



Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi's Islamic Educational Thought and Its Relevance to Contemporary Education

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the Islamic educational thought of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi and its relevance to contemporary Islamic education. It focuses on four aspects: educational objectives, the role of educators, learner characteristics, and learning methods. The study employed a qualitative approach using content analysis of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's works, particularly *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi*, supported by relevant scholarly literature. The findings show that his educational thought emphasizes the integration of spiritual, moral, and intellectual development. Education is directed not only toward knowledge acquisition but also toward moral cultivation and closeness to God. Educators are positioned as role models, while learners are viewed as individuals with innate potential who actively participate in learning. Learning methods are expected to be flexible, contextual, dialogic, and responsive to learners' conditions and abilities. These principles remain relevant to contemporary Islamic education, particularly in strengthening character education and addressing moral challenges among younger generations in the digital era. The study highlights Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's contribution to the development of holistic and value-oriented Islamic education.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education is an important pillar in the development of human civilization based on the values of faith, morality, and knowledge. From an Islamic perspective, education is not merely oriented toward the transfer of knowledge but also emphasizes character development (*morality*) and the comprehensive development of human potential, encompassing spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions. Therefore, examining the educational thought of Islamic scholars is important for exploring educational concepts that remain relevant and applicable in addressing the challenges of changing times.

Throughout the history of Islamic civilization, scholarly traditions developed through chains of transmission (*isnad*) that connected one generation of scholars to the next, accompanied by a strong emphasis on *adab*, namely ethics in seeking and teaching knowledge. Andalusia (Islamic Spain) from the fourth to the sixth century of the Hijri calendar was one of the major centers of Islamic civilization and produced many prominent scholars in various disciplines, including Islamic

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jurisprudence, hadith, language, and philosophy. The contributions of Andalusian scholars to the body of Islamic educational thought remain important to explore, given that scholarship on figures from this region has been relatively less extensive than research on scholars from the Middle East (Munzirin, 2025).

One Andalusian scholar who made a significant contribution to Islamic scholarship, particularly in the field of education, was Abu 'Umar Yusuf ibn 'Abdillah ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Namari al-Andalusi al-Qurthubi, better known as Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi. He was born in Cordoba in 368 AH/978 CE and died in Xativa in 463 AH/1071 CE. During his lifetime, he served as a *qadi* (judge) in Lisbon and Santarem and was widely recognized as one of the leading hadith scholars of his time (Barakat, 2023). Although he initially followed the Zahiri school, he later became recognized as one of the prominent scholars of the Maliki school. This intellectual journey reflects his openness to considering evidence and scholarly argumentation.

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's thought addresses scholarly knowledge in an integrated manner with Islamic values, particularly in relation to moral development, the role of educators, and educational objectives oriented toward the formation of *insan kamil*. One of his monumental works is *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi*, a book that specifically discusses the virtue of knowledge, the ethics of learners, and the ethical relationship between teachers and students (Furqan, 2023; Saefuddin, 2026). Through this work, Al-Qurthubi's thought demonstrates that knowledge is not understood merely as the acquisition of information but as part of a process of developing individuals with faith, moral character, and responsibility in applying their knowledge. Thus, Al-Qurthubi's thought has not only a theoretical dimension but also a practical dimension that can be considered in the development of Islamic education today.

The distinctive characteristics of Al-Qurthubi's educational thought can also be observed when it is compared with the ideas of later Islamic educational thinkers, such as al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and Ibn Khaldun in *Muqaddimah*. Al-Qurthubi's thought has its own distinctive character because it systematically combines the authority of hadith scholarship with educational ethics before the two major works mentioned above were written (Nasrowi, 2017). This position makes his thought important in the early development of the tradition of writing on *adab al-'ilm*, or scholarly ethics, which subsequently remained an important part of Islamic intellectual and educational traditions among later generations of scholars (Engkizar et al., 2025).

The relevance of this thought has become increasingly significant in the development of education in the digital era, characterized by technological advancement and globalization. Islamic education faces various challenges, including moral degradation, character crises, an increasingly instant-oriented digital culture, the spread of misinformation, and hedonistic lifestyles that affect younger generations, particularly Generation Z (Fadhilah et al., 2025; Hafidzah et al., 2025). These challenges have become more complex as modern education systems tend to place considerable emphasis on cognitive development and academic achievement, while the affective and spiritual development of learners receives relatively less attention.

These conditions call for efforts to reconstruct educational concepts that are not only adaptive to changing times but also remain grounded in the fundamental values of Islamic teachings. The Indonesian government has attempted to respond to these issues through character education policies, including the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasizes noble character, independence, and critical reasoning among learners. Nevertheless, implementation in practice continues to face various challenges, particularly in fully integrating Islamic values into everyday learning practices (Anjelita & Persada, 2024). This situation demonstrates the

importance of revisiting classical Islamic educational thought that emphasizes the integration of knowledge, morality, and personality development.

Several previous studies have examined Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's thought from various perspectives. These studies include textual analyses of *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm* (Furqan, 2023; Saefuddin, 2026; Wafirah, 2021), studies of learners' ethics and their relevance to national education (Suprahaet et al., 2019), and examinations of the relationship between his jurisprudential and hadith thought (Mala & Fudhaili, 2022). These studies demonstrate that Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's thought encompasses a broad range of issues within the Islamic scholarly tradition. However, studies that specifically map his thought into four operational categories educational objectives, the role of educators, learner characteristics, and learning methods while explicitly relating them to the context of the moral challenges faced by Generation Z in Indonesia's digital era remain limited. This limitation constitutes the research gap addressed by the present study and provides the basis for its novelty.

Based on this background, the study addresses two main research questions: how are educational objectives, the role of educators, learner characteristics, and learning methods conceptualized in the thought of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi; and how is this thought relevant to addressing contemporary Islamic educational challenges, particularly in Indonesia? Accordingly, this study aims to examine Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi's Islamic educational thought in depth and analyze its relevance to the context of contemporary education.

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich scholarship on classical Islamic educational thought, particularly research on Andalusian scholars, whose contributions have received relatively less attention than those of Islamic educational thinkers from the Middle East. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for educators, Islamic educational institution administrators, and policymakers in developing educational practices that are holistic, integrative, and oriented toward the cultivation of noble character. In this way, Al-Qurthubi's educational thought can serve as a conceptual resource for addressing the need for Islamic education that is adaptive to contemporary developments while remaining firmly rooted in Islamic values.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using content analysis to examine and understand Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi's educational thought in the field of Islamic education. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on interpreting and gaining an in-depth understanding of educational ideas contained in Al-Qurthubi's works. Content analysis was used to systematically and contextually identify, classify, and interpret educational concepts contained in the sources under examination (Engkizar et al., 2024; Engkizar et al., 2026; Langputeh et al., 2023; Preiser et al., 2021; Vears & Gillam, 2022).

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprised the works of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi relevant to Islamic education, particularly *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi*. The secondary sources included scholarly journals, academic articles, previous research findings, books, and other relevant literature on Islamic educational thought and studies of Al-Qurthubi, including research that discusses or compares his thought with that of other Islamic educational thinkers. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the research focus and their contribution to providing contextual understanding of Al-Qurthubi's educational thought.

Data were collected through documentation of relevant written sources. The data collection process involved searching for, carefully reading, recording, selecting, and organizing information related to the research focus. The data were then

classified according to the main themes of Al-Qurthubi's educational thought, including educational objectives, the role of educators, learner characteristics, learning methods, and their relevance to contemporary Islamic education (Altheide & Schneider, 2016; Engkizar et al., 2025; Kyngäs, 2020; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive-analytical content analysis. The analysis process involved several stages, including identifying relevant data, reducing and grouping the data according to themes, interpreting the meanings contained in the texts, and synthesizing the findings to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Al-Qurthubi's educational thought. The categorized data were then analyzed by considering the context of the thinker's ideas and their relationship to the development of Islamic education (Alejandro & Zhao, 2024; Engkizar et al., 2026; Kara, 2023). The findings were subsequently compared with the educational thought of other Islamic educational thinkers and related to the context of contemporary Islamic education to identify the characteristics, similarities, differences, and relevance of Al-Qurthubi's thought. The analysis process was conducted systematically by referring to the stages of qualitative data analysis, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Daniel & Harland, 2018; Lungu, 2022).

The trustworthiness of the data was established through source triangulation by comparing information obtained from Al-Qurthubi's primary works with relevant secondary sources. Cross-checking was conducted to ensure the consistency of the information, strengthen the interpretation of the texts, and reduce potential bias in understanding the thinker's ideas. This triangulation process was also used to situate the findings within the broader context of Islamic education research, thereby providing a stronger interpretive basis and ensuring that the findings could be scientifically justified (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Lindgren et al., 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi's Islamic educational thought is comprehensive and integrative, emphasizing a balance among spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions. His thought is not oriented solely toward the acquisition of knowledge but also toward the development of character and personality in accordance with Islamic teachings. The findings are discussed in terms of Al-Qurthubi's biography and intellectual works, educational objectives, the role of educators, characteristics of learners, learning methods, comparisons with other Islamic educational thinkers, relevance to contemporary Islamic education, and practical implications and recommendations.

Brief Biography and Intellectual Works of Al-Qurthubi

Before examining Al-Qurthubi's educational thought in greater depth, it is important to understand his biographical background and intellectual works as the context underlying the development of his educational ideas. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr grew up and received his education within the scholarly environment of Cordoba, which at the time was one of the leading centers of Islamic civilization in Andalusia. He studied under a number of prominent scholars in hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, and language, thereby acquiring a strong scholarly tradition before later serving as a *qadi* in Lisbon and Santarem (Barakat, 2023). His intellectual journey, which initially emerged from the Zahiri school and later shifted toward the Maliki school, reflects an intellectual openness in developing thought based on evidence and scholarly argumentation rather than merely on sectarian or school-based partisanship (Mala & Fudhaili, 2022).

Al-Qurthubi's works, covering hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, history, and education, demonstrate the breadth of his scholarly horizons. Among these works, *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi* is an important reference in the study of classical Islamic

education because it specifically discusses the virtue of knowledge, the obligation to disseminate knowledge, the ethics of learners, and the ethical relationship between teachers and students (Wafirah, 2021). Through this work, Al-Qurthubi's educational thought can be systematically examined, particularly in relation to educational objectives, the role of educators, learner characteristics, and learning methods.

Educational Objectives

Al-Qurthubi views Islamic education as aiming to develop the complete human being (*insan kamil*), namely an individual who maintains a balance among faith (*iman*), knowledge (*'ilm*), and action (*'amal*). These three elements are interrelated and cannot be separated. Faith serves as the spiritual foundation, knowledge provides the means to understand truth, and action represents the practical manifestation of faith and knowledge in everyday life. Accordingly, the purpose of education is not limited to worldly achievements, such as intellectual development and practical skills, but also encompasses an *ukhrawi* dimension, namely closeness to Allah SWT and salvation in the hereafter.

In *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi*, Al-Qurthubi emphasizes that knowledge that is not accompanied by righteous action and good character does not provide genuine benefit to its possessor. This view indicates that educational success should not be measured solely by the amount of knowledge acquired by learners, but also by the extent to which such knowledge shapes a God-conscious personality and contributes to society. Education therefore has a transformative function because knowledge must be manifested in behavior and real-life practices (Kalsum et al., 2025; Kassymova et al., 2025; Mustafa et al., 2026).

The idea of integrating faith, knowledge, and action was subsequently emphasized by later Islamic thinkers, including al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, although with different emphases and systematic approaches. This continuity indicates that Al-Qurthubi's thought occupies an important position in the early development of the discourse on holistic Islamic educational objectives, particularly in connecting knowledge with moral and spiritual development.

The Role of Educators

Al-Qurthubi places teachers at the center of the educational process. Teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but also serve as role models (*uswah hasanah*) for learners. Educators are expected to possess strong scholarly competence, moral integrity, and sincerity in teaching without making worldly rewards their primary objective. Role modeling is important because learners tend to observe and imitate teachers' behavior in everyday life. Therefore, educators' conduct becomes part of the educational process and indirectly shapes learners' character, functioning as a form of hidden curriculum.

In addition to serving as role models, Al-Qurthubi emphasizes educators' responsibility not to conceal knowledge (*kitman al-'ilm*) and to communicate it fairly to anyone who needs it. This principle demonstrates the moral and social responsibility inherent in educational activities. Knowledge should not become exclusive knowledge possessed only by certain groups but should be conveyed to those who need it and are capable of receiving it.

The principles of justice and openness in education are relevant to the demands of modern teacher competencies, which include pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies as mandated by national education policy. Thus, Al-Qurthubi's view of the role of educators is not merely normative and theological but also has operational relevance for the development of teacher professionalism today. Teachers are expected not only to master instructional content but also to demonstrate integrity, social responsibility, and exemplary conduct in their educational roles (Defriyanto et al., 2026; Htay et al., 2025; Saidi et al., 2025).

Learner Characteristics

Al-Qurthubi views every individual as possessing potential (*fitrah*) that needs to be developed through education. Learners are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but active subjects who participate in the learning process. This perspective indicates that education should consider individual learner characteristics so that learning does not proceed uniformly without taking learners' conditions and needs into account.

Therefore, educational approaches should consider learners' psychological conditions, abilities, and needs so that the learning process can take place effectively. Attention to learner characteristics indicates that educational success depends not only on the content delivered but also on the extent to which the learning process corresponds to the capacities and conditions of individual learners.

Furthermore, in *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi*, Al-Qurthubi emphasizes the importance of learners' proper conduct toward teachers and knowledge itself. Such conduct includes *tawadhu*, or humility, patience, perseverance, and respect for teachers as a form of appreciation for the source of knowledge. Proper conduct is regarded as both a prerequisite and a completion of the learning process because, without good conduct, acquired knowledge may not produce optimal blessing and benefit (Mustofa & Ali Firman, 2021).

This perspective demonstrates that education from Al-Qurthubi's viewpoint does not end with the transmission of knowledge. Character formation is an inseparable component of acquiring knowledge (Khoiroh et al., 2022). Thus, learner quality is determined not only by intellectual ability but also by attitudes, ethical conduct, and the moral orientation underlying the use of acquired knowledge.

Learning Methods

Al-Qurthubi emphasizes the importance of using varied and contextual learning methods. Learning methods should be adapted to the subject matter and the conditions of learners. In this process, learning should employ humanistic and dialogical approaches, such as deliberation and question-and-answer sessions (*munaẓharah*), rather than relying solely on memorization without understanding. Consistent with the findings of Wafirah (2021), Al-Qurthubi argues that education should prioritize understanding (*fahm*) over memorization alone. At the same time, religious knowledge is placed at the highest level in the hierarchy of knowledge.

The emphasis on understanding indicates that learning activities should encourage learners to comprehend the meaning and substance of the knowledge being studied. Thus, memorization still has a place in the learning process, but it should not be the sole measure of educational success. Knowledge must be understood, internalized, and ultimately manifested in behavior.

In addition, learning should integrate moral and spiritual values so that it produces not only intellectually capable individuals but also individuals with good character. The principle of gradual progression (*tadarruj*) in presenting learning materials is also emphasized by adjusting the level of difficulty to learners' reasoning abilities. Presenting material gradually enables learners to absorb knowledge more comprehensively and reduces the possibility of misunderstanding.

This methodological approach demonstrates that Al-Qurthubi's educational thought shares common ground with several principles that have developed in modern educational theory, particularly meaningful learning and scaffolding. Although these concepts emerged within different theoretical contexts, they share the principle that learning materials, processes of understanding, and instructional provision should be adapted to learners' abilities.

Comparison with Other Islamic Educational Thinkers

To strengthen the scholarly position of Al-Qurthubi's educational thought, this study compares it with the ideas of several other widely recognized Islamic

educational thinkers, particularly Ibn Khaldun and al-Ghazali. In *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun views education as part of the process of civilization (*'umran*) and emphasizes its close relationship with social context and the development of civilization. He also stresses the importance of gradual instruction, beginning with easier material and progressing toward more difficult content (Nasrowi, 2017).

Meanwhile, al-Ghazali, in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, places greater emphasis on *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or purification of the soul, as one of the core dimensions of education. From this perspective, teachers are not merely responsible for transmitting knowledge but also for guiding and nurturing learners' spiritual development.

Compared with these two thinkers, Al-Qurthubi is distinctive because his educational thought is grounded in a strong hadith-based scholarly tradition. His educational arguments are closely connected to *naqli* evidence, giving his thought a distinctive character compared with approaches that are more philosophical or sociological. This orientation demonstrates that Al-Qurthubi's educational thought is closely connected to the Islamic tradition of knowledge transmission and scholarly validation.

From a chronological perspective, Al-Qurthubi's works also emerged earlier than *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and *Muqaddimah*. His thought can therefore be positioned as an important link in the development of *adab al-'ilm* within the subsequent Islamic scholarly tradition. Although these three thinkers emphasize different aspects, they share a fundamental understanding of education as a process of developing the whole human being rather than merely transferring information.

Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Education

Al-Qurthubi's educational thought remains relevant to contemporary educational conditions. Amid the challenges of globalization and increasingly rapid technological development, Islamic education requires an approach capable of maintaining a balance between advances in knowledge and character development. Changes in the social and digital environment also create new challenges for learners' moral development.

The moral challenges experienced by Generation Z in the digital era, including negative influences from social media, hedonistic lifestyles, low levels of digital literacy, and declining interest among young people in religious activities, constitute challenges that cannot be addressed through cognitive approaches alone (Fadhilah et al., 2025; Hafidzah et al., 2025). This condition demonstrates the need for an educational approach that integrates knowledge with the development of attitudes, values, and character.

In this context, Al-Qurthubi's emphasis on the balance of faith, knowledge, and action provides a relevant conceptual framework for contemporary Islamic education. Teacher role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), respect for proper conduct, and the use of dialogical and gradual learning methods can also serve as foundations for responding to changes in the educational environment. Education should not only aim to improve academic abilities but also develop learners' capacity to internalize and apply Islamic values in everyday life.

Al-Qurthubi's approach, which integrates spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions, can therefore be adapted by Islamic educational institutions to develop an educational system that is both high-quality and character-oriented in the contemporary era. This framework is also relevant to efforts to support the implementation of character education policies in Indonesia, particularly by positioning personality development as an integral component of educational achievement.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have several practical implications for the development of Islamic education. First, in Islamic education curriculum

development, Al-Qurthubi's principle of integrating faith, knowledge, and action can serve as a framework for formulating learning outcomes that are not limited to cognitive aspects but also encompass affective and spiritual dimensions. Such an approach enables education to connect knowledge acquisition with character development and its application in everyday life.

Second, in the development of teacher professionalism, the concepts of role modeling (*uswah hasanah*) and sincerity in teaching can be integrated into training programs and professional development for educators in Islamic educational institutions. Teachers need to be strengthened not only in terms of subject mastery and pedagogical skills but also in moral integrity and responsibility in fulfilling their role as role models for learners.

Third, in the formulation of learning methods, the principle of prioritizing understanding over memorization and gradual learning (*tadarruj*) can be adapted into critical-reasoning-based learning strategies that correspond to the needs of learners in the digital generation. Such adaptation should nevertheless preserve the fundamental characteristics of Al-Qurthubi's thought, particularly the integration of knowledge, moral values, and practical life.

Further recommendations are directed toward future research conducted comparatively and in greater depth. Future studies could examine the original text of *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi* through textual and philological analysis to obtain a deeper understanding of the construction of Al-Qurthubi's educational thought. In addition, the application of Al-Qurthubi's educational concepts could be examined through field research, including action research in Islamic educational institutions. In this way, the relevance of Al-Qurthubi's thought can be understood not only conceptually but also verified through empirical application and observation in contemporary Islamic education contexts.

CONCLUSION

The educational thought of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurthubi emphasizes the integration of intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions in the formation of individuals and the development of Islamic education. His educational conception places the formation of *insan kamil* as an important orientation, while positioning educators as knowledgeable and ethical role models and learners as active individuals endowed with *fītrah* and guided by *adab*. His emphasis on varied, dialogic, and gradual learning also demonstrates an educational orientation that considers the development and conditions of learners.

The concept of education and *adab al-'ilm* developed by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr offers a valuable conceptual contribution to contemporary Islamic education, particularly in strengthening character formation. The integration of knowledge and *adab* provides an important foundation for developing learners who possess not only intellectual competence but also moral responsibility and Islamic values. In the context of contemporary education, these principles remain relevant to efforts to address challenges related to character and morality in the digital era.

Further research is needed to examine Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's original works more extensively and to investigate the empirical application of his educational concepts in contemporary Islamic educational institutions. Such studies may contribute to the development of practical educational models that integrate knowledge, character, and Islamic *adab* while remaining responsive to contemporary educational challenges.

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