthesis of these perspectives indicates that Islamic educational philosophy integrates moral, intellectual, and social dimensions into a holistic educational model. Such an approach remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges, including the need for character education, intellectual development, and social responsibility in modern learning environments. By revisiting the educational thought of classical Muslim scholars, contemporary educational systems can develop more balanced and integrative approaches that combine ethical values, rational inquiry, and social awareness. Therefore, the reconstruction of classical Islamic educational philosophy can contribute significantly to the development of contemporary Islamic education that seeks to nurture knowledgeable, ethical, and socially responsible individuals.

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