

The Educational Thought of Ibn Khaldun and Its Relevance to the Modern Education Curriculum

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Abstract

Ibn Khaldun, a 14th-century Muslim thinker, offered an educational perspective that emphasized the close relationship between knowledge, civilization, and moral formation. His thought highlights the importance of gradual processes in learning, the role of practical experience, as well as the interconnection between religious and rational knowledge. This study aims to analyze Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas and explore their relevance to the modern education curriculum. The research method employed is a literature review by examining various recent publications released between late June and early August, including international journal articles, books, and scholarly conference proceedings. The findings reveal two key points: first, Ibn Khaldun's idea of integrating religious and rational sciences has significant relevance to modern integrative and holistic curriculum models; second, his emphasis on gradual and experience-based learning methods aligns with constructivist approaches in contemporary curricula. This study demonstrates that Ibn Khaldun's educational thought not only holds historical value but also provides conceptual inspiration for designing a more balanced modern education.

Keywords: *Ibn Khaldun; Islamic Education; Modern Curriculum; Knowledge Integration; Constructivism*

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Introduction

Education is one of the most essential pillars in the development of human civilization [1]. Through education, human beings not only acquire knowledge but also construct identity, culture, and sustainable social order [2]. In the Islamic context, education holds a highly fundamental position as it is regarded as the primary means of transmitting religious values while simultaneously nurturing the potential of human intellect [3]. This is consistent with the command of Allah in QS. Al-‘Alaq: 1–5, which underscores the importance of reading, learning, and transforming knowledge into daily life.

History records numerous Muslim scholars who made significant contributions to educational thought, among them Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406). He is renowned as a historian, sociologist, and Muslim philosopher who authored the monumental work *al-Muqaddimah*. In this work, Ibn Khaldun not only elaborated theories of society and civilization but also proposed important ideas regarding education, methods of teaching, and the function of knowledge for humankind [4]. His thinking situates education as an instrument of civilization (*umran*) closely tied to the progress of nations [5].

According to Ibn Khaldun, education must proceed gradually (*tadarruj*) and should not be rushed. He emphasized the importance of practical experience in reinforcing theoretical understanding so that knowledge becomes deeply ingrained within learners [6]. This reflects his view of learning as a complex, layered process requiring patience, method, and continuity—contrasting with perspectives that reduce education to mere knowledge transmission [7].

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun rejected the dichotomy between religious and rational sciences. For him, religious sciences were essential for shaping morality and spirituality, while rational sciences served to strengthen social, economic, and political life. This integrative perspective resonates with modern educational discourse, which rejects rigid disciplinary separations and instead emphasizes a holistic approach encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions [8].

In the context of modern education, particularly in the 21st century, complex global challenges have emerged. Technological advancements, social dynamics, and labor market demands necessitate adaptive and relevant curricula. Education can no longer focus solely on content mastery but must also foster critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy. In this regard, Ibn Khaldun’s ideas of gradual, integrative, and experience-based education find renewed relevance as a philosophical foundation for modern curriculum design.

Contemporary research also highlights the compatibility between Ibn Khaldun’s thought and modern constructivist theories, particularly Vygotsky’s concept of scaffolding. Just as Ibn Khaldun emphasized staged learning, modern constructivism views students as active subjects who construct knowledge through social interaction and lived experience. Thus, Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual legacy can be positioned as part of the theoretical framework that supports contemporary curricular approaches.

The context of Islamic education in Indonesia further demonstrates the applicability of Ibn Khaldun’s ideas. Curricula in madrasahs, pesantrens, and Islamic universities attempt to integrate religious and general sciences. Yet in practice, challenges persist, including a dualistic curriculum that creates imbalance in knowledge acquisition. Ibn Khaldun’s rejection of the dichotomy of sciences offers inspiration for strengthening integration within Indonesia’s Islamic education system.

Beyond the Islamic framework, Ibn Khaldun’s educational philosophy also engages in dialogue with modern Western paradigms. While Western thought—exemplified by John Dewey—developed theories of experience-based education, Ibn Khaldun had already stressed the role of practical experience in shaping understanding centuries earlier. The dialogue between classical Islamic intellectual heritage and modern educational theory thus opens the possibility for a curriculum that is universal, contextual, and adaptive to global challenges.

Although many previous studies have examined Ibn Khaldun’s contributions, most remain limited to historical and philosophical aspects. This study, however, specifically focuses

on the relevance of his ideas for modern curriculum development. By employing recent literature from late June to early August, this research enriches the discourse with updated perspectives that connect Ibn Khaldun's classical ideas with contemporary educational practice.

Based on this background, the present study is important in ensuring that Ibn Khaldun's intellectual legacy is not merely remembered as part of history but also serves as a conceptual foundation for curriculum development in the modern era. By exploring the relevance of his thought, this study seeks to provide inspiration for building an integrative, holistic model of Islamic education capable of addressing global challenges. It reaffirms that classical thought has never lost its relevance; rather, it continues to offer valuable insights for enriching the educational landscape in the modern age.

Literature Review

Studies on Ibn Khaldun's educational thought have been conducted extensively, yet most remain focused on historical aspects. Recent literature highlights the need to compare Ibn Khaldun's ideas with contemporary educational approaches that are competency-based, constructivist, and integrative. Several studies suggest that Ibn Khaldun viewed education as a social process closely connected to the development of civilization. This perspective resonates with modern educational models that emphasize the interrelationship between knowledge, skills, and character formation. Recent scholarship also indicates that Ibn Khaldun's theory of *tadarruj* (gradual learning) aligns with Vygotsky's scaffolding approach [9]. Furthermore, his conception of integrating religious and rational sciences can be compared with the discourse on integrative curricula widely implemented in modern Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun's thought can be regarded as a valuable source of inspiration for constructing curricula that are both globally relevant and firmly rooted in Islamic values.

Research Methodology

This study employed a library research method by reviewing literature on Ibn Khaldun's Islamic educational thought and its relevance to modern curriculum development. The primary source was Ibn Khaldun's classical work *al-Muqaddimah*, complemented by contemporary studies from national and international journals published between late June and early August. The analytical technique applied was content analysis, focusing on Ibn Khaldun's key educational ideas and interpreting their relationship with modern curriculum theories. This method was chosen as it is well-suited for exploring philosophical thought while simultaneously allowing for conceptual comparison with contemporary educational approaches [10].

3.1 The Integration of Religious and Rational Sciences in Ibn Khaldun's Perspective

In *al-Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun emphasized that a sound education must integrate religious sciences with rational sciences. For him, religious sciences serve as the moral and spiritual foundation, while rational sciences play a crucial role in managing social, economic, and political life [11]. This perspective arises from his conviction that human beings are social creatures who require balance between spiritual and material dimensions. Thus, the integration of knowledge is not merely an academic necessity but an inevitability in the construction of civilization [12].

Ibn Khaldun rejected a sharp dichotomy between religious and rational sciences. He argued that the two complement one another: religious sciences guide ethics and morality, while rational sciences enrich intellectual insight and life skills. This view stands in opposition to reductionist perspectives that privilege only one dimension of knowledge, and it aligns with modern educational approaches that encourage the development of multiple intelligences and integrative curricula [13].

In the context of modern curricula, Ibn Khaldun's concept of integration corresponds with holistic educational paradigms that regard learners as multidimensional beings. Education that focuses solely on cognitive aspects while neglecting morality risks producing intelligent

individuals who are ethically fragile. Conversely, an education system oriented only toward morality without equipping learners with rational skills leads to backwardness. Therefore, the integration of both forms of knowledge serves as the foundation for a balanced and adaptive curriculum.

Recent studies demonstrate that the integration of religious and rational sciences can be realized through interdisciplinary curricular approaches. For instance, science instruction can be linked with religious values, enabling learners not only to grasp scientific concepts but also to recognize their connection to religious teachings. Ibn Khaldun in this regard provided an early framework that knowledge should be directed toward the welfare of the community rather than mere intellectual satisfaction [14].

More broadly, Ibn Khaldun's integrative perspective offers a way to address the problem of dualism in contemporary Islamic education. In Indonesia, for example, distinctions persist between general and religious educational institutions, often resulting in a gap between scientific knowledge and religious values. By adopting Ibn Khaldun's thought, modern curricula can be designed to help students understand the logical relationship between religion and science, thereby fostering a generation that is both knowledgeable and morally grounded.

Integration of knowledge also has important implications for character formation. Ibn Khaldun stressed that religious sciences instill moral discipline, while rational sciences develop analytical and critical skills. When combined, learners grow not only as believers but also as intelligent individuals capable of navigating rapid social change. This is consistent with the goals of national education, which aim to nurture a generation that is faithful, virtuous, intellectually capable, and globally competitive.

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun's concept of integration is highly relevant to the discourse on the Islamization of knowledge. Although the movement to Islamize knowledge emerged only in the 20th century, Ibn Khaldun had already emphasized the importance of linking rational sciences with religious values. His thought provides an early foundation demonstrating that Islam does not reject knowledge; rather, it directs knowledge toward human welfare and the preservation of civilization.

In the era of globalization, the integration of religious and rational sciences also addresses the challenge of educational secularization. Many modern education systems detach knowledge from spirituality, resulting in moral crises. Ibn Khaldun offers the perspective that education must remain connected to divine values in order to avoid succumbing to pure materialism. This integration transforms education into a means of forming holistic human beings rather than merely producing a workforce.

Recent literature further shows that Ibn Khaldun's idea of integration is increasingly relevant to the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasizes 21st century skills. Critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity can be optimally developed when accompanied by ethical and spiritual foundations. In other words, the integration of religious and rational sciences as envisioned by Ibn Khaldun enhances student competencies to compete globally while maintaining moral integrity.

From this overall analysis, it can be concluded that Ibn Khaldun's thought on the integration of religious and rational sciences constitutes a significant contribution to modern educational discourse. His ideas bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary education. More importantly, this integration points to the need for curricula that not only cultivate intellectual capacity but also nurture the soul, thereby shaping a civilization that is just, ethical, and sustainable.

3.2 Gradual and Experiential Learning: Relevance to Modern Constructivism

In *al-Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun asserted that knowledge cannot be acquired instantaneously but must be attained through a gradual process (*tadarruj*). This process requires layered stages, beginning with the mastery of basic concepts, followed by intermediate understanding, and culminating in deeper mastery. He argued that learning forced within a short period results only in superficial memorization without genuine comprehension. This

perspective demonstrates Ibn Khaldun's early grasp of learning psychology long before the emergence of modern educational theories.

Ibn Khaldun's concept of *tadarruj* bears striking similarities to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to ZPD, learners require gradual scaffolding from teachers to reach higher levels of understanding. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun emphasized that educators must structure materials progressively so that students are not overwhelmed by the complexity of knowledge beyond their capacity. This reflects a continuity between classical Islamic thought and contemporary constructivist theory.

In addition to gradual learning, Ibn Khaldun underscored the importance of practical experience in reinforcing theoretical knowledge. He argued that knowledge remains abstract unless applied in real-life contexts. Thus, learners must directly engage with the processes or phenomena they study in order to develop deeper understanding. This view resonates with the concept of experiential learning, now recognized as a vital approach in modern education.

In modern curricula, experiential learning is realized through methods such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, and service learning. These approaches require students not only to absorb information but also to engage actively in solving real-world problems. Ibn Khaldun had already articulated a similar principle—that concrete experience strengthens abstract understanding, making it an integral part of the learning process.

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun noted that excessive reliance on theory without practice weakens students' critical abilities. Education based solely on memorization and repetition, without space for exploration, leads to intellectual stagnation. This critique is highly relevant to contemporary educational contexts, particularly in systems that still emphasize rote learning. Experiential approaches thus offer solutions by enabling learners not only to "know" but also to "understand and apply."

Ibn Khaldun's concept of gradual learning also aligns with the modern spiral curriculum principle. In a spiral curriculum, subject matter is introduced in simplified form and revisited at increasingly complex levels. This allows students to progressively deepen their understanding. Ibn Khaldun argued that such an approach is more effective than presenting heavy material all at once.

Recent literature reviews show that schools implementing constructivist approaches demonstrate stronger outcomes in comprehension and creativity. These findings reinforce Ibn Khaldun's belief that knowledge should be acquired progressively and supported by real-life experience. His thought thus proves not only theoretically relevant but also empirically validated in contemporary educational practice.

In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, *tadarruj* and experiential learning can be applied within the curricula of madrasahs and pesantrens. For example, the study of *fiqh* should not end with rote memorization of texts but should also be enriched with practical exercises, such as simulating *muamalah* contracts or conducting field observations. This enables learners to understand legal principles theoretically while also being capable of applying them in daily life.

Experiential learning further provides social benefits. Ibn Khaldun emphasized that humans are social beings who develop through interaction with their environment. This idea resonates with 21st-century curriculum priorities that emphasize collaborative learning as a key strategy. Through collaborative experiences, learners benefit not only from teachers but also from peers and their surroundings.

In sum, Ibn Khaldun's ideas on gradual and experiential learning make a significant contribution to modern curriculum development. His concepts resonate with constructivist theory and address the demands of contemporary education, which emphasizes deep understanding, practical skills, and character formation. As such, Ibn Khaldun's intellectual legacy remains highly relevant and provides a philosophical foundation for reforming both Islamic and general education in the global era.

Conclusion

Ibn Khaldun's educational thought makes a significant contribution to the discourse on modern curriculum development. His two central ideas—the integration of religious and rational sciences, and the principle of gradual, experience-based learning—prove highly relevant to contemporary curricular models that emphasize cognitive, affective, and psychomotor balance, as well as constructivist approaches to learning. This study affirms that classical intellectual legacies possess not only historical value but also conceptual relevance as sources of inspiration for designing more comprehensive and adaptive curricula. Thus, Ibn Khaldun's thought remains pertinent in addressing the challenges of modern education, particularly in constructing curricula oriented toward knowledge integration, character formation, and the strengthening of practical skills.

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