

# Transformation of Islamic Educational Institutions during the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750 AD): From Kuttab to a Structured Education System

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## ARTICLE INFORMATION

### Keywords:

Umayyad Dynasty;  
Islamic Educational  
Institutions;  
Educational  
Transformation

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### Article history:

Received 2026-06-01  
Revised 2026-06-01  
Accepted 2026-06-010

## ABSTRACT

The Umayyad Dynasty (661-750 AD) was a crucial period in the history of Islamic civilization marked by the expansion of territory from China to Andalusia, thus giving rise to an urgent need for a more structured and institutional education system. Amidst cultural intersections with Persian, Byzantine, and Greek civilizations, Islamic Education during the Umayyad Dynasty identified the emerging institutional forms and explained the driving factors behind these developments. This study uses a historical-descriptive method with a literature review approach. The results of the study indicate that Islamic Education during this period developed through a diversification of institutions, starting from Kuttab as a primary education, mosques as centers of secondary and higher education, badiah as an institution for preserving Arabic, to Bimaristan as a center for medical studies and the Literature Council as a scientific and cultural forum. The Umayyad Dynasty was thus a period of Islamic intellectual incubation that laid a solid foundation for the golden age of the Abbasid era, while also offering inspiration for the development of integrative and multidisciplinary contemporary Islamic Education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of Islamic civilization cannot be separated from the dynamics of its educational development. Education in Islam is not merely a process of transmitting knowledge, but rather an instrument of civilization that directly shapes the character

of the people and the socio-cultural framework of Muslim society. In this context, the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750 AD) occupies a very strategic position; it is not only the first chapter of monarchical rule in Islamic history but also the eras that followed. The extraordinary expansion of its territory, from the Arabian Peninsula to Andalusia in the west and the borders of China in the east, forced Muslims to directly confront the scientific traditions of Persian, Greek, Byzantine, and Coptic civilizations (Hitti, 2010; Yatim, 2002). This unity became the main catalyst for the transformation of the Islamic education system from an informal, oral model to a structured institution.

Although this period is often viewed partially in the literature of Islamic education history, several prominent scholars have affirmed its significance. (Mahmud Yunus, 1992) in the history of Islamic education explicitly outlines the three-tiered education system that was established during the Umayyad period. (Samsul Nizar, 2007) asserts that institutions such as *kuttab* and *badiah* are the embryo of the formal Islamic education system. Meanwhile, (Hasan Langgulung, 1988) assesses that the role of the mosque as a center of scientific activity in this era surpasses its ritual function and makes it equivalent to a university in the context of modern civilization.

This research concludes that the Umayyad Dynasty was a period of fundamental transition in education, not merely a continuation of the *Khulafaur Rasyidin* tradition, but rather an institutional leap that gave rise to the diversification of educational institutions, the integration of religious and secular sciences, and the formation of networks of intellectual centers in various major cities of the Islamic world from Mecca, Medina, Basra, and Kufa to Damascus and Fustat. This finding also challenges the narrative that downplays the Umayyad contribution to the history of Islamic education.

## **2. METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative method that employs library research (library study). Library research is a type of qualitative research that is generally conducted without going into the field to search for data sources, so this research is based on written works such as books or journals. with the data collection technique being the document study instrument. The use of the document study instrument can also be referred to as a literature study, which is a series of activities related to the method of collecting library data, reading and taking notes, and processing research materials. Document study in this research examines literature related to the research focus on the construction and context of historical truth.

The data analysis technique applied is content analysis, which is qualitative in nature, combined with comparative-historical methods to compare findings from various sources and identify significant development patterns. The validity of the data is ensured thru source triangulation, which involves the consistency of information

from various different references to obtain a more accurate and balanced picture. The entire analysis process is directed to systematically answer the research question, namely how the transformation of Islamic educational institutions took place during the Umayyad Dynasty and what factors drove it.

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **A. Structure and Levels of Islamic Education during the Umayyad Dynasty**

The Islamic education system during the Umayyad Dynasty (661–750 CE) showed significant structural development compared to the era of the Caliphs. Education no longer simply took place spontaneously in mosques, but rather gradually formed into organized levels. Mahmud Yunus noted that the educational structure during this period was divided into three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary, each with its own institutions, curriculum, and learning methods (Mahmud Yunus, 1992: 33).

##### **1) *Kuttab: Primary Educational Institution***

Kuttab is a primary educational institution that serves as a place for children to learn to read, write, memorize the Qur'an, and study the basic teachings of Islam. In addition to religious material, Kuttab students are also taught Arabic grammar, stories of the prophets, hadith, and the basics of faith (Samsul Nizar, 2007: 62). Students come from various social strata, from the nobility to the common people, so Kuttab plays a crucial role in the democratization of access to education in the early days of Islam (Anwar, 2015: 50).

##### **2) *Mosque: Center for Secondary and Higher Education***

Mosques function as both secondary and tertiary educational institutions. At the secondary level, the material taught includes in-depth study of the Qur'an, interpretation, hadith, jurisprudence, literature, poetry, grammar, arithmetic, and astronomy (Athiyah al-Abrasyi in Anwar, 2015: 51). At the tertiary level, learning takes place in the form of halaqah—a circle of knowledge led by a prominent scholar and implemented by students together (Mahmud Yunus, 1992: 39). Hasan Langgulung states that the function of mosques in this era has gone beyond mere places of worship and transformed into democratic and inclusive open universities (Hasan Langgulung, 1988: 45).

##### **3) *Badiyah: Arabic Language Preservation Institute***

Badiyah is a unique educational institution that emerged as a direct response to the Arabization policy initiated by Caliph Abdul Malik bin Marwan. Badiyah are Bedouin villages in the Sahara desert whose inhabitants still maintain the purity and

fluency of Arabic according to its original rules (Zuhairini et al., 2004: 78). Students, including the sons of the caliph, were sent to Badiah to learn pure Arabic, free from the influence of foreign dialects that began to enter along with the expansion of Islamic territory (Ayyasy, 2023: 57).

#### **4) *Bimaristan: Center for Medical Studies***

The Bimaristan—meaning "hospital" in Persian—was one of the most monumental institutional innovations of the Umayyad Dynasty. This institution served not only as a place for treatment and patient care, but also as a center for medical studies (Mahmud Yunus, 1992: 39). The first Bimaristan was established during the reign of Caliph al-Walid ibn Abdul Malik in 88 AH/706 AD, driven by Khalid ibn Yazid's deep interest in chemistry and medicine, which then encouraged the translation of Greek scientific books into Arabic (Hitti, 2010: 317).

#### **5) *Literary and Library Council***

The Literary Assembly was an intellectual forum held by the caliph to discuss various branches of science, literature, and culture. During the Umayyad era, its organization was moved from the mosque to the palace, and its participants included scientists, writers, and intellectuals from across the Islamic world (Samsul Nizar, 2007: 62). Meanwhile, the Umayyad Dynasty government built a large library in Cordoba during the reign of Caliph al-Hakam ibn Nasir, which became one of the largest libraries in the world at the time (Musyrifah Sunanto, 2004: 62).

### **1) Islamic Education Learning Methods During the Umayyad Dynasty**

The development of education during the Umayyad Dynasty was reflected not only in the diversification of institutions but also in the richness of learning methodologies employed. The process of transmitting knowledge during this period utilized four main methods, applied systematically.

#### **a) *Oral Method***

The oral method is the most dominant method which includes several technical variations: (1) dictation, where the teacher dictates the material and the students take notes as a learning guide; this method is considered effective because it ensures that students have notes as a reference (Anwar, 2015: 56); (2) lecture, where the teacher explains the material orally and the students listen; (3) qira'ah, where students read the text in front of the teacher to get corrections and scientific certificates; and (4) scientific discussions which encourage critical and argumentative thinking skills (Ahmad Tafsir, 2004: 112). The oral method is considered the most authentic because

it ensures the accuracy of the direct transmission of knowledge in a trusted chain of sanad (Anwar, 2015: 55).

### ***b) Memorization Method***

The memorization method requires students to read the material repeatedly until they truly memorize it and can reproduce it accurately. However, memorization in this era is not merely mechanical; students are also required to contextualize the memorization into a deeper understanding (Anwar, 2015: 56). This method is primarily applied in the study of the Qur'an, hadith, and Arabic poetry, the three main pillars of classical Islamic scholarly tradition (Suwito and Fauzan, 2005: 87).

### ***c) Writing Method***

The writing method involved copying the works of previous scholars. This process involved a profound intellectualization process, as students not only passively wrote but also internalized and internalized the sensitive content of the text (Dalimunthe & Nasution, 2023: 164-68). This method played a significant role in the preservation and dissemination of Islamic knowledge in the pre-print era (Anwar, 2015: 57).

### ***d) Scientific Travel Method***

The rihlah (journey in search of knowledge) method developed rapidly during the Umayyad Dynasty, particularly in the context of collecting and verifying hadith. The urge to conduct rihlah grew stronger during the reign of Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz, who ordered the official collection of hadith due to the rise of hadith forgery (Musyrifah Sunanto, 2004: 62). Scholars were willing to travel long distances across regions in order to obtain a single authentic hadith narration, and this tradition later gave birth to the discipline of rijal al-hadith as a separate branch of knowledge (Badri Yatim, 2002: 48-49).

## **C. Madrasahs as Intellectual Centers and Dissemination**

One of the most important achievements of Islamic education during the Umayyad era was the decentralization of centers of knowledge. While during the Caliphate, education remained centered in Medina, during the Umayyad era, intellectual centers had developed evenly across the major cities of the Islamic world (Mahmud Yunus, 1992: 35).

### ***1. Madrasah of Mecca and Medina (Hijaz)***

In Mecca, the first teacher to teach after the conquest was Mu'adz bin Jabal who taught the Koran and halal and haram in Islam. During the time of Abdul Malik bin Marwan, Abdullah bin Abbas was present in Mecca and taught at the Grand Mosque, making it a very influential center for Al-Qur'an interpretation (Mahmud Yunus, 1992: 35–36). Madinah Madrasah was even considered more advanced because it was the residence of the Prophet's friends who were the most authoritative sources of hadith and fiqh (Ajid Thohir, 2004: 89).

## **2. Basrah and Kufa Madrasah (Iraq)**

Basrah Madrasah gave birth to great figures such as Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (expert in jurisprudence, hadith and the Koran) and Anas bin Malik (main narrator of hadith) (Mahmud Yunus, 1992: 37). Meanwhile, Madrasah Kufah—which was centered on the scientific legacy of Abdullah bin Mas'ud—gave birth to six great scholars: al-Qamah, al-Aswad, Masruq, Ubaidah, al-Haris bin Qais, and Amr bin Syurah, who would later influence the development of the Hanafi school (Fuji Rahmadi P., 2018: 453).

## **3. Madrasah Damascus (Syria) and Fustat (Egypt)**

Damascus as the capital of the Umayyad Dynasty developed into a center of knowledge that produced the great Imam Abdurrahman al-Auza'i, whose knowledge was equated with that of Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifah (Mahmud Yunus, 1992: 38). Meanwhile, the Fustat Madrasah in Egypt was pioneered by Abdullah bin Amr bin al-Ash who wrote down hadith in al-Shahifah al-Sadiqah—considered one of the first written hadith compilations in Islamic history (Maidir Harun & Firdaus, 2001: 67).

## **4. Arabization Policy and Its Impact on the Development of Science**

The Arabization policy initiated by Caliph Abdul Malik bin Marwan (685–705 AD) made Arabic the sole official language of state administration, replacing Greek in Syria and Persian in Iraq (Ayyasy, 2023: 56–57). Its implications for education were transformative: Arabic was no longer merely a language of religion, but rather a language of science and global civilization (Hitti, 2010: 214).

Arabization directly spurred the birth of several new disciplines. Abul Aswad ad-Du'ali pioneered the creation of the science of grammar (*nahwu*), introducing a punctuation system consisting of dots and *harakat* (spells) into the Quran to prevent reading errors among the growing number of non-Arabs (Ayyasy, 2023: 58–60). Arabic grammar, rhetoric, and lexicography also developed rapidly in the same

context, so this policy had not only a political dimension but also a profound epistemological impact on Islamic civilization (Zuhairini et al., 2004: 78).

#### **D. The Translation Movement and the Birth of New Sciences**

Khalid ibn Yazid—Muawiyah's grandson, nicknamed Hakim Ali Marwan—was a central figure who initiated the translation of books on chemistry, medicine, and astronomy from Greek, Coptic, and Syriac into Arabic (Hitti, 2010: 317). This movement became the seed of the "Great Translation Movement" which later reached its peak during the Abbasid Dynasty (Daulay et al., 2020: 74).

The branches of science that grew during the Umayyad era include: (1) Qira'at Science, which developed from the tradition of reading the Qur'an into a separate discipline (Anwar, 2015: 62); (2) Tafsir Science, which developed rapidly along with the increasing need for contextual interpretation for non-Arab communities (Harun Nasution, 1985: 65); (3) Hadith Science, which experienced great progress through the order for official bookkeeping by Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz (Musyrifah Sunanto, 2004: 62); (4) Fiqh Science which developed into an independent discipline (Anwar, 2015: 64); (5) Geography and History Science, which developed driven by administrative and expeditionary needs (Indasari, 2017: 57); and (6) Sufism Science which grew as a spiritual response to the worldly luxuries of the dynasty era (Dalimunthe & Nasution, 2023: 16469).

#### **E. The Role of Ulama and the Transmission of Knowledge**

The advancement of Islamic education during the Umayyad era was inseparable from the central role of the ulama as the primary agents of transmission and development of knowledge. The ulama established madrasas in every major city and undertook pilgrimages from Andalusia to Khurasan in search of a reliable chain of knowledge (Anwar, 2015: 65–66). This scholarly spirit was supported by the caliph's policies, which highly valued scholars (Nurkholis Madjid, 2007: 134).

The system of scientific transmission runs in a continuous relay pattern: from the generation of companions to the tabi'in, from tabi'in to tabi' al-tabi'in, and so on. A harmonious and dedicated teacher-student relationship becomes the epistemological foundation that guarantees the authenticity of the transmitted knowledge (Musyrifah Sunanto, 2004: 58). This pattern not only maintains the integrity of Islamic science, but also builds a cross-regional intellectual network that becomes the infrastructure of Islamic civilization until the centuries that followed (Soekarno & Ahmad Supardi, n.d.: 112).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research successfully answers the stated objective, namely analyzing the transformation of Islamic educational institutions during the Umayyad Dynasty (661–750 CE). The findings show that this period was not merely a political transition, but a real institutional leap: the Islamic educational system transformed from an informal, oral model into an organized, three-tiered structure, supported by an unprecedented diversification of institutions—Kuttab, Mosque, Badiah, Bimaristan, Majelis Sastra, and Library. The Arabization policy, the translation movement pioneered by Khalid ibn Yazid, the compilation of hadith by Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, and the role of the inter-city network of scholars were structural factors that synergistically encouraged the formation of the intellectual foundations of Islam. Thus, the thesis that the Umayyad Dynasty was merely a political dynasty without significant intellectual contributions cannot be maintained historically.

However, this study is limited by the scope of primary sources available in modern Indonesian and Arabic. Future studies should expand the analysis by referring directly to classical Arabic sources, such as *Tarikh al-Tabari* and *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* Ibn al-Athir, to obtain a more authentic and detailed picture. Furthermore, further research comparing the Umayyad educational system in the East (Iraq, Persia) with the West (Andalusia, North Africa) would be highly relevant for understanding regional variations in the development of Islamic educational institutions. Emerging research on the relationship between state policy and the development of Islamic curricula in the first century of the Hijra also opens up promising interdisciplinary research opportunities between the history of education, Islamic politics, and the sociology of knowledge.

In practical terms, the educational legacy of the Umayyad Dynasty offers valuable lessons for the development of contemporary Islamic education: that the progress of Islamic civilization historically never occurred in isolation, but rather through openness to cross-cultural knowledge, consistent state policy support, and synergy between religious institutions and general scientific institutions. These principles remain relevant as a reference in designing an integrative and adaptive model of Islamic education in the global era.

The author would like to express his deepest gratitude to Dr. Busahdiar, MA., the lecturer in charge of the History of Islamic Education course at the Master of Islamic Studies Program, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, for his invaluable guidance, direction, and academic input in the process of writing this article. Appreciation is also expressed to the UMJ Postgraduate Library for their support in providing reference access that facilitated the research process, as well as to all fellow students who have provided constructive discussions and input.

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research was conducted independently as part of an academic assignment within their study program, without the involvement of any third party that could influence the representation or interpretation of the reported research results.

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