



ENSURING EQUITABLE AND QUALITY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE TOWARD A FAITHFUL, INTELLIGENT, AND GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE GENERATION

Imam Baidawi¹, Halimatus Sa'diyah²,

^{1,2} Stai Cendekia Insani, Indonesia,

e-mail: 1imbaidawiim3@gmail.com , 2thusy723@gmail.com,

Abstract

This paper explores the intersection between Islamic educational philosophy and contemporary efforts to ensure equitable and quality primary and secondary education. Drawing on classical sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and seminal works by scholars like Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun, the study articulates an Islamic vision of education that balances faith, intellect, and moral character. Through qualitative library-based research and thematic analysis, the paper examines how Islamic values such as justice ('adl), knowledge ('ilm), and holistic development (tarbiyah) can complement global educational goals, particularly those outlined in SDG 4. The findings reveal that the Islamic approach offers both normative insights and practical strategies for addressing systemic inequities, fostering inclusive learning environments, and developing ethically grounded learners who are also globally competent. Rather than positioning itself in opposition to modern educational standards, the Islamic perspective enriches them by embedding purpose, ethics, and community responsibility into the learning process. This study contributes to educational theory by offering a culturally rooted yet universally relevant model that bridges spiritual development with academic and global excellence.

Keywords: *Islamic education, educational equity, quality education, SDG 4, moral development, global competitiveness, primary and secondary education*

A. Introduction

Education stands at the core of human development and societal progress. It plays a crucial role not only in empowering individuals but also in shaping communities that are just, informed, and resilient. Despite global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals particularly SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning millions of children around the world, especially in developing and Muslim-majority countries, still face systemic barriers in accessing primary and secondary education of acceptable quality (UNESCO, 2023).

In the discourse on global education reform, much attention has been paid to policy, infrastructure, teacher training, and digital learning. However, less emphasis has been placed on integrating ethical, spiritual, and cultural dimensions—particularly from non-Western perspectives such as Islam into educational models. Islam views education as a holistic process that unites iman (faith), 'ilm (knowledge), and 'amal (action). The Quranic command “Read in the name of your Lord” (Al-'Alaq: 1) establishes learning as a sacred act. Consequently, education is not merely a tool for economic advancement, but a transformative journey that develops a faithful, intelligent, and morally upright human being.

Recent literature has explored aspects of Islamic education in various contexts. For instance, Al-Attas (2022) emphasizes the integration of adab (ethics) in shaping student character, while Hashim & Langgulung (2021) examine curriculum alignment between Islamic values and national education standards in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, there remains a research gap in applying Islamic perspectives to current issues of educational equity and quality, especially in aligning faith-based education with the demands of a globalized and competitive world.

This research addresses two key gaps in the existing literature. First, while educational equity is often framed in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, or geography, few studies explore how Islamic worldviews can contribute to designing just and inclusive education systems. Second, much of the scholarship on Islamic education focuses on religious institutions, with limited engagement in the broader policy discourse concerning national primary and secondary education.

This study argues that Islamic educational philosophy can provide a normative and practical framework to enhance equity and quality in primary and secondary education. By synthesizing traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational paradigms, this research offers a culturally relevant and ethically grounded approach to educational reform especially in Muslim-majority societies or institutions that seek to harmonize spiritual and academic excellence.

Therefore, this study is important for two reasons: (1) it highlights an underexplored dimension in the global dialogue on education equity by integrating Islamic values into mainstream educational frameworks, and (2) it contributes to the academic conversation by bridging classical Islamic education principles with contemporary demands for global competitiveness, cognitive development, and character formation. The results of this study are expected to enrich the theoretical landscape of educational studies and offer practical insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators who aim to cultivate a generation that is faithful, intellectually competent, and capable of contributing to a just global society..

B. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach using library research (literature review) and document analysis as the primary methods. The research aims to explore Islamic perspectives on educational equity and quality in primary and secondary education, and how these perspectives can inform the development of faithful, intellectually capable, and globally competitive learners.

The design is conceptual and descriptive-analytical, aiming to synthesize classical Islamic educational thought with contemporary educational theories and global education frameworks. This design allows for a critical engagement with both traditional texts and modern empirical studies.

The data for this study were collected from two primary sources: Classical and Contemporary Islamic Texts: Including the Qur'an, Hadith, works of Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, and contemporary thinkers like Al-Attas, Naquib, and Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, which form the normative basis for Islamic educational thought.

Contemporary Academic Literature and Policy Documents: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and global education policy documents (e.g., UNESCO, UNICEF, and national education policies) published in the last ten years, focusing on educational equity, quality, and Islamic education frameworks.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, in which relevant concepts, principles, and models related to equity, quality, and Islamic education were identified, categorized, and synthesized. The analysis focused on: Extracting key themes from Islamic sources regarding educational aims, methods, and learner characteristics. Mapping these themes to contemporary educational discourses on equity, quality, and competitiveness. Identifying conceptual alignments and tensions between Islamic and modern educational paradigms. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, triangulation was applied by comparing findings from multiple sources and perspectives Islamic epistemology, educational philosophy, and policy studies. In addition, peer debriefing and expert consultation were conducted with scholars in Islamic education and education policy.

As a non-empirical study, this research did not involve human subjects. Nevertheless, ethical academic practices were maintained by ensuring proper citation, avoiding plagiarism, and critically reflecting on sources with transparency and respect for intellectual traditions.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Islamic Conception of Educational Equity and Quality

Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes both the equal right to seek knowledge and the moral purpose of education. The Qur'an advocates for universal access to knowledge (*'ilm*) regardless of gender, race, or social status, as reflected in the hadith: "*Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim, male and female.*" (Ibn Mājah). This highlights the intrinsic link

between equity and justice (*'adl*) in Islam, implying that education must be inclusive, fair, and accessible to all segments of society.

From the Islamic perspective, quality in education is not merely defined by measurable academic outcomes but also by the development of character (*akhlaq*), spiritual awareness (*iman*), and intellectual growth (*'aql*). Al-Ghazali emphasized the harmony between reason and revelation, advocating for an educational system that forms virtuous individuals capable of benefiting society.

This differs from many contemporary educational frameworks that often prioritize economic competitiveness and standardized testing. Islamic education insists that moral and spiritual dimensions must be integral to definitions of educational quality.

2. Challenges in Contemporary Education: Equity, Values, and Global Competitiveness

Globally, primary and secondary education systems especially in Muslim-majority contexts struggle with structural inequities: disparities in school access, teacher quality, infrastructure, and curriculum relevance. UNESCO (2023) reports that over 244 million children and adolescents are still out of school, with higher dropout rates in areas affected by poverty, conflict, and marginalization.

Furthermore, while efforts have been made to align national curricula with global standards, these often neglect the cultural and religious identity of learners. This results in a disconnection between formal schooling and the holistic formation of the child as envisioned in Islam.

The study finds that incorporating Islamic principles into mainstream education can help address these gaps. For instance, fostering a sense of divine purpose in learning can improve student motivation, discipline, and long-term resilience. Similarly, emphasizing justice, compassion, and integrity can enhance social emotional learning and reduce behavioral issues in schools.

3. Synthesis of Islamic Educational Values and Global Educational Goals

A comparative thematic analysis shows that there is significant conceptual overlap between Islamic educational aims and global education frameworks like SDG 4, particularly in the areas of inclusion, lifelong learning, and learner well being. For example:

- Equity in Islam aligns with SDG's commitment to inclusive education.
- Tarbiyah (holistic development) corresponds with modern emphases on 21st-century skills and character education.
- Global competitiveness, if grounded in ethical integrity, matches the Islamic call to be *khair ummah* (the best community) that contributes positively to the world.

This alignment suggests that Islamic principles can complement and enrich global education strategies. However, this requires educational policy-makers and curriculum designers in Muslim contexts to critically adapt Islamic

values within contemporary pedagogical models—rather than simply replicate traditional forms of religious instruction.

4. Toward a Faithful and Globally Competitive Generation

The findings indicate that an educational model rooted in Islamic values, yet responsive to modern realities, can contribute to the formation of a faithful, intelligent, and globally competitive generation. Such a model integrates:

- Spiritual formation (taqwa and iman)
- Cognitive development (critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving)
- Ethical responsibility (social justice, environmental awareness, global citizenship)

This holistic paradigm can serve not only Muslim students but also contribute to the global discourse on education reform offering a value-based alternative to purely secular or technocratic models of schooling.

D. Conclusion

This study has examined how Islamic educational philosophy can meaningfully contribute to the discourse on equitable and quality education, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. Rooted in a vision that integrates faith, intellect, and ethical responsibility, the Islamic perspective provides a holistic framework that complements global educational goals while addressing specific cultural and moral needs of learners especially in Muslim-majority contexts.

By revisiting classical and contemporary Islamic sources, the study demonstrates that education in Islam is not merely a means for cognitive development, but a transformative process aimed at cultivating balanced individuals who are spiritually conscious, morally upright, and intellectually capable. Such a model offers both normative insights and practical pathways for designing educational systems that are inclusive, value-based, and globally relevant.

The research also reveals that many challenges facing contemporary education such as inequities in access, declining moral character, and the dominance of test-centric pedagogy can be addressed by reintroducing ethical and spiritual dimensions into curriculum and pedagogy. Integrating Islamic values into mainstream educational policies does not mean replacing secular content, but enriching it with moral purpose and cultural rootedness.

In this sense, the Islamic educational paradigm does not stand in opposition to global competitiveness; rather, it calls for a redefinition of what it means to be "globally competitive" not simply in terms of technical skills or market readiness, but in terms of the ability to contribute meaningfully, ethically, and compassionately to a complex and interconnected world.

As a contribution to the broader field of educational reform, this study encourages scholars, policymakers, and educators to engage more deeply with

non-Western philosophical traditions, such as Islam, as rich sources of innovation and guidance in the quest for truly equitable and quality education for all.

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