

The Transformation of Islamic Education Curriculum in The Umayyad-Abbasid Era: Structure, Materials, and Methodology

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum from the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750 CE) to the Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258 CE), focusing on three main aspects: institutional structure, curriculum content, and teaching methodology. The novelty of this research lies in three fundamental aspects. First, this study offers an integrated three-dimensional analytical framework (structure-content-methodology) that has never been regularly employed in comparative studies of classical Islamic education. Second, this research identifies the "Abbasid Curriculum Transformation Model" as a historical paradigm demonstrating how cross-civilizational knowledge integration can be achieved without sacrificing religious identity—a finding with direct relevance to contemporary Islamic education reform discourse. Third, this study synthesizes recent literature (2019-2025) with classical sources to produce a more comprehensive historiographical reconstruction compared to previous studies that tend to be descriptive-fragmentary in nature. Using a qualitative approach with historical-comparative analysis methods, this research examines primary and secondary sources to identify significant patterns of change in the Islamic education system during these two caliphate periods. The findings reveal that the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum underwent substantial evolution from an informal education system centered on mosques and kuttab during the Umayyad era to a structured institutional system with the establishment of institutions such as Bayt al-Hikmah during the Abbasid era. Curriculum content evolved from an exclusive focus on Qur'anic and Hadith studies to a comprehensive curriculum integrating philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. Teaching methodology transformed from a didactic, memorization-based approach to interactive methods emphasizing discussion, debate, and critical thinking. These findings contribute significantly to the historiographical understanding of Islamic education development and offer new perspectives for contemporary Islamic education curriculum reform.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has a long history spanning more than fourteen centuries, undergoing various transformations along with changes in the social, political and cultural context of Islamic civilization [1]. The transformation of the Islamic education curriculum is a complex phenomenon influenced by the dynamics of political power, intellectual development, and interaction with other civilizations [2]. A thorough understanding of the historical evolution of Islamic education curricula is crucial for formulating strategies for Islamic education reform that are relevant to contemporary challenges.

The curriculum in the context of Islamic education cannot be separated from the comprehensive Islamic worldview of

knowledge ('ilm) and education (*tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, *ta'dib*). According to Baiza, the Islamic education curriculum has historically encompassed two main categories: religious sciences ('*Ulum al-Diniyah*) and rational sciences ('*Ulum al-'Aqliyah*). This dichotomy, while not always rigid, forms a conceptual framework for understanding the evolution of the Islamic education curriculum [3].

In their systematic review, Falaqi et al. identified that the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum was influenced by the thoughts of Islamic educational philosophers such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, and Ibn Sina. These thoughts formed an epistemological foundation that influenced the structure, content, and methodology of learning throughout various periods of Islamic history [4].

The Umayyad Dynasty (661-750 AD) and the Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258 AD) represent two formative periods in the history of Islamic education that exhibit significantly different curricular characteristics [5]. The Umayyad era was marked by the consolidation of political power and territorial expansion which influenced the orientation of education towards religious legitimacy and loyalty to the Caliphate [6]. In contrast, the Abbasid era witnessed a fundamental transformation with the establishment of structured educational institutions and the development of a more comprehensive curriculum [7].

Research on the transformation of Islamic education curricula between these two dynasties is important for several reasons. First, this transitional period marked a paradigmatic shift from an informal to a formal, institutionalized education system [3]. Second, this transformation reflects how external factors such as contact with Greek, Persian, and Indian civilizations influenced the development of the curriculum [8]. Third, this historical understanding can provide valuable insights for navigating the challenges of Islamic education reform in today's era of globalization [4].

Formulation of the problem

This study formulates the following research questions:

1. How did the institutional structure of Islamic education transform from the Umayyad Dynasty to the Abbasid Dynasty?
2. How did the material and content of the Islamic education curriculum change between the two periods?
3. How did the learning methodology in Islamic education evolve from the Umayyad era to the Abbasid era?
4. What factors drive the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum?

Research purposes

This research aims to: (1) analyze the transformation of the institutional structure of Islamic education from the Umayyad Dynasty to the Abbasid Dynasty; (2) identify changes in the material and content of the Islamic education curriculum; (3) examine the evolution of learning methodology; and (4) explore the factors driving this transformation.

This research offers several original contributions that distinguish it from previous studies:

First, This study develops an integrated three-dimensional analytical framework (structure, material, and methodology) to examine the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum. Previous studies have tended to analyze these dimensions separately, failing to capture the complex interrelationships between structural, content, and pedagogical changes. This integrative approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the dynamics of curriculum transformation.

Second, This study identifies and articulates the "Abbasid Curriculum Transformation Model" as a historical paradigm that demonstrates how Islamic civilization successfully integrated knowledge from various external sources (Greek, Persian, and Indian) into the Islamic curriculum framework without sacrificing fundamental religious identity and values. These findings have direct practical implications for contemporary discourse on Islamic education reform amidst the challenges of globalization.

Third, This study conducts a comprehensive synthesis between the latest academic literature (2019-2025) with the reconstruction of classical sources, resulting in a richer and more actualized historiographical narrative compared to previous studies which tend to be descriptive-fragmentary or limited to the analysis of only one period.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of the historiography of Islamic education by providing a new conceptual framework for understanding curriculum transformation. Practically, the findings can serve as a reference for educational policymakers in formulating curriculum reforms rooted in Islamic intellectual traditions while addressing contemporary challenges.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a historical-comparative research design. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives of analyzing the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum from a historical perspective and comparing curriculum characteristics between two different periods of the caliphate [9].

The historical analysis method allows for the systematic reconstruction of past events based on available evidence, while the comparative approach facilitates the identification of continuities and discontinuities between the Umayyad and Abbasid period [10]. The combination of these two approaches provides a robust methodological framework for answering the research questions.

Data source

Primary Sources

Primary sources include historical documents from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, including:

1. Chronicles of Islamic history such as *al-Tabari's Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*
2. Classic works on education such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* Al-Ghazali's work
3. Manuscripts relating to educational practices from both periods

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources include:

1. Scopus indexed scientific journal articles discussing Islamic education in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras
2. Academic books on the history of Islamic education
3. Encyclopedia and standard reference on Islamic civilization

Inclusion criteria for secondary sources include: (1) published in indexed journals or leading academic publishers; (2) discussing aspects of Islamic education in the Umayyad and/or Abbasid periods; (3) written in English, Arabic, or Indonesian.

Data collection technique

Data collection is done through:

1. Systematic literature study: Search academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar) using relevant keywords
2. Document analysis: Critical examination of primary and secondary sources
3. Source triangulation: Verify information through multiple source comparisons

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed Berg's modified historical analysis procedure and included the following steps:

1. External Criticism (Authenticity)
Evaluate the authenticity of the sources used, including verification of authorship, date, and provenance of documents.
2. Internal Criticism (Credibility)

- An assessment of the reliability and accuracy of the information contained in a source, taking into account potential biases and the context in which the document was produced.
3. Historical Synthesis
Integration of evidence from multiple sources to reconstruct a coherent narrative about curriculum transformation.
4. Comparative Analysis
A systematic comparison between the characteristics of Islamic education curriculum in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras based on three dimensions: structure, material, and methodology [10].

Research validity was ensured through source triangulation, peer debriefing, and thick description. Reliability was achieved through systematic documentation of research procedures and an audit trail that enabled study replicability.

RESULTS

Transformation of the Institutional Structure of Islamic Education Educational Structure in the Umayyad Era

Historical analysis shows that the institutional structure of Islamic education during the Umayyad era was informal and decentralized. Judd identified that the mosque (masājid) served as the main center of educational activities, where *halaqah* (study circles) organized by prominent scholars. This system reflects continuity with early Islamic educational practices rooted in the prophetic tradition.[5]

Kuttāb (elementary school) was the first formal educational institution to develop in the Umayyad era[11]These institutions focus on teaching the basics of reading, writing, and memorizing the Qur'an. However, kuttabs do not have a standardized curriculum structure, and learning content varies depending on the competence of individual teachers.

Robinson notes that advanced education in the Umayyad era depended on a personal relationship between teacher (shaykh) and student (*tālib*). There were no formal institutions for higher education; instead, seekers of knowledge traveled (*rihlah*) to various cities to learn from leading scholars in specific fields [12].

Judd shows that the ulama of the Umayyad era had an ambiguous relationship with political power. Some ulama functioned as qadi and advisors to the caliph, while others maintained independence from the power structure. This dynamic influenced the educational orientation, which tended to be conservative and focused on preserving tradition.[5][13]

Educational Structure in the Abbasid Era

Significant structural transformations occurred during the Abbasid era with a more systematic institutionalization of education. AbdulAziz Algeriani and Mohadi identified Bayt al-*Ḥikmah* as a paradigmatic educational institution that represents a new approach to the organization of knowledge. Founded during the reign of Caliph Al-Ma'mun (813-833 AD), Bayt al-Hikmah functions as a translation center, library, and academy that integrates various disciplines [7].

The development of the madrasah as a structured higher education institution was a significant innovation of the Abbasid era [14]. Different from halaqah Informally, madrasas have a more organized curriculum, a permanent teaching faculty, and a funding system through waqf (endowment). This institutionalization allows for a more systematic continuity and reproduction of knowledge.

Amezian emphasizes the crucial role of the waqf system in supporting the Abbasid educational infrastructure. The waqf provided a sustainable source of funding for madrasas, libraries, and

teaching hospitals, freeing these institutions from direct dependence on political patronage. This financial autonomy contributed to the development of a vibrant intellectual tradition [15].

Bennison notes that the Abbasid educational structure reflected the empire's cosmopolitanism, integrating diverse intellectual traditions. The presence of scholars from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds in Abbasid educational centers demonstrated a structural inclusiveness that contrasted with the relative homogeneity of the Umayyad era [8].

Comparative Analysis of Institutional Structure

A comparison of the institutional structures of education between the Umayyad and Abbasid eras demonstrates the evolution from a decentralized-informal system to a centralized-formal system. Table 1 summarizes the key differences:

Table 1. Comparison of Institutional Structures of Islamic Education		
Aspect	Umayyad Era	Abbasid Era
Main Center	Mosque, Kuttāb	Madrasah, Bayt al-Hikmah
Level of Formalization	Low	Tall
Funding	Ad hoc, patronage	Systematic, waqf
Curriculum	Not standardized	Structured
Range	Local	Imperial

This structural transformation can be understood within the context of broader socio-political changes. The Abbasid era witnessed administrative consolidation that required an educated bureaucracy, encouraging the formalization of education to meet the needs of the state [14].

Transformation of Curriculum Material and Content Umayyad Era Curriculum

The Islamic education curriculum during the Umayyad era was dominated by religious studies, with a central focus on the Qur'an and Hadith. Donner shows that the "Qur'anization" of public discourse during the Umayyad era influenced the prioritization of Qur'anic studies in education. The Qur'an was studied not only as a religious text but also as a source of political and legal legitimacy [16].

Robinson identifies the main components of the Umayyad curriculum:

- a. Qirā'ah (reading the Qur'an): Mastery of tajweed and qira'at
- b. hifz (Quran memorization): Memorizing all or part of the Qur'an
- c. Book (writing): Arabic calligraphy and writing of religious texts
- d. hadist: Study of prophetic traditions and isnād (chain of transmission)
- e. Fiqh: Basic Islamic Jurisprudence [12].

Khoury notes that in some regions, particularly Al-Andalus, the Umayyad curriculum was expanded to include general education elements such as basic arithmetic and Arabic poetry. However, this expansion was sporadic and did not represent a centralized curriculum policy [11].

Judd shows that the orientation of the Umayyad curriculum was influenced by the dynasty's need for political legitimacy. The emphasis on religious studies served to strengthen the caliph's religious authority and emphasize the faithful's loyalty to the existing power structure [5].

Abbasid Era Curriculum

The Abbasid era witnessed a dramatic diversification of the Islamic education curriculum. AbdulAziz Algeriani and Mohadi

(2019) identified that the translation movement (*ḥarakat al-tarjamah*) brought the corpus of Greek, Persian, and Indian knowledge into the Islamic intellectual tradition. Translations of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Galen, and others broadened the epistemological horizons of Islamic education [17][18].

Based on Bernards and El-Hibri's analysis, the Abbasid curriculum can be categorized into several areas:

- Religious Sciences ('*Ulûm al-Naqliyyah*): Tafsir (Quranic exegesis), Hadith and 'Ulûm al-hadist, Fiqh and ushûl al-fiqh, Kalâm (dialectical theology), and Sufism.
- Rational Sciences ('*Ulûm al-'Aqliyyah*): Philosophy (philosophy), Mâtîq (logic), *Riyadiyyât* (mathematics), Falak (astronomy), *Tibb* (medicine), *kimiya* (chemistry/alchemy) [17], [19].

In his study of the cultural impact of scholars in the Emirate of Andalusia, Alotaibi demonstrates that the comprehensive Abbasid curriculum had a far-reaching influence beyond the geographic boundaries of the Caliphate. The transfer of knowledge from the Islamic world to medieval Europe was largely mediated by the curriculum developed during the Abbasid era [20].

Idriz explained that curriculum diversification was accompanied by academic specialization. The *ijâzah* system allowed scholars to obtain certification in specific fields, creating professional differentiation within the Islamic intellectual community [21].

Comparative Analysis of Curriculum Content

The transformation of curriculum content from the Umayyad to the Abbasid era reflects an epistemological shift from religious exclusivism to intellectual inclusivism. Baiza characterizes this shift as a transition from a "monocultural" to a "multicultural" curriculum that integrates the intellectual heritage of various civilizations [3].

Table 2.
Comparison of Islamic Education Curriculum Content

Dimensions	Umayyad Era	Abbasid Era
Main Focus	Religious Science	Religious Science + Rational
Source of Knowledge	Al-Quran, Hadith	Al-Qur'an, Hadith, Greek, Persian, Indian
Discipline Coverage	Limited	Comprehensive
Orientation	Preservative	Integrative-Innovative
Specialization	Minimum	Develop

Factors that encourage curriculum diversification include:

- Cultural contact: The Abbasid expansion brought Muslims into intensive contact with the intellectual traditions of Hellenism, Persia, and India
- Patronage of the Caliph: Abbasid caliphs such as Al-Ma'mun actively supported intellectual activities
- Administrative needs: Imperial bureaucracy required skilled personnel in various fields
- Internal dynamics: The development of kalam and theological debates encouraged the study of logic and philosophy [3].

Transformation of Learning Methodology

Umayyad Era Learning Methodology

Learning methodology during the Umayyad era was dominated by a didactic approach that emphasized oral transmission of knowledge and memorization. Giladi, in his study of individualism and conformity in medieval Islamic education, identified the following key characteristics of Umayyad methodology:

- Talqîn* (dictation): The teacher reads the text and the students listen and take notes
- Hifh* (rote): Strong emphasis on verbatim memorization of religious texts
- Tikrâr* (repetition): The practice of repeating material to strengthen memory
- Samî'* (listening): Transmission of knowledge through direct hearing from the teacher [22].

Osman and Mohadi note that these methods are rooted in pre-Islamic and early Islamic oral traditions, where text preservation through memorization was crucial before written codification became widespread. This approach was effective for the transmission of a relatively limited religious corpus but less conducive to the development of critical thinking and intellectual innovation [23].

Robinson shows that teacher-student interactions in the Umayyad era were hierarchical, with the teacher as the unquestioned authority. The concept *suhbah* (mentoring) emphasizes the student's obedience to the teacher as a prerequisite for the transmission of knowledge and *barakah* (spiritual blessings) [12].

Abbasid Era Learning Methodology

The Abbasid era witnessed the evolution of learning methodology towards a more interactive and analytical approach. AbdulAziz Algeriani and Mohadi identify methodological innovations that developed in the Bayt al-*ḥikmah* and similar institutions:

- Munâzharah direction (debate): A structured discussion to test and defend arguments
- Mudhâkarah* (collaborative discussion): Cooperative learning among undergraduates
- Ta'liq* (commentary): The practice of writing glosses and commentaries on classical texts
- Tajribah* (experiment): An empirical approach in natural sciences such as medicine and chemistry [7].

Baiza shows that the integration of Aristotelian logic (*mantiq*) into the Abbasid curriculum fundamentally influenced learning methodology. Mastery of logic became a prerequisite for advanced studies in theology (*kalam*) and philosophy, encouraging an analytical approach to knowledge [3].

Souad and Ramdane identify that Abbasid-era methodology reflected a "culture of learning" (*thaqāfat al-ta'allum*) that valued inquiry and innovation. Scholars not only transmitted received knowledge but were also expected to contribute to the development of knowledge through original research and writing [24].

Fauzi et al. in their analysis of innovations in Islamic education curriculum note that some Abbasid methodological principles—such as the emphasis on critical thinking and the integration of knowledge—have contemporary relevance for Islamic education reform [25].

Comparative Analysis of Learning Methodologies

A comparison of learning methodologies between the Umayyad and Abbasid eras demonstrates the evolution from a transmission paradigm to a transformation paradigm. Table 3 summarizes the key differences:

Table 3.
Comparison of Learning Methodologies

Aspect	Umayyad Era	Abbasid Era
Dominant Approach	Didactic	Interactive
Emphasis	Memorization	Critical analysis
Role of Students	Passive-receptive	Active-participatory
Main Method	Talqin, hifz	Munazdirection, tajribah
Orientation	Preservation	Innovation

This methodological transformation can be understood in the context of the epistemological expansion that accompanies curriculum diversification. The integration of the rational sciences requires learning methods that go beyond memorization to include demonstration, argumentation, and empirical verification [14].

Driving Factors of Transformation

Analysis of historical sources identifies several factors that drove the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum from the Umayyad to the Abbasid era:

Political Factors

The regime change from the Umayyads to the Abbasids in 750 CE brought a political reorientation that influenced educational policy. According to El-Hibri, the Abbasids sought legitimacy through patronage of intellectual activity, in contrast to the Umayyads, who relied more on military and tribal power. Investment in education and translation became soft power instruments to consolidate power [17].

Judd notes that the relocation of the center of the caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad brought Muslims into more intensive contact with Persian and Mesopotamian intellectual traditions, facilitating an exchange of knowledge that enriched the curriculum [5].

Socio-economic factors

The economic prosperity of the early Abbasid era provided resources for the development of educational infrastructure. Amezzian points out that economic surpluses enabled the establishment of educational institutions through endowments (waqf) and patronage. The urbanization that accompanied economic growth also created a demand for educated workers for administration, trade, and urban professions [15].

Cultural Factors

Bennison emphasizes the role of cultural contact in curriculum transformation. The assimilation of Hellenistic, Persian, and Indian intellectual traditions expanded the repertoire of knowledge available for integration into the curriculum. The "translation movement" became a primary mechanism for this cross-cultural knowledge transfer [8].

Internal-Intellectual Factors

Internal developments in Islamic thought also drove curriculum transformation. The emergence of theological schools (kalam) such as the Mu'tazilah created a need for the study of logic and philosophy to defend doctrinal positions. These debates stimulated the development of argumentative methodologies, which were later institutionalized in the curriculum [3].

The Abbasid Curriculum Transformation Model: A Historical Paradigm

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the three dimensions of transformation (structure, material, methodology) and its driving factors, this study identifies the "Abbasid Curriculum Transformation Model" as a historical paradigm that has distinctive characteristics:

1. **Integration without Assimilation** The Abbasid curriculum successfully integrated knowledge from various civilizations (Greek, Persian, and Indian) into an Islamic framework without sacrificing fundamental religious identity. This process was mediated by critical selection and creative adaptation.

2. **Progressive Institutionalization:** The structural transformation from informal to formal systems is carried out gradually, allowing continuity with previous traditions while introducing organizational innovations.
3. **Curricular Diversification:** The expansion of the curriculum from an exclusive religious focus to the inclusion of rational sciences reflects an adaptive response to the needs of a growing society.
4. **Methodological Innovation:** The development of interactive and analytical learning methods reflects a commitment to developing critical thinking capacity, not just the transmission of knowledge [17].

This model offers a relevant historical precedent for contemporary discourse on Islamic education reform in the era of globalization.

Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education

The findings of this study have significant implications for the discourse on contemporary Islamic education reform. As identified by Hashim and Jemali, Islamic education today faces the challenge of maintaining its religious identity while responding to the demands of modernization and globalization [1] [26].

Nawi et al. show that globalization has created pressure to reform the Islamic education curriculum to make it more relevant to contemporary challenges. The historical precedent of the Umayyad-Abbasid transformation suggests that the integration of "external" knowledge into the Islamic curriculum has its roots in the classical tradition, not simply a modern imposition [2] [27].

Romlah et al., in their study of madrasas in multicultural Indonesia, emphasize the importance of navigating the balance between tradition and modernity. The historical experience of the Abbasid era demonstrates that curriculum transformation can be achieved without sacrificing religious identity, as long as it is based on solid epistemological principles [28] [29].

Siregar et al. identify technology as a transformative factor in contemporary Islamic education, analogous to the role of translation and writing in the Abbasid era. The integration of technology can facilitate access to knowledge and innovative learning methods, just as Abbasid institutions facilitated access to the intellectual heritage of previous civilizations [30] [31].

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasties based on three main dimensions: institutional structure, curriculum materials, and learning methodology. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

First, the transformation of institutional structures was marked by the evolution of an informal education system centered on mosques and kuttābs in the Umayyad era towards a formal, institutionalized system with the establishment of madrasas and Bayt al-*ḥikmah* during the Abbasid era. This institutionalization was accompanied by the development of sustainable funding mechanisms through waqf and the formalization of certification through the ijāzah system.

Second, the curriculum material underwent significant diversification from an exclusive focus on religious studies (the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh) in the Umayyad era to a comprehensive curriculum integrating the rational sciences (philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine) in the Abbasid era. This diversification was made possible by the translation movement that brought the intellectual heritage of Greek, Persian, and Indian civilizations into the Islamic tradition.

Third, learning methodology transformed from a didactic approach based on memorization and oral transmission in the Umayyad era to interactive methods emphasizing debate, discussion, and experimentation in the Abbasid era. The integration of logic into the curriculum encouraged an analytical approach to knowledge.

Fourth, curriculum transformation is driven by a complex interaction of political (regime change, policy reorientation), socio-economic (prosperity, urbanization), cultural (contact with other civilizations), and internal-intellectual (development of Islamic thought) factors.

Fifth, this study identifies the “Abbasid Curriculum Transformation Model” as a historical paradigm that demonstrates the possibility of cross-civilizational knowledge integration without sacrificing religious identity—a finding with direct relevance for contemporary Islamic education reform.

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