



# Islamic Educational Thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: Relevance for Contemporary Character Pedagogy

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## Article Information:

Received February 10, 2026

Revised March 18, 2026

Accepted April 10, 2026

**Keywords:** *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Islamic educational thought, character pedagogy, tazkiyat al-nafs, holistic education*

## Abstract

This study examines the educational thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and its relevance to contemporary character pedagogy. The study aims to analyse the philosophical foundations, educational objectives, pedagogical methods, and character formation framework developed by Ibn Qayyim while exploring their conceptual relevance to contemporary educational theories. Employing a qualitative content analysis design with a scholar study approach, the analysis draws primarily on Ibn Qayyim's major works, including *Tuhfat al-Mawdud bi Ahkam al-Mawlud*, *Madarij al-Salikin*, *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah*, and *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in*, supported by recent scholarly literature on Islamic education. The findings indicate that Ibn Qayyim's educational philosophy is founded upon the integration of *fitrah*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, intellectual development, and moral cultivation within a holistic educational framework. His pedagogical model emphasizes exemplary modelling (*uswah hasanah*), dialogue (*hiwar*), gradual instruction (*tadarruj*), habit formation, and spiritual purification as complementary strategies for developing learners' character. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that these principles exhibit strong conceptual alignment with several contemporary educational perspectives, including learner-centered education, Social Learning Theory, differentiated instruction, developmental pedagogy, and holistic character education. This study contributes to the discourse on Islamic educational philosophy by proposing Ibn Qayyim's educational thought as a conceptual framework that enriches contemporary character pedagogy through the integration of cognitive, moral, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

## INTRODUCTION

Character education has become one of the major concerns in contemporary educational discourse due to increasing challenges posed by digital transformation, technological advancement, and shifting social values (Arif et al., 2023; Bai & Liang, 2022; Supaat & Muslim, 2023). While educational systems have achieved significant progress in developing cognitive competencies, many scholars argue that moral integrity, emotional maturity, and spiritual awareness have not developed proportionally (Haerudin & Noor, 2022; Onandia-Hinchado et al., 2021). This imbalance has encouraged educators and researchers to seek educational frameworks

### How to cite:

Konoras, H., Adanan, S. F., Sajad, S., Muhdi, M. (2026). Islamic Educational Thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: Relevance for Contemporary Character Pedagogy. *Ahlussunnah: Journal of Islamic Education*, 5(1), 585-592.

### E-ISSN:

2827-9573

### Published by:

The Institute for Research and Community Service

capable of integrating intellectual achievement with ethical and character development. Consequently, holistic approaches to education have gained increasing attention within both contemporary educational theory and Islamic educational philosophy (Wijaya, 2021).

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah is recognized as one of the scholars who developed a comprehensive educational philosophy integrating theology, psychology, ethics, and pedagogy (Nasril et al., 2025a). Rather than understanding education merely as the transmission of knowledge, Ibn Qayyim conceptualizes it as a process of nurturing the whole person through the development of *fitrah*, purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), cultivation of beneficial knowledge, and formation of virtuous character. His educational philosophy places moral and spiritual development at the centre of the learning process, making it highly relevant to current discussions concerning holistic and character-based education (Syaffutra et al., 2025).

Previous studies have examined various dimensions of Ibn Qayyim's educational thought, including Islamic character education, child education, moral development, and spiritual formation. Most of these studies, however, remain descriptive, focusing primarily on explaining his educational concepts within the historical context of classical Islamic scholarship. Limited attention has been given to analysing his educational philosophy as an integrated pedagogical framework and examining its conceptual relevance to contemporary educational theories, particularly learner-centered education, Social Learning Theory, differentiated instruction, developmental pedagogy, and holistic character education (Asyibli et al., 2025; Simbolon, 2023). As a result, the theoretical contribution of Ibn Qayyim's educational thought to contemporary character pedagogy has not been comprehensively articulated.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative content analysis using a scholar study approach to examine Ibn Qayyim's educational philosophy through his major works. Rather than merely describing his ideas, this study analyses the philosophical foundations of his educational thought, educational objectives, pedagogical methods, and framework of character formation before interpreting their relevance within contemporary educational discourse.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyse the educational thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and explore its relevance to contemporary character pedagogy. The study argues that Ibn Qayyim's integration of *fitrah*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, moral cultivation, and learner development offers a holistic conceptual framework capable of enriching current approaches to character education by combining cognitive, psychological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions within a unified pedagogical perspective (Engkizar et al., 2026; Zein & Ramadhona, 2026).

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative content analysis design using a scholar study approach to examine the educational thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and its relevance to contemporary character pedagogy. The study focused on systematically analysing the educational concepts presented in Ibn Qayyim's primary works, particularly *Tuhfat al-Mawdud bi Ahkam al-Mawlud*, *Madarij al-Salikin*, *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah*, and *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in* (Lindgren et al., 2020; Neuendorf, 2019; Renz et al., 2018). These primary sources were complemented by contemporary scholarly literature on Islamic education, character education, educational philosophy, and pedagogy indexed in reputable international journals to contextualise and compare Ibn Qayyim's educational framework with current educational theories.

Data were collected through an extensive literature review and document analysis. The analysis followed the procedures of qualitative content analysis,

including data familiarisation, identification of educational concepts, open coding, thematic categorisation, interpretation, and conceptual synthesis (Hafizah et al., 2025; M et al., 2026; Masani & Fabanjo, 2026). The coding process focused on four analytical themes; (1) the philosophical foundations of education, (2) educational objectives and character formation, (3) pedagogical methods, and (4) the relevance of Ibn Qayyim's educational thought to contemporary character pedagogy. To enhance analytical credibility, concepts identified from Ibn Qayyim's writings were continuously compared with recent scholarly discussions in contemporary educational literature, enabling the development of an integrated conceptual framework. The findings are presented descriptively and interpreted through a contemporary pedagogical perspective to demonstrate the theoretical contribution of Ibn Qayyim's educational philosophy to current character education discourse (Abduldayev et al., 2026; Harun et al., 2026; Kassymova et al., 2025).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Foundations of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah's Educational Thought

The analysis of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah's principal works demonstrates that his educational thought is founded upon an integrated theological, psychological, and ethical framework. Unlike educational perspectives that primarily emphasize cognitive achievement, Ibn Qayyim conceptualizes education as a comprehensive process of nurturing the human being through the harmonious development of intellect ('aql), heart (qalb), innate disposition (fitrah), and behavior (akhlaq). This paradigm reflects an educational philosophy that seeks not only intellectual excellence but also spiritual and moral transformation.

Ibn Qayyim (691–751 H/1292–1350 CE), whose full name was Shams al-Din Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Zur'i al-Dimashqi, was one of the most influential scholars of the Hanbali tradition. Educated in Damascus and profoundly influenced by his teacher Ibn Taymiyyah, he developed an intellectual orientation that combined rigorous textual scholarship with deep concern for spirituality and human psychology. His educational ideas are dispersed across several major works, particularly *Tuhfat al-Mawdud bi Ahkam al-Maw'lud*, *Madarij al-Salikin*, *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah*, and *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in*, which collectively provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding his philosophy of education (Nasril et al., 2025b; Ridhona, 2023).

One of the central findings of this study is that the concept of fitrah constitutes the anthropological foundation of Ibn Qayyim's educational philosophy. He argues that every child is born with an innate inclination toward faith and virtue, while the educational process functions primarily to preserve, cultivate, and actualize this God-given potential. In contrast to empiricist perspectives that portray learners as passive recipients of external influences, Ibn Qayyim views learners as individuals possessing inherent capacities that require appropriate guidance and environmental support. Consequently, education becomes a process of safeguarding human nature from moral and intellectual corruption rather than constructing character from an empty state.

Another significant foundation identified in this study is the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul). Ibn Qayyim consistently emphasizes that intellectual development cannot be separated from spiritual purification (Ardilah et al., 2026; Azhari et al., 2026). Diseases of the heart including arrogance, envy, greed, and excessive worldly attachment are regarded as obstacles to acquiring beneficial knowledge. Therefore, educational success is measured not merely by cognitive mastery but by the learner's ability to transform knowledge into righteous conduct and spiritual maturity. This perspective positions moral purification as an indispensable prerequisite for meaningful learning (Kamridah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, Ibn Qayyim classifies knowledge into two complementary categories: knowledge sought for its own intrinsic value, primarily revealed religious sciences, and instrumental knowledge that supports human welfare, such as language, medicine, mathematics, and other empirical disciplines. Rather than promoting a dichotomy between religious and worldly sciences, this framework illustrates an integrated epistemology in which all forms of knowledge ultimately contribute to fulfilling humanity's responsibility as God's vicegerent on earth (Hossain, 2023). The findings therefore indicate that Ibn Qayyim's educational philosophy represents a holistic educational paradigm integrating cognitive, spiritual, psychological, and ethical dimensions. Such integration forms the conceptual basis for his broader vision of character education and provides an important theoretical foundation for contemporary Islamic pedagogy.

### **Character Pedagogy in Ibn Qayyim's Educational Framework**

The analysis reveals that character formation constitutes the ultimate objective of education in Ibn Qayyim's thought. Educational attainment is evaluated not primarily through academic achievement but through the successful internalization of Islamic values manifested in personal conduct, social responsibility, and spiritual consciousness. Accordingly, education functions as a lifelong process of cultivating virtuous individuals who possess balanced intellectual competence and moral integrity (Makmudi, 2022; Nofaldi, 2018).

Within this framework, the highest educational objective is *ma'rifatullah*, namely attaining knowledge of God through intellectual reflection, spiritual purification, and righteous action. Intermediate educational goals include the acquisition of beneficial knowledge (*'ilm nafi'*), the cultivation of noble character (*akhlak karimah*), and preparation for responsible participation in society. Thus, educational outcomes encompass both worldly competence and ultimate spiritual fulfillment (*sa'adat al-darain*). The role of teachers extends far beyond instructional responsibilities (Nurmadiyah, 2016; Putra, 2023). Ibn Qayyim portrays educators as *murabbi*, individuals entrusted with nurturing learners intellectually, emotionally, morally, and spiritually. Teachers therefore function as living examples whose actions often exert greater educational influence than verbal instruction. Their sincerity (*ikhlas*), compassion (*rahmah*), wisdom (*hikmah*), and moral consistency become essential prerequisites for effective educational practice.

Equally important is Ibn Qayyim's understanding of learners as individuals possessing diverse innate potentials (*isti'dad*). Educational practices should therefore recognize differences in intellectual capacity, psychological development, interests, and talents rather than imposing uniform instructional approaches. Learners are expected to demonstrate perseverance, humility, discipline, and respect for knowledge, while teachers are responsible for facilitating the optimal development of each learner's unique capabilities. This learner-centered orientation also appears prominently in Ibn Qayyim's discussion of child education. His analysis begins even before birth through the selection of righteous spouses and continues during infancy with parental care, emotional attachment, breastfeeding, and the gradual cultivation of religious and moral habits (Engkizar et al., 2024; Muis et al., 2019). During childhood, he emphasizes balanced discipline grounded in affection rather than excessive punishment, arguing that harsh educational practices undermine psychological well-being and hinder healthy character development.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Ibn Qayyim's character pedagogy integrates family education, teacher professionalism, learner individuality, and moral cultivation into a coherent educational framework oriented toward holistic human development.

### **Educational Methods in Ibn Qayyim's Thought**

The present analysis identifies six major pedagogical approaches that



characterize Ibn Qayyim's educational methodology, namely *uswah hasanah* (exemplary modelling), *hiwar* (dialogue), *targhib wa tarhib* (motivation and warning), *ta'wid* (habit formation), *tadarruj* (gradual instruction), and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (spiritual purification). These approaches collectively demonstrate that Ibn Qayyim regarded education as an individualized and psychologically informed process rather than a rigid transmission of information. Among these methods, exemplary modelling occupies a central position. Ibn Qayyim argues that learners imitate observable behavior more effectively than verbal instruction. Consequently, teachers' personal conduct becomes the primary medium through which ethical values are transmitted. The credibility of education depends largely upon consistency between what teachers teach and how they behave in everyday life (Makmudi, 2021).

Dialogue (*hiwar*) represents another essential instructional strategy. Rather than encouraging passive memorization, Ibn Qayyim advocates interactive discussion that stimulates curiosity, critical thinking, and reflective reasoning. Through questioning, analogy, and guided conversation, learners actively construct understanding while strengthening their intellectual independence. Motivational strategies combining encouragement (*targhib*) and warning (*tarhib*) are similarly employed to cultivate balanced emotional development. Positive reinforcement encourages hope, perseverance, and enthusiasm for learning, whereas carefully administered corrective measures establish ethical boundaries without undermining learners' dignity. Importantly, disciplinary actions should always serve educational rather than punitive purposes (Aljihadi, 2026; Jamaludin et al., 2026).

Another major finding concerns Ibn Qayyim's emphasis on habit formation through gradual instruction. Character cannot be established instantaneously but develops through repeated practice adapted to learners' developmental readiness. Educational activities should therefore proceed systematically from simple to complex tasks while respecting psychological maturity and individual capacity. Distinctively, Ibn Qayyim incorporates spiritual purification as a pedagogical method. Activities such as remembrance of God (*dhikr*), self-reflection (*muhasabah*), contemplation (*tafakkur*), and awareness of divine supervision (*muraqabah*) are regarded as educational practices that strengthen emotional regulation, moral awareness, and self-discipline (Akyuni et al., 2025; Thoha et al., 2023). This dimension distinguishes his educational model from approaches that prioritize cognitive development while neglecting learners' spiritual formation.

Finally, Ibn Qayyim emphasizes educational differentiation based on learners' natural talents and inclinations. Teachers should identify each learner's strengths and provide educational experiences aligned with their individual potential. Such differentiation prevents educational frustration while maximizing opportunities for personal growth and meaningful achievement (Hussin, 2026).

### **Relevance of Ibn Qayyim's Educational Thought to Contemporary Character Pedagogy**

The findings indicate that Ibn Qayyim's educational philosophy remains conceptually relevant to several contemporary pedagogical paradigms. Although developed within a classical Islamic intellectual tradition, many of his educational principles correspond with current discussions concerning holistic education, learner-centered pedagogy, character education, and socio-emotional development. The concept of *fitrah* aligns closely with learner-centered education by recognizing that every learner possesses unique developmental potential requiring individualized educational support. Rather than treating learners as homogeneous recipients of instruction, Ibn Qayyim advocates educational practices that accommodate individual differences in ability, personality, and developmental readiness (Ihsan et al., 2021).

Similarly, his emphasis on *uswah hasanah* demonstrates strong conceptual compatibility with Social Learning Theory, particularly regarding observational

learning and behavioural modelling. Ethical values are acquired most effectively through meaningful interaction with credible role models, highlighting the continuing significance of teacher professionalism in contemporary educational settings. The principle of *tadarruj* also corresponds with developmental pedagogy by recommending instructional sequencing that matches learners' cognitive and psychological growth. Meanwhile, his recognition of diverse learner abilities parallels differentiated instruction, which has become an important strategy for addressing classroom diversity in twenty-first-century education.

Perhaps the most distinctive contribution lies in Ibn Qayyim's concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, which broadens contemporary discussions of character education by integrating spiritual purification with emotional regulation, ethical behaviour, and intellectual development. While many modern approaches emphasize cognitive and socio-emotional competencies, Ibn Qayyim adds an explicitly spiritual dimension that strengthens moral commitment and personal integrity. Overall, this study demonstrates that Ibn Qayyim's educational thought should not merely be regarded as a historical legacy but as a dynamic conceptual framework capable of enriching contemporary character pedagogy (Mahmud & Abdullah, 2023). His integration of theology, psychology, ethics, and educational practice provides valuable theoretical insights for developing holistic educational models that respond to contemporary moral and educational challenges while maintaining strong spiritual foundations.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah's educational thought provides a holistic framework that integrates *fitrah*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, intellectual development, and moral cultivation as the foundation of Islamic education. His educational philosophy positions character formation as the primary objective of learning, supported by pedagogical approaches such as exemplary modelling (*uswah hasanah*), dialogue (*hikmah*), gradual instruction (*tadarruj*), habit formation, and learner-oriented guidance based on individual potential. The analysis further reveals that these principles exhibit strong conceptual relevance to contemporary character pedagogy through their alignment with learner-centered education, Social Learning Theory, differentiated instruction, developmental pedagogy, and holistic education. Accordingly, this study contributes to the discourse on Islamic educational philosophy by proposing Ibn Qayyim's educational thought as a conceptual framework that enriches contemporary character education through the integration of cognitive, psychological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Future research may extend this conceptual framework by examining its implementation and effectiveness in contemporary educational institutions across different educational contexts.

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**First publication right:**

Ahlussunnah: Journal of Islamic Education

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