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Analysis of Islamic Educational Thought and Study of Classical Figures

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ABSTRACT   *This study examines classical Islamic educational thought through an analysis of three prominent figures: Al-Kindi, Ibn Miskawaih, and Ibn Khaldun. Using a qualitative library research approach, the study explores how their educational ideas address intellectual development, moral formation, and social adaptation within the Islamic tradition. Data were collected from primary classical texts and relevant secondary sources and analyzed using content analysis to identify core educational principles, learning methods, and conceptual orientations. The findings reveal that Al-Kindi emphasizes rational inquiry and the integration of reason and revelation, positioning education as a means of attaining truth through systematic and logical thinking. Ibn Miskawaih places moral and character education at the center of the educational process, highlighting the role of ethical habituation, early moral development, and psychological balance. Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun views education as a socially embedded and context-dependent process, stressing the importance of societal relevance, specialization of knowledge, experiential learning, and environmental influence. Collectively, these perspectives form an integrative educational framework that balances intellectual, moral, and socio-adaptive dimensions. The study demonstrates that classical Islamic educational thought remains theoretically relevant for contemporary educational discourse and offers valuable insights for developing holistic, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded educational models in the modern era.*

Keywords   : *Islamic Education, Classical Islamic Thought, Al-Kindi, Ibn Miskawaih, Ibn Khaldun.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education is inseparable from the contributions of great thinkers of the past who laid a strong foundation for the development of science and civilization(Anwar et al., 2024). Their thinking was not only relevant in their time but also provided valuable insights for modern education (Hilgendorf, 2003). This article will examine the educational thought of three prominent figures: Al-Kindi, Ibn Maskawaih, and Ibn Khaldun, analyzing the core concepts they offered in education philosophically, psychologically, and methodologically (Azaki Khoirudin et al., 2025)whose relevance remains today. Studying their thoughts is crucial for understanding how Islamic educational ideas were formed, developed, and responded to the challenges of their time(Albadri et al., 2023; Alloush et al., 2024). By analyzing the works and thoughts of these figures, we can reconstruct the basic principles of Islamic education and assess their significance in the contemporary educational context. This study not only explores historical contributions but also opens up a space for reflection on the development of a more humanistic, integral, and adaptive Islamic educational paradigm to social change.

The choice of Al-Kindi (who focused on rationality and philosophy) (Abbasi, 2023), Ibn Miskawaih (who focused on ethics and moral psychology) (Putra & Hayeesama-ae, 2022), and Ibn Khaldun (who focused on sociology and curriculum adaptation) was not without reason(Tijani Ahmad Ashimi, 2023). The three collectively represent a complete triad of educational dimensions: Intellectual, Moral, and Socio-Adaptive(Abdellah & Haridy, 2017; El-Kholei, 2019). This study aims primarily to unravel the distinctive contributions of each figure and then synthesize their views into a holistic framework for Islamic education. Through this framework, we can find common ground that allows modern Islamic education to overcome the dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge, as well as between material mastery and character development.

Islamic education plays a strategic role in shaping human civilization through the internalization of values, intellectual development, and moral formation (Alkouatli, 2018; Muhsin & Ahmad, 2019). Since the classical era, Muslim thinkers have laid a rich philosophical, epistemological, and methodological foundation (Faruque, 2024; Suyono, 2021) for the development of educational theory and practice. The thoughts of figures such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Khaldun, Al-Farabi, and Al-Zarnuji not only reflect the educational views of their time but also significantly contribute to the formation of the Islamic educational paradigm down to the modern era.(Zulfian & Saputra, 2021).

Furthermore, a systematic review of the thoughts of classical figures allows for the strengthening of the scientific body of knowledge in Islamic education studies. Through historical, philosophical, and analytical approaches, this study can reveal the relevance of basic Islamic educational values such as tazkiyah al-nafs (self-control), tahdzib al-akhlaq (morality), the integration of knowledge ('ilm) and good deeds ('amal), and an orientation toward social welfare. This study not only illustrates the continuity and changes in educational paradigms in Islam but also serves as a foundation for developing an educational model that is responsive to the needs of contemporary Muslim society.

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide a strong theoretical foundation for educational policymakers, educators, and academics in reformulating the Islamic education curriculum. Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on social relevance can guide curriculum adjustments; Ibn Miskawaih's focus on character can strengthen moral education programs; and Al-Kindi's principles of integration can support the integration of sciences in schools and universities. Thus, this article contributes to providing an integrated educational model that promises a balance between intellectual intelligence, moral nobility, and the necessary socio-professional skills.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with library research because the focus of the study is the thoughts of classical Islamic figures as expressed in written works. The entire research process was conducted through an in-depth review of various relevant primary and secondary literature. Primary data sources come from the original works of classical figures such as Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Miskawaih, al-Kindi, and other figures who have made significant contributions to Islamic educational thought. Meanwhile, secondary data sources include books on the history of Islamic education, journal articles, academic studies, and encyclopedias explaining the social and historical context of these figures.

The data in this study were collected through documentation techniques, namely collecting literature related to the research theme. Each work was carefully read, then important ideas related to educational aspects were recorded, such as educational goals, the role of teachers, teaching methods, student concepts, curriculum, and moral values emphasized by each figure. This process was continued with data organization through intensive reading activities, note-taking, grouping, and selecting information to maintain focus on relevant matters.

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Data analysis was conducted using content analysis. The analysis process began with data reduction, which involved simplifying and selecting the core ideas of each figure. The data was then grouped into specific categories so that ideas between figures could be systematically compared. In the next stage, researchers interpreted the meaning of the figures' thoughts by examining the historical, cultural, and theological contexts behind them. This analysis enabled researchers to understand not only the content of the thoughts but also the conceptual reasons underlying their emergence. If necessary, comparative analysis was also conducted to assess the similarities and differences between figures in their views on Islamic education.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation, comparing various literature sources to enhance the strength and accuracy of the information received. Furthermore, researchers cross-checked primary and secondary sources to ensure understanding of a concept wasn't based solely on a single source. In some areas, validity was enhanced by reviewing the opinions of Islamic education experts who had conducted similar research. Because this is library research, all research activities were conducted in both physical and digital libraries. The literature search process was conducted through university libraries, digital repositories, and scientific platforms like Google Scholar, allowing researchers to obtain authoritative sources. The research timeframe was adjusted to meet the researchers' needs for an in-depth examination of the thoughts of these classical figures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Result

Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi is known as the "first Arab philosopher" who introduced Greek philosophy to the Islamic world (Vella & Ahmad Rizal, 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2021). He considered education as a search for truth. Although his thinking focused more on metaphysics, mathematics, and medicine, Al-Kindi had a view of education that can be drawn from his work. His main principles:

Table 1. Al-Kindi's Educational Philosophy: Core Principles and Pedagogical Implications

Aspect	Al-Kindi's Educational Thought	Educational Implications
General View of Education	Education is understood as a process of seeking truth (*al-ḥaqq*) through reason, which Al-Kindi regarded as a divine gift.	Education should cultivate rational thinking and intellectual inquiry oriented toward universal truth.
Purpose of Education	The ultimate goal of education is the attainment of truth through the proper use of reason and knowledge.	Learning objectives should emphasize critical, logical, and reflective thinking skills.
Relationship between Reason and Revelation	Reason (philosophy) and revelation (religion) are not contradictory but complementary paths to knowledge.	Educational systems should integrate religious studies with rational and philosophical sciences.
Integration of Sciences	Religious sciences (Qur'an and Hadith) should be studied alongside rational sciences such as philosophy, logic, mathematics, and medicine.	Curriculum design should adopt a holistic and interdisciplinary approach.
Learning Method: Logic	Logic (*manṭiq*) is essential for distinguishing truth from falsehood and serves as the foundation of all sciences.	Logic should be taught as a core subject to support understanding across disciplines.
Learning Method: Systematic Progression	Learning should proceed systematically from simple concepts to more complex ones.	Pedagogical approaches should be structured and aligned with learners' cognitive development.
Intellectual Orientation	Emphasis on metaphysics, mathematics, and rational sciences as tools for understanding reality.	Education fosters analytical reasoning and deep intellectual comprehension of the universe.

Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Muhammad Miskawaih was a philosopher and historian who focused heavily on ethics and moral psychology (Agung, 2018; Ismail, 2016). He believed that education

should be based on morals and character development. His thoughts on education are contained in his monumental work, Tahdhib al-Akhlaq wa Tathhir al-A'raq (The Purification of Morals and the Purification of Traits) (Khalina Mohammed Khalili, 2024; Riza & Zainuddin, 2023). Its main principles are:

Table 2. Core Principles of Moral Education in Ibn Miskawaih's Thought

Aspect	Ibn Miskawaih's Educational Thought	Educational Implications
Educational Orientation	Education centers on moral and character development.	Moral education becomes the foundation of the educational process
Aim of Education	The goal of education is the cultivation of noble character; knowledge without ethics is meaningless.	Learning outcomes emphasize virtue and ethical behavior
Human Nature	Humans are morally neutral and shaped by education.	Educational environments must support positive character formation.
Concept of the Soul (*Nafs*)	The soul consists of appetitive, irascible, and rational faculties, guided by reason	Education promotes self-control and rational moral judgment
Early Moral Education	Moral education should begin in early childhood.	Character education is prioritized at early educational stages.
Role Modeling	Teachers function as moral exemplars.	Educators' behavior directly influences students' morals
Advice and Guidance	Moral growth occurs through counsel and gentle correction	Ethical guidance is applied through supportive pedagogy
Habituation (*Tadrij*)	Good character is formed through gradual habituation	Moral practices are reinforced through repetition.
Praise and Motivation	Praise encourages virtue; criticism is applied wisely.	Positive reinforcement supports moral development

Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldun was a historian, sociologist, and economist considered a pioneer of modern sociology (Adiyono et al., 2024; Mowlana, 2024). In his work, the Muqaddimah, he analyzed how education is closely linked to the social, economic, and political conditions of a civilization. He argued that education must be in line with societal developments. His main principles are:

Table 3. Core Educational Principles in Ibn Khaldun's Thought

Aspect	Ibn Khaldun's Educational Thought	Educational Implications
Educational Perspective	Education is shaped by social and civilizational contexts.	Education adapts to societal change
Contextual Learning	Methods and curricula vary by time and environment	Flexible, context-based curricula.
Ashabiyah	Education strengthens social solidarity	Learning promotes collective identity
Knowledge Specialization	Knowledge is divided into *naqliyah* and *aqliyah* sciences	Emphasis on disciplinary specialization.
Gradual Learning (*Tadrij*)	Learning progresses from simple to complex	Structured and scaffolded instruction
Practice and Experience	Knowledge requires practical application	Experiential learning is essential
Environmental Influence (*Ibrah*)	Educational outcomes depend on the environment	Supportive learning environments are prioritized.

Discussion

The analysis of classical Islamic educational thought as represented by Al-Kindi, Ibn Miskawaih, and Ibn Khaldun reveals a rich and multidimensional conception of education that integrates rationality, morality, and social context. Although each figure approached education from distinct intellectual orientations-philosophical, ethical, and sociological (Qamar & Al-Kindi, 2020), their ideas collectively demonstrate that Islamic education is not merely concerned with

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knowledge transmission, but with the holistic formation of individuals and civilizations (Bergamo & Ceddia, 2025; Gadekar et al., 2023).

Al-Kindi's educational philosophy emphasizes education as a rational pursuit of truth (*al-ḥaqq*) (Akkari, 2023; Armayanto et al., 2025). His insistence on the harmony between reason and revelation reflects an epistemological framework in which rational sciences and religious knowledge are mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory. This perspective positions education as a means of cultivating logical thinking and intellectual discipline, particularly through the mastery of logic (*manṭiq*). The systematic and gradual learning approach advocated by Al-Kindi aligns with contemporary constructivist views that emphasize cognitive progression from simple to complex concepts. Thus, Al-Kindi's thought contributes a foundational philosophical dimension to Islamic education, underscoring the centrality of reason as a divine gift in the learning process.

In contrast, Ibn Miskawaih situates education primarily within the domain of moral and character development (Putri et al., 2023). His ethical orientation asserts that knowledge devoid of morality lacks meaning, thereby placing *akhlaq* at the core of educational objectives (Maksudin, 2023). By conceptualizing the soul (*nafs*) as comprising appetitive, irascible, and rational faculties, Ibn Miskawaih assigns education the task of enabling rational control over desires and emotions. His emphasis on early moral education, habituation (*tadrij*), role modeling, and positive reinforcement highlights education as a long-term formative process rather than an instantaneous acquisition of knowledge. This moral-psychological approach complements Al-Kindi's rationalism by addressing the affective and ethical dimensions of learners, reinforcing the holistic nature of Islamic educational philosophy.

Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun expands the scope of educational thought by embedding education within broader social, economic, and civilizational dynamics (Ahn & Juraev, 2025; Young-Jin Ahn, 2025). His contextual view of education challenges static and uniform pedagogical models, arguing instead that curricula and methods must respond to societal needs and historical conditions. Through the concept of *ashabiyah* (social solidarity), Ibn Khaldun underscores education's role in fostering collective identity and sustaining civilization. His classification of knowledge into transmitted (*naqliyah*) and rational (*aqliyah*) sciences (Desy Utari et al., 2025; Mujahidah & Alpin Hascan, 2023), along with his emphasis on specialization, practice, and experiential learning, anticipates modern educational theories that value applied knowledge and disciplinary depth. Furthermore, his recognition of environmental influence (*ibrah*) highlights the importance of intellectual climate in shaping educational outcomes.

When examined collectively, the educational thoughts of these three classical figures demonstrate a complementary and integrated framework. Al-Kindi contributes epistemological and methodological clarity (Franco, 2021), Ibn Miskawaih provides ethical and psychological grounding (Shabbir & Rehman, 2019), and Ibn Khaldun offers sociological and contextual analysis (Bekele & Amponsah, 2025). Together, they present Islamic education as a dynamic system that balances reason, morality, and social responsibility. This synthesis challenges contemporary educational paradigms that often fragment cognitive, moral, and social dimensions, and instead offers a unified vision rooted in classical Islamic scholarship. The findings of this study affirm that classical Islamic educational thought remains highly relevant to modern educational discourse. By integrating rational inquiry, moral formation, and contextual awareness, the educational philosophies of Al-Kindi, Ibn Miskawaih, and Ibn Khaldun provide a robust theoretical foundation for developing holistic and sustainable educational models in both Islamic and global contexts (Muwaffiqillah et al., 2025; Norman & Ruhullah, 2024).

The educational ideas of classical Islamic thinkers such as Al-Kindi, Ibn Miskawaih, and Ibn Khaldun demonstrate a remarkable relevance to contemporary educational challenges in the modern era. Despite being formulated in pre-modern contexts, their thoughts address core issues that remain central to present-day education, including the integration of knowledge, character formation, and responsiveness to social change.

Al-Kindi's emphasis on reason as a divine gift and education as a pursuit of truth aligns closely with current demands for critical thinking and rational inquiry in the age of information and digital transformation. In an era marked by rapid technological advancement and the proliferation of information, Al-Kindi's insistence on logical thinking (*manṭiq*) serves as an important foundation for developing analytical skills and combating misinformation. His view on the integration of religious and rational sciences also resonates with contemporary interdisciplinary approaches that seek to overcome the dichotomy between faith-based values and scientific knowledge.

Ibn Miskawaih's focus on moral and character education gains increasing significance in modern societies facing ethical dilemmas, social fragmentation, and moral relativism. The prioritization of *akhlaq* as the core objective of education corresponds with current global discourses on character education, social-emotional learning, and values-based education. His emphasis on habituation, role modeling, and early moral education reflects modern pedagogical practices that highlight the importance of behavioral consistency, positive reinforcement, and the formative impact of early childhood education in shaping ethical citizens.

Ibn Khaldun's contextual and sociological approach to education is particularly relevant in the contemporary globalized world, where educational systems must adapt to diverse social, economic, and cultural conditions. His argument that education should respond to societal needs parallels current educational reforms that emphasize relevance, adaptability, and lifelong learning. Moreover, the concept of *ashabiyah* provides a valuable framework for understanding education's role in strengthening social cohesion amid increasing individualism and social polarization. His stress on experiential learning and environmental influence anticipates modern learner-centered and community-based educational models.

Collectively, the educational philosophies of these classical figures offer a comprehensive framework that addresses the intellectual, moral, and social dimensions of education in the modern era. Their ideas suggest that effective education in contemporary contexts requires not only cognitive competence and technical skills but also ethical integrity and social responsibility. Thus, integrating classical Islamic educational thought into modern educational discourse can contribute to the development of holistic educational models capable of responding to the complexities of twenty-first-century societies. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by advancing an understanding of classical Islamic educational thought as a comprehensive and dynamic framework that extends beyond historical and normative interpretations, demonstrating its continued theoretical and practical relevance in addressing contemporary educational challenges, particularly in integrating rational inquiry, moral character formation, and sensitivity to changing social contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that classical Islamic educational thought, as articulated by Al-Kindi, Ibn Miskawaih, and Ibn Khaldun, offers a multidimensional educational framework that remains conceptually robust and adaptable to contemporary educational realities. Their perspectives collectively demonstrate that education in the Islamic intellectual tradition is not confined to knowledge acquisition but is oriented toward the balanced development of intellectual capacity, ethical integrity, and social responsibility. The analysis shows that rational inquiry, moral cultivation, and contextual awareness are interdependent elements that form the foundation of a holistic educational paradigm capable of addressing the complexities of modern societies. Furthermore, this study highlights that classical Islamic educational theories possess an inherent flexibility that allows them to engage meaningfully with current educational transformations, including globalization, technological advancement, and shifting social structures. By positioning education as a dynamic and socially embedded process, these thinkers provide valuable insights for rethinking contemporary educational models that often prioritize technical competence while overlooking ethical and communal dimensions. Despite these contributions, this research is

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limited to a conceptual and textual analysis of selected classical figures. Future research is therefore encouraged to explore empirical applications of classical Islamic educational principles within modern educational institutions, particularly in the context of digital learning environments and artificial intelligence–assisted education. Additionally, comparative studies involving other Islamic and non-Islamic educational thinkers could further enrich the discourse by identifying convergences and divergences across intellectual traditions. Such studies would deepen the understanding of how classical educational philosophies can inform the development of inclusive, ethical, and context-sensitive educational systems in the twenty-first century.

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