



# The Role of Teachers and Students in the Islamic Tradition of the Classical Period

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## Abstract

The Islamic tradition during the classical era made a significant contribution to the formation of civilization in education and the development of science. This discussion includes the roles of teachers and students in the classical Islamic tradition, emphasizing educational relationships, scientific ethics, and the methods of knowledge transmission that developed during that period. Teachers were positioned not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral and spiritual role models possessing scientific authority and moral integrity. Meanwhile, students were viewed as active subjects in the learning process, who were required to possess good manners, sincerity, and a commitment to the pursuit of knowledge. The success of classical Islamic education was largely determined by a harmonious reciprocal relationship between teachers and students, grounded in religious, ethical, and spiritual values. This is relevant for reflecting on the contemporary educational process so that it focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on the development of students' character and morals.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education during the classical period initially focused solely on religious knowledge. However, over time, it expanded to encompass many other areas. This undoubtedly influenced the roles of teachers and students in the educational process. Both roles required a good and smooth relationship to achieve specific goals. At that time, the role of teachers was central to the entire teaching and learning process. They acted not only as sources of knowledge but also as spiritual role models and moral guides (Listiana et al., 2023; Solichin, 2008; Utari et al., 2024; Zuhdiah et al., 2024).

During the golden age of Islamic civilization, the teacher-student relationship was built on a strong foundation of etiquette, respect, and submission. The learning process took place not only in formal spaces like mosques or madrasas, but also through deep personal interactions where teachers instilled character and ethical values in their students. Therefore, it can be said that at that time, the role of teachers was not limited to teaching alone, but rather a multidimensional one (encompassing various aspects and elements: as a source of knowledge (*alim*), as an educator (*murabbi*), and as a spiritual guide (*mursyid*) (Mudzakkir et al., 2024; Khoiri & Putri, 2024; Muslimin, 2012).

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Thus, it is through such a relationship that a good educational ecosystem will be created, where knowledge and spirituality are interconnected. Looking back at the modern era, education faces unprecedented challenges, especially in classical times. Technological advances, especially the internet and social media, have significantly changed the dynamics between teachers and students. Information is now widely available and easily accessible, often making the role of the teacher as the sole source of knowledge less relevant. As a result, the teacher-student relationship has become solely focused on delivering curriculum material and academic evaluation.

This shift undoubtedly has serious consequences, such as the degradation of manners and ethics in the teacher-student relationship. Students tend to view teachers as "service providers" rather than figures to be respected. This phenomenon demonstrates the urgency of reclaiming the role of the teacher. This paper aims to reexamine the role and methods used by teachers in classical Islam. By analyzing how they successfully shaped character and produced knowledgeable generations, we can find ways to integrate these values into contemporary education systems. The main goal is to offer solutions that can help teachers return to being moral authority figures and character educators amidst the onslaught of technology, so that education not only produces intelligent people, but also those with noble morals.

## METHODS

The method used in this study is qualitative research. The chosen qualitative methodology is implemented through a literature review approach, which involves examining literature sources related to the theme or issue that this article will cover (Engkizar et al., 2024; 2025; Jaafar et al., 2025; Baroud et al., 2025). The data used consists of scientific studies, articles, or academic texts that are relevant to the issue or topic under consideration. Informed by the analysis derived from this research or article, the researchers concentrated on the role of educators and learners in the context of Islamic education. The dimension of this role is evaluated through the lens of the perspective of the Islamic tradition (Engkizar et al., 2022; 2023; Ummah et al., 2025).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between teachers and students in the classical Islamic tradition was close and sustainable. This relationship is not solely academic, but also emotional and spiritual. The teacher plays the role of an exemplary figure (*uswah*), while the student imitates the behavior and way of life of the teacher. This relational model forms an educational system that is oriented towards character formation and internalization of Islamic values.

Intense interaction between teachers and students allows for the in-depth transfer of knowledge and the formation of noble morals. This is one of the main factors for the success of classical Islamic civilization in producing great scholars and influential scientists. In the context of modern education, these values are relevant to be used as inspiration in building humanistic, ethical, and meaningful educational relationships between educators and students.

### Islamic Period in the Classical Period

The history of Islamic civilization is generally divided into three main periods: Classical, Medieval, and Modern (Kristianto, 2023; Nopitasari, 2023). The Classic Period (650–1250 AD) was a period of the formation, expansion, and peak of Islamic civilization. During this time, Islam became not only a political power, but also the center of world science, uniting various ancient civilizations such as Greece, Persia, and India. Islamic rule stretched from Spain (Andalusia) in the West to India in the East. The Classical period is known for its unparalleled advances in various disciplines, dominated by Muslim scholars from various fields of science.

The first, Science and Mathematics Mathematics: The discovery of the concept of Algebra by Al-Khawarizmi (including algorithms) and the use of the decimal number system. Astronomy: The construction of observatories and the development of accurate astronomical instruments. Medicine: Ibn Sina's monumental work (*Al-Qanun fiat-Tibb/The Canon of Medicine*) became a reference in Europe until the 17th century.

The second, Philosophy and Theology Philosophy. Figures such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Rushd played a major role in preserving and developing Greek philosophy, aligning it with Islamic teachings. Theology (*Kalam*): The birth of various schools of theology (*Mu'tazilah, Ash'ariyah*) that discuss fundamental issues regarding divinity and human free will. The third, Fields of Law and Literature Law (Fiqh): The establishment of schools of Islamic law by great imams such as Imam Hanafi, Imam Maliki, Imam Shaf'i, and Imam Hambali. Literature: The development of Arabic literature, including prose and poetry, as well as legendary works such as One Thousand and One Nights.

### Teachers as Holders of Scientific Authority

Educators are an important factor in the formation of prospective community members. The function of the educator goes beyond mere instruction (as a supplier of knowledge), encompassing the role of facilitator, developer, and supervisor of educational activities that effectively promote students' academic engagement in the pursuit of set goals. As a result, it can be concluded that educators, as responsible entities, are intrinsically linked to efforts to illuminate the complexity of the development of society in all its dimensions through the optimization of the diverse potentials possessed by the participants in the educational process (Agung, 2017).

School is simply interpreted as one of the important requirements for an individual to be part of society. Everyone's visualization when they hear the word school is always circular in the answer where school is a forum for learning and teaching activities that take place between teachers and students.

The role of teachers is certainly the most influential on the sustainability of every school activity. Teachers are also the ones who most often build interactions so that they can be close to students. This is due to the responsibility for the success of a student. Success indicators can be seen from students' ability to master the material, satisfactory grades, attendance levels to behavior in accordance with the school's vision and mission. And this is where the concept of authority that teachers have is present in realizing student success.

In classical times, the position of the teacher (often called *ulama, sheikh, mu'allim, or mu'addib*) was very noble. They are seen as "heirs of the prophets" (*warathat al-anbiya*) who carry out the sacred task of spreading knowledge and guiding the people (Faruqi et al., 2023). Their scientific authority is not only based on intellectual prowess, but also on morality and spiritual closeness to religious teachings.

The terminology for teachers varies depending on the context: *Mu'allim*: A teacher who focuses on the transfer of knowledge, especially in *kuttāb* (basic educational institutions) to teach reading, writing, and the Quran. *Mu'addib*: Teachers who are responsible for educating ethics (*adab*), morals, and literature, are often employed by the nobility or caliphs for their children. *Shaykh/Ulama/Mudarris*: A degree for a high-level teacher or professor, especially in the *halaqah* system in a mosque or later in a *madrasah*, focusing on the study of in-depth religious sciences (such as Fiqh, Hadith, Tafsir) and rational sciences (such as Philosophy and Medicine) (Muspiroh, 2019; Dawolo et al., 2024).

From an Islamic perspective, teachers have a very noble position, as affirmed in various verses of the Quran and hadith of the Prophet PBUH. Teachers are often referred to as the heirs of the prophets (*waratsatul anbiya*), who not only teach worldly

knowledge, but also guide people to truth, faith, and noble morals (Rasyidi et al., 2020; Astuti & Hasibuan, 2023; Manik, 2020).

The teacher also has full authority in determining the teaching methodology, which is generally carried out through *the halaqah* (circle of study) system in the mosque. Teachers also have a crucial role in instilling learning ethics (*adab al-'ilm*). They not only transfer *knowledge*, but also build character building, faith, and noble morals of students. Figures such as Al-Ghazali emphasized that the teacher's job is to be an example of good morals and guide students so that the purpose of studying is to get closer to Allah.

Teachers were at the core of the various educational institutions that developed in classical times: *Kuttāb* and Mosque: In the early period, mosques and *kuttāb* were the main centers of education. In the mosque, the teacher leads the *halaqah*. In addition, at this time reading and writing were also taught. Today, educators have a good pedagogical approach, where, after a demonstration of cognitive talent by a student, the educator directs the child to *kuttāb* for instruction in literacy skills, and then, after successfully acquiring these skills, the child is then referred to another *kuttāb* that focuses on the study of the Quran and the basic principles of Islamic teachings (Oktavia et al., 2025; Ibrahim, 2024).

Madrasah: Madrasah, as an important institution within the framework of Islamic Education, serves as a place for the advancement of various Islamic sciences, including but not limited to: Fiqh, Quran and Tafsir Studies, Hadith and related sciences, as well as the disciplines of Nahwu, Sharaf, Arabic linguistics, and literature (Hafid et al., 2022; Irwanto et al., 2023; Purwanto & Zikriadi, 2025).

When associated with the context of contemporary society, educators take on an important role as exemplars of ethical behavior, which necessitates the embodiment of moral values and the proactive utilization of opportunities to influence and engage their students. Furthermore, educators fulfill the role of caregivers, performing responsibilities that include encouragement (as a support), coaching (as a supervisor), and enforcement of disciplinary measures to ensure that students comply with the established regulations of the educational institution as well as norms prevalent in family and social contexts (Kartika & Arifudin, 2023; Maliudin et al., 2022).

So, the effectiveness of education is highly dependent on the ability of educators to integrate moral exemplary and discipline coaching in the educational process, so that students can develop as individuals who comply with norms and are able to play a positive role in family, school, and community life.

### **Pupils as Students of Knowledge**

The golden period of Islamic civilization was marked by rapid progress in various fields of science. In this case, the role of students as learners is very central and has special characteristics that are different from the modern education system. Students are not only recipients of information, but also play a major role in the process of developing knowledge, which is driven by spiritual motivation and a strict study ethic.

Students at this time have a fundamental role in memorizing the Quran and Hadith as well as other religious and scientific texts as the main foundation of their education. This method, which is carried out in institutions such as *kuttāb* (basic level) and *halaqah* (assembly of knowledge in mosques) to ensure that teachings and knowledge are passed on from one generation to the next (Dawolo et al., 2024; Fathurrahman, 2017).

In addition, they are also known to have a burning motivation and enthusiasm in seeking knowledge. They often travel long distances (*rihlah ilmiyyah*) from one city to another such as from Andalusia to Baghdad, or from Medina to Kufa to learn

directly from famous scholars or teachers (*sheikhs*) in certain fields. This shows perseverance and sacrifice, as well as their role as fighters of knowledge.

The dominant learning methods at that time, such as halaqah (study circles) in mosques, emphasized memorization (*hifz*) and discussion (*mudarasa*). The role of the student is: Oral method (memorization). Memorization is considered the main foundation for mastering knowledge. The *imla'* (writing) method refers to a set of methods used in various levels of classical knowledge that serve to provide accurate and safe knowledge because students have writing. It also helps strengthen students' memory. Currently, the *imla'* method is applied in educational institutions that are attended by many students. The discussion method is the main foundation in classical Islamic education to build dynamic and interactive learning between scholars and students. In various discussion assemblies, scholars and students gather to explore and discuss various aspects of religion, philosophy, law, and other sciences. Discussions usually take place in an open and inclusive atmosphere, allowing each participant to contribute with their own opinions and thoughts (Sholikhah, 2024; Wibowo & Salfadilah, 2025).

The main goal of classical Islamic education is centered on the cultivation of moral integrity (*akhlaq*). This form of education not only emphasizes the achievement of knowledge, but also prioritizes character development and virtuous ethics, which are considered paramount. Learners are instructed to cultivate exemplary behavior, both in their interactions with peers and in their relationships with the Divine. The idea of "*adab*" thus becomes very important, as it encompasses many dimensions (ethical, moral, and spiritual) that are important to every individual who practices Islam.

Education without ethical considerations can be considered fundamentally flawed, since the purpose of education is to cultivate individuals who have intellectual acumen and virtuous character. The main goal of classical Islamic education is to produce individuals who are aware of God, have a deep understanding of religious principles, and are able to live a life in harmony with Islamic principles (Hawari et al., 2024).

As a result, classical Islamic education goes beyond the mere transmission of religious knowledge, it seeks to mold each individual into a person of integrity, ethical disposition, and noble character. This educational framework equips students to engage as constructive members of society, contributing positively across the social, political, and spiritual domains. In addition, the classical educational paradigm underscores the importance of discipline and perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge.

### **Comparison of Islamic Education in the Classical Period with Contemporary Reality**

Contemporary Islamic education refers to the system that has existed since the modernization period (around the 19th century) until now. Islamic education, both classical and contemporary, shares the overarching goal of cultivating individuals characterized by moral integrity and intellectual prowess. Despite the continuity of these goals over time, there are major differences in the methodology adopted by classical and modern Islamic education. These differences are mainly related to pedagogical strategies, curricular emphasis, and adaptability to evolving social contexts.

Classical Islamic education emphasizes more on spiritual and moral aspects, while modern education tends to focus on intellectual development and technical expertise. In today's world, education is geared towards preparing students to enter the workforce with the specific technical skills and expertise required by today's industry and economy. The goal is often oriented towards achieving grades, degrees or diplomas. But even so, modern Islamic education still tries to maintain the basic

Islamic values that have been taught since classical times (Budiyanto et al., 2022). The author divides this comparison into 2 roles, namely the role of the teacher and also the role of the student.

The first, the Role of Educators. The perspective held by contemporary educators seems to have entered a state of instability and fragility. This statement is supported by various observations and empirical evidence. A large number of educators today no longer consider themselves to be bearers of the sacred and honorable mandate, which characterized the ethos of educators in the classical era; rather, they take on the role of mere employees who receive remuneration from state and private entities, having special obligations to fulfill. As a result, this gives rise to the idea that the act of educating has turned into the fulfillment of a mere professional task.

Contemporary educators, in the exercise of their responsibilities, tend to prioritize aspects of cognitive intelligence (*aqliyat*) and psychomotor intelligence (*ajasamiyat*), while paying comparatively less attention to affective (mental) intelligence. This trend is manifested in educational output, which results in many intelligent and skilled students, yet at the same time, there is still an unsettling prevalence of students engaging in morally reprehensible behavior (such as violence, aggression, and sexual violence), in addition to a number of scholars engaging in corruption, oppression, and civil rights violations. This phenomenon is one of the indicators that the education he received is not perfect.

The reality of these forms of deviation shows that intellectual intelligence without a strong spiritual and moral foundation is not enough to form the whole human being as the goal of education (*insan kamil*). The existence of this imbalance emphasizes that education has not carried out its function perfectly as a means of forming character and civilization, so there needs to be a reorientation towards education that integrates the aspects of *aqliyah*, *jasadiyah*, and *ruhiyah* in a balanced manner.

The second, the role of students. In the classical Islamic period, manners were the most important thing that students must have. Manners towards teachers (*mu'allim* or *sheikh*) and knowledge itself are considered the key to the blessings and success of knowledge. The ancient disciples considered the teacher (*sheikh*) as a saint and the heir of the prophet in the context of educating and teaching. They believe that if they do not respect the teacher, the knowledge obtained will not be useful. So that respect for the students arises by itself.

Students should dress neatly and neatly, sit in a proper place, not laugh out loud, not spit, not snare and not answer unless asked. He should not speak loudly and should speak politely. If you look at the present, that respect still exists even though it is very far from the manners of the classical period, but more towards respecting the competence of teachers. Students feel they have the right to ask questions, criticize, and even debate. So that the relationship built between students and teachers becomes more relaxed.

## CONCLUSION

In classical times, the position of the teacher (often called *ulama*, *sheikh*, *mu'allim*, or *mu'addib*) was very noble. They are seen as "heirs of the prophets" (*waratshat al-anbiya*) people who carry out the sacred task of spreading knowledge and guiding the people. Their scientific authority was based not only on intellectual prowess, but also on morality and spiritual closeness to religious teachings. The main goal of classical Islamic education is to cultivate ethical behavior (morality). Scholars are instructed to embody virtuous behavior, not only in their interpersonal interactions but also in their communion with God. The idea of "*adab*" in this context is considered important, as it encompasses multifaceted dimensions (ethical, moral, and spiritual) that are essential for every Muslim individual to have.

Classical Islamic education places greater emphasis on the spiritual and moral dimensions, while contemporary education primarily prioritizes cognitive advancement and technical proficiency. Today, the educational framework is oriented to equip students for entry into the professional realm with the necessary technical competencies and specialized knowledge demanded by modern industry and economic structures. The goals are often aligned with the achievement of academic grades, degrees, or diplomas.

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