



IBN KHALDŪN'S CONCEPT OF MALAKAH AND THE TRI-DIMENSIONAL EDUCATIONAL MODEL: A HERMENEUTIC RECONSTRUCTION FOR INTEGRATED CURRICULUM DESIGN

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Abstract: This article presents a systematic reconstruction of Ibn Khaldūn's educational philosophy as an integrated tri-dimensional model grounded in the concept of malakah a deeply ingrained, embodied skilled disposition acquired through sustained, deliberate practice. Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics and close analysis of the Muqaddimah, the study identifies three interdependent dimensions of Ibn Khaldūn's pedagogical thought: intellectual development through gradual, sequenced instruction (al-tadrīj fī al-ta'lim); moral formation through the cultivation of virtuous dispositions (tahdhīb al-akhlāq); and experiential mastery through direct, embodied practice (tajriba). The article demonstrates that these dimensions are not separate topics but mutually qualifying components of a coherent educational architecture unified by the principle of malakah. Six formal propositions are developed to articulate the internal logic of the framework, and the model is critically situated in dialogue with contemporary educational theories including constructivism, experiential learning, character education, competency-based education, and critical pedagogy. The findings contribute to Islamic educational philosophy, comparative education, and ongoing efforts to decolonise curriculum theory by recovering non-Western conceptual resources. The article concludes with implications for curriculum design, teacher education, assessment practice, and educational policy, and proposes an agenda for empirical research on the application of the malakah framework in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldūn; Islamic education; tri-dimensional learning; competency-based education

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INTRODUCTION

The global education landscape is undergoing a period of profound transformation, shaped by the intersecting forces of technological disruption, cultural pluralism, and the growing demand for learning outcomes that extend beyond cognitive achievement to encompass ethical character and practical competence. International frameworks for twenty-first-century education increasingly emphasise the integration of knowledge, skills, and values as interdependent pillars of holistic human development.¹ Yet despite this consensus, much of contemporary curriculum design

¹ Joke Voogt and Natalie Pareja Roblin, "A Comparative Analysis of International Frameworks for 21st Century Competences," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012): 299–321.

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remains fragmented, separating intellectual formation from moral cultivation and theoretical knowledge from practical application.² This fragmentation has prompted scholars across educational traditions to search for integrative philosophical foundations capable of reunifying the aims of education.

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the question of educational integration has been a central concern for centuries. Scholars such as al-Attas and Nasr have articulated comprehensive visions of Islamic education that resist the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, between knowledge transmission and character formation.³ Their works have informed a growing body of scholarship on Islamic educational philosophy that seeks to retrieve classical concepts for contemporary application.⁴ Nevertheless, the practical translation of these philosophical ideals into curriculum frameworks remains an area of ongoing inquiry, particularly in contexts where Islamic education must respond simultaneously to local cultural demands and global educational standards.⁵

Among the classical Islamic thinkers whose educational ideas have attracted renewed scholarly attention, Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) occupies a distinctive position. Best known for his monumental work *al-Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn is widely regarded as a founder of the social sciences and a pioneer of historical methodology.⁶ However, his contributions to educational thought are arguably no less significant. Embedded within the broader framework of his theory of civilisation (*‘umrān*) and his epistemology of knowledge acquisition, Ibn Khaldūn's educational ideas constitute a coherent pedagogical model that integrates three dimensions often treated separately in modern education: intellectual development through systematic and graduated instruction, moral formation through the internalisation of virtuous dispositions, and practical mastery through experiential engagement.⁷

² Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).

³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education* (Jeddah: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979); Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

⁴ J. Mark Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education," *Comparative Education* 40, no. 4 (2004): 517–529; Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998).

⁵ J. Mark Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?" *Journal of Moral Education* 36, no. 3 (2007): 283–296; Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁶ Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Allen J. Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Recent scholarship has begun to explore the contemporary relevance of Ibn Khaldūn's educational concepts, examining their alignment with constructivist pedagogy, experiential learning theory, and outcome-based curriculum design.⁸ Several studies have drawn parallels between Ibn Khaldūn's principle of gradual learning and the modern pedagogical strategy of scaffolding, while others have linked his emphasis on direct experience with problem-based learning approaches.⁹ At the same time, his insistence on the moral role of the educator resonates strongly with contemporary character education movements that position ethical formation as a core responsibility of schooling rather than an ancillary concern.¹⁰

Despite this growing interest, the existing literature on Ibn Khaldūn's educational thought suffers from three significant limitations. First, most studies treat individual aspects of his pedagogy—gradual learning, experiential method, or moral education in isolation, without recognising the integrated, tri-dimensional architecture that gives his educational model its coherence and theoretical power. Second, the majority of comparative analyses remain at a descriptive level, pointing to surface similarities between Ibn Khaldūn's ideas and modern theories without engaging in the kind of critical dialogue that might reveal genuine conceptual tensions, alternative possibilities, or synthetic contributions. Third, relatively few studies have attempted to translate Ibn Khaldūn's educational philosophy into a concrete framework that could inform contemporary curriculum design, particularly in competency-based and character education contexts. These gaps are not merely scholarly oversights; they represent missed opportunities for enriching global educational discourse with a non-Western philosophical perspective that has much to offer the current search for integrated, holistic models of education.¹¹

This article addresses these gaps by proposing a reconstruction of Ibn Khaldūn's educational model as an integrated tri-dimensional framework encompassing intellectual, moral, and experiential dimensions, grounded in his epistemological concept of *malakah* a term denoting the

⁸ Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); John Seely Brown, Allan Collins, and Paul Duguid, "Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning," *Educational Researcher* 18, no. 1 (1989): 32–42; David A. Kolb, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Charalampos Mainemelis, "Experiential Learning Theory: Previous Research and New Directions," in *Perspectives on Thinking, Learning, and Cognitive Styles* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 227–248.

⁹ Janneke van de Pol, Monique Volman, and Jos Beishuizen, "Scaffolding in Teacher–Student Interaction: A Decade of Research," *Educational Psychology Review* 22, no. 3 (2010): 271–296; John R. Savery, "Overview of Problem-Based Learning: Definitions and Distinctions," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning* 1, no. 1 (2006): 9–20; Filip Dochy et al., "Effects of Problem-Based Learning: A Meta-Analysis," *Learning and Instruction* 13, no. 5 (2003): 533–568.

¹⁰ Lickona, *Educating for Character*; Marvin W. Berkowitz and Melinda C. Bier, *What Works in Character Education: A Research-Driven Guide for Educators* (Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership, 2005); Daniel K. Lapsley, "Moral Identity and Developmental Theory," *Human Development* 58, no. 4–5 (2015): 299–328.

¹¹ Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education," 517–529; Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, eds., *Decolonising the University* (London: Pluto Press, 2018).

acquisition of a firmly established habitus or skilled disposition through sustained, deliberate practice. The concept of malakah is central to Ibn Khaldūn's theory of learning and represents a distinctive contribution to educational philosophy that has no precise equivalent in Western pedagogical traditions. We argue that malakah offers a compelling conceptual bridge between the cognitive, ethical, and practical aims of education, providing a philosophical foundation for competency-based curricula that is at once developmentally sequenced, morally grounded, and experientially anchored.

The novelty of this study is threefold. First, it offers the first systematic reconstruction of Ibn Khaldūn's tri-dimensional educational model as an integrated whole, moving beyond the fragmented treatment of his ideas that characterises existing scholarship. Second, it demonstrates how the concept of malakah can serve as a unifying principle for integrating competency-based education, character education, and experiential learning within a single coherent framework. Third, it critically situates Ibn Khaldūn's model in dialogue with contemporary educational theories—including constructivism, experiential learning, and critical pedagogy—thereby contributing to the broader project of decolonising educational philosophy by recovering non-Western intellectual resources for addressing global educational challenges.¹²

The article proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the philosophical hermeneutic methodology employed in this study, drawing on the tradition of Gadamerian hermeneutics as adapted for the analysis of classical educational texts. Section three presents the findings of our hermeneutic analysis, organised around the three dimensions of Ibn Khaldūn's educational model and the unifying concept of malakah. Section four discusses these findings in relation to contemporary educational theories and practices, highlighting both points of convergence and productive tensions. The conclusion synthesises the study's contributions, acknowledges its limitations, and proposes directions for future research, including empirical investigations into the application of the malakah framework in diverse educational settings.

The significance of this study extends beyond the rehabilitation of a historical figure. At a time when education systems worldwide are grappling with the challenge of preparing learners not only for academic success but also for ethical citizenship and practical competence in rapidly changing societies, Ibn Khaldūn's integrated vision offers a timely reminder that the most enduring educational philosophies are those that refuse to separate the mind from the character, or knowledge from action.

¹² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50th Anniversary ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Henry A. Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1988); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

METODE PENELITIAN

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in philosophical hermeneutics, following the hermeneutic tradition articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Philosophical hermeneutics is particularly well-suited to the study of historical educational texts because it provides a rigorous framework for interpreting texts across temporal, cultural, and linguistic distances while remaining attentive to the interpreter's own situatedness and pre-understandings. Unlike purely descriptive literature reviews that merely summarise what earlier authors have said, a hermeneutic approach seeks to engage the text in a dialogical process of questioning, interpretation, and application\ movement that Gadamer terms the fusion of horizons (Horizontverschmelzung) between the world of the text and the world of the interpreter.¹³ The choice of philosophical hermeneutics over alternative methodological traditions is justified by the nature of the research questions. This study does not seek to test hypotheses, to measure variables, or to generate theory from empirical data; it seeks to understand and reconstruct the educational philosophy of a classical thinker through sustained interpretive engagement with his primary text. A systematic review methodology would be inappropriate because the aim is not to aggregate findings from multiple empirical studies but to engage deeply with a single authoritative source. Content analysis would be insufficient because it cannot capture the dialogical, transformative dimension of the interpretive process. Hermeneutics alone provides the philosophical and procedural resources for the kind of interpretive reconstruction that this study undertakes.¹⁴

The epistemological orientation of this study is constructivist and interpretivist. It recognises that knowledge is historically situated and that the meaning of a text is not a fixed property awaiting extraction but is co-constituted through the encounter between text and interpreter. This orientation explicitly rejects the positivist assumption that a single, definitive interpretation of Ibn Khaldun's educational thought is possible or desirable, while maintaining that some interpretations are more rigorously grounded in textual evidence, logical coherence, and dialogical depth than others. The validity of the study's findings rests not on their correspondence to

¹³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004); Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Shaun Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

¹⁴ For a comprehensive justification of hermeneutics in educational research, see Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*; for conceptual paper methodology, see Elina Jaakkola, "Designing Conceptual Articles: Four Approaches," *AMS Review* 10, no. 1 (2020): 18-326.

an external reality but on their cogency, their consistency with the textual evidence, and their usefulness for informing educational practice and further inquiry.¹⁵

The primary text under investigation is Ibn Khaldūn's Muqaddimah in the authoritative English translation by Franz Rosenthal. The choice of this translation is justified by its scholarly recognition as the definitive English edition and its extensive citation in Anglophone Ibn Khaldūn scholarship. Where necessary, key passages were checked against the Arabic original to ensure interpretive accuracy. The analysis focuses specifically on the sections of the Muqaddimah that deal with learning, pedagogy, the acquisition of knowledge, the role of the teacher, and the relationship between theoretical understanding and practical mastery. Secondary sources include contemporary scholarly works that engage critically with Ibn Khaldūn's educational concepts, as well as foundational texts in Western educational philosophy and psychology that provide comparative points of reference.¹⁶

The methodological procedure followed four stages, adapted from the hermeneutic cycle as applied to educational research. In the first stage, immersion and pre-understanding, the researcher engaged in repeated, close readings of the Muqaddimah with particular attention to the sections on learning, pedagogy, the acquisition of knowledge, and the role of the teacher. Key passages were identified and annotated, allowing the researcher's initial interpretive framework shaped by familiarity with contemporary educational discourse to be made explicit and held in productive tension with the text's own conceptual categories.¹⁷ The second stage, hermeneutic dialogue and concept identification, involved a systematic questioning of the text to identify the core educational concepts embedded within Ibn Khaldūn's broader theory of civilisation (*ʿumrān*). Through iterative reading and reflection, three integrative themes emerged: the principle of gradual intellectual development (*al-tadrīj al-taʿlīm*), the moral formation of character through the cultivation of virtuous dispositions (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*), and the necessity of experiential practice for the acquisition of skilled mastery (*malakah*). These themes were not imposed from outside but emerged through the text's own internal logic as it responds to

¹⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*; Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

¹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*; Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Allen J. Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ For the hermeneutic cycle methodology, see Shaun K. Boell and Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic, "A Hermeneutic Approach for Conducting Literature Reviews and Literature Searches," *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* 34, no. 1 (2014): 257-286; Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, "Hermeneutics and Critical Hermeneutics: Exploring Possibilities within the Art of Interpretation," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7, no. 3 (2006): Art. 19.

the interpreter's questions about the aims and methods of education.¹⁸ In the third stage, critical dialogue with contemporary theory, the three identified themes were examined in relation to relevant modern educational frameworks. The hermeneutic task at this stage was not to establish a simple equivalence or anticipation of modern ideas in Ibn Khaldun's work but to engage the two form of presentism that hermeneutics explicitly warns against but to engage the two conceptual worlds in genuine dialogue, allowing each to illuminate, challenge, and potentially correct the other. This dialogical process generated both points of convergence and productive tensions, which are reported in the findings section that follows.¹⁹ The fourth and final stage, synthesis and application, involved the reconstruction of Ibn Khaldun's educational insights as an integrated tri-dimensional model, articulated in terms that speak to contemporary educational concerns without reducing the historical text to a mere echo of present-day preoccupations. The resulting model is presented as a philosophical resource for current curriculum debates rather than a prescriptive blueprint, in keeping with the hermeneutic understanding that the meaning of a text is never exhausted by any single interpretation but remains open to future readings in new contexts.²⁰

Throughout the research process, methodological reflexivity was maintained. The researcher's positionality as an educator trained in both Islamic and Western educational traditions necessarily shapes the interpretive lens brought to the text. Rather than seeking to eliminate this influence which hermeneutics recognises as impossible the study acknowledges it as a constitutive element of the interpretive process and exposes it to critical scrutiny through the dialogical method described above. The trustworthiness of the findings is supported by the transparency of the analytical procedure, the use of direct textual evidence, and the systematic engagement with alternative interpretations through the device of critical dialogue.²¹

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Deconstruction of the Fragmentation Paradigm

The dominant paradigm in contemporary educational philosophy operates on what may be termed the principle of dimensional disjunction: the treatment of intellectual, moral, and practical dimensions of education as conceptually and institutionally separate domains. This disjunction is not merely a matter of curricular organisation but reflects a deeper epistemological fragmentation

¹⁸ Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, 294-305, 334.

¹⁹ Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education; Warnke, Gadamer.

²⁰ Grondin, Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics; Kinsella, "Hermeneutics and Critical Hermeneutics."

²¹ Kinsella, "Hermeneutics and Critical Hermeneutics"; Warnke, Gadamer.

a failure to recognise that human learning is an integrated psycho-social-moral phenomenon that cannot be understood through the lens of any single dimension in isolation. The fragmentation manifests in three interrelated forms.²²

First, cognitive-instrumental reduction treats the learner as an information-processing system and systematically marginalises questions of moral formation and embodied practice. This orientation, while yielding measurable outcomes, produces graduates who know but do not necessarily understand, understand but do not necessarily value, and value but do not necessarily act. Second, moral-educational marginalisation positions character formation as an add-on rather than an integral dimension of all learning. Character education programmes, ethics modules, and values-based initiatives are added to the curriculum rather than woven into its fabric. Third, theory-practice dualism produces a competence gap wherein learners who perform well on abstract assessments struggle to apply knowledge in real-world contexts. The cumulative effect is an educational paradigm that produces learners who are informed but not formed, skilled but not wise, competent but not virtuous.

A crucial logical observation must be made at this point: the fragmentation cannot be overcome through additive strategies. Adding character education modules to a cognitively oriented curriculum, or inserting practical components into a theory-driven programme, does not produce integration; it merely compounds fragmentation. The reason is structural: additive approaches leave the underlying epistemology unchanged. So long as intellectual, moral, and practical dimensions are conceived as separate kinds of learning that must be 'balanced' or 'combined', the unity of the educational experience the sense in which every act of learning is simultaneously cognitive, moral, and practical is lost. True integration requires a conceptual framework in which the three dimensions are not merely juxtaposed but internally related: each dimension presupposes and qualifies the others. It is here that Ibn Khaldūn's concept of malakah enters as a theoretical resource of surprising power and contemporary relevance.

The Tri-Dimensional Malakah Framework

The Malakah Framework is structured as a tripartite architecture comprising three layers: the foundational layer (epistemological premises), the operational layer (the three dimensions and their internal dynamics), and the teleological layer (the unifying principle and its outcomes). At the foundational level, the model rests on four epistemological premises derived from the hermeneutic analysis of Ibn Khaldūn's Muqaddimah. The first premise, that of human unity (*al-wahda al-*

²² Noddings, Caring; Lickona, Educating for Character.

insāniyya), holds that the human person is a unified being whose intellectual, moral, and practical capacities are dimensions of a single, integrated self. The second premise, that of embodied cognition (al-idrāk al-mujassad), asserts that knowledge is not purely conceptual but always involves the body, the senses, and the material world. The third premise, that of gradual actualisation (al-takwīn al-tadrijī), recognises that human potential is actualised through a developmental process that must respect the natural order of learning. The fourth premise, that of telic orientation (al-tawajjuh al-ghā'ī), posits that education is inherently teleological: it aims at the formation of malakah.

Each dimension of the model represents a distinct modality of learning, defined by its characteristic activity, its specific object, and its mode of acquisition. The intellectual dimension concerns understanding (al-fahm) and theoretical knowledge ('ilm naẓarī), acquired through gradual, sequenced instruction and dialectical reasoning. Its corresponding malakah is cognitive mastery: the ability to grasp, analyse, and synthesise complex ideas with fluency. The moral dimension concerns character formation (al-takhlīq) and virtuous dispositions (al-akhlāq al-fāḍila), cultivated through habituation, role-modelling, and reflective practice. Its corresponding malakah is ethical mastery: the disposition to recognise, choose, and act upon what is good. The experiential dimension concerns practical engagement (al-mumārasa) and embodied skill (al-mahāra al-mujassada), developed through repeated practice, direct application, and apprenticeship. Its corresponding malakah is practical mastery: the capacity to perform skilled actions with competence and creativity.

At the apex of the model is malakah, which serves as both the organising principle and the telos of the entire framework. The relationship between the three dimensions and malakah is not hierarchical in the sense of one dimension being more important than the others, but integrative: each dimension contributes a necessary component to the formation of malakah, and malakah in turn qualifies and perfects each dimension. Intellectual malakah is the state in which the learner possesses a deeply ingrained capacity for disciplined thinking. Moral malakah is the state in which virtue has become second nature. Practical malakah is the state in which skilled competence is embodied and expressed with fluency, adaptability, and creative responsiveness.

The Principle of Mutual Qualification

The three dimensions are not merely co-present but mutually qualifying. Each dimension shapes and is shaped by the others through three dyadic relationships. The intellectual-moral relationship ensures that intellectual development without moral formation produces cleverness

without wisdom, while moral formation without intellectual rigour produces good intentions without critical discernment. The intellectual-experiential relationship ensures that theoretical knowledge without practical engagement remains abstract and inert, while practical engagement without theoretical structure remains instinctive and unrepeatable. The moral-experiential relationship ensures that moral formation without practical engagement remains abstract and ineffective, while experiential practice without moral guidance produces technical competence without ethical constraint. Malakah arises precisely at the intersection of these three dimensions: it is theory-informed practice that is also morally directed.

The Integrative Cycle

The formation of malakah proceeds through a cyclical process that integrates all three dimensions. The first stage, apprehension (*al-talaqqī*), involves the learner encountering new knowledge, values, or skills through guided instruction mediated by a teacher who exemplifies moral qualities. The second stage, assimilation (*al-tamaththul*), involves internalisation through repetition, reflection, and gradual appropriation, as understanding deepens through connection to the learner's existing framework of meaning and value. The third stage, application (*al-tatbīq*), entails putting what has been assimilated into practice, confronting the gap between theoretical understanding and practical execution. The fourth stage, consolidation (*al-tamakkun*), represents the arrival at a state of settled mastery in which knowledge, virtue, and skill are no longer separable but constitute a unified disposition. Each cycle leads to a higher level of malakah, which then serves as the foundation for the next cycle of learning. The process is therefore recursive and developmental: malakah is both the outcome of learning and the precondition for further learning.

The Intellectual Dimension: Gradual Learning

Ibn Khaldūn's most extensively discussed educational principle is that learning must be gradual. He writes that the learner should first be introduced to the basic foundations (*uṣūl*) of each discipline before being exposed to its complexities and finer points (*masā'il*). This progression must be carefully calibrated to the learner's developmental capacity, proceeding from the concrete to the abstract, from the simple to the compound, and from the familiar to the unfamiliar.²³ This principle finds a strong analogue in the modern educational concept of scaffolding, which refers to the structured support provided by a teacher to enable a learner to achieve understanding or skill beyond their current independent capability.²⁴ Similarly, Vygotsky's concept of the zone of

²³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 294–296.

²⁴ Van de Pol, Volman, and Beishuizen, "Scaffolding in Teacher–Student Interaction," 271–296.

proximal development (ZPD) articulates the same fundamental insight: learning is most effective when it builds systematically on what the learner already knows, under the guidance of a more capable peer or instructor.²⁵ Biggs's model of constructive alignment, which emphasises the coherent alignment of learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment tasks, further echoes Ibn Khaldūn's insistence that each stage of learning must prepare the ground for the next.²⁶ Where Ibn Khaldūn departs from these Western frameworks is in his insistence that gradual learning is not merely a pedagogical technique but a metaphysical principle rooted in the nature of human cognition. Because the human mind cannot grasp complex realities all at once, knowledge must be 'digested' slowly, like food, through repeated exposure, reflection, and application. This organic metaphor positions learning as a developmental process akin to growth rather than an act of information transfer.

The Moral Dimension: Character Formation

For Ibn Khaldūn, the ultimate purpose of education is not the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake but the formation of virtuous character. He insists that the teacher's role extends beyond the transmission of information to include the cultivation of moral and spiritual qualities in the student.²⁷ This conviction arises from his broader anthropological vision: human beings are not only rational animals but moral agents whose flourishing depends on the harmonisation of intellect, will, and action. This dimension of Ibn Khaldūn's thought resonates strongly with the contemporary character education movement.²⁸ It also aligns with the ethics of care articulated by Noddings, who argues that education must attend to students' moral and emotional development as seriously as it attends to their intellectual growth.²⁹

However, Ibn Khaldūn's moral dimension is not reducible to character education as it is typically practised in Western contexts. For him, moral formation is not an add-on to the curriculum but the very purpose of the educational enterprise. Intellectual development without moral grounding produces clever but dangerous individuals; experiential learning without ethical guidance produces skilled but unprincipled actors. The moral dimension, therefore, is not parallel to the intellectual and experiential dimensions but qualifies them, infusing them with purpose and direction. This insight has profound implications for contemporary debates about the role of values

²⁵ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*.

²⁶ John Biggs, "Enhancing Teaching through Constructive Alignment," *Higher Education* 32, no. 3 (1996): 347–364.

²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 305–306.

²⁸ Lickona, *Educating for Character*; Berkowitz and Bier, *What Works in Character Education*.

²⁹ Noddings, *Caring*.

in education: it challenges both the value-neutral pretensions of technocratic education and the compartmentalisation of moral education into discrete programmes or subjects.

The Experiential Dimension: Practice and Mastery

Ibn Khaldūn's emphasis on direct experience as the pathway to malakah constitutes the third dimension of his educational model. He argues that theoretical knowledge alone, no matter how refined, can never substitute for the embodied understanding that comes through repeated practice. The scholar who has memorised the rules of composition is not yet a writer; the student who has learned the principles of carpentry is not yet a carpenter. Only through sustained, hands-on engagement with the materials and challenges of a craft does theoretical knowledge crystallise into genuine mastery.³⁰ This insight finds its most developed expression in modern experiential learning theory. Kolb's model of experiential learning, which conceptualises learning as a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation, provides a robust framework for understanding how malakah is acquired.³¹ Problem-based learning (PBL), which challenges students to confront authentic problems and develop solutions through inquiry and collaboration, operationalises the same principle.³²

Yet Ibn Khaldūn's experiential dimension is distinguished by its integration with the moral and intellectual dimensions. Experience, for him, is not merely a pedagogical method but a form of moral training: the learner who practises a skill under the guidance of a virtuous teacher is not only developing technical competence but also internalising the ethical dispositions that govern its proper use. In this sense, malakah is never merely a skill; it is always a virtuous skill, one that embeds technical excellence within moral purpose. This integrated conception challenges the instrumentalist orientation of much contemporary vocational and professional education, which tends to separate technical training from ethical formation.

Critical Dialogue with Contemporary Theory

1. Ibn Khaldūn and Constructivism

The dialogue between Ibn Khaldūn and constructivism reveals both convergence and productive tension. Both traditions agree that learning is an active, developmental process that cannot be reduced to passive reception. However, Ibn Khaldūn's model insists on the irreducibility

³⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 334–336.

³¹ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2014).

³² Savery, "Overview of Problem-Based Learning," 9–20; Dochy et al., "Effects of Problem-Based Learning," 533–568.

of the moral dimension in a way that constructivism, with its emphasis on cognitive development, has historically underemphasised. Moreover, while constructivism positions the teacher primarily as a facilitator, Ibn Khaldūn's framework assigns the teacher a dual role as both pedagogical guide and moral exemplar a conception that challenges the constructivist tendency to downplay the asymmetrical, formative dimension of the teacher-student relationship.³³

At the same time, constructivism offers a corrective to potential weaknesses in Ibn Khaldūn's framework. Constructivism's emphasis on the learner's active role in meaning-making guards against the risk of excessive teacher-directedness that could arise from Ibn Khaldūn's strong emphasis on guided instruction. A synthesis of the two approaches would combine the structured, developmental sequencing emphasised by Ibn Khaldūn with the learner-centred, inquiry-oriented pedagogy championed by constructivism, thereby producing a model that is both rigorous in its progression and responsive to the learner's agency.

2. Ibn Khaldūn and Critical Pedagogy

The comparison with critical pedagogy reveals perhaps the most significant challenge to Ibn Khaldūn's framework: does its emphasis on guided, tradition-rooted education risk reproducing authority structures uncritically? Freire's critique of 'banking education' and Giroux's call for teachers as 'transformative intellectuals' raise legitimate questions about the extent to which Ibn Khaldūn's model accommodates critical questioning and social transformation.³⁴ We argue that a hermeneutic reading of Ibn Khaldūn reveals resources for addressing this challenge. His concept of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) and his recognition that knowledge is socially and historically situated together imply that education must cultivate not only reverence for tradition but also the critical capacity to engage with it productively. A sufficiently developed *malakah* particularly at advanced stages includes the capacity for creative and critical application of learned principles, not merely their mechanical reproduction. Moreover, Ibn Khaldūn's own sociological analysis of how knowledge systems arise, consolidate, and decline demonstrates a critical reflexivity that can be harnessed for emancipatory educational purposes.

3. Ibn Khaldūn and Competency-Based Education

The convergence between Ibn Khaldūn's *malakah* and CBE's emphasis on demonstrable competence is striking yet incomplete. CBE frameworks focus primarily on observable

³³ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*; Brown, Collins, and Duguid, "Situated Cognition," 32–42.

³⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals*.

performance, whereas Ibn Khaldūn's malakah includes an inner, dispositional dimension that may not be directly observable but is nonetheless essential to genuine mastery. This suggests that Ibn Khaldūn's model can enrich CBE by providing a philosophical foundation that reconnects competence with character, and skill with moral purpose.³⁵

Specifically, the Malakah Framework addresses a persistent criticism of competency-based approaches: that they risk reducing education to the production of measurable but ethically ungrounded performance. By grounding competence in the broader concept of malakah, the framework ensures that the development of skill is always accompanied by the cultivation of the dispositions and values that govern its appropriate exercise. This integration is particularly important in professional education, where technical competence without ethical grounding can have serious consequences. A medical graduate who possesses the technical skills to perform surgery but lacks the moral malakah to exercise those skills with compassion and integrity is, by Ibn Khaldūn's standards, not genuinely educated.

CONCLUSION

The central thesis of this study is that Ibn Khaldūn's educational thought, when subjected to systematic hermeneutic reconstruction, yields an integrated tri-dimensional model organised around the unifying concept of malakah a deeply ingrained, embodied skilled disposition acquired through gradual, morally grounded, and experientially anchored practice. This model challenges the dominant paradigm of dimensional disjunction that has characterised modern educational philosophy, wherein intellectual, moral, and practical dimensions of learning are treated as conceptually and institutionally separate domains. The hermeneutic analysis of the Muqaddimah has revealed that Ibn Khaldūn's educational ideas are not a collection of discrete insights about gradual learning, moral formation, and experiential practice, but rather a coherent philosophical architecture in which each dimension presupposes and qualifies the others through the integrative dynamics of malakah formation. The study therefore offers not merely a reinterpretation of a historical figure but a theoretically grounded alternative to fragmented approaches to curriculum design.

This study makes four distinct contributions to educational theory. First, it offers the first systematic reconstruction of Ibn Khaldūn's educational thought as an integrated tri-dimensional model, moving beyond the fragmented, theme-by-theme treatments that have characterised previous scholarship. Second, the study recovers the concept of malakah as the organising principle

³⁵ Spady, Outcome-Based Education; Mulder, Weigel, and Collins, "The Concept of Competence," 53–68.

of Ibn Khaldūn's educational model and articulates its potential as a bridging concept between Islamic and Western educational traditions. Third, the study contributes to the decolonisation of educational philosophy by demonstrating that non-Western intellectual traditions contain sophisticated theoretical resources for addressing contemporary educational challenges. Fourth, the study models a methodological approach philosophical hermeneutics grounded in the Gadamerian tradition for engaging classical educational texts that is both rigorous in its interpretive procedures and productive in its theoretical outcomes.

The Malakah Framework carries implications that extend beyond the theoretical domain into curriculum design, teacher education, assessment practice, and educational policy. For curriculum design, it suggests that learning outcomes should be defined not in terms of content coverage or isolated skill acquisition but in terms of the progressive formation of *malakāt*—durable, integrated dispositions that unite knowing, valuing, and doing. This implies a shift from curriculum models organised around discrete subjects or competencies toward spiral curricula that revisit foundational concepts at progressively higher levels of complexity. For teacher education, it implies that educators must be prepared not merely as content specialists or pedagogical technicians but as moral exemplars capable of attending simultaneously to the intellectual, moral, and practical dimensions of every learning encounter. For assessment practice, the framework challenges the dominance of narrow, performance-based measures that capture immediate achievement but not the depth, durability, or transferability of learning. Assessing malakah requires approaches that evaluate not merely what a learner can demonstrate under test conditions but the quality of their engagement with authentic challenges over time. For educational policy, it offers a principled basis for resisting the reduction of educational quality to standardised test scores and for advocating a more holistic conception of educational accountability that reconnects competence with character.

This study is subject to limitations that must be acknowledged with candour. As a conceptual study grounded in the hermeneutic analysis of a single primary text, the findings are necessarily interpretive rather than definitive. The tri-dimensional model is a reconstruction a bringing-together of insights that Ibn Khaldūn himself did not explicitly systematise and other scholars working with the same textual materials may arrive at different configurations. The study's exclusive focus on the *Muqaddimah*, while methodologically necessary for depth of analysis, means that Ibn Khaldūn's other works including his autobiographical writings and his multi-volume universal history (*Kitāb al-ʿIbar*) have not been systematically examined. Furthermore, the Malakah Framework has not been empirically tested, and its cross-cultural applicability requires careful examination. The relationship between the three dimensions also requires further theoretical

specification, particularly regarding questions of priority in specific pedagogical contexts and developmental sequencing across the lifespan. These limitations, however, are not weaknesses of the framework but invitations to its further development through sustained theoretical and empirical inquiry.

The limitations identified above point toward a productive agenda for future research. Empirical studies are needed to test the six propositions of the Malakah Framework through design-based research in which curricula are redesigned according to malakah-informed principles and their effects longitudinally assessed. Comparative studies across educational traditions—Islamic, Western, East Asian, Indigenous could examine whether analogous concepts to malakah exist in other traditions and how they are operationalised. Instrument development research is needed to create and validate measures of malakah in its intellectual, moral, and experiential dimensions. Historical research extending the hermeneutic analysis to other works by Ibn Khaldūn and to other classical Islamic educational thinkers could test whether the tri-dimensional model reflects a broader pattern in Islamic educational philosophy. Policy research examining how the Malakah Framework might inform national curriculum standards, teacher certification requirements, and school accountability systems would explore the policy implications of the model at scale.

The educational thought of Ibn Khaldūn, as reconstructed in this study, offers a vision of education that is at once intellectually rigorous, morally serious, and practically engaged. The concept of malakah the gradual formation of deeply ingrained, virtuous skilled mastery through sustained, guided practice provides a unifying principle for an integrated approach to curriculum design that reconnects cognitive achievement with character formation and theoretical knowledge with embodied practice. At a time when education systems worldwide struggle with the fragmentation of learning purposes, the reduction of educational quality to measurable performance, and the marginalisation of moral and spiritual dimensions of human development, Ibn Khaldūn's voice speaks across seven centuries with surprising freshness and urgency. His is not a voice that can be appropriated uncritically, nor one that can be dismissed as a relic of a pre-modern past. It is, rather, an invitation to rethink the purposes of education from within a tradition that has always insisted that the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of virtue are not separate enterprises but dimensions of a single, sacred human task: the formation of souls capable of living well, wisely, and justly in the world. This study has sought to honour that invitation by demonstrating that Ibn Khaldūn's educational philosophy, far from being of merely historical interest, constitutes a living resource for the ongoing work of educational renewal.

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