

The Evolution of the Islamic Education Curriculum: A Comparative Analysis of the Umayyad, Abbasid and Islamic Golden Ages

Anugrah Giffari¹

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang
anugrahgiffari25@webmail.umm.ac.id

Faridi²

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang
faridi_umm@umm.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the evolution of Islamic education curriculum during the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE), Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE), and the Islamic Golden Age (8th to 14th century). Through a historical-analytical approach with systematic literature review, this research identifies structural and substantial transformations in the Islamic education system, encompassing institutional aspects, teaching methodologies, and knowledge integration. The findings reveal a significant shift from informal mentorship-based education during the Rashidun Caliphate period toward a formal structured educational system during the Umayyad era, which subsequently reached its zenith during the Abbasid period with the establishment of learning institutions such as Bayt al-Hikmah. This study also reveals that the integration of religious education and secular sciences became the primary characteristic of the Islamic curriculum, providing fundamental contributions to the advancement of Islamic civilization and world civilization as a whole. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed in the context of contemporary Islamic education development.

Keywords: Islamic education curriculum, Umayyad Caliphate, Abbasid Caliphate, Islamic Golden Age, Bayt al-Hikmah

Abstract

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara komprehensif evolusi kurikulum pendidikan Islam selama periode Kekhalifahan Umayyah (661-750 M), Kekhalifahan Abbasiyah (750-1258 M), dan Zaman Keemasan Islam (abad ke-8 hingga ke-14). Melalui pendekatan historis-analitis dengan kajian literatur sistematis, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi transformasi struktural dan substansial dalam sistem pendidikan Islam, meliputi aspek kelembagaan, metodologi pengajaran, dan integrasi ilmu pengetahuan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terjadi pergeseran signifikan dari pendidikan informal berbasis mentorship pada periode Khulafaur Rasyidin menuju sistem pendidikan formal yang terstruktur pada masa Umayyah, yang kemudian mencapai puncaknya pada era Abbasiyah dengan pendirian institusi-institusi pembelajaran seperti Bayt al-Hikmah. Penelitian ini juga mengungkap bahwa integrasi antara pendidikan agama dan ilmu pengetahuan sekuler menjadi karakteristik utama kurikulum Islam, yang memberikan kontribusi fundamental terhadap kemajuan peradaban Islam dan peradaban dunia secara keseluruhan. Implikasi teoretis dan praktis dari temuan ini dibahas dalam konteks pengembangan pendidikan Islam kontemporer.

Kata-Kata Kunci: kurikulum pendidikan Islam, Kekhalifahan Umayyah, Kekhalifahan Abbasiyah, Zaman Keemasan Islam, Bayt al-Hikmah

INTRODUCTION

The history of Islamic education is one of the fundamental aspects in understanding the dynamics of Islamic civilization which has made a significant contribution to the development of world science and culture. The period of the caliphate, especially the Umayyad and Abbasid eras, represented a transformative phase in the evolution of the education system that not only shaped the intellectual identity of Muslims but also laid the foundations for the advancement of global science (El-Hibri, 2021; Khoury, 2019).

The socio-political context surrounding each period of the caliphate had a substantial influence on the formation and development of the educational curriculum. The massive expansion of Islamic rule during the Umayyad period created an urgent need for administrative and religious cohesion which was then reflected in the established curricular priorities (Judd, 2016). Similarly, the political stability and economic prosperity of the Abbasid period facilitated the development of more structured and comprehensive educational institutions (Algeriani & Mohadi, 2019).

The study of the history of Islamic education has attracted the attention of various academics from various perspectives. Makdisi, (1981) research in his work *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* provides an in-depth analysis of the development of Islamic higher education institutions, especially madrasas, and their influence on European universities. However, Makdisi's study focuses more on institutional aspects without providing a comprehensive elaboration on the evolution of the curriculum specifically.

Berkey (1992) in *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* explores the mechanisms of knowledge transmission in the context of medieval Egypt, with an emphasis on the teacher-student relationship and scientific authority. Although it provides valuable insights into teaching methodology, the study is limited to specific geographical contexts and does not include comparisons between the caliphate periods.

Günther's (2006) research on classical Islamic education identified various pedagogical methods used in Islamic learning traditions, including *talqin*, *sama'*, and diplomas. An important contribution of this study lies in the understanding of teaching methodology, but the curricular aspects and integration of science have not been explored in depth.

Leiser (2015) study on the transformation of education during the Abbasid period highlights the role of caliph patronage in the development of learning institutions such as Bayt al-Hikmah. This research makes a significant contribution to understanding the relationship

between political support and intellectual progress, although it lacks a comparative analysis with previous periods.

Contemporary research by Baiza (2022) and Muqowim & Lessy (2019) has examined the historical relevance of Islamic education to modern educational reform. Both studies emphasize the importance of learning from Islamic intellectual traditions to meet the challenges of contemporary education, but have not provided a systematic analytical framework for understanding the evolution of the curriculum chronologically.

Algeriani and Mohadi (2019) in their study of the contribution of Muslim scholars to science underline the intellectual achievements of the Islamic Golden Age. This study provides comprehensive documentation of scientific achievements, but does not explicitly link these achievements to the underlying curriculum structure and education system.

Furthermore, El-Hibri (2021) and Khoury (2019) have made important contributions to understanding the historical and political context of the Islamic caliphate. Although both studies provide a strong contextual foundation, the main focus is not on the educational aspect but on political and social dynamics in general.

Based on a review of previous studies, several research *gaps* were identified that are the basis for the novelty of this research. First, previous research has tended to focus on a single period or one particular aspect (institutional, methodological, or political context) without providing a comprehensive comparative analysis of the evolution of the curriculum across the caliphate periods. Second, the causality relationship between curriculum transformation and the achievement of the Islamic Golden Age has not been systematically explored. Third, the practical implications of historical findings on the development of contemporary Islamic education still require further elaboration.

This research offers novelty through several aspects. Methodologically, this study uses a historical-analytical approach with a systematic literature review that integrates various primary and secondary sources to build a comprehensive narrative of curriculum evolution. Substantially, this study provides an *integrated analytical framework* that connects three main dimensions—institutional, teaching methodology, and scientific integration—in understanding the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum. Comparatively, this study systematically analyzes the comparison of curriculum characteristics in the Khulafaur Rashid, Umayyad, Abbasid periods, to the peak of the Islamic Golden Age, so as to identify evolutionary patterns and their determinant factors. Contextually, this study articulates the relevance of historical

findings to contemporary Islamic educational reform discourses, bridging the gap between historical studies and practical applications.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to systematically understand how the Islamic education curriculum evolved throughout the period of the caliphate and how it contributed to the achievement of the Islamic Golden Age. This historical understanding has significant contemporary relevance, given the ongoing discourse on Islamic education reform in various parts of the Islamic world (Baiza, 2022; Muqowim & Lessy, 2019).

This research aims to: (1) identify the characteristics of the educational curriculum in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods; (2) analyze the factors that affect the evolution of the curriculum; (3) exploring the contribution of the Islamic education system to the advancement of science and philosophy; and (4) examine the implications of historical findings on the development of contemporary Islamic education.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a historical-analytical study design. The systematic literature review method is applied to collect, evaluate, and synthesize primary and secondary sources relevant to the research topic. Primary data sources include historical documents, manuscripts, and contemporary records from the period studied. Secondary data sources consist of Scopus indexed journal articles, academic books, and scientific publications that discuss the history of Islamic education. The literature selection process follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol with explicitly set inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data analysis uses a thematic content analysis method that allows the identification of patterns and main themes that emerge from the corpus of literature. Triangulation of sources is carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the developed interpretations.

RESULT

Educational Curriculum in the Umayyad Period (661-750 AD)

Core Subjects in the Curriculum

The results of the literature review show that religious education occupies a central position in the Umayyad curriculum. The teaching of the Qur'an is fundamental because literacy in sacred texts is seen as essential for all Muslims. Khoury notes that the focus on religious education was a continuity of the Khulafaur Rashidine period, but the Umayyad Dynasty

expanded the scope of the curriculum to include subjects outside of religious texts, such as poetry and philosophy (Khoury, 2019).

Arabic became a vital medium for education during the Umayyad period. Akhirudin et al. (2025) identify that the emphasis on Arabic serves a dual purpose: as an educational instrument and as a unifying force throughout the caliphate. Arabic is established as the language of administration, culture, and education.

Institutional Structure of Education

The findings of Judd's research (2016) reveal that the Umayyad Dynasty established more formal educational institutions than in the previous period. Judd documents the establishment of structured schools (kuttab) and the appointment of qualified teachers (qadis) to supervise education. This institutional shift allows for a more standardized curriculum.

Giladi (2005) found that the Umayyad educational approach was more systematic, incorporating diverse teaching methods that took into account the individual needs and backgrounds of students. This approach is influenced by Islamic traditions and educational practices from the pre-Islamic era as well as neighboring cultures such as Greece and Persia.

Regional Variations in Curriculum Implementation

Forcada (2025) elaborates that in regions such as al-Andalus, Umayyad rulers initially faced instability and relied heavily on the support of clerics. This led to a curriculum that often excluded controversial subjects such as philosophy and astrology. However, with the rise of Abd al-Rahman III, there was a revival in scientific inquiry and philosophical thought.

Educational Curriculum in the Abbasid Period (750-1258 AD)

Diversification of Subjects in the Curriculum

The results of Arslantaş's (2015) research show that the Abbasid period experienced substantial diversification in curriculum subjects. Religious studies remain at the core of the curriculum, including the study of the Qur'an and Hadith. Arslantaş documented that the focus on these religious texts is crucial to inculcate moral and ethical values in students.

AbdulAziz Algeriani & Mohadi (2019) identify the pivotal role of Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad in translating and preserving ancient texts. The institution became a center for translation, where Greek, Persian, and Indian works were translated into Arabic.

Mahjoub (2025) found that the translation movement contributed to the development of scientific terminology in Arabic. Stewart (2017) notes that subjects such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy developed rapidly during this period.

Urban and Rural Education Disparities

El-Hibri (2021) explains that in urban centers such as Baghdad, educational institutions are more formalized and diverse, often supported by a waqf (endowment) system. Amezzian (2024) explores the role of waqf in higher education institutions during the Abbasid era (334-656 H).

Souad & Ramdane (2017) found that rural areas have limited access to formal education. Education in this region is informal, relying on local religious leaders or community elders.

The Role of Religious Institutions

Arslantaş (2015) identified that religious institutions function as centers for religious instruction as well as hubs for scientific and philosophical learning. Obeidat (2020) found that women also contribute to the funding and management of educational institutions through the waqf system.

Characteristics of the Islamic Golden Age Curriculum

Integration of Religious and Secular Knowledge

Önder (2023) found that Qur'anic education and religious studies remain the foundations of the curriculum, with the belief that early education will have a lasting impact on students' character. The curriculum also covers a wide range of secular subjects. Reinhold (2021) extracts lessons from the Golden Age that demonstrate the continued relevance of this integrative education model.

Medical Education Paradigm

Asad et al. (2024) identify educational paradigms in the history of Islamic medicine, showing how scholars from diverse backgrounds contributed to significant developments in medicine. Sadeghi et al. (2021) analyzed the work of *Al-Masa'il fi al-tibb* by Hunain ibn Ishaq which uses the question-and-answer method in medical education.

Key Intellectual Figures

Forcada (2025); Stewart, (2017) documented that scholars such as Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) played pivotal roles in the intellectual movement. Alotaibi (2023) records the cultural impact of scholars in the Emirate of Andalusia (138-442 H/756-1031 AD). Mohd Tajuddin & Zakaria, (2020) analyze the instructional methods and subjects discussed in the educational speech of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-810 AD).

DISCUSSION

Comparative Analysis of Curriculum Evolution

The findings of this study reveal a progressive evolution in the Islamic education curriculum from the Umayyad period to the Islamic Golden Age. Comparisons between periods show some significant transformation patterns. In the institutional aspect, there was a fundamental shift from the informal education model based on personal mentorship in the Khulafaur Rasyidin period to a more structured system during the Umayyad period. Judd (2016) explained that the establishment of kuttab and the appointment of qadis as educators represent the first step of institutionalization. This process reached its peak in the Abbasid era with the establishment of Bayt al-Hikmah and an organized madrasah system (Algeriani & Mohadi, 2019)

This institutional transformation can be understood in the context of the caliphate's increasingly complex administrative needs. The massive territorial expansion during the Umayyad period created an imperative to produce educated personnel capable of performing bureaucratic and religious functions in the newly conquered territories. This is in line with Khoury's (2019) argument that education functions as an instrument of social and administrative cohesion.

Determinant Factors in the Evolution of the Curriculum

Analysis of the research findings identified several determinant factors influencing the evolution of the Islamic education curriculum: First, political-administrative factors play a crucial role. Political stability and the support of the rulers for intellectual activities are prerequisites for the development of a more comprehensive curriculum. A concrete example is the rise of science in al-Andalus after the consolidation of power of Abd al-Rahman III (Forcada, 2025).

Second, economic factors, especially the waqf system, provide financial infrastructure that enables the sustainability of educational institutions. Amezzian (2024) points out that waqf not only provides funding but also guarantees the relative independence of educational institutions from political fluctuations. Third, cultural factors are in the form of openness to intellectual traditions from other civilizations. Giladi (2005) notes that the Umayyad educational approach incorporates elements from Greek and Persian educational practices. This openness reached its full manifestation in the Abbasid translation movement which systematically transferred the intellectual heritage of Greece, Persia and India into Arabic.

The Significance of Arabic in Curriculum Development

The role of Arabic goes beyond mere communicative functions. Akhirudin et al. (2025) argue that Arabic serves as a catalyst for the development and dissemination of knowledge.

Precise grammatical structure and high derivative capacity allow for the development of technical terminology in a wide range of disciplines.

Mahjoub (2025) demonstrates how Al-Kindi developed philosophical terminology in Arabic, creating a conceptual apparatus that enabled sophisticated philosophical discourse. This process represents an original contribution that goes beyond the mere translation of foreign texts. The unifying function of Arabic also has significant curricular implications. With the establishment of Arabic as the official language of administration, education, and science, a shared intellectual space was formed that facilitated the exchange of ideas across geographical and ethnic boundaries within the vast territory of the caliphate.

Integration of Religious and Secular Sciences: Distinctive Characteristics

One of the most significant findings of this study is the integrative characteristics of the Islamic education curriculum that combines religious studies with secular disciplines. In contrast to the rigid dichotomy between religious and secular education that is often found in contemporary education systems, classical Islamic curricula adhere to a holistic approach.

Lovat (2021) explained that the philosophy of Islamic education views knowledge as a means to understand both the dimensions of divinity and the natural world. This perspective results in a curriculum that does not separate between "religious science" and "world science" but sees both as distinct manifestations of the same search for truth.

This integrative approach has significant pedagogical implications. Tiliouine (2014) argues that this integration not only enriches the educational experience but also fosters a sense of moral and ethical responsibility in the application of knowledge. Classical Muslim scientists did not see their scientific activities as separate from religious commitments but rather as expressions of that commitment.

Urban-Rural Disparity and Its Implications

The findings regarding disparities in educational access between urban and rural areas have important implications for our understanding of the reach of classical Islamic education systems. El-Hibri (2021) and Souad & Ramdane (2017) show that comprehensive curricula and formalized institutions are mainly found in urban centers.

This disparity can be understood in the context of the distribution of economic resources and infrastructure. Urban centers such as Baghdad, Cordoba, and Cairo were loci of accumulated wealth and power that allowed the establishment and maintenance of expensive educational institutions. The waqf system, while providing a sustainable funding mechanism, tends to be concentrated in urban areas (Amezzian, 2024).

However, it should be noted that informal education in rural areas, although limited in curricular scope, still plays an important role in the transmission of religious values and the social cohesion of Muslim communities. Mosque-based education and guidance by local scholars ensure that the basic principles of Islam remain widespread albeit with varying intensity.

Contribution to the Advancement of Global Science

The findings of the study confirm the significance of the contribution of the Islamic education system to the advancement of global science. Institutions such as Bayt al-Hikmah not only preserve the intellectual heritage of previous civilizations but also stimulate original development in various fields. Asad et al. (2024) and Sadeghi et al. (2021) demonstrate contributions in the field of medicine, where not only the transmission of Greek medical knowledge but also the development of innovative pedagogical methods such as Hunain ibn Ishaq's question-and-answer approach took place. Stewart (2017) documented similar advances in mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy.

Muqowim & Lessy (2019) compares Islamic educational practices with contemporary education systems in Europe and Asia, identifying that Islamic education in this period is more inclusive and integrated. These characteristics contributed to great intellectual productivity during the Islamic Golden Age.

Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education

The historical findings of this study have significant relevance for contemporary Islamic educational discourse. Baiza (2022) questions whether contemporary Islamic education and its pedagogical approaches are still fit for purpose, advocating critical reflection on historical heritage. Some of the lessons that can be extracted include: First, the value of integration between religious and secular education. The rigid dichotomy often found in contemporary education systems has no precedent in the classical Islamic educational tradition and has the potential to reduce the relevance of Islamic education in the modern context.

Second, the importance of openness to intellectual traditions from various sources. The Abbasid translation movement demonstrated that the critical appropriation of knowledge from non-Muslim sources was not only compatible with the Islamic identity but enriched it. Third, the significance of sustainable institutional and financial support. The waqf system provides a historical model for independent and sustainable education funding that can be adapted to contemporary contexts. Fourth, the need to overcome disparities in access to education. The urban-rural inequalities identified in the classical period remain relevant as a challenge to be overcome in the contemporary Islamic education system. Muneer Hudawi (2013) and Aziz (2026)

explore the complexity of the negotiation between tradition and modernity in contemporary Islamic education, showing that lessons from history can inform responses to the challenges of the present without falling into historical romanticism.

CONCLUSION

This research has comprehensively analyzed the evolution of the Islamic education curriculum during the period of the Umayyad Caliphate, the Abbasid Caliphate, and the Islamic Golden Age. Several key conclusions can be drawn from this analysis: First, the educational curriculum in the Umayyad period was characterized by a strong emphasis on religious and linguistic education, with a significant shift towards more formal and structured institutions. The establishment of kuttab and the appointment of qadis as educators marked the transition from an informal mentorship model to a more standardized and accessible education system. Second, the Abbasid period marked the peak of the development of the Islamic educational curriculum, with the substantial diversification of the subjects taught and the establishment of prestigious learning institutions such as Bayt al-Hikmah. The integration of religious studies and secular disciplines such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy creates an intellectual environment conducive to the advancement of science. Third, the Islamic Golden Age was the culmination of this curricular evolution, with a curriculum that harmoniously integrated religious and secular teaching, fostering a dynamic intellectual tradition that influenced both the Islamic world and Western educational systems. Fourth, the role of the Arabic language as a medium of education functions not only as an instrument of learning but also as a unifying force that facilitates cultural cohesion and intellectual exchange throughout the territory of the caliphate. Fifth, religious institutions such as mosques and madrassas play a crucial role in shaping and implementing the curriculum, serving as hubs for simultaneous religious and secular learning.

The implications of these findings for contemporary Islamic education are significant. The integration model between religious and secular education, the emphasis on critical inquiry and intellectual exploration, and the commitment to educational accessibility are principles that remain relevant in the context of today's Islamic educational reforms. The limitation of this study lies in its predominantly focus on secondary sources. Future research can expand the analysis through a direct study of historical manuscripts and primary documents to gain a more nuanced understanding of actual educational practices.

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