

# The Role of Teachers, Students and Curriculum in Classical Islamic Education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article History:</i> Accepted: 15 March 2024 Revised: 13 April 2024 Approved: 20 May 2024 Available Online: 25 June 2024</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Classical Islamic education Teacher's role Curriculum</p>	<p>This article discusses the role of teachers, students, and curriculum in the context of classical Islamic education, with a focus on literature analysis from various primary and secondary sources. The main aim of this writing is to describe the contribution of each entity in building a solid foundation for Islamic education. Teachers in classical Islamic education are considered the main pillars in transmitting religious and moral knowledge, while students act as recipients of knowledge who are responsible for understanding and applying these teachings in everyday life. The curriculum in this context is designed to ensure a thorough understanding of Islamic spiritual and ethical values, as well as to develop students' critical thinking. This research methodology involves a comprehensive literature study, analyzing classical texts and secondary literature to explore the relevance and application of educational concepts in the classical Islamic tradition. Thus, this study is expected to provide in-depth insight into the roles played by teachers, students, and curriculum in classical Islamic education and their relevance in the context of modern education.</p>

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## 1. Introduction

Classical Islamic education is a valuable heritage originating from the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his successors. In this context, the role of teachers, students, and the curriculum have a central role in forming the spiritual and intellectual foundation of Muslims. Since the beginning of its history, Islamic education has not only aimed to convey religious knowledge, but also to build strong character and noble morals in accordance with the teachings of the Koran and Sunnah. The time limit of the classical period can be different depending on the perspective of the writer, whether a Muslim writer or a Western writer. Western writers often refer to the 7th to 12th/13th centuries AD as the dark age, while Muslim writers identify the period as the golden age (*al-'ashr al-dzahabi*) (Hodgson, 1974). According to Harun Nasution, Islamic history can be divided into three periods: (a) the classical period, which lasted from 650 to 1250 AD, starting from the birth of Islam until the destruction of Baghdad, (b) the medieval period, from 1250 to 1800 AD, which began with the destruction of Baghdad and lasted until the emergence of renewal ideas in Egypt, and (c) the modern period, which started from 1800 AD until today (Nasution, 1985a).

The role of teachers in classical Islamic education is not just as teachers, but also as role models in everyday life (Akmalia, 2019). They are responsible for transmitting not only theological knowledge, but also ethical values, morals, and spirituality to students. (Zaki et al., 2022). In this way, they help students to develop a deep relationship with Allah SWT and to practice Islamic teachings in every aspect of their lives. On the other hand, the role of students

in classical Islamic education is very important because they are considered as recipients and inheritors of religious teachings (Siahaan, Akmalia, et al., 2023) . They are required to have high dedication in studying the Koran and hadith, as well as to internalize the values taught by their teachers. In this way, they became not only copyists of sacred texts, but also guardians and custodians of Islamic teachings for future generations (Zulfitria, 2018).

The curriculum in classical Islamic education is carefully designed to cover various aspects of life including religious knowledge, Islamic law, philosophy and ethics (Siahaan, Supardi, et al., 2023) . It aims to provide a holistic understanding of Islam and to prepare students with the skills necessary to become positive contributing members of society. During the classical Islamic period, the educational curriculum developed significantly along with the progress of Islamic civilization which included various fields of science. Education at this time was not only limited to religious teachings, but also included world sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy and literature (Setiarini, 2022). Educational institutions such as *kuttabs* , madrasas and mosques became important centers of learning. The curriculum implemented in these institutions is designed to form individuals who not only have broad knowledge but also have noble character (Irani et al., 2014) . The main focus of the curriculum during that period was memorizing the Al-Qur'an, understanding hadith, and mastering various sciences that support the social and intellectual life of Muslims.

## 2. Method

This research method, known as library research, involves collecting and analyzing information from various written sources such as books, journals, articles, reports, and other library documents. Based on Bodgan and Taylor's explanation, library research is included in the qualitative research category (Moleong, 2016).

## 3. Results and Discussion

### Teachers in the Classical Islamic Period

In the context of education, teachers or educators refer to all individuals who are involved or have an influence on someone, be it in the form of nature, humans, or the environment (Nata, 2013) . Humans in the role of educators have a variety of types, but the most commonly known in education include parents of students, teachers at school, friends, and other figures or figures. In the tradition of Islamic education, there are several terms that refer to educators, such as *mu'allim kuttab* and *muaddib* . *Mu'allim kuttab* refers to individuals who live a simple life and generate their own income to support their families. Meanwhile, *muaddib* is a private teacher for the children of the caliph and the prime minister. A *muaddib* trusted by the caliph would educate their children, with strict requirements in the palace, including not only imparting knowledge but also teaching skills such as swordsmanship and horsemanship (Lailatul, 2018).

The difference between *muallim kuttab* and *muaddib* is not only visible in terms of the appreciation and respect received from the community, but also in terms of financial income. Most *kuttab teachers* often do not get enough appreciation and respect from the community, which may be due to their less than commendable moral level as educators, which may also be influenced by the lack of allowances from student guardians. On the other hand, *muaddib* received very high respect and appreciation, especially in front of the general public and the caliph and palace officials. Islamic thinkers have given many definitions and conditions regarding the relationship between teacher and student, both in understanding each other's rights and obligations. Even Al-Ghazali, in his book *Ihya Ulumudin*, placed the teacher as a very noble

figure, as the position directly under the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and specialized him with the attributes of purity (Unfortunately, 2009).

A person who has knowledge and puts it into practice is worthy of respect in this world, like the sun which gives light to others while illuminating himself, or like musk oil whose smell is enjoyed by others and he himself is also fragrant. People who work in the field of education have chosen honorable and very important work, therefore they must maintain manners and courtesy in carrying out this task (Dulay & Pasa, 2016). The Qur'an indicates that the duties of a teacher are comparable to those of the Prophets, the most important of which is teaching the science of monotheism (An-Nahlawi, 1995). In general, the criteria for teachers during the classical Islamic period are described based on the opinions of Islamic philosophers who lived between 650 and 1250 AD, which is often referred to as the golden age of Islam until the fall of Baghdad.

Ibn Sina provides a concept regarding the criteria for a good teacher (Nuryadin et al., 2022). According to him, a good teacher must have the following characteristics: intelligent, understand how to educate morals, competent in educating children, have a calm appearance, don't like joking or playing around in front of students, don't be surly, polite, clean, pure, and pure. Furthermore, Ibnu Sina added that ideally, a teacher is a man who is honorable, has noble character, is intelligent, thorough, patient, painstaking in educating children, fair, frugal in the use of time, likes to hang out with children, and is not harsh. Apart from that, teachers must also prioritize the interests of the people over personal interests, distance themselves from people with low morals, and be polite in debating, discussing and socializing. By paying attention to these criteria, Ibnu Sina describes teachers as role models who emphasize teaching competence and good personality. These competencies enable teachers to educate their students with various knowledge, while good morals help develop noble mental and moral qualities (Asari, 2018).

Ibn Maskawih views teachers as equal to the Prophet, especially in matters of love. Love for teachers is placed second after love for God. However, the teacher referred to by Ibnu Maskawih is not just a formal teacher because of his position, but a teacher who has requirements such as being trustworthy, intelligent, having a good reputation in society, and being a nobler role model than his students. (Nata, 2016). According to Al-Ghazali, a teacher who is worthy of teaching must have perfect intelligence and reason, as well as good morals and a strong physique. (Ashari, 2020). With perfect intelligence and reason, teachers can have a deep understanding of various sciences. Good morals make him an example and role model for his students, while physical strength enables teachers to carry out their teaching and educational duties well. Apart from these general characteristics, Al-Ghazali also mentioned special requirements for a teacher, namely: having a loving nature, not asking for wages for his work, functioning as an honest and correct director and instructor in front of his students, using sympathetic and gentle teaching methods without violence or insults, appearing as a role model in front of his students, recognizing the different potential of individual students, understanding the nature and psychology of his students, and sticking to what he says (Al-Ghazali, 2014).

According to Al-Qosqosamdi, the requirements to become a teacher in the classical period in Egypt can generally be classified into two categories: physical requirements and psychological requirements. Physical requirements include a good body shape, an attractive face, a wide chest, and a clean face. Psychological requirements include having common sense, a civilized heart, sharp understanding, being fair to students, being an officer, being patient and not easily angered. Apart from that, a teacher must be able to speak by showing the breadth of his knowledge, using words that are clear and easy to understand, choosing good and noble words, and avoiding

actions that are not praiseworthy. (Sulaeman, 2020) . (An-Nahlawi, 1995) suggests that to carry out their duties well, a teacher must have the following characteristics: 1) Rabbani behavior and thought patterns. 2) Be sincere in carrying out your duties. 3) Be patient in teaching various sciences to children. 4) Be honest in conveying what he teaches. 5) Always equip yourself with knowledge and try to improve your quality. 6) Able to use various teaching methods in a varied manner and choose methods that suit the child's needs. 7) Able to manage students well. 8) Study the psychological life of children according to their age level of development, so that they can treat students according to their intellectual abilities and psychological readiness. 9) Responsive to various world conditions and developments that influence children's mental development. 10) Be fair to all students, without distinguishing between one another.

## **Learners of the Classical Islamic Period**

Students are children who are studying, namely those who receive basic education from an educational institution (Ahmed, 1968) . Before the emergence of schools and universities which became known as formal educational institutions, in the Islamic world there had actually been developing non-formal Islamic educational institutions. Some of these non-formal Islamic educational institutions include: Kuttab as a basic educational institution, Lower education at the palace, Book merchant shops, Ulama houses, Majlis or literary salon, Badiyah (hamlet where the Badawi live ), Library, Mosque. At the beginning of the development of Islam, students of knowledge were not differentiated. When Rasulullah was still alive, all friends had the same opportunity to gain knowledge and experience about Islamic teachings directly from Rasulullah SAW. However, not all friends can take advantage of this opportunity to learn from him. This is understandable because friends have various jobs and activities. In classical times, there were no definite provisions regarding the age limit for someone who wanted to study at a kuttab. The students entering these basic educational institutions vary in age. Some students are 5 years old, some are 7 years old, and some are even 10 years old (Asari, 2014).

At the beginning of the development of Islam, educational activities were carried out at the house of Al-Arqam bin Abi Al-Arqam. Then, this activity moved to the mosque. As time went by, Muslims felt the need to have a special place for their children's learning activities, so they made the kuttab a place for basic education. (Langroll, 1988) . At *the kuttab* , students are taught basic skills such as reading and writing the Koran as well as the basics of religion (Al-Jumbulati, 1994) . The length of study at *the kuttab* depends on the student's willingness and ability. Students who are intelligent and diligent can complete their studies in a relatively short time, while those who are less intelligent and lazy take longer (Lailatul, 2018). However, generally the study period at *a kuttab* is around five years. Graduation is based on the student's ability to memorize the Koran. According to Mahmud Yunus, students at *the kuttab* study six days a week. Lessons start on Saturday and end on Thursday. Study time starts in the morning and ends after Asr prayers. Usually, after midday prayers, the students go home to eat (Pito, 2018). From this description, it can be concluded that students spend more time in *the kuttab* during the day, interacting with teachers and other students. Students who are under the care of a teacher have longer social time with the teacher than other students who have to go home after class. Therefore, it can be assumed that the teacher who teaches at the kuttab is someone who is very close to the students, apart from their parents.

## **Education Curriculum During Classical Islam**

### **1. Islamic Education Curriculum at the time of the Prophet SAW.**

Education during the time of the Prophet can be divided into two periods: the Mecca period and the Medina period. In the Mecca period, from the time the Prophet was sent as an Apostle until he moved to Medina for approximately 13 years, the Islamic education system depended

heavily on the Prophet. No other party has the authority to determine educational materials other than the Prophet (Nasution, 1985b). In general, the material from the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet at that time focused on religious studies which emphasized theology and worship, such as believing in Allah, His Messenger and the Last Day, as well as performing prayers. Zakat was not yet part of educational material, because at that time zakat was better understood as alms to the poor and orphans. Apart from that, moral material is also taught to encourage noble behavior and avoid evil actions. The scientific material has not yet been used as a formal lesson, but the Prophet gave encouragement to pay attention to human, animal, plant and natural phenomena.

During his time in Mecca, the Prophet's teachings included: a) Religious education which emphasized the importance of reading using the name of Allah alone, without associating partners with Him with idols, because Allah is the Greatest and Most Gracious. Therefore, the worship of idols must stop. b) Rational and scientific education, namely studying the creation of humans from a clot of blood and the creation of the universe. Allah will teach these things to those who research and study them, even though they did not know them before. To gain this knowledge, one is expected to read a lot and take notes with a pen. c) Character and moral education, in accordance with the teachings contained in the Al-Qur'an and Hadith. d) Physical and health education, namely paying attention to physical health and strength, as well as maintaining cleanliness of clothing, places and food (Daulay, 2009).

## **2. Islamic Education Curriculum at the time of Khulafa al-Rasyidin**

The preparation of the Islamic education curriculum during the Khulafa al-Rasyidin era was carried out autonomously, without interference from the government, except during the time of the caliph Umar ibn Khattab who was involved in adding curriculum material at the *kuttab institution*. Companions who had religious knowledge opened their own educational councils, so that during the time of Abu Bakar, *kuttab educational institutions* experienced significant progress. The progress of this *kuttab* institution occurred when Muslims had succeeded in conquering several regions and establishing relations with other advanced nations. This educational institution became so important that the ulama at that time argued that teaching the Koran was an adequate collective responsibility. (Asari, 2018). This condition creates challenges for non-Arab Muslims in reading and understanding the Koran. Therefore, it is considered important to provide a thorough knowledge of Arabic. Since then, Islamic education began to combine learning Arabic in parallel with learning the Koran (Dulay & Pasa, 2016).

The educational curriculum taught during the time of Caliph al-Rasyidin, before the time of Umar ibn Khattab (d. 32 H/644 AD), for *kuttab* included: (a) learning to read and write, (b) reading the Koran and memorizing it, and (c) learn the basics of the Islamic religion such as ablution, prayer, fasting, etc. When Umar ibn Khattab was appointed Caliph, he instructed the townspeople to teach their children (a) swimming, (b) riding camels, (c) archery, and (d) reading and memorizing simple poetry and proverbs. Meanwhile, educational material at the middle and high levels includes: (a) the Al-Qur'an and its interpretation, (b) hadith and its collection, and (c) fiqh (*tasyri*). Sciences that were considered worldly and philosophy were not yet known at that time. This was possible because the social structure of society at that time was still in the stage of developing Islamic insight, which was more focused on a literal understanding of the Koran and Hadith (Astuti, 2016).

## **3. Islamic Education Curriculum during the Umayyad Dynasty**

During the Umayyad Dynasty, the education pattern was decentralized. The study of science in this period was centered in various cities such as Damascus, Kufa, Mecca, Medina, Egypt, Cordova, as well as several other cities such as Basrah and Kufa in Iraq, Damascus and

Palestine in Syria, and Fustat in Egypt. At this time, Islamic education experts used the word "*al-Maddah*" to refer to the curriculum. This was because the curriculum at that time was more identical to a series of subjects that had to be given to students at a certain level (Daulay, 2016). Essentially, Islamic education during the Umayyad Dynasty was almost the same as education during the Khulafa al-Rasyidin era. However, there are differences and developments of their own. The authorities' attention to the field of education is relatively lacking, so that education is not regulated by the government but is managed by ulama who have in-depth knowledge. There was almost no educational policy from the government, so the Islamic education system at that time ran naturally.

During this period, developments achieved in the field of education included the development of nahwu science which was used to provide punctuation marks, record language rules, and transmit language knowledge. Although there are differences of opinion regarding the formation of nahwu science, this scientific discipline became one of the important characteristics of progress in that period. In this period, the evolution of the discipline of jurisprudence showed significant progress. This era saw the birth of a number of mujtahids in the field of fiqh. At the end of the Umayyad period, important figures emerged in the Islamic jurisprudence school, such as Imam Abu Hanifah in Iraq (born 80 H/699 AD) and Imam Malik ibn Anas in Medina (born 96 H/714 AD). Meanwhile, Imam al-Shafi'i and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal were born during the Abbasid era (Chalil, 1989).

The various curricula that developed during the Umayyad dynasty can be seen from level education, namely at the lower level of education, basic education is generally delivered individually by teachers to students at kuttab institutions. There, they learn reading and writing skills, as well as studying the Koran by memorizing it, as well as understanding the principles of the Islamic religion such as the procedures for ablution, prayer, fasting, and so on. Sometimes, language, Arabic grammar (*nahwu*), and metrics (*arudh*) were also taught. Meanwhile, in the secondary education curriculum, teachers teach their students in mosques. The material taught at this level includes the study of the Qur'an and its interpretation, hadith and its collection, as well as the science of fiqh (*tasyri'*) (Syibromilitia, 2021).

As for the Higher Education Curriculum varies depending on the sheikh who is the teacher. According to Rahman, this kind of education is called adult education because it is aimed at many people with the main aim of teaching them about the Koran and religion. (Siregar & Yulianti, 2017). The educational curriculum at this level is divided into two departments, namely the department of religious sciences (*al-ulum al-naqliyah*) and the department of science (*al-ulum al-aqliyah*). This second curriculum is characteristic of the second phase in the development of Muslim thought, where they began to interact with thought from Greece, Persia and India. According to Mahmud Yunus, the curriculum for this type of education includes mantiq (logic), natural sciences and chemistry, music, exact sciences, geometry, astronomy (astronomy), divinity, animal science, plant science, and medicine.

Hasan Langgungulung stated that one of the achievements of the Umayyad dynasty in the field of education was developing scientific aspects in the mosque so that the mosque became an important center for the development of higher science in Islamic society. With this approach, in mosques various disciplines are taught, such as literature, poetry, ancient history and theology using the debate method. Therefore, the period from the beginning of the second century Hijriyah to the end of the third century Hijriyah is considered the golden age of education in mosques. (Langroll, 1988).

## 4. Islamic Education Curriculum during the Abbasid Dynasty

In the 4th century Hijriyah, there were seven educational "institutions" that had been established. The seven institutions include (a) *kuttab* (basic educational institution), (b) masjid (educational institution in a mosque), (c) book seller's shop, known as *al-hawanit al-waraqin*, (d) residence of scholars or *manazil al-'ulama*, (e) arts and literature studio or *al-shalunat al-adabiyah*, (f) library or *dawr al-kutub wa dawr al-'ilm*, and (g) madrasah (school educational institution) (Daulay, 2016). All of these "institutions" have unique characteristics and different fields of study. In general, all educational institutions can be grouped into three levels. At the first level, namely at basic education, the curriculum includes (a) learning to read the Koran and memorizing it, (b) the basics of the Islamic religion such as procedures for ablution, prayer and fasting, (c) writing skills, (d) stories of great figures, (e) reading and memorizing poetry, (f) basic mathematics, and (g) basics of Arabic grammar. However, this kind of curriculum is not consistent across places, because each region has variations. For example, according to Ibn Khaldun's opinion quoted by Hasan 'Abd al-'Al in Morocco, only the Koran and writing were taught. Meanwhile, in Andalusia, the curriculum includes the Koran, writing, poetry, as well as Arabic grammar and fine print. In Tunisia, the focus is on the Qur'an, hadith, and the basics of religious knowledge, with special emphasis on memorizing the Qur'an (Yunus, 1992).

At the basic education level, the methods used are repetition and memorization methods. This means that the teacher will repeat the readings of the Koran in front of the students, and the students will follow along and are expected to memorize the readings. This memorization does not only apply to material from the Koran or hadith, but also to other sciences. Included in poetry lessons, the teacher delivers poetry using the simplest *wazn* (*patterns or rhythms*) so that students can memorize them quickly. At the secondary education level, the following subjects are available: (a) the Koran, (b) Arabic language and Arab culture, (c) fiqh (Islamic law), (d) tafsir (interpretation of the Koran), (e) hadith, (f) *nahw* (grammar)/ *sharf* (morphology)/ *balaghah* (rhetoric), (g) exact sciences, (h) *mantiq* (logic), (i) *falak* (astronomy), (j) *date* (history), (k) natural sciences (natural science), (l) medicine, and (m) music. Just like in lower education, the curriculum at secondary education level also varies in various regions (Daulay, 2009).

In the Abbasid era, educational materials were prepared by ulama, a group of individuals who were respected for their knowledge and recognized as authorities in religious and legal matters. However, the state also controls the influence produced by each educational institution and even carries out investigations into its teaching methods. With this kind of intervention, the state can determine the curriculum structure that educational institutions must follow. The curriculum during the Abbasid dynasty was divided into three levels. First, the basic education curriculum (*kuttab*) includes lessons such as reading the Koran and memorizing it, Islamic religious principles such as procedures for ablution, prayer and fasting, writing skills, stories of great Islamic figures, reading and memorizing poetry or prose, mathematics, as well as the basics of Arabic grammar. Second, the secondary education curriculum includes the study of the Koran, Arabic language and literature, fiqh, tafsir, hadith, Arabic grammar (*nahwu/sharaf/balaghah*), exact sciences, logic (*mantik*), astronomy (*falak science*), history (*date*), natural sciences, medicine, and music. Third, the Islamic higher education curriculum is divided into two departments, namely *naqliyah* sciences (sciences that originate from revelation) and *aqliyah sciences* (rational sciences) (Asari, 2018).

## 4. Conclusion

Overall, classical Islamic education emphasizes the important role of teachers, students and the curriculum in forming a solid foundation for religious and moral learning. Teachers are

considered the backbone in transmitting knowledge and religious values to students, while students are responsible for internalizing and applying these teachings in everyday life. In kuttab, which was basic education at that time, students' various social backgrounds were not a barrier to obtaining an education, with children from poor families able to study for free. Students spend their time in direct interaction with teachers and fellow students in the kuttab, which allows for intensive coaching from the teachers. Smart students are given the opportunity to continue their education at the Jami' mosque halaqah or madrasa after successfully completing the study phase at the kuttab, with their graduation assessment based on their ability to memorize the Koran.

At the secondary and higher education levels, students receive various facilities such as scholarships and dormitories, which support their learning at the madrasa. However, there are also students who study under the guidance of certain lecturers and pay fees according to the agreement. The role of teachers during the classical Islamic period was very important, not only in teaching science, but also in shaping the character and morality of students, with their position considered strategic and honorable in society, even under the direct influence of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

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