

Ibn Khaldun's Educational Epistemology and Its Theoretical Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology and its theoretical implications for contemporary Islamic education. Drawing primarily on Ibn Khaldun's *al-Muqaddimah*, the study conceptualizes education as an epistemic process that is gradual, contextual, and oriented toward the formation of intellectual and moral dispositions. Employing a qualitative research design based on Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach, the study reconstructs key epistemological concepts in Ibn Khaldun's educational thought, including *tadarruj* (gradual instruction), *malakah* (the formation of intellectual capacity), the integration of reason, experience, and revelation, as well as the social and ethical foundations of knowledge. The analysis demonstrates that Ibn Khaldun's epistemology provides a coherent theoretical framework for addressing major challenges faced by contemporary Islamic education, such as the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge, curricular fragmentation, and the dominance of instrumental and utilitarian educational paradigms. From Ibn Khaldun's perspective, education is not merely the transmission of information, but a civilizational project aimed at cultivating knowledgeable, ethical, and socially responsible individuals. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology offers strong theoretical relevance as a conceptual foundation for reconstructing contemporary Islamic education in an integrative, ethical, and context-sensitive manner.

KEYWORDS: *Ibn Khaldun; educational epistemology; Islamic education; malakah; tadarruj*

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on Islamic education has consistently revolved around the relationship between knowledge, humanity, and civilization. Education in the Islamic intellectual tradition has never been limited to the transmission of information or technical competence. It has been understood as a civilizational process through which human potential is cultivated in harmony with ethical, spiritual, rational, and social dimensions. Within this intellectual landscape, the epistemology of education occupies a central position, as it determines the sources, methods, purposes, and orientations of knowledge. Among Muslim thinkers, Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) stands out as a scholar whose epistemological vision offers a comprehensive and systematic framework for understanding education as a dynamic social and intellectual process. His thought, articulated most prominently in *al-Muqaddimah*, provides a conceptual bridge between classical Islamic scholarship and modern educational theory.

Despite the extensive scholarship on Ibn Khaldun in sociology, historiography, and political theory, his epistemological contribution to education often remains fragmented within contemporary academic discussions. Many studies treat his educational ideas as ancillary to his theory of *‘umrān* or reduce them to methodological observations about learning and instruction. Such approaches tend to overlook the epistemic structure underlying his educational thought, including his views on the nature of knowledge, the hierarchy of sciences, the role of reason and experience, and the moral foundations of learning. This limitation has resulted in an underdeveloped understanding of how Ibn Khaldun’s epistemology can inform contemporary Islamic education, particularly in responding to modern challenges such as secularization, instrumentalism, and the fragmentation of knowledge.

Previous studies have acknowledged Ibn Khaldun’s relevance to education by emphasizing concepts such as *ta’līm*, *tarbiyah*, and *ta’dīb*, as well as his critique of rote learning and coercive pedagogy (Zai & Ahmad, 2021: 45; Afrina Rambe et al., 2024: 112). Other scholars have highlighted his integrative vision that combines rational inquiry with religious knowledge, positioning him as a precursor to holistic and learner-centered education (Kuswanjono, 2007: 87; Saepudin & Saifudin, 2019: 64). More recent studies further underline the compatibility of Ibn Khaldun’s ideas with constructivist and experiential learning theories, particularly through his emphasis on gradual instruction (*tadarruj*), habituation (*malakah*), and contextual learning (Ferianto et al., 2024: 91). While these contributions are significant, they often remain descriptive and lack a deeper epistemological synthesis that situates Ibn Khaldun’s educational thought within broader debates on knowledge production and educational philosophy.

The problem addressed in this article lies in the gap between the richness of Ibn Khaldun's epistemological framework and its limited theoretical articulation in contemporary Islamic educational discourse. Modern Islamic education frequently faces a dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge, between moral formation and technical competence, and between tradition and modernity. This dichotomy has contributed to curricular fragmentation and conceptual ambiguity regarding educational aims. In many contexts, Islamic education struggles to respond meaningfully to rapid social change, technological development, and the epistemic assumptions of modern science, often resulting in either uncritical adaptation or defensive traditionalism. Ibn Khaldun's epistemology offers conceptual resources to move beyond this impasse, yet its potential remains insufficiently explored in a systematic manner.

The urgency of revisiting Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology becomes more apparent when situated within the contemporary global educational landscape. The current era is marked by epistemic pluralism, digital transformation, and shifting conceptions of knowledge authority. Educational institutions are increasingly required to cultivate critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and social awareness alongside technical expertise. In Islamic educational contexts, this demand intersects with the need to preserve spiritual and moral foundations while engaging constructively with modernity. Scholars have argued that Ibn Khaldun's integrative vision—rooted in revelation, reason, and empirical observation—provides a viable framework for addressing these challenges without sacrificing epistemic coherence or religious authenticity (Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023: 138; Rosyida, 2020: 57).

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun's epistemology is deeply connected to his understanding of human nature and social reality. Knowledge, in his view, is not merely an abstract cognitive possession but a product of interaction between the human intellect, social environment, and historical conditions. Education, therefore, becomes a civilizational project aimed at forming individuals capable of sustaining and advancing society. This perspective aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize contextual learning, social constructivism, and the ethical responsibilities of knowledge production. By foregrounding this dimension, Ibn Khaldun's thought offers a critical counterbalance to technocratic and utilitarian approaches that dominate much of modern education.

Despite these strengths, existing literature often treats Ibn Khaldun's educational ideas in isolation or as supplementary to broader discussions of Islamic education. Few studies have systematically examined his epistemology as a coherent theoretical foundation capable of informing contemporary educational paradigms. This gap highlights the need for a focused inquiry that reconstructs Ibn Khaldun's epistemological assumptions and explores their implications for current educational theory and practice. Such an inquiry is essential not only for historical understanding

but also for developing a normative framework that can guide Islamic education in the face of modern intellectual and cultural challenges.

This article positions itself within this scholarly gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of Ibn Khaldun's epistemology of education and examining its theoretical implications for contemporary Islamic education. It seeks to move beyond descriptive accounts by critically engaging with his conception of knowledge, learning, and human development, and by situating these concepts within ongoing debates in educational philosophy. In doing so, the article contributes to the refinement of Islamic educational theory and provides conceptual tools for rethinking educational practice in Muslim societies.

By engaging critically with classical texts and contemporary scholarship, this study aims to demonstrate that Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology offers more than historical insight. It provides a coherent and adaptable framework capable of guiding educational thought and practice in a rapidly changing world. Through this contribution, the article seeks to reaffirm the relevance of Islamic intellectual heritage as a living tradition that continues to inform and enrich modern educational discourse.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach to examine Ibn Khaldun's epistemology of education as articulated in *al-Muqaddimah*. Ricoeur's hermeneutics is employed because it provides a rigorous methodological framework for interpreting classical texts as autonomous discourses whose meanings extend beyond their original historical contexts. According to Ricoeur, a text becomes independent from its author once it is written, allowing it to generate new interpretations in different temporal and cultural settings (Ricoeur, 1976: 89). This principle is particularly relevant for reconstructing Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology within contemporary Islamic educational discourse. The analytical process in this research follows Ricoeur's dialectical movement between explanation and understanding. Explanation involves a systematic examination of the conceptual structures underlying Ibn Khaldun's educational thought, including key epistemological notions such as *malakah*, *tadarruj*, experiential learning, and the integration of reason, revelation, and experience. Understanding, in contrast, seeks to interpret the deeper meanings of these concepts by situating them within broader philosophical debates on knowledge, education, and human development. This dialectical movement ensures that the analysis remains both textually grounded and theoretically reflective (Ricoeur, 1981: 161).

Central to this methodology is the concept of distanciation, which enables the text to be read critically without collapsing its meaning into either the author's intention or the reader's subjective perspective. Through distanciation, Ibn

Khaldun's educational ideas are approached as epistemological propositions that can be recontextualized and reappropriated within modern educational challenges, such as curricular fragmentation and the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge. Contemporary scholars have emphasized that Ricoeur's hermeneutics allows classical Islamic texts to function as living intellectual resources rather than static historical documents (Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023: 134). The interpretive outcome of this hermeneutical process is a critical appropriation of Ibn Khaldun's epistemology, through which his educational concepts are reconstructed as a coherent theoretical framework relevant to contemporary Islamic education. Recent studies confirm the methodological validity of this approach, demonstrating that Ricoeur's hermeneutics facilitates a productive dialogue between classical Islamic epistemology and modern educational theory (Sihab & Husnaini, 2025: 351). By employing this method, the study ensures epistemological rigor, interpretive depth, and contextual relevance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Biography of Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun, whose full name was Abū Zayd 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn al-Ḥaḍramī, was born in Tunis in 1332 CE (732 AH) during a period marked by political fragmentation and intellectual transition in the Islamic world. His family originated from Andalusia and migrated to North Africa following the decline of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula. This Andalusian heritage placed Ibn Khaldun within a scholarly and political milieu that combined administrative experience with strong religious and intellectual traditions (Suandi & Herman, 2024: 67). The historical circumstances surrounding Ibn Khaldun's birth were crucial to the formation of his worldview. The collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate, the fall of Baghdad, and the weakening of political authority in North Africa shaped his critical awareness of civilizational decline. These experiences later informed his epistemological orientation, particularly his insistence that knowledge must be examined within its social, historical, and political conditions (Fahmi & Sukandar, 2025: 606).

Ibn Khaldun's early education began within his family environment, where Qur'anic studies, Arabic linguistics, and basic religious sciences were emphasized. He memorized the Qur'an at a young age and studied fiqh, hadith, and Arabic grammar under leading scholars in Tunis, which at the time functioned as an important intellectual center for scholars from the Maghreb and Andalusia (Suandi & Herman, 2024: 67-68).

A distinctive feature of Ibn Khaldun's intellectual formation was his exposure to both transmitted sciences (*naqliyah*) and rational sciences (*'aqliyah*). He studied logic, philosophy, mathematics, and rhetoric alongside religious disciplines. This

integrative educational background later became the foundation of his epistemological critique of dichotomous knowledge systems and his advocacy for a balanced curriculum that harmonizes revelation and reason (Primasti et al., 2022: 210). Ibn Khaldun viewed knowledge not merely as theoretical acquisition but as a gradual intellectual habituation (*malakah*). He argued that learning must proceed in stages, respecting the cognitive development of learners. This principle, rooted in his own educational experience, later crystallized into his pedagogical concepts of *tadrīj* (gradual instruction) and *takrīr* (repetition) (Fahmi & Sukandar, 2025: 607).

Beyond his scholarly pursuits, Ibn Khaldun was deeply involved in political life. He served in various administrative and diplomatic positions in North Africa and Andalusia, and later as a judge (*qāḍī*) in Egypt. These roles exposed him to the realities of governance, power struggles, and social dynamics, providing him with empirical insights that strongly influenced his theory of knowledge and education (Suandi & Herman, 2024: 68).

Ibn Khaldun's political career reinforced his conviction that knowledge cannot be separated from social reality. He observed firsthand how poorly educated elites, moral decay, and rigid traditions contributed to societal decline. Consequently, he emphasized that education must cultivate not only intellectual competence but also ethical awareness and social responsibility (Rizki et al., 2025: 175). This experiential dimension of Ibn Khaldun's life explains his rejection of purely speculative philosophy detached from lived experience. Instead, he promoted an empirical-rational approach grounded in observation (*mushāhadah*) and experience (*tajribah*). These principles later became central to his epistemology of education, which views learning as a socially embedded and transformative process (Sihab & Husnaini, 2025: 349). Ibn Khaldun's intellectual maturity culminated in the composition of *al-Muqaddimah*, written during his period of retreat from political life. This work represents a synthesis of his scholarly training, political experience, and critical reflection on history and society. In *al-Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun introduced a new science of civilization (*‘ilm al-‘umrān*), which analyzed social phenomena through causal and empirical frameworks (Fahmi & Sukandar, 2025: 606).

Within this monumental work, Ibn Khaldun devoted significant attention to education. He criticized pedagogical practices that relied excessively on rote memorization and coercion, arguing that such methods inhibit intellectual development and creativity. Instead, he advocated for gradual learning, contextual instruction, and the alignment of teaching methods with learners' psychological capacities (Primasti et al., 2022: 211).

For Ibn Khaldun, education served a civilizational function. It was not merely a means of transmitting knowledge but a process of forming disciplined, ethical, and socially responsible individuals capable of sustaining societal cohesion (*‘asabiyyah*).

This view reflects his broader epistemological claim that knowledge emerges from and contributes to social organization (Fahmi & Sukandar, 2025: 608).

Ibn Khaldun's biography reveals a coherent epistemological vision grounded in the unity of knowledge, experience, and morality. His concept of *malakah* underscores that true knowledge is internalized through sustained practice and understanding rather than superficial memorization. Education, therefore, must be continuous, contextual, and formative (Suandi & Herman, 2024: 69). He further argued that coercive teaching methods damage learners' motivation and moral character. This insight, derived from both his educational background and political observations, positions Ibn Khaldun as an early proponent of learner-centered and psychologically informed pedagogy (Primasti et al., 2022: 212). Moreover, Ibn Khaldun emphasized the ethical responsibility of educators. Teachers, in his view, function not only as transmitters of knowledge but as moral exemplars whose character profoundly influences students. This ethical dimension of epistemology remains highly relevant for contemporary Islamic education, which seeks to balance cognitive achievement with character formation (Rizki et al., 2025: 176).

Understanding Ibn Khaldun's biography is essential for contextualizing his epistemology of education. His life demonstrates that knowledge production is inseparable from social engagement and historical awareness. For contemporary Islamic education, this implies that curricula must integrate classical Islamic knowledge with modern social sciences and lived realities (Sihab & Husnaini, 2025: 350). Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on gradual learning (*tadrīj*), repetition (*takrīr*), and social solidarity (*'asabiyyah*) provides a theoretical foundation for holistic and integrative educational models. These principles align with contemporary educational theories that emphasize experiential learning, character education, and contextual pedagogy (Fahmi & Sukandar, 2025: 609). In the context of globalization and moral challenges, Ibn Khaldun's epistemological framework offers a critical alternative to purely instrumental education. By grounding learning in ethical values, social responsibility, and intellectual rigor, Islamic education can reclaim its transformative and civilizational mission (Rizki et al., 2025: 178).

Epistemology of Education According to Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun's epistemology of education is fundamentally grounded in his view of knowledge as a process that develops gradually in accordance with human cognitive capacity and social context. In *al-Muqaddimah*, he emphasizes that education must be conducted through a gradual and structured process (*tadarruj*), rather than through instantaneous transmission of information. He explicitly states:

“Knowledge cannot be delivered all at once; it must be taught little by little so that the intellect can absorb and master it perfectly.” (Ibn Khaldun, 1967: 317)

This foundational statement reflects Ibn Khaldun's epistemological position that knowledge acquisition is a developmental process rather than a mechanical transfer. Education, therefore, must be aligned with the learner's intellectual readiness and psychological condition. According to Suandi and Herman (2024: 69), Ibn Khaldun's insistence on gradual instruction demonstrates his awareness of cognitive development long before it became a central concern in modern educational theory. From an epistemological perspective, *tadarruj* ensures that knowledge is internalized meaningfully, enabling learners to develop analytical reasoning and reflective thinking rather than superficial understanding.

In contemporary Islamic education, this principle challenges rigid and overloaded curricula that prioritize content coverage over intellectual mastery. Fahmi and Sukandar (2025: 607) argue that Ibn Khaldun's gradualist approach provides a strong epistemological basis for learner-centered education, where depth of understanding is valued over the quantity of material delivered.

Malakah: Education Through the Formation of Intellectual Dispositions

A central concept in Ibn Khaldun's epistemology of education is *malakah*, which refers to a stable intellectual disposition formed through continuous practice and engagement with knowledge. He criticizes educational practices that rely excessively on memorization without application, asserting: "A habit formed through continuous repetition will lead to strong ability, whereas knowledge without practice will not endure in the mind." (Ibn Khaldun, 1967: 320)

This statement illustrates Ibn Khaldun's epistemological distinction between nominal knowledge and embodied understanding. Knowledge becomes epistemically valid only when it is transformed into *malakah*, that is, a durable cognitive and practical competence. Primasti et al. (2022: 211) emphasize that *malakah* represents Ibn Khaldun's rejection of rote learning and his advocacy for active engagement as the foundation of meaningful education.

From this perspective, learning is not complete at the level of comprehension alone but must culminate in intellectual capability and ethical orientation. Rizki et al. (2025: 176) further explain that *malakah* integrates cognitive mastery with character formation, positioning education as a transformative process that shapes both intellect and moral disposition. This epistemological framework remains highly relevant for contemporary Islamic education, which seeks to move beyond exam-oriented learning toward holistic human development.

Gradual Education (*Tadarruj*) and Cognitive Development

Ibn Khaldun consistently argues that the effectiveness of education depends on its alignment with the learner's cognitive stage. He warns against pedagogical practices that impose complex knowledge prematurely, stating: "When knowledge is

presented all at once, the intellect cannot bear the burden, and learning becomes ineffective.” (Ibn Khaldun, 1967: 317)

This assertion highlights Ibn Khaldun’s epistemological sensitivity to the limits of human cognition. Knowledge, in his view, must be organized progressively, beginning with foundational concepts before advancing to abstract and complex ideas. Suandi and Herman (2024: 70) note that this principle reflects Ibn Khaldun’s broader theory of human development, which recognizes gradual intellectual maturation as a natural process.

In contemporary educational discourse, this principle supports curriculum designs that emphasize sequencing, scaffolding, and developmental appropriateness. Fahmi and Sukandar (2025: 608) argue that Ibn Khaldun’s *tadarruj* offers a theoretical foundation for adaptive curricula in Islamic education, particularly in plural and dynamic social contexts where learners’ backgrounds and abilities vary significantly.

Knowledge Construction Through Practice and Experience

Ibn Khaldun’s epistemology also underscores the role of experience and social interaction in the construction of knowledge. He explicitly states: “Knowledge grows through practice and experience, not merely through memorization; the intellect that engages with reality will master knowledge more effectively.” (Ibn Khaldun, 1967: 325)

This statement reveals Ibn Khaldun’s view of knowledge as an active and contextual process. Learning occurs most effectively when learners interact with their environment and apply theoretical understanding to real situations. Sihab and Husnaini (2025: 349) interpret this view as evidence of Ibn Khaldun’s empirical orientation, which positions experience (*tajribah*) as a legitimate source of knowledge alongside reason and revelation.

Such an epistemological stance reinforces the importance of contextual and activity-based learning in contemporary Islamic education. Primasti et al. (2022: 212) argue that Ibn Khaldun’s emphasis on experience anticipates modern educational approaches that prioritize meaningful learning, critical inquiry, and social engagement. Education, therefore, becomes a dynamic process that connects intellectual reflection with lived reality.

Ibn Khaldun firmly situates education within its social and cultural context, arguing that knowledge cannot be detached from the conditions of the society in which it is taught. He asserts:

“Every form of education must be adapted to the customs, culture, and social conditions of the community; knowledge that is not suited to its context will be difficult to implement.” (Ibn Khaldun, 1967: 330)

Original Arabic text:

كل تعليم يجب أن يتناسب مع العادات والثقافة والظروف الاجتماعية للمجتمع، فالعلوم غير المتوافقة مع السياق يصعب تطبيقها (Ibn Khaldun, 1967: 330)

This statement reflects Ibn Khaldun's holistic epistemology, which views knowledge as socially embedded and culturally mediated. Fahmi and Sukandar (2025: 609) emphasize that this perspective challenges universalistic and decontextualized models of education, advocating instead for curricula that respond to local realities and social needs.

Rizki et al. (2025: 178) further argue that Ibn Khaldun's social epistemology provides a critical foundation for contemporary Islamic education, particularly in multicultural societies. By aligning educational content with cultural values and social conditions, education can function as a means of strengthening social cohesion and ethical responsibility.

Taken together, Ibn Khaldun's concepts of *tadarruj*, *malakah*, experiential learning, and social contextualization form a coherent epistemological framework for education. His thought positions knowledge as a gradual, embodied, and socially grounded process that integrates intellectual, ethical, and practical dimensions. Drawing on contemporary scholarly interpretations, it is evident that Ibn Khaldun's epistemology remains theoretically robust and pedagogically relevant for addressing the challenges of Islamic education in the modern era.

Theoretical Implications of Ibn Khaldun's Educational Epistemology for Contemporary Islamic Education

The epistemology of education formulated by Ibn Khaldun offers a comprehensive and systematically grounded theoretical framework that remains highly relevant for contemporary Islamic education. His intellectual contribution transcends practical pedagogical techniques and instead addresses the philosophical foundations of knowledge, learning, human development, and civilization. In an era marked by epistemic fragmentation, instrumental rationality, and the marginalization of ethical values within educational systems, Ibn Khaldun's epistemology provides a coherent paradigm capable of integrating intellectual rigor, moral orientation, experiential depth, and social responsibility. Consequently, the significance of his thought is not merely historical but fundamentally theoretical, offering enduring conceptual resources for rethinking the epistemological foundations of Islamic education in the modern world.

At the core of Ibn Khaldun's epistemology is the conception of knowledge as a socially embedded, developmentally acquired, and purpose-oriented phenomenon. Knowledge, in his view, does not arise in isolation from social reality but is deeply shaped by historical, cultural, political, and civilizational contexts. Intellectual development unfolds within the dynamics of *'umrān* (civilization), where moral order, social organization, and cultural vitality play decisive roles in shaping epistemic

capacities. This perspective directly challenges modern educational paradigms that tend to treat knowledge as neutral, value-free, and universally transferable. Ibn Khaldun's epistemology thus reframes education as a formative civilizational process rather than a technical mechanism for information delivery or economic utility (Zai & Ahmad, 2021: 41).

From a theoretical standpoint, this view constitutes a powerful critique of contemporary educational models dominated by instrumentalism and market-oriented rationality. In many modern systems, learning outcomes are measured primarily in terms of efficiency, productivity, and employability. Ibn Khaldun, however, situates education within a broader moral and social horizon, asserting that knowledge derives its true meaning from its contribution to social cohesion, ethical refinement, and intellectual maturity. As Suandi and Herman (2024: 69) argue, this epistemological orientation challenges contemporary Islamic education to move beyond content-driven curricula toward a holistic paradigm grounded in intellectual depth, moral integrity, and social responsibility.

A central theoretical implication of Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology lies in his integrative understanding of the sources of knowledge. He advances a unified epistemic framework that harmonizes reason (*'aql*), experience (*tajribah*), and revelation (*wahy*) as complementary rather than antagonistic sources of knowledge. Rational inquiry and empirical observation are indispensable for understanding the material, historical, and social dimensions of reality, while revelation provides metaphysical orientation, ethical boundaries, and ultimate meaning. According to Fahmi and Sukandar (2025: 606), this synthesis represents an early and sophisticated formulation of an integrative educational theory that avoids epistemological dualism.

This unified epistemology offers a compelling theoretical response to the persistent dichotomy between "religious" and "secular" sciences that continues to shape contemporary Islamic education. The separation of knowledge domains has resulted in curricular fragmentation, where religious studies and modern sciences are taught as isolated and conceptually disconnected fields. Ibn Khaldun's framework challenges this separation by emphasizing epistemic coherence as a necessity rather than a pedagogical convenience. As Kuswanjono (2007: 84) notes, educational integration within Ibn Khaldun's epistemology does not undermine scientific autonomy but situates scientific inquiry within a broader ethical and civilizational purpose informed by revelation.

Equally significant is Ibn Khaldun's conception of learning as a gradual and developmental process, articulated through the principle of *tadarruj* (gradualism). He argues that knowledge must be transmitted progressively, in accordance with learners' cognitive readiness and psychological development. Excessive abstraction, coercive instruction, premature exposure to complex material, and cognitive overload hinder intellectual formation rather than facilitate it. Fahmi and Sukandar (2025: 607)

emphasize that *tadarruj* constitutes a foundational epistemological critique of pedagogical rigidity and intellectual coercion.

From a theoretical perspective, *tadarruj* carries profound implications for curriculum design in contemporary Islamic education. Many institutions continue to prioritize curricular density and content accumulation, exposing learners to advanced religious texts without adequate conceptual scaffolding. Ibn Khaldun's epistemology challenges this practice by asserting that meaningful understanding emerges through phased mastery rather than immediate complexity. Suandi and Herman (2024: 70) argue that this gradualist epistemology supports learner-centered and developmentally responsive curricula that prioritize depth over breadth, adaptive learning pathways, and differentiated instruction.

Closely related to *tadarruj* is the concept of *malakah*, which represents a stable intellectual disposition acquired through continuous practice, reflection, and engagement. Unlike superficial memorization, *malakah* signifies embodied knowledge that integrates understanding, skill, and ethical orientation. Primasti et al. (2022: 211) identify *malakah* as the epistemological core of Ibn Khaldun's educational philosophy, distinguishing authentic learning from mechanical repetition.

Theoretically, *malakah* challenges prevailing assessment paradigms in contemporary Islamic education that prioritize recall and textual reproduction. Instead, Ibn Khaldun's epistemology advances a competence-based understanding of learning, where knowledge is validated through application, reasoning, and moral conduct. Rizki et al. (2025: 176) argue that *malakah* functions as a conceptual bridge between cognitive mastery and character formation, positioning education as a process of intellectual and ethical cultivation. This perspective legitimizes pedagogical approaches that emphasize mastery learning, reflective practice, dialogical engagement, and contextual analysis of religious texts.

Ibn Khaldun further reinforces this epistemology by affirming experience (*tajribah*) as a legitimate and essential source of knowledge. Learning, he argues, is most effective when learners engage directly with reality rather than relying solely on abstract instruction. Sihab and Husnaini (2025: 349) interpret this stance as evidence of Ibn Khaldun's empirical orientation, which complements reason and revelation within an integrated epistemological framework.

This affirmation of experiential knowledge challenges the persistent dichotomy between theory and practice in many Islamic educational institutions, where religious knowledge is often treated as purely textual and detached from lived experience. Ibn Khaldun rejects this separation, insisting that knowledge attains epistemic validity through application, social relevance, and practical engagement. Primasti et al. (2022: 212) argue that experiential learning within Ibn Khaldun's framework enhances critical thinking, contextual understanding, and ethical sensitivity. Consequently,

contemporary Islamic education is theoretically encouraged to adopt activity-based learning, contextual interpretation (*fiqh al-wāqiʿ*), and socially engaged pedagogy.

Another defining feature of Ibn Khaldun's epistemology is his insistence on the social contextualization of knowledge. He views education as inherently shaped by customs, traditions, political conditions, and historical circumstances. Fahmi and Sukandar (2025: 609) describe this orientation as a form of social epistemology that resists decontextualized and universalistic educational models. Intellectual development, according to Ibn Khaldun, flourishes in environments characterized by political stability, economic sustainability, moral discipline, and cultural vitality.

From a theoretical standpoint, this insight challenges individualistic educational models that focus exclusively on learner competence while neglecting systemic and institutional conditions. Ibn Khaldun's epistemology encourages a holistic understanding of educational ecosystems in which policy, governance, culture, and pedagogy interact dynamically. Saepudin and Saifudin (2019: 66) emphasize that meaningful educational reform requires institutional integrity, ethical leadership, and supportive socio-political environments alongside curricular innovation.

Central to Ibn Khaldun's epistemology is the integration of ethics into the very structure of knowledge. Education, in his view, is not value-neutral but inherently moral. Knowledge divorced from ethical orientation leads not to progress but to civilizational decay. Rizki et al. (2025: 175) highlight that Ibn Khaldun consistently links intellectual excellence with moral responsibility and social accountability.

This ethical epistemology stands in sharp contrast to technocratic educational models that prioritize efficiency, competitiveness, and standardization over moral development. In contemporary Islamic education, Ibn Khaldun's framework reinforces the necessity of cultivating character (*akhlaq*) alongside cognition. Educational success, therefore, cannot be measured solely through standardized metrics but must account for moral integrity, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness.

This ethical orientation also extends to Ibn Khaldun's conception of the educator. Teachers are not mere transmitters of information but moral exemplars and active agents in the formation of intellect and character. Their authority derives from experiential wisdom, ethical credibility, and reflective practice rather than technical expertise alone. Mahardhika and Wantini (2023: 141) note that this conception aligns with contemporary discussions on ethical professionalism and reflective teaching.

Taken collectively, the epistemological principles articulated by Ibn Khaldun—integrative sources of knowledge, *tadarruj*, *malakah*, experiential learning, social contextualization, and ethical orientation—form a coherent and holistic framework for contemporary Islamic education. Fahmi and Sukandar (2025: 610) argue that this

framework offers a systematic alternative to reductionist paradigms that fragment knowledge and marginalize values.

From a theoretical perspective, Ibn Khaldun's epistemology enables Islamic education to reclaim its civilizational role as a transformative force. Education is reconceptualized as a process that simultaneously cultivates intellectual excellence, moral integrity, and social responsibility. Sihab and Husnaini (2025: 350) conclude that Ibn Khaldun's educational thought remains epistemologically robust precisely because it integrates human development with social reality and ethical purpose.

In conclusion, the theoretical implications of Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology extend far beyond historical relevance. His integrative understanding of knowledge—grounded in social reality, developmental psychology, and moral purpose—offers a robust and coherent framework for addressing the epistemological challenges confronting contemporary Islamic education. By rearticulating the relationship between knowledge, ethics, and civilization, Ibn Khaldun provides conceptual tools for developing educational systems that are intellectually rigorous, morally grounded, and socially responsive. Serious engagement with his epistemology enables Islamic education to move beyond reactive adaptation toward a principled, reflective, and civilizationally conscious engagement with modernity.

CONCLUSION

Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology demonstrates that education within the Islamic intellectual tradition cannot be reduced to a value-neutral or purely technical enterprise detached from moral, social, and civilizational dimensions. Knowledge, in Ibn Khaldun's view, is acquired through a gradual and developmental process that corresponds to human cognitive capacities and the social conditions in which learning takes place. The principles of *tadarruj* and *malakah* underscore that authentic learning extends beyond memorization or theoretical comprehension toward the formation of stable intellectual dispositions that enable critical reasoning, practical application, and ethical discernment. Education thus emerges as a formative process through which intellectual maturity and moral character are cultivated in an integrated and sustainable manner.

The theoretical implications of Ibn Khaldun's epistemology for contemporary Islamic education are particularly significant in addressing the enduring dichotomy between religious and secular forms of knowledge. By articulating a unified epistemic framework that integrates reason (*'aql*), experience (*tajribah*), and revelation (*wahy*), Ibn Khaldun offers a principled alternative to fragmented and reductionist educational paradigms. This integrative vision provides a strong theoretical foundation for the development of holistic Islamic curricula in which scientific inquiry, religious understanding, and ethical formation are conceptually

interconnected. Education, within this framework, is not oriented primarily toward technical efficiency, market demands, or utilitarian outcomes, but toward the comprehensive formation of learners as intellectually competent, morally responsible, and socially engaged agents.

Moreover, Ibn Khaldun situates education firmly within its social and historical context, emphasizing its role as a civilizational project rather than an exclusively individual pursuit. Contemporary Islamic education, therefore, must be both contextually responsive and normatively grounded, capable of engaging constructively with modern challenges without relinquishing its ethical and spiritual foundations. By adopting Ibn Khaldun's educational epistemology as a theoretical reference point, Islamic education can move beyond reactive adaptation toward a reflective and principled paradigm of reform. Such a paradigm enables Islamic educational institutions to reclaim their transformative role in shaping individuals who are intellectually rigorous, ethically grounded, and socially responsible, thereby contributing meaningfully to the cultivation of a just, cohesive, and sustainable civilization.

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