

# The Relationship of Language, Education and Civilization

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the interrelationship between language, education, and civilization from an Islamic perspective, drawing on the thought of Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, and Ibn Khaldun. Despite the significance of these three elements in shaping human development, their interconnection as an integrated framework within Islamic intellectual tradition remains underexplored in existing scholarship. Using a library research design and a thematic and comparative philosophical analysis of classical and contemporary Islamic sources, this study identifies three key patterns: (1) language functions as a divine gift and epistemological vehicle for transmitting knowledge across generations; (2) education conceptualized through *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib* transforms linguistic and cognitive capacity into moral and spiritual formation; and (3) civilization emerges as the cumulative expression of sustained educational traditions, as illustrated by Ibn Khaldun's concept of *'umran*. The analysis reveals a mutually reinforcing triad in which each element enables and sustains the others. The paper concludes that this Islamic integrative framework offers a normatively rich and practically relevant alternative to reductive models of education, with particular implications for curriculum design and civilizational renewal in contemporary Muslim-majority contexts.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language, education, and civilization are three interconnected elements that have been essential to the development of human society throughout history. The Islamic viewpoint holds that language is a divine gift that, in addition to being a means of communication, enables people to learn, express themselves, and establish social order. The Qur'an highlights the importance of language through the concept of *al-bayan* (expression), according to Surah Ar-Rahman (55:1-4), which shows that Allah taught people how to talk. Furthermore, the story of Prophet Adam in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:31) demonstrates the close relationship between language, knowledge, and human civilization by showing that teaching names was one of the earliest forms of knowledge given to humanity (Nasr, 2015). Islamic teachings also place a strong emphasis on the importance of knowledge and education. The first revelation that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ received was the order *Iqra'* (Read), which emphasizes that education and intellectual inquiry are important cornerstones of human progress. In addition to teaching knowledge, Islamic education fosters the growth of moral values, spiritual awareness, and intellectual prowess. According to Al-Ghazali, the ultimate purpose of education is to produce morally upright and competent individuals who can fulfill their responsibilities to God and society (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Therefore, education is a transformative process that shapes individuals and develops society. Ibn Khaldun went on to emphasize the connection between education and civilization, arguing that the quality of a civilization's intellectual and educational traditions directly affects its capacity to progress or regress. In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun explained that knowledge can only expand by effective generational transmission and systematic learning processes (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). According to this viewpoint, civilization is essentially based on the growth of knowledge supported by language and education rather than being exclusively the product of political or economic power.

Despite substantial scholarship on each domain individually, a critical gap persists: existing studies on Islamic educational philosophy (e.g., studies focused on Al-Ghazali's pedagogy or Al-Attas's Islamization of knowledge), Islamic linguistics, and Islamic civilization theory have largely developed along separate disciplinary tracks, without systematically articulating how the three constitute a unified intellectual architecture. Studies on language in Islamic thought tend to focus on Qur'anic linguistics or translation theory; studies on Islamic education tend to center on curriculum and moral formation; and studies on Islamic civilization tend to address historical or political dimensions. No prior study has constructed an integrated conceptual framework that positions language as the epistemological foundation, education as the transformative mechanism, and civilization as the telos a triadic model grounded in classical Islamic sources and tested against contemporary educational challenges. This paper addresses that gap by offering precisely such a framework, thereby contributing a novel theoretical synthesis to the field of Islamic philosophy of education. In order to fill this gap, the current study looks at how language, education, and culture are related from an Islamic perspective. The research examines how education promotes moral and intellectual development, how language serves as a means of knowledge transmission, and how civilization results from the interplay of these processes, drawing on both ancient and modern studies. By offering an integrated conceptual framework that clarifies the dynamic link between language, education, and civilization within Islamic thinking, the study adds to the body of current material. This framework views education as the means of human development, language as the basis of knowledge transfer, and civilization as the cumulative result of moral and intellectual progress rather than regarding these ideas as distinct fields. The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 provides an overview of this relationship.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a library research design to examine the interrelationship between language, education, and civilization from the perspective of Islamic thought. Library research relies on books, journal articles, and other scholarly documents as the primary sources of data. According to Zed (2014), library research relies on various forms of literature as the main source of data rather than direct field observations. This approach is appropriate for examining concepts, ideas, and intellectual traditions through systematic analysis of written sources (Zed, 2014). The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary sources, comprising a total of twenty-three (23) selected works. Primary sources included the foundational works of prominent classical Muslim scholars specifically Al-Farabi's *Kitab al-Huruf*, Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas's *The Concept of Education in Islam*, and Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* whose ideas have significantly influenced Islamic intellectual traditions regarding language, education, and civilization. Secondary sources were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books published between 1978 and 2025, addressing Islamic educational philosophy, language theory, and civilizational thought in both classical and contemporary contexts. Sources were selected based on four inclusion criteria: (1) direct relevance to at least one of the three core concepts (language, education, civilization); (2) grounding in Islamic intellectual tradition or explicit engagement with it; (3) academic credibility as evidenced by peer review or established scholarly reputation; and (4) contribution of analytical depth rather than mere descriptive summary. Sources that addressed only tangential themes or that lacked adequate conceptual grounding were excluded. The collected data were analyzed through a multi-layered qualitative approach comprising thematic analysis, conceptual analysis, and comparative philosophical analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and categories across the selected sources regarding the roles of language, education, and civilization within Islamic thought (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Conceptual

analysis was used to examine the internal logic, definitional structure, and theoretical implications of key Islamic concepts such as tarbiyah, ta'lim, ta'dib, 'aql, and 'umran. Comparative philosophical analysis was applied to assess points of convergence and divergence between classical Islamic thinkers and contemporary educational philosophers, and to situate the Islamic framework within broader debates in the philosophy of education. The integration of these three analytical modes allowed the study to move beyond descriptive exposition toward interpretive synthesis and the construction of an original conceptual framework.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Results**

Based on the analysis of classical Islamic scholarly works and relevant contemporary literature, this study identifies three principal findings concerning the roles of language, education, and civilization within the Islamic intellectual tradition. The results are presented according to the three thematic categories that emerged from the content analysis.

#### **Language as the Foundation of Knowledge Transmission**

The analysis reveals that language occupies a foundational position in Islamic thought, functioning primarily as the medium through which knowledge is acquired, preserved, and transmitted across generations. Classical Islamic sources consistently position language as more than a communicative instrument; it is understood as a divine gift that enables human beings to engage with revelation and intellectual heritage. This is evidenced by the Qur'anic reference to al-bayan (Qur'an 55:4) and the narrative of Allah teaching Adam the names of all things (Qur'an 2:31), both of which associate language directly with knowledge acquisition and human distinction (Nasr, 2015). The analysis of classical Islamic scholars further demonstrates that language was regarded as indispensable for both religious and rational inquiry. Al-Farabi identified language as the instrument through which thought is organized and communicated within society, while Al-Ghazali emphasized its role in enabling individuals to interpret revelation and engage in intellectual inquiry (Al-Farabi, 1981; Al-Ghazali, 2011). Al-Attas additionally articulated that language carries the conceptual structures of a worldview, meaning that changes in language can fundamentally alter one's perception of knowledge, reality, and existence (Al-Attas, 1991). The historical evidence examined in this study further confirms that the role of Arabic as the language of Islamic scholarship was decisive in the transmission of knowledge during the classical period. The translation movement of the Abbasid era, which rendered Greek philosophical and scientific texts into Arabic, illustrates how a shared scholarly language enabled diverse intellectual traditions to be preserved and built upon. Without this linguistic medium, the circulation of knowledge across regions and generations would have been severely limited (Gutas, 1998). Contemporary scholarship reviewed in this study similarly affirms the strategic significance of language in educational and civilizational contexts. Sapri et al. (2022) found that Islamic education must integrate language, knowledge, and adab to ensure the continuity of Islamic values. Ghufroon et al. (2024) demonstrated that language learning in Islamic institutional settings shapes not only linguistic competence but also students' religious and cultural identity. Taken together, these findings indicate that language in Islamic thought serves as a primary vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and the preservation of civilizational values.

#### **Education as the Primary Mechanism of Human Development**

The results of this study indicate that education, as conceptualized in Islamic thought, encompasses far more than the transfer of information between teacher and learner. Classical Islamic scholarship consistently frames education as a holistic process directed toward the formation of morally upright, intellectually competent, and spiritually aware individuals. This holistic

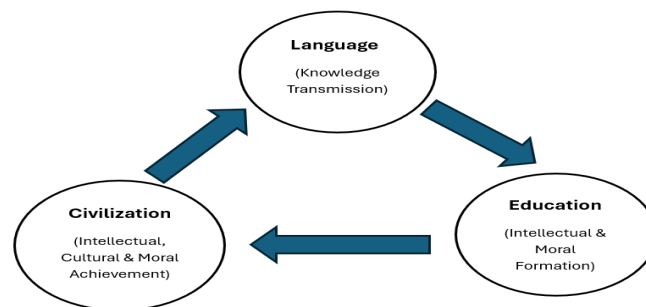
understanding is reflected in the three foundational Arabic concepts *tarbiyah* (nurturing and moral formation), *ta'lim* (transmission of knowledge), and *ta'dib* (cultivation of adab or proper conduct) each of which addresses a distinct yet interrelated dimension of human development (Al-Attas, 1991; Nasr, 2015). The analysis of Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy reveals that education is primarily a spiritual and ethical undertaking. Knowledge, in his view, is not pursued for worldly gain alone but as a means of purifying the soul and drawing closer to God. Teachers are therefore not merely conveyors of information but moral exemplars whose conduct and intention shape the character of their students (Al-Ghazali, 2011). This conception reflects a coherent pedagogical framework in which intellectual development and moral formation are inseparable. Ibn Khaldun's analysis in the *Muqaddimah* adds a socio-historical dimension to this finding. His examination of educational institutions across different civilizations demonstrates that the capacity of a society to sustain knowledge transmission through structured education is directly associated with its civilizational vitality. Societies that maintained robust educational traditions mosques, madrasas, scholarly networks were found to achieve greater intellectual and cultural advancement, while those that neglected such institutions experienced intellectual decline and eventual civilizational regression (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). Al-Attas' concept of *ta'dib* emerges from the analysis as a particularly significant contribution to Islamic educational thought. His critique of educational systems that prioritize technical and material achievement over ethical and spiritual formation indicates that the neglect of moral education constitutes a fundamental deficiency with far-reaching consequences for society. The findings suggest that education, to be authentically transformative, must integrate the development of knowledge with the cultivation of character and values (Al-Attas, 1991). Contemporary scholarly perspectives reviewed in this study reinforce these classical findings. Halstead (2004) and Ashraf (1985) both affirm that Islamic education is distinguishable by its commitment to holistic human development, combining intellectual, ethical, and spiritual formation. These perspectives confirm that the educational principles articulated by classical Islamic scholars retain their relevance for contemporary educational contexts, particularly in addressing challenges related to moral development and the integration of values in learning.

### **Civilization as the Collective Outcome of Language and Education**

The analysis of the selected sources reveals that civilization, within the Islamic intellectual framework, is understood not primarily as a product of political or economic power but as the cumulative outcome of sustained intellectual and educational traditions supported by a shared linguistic medium. This conceptualization contrasts with narrower definitions of civilization that emphasize material or technological achievement, and it reflects the holistic character of Islamic thought in which moral, intellectual, and social development are regarded as interconnected dimensions of civilizational progress. Ibn Khaldun's concept of *'umran* provides the most systematic theoretical articulation of this relationship found in the sources examined. His analysis demonstrates that civilizations flourish when they possess strong intellectual traditions, effective educational institutions, and social cohesion, and that they decline when these foundations deteriorate. Knowledge, in Ibn Khaldun's framework, is not merely an ornament of civilization but its foundational substance; without the continuous production and transmission of knowledge, no civilization can sustain itself across generations (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). The historical evidence of the Abbasid period, as documented in the sources reviewed, provides a concrete illustration of this theoretical relationship. The unprecedented intellectual flourishing of this era—encompassing philosophy, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and jurisprudence was supported by a network of educational institutions, libraries, and translation centers that enabled knowledge to accumulate, circulate, and be applied across diverse fields. The common scholarly language of Arabic played a decisive role in facilitating this process, enabling scholars from different linguistic backgrounds to

contribute to and benefit from a shared intellectual tradition (Gutas, 1998; Saliba, 2007). The contemporary sources reviewed in this study similarly affirm that sustainable civilization requires the integration of intellectual and moral development. Biesta (2020) argues that education must be oriented not only toward individual achievement but toward the cultivation of citizens who can contribute responsibly to shared social life. This perspective resonates with the Islamic emphasis on *adab* and ethical formation as preconditions for genuine civilizational advancement. Both classical and contemporary perspectives thus converge on the conclusion that the strength of a civilization is measured not merely by its material accomplishments but by the quality of its educational traditions and the moral character of its members.

These findings collectively indicate that language, education, and civilization operate as a mutually reinforcing triad within Islamic thought. Language enables the communication and preservation of knowledge; education transforms that knowledge into individual and collective capacity; and civilization represents the broader social and cultural expression of these accumulated capacities over time. Before presenting the visual summary of this relationship, it is important to explain the conceptual architecture the framework embodies. At the base of the framework lies Language (*Lughah*), which serves as the ontological and epistemological foundation: it is through divinely-gifted human language that revelation is received, knowledge is codified, and meaning is preserved across generations. From this foundation arises Education understood through the triadic Islamic concepts of *tarbiyah* (moral nurturing), *ta'lim* (knowledge transmission), and *ta'dib* (ethical refinement) which functions as the dynamic mechanism by which linguistic and cognitive resources are transformed into human virtue and social capacity. At the apex of the framework stands Civilization (*'Umran*), which, following Ibn Khaldun's theory, is not reducible to material or political achievement but represents the organic culmination of a community's linguistic vitality and educational depth. The directional flow of the framework is bidirectional: civilization, in sustaining its scholarly institutions and linguistic traditions, continuously regenerates the educational processes that produced it. The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 provides a visual summary of this integrated relationship.



**Figure 1.** Integrated Framework of Language, Education, and Civilization in Islamic Thought

## Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the integrated relationship between language, education, and civilization within Islamic intellectual tradition and offer several important insights for contemporary educational thought. Taken together, the results demonstrate that these three dimensions are not merely adjacent fields of inquiry but constitute a coherent framework in which each element sustains and is sustained by the others. This section discusses the significance of these findings in relation to existing scholarship and their implications for educational theory and practice.

### The Strategic Role of Language in Knowledge Preservation and Civilizational Continuity

The finding that language functions as a foundational medium for knowledge transmission in Islamic thought corresponds with and enriches broader contemporary scholarship on the relationship

between language, cognition, and social development. The social semiotic perspective articulated by Halliday (1978) and the sociocultural emphasis of Vygotsky (1978) both recognize language as an essential tool through which knowledge is constructed and shared within communities. The Islamic perspective adds a normative and spiritual dimension to this understanding, framing language not merely as a social instrument but as a divinely conferred capacity that carries responsibilities for its users. This finding has meaningful implications for contemporary Islamic education. If language is understood as a carrier of worldview and civilizational values, as Al-Attas (1991) and Ahmad (2019) maintain, then language education cannot be reduced to the development of communicative competence alone. The teaching of language particularly Arabic in the context of Islamic education must be accompanied by attention to the conceptual frameworks and epistemic orientations embedded within it. This insight suggests that language curricula in Islamic educational institutions should be designed to cultivate not only linguistic proficiency but also the capacity for critical engagement with the intellectual heritage carried by that language. Furthermore, the historical evidence of Arabic's role during the Abbasid period illustrates the civilizational consequences of a shared scholarly language. The translation movement and the institutional support it received enabled a remarkable synthesis of diverse intellectual traditions, demonstrating that language policy and educational investment are not merely pedagogical matters but factors with long-term civilizational significance (Gutas, 1998). This historical lesson remains pertinent in contemporary discussions about the role of language in education, particularly in multilingual societies where decisions about the language of instruction carry implications for cultural continuity and intellectual development.

### **Islamic Educational Philosophy and Contemporary Challenges in Human Development**

The finding that Islamic education is directed toward holistic human development integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation connects meaningfully with contemporary debates about the purposes of education in the twenty-first century. The observation made by Biesta (2020) that education must go beyond qualification and socialization to address questions of subjectification that is, the formation of responsible and responsive human beings resonates with the Islamic emphasis on *ta'dib* and the cultivation of *adab*. Both perspectives critique educational systems that privilege technical efficiency over the development of character and ethical judgment. This alignment between classical Islamic educational philosophy and contemporary critical educational thought is significant for several reasons. First, it suggests that the concerns raised by Al-Attas (1991) about the secularization and desacralization of knowledge are not merely theological objections but reflect a broader educational concern about the fragmentation of learning from meaning and purpose. Second, it indicates that Islamic educational thought has the conceptual resources to engage productively with contemporary challenges, including the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, the commodification of education, and the erosion of cultural identity in globalized learning environments. The findings also draw attention to the role of the teacher in Islamic educational thought. Al-Ghazali's portrayal of the teacher as a moral exemplar whose character and intention shape the formation of learners stands in productive tension with technocratic models of teaching that reduce the educator's role to the efficient delivery of content. In an era characterized by increasing reliance on digital platforms and automated learning systems, the Islamic insistence on the personal, relational, and ethical dimensions of teaching offers an important counterpoint and a reminder that education is fundamentally a human enterprise.

### **Rethinking Civilization Through the Lens of Language and Education**

The finding that civilization is understood in Islamic thought as the cumulative outcome of intellectual and educational traditions rather than primarily a function of political or military power offers a distinctive perspective that merits broader consideration in contemporary discourse on development and human flourishing. Ibn Khaldun's concept of *'umran* anticipates many of the

concerns raised by contemporary theorists who argue that sustainable development requires attention to cultural, intellectual, and moral dimensions in addition to material and economic factors. This civilizational perspective has practical implications for educational policy. If civilizational sustainability depends upon the quality of a society's educational traditions and the vitality of its knowledge institutions, then investment in education must be understood not merely as an economic strategy for enhancing human capital but as a civilizational responsibility. This framing challenges the dominant instrumentalist logic in contemporary educational policy, which tends to evaluate education primarily in terms of its contribution to economic productivity and labor market outcomes. The similarities identified in this study between Islamic and contemporary Western educational thinkers such as Dewey (1916) and Biesta (2020) suggest that the Islamic integrative framework is not culturally parochial but rather resonates with universal concerns about the relationship between education and social development. These convergences strengthen the case for incorporating Islamic educational thought into comparative and international educational discourse, where it can contribute distinctive insights while engaging critically with prevailing models. Taken together, the three themes discussed above demonstrate that the integrated framework of language, education, and civilization articulated in classical Islamic thought retains considerable intellectual vitality and practical relevance. Rather than representing a historical artifact, this framework offers a coherent and normatively rich alternative to reductive models of education and development that dominate contemporary policy discourse. It must be acknowledged, however, that the classical Islamic framework is not without its tensions and limitations as an analytical lens. Critics might argue that Al-Ghazali's hierarchical ordering of knowledge privileging religious sciences over instrumental ones risks producing educational systems that are ill-equipped to meet the demands of modern scientific and technological civilization. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun's civilizational model, grounded in the dynamics of Arab tribal society ('asabiyyah), may not translate straightforwardly to the pluralistic, post-colonial nation-states that constitute the contemporary Muslim world. Al-Attas's concept of Islamization of Knowledge, while intellectually powerful, has also been critiqued by scholars such as Wan Daud (1998) as being insufficiently attentive to the epistemological contributions of non-Islamic traditions. These are legitimate critiques that must be held in productive tension with the framework's strengths. Rather than dismissing them, this paper proposes that such tensions are themselves generative: they reveal the need for a critical and selective appropriation of classical Islamic thought rather than an uncritical revival.

One of the most significant contemporary challenges to the Islamic integrative framework and to educational philosophy more broadly is the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs) as agents of knowledge production, transmission, and even moral discourse. This development demands explicit engagement, not peripheral mention. From the perspective of the Islamic framework developed in this paper, AI poses a fundamental civilizational question: can a linguistic system without *ruh* (spirit), *niyyah* (intention), and *akhlak* (character) serve as a legitimate medium of knowledge transmission in the Islamic sense? Al-Attas's distinction between *'ilm* (knowledge grounded in right relationship with God and the cosmos) and mere information accumulation suggests that AI-generated content, however linguistically sophisticated, remains epistemologically deficient from an Islamic standpoint unless framed within a human educational context governed by moral purpose. Moreover, the reliance on AI in education risks accelerating precisely the fragmentation that this paper argues against separating language from meaning, knowledge from formation, and information from wisdom. This is not to argue that AI should be rejected wholesale; rather, the Islamic integrative framework offers a principled basis for determining the appropriate role of AI in educational contexts: as a tool subordinate to the moral and formative purposes of *ta'dib*, not as a replacement for the teacher-student relationship that Al-Ghazali identified as irreducibly personal and ethical. The framework developed in this paper also carries concrete

operational implications for contemporary curriculum design in Muslim-majority contexts. First, if language is the epistemological foundation of knowledge transmission, then Arabic language education in Islamic schools (madrasah) should be repositioned not merely as a religious ritual competency but as the cornerstone of the entire curriculum a gateway to the Islamic intellectual tradition and a medium for cross-generational civilizational continuity. Second, if education is understood holistically through tarbiyah, ta'lim, and ta'dib, then curriculum frameworks should explicitly integrate moral formation as a structured pedagogical objective, not a peripheral add-on. This aligns with the call by contemporary scholars such as Biesta (2020) for a world-centred education that restores the existential and ethical dimensions of learning. Third, if civilization is the telos of education, then assessment frameworks in Muslim-majority institutions should include civilizational indicators measures of students' capacity for ethical reasoning, civic engagement, and contributions to collective flourishing alongside academic performance metrics. These implications suggest that the Islamic integrative framework is not merely a philosophical position but a practically actionable curricular philosophy.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper explains that language, education, and civilization, from an Islamic perspective, are closely interrelated and form the primary foundation for human development and societal progress. Language serves as a means of conveying and preserving knowledge, while education through the concepts of tarbiyah, ta'lim, and ta'dib not only transfers knowledge but also shapes human character, morality, and spirituality. Furthermore, civilization is the result of a strong educational tradition and a thriving culture of scholarship. According to Islamic thought, particularly that of Ibn Khaldun, the progress of civilization depends heavily on the quality of a society's education and intellectual traditions. In the modern era, fraught with the challenges of globalization and technology, the integration of intellectual development and moral cultivation remains relevant as the foundation for building a sustainable civilization. This study has limitations because it relies solely on a literature review, so its findings remain conceptual and have not yet been empirically tested. Furthermore, this study focuses only on the thought of Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, and Ibn Khaldun, and thus does not yet encompass the perspectives of other Islamic thinkers such as Ibn Rusd and Ibn Sina, including the Shi'a intellectual tradition. Moving forward, this research can be expanded through empirical studies in Islamic educational institutions, curriculum policy analyses, and an examination of the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on Islamic epistemology. Furthermore, comparative studies with non-Western educational philosophies such as Confucianism and Ubuntu are also crucial for enriching the discourse on alternative education at the global level.

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