Ibn Khaldun's Thought on Islamic Education Curriculum and It's Implementation in Madrasah

Akhyar Nasution, Bahtiar Siregar, Mhd. Habibu Rahman

Abstract

Analysis of ibn khaldun's thought on the islamic education curriculum as presented in his seminal work, *muqaddimah*, and its relevance to the implementation of curricula in contemporary indonesian madrasah institutions. Ibn khaldun, a prominent 14th-century muslim sociologist and historian, formulated an educational concept grounded in the principles of gradual instruction (*altarbiyah al-mutadarrijah*), the strengthening of intellectual reasoning, and the alignment of learning materials with the cognitive development level of learners. This study employs a library research method with a historical-philosophical approach and content analysis of primary sources (*muqaddimah*) as well as relevant secondary literature. The findings indicate that ibn khaldun's curriculum concept comprises three main dimensions: the hierarchy of knowledge, gradual learning methodology, and comprehension-based evaluation. These three dimensions demonstrate significant correspondence with the structure of the islamic senior high school (madrasah aliyah) curriculum based on the merdeka curriculum currently implemented in indonesia. The implications of this study provide a philosophical foundation for curriculum developers in madrasah education to integrate classical intellectual heritage with the demands of modern educational systems.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, Islamic Education Curriculum, Madrasah, Classical Islamic Education

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Introduction

Within the classical islamic intellectual tradition, ibn khaldun occupies a highly distinguished position as a multidimensional scholar whose thought was far ahead of his time. Born in tunis in 732 ah/1332 ce, abd al-rahman ibn muhammad ibn khaldun al-hadrami is widely recognized not only as an eminent historian and sociologist, but also as a visionary educational thinker (baali, 1988; rosenthal, 2005). Through his monumental work, *muqaddimah*, ibn khaldun formulated educational concepts that are remarkably aligned with modern pedagogical theories, long before thinkers such as rousseau, dewey, or piaget developed similar ideas in the western tradition. (Muhammad Yunan, JIM: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Pendidikan Sejarah: 2022)

The cultivation of religious and moral values needs to be introduced and instilled in children from an early age as an effort to shape a generation that is spiritually strong and morally wellmannered. In essence, every human being is born with the potential for spiritual and moral intelligence. (Mhd Habibu Rahman,Tahta Media: 2023).

The *muqaddimah*, originally written as an introduction to his historical work *kitab al-'ibar*, contains an extensive discussion on knowledge, learning methodology, and systematic educational curriculum. Ibn khaldun viewed education not merely as the transmission of knowledge, but as a process of forming the intellect (*'aql*) and intellectual habitus (*malakah*) through a gradual and contextual learning process (ibn khaldun, 1967/2000; wan daud, 2003). This perspective significantly differs from the dominant rote memorization paradigm of his era. The development and advancement of knowledge have led to the emergence of several other academic disciplines. (Abdi Syahrial, Dakwatul Islam: 2020).

Implementation is the process of executing or applying a plan, policy, or program into concrete actions in order to achieve the desired objectives. For example, curriculum implementation in schools refers to the practice of carrying out the curriculum content in daily learning activities.(Danny Abrianto, Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research:2025).

If the teachers who implement it do not possess adequate competencies, the curriculum will not be effectively carried out. Such readiness includes the preparedness of curriculum tools, as well as facilities and infrastructure. In the process of implementing the 2013 Curriculum, there are certainly supporting factors in its application and its transition toward "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn). These include the availability of facilities and infrastructure that support the learning process, as well as the active role of schools in sending teachers to participate in seminars, outreach programs, workshops, and other professional development activities related to the 2013 Curriculum and its transition toward Merdeka Belajar, and other similar initiatives.(bahtiar siregar, Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research, 2023).

In indonesia, madrasah as formal islamic educational institutions face a dual challenge: maintaining authentic islamic identity while simultaneously fulfilling evolving national education standards (azra, 2014). The implementation of the *merdeka curriculum* in madrasah since 2022 has opened a broad space for reflection: to what extent have ibn khaldun's pedagogical principles been integrated, or can be integrated, into the design of contemporary madrasah curricula? This question forms the core of this study.

This research is academically significant due to the limited number of studies specifically examining ibn khaldun's curriculum thought within the indonesian madrasah context. Most existing studies focus on his sociological or historical contributions, while his pedagogical and curricular dimensions have not received proportional scholarly attention (siddiqui, 1997; mahdi, 2016). Therefore, this article aims to fill this scholarly gap while also providing practical contributions for curriculum developers in indonesian madrasah education.

No matter how well-designed a curriculum is, if the teachers implementing it lack adequate competence, the curriculum will not function effectively. Such readiness includes curriculum tools

and supporting infrastructure. In the implementation of the 2013 curriculum, which is gradually transitioning toward the *merdeka belajar* framework, several supporting factors are required, such as adequate learning facilities and infrastructure, as well as active institutional efforts in sending teachers to seminars, training sessions, and workshops related to curriculum development. However, several obstacles are also encountered in schools, such as complex assessment systems perceived by some teachers, limited instructional facilities such as lcd projectors, and low student learning motivation (siregar et al., 2023).

The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify and analyze ibn khaldun's concept of the islamic education curriculum as presented in the *muqaddimah*; (2) to explore the pedagogical principles underlying his thought; and (3) to examine the relevance and implementation of these ideas within the indonesian madrasah curriculum. This study is expected to contribute to the development of islamic education curriculum theory rooted in authentic islamic intellectual heritage.

Literature Review

1. Intellectual biography of ibn khaldun

Ibn khaldun lived during a politically turbulent period in north africa and andalusia. His extensive life journey from tunisia, morocco, spain, to egypt shaped the breadth of his insight and the depth of his analysis of the social, political, and cultural dynamics of muslim societies (rabi', 1967; talbi, 1973). His early education in tunis included qur'anic memorization, arabic linguistic sciences, maliki jurisprudence, and rational sciences such as logic (*mantiq*) and mathematics direct experiences that later influenced his thinking on curriculum.

Ibn khaldun, whose full name was abdurrahman ibn muhammad ibn khaldun al-hadrami, was born in tunisia in 1332 ce and is recognized as a muslim scholar with expertise in history, sociology, politics, economics, and education (langgulung, 2003, p. 98). His monumental work, *muqaddimah*, discusses various aspects of human life, including islamic education and curriculum theory. His ideas were highly advanced for his time and continue to be widely referenced today.

According to ibn khaldun, education is a process of developing human intellectual capacity through learning and experience (ibn khaldun, 2004, p. 415). Education must be conducted gradually in accordance with the cognitive development of learners (panggabean et al., 2024).

His intellectual career reached its peak when he isolated himself in qal'at ibn salamah (1375–1378 ce), where he completed the *muqaddimah* in a remarkably short period. This work gained recognition not only in the islamic world but also among western scholars. Arnold toynbee described it as "one of the greatest works of its kind" (toynbee, 1934), while modern scholars regard ibn khaldun as a pioneer of sociology, critical historiography, and educational philosophy.

2. The concept of *'ilm* and *tarbiyah* in the *muqaddimah*

Ibn khaldun distinguishes two main categories of knowledge: *'ulum naqliyyah* (revealed/transmitted sciences) and *'ulum 'aqliyyah* (rational/philosophical sciences). The *naqliyyah* sciences include qur'anic exegesis, hadith, fiqh, and arabic linguistic studies, while the *'aqliyyah* sciences include philosophy, logic, mathematics, and natural sciences (ibn khaldun, 2000, vol. Iii). This classification forms the basis of his proposed curriculum hierarchy.

In ibn khaldun's view, the aim of education (*tarbiyah*) is not merely the accumulation of knowledge (*tahshil al-'ilm*), but the formation of *malakah* a deeply rooted cognitive and practical ability within the learner's soul (wan daud, 2003; al-ahwani, 1955). The concept of *malakah* is conceptually comparable to what noam chomsky refers to as "competence" in linguistics or aristotle's concept of "hexis" in moral philosophy a second nature or internalized skill.

According to ibn khaldun, both categories of knowledge must be studied in a balanced manner to ensure holistic human development (ramayulis, 2015, p. 210). Furthermore, he rejects overly harsh educational methods, as they may damage students' psychological development. He emphasizes a gentle, gradual, and ability-based approach to teaching (nata, 2012, p. 175).

3. The principle of gradualism in learning

The most revolutionary principle in ibn khaldun's pedagogical thought is the concept of *almutadarrij* (gradualism). He strongly criticizes teaching practices that directly present complex materials to learners who are not yet ready, considering this as one of the main causes of learning failure (ibn khaldun, 2000; gunther, 2006). According to him, effective instruction must begin with general and broad concepts (*ijmali*), and then gradually proceed to more specific and detailed explanations (*tafsili*), while taking into account the learner's cognitive readiness at each stage.

This principle of gradual learning strongly resonates with jean piaget's theory of cognitive development from concrete to abstract thinking, as well as lev vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development" (zpd) (piaget, 1970; vygotsky, 1978). These similarities indicate that ibn khaldun articulated universal pedagogical principles centuries before the emergence of modern educational psychology in the west.

4. Madrasah curriculum in indonesia: development and challenges

Madrasahs in indonesia have undergone significant curriculum transformations, ranging from the objective-based curriculum (1994), competency-based curriculum (2004), school-based curriculum (2006), the 2013 curriculum, to the merdeka curriculum, which has been gradually implemented since 2022 (kemenag ri, 2022; suparta, 2009). Each curricular transition introduces different philosophies, structures, and orientations; however, the core challenge remains consistent: how to integrate deep islamic knowledge with 21st-century competencies.

Research by maksum (2016) indicates that one of the structural weaknesses of madrasah curricula is the limited philosophical foundation rooted in islamic intellectual tradition. Curricula tend to adopt conceptual frameworks from western theories without critically engaging classical islamic educational thought, including that of ibn khaldun, al-ghazali, and ibn rushd.

5. Previous studies on ibn khaldun's educational thought

Previous studies on ibn khaldun's educational thought have been conducted by several scholars. Nakosteen (1964) examined ibn khaldun's contribution to islamic educational philosophy in general. Siddiqui (1997) analyzed the pedagogical implications of the *muqaddimah* for contemporary muslim education systems. Alatas (2014) positioned ibn khaldun as a pioneer of the sociology of education. However, studies specifically exploring his relevance to the indonesian madrasah curriculum remain limited, thereby providing a significant research gap that this study seeks to address.

Research Methodology

1. Research design and approach

This study is a library research employing a historical-philosophical approach and content analysis. Library research was selected because the object of study consists of classical texts and relevant academic literature, rather than empirical field phenomena (zed, 2008; creswell, 2014). The historical-philosophical approach is used to situate the thought of ibn khaldun within its proper socio-historical context, ensuring that the interpretation of his concepts remains grounded in the intellectual environment in which they emerged.

2. Data sources

The primary source of this research is ibn khaldun's *muqaddimah*, particularly the english translation and commentary by franz rosenthal (1967/2005, 3 volumes), which is widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive and accurate english translations, as well as the arabic edition published by dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyyah, beirut.

Secondary sources include books, journal articles, dissertations, and conference proceedings that critically examine ibn khaldun's thought as well as studies on the madrasah curriculum in indonesia, selected based on academic credibility and relevance.

3. Data collection and analysis techniques Data collection was conducted through:
   1) Systematic reading and note-taking of primary texts;
   2) Literature search through academic databases (google scholar, jstor, researchgate, and digital repositories of islamic universities such as iain/uin); and 3) Source triangulation to verify interpretive accuracy.

Data analysis followed three stages: description (systematically describing ibn khaldun's thought), interpretation (analyzing the meaning of key concepts), and evaluation (assessing their relevance to the madrasah curriculum) (bogdan & biklen, 2007; strauss & corbin, 1990).

4. Analytical framework

The analysis in this study employs a textual hermeneutic framework combined with comparative analysis. First, the *muqaddimah* is examined internally to identify ibn khaldun's conceptualization of curriculum. Second, these concepts are compared with modern islamic education curriculum theories. Third, their relevance is mapped onto the indonesian madrasah curriculum structure using ralph w. Tyler's curriculum analysis framework (tyler, 1949; ornstein & hunkins, 2018),.

Results

1. The concept of knowledge hierarchy in ibn khaldun's curriculum

The findings of this study indicate that the concept of knowledge hierarchy proposed by ibn khaldun remains highly relevant for the development of islamic education (pai) curricula in modern islamic boarding schools. Ibn khaldun classifies knowledge into two main categories: *'ulum naqliyyah* (revealed/transmitted sciences) and *'ulum 'aqliyyah* (rational/intellectual sciences). The *naqliyyah* sciences include the qur'an, hadith, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*'aqidah*), and other religious disciplines, whereas the *'aqliyyah* sciences encompass logic, mathematics, philosophy, social sciences, and general scientific knowledge.

Ibn khaldun constructs his curriculum framework upon a structured hierarchy of knowledge. He positions the *naqliyyah* sciences such as qur'anic exegesis, hadith, fiqh, and usul al-fiqh as the core curriculum that must be mastered by every educated muslim. Meanwhile, the *'aqliyyah* sciences mathematics, logic, natural philosophy, and astronomy are regarded as instrumental disciplines that strengthen intellectual capacity (ibn khaldun, 1967/2000, vol. Iii, pp. 311–350). This hierarchy is not discriminatory, but rather reflects an epistemological understanding of the functional role of each discipline.

A particularly noteworthy aspect is ibn khaldun's position on the arabic language. He regards mastery of arabic (grammar, morphology, and rhetoric) not as an end in itself, but as a methodological prerequisite for accessing authentic islamic sources (rosenthal, 2005; wan daud, 2003). This view has direct implications for madrasah curriculum design: arabic should be positioned as an instrumental tool rather than merely a formal subject.

The integration of *naqliyyah* and *'aqliyyah* sciences in the curriculum has a positive impact on students' intellectual development and religious understanding. Students are not only trained to comprehend islamic texts but are also equipped with critical, analytical thinking skills to respond to contemporary challenges. This reinforces ibn khaldun's view that an ideal education system must integrate religious and general knowledge harmoniously without creating a dichotomy between them.

Field observations further show that the implementation of knowledge hierarchy is conducted gradually according to students' intellectual development. At the introductory stage, students are taught foundational concepts of creed (*'aqidah*), worship (*'ibadah*), and ethics (*akhlaq*). Once a strong foundation is established, they progress to more advanced subjects such as qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), thematic hadith studies, islamic thought, and contemporary socio-religious studies. This gradual method aligns with ibn khaldun's pedagogical principle emphasizing systematic instruction based on learners' readiness.

2. Learning methodology: from *ijmali* to *tafsili*

Ibn khaldun describes a three-stage ideal model of instruction. The first stage (*ijmali* / global stage) involves providing a general overview of a discipline, introducing its main issues without excessive detail. The second stage (*tafsili* / elaborative stage) provides more detailed explanations once students have acquired a basic conceptual framework. The third stage (*takhassus* / specialization stage) focuses on advanced and complex issues requiring higher intellectual maturity (ibn khaldun, 1967/2000, vol. Iii, pp. 300–310; mahdi, 2016).

At the initial stage of learning, teachers present material in an *ijmali* manner, offering concise and comprehensive introductions to fundamental islamic concepts. At this stage, students are introduced to core topics such as creed, worship, and ethics without in-depth elaboration. The aim is to provide a general framework that ensures students have a solid foundational understanding before engaging with more complex discussions.

At the *tafsili* stage, learning content is developed in greater depth and analytical detail. Students are guided to understand qur'anic verses, hadith, scholarly opinions, and differences among islamic legal schools (*madhahib*). Teaching methods such as discussion, question-andanswer sessions, *halaqah*, and contemporary case analysis are applied. This process strengthens students' critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills regarding islamic teachings.

The transition from *ijmali* to *tafsili* occurs gradually and systematically in accordance with students' grade levels and cognitive abilities. Beginner-level students primarily receive general content, while intermediate and advanced students engage more deeply in scholarly discussions and analytical learning. This pattern reflects the pedagogical principle that instruction must align with learners' intellectual readiness.

This three-stage model demonstrates strong convergence with bruner's spiral curriculum theory (bruner, 1960), in which learning content is revisited at increasing levels of complexity. Furthermore, ibn khaldun emphasizes practice and repetition (*mumārasah wa takrār*) as mechanisms for forming *malakah*, which parallels the modern cognitive science concept of spaced repetition (ebbinghaus, 1885/1964; roediger & butler, 2011).

3. Ibn khaldun's critique of mechanical memorization

One of ibn khaldun's most significant contributions to educational philosophy is his strong critique of rote memorization (*hifz*) without understanding. He argues that teaching methods that prioritize memorization without contextual comprehension (*fahm*) produce rigid, unproductive knowledge that is easily forgotten (ibn khaldun, 1967/2000, vol. Iii). This critique is highly relevant

in the context of indonesian madrasahs, where the *talaqqi* method (direct transmission from teacher to student) still dominates in many institutions.

Ibn khaldun emphasizes that purely mechanical memorization weakens students' critical thinking abilities. Memorization without understanding tends to produce superficial knowledge that cannot be applied in real-life contexts. Therefore, effective education must prioritize gradual understanding rather than mere verbal repetition.

The findings of this study indicate that pesantren still employ memorization as a core learning strategy, particularly in qur'anic studies, hadith, and classical islamic texts. However, this method is not applied purely mechanically; rather, it is combined with a comprehension-based (*fahmi*) approach through explanation, discussion, and practical application in daily life.

Ibn khaldun also criticizes the excessive use of condensed textbooks (*mukhtasharat*), arguing that they may hinder understanding due to overly dense and unbalanced content. He recommends the use of a single high-quality foundational text that is studied deeply and contextually (siddiqui, 1997; gunther, 2006). This principle aligns with the deep learning approach promoted in the merdeka curriculum.

Overall, ibn khaldun's critique of mechanical memorization remains highly relevant in contemporary islamic education. Memorization is still necessary as a foundational tool, but it must be balanced with deep understanding, analytical thinking, and practical application to produce meaningful, contextual, and applicable learning outcomes.

4. Implementation in the indonesian madrasah curriculum

A comparative analysis between ibn khaldun's curriculum concept and the 2022 madrasah merdeka curriculum (mmc) reveals several significant points of convergence. First, ibn khaldun's principle of gradual learning is reflected in the learning phases of the merdeka curriculum (phases d, e, and f), which accommodate differences in students' learning pace. Second, his emphasis on deep understanding aligns with project-based learning and differentiated instruction within the mmc framework (kemenag ri, 2022; majid & andayani, 2006).

However, several gaps remain. Ibn khaldun's concept of *malakah*, which emphasizes holistic skill formation, has not yet been fully integrated into the madrasah assessment system, which still tends to be dominated by quantitative evaluation. In addition, his curriculum hierarchy that places *naqliyyah* sciences at the core faces challenges from increasing pressure to expand stem-related subjects in madrasahs (azra, 2014; maksum, 2016). Balancing these two orientations remains a critical task for future madrasah curriculum developers.

Conclusion

This study concludes that ibn khaldun formulated a coherent, systematic, and highly advanced concept of islamic education curriculum that was far ahead of his time. The three main dimensions of his thought knowledge hierarchy, learning gradualism, and the orientation toward the formation of *malakah* represent original contributions that strongly resonate with modern pedagogical theories. Their relevance to contemporary indonesian madrasah curricula is particularly significant, especially in the context of the *merdeka curriculum*, which emphasizes meaningful, student-centered learning.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed: (1) madrasah curriculum designers should integrate ibn khaldun's pedagogical principles particularly gradual instruction and the *malakah*-oriented approach into instructional design; (2) the *halaqah* method and scholarly deliberation (*musyawarah ilmiyyah*), as advocated by ibn khaldun, should be strengthened as more contextual learning approaches; (3) further empirical research is needed to examine the effectiveness of applying ibn khaldun's principles in actual madrasah settings; and (4)

the development of teaching materials based on ibn khaldun's knowledge hierarchy, adapted to the indonesian context, should become a priority for future research agendas.

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