

Overview Social-Political Context, Causes of Decline, and Islamic Education during the Medieval Period, 1258–Mid-18th Century

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ABSTRACT

The role of language editing in students' language comprehension is becoming increasingly important. Reading and writing are the primary activities in language learning, and with proper language editing, students can enhance their understanding of the language and develop their language skills. This study aims to enhance students' language comprehension by examining the role and implications of language editing. This study uses qualitative literature research, with data sources such as books and journal articles, employing a documentary approach, and is analyzed using descriptive or analytical techniques. The results of this study show that language editing enhances students' language comprehension by improving grammar, expanding vocabulary, clarifying the relationship between vocabulary and meaning, and improving students' communication.

Keywords:

*Islamic Education
Decline, Educational
Transformation, Ijtihad*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap dinamika kemunduran pendidikan Islam pada periode pertengahan, yaitu sejak kejatuhan Baghdad tahun 1258 hingga pertengahan abad ke-18. Dalam kajian ini, penulis menelaah faktor-faktor sosial, politik, dan keilmuan yang menyebabkan melemahnya peradaban Islam, serta bagaimana transformasi pendidikan berlangsung dalam konteks tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi pustaka dengan pendekatan historis-kritis. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa stagnasi pendidikan Islam disebabkan oleh dominasi pemikiran sufistik yang mengesampingkan rasionalitas, ditutupnya pintu ijtihad, dan lemahnya dukungan kekuasaan terhadap ilmu pengetahuan. Meskipun mengalami kemunduran secara institusional, pendidikan Islam tetap bertahan melalui lembaga-lembaga tradisional seperti pesantren dan madrasah, terutama di kawasan perifer seperti Nusantara. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kemunduran pendidikan Islam bukanlah kehancuran total, melainkan transformasi orientasi dan fungsi pendidikan dalam menghadapi tantangan zaman.

Kata Kunci:

*Kemunduran Pendidikan
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INTRODUCTION

From the 13th century to the mid-18th century, the Islamic world entered a period marked by challenges and profound changes. This period marked a critical point in Islamic civilization, where the previous dominance in political power, culture, and intellectual advancement began to show significant signs of decline. The impact was widespread, including in the education sector, which during the golden age of Islam had been the center of global scientific advancement. (Nasution, 1985). The beginning of this period was marked by the fall of Baghdad to the Mongol army in 1258. This event not only ended the political power of the Abbasid Dynasty but also destroyed centers of learning and large libraries such as Baitul Hikmah, which for centuries had been a symbol of the advancement of Islamic science (Hitti, 1996). Since then, various regions of the Islamic world have experienced drastic socio-political changes, including dynastic instability, inter-regional conflicts, and weak support for scientific activities and formal education (Rahman, 2024). In addition to internal factors, the Islamic world also faced external pressures, such as increasing Western expansion, colonization, and foreign cultural intervention. All of this contributed to a shift in values within Islamic society, where the spirit of scholarship that had previously been upheld began to be replaced by political interests and the survival of power (Hodgson, 1974). The ruling dynasties in various regions focused more on military strength and governmental stability than on supporting the development of education.

This situation has prevented the Islamic education system from developing as it did during its golden age. Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and other educational institutions have stagnated or even declined. Nevertheless, in some regions, efforts continue to preserve the Islamic intellectual tradition, such as in the Middle East and the Indonesian archipelago, which have remained strongholds of Islamic knowledge into the modern era (Azra, 2013; Dwifatma, 2005). During the decline and middle periods of Islamic civilization—particularly from the fall of Baghdad in 1258 until the dawn of the modern Islamic world—the Islamic education system underwent a complex transformation. These changes encompassed not only the physical and structural aspects of educational institutions, but also conceptual dimensions such as scientific paradigms, curriculum structure, teaching methods, and even the very purpose of education itself. Educational institutions such as madrasahs, zawiyahs, and Islamic boarding schools began to adapt to the changing socio-political realities arising from conflict, colonization, and the decline of Islamic dynasties across various regions. In these unstable conditions, Muslims faced significant challenges in maintaining the continuity of the intellectual heritage that had been built since the golden age of Islam. Many scientists and scholars at that time continued to strive to preserve the

classical Islamic scientific tradition, especially in fields such as fiqh, tafsir, hadith, and tasawuf, even though the scope and innovation of science had narrowed (Rahman, 2024).

This situation reflects efforts to survive in the face of pressures of the times, both internal factors such as political stagnation and leadership crises, and external factors such as Mongol attacks, Western imperialism, and rapid social change (Hodgson, 1974). Historical research and studies of this period allow us to see more clearly the complex dynamics that shaped Islamic education. Not only as a reaction to decline, but also as an adaptive strategy in maintaining the identity, values, and structure of education that had become an essential part of Islamic civilization. Understanding this context provides important insights into how the Islamic education system survived and even became the foundation for intellectual revival in subsequent periods, including its contributions to the global world in science, philosophy, and spirituality (Azra, 2013; Dwifatma, 2005).

Based on this background, the researcher was motivated to conduct research on Islamic Education During the Decline/Middle Period (1258-Mid-18th Century). In Q.S. Al-Mujādilah (58) verse 11. This verse shows that knowledge is the central pillar of glory and the continuity of civilization. Amidst political and social decline in the Middle Ages, education became a force for preserving the intellectual heritage of Muslims. As for Q.S. Surah Az-Zumar (39) verse 9, it reads:

... قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

Meaning:

"Say: 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only those of understanding will take heed." (Agama, 2012).

This verse underscores the importance of knowledgeable people in preserving Islamic values, especially in times when knowledge stagnates. Education is not only a light in the darkness but also the difference between progress and regression for the people. Islamic education is an integral part of Islamic civilization, which has been a driving force for the development of science since its inception. However, between 1258, when Baghdad fell to the Mongols, and the mid-18th century, Islamic education experienced a period of decline. This period was marked by significant changes in the structure and direction of education, including a shift in scientific paradigms, stagnation in scientific creativity, and the dominance of more conservative religious ideas.

Initially, Islamic education was known to be open to various fields of knowledge, both religious and rational. Harun Nasution noted that during the classical period, theology, philosophy, astronomy, and medicine developed alongside Sharia sciences. However, during the period of decline, the orientation of education narrowed to formal religious sciences such as fiqh and tafsir, while rational sciences were abandoned as irrelevant to "pure" Islamic teachings (Nasution, 1985). Fazlur Rahman explains that the leading causes of stagnation in Islamic education are the dominance of *taqlid* (imitation) and the cessation of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). In his work *Islam and Modernity*, Rahman emphasizes that the education system has lost its critical thinking and creativity because it places more emphasis on preserving dogma (Rahman, 2024). This situation

is exacerbated by the lack of curriculum reform and the weakening role of educational institutions in shaping social change. Madrasahs, as the leading institutions of Islamic education, also changed function. George Makdisi states that during their golden age, madrasahs became intellectual centers that produced great scholars. However, during their decline, madrasahs became institutions that preserved traditions more oriented toward texts and law (Daniel & Makdisi, 1984). Marshall Hodgson adds that although these educational institutions continued to exist institutionally, the spirit of innovation that once animated them began to fade (Hodgson, 1974).

However, Azyumardi Azra also criticized the view that Islamic education was completely stagnant. In his research on the network of scholars in the archipelago and the Middle East, Azra showed that Islamic education remained active through the pesantren system and transnational networks of scholars. At a time when the caliphate was disintegrating, Islamic education survived through non-formal institutions and the social structure of the ulama. A contemporary study by Yusuf Hadi also introduces the term “resilient education” in understanding this period of decline. According to him, Islamic education has shown resilience in maintaining the moral and spiritual values of the Muslim community despite political instability. In this context, education does not become a tool for structural change, but rather a space for protecting Islamic values and identity. These views show that Islamic education during the period of decline did not completely collapse, but instead transformed orientation. Education continued, although no longer in the context of scientific innovation, but instead in the form of preserving tradition. Therefore, this period still offers essential lessons for Islamic education today: the importance of balancing preservation and renewal.

Transformation of the Goals of Islamic Education. In the early days of Islamic glory, education aimed to integrate religious knowledge and rational knowledge. However, during the period of decline, the goal of education was more oriented towards preserving dogma and religious social norms. According to Syed Naquib al-Attas, the decline of Islamic civilization was also triggered by a misunderstanding of the meaning of knowledge and education, whereby knowledge was no longer positioned as a means of achieving wisdom, but merely as memorization and reproduction of religious texts (Al-Attas, 2023). **Rigid and Non-Adaptive Curriculum Structure.** a stagnant curriculum characterized Islamic education at this time. The previously rapidly developing fields of theology, philosophy, and science began to be abandoned. The emphasis solely on classical texts or *turats* led to stagnation. This is confirmed by Rachmad Zubaidi, who notes that from the 17th to the 18th centuries, madrasahs did not significantly update their curricula, rendering them unable to address contemporary issues. **The Dominant Role of Ulama and the Loss of Interdisciplinary Tradition,** Scholars became central figures in education, but in many cases, they encouraged an exclusive approach to knowledge. The tradition of dialogue between religion and philosophy that flourished from the 8th to the 11th centuries has almost disappeared today. Ibn Khaldun, in *his Muqaddimah*, referred to this phenomenon as the cause of the weak dynamics of science, because learning was too limited to formal and textual aspects, without considering the social and political context (bin Khaldun & Abdurrahman, 2001).

Disconnection from the Greek Scientific Tradition and Islamic Science. Before the decline, works such as those by Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, and Al-Kindi served as the primary sources for the development of science. However, after 1258, many vital manuscripts were lost due to the Mongol invasion and dynastic conflicts. In addition, there was resistance to the influence of Greek philosophy, which was considered contrary to orthodox Islamic doctrine. This resulted in a break in the chain of knowledge

transmission (Dodge & Nakosteen, 1964). Local Revitalization: Islamic Boarding Schools and Mosques. Although the center of the Islamic world declined, local educational institutions emerged and flourished in peripheral regions such as the Indonesian archipelago. The pesantren and surau systems in Indonesia and Malaysia became a form of resistance against the stagnation at the center, as well as a forum for the formation of local scholars with high cultural resilience. Azra refers to this as a form of *peripheral Islamic educational resilience* (Azra & Hasan, 2002). The Contribution of the Islamic World to the Western World. Although often considered stagnant, some ideas and legacies of Islamic education continue to influence the development of education in Europe. Studies by Montgomery Watt show that Europe experienced an intellectual revival after studying the works of Muslim scientists such as Al-Ghazali, Al-Razi, and Ibn Rushd, which were translated into Latin during the Middle Ages (Watt, 2019). This shows that Islamic education continues to have a global impact despite experiencing internal crises.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative research with a library research model. Library research is used to thoroughly examine written sources relevant to the theme of Islamic education during the decline of Islamic history. The approach is historical, aiming to reconstruct critical past events, particularly social, political, and intellectual developments that influenced the rise and decline of Islamic education from 1258 AD to the mid-18th century AD. This approach is relevant because the research topic examines the long historical dynamics of Muslims, from the golden age to a period of intellectual and institutional stagnation. The data sources in this research consist of: Primary sources, namely key literature written by or discussing the thoughts of figures such as Ibn Khaldun, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, and other classical scholars who discussed the dynamics of Islamic education at that time. Secondary sources, namely books on the history of Islamic education and contemporary scientific articles that examine the decline of Islam and changes in the Islamic education system. Some of these are the works of Fazlurrahman, M.M. Syarif, Harun Nasution, and Abudin Nata (Nata, 2014).

Data collection techniques were carried out through document analysis, specifically by reviewing relevant literature and historical documents. The literature included history books, scientific journal articles, Islamic encyclopedias, and classical sources. Data analysis techniques use content analysis, which involves examining documents to identify key patterns in the decline of Islamic education. This technique consists of identifying, categorizing, and interpreting the historical, social, and intellectual content that shaped the transformation of Islamic education in the Middle Ages. For example, it traces how internal factors, such as the spread of traditional thinking and the closure of *ijtihad*, as well as external factors, such as the Mongol invasion and the Crusades, influenced the Islamic education system (Asriadi Nursafar, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Decline and Islamic Education

Throughout the history of Islamic thought, two major schools have emerged, competing to shape the direction of Islamic education. On the one hand, there is the traditional style of education derived from revelation, which later transformed into Sufi education that emphasizes spiritual and

moral aspects. On the other hand, there is also a rational school of thought that emphasizes the importance of reason in the educational process (Amin, 2024). At their peak, these two styles complemented each other and colored Islamic civilization. However, as rational thinking was adopted by Western civilization and no longer the focus of the Islamic world, Sufism became dominant, emphasizing the spiritual dimension and tending to neglect worldly aspects. It was at this point that the decline of Islamic education and culture began to appear. The decline of Islamic civilization occurred between 1250 AD and 1500 AD, with significant impacts mainly on education. Many believe that one of the leading causes of this decline was the strengthening of traditional thinking, which led to limitations in freedom of thought, the closing of the door to *ijtihad*, and the dogmatization of the fatwas of past scholars (Nata, 2014).

While Muslims experienced a decline, Western civilization showed rapid development in science and philosophy. In Europe, a rational approach grounded in philosophy underpinned progress, in contrast to the Islamic world, which remained mired in traditional thinking. Figures such as Ibn Rushd played an essential role in promoting the European Renaissance through their intellectual contributions. As a result, the center of education shifted from the Islamic world to the Western world, a significant shift that began with the fall of Baghdad in the East and Cordoba in the West—two cities that had previously been centers of Islamic education. Syarif explains several factors that led to the decline of Islamic thought, namely:

1. The rise of philosophical schools of thought in Islam, both Sufi-oriented, such as that brought by Al-Ghazali in the East, and rational philosophy, such as that of Ibn Rushd in the West, which then led to a tendency towards Sufism or materialism.
2. Muslim leaders such as caliphs, sultans, and amirs no longer paid attention to the development of science and culture.
3. Rebellions and invasions from outside hindered the intellectual and cultural progress of Islam (Zuhairini dkk, 1984).

The causes of the intellectual decline of Muslims are rooted in the education system that has been in place since the beginning of Islamic history. There are two competing schools of thought: the traditional school, based on revelation and developed into Sufi education, and the rational school, based on common sense and giving rise to an empirical-material approach to education.

The tendency toward rational thinking developed thanks to the influence of Ikhwanussafa, who believed that knowledge could be obtained through three channels: the five senses, listening to information, and through writings understood through language. However, a school of thought emerged that opposed this rationalism, particularly during the Abbasid period. The Sufi school offered a spiritual approach to achieving the truth through purification of the heart and soul. Fazlurrahman highlighted that from the 4th century AH/10th century AD to the 5th century AH/11th century AD, there was a stagnation of intellectual thought due to the closure of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) (Rahman, 2024). This contributed to the stagnation of legal and theological knowledge due to the exclusivity of religious thought from secular rationality. As a result, religious knowledge did not keep pace with the demands of the times, and the intellectual activities of Muslim society nearly came to a halt. The destruction of educational centers such as Baghdad and Granada exacerbated this situation.

Both cities were destroyed, including educational institutions and scientific books. This had a significant impact on Islamic education, particularly in intellectual and material aspects, although the spiritual side remained intact. From this, it can be concluded that the leading causes of educational decline stem from internal and external factors. Internally, stagnation in intellectual education has led to an imbalance between the sciences of reason and tradition, as well as a lack of support from authorities for educational institutions. Externally, attacks by the Tartars destroyed the centers of Islamic learning, making their recovery very difficult. Ibn Khaldun also emphasized that internal factors were more dominant in causing the collapse of civilization. The luxurious lifestyles of the authorities and society had the potential to cause moral decadence and corrupt practices, which ultimately destroyed the structure of civilization itself (Syarif, 1963).

2. Social and Political Background of the Decline of Islamic Education

When the Abbasid Dynasty replaced the Umayyad Dynasty in Islamic rule, there were significant changes in Islamic civilization, including in Islamic education. During the early period of Abbasid rule (132 AH/750 AD to 232 AH/847 AD), Islamic education reached its peak. This was marked by the establishment of various educational institutions spread from big cities to remote villages. However, entering the second phase of Abbasid rule (847–942 AD), there were signs of intellectual decline. This decline culminated in the fifth phase, namely, the collapse of the Abbasid Dynasty in 1258 AD. This development is in line with the theory of historical cycles proposed by Ibn Khaldun, namely that the phases of a civilization consist of a pioneering generation, a successor generation, a generation of enjoyers, and a destructive generation. Several internal factors contributed to the decline of the Abbasid Dynasty, with direct impacts on Islamic education. These included internal conflicts within the royal family, the military's dominant influence in government, a national financial crisis, the emergence of more minor dynasties, an overly large territory, and religious fanaticism and sectarian divisions. Meanwhile, externally, the Mongol invasion and the Crusades also accelerated this decline.

On the other hand, Western Islamic regions such as Spain experienced a long period of prosperity lasting around eight centuries. Cordoba, as an intellectual center, competed with Baghdad in terms of scientific advancement. However, Spain eventually experienced a decline similar to that of Baghdad, due to several main factors, as follows:

- a. Disputes within the royal family that arose due to the lack of clarity in the system of power succession.
- b. The lack of charismatic leaders to replace the previous caliph.
- c. Internal conflicts among Muslims themselves.
- d. Conflict between Muslims and Christians within the country, which was exacerbated by the government's failure to implement Islamization fully.
- e. The emergence of small kingdoms competing with each other for power (Yusrianto, 1998).

In this weak situation, Christian forces in Spain took advantage of the conditions to launch attacks aimed at destroying Islam. The collapse of Islamic power in both Baghdad and Cordoba was a significant factor in the decline of Islamic education as a whole.

3. Profile of Education During the Decline

During the period of disintegration between 1000 and 1250 AD, caliphs and kings tended to restrict freedom of thought and even suppress the development of philosophy. Philosophy became a field of study practiced in secret, especially during the era of Ikhwan al-Safa and Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali was known for his harsh stance against philosophy and figures who used reason as the primary basis for understanding science. This situation directly contributed to the loss of the tradition of philosophical education. In Andalusia, those who studied philosophy or astronomy were viewed as *zindiq* (heretics) and even infidels. One prominent figure, Ibn Rushd, was exiled, imprisoned, and tortured for teaching philosophy. In other words, during this period of decline, philosophy had almost no place in education. There were no significant efforts to preserve or develop it. Knowledge related to logic, philosophy, and thought in general also experienced a similar decline. However, after the destruction of Baghdad, several kingdoms emerged that attempted to revive Islamic education, although philosophy was still not widely recognized. One example was the Mamluk Kingdom in Egypt.

After the fall of Baghdad in 1258 AD, the Mamluk Sultan in Egypt appointed Baibars as caliph with the title Al-Mustanshir. Baibars was a descendant of the caliph who had managed to escape to Egypt. This appointment made Cairo the new capital of the Islamic world, with al-Jami' as a center of education centered at al-Jami' al-Azhar. Under the reign of Sultan Baibars (658–676 AH / 1260–1277 AD), significant progress was made in various fields of knowledge, especially in Islamic sciences and the Arabic language. During the reign of Sultan Qalawun (678–689 AH / 1279–1290 AD), the development of educational institutions and public services flourished. A large hospital (RS Qalawun) and several significant madrasas were established. These madrasas taught Islamic jurisprudence in the four primary schools of thought and possessed valuable library collections. Furthermore, under the leadership of Sultan Al-Nashir (693–741 AH / 1293–1341 AD), the Islamic world reached its peak of progress in the fields of art, culture, and technology (Yunus, 1979). Overall, during the Mamluk Dynasty—after the Ayyubid era—there was a significant increase in the number of madrasas. There were approximately 70 madrasas spread across various regions of the empire.

CONCLUSION

The decline of Islamic education is the result of a long, dynamic process involving both internal and external factors. Historically, Islamic education once reached its peak, but then declined due to several interrelated causes. First, intellectually, there was an imbalance between two major currents in Islamic education: the Sufi approach, which emphasized spirituality, and the rational approach, which emphasized reason. When rational thinking was abandoned and the Sufi approach dominated, a process of stagnation in the development of science began. This was exacerbated by the closing of the door to *ijtihad* and the development of dogmatic views that limited freedom of thought. Second, from a socio-political perspective, the decline of Islamic education occurred alongside the weakening of Islamic political power, especially after the collapse of the Abbasid Dynasty in 1258 AD. Internal conflicts, weak leadership, military domination in government, and sectarian fanaticism further exacerbated the condition of education. External attacks, such as the Mongol invasion and the Crusades, accelerated the collapse of educational centers such as Baghdad and Cordoba.

Third, educational profiles during the decline period reveal restrictions on freedom of thought, particularly in philosophy and rational science. Figures such as Ibn Rushd were persecuted for their philosophical ideas. As a result, logical and empirical sciences did not develop and were even considered deviant. However, after the destruction of Baghdad, there were several attempts at recovery, such as those by the Mamluk Dynasty in Egypt, which built madrasas and made Cairo a new center of Islamic education through the al-Azhar institution. In general, internal factors such as government policies, the dominance of dogmatic thinking, and weak support for science were the leading causes of the decline of Islamic education. External factors, such as invasion and colonization, exacerbated the already fragile conditions. As emphasized by Ibn Khaldun, the collapse of civilization is caused more by moral decadence and internal decay than by external attacks. Therefore, the decline of Islamic education is not merely a military or economic issue, but a reflection of a deep epistemological, cultural, and spiritual crisis within the Muslim community itself.

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