

FAZLUR RAHMAN'S THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC EDUCATION WORLD

Alsadika Ziaul Haq^{1*}, Maragustam², Usman³

¹²³ Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: alsadika.haq@student.uin-suka.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The contemporary Islamic education system is facing significant challenges due to the rapid pace of globalization, technological advancements, and ideological changes. These challenges call for an adaptive educational model that balances traditional Islamic values with modern educational needs. Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988), a prominent Muslim philosopher, provided essential insights into this issue. Rahman critiqued the intellectual stagnation within the Muslim world and the division between religious and secular knowledge. His educational philosophy promotes a holistic integration of science, ethics, and methodology, advocating for a system that nurtures not just intellectual capabilities, but also moral and spiritual development. This study aims to analyze Rahman's thoughts on Islamic education and explore their relevance in addressing the current issues within contemporary Islamic education. Using a qualitative approach and library research, this paper examines Rahman's works, particularly his hermeneutical method of double movement, and their implications for modern Islamic curricula. The study finds that Rahman's approach can provide a progressive framework for Islamic education, emphasizing critical thinking, moral integrity, and the integration of religious and general knowledge. Rahman's educational philosophy is crucial in reshaping Islamic education to meet contemporary demands without losing its Islamic identity.

Keywords: Character Building, Critical Thinking, Education Reform, Fazlur Rahman, Islamic Education

INTRODUCTION

The world of contemporary Islamic education is facing a complex crossroads. On the one hand, it upholds the scientific heritage and moral values that have shaped civilization for centuries. On the other hand, the pace of globalization, developments in information technology, and exponential social change demand adaptation and dynamic relevance. The phenomenon of globalization, an inevitable reality (Fikri, 2019; Wijayanti et al., 2022), has brought with it various impacts, both positive and negative. The most obvious positive impact is the acceleration of information dissemination and technological advancement (Ekaprasetya et al., 2021; Saputri et al., 2024), which allows for easier and faster access to knowledge (Astria, 2019). However, if not balanced with adequate preparedness, globalization can also backfire. Many children and adolescents, for example, are not yet able to use technological media proportionally (Alia & Irwansyah, 2018), which has the potential to cause behavioral changes and even moral deviations (Novanda & Supriyanto, 2020).

Furthermore, the tide of globalization also carries with it ideologies such as liberalism, hedonism, and secularism, which have penetrated family and community structures, making it difficult for parents to guide family members according to religious values (Maragustam, 2018). As a result, moral and character decay has become a serious problem affecting the younger generation today (Patimah & Herlambang, 2021; Rusnali, 2020). This decline in morals indicates the need for an educational model that not only focuses on the cognitive realm but also comprehensively integrates the affective (moral) and psychomotor aspects. Morality, or character, is the main trait that is engraved and integrated in a person's mind, feelings, beliefs, and behavior, which distinguishes them from others (Maragustam, 2019). Therefore, a comprehensive and authentic education system is needed to shape, develop, and optimize moral education.

In this context, the thoughts of Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988), an influential Pakistani Muslim thinker, are very relevant. Rahman was one of the key figures in the effort to renew modern Islamic thought. He strongly criticized the intellectual stagnation that had plagued the Muslim world and the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences, which had weakened the position of Muslims on the global stage. His educational philosophy offers a foundation for rebuilding a holistic and adaptive vision of Islamic education

that is capable of responding to the challenges of the times without losing its Islamic identity. This paper will philosophically examine Fazlur Rahman's views on Islamic education, their relevance in the contemporary era, and his radical yet constructive methodological offerings.

In line with the complexity of contemporary Islamic education problems, this research is of high urgency. First, Fazlur Rahman's thinking offers a conceptual framework that has the potential to bridge the tension between tradition and modernity through the integration of science, ethics, and methodological renewal. Second, the relevance of Rahman's thoughts needs to be studied more deeply in the context of the current Islamic education system, which still faces problems of scientific dichotomy, stagnant thinking, and weak critical thinking skills among students. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to comprehensively analyze Fazlur Rahman's ideas on educational development and evaluate his contribution to the reconstruction of a more progressive, contextually relevant, and character-building Islamic education. Thus, this study is expected to provide a new direction for the development of curriculum, learning methodology, and the vision of Islamic education that is capable of responding to global challenges without losing its normative roots.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a type of library research or in-depth literature study. This method was chosen because the main objective of the research is to analyze Fazlur Rahman's thoughts on Islamic education and their relevance to the contemporary world of Islamic education. The author uses two main types of sources: primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used are two major works by Fazlur Rahman, namely *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* and *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam Menuju Pembentukan Karakter* (Islamic Education Philosophy Towards Character Building) by Prof. Dr. H. Maragustam, M.A., published in 2018. These two books provide a strong theoretical foundation for examining Rahman's thoughts in the context of Islamic education. In addition, to enrich the understanding and perspective in this study, the author also combines secondary sources, consisting of other books and scientific articles related to the theme being studied, such as Islamic education, Fazlur Rahman's thoughts, and their application in the contemporary era. In his analysis, the author uses a hermeneutic approach to interpret Rahman's texts, which allows researchers to delve deeper into the values and principles that can be applied in modern Islamic education. The analysis process was carried out by examining and comparing various arguments found in these sources, identifying the main themes, and drawing conclusions relevant to the current context of Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Brief Biography and Intellectual Background of Fazlur Rahman

Fazlur Rahman was born on September 21, 1919, in *Hazara*, a border region between India and Afghanistan that is now part of Pakistan. His family background was deeply rooted in Islamic scholarship; his father was a respected local scholar, a hafiz of the Qur'an and an expert in Islamic law, who taught him the basics of religious knowledge from an early age. Rahman's early education included mastery of Arabic, Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, fiqh, and classical Islamic philosophy, which gave him a solid foundation in traditional scholarship (Bilal, 2021). However, Rahman did not just stick to tradition. He pursued a modern education at Punjab University, Lahore, where he earned an MA in Arabic Studies. He then continued his education at Oxford University, England, and successfully completed his doctoral studies in Philosophy in 1949 with a dissertation on the philosophy of Ibn Sina. His academic journey in the West led him to an in-depth introduction to modern Western philosophy, hermeneutics, and the social sciences. It was this intersection between two different intellectual traditions—classical Islam and modern Western thought—that shaped the uniqueness and depth of Rahman's thinking. After completing his studies, Rahman taught at various leading institutions, including Durham University in England, McGill University in Canada, and finally the University of Chicago in the United States, where he spent most of his career until his death in 1988. During his career, he also served as Director of the Central Institute of Islamic Research in Pakistan, a position that gave him the opportunity to apply his ideas on Islamic reform in state policy, albeit only temporarily due to resistance from conservative circles (Afandi & Bagus Cahyadi, 2025). This rich and diverse intellectual background made Rahman a thinker who was able to see the problems of Muslims from various perspectives. He was not blind to the internal weaknesses of Muslims, especially in terms of

intellectual stagnation and disconnection from the original spirit of the Qur'an. However, he also did not get caught up in blind imitation of the West. Instead, Rahman sought to revive the tradition of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in Islam using modern methodological tools, an endeavor with significant implications for the philosophy of Islamic education.

Basic Concepts of Islamic Educational Philosophy according to Fazlur Rahman

Fazlur Rahman's philosophy of Islamic education is inherently linked to his theological and philosophical view of Islam as a comprehensive and dynamic religion, not merely a set of rituals or static doctrines. This foundation is a crucial starting point because he believes that the crisis in education in the Muslim world is rooted in a crisis of understanding the essence of Islam itself. For Rahman, when Islam is reduced to a series of frozen dogmas and formalistic ritualism that are disconnected from social reality, education will automatically become a tool for preserving this stagnation. This kind of education will only produce a generation that is familiar with the texts but clumsy in dealing with context, as well as individually pious but socially crippled. On the contrary, Rahman asserts that Islam is an ethical and progressive worldview (*weltanschauung*), in which the revelations of the Qur'an are the source of universal moral principles that must be continually brought to life through reasoning and *ijtihad*. Therefore, true Islamic education must reflect this dynamism, functioning as an intellectual driving force that connects the spirit of revelation with the challenges of an ever-changing era (Duderija, 2017). Based on this theological foundation, Rahman radically rejects the educational model that he considers to be passive "knowledge transmission." In this model, students are positioned as empty vessels whose only task is to receive and memorize information passed down from previous generations, without any room for critical thinking or innovation. According to him, this transmission model is responsible for "closing the door to *ijtihad*" and perpetuating blind imitation (imitation without understanding). Instead, he offers a vision of education as an active and transformative "process of formation." Education is not about filling the head, but about lighting a fire in the soul. This process aims to activate all of God's potential gifts within humans (*fitrah*), especially the faculty of reason (*intellect*) to think rationally and the heart (*qalb*) to feel and realize moral truth (Aslan, 2018). Thus, the goal of education shifts from merely producing memorizers to forming thinkers who are able to engage in dialogue with sacred texts, analyze reality, and creatively formulate ethical solutions to contemporary problems.

The culmination of this educational vision is the realization of a complete human being (*insan kamil*), a concept that is the ultimate goal of the entire educational process. A complete human being, in Rahman's view, is an individual who has achieved a harmonious balance between three fundamental dimensions: moral, intellectual, and spiritual (Waghid, 2004). This balance is the antidote to "*intellectual schizophrenia*," a term that describes the condition of division within educated Muslims that remains a problem to this day (Moosa, 2015). Without intellectual ability, a Muslim will fail to become an effective agent of change (*khalifatullah*) in the modern world. Without moral depth, that intelligence can be misused for destructive purposes. And without spiritual maturity centered on *tawhid*, all intellectual and moral achievements will lose their meaning and ultimate direction. Thus, in the author's opinion, *the perfect human* being is not a flawless figure, but rather an individual who continuously strives to unite knowledge, faith, and deeds into a dynamic, relevant, and contributory personal whole for civilization.

The Purpose of Education: Moral, Intellectual, and Spiritual Integration

Rahman strongly emphasizes that education must be directed towards developing all dimensions of human existence. He criticizes educational models that focus only on cognitive aspects (mastery of knowledge) or ritual aspects (religious practices) separately. According to him, the goal of Islamic education is to produce individuals who: Have Deep Moral-Emotional Awareness: This means instilling noble character, ethics, and Islamic values sourced from the Qur'an and Sunnah, which are not only understood rationally but also experienced emotionally. Intellectually Competent: Education must develop critical, analytical, and rational thinking skills. This includes mastery of various disciplines, both Islamic and modern sciences, to understand the reality of the world (Syamsudin et al., 2025). Spiritual Maturity: The spiritual dimension in Rahman's education is not merely a ritualistic aspect, but a deep appreciation of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) as a principle that binds all aspects of life. The integration of these three dimensions-moral, intellectual, and spiritual-is at the core of Rahman's educational vision. He believes that

separating these aspects will result in individuals who are lopsided: perhaps intelligent but lacking in character, or pious but not critical (Hermansen, 1996).

Primary Sources: The Qur'an and Sunnah as the Basis of the Curriculum

For Rahman, the Qur'an and Sunnah are the two main and irreplaceable sources for any attempt at renewal in Islamic education. This assertion is fundamental, because it places his modernization project firmly within the framework of Islamic authenticity, not outside it. However, what distinguishes Rahman from traditionalists is his strong rejection of narrow textualist readings and decontextualization. He argues that treating the Qur'an as a static legal codebook is a methodological error that has led to *intellectual paralysis*. Instead, he views the Qur'an as a living source of revelation, which responds to specific historical situations with the aim of instilling a coherent ethical worldview (*weltanschauung*). Thus, the task of education is not merely to teach "what the text says," but to train students to understand "why the text says that" in its context, and then to explore the universal moral principles behind it (Syauqi, 2022). With this hermeneutical foundation, Rahman's idea that the Qur'an and Sunnah should be the "basis of the curriculum" has a much deeper meaning than simply adding religious subjects or pasting verses into science textbooks. Rather, it is a call for a paradigm shift, in which the spirit and ethical principles of the Qur'an—such as justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and responsibility as khalifah—should become the epistemological and ethical framework that inspires and shapes all subject matter. In practice, this means that science teaching should not only aim to understand the laws of nature, but also to foster a sense of wonder at God's creation and an awareness of ecological responsibility. Similarly, the study of social sciences should not only analyze the structure of society, but also critically evaluate it based on the Qur'anic ideals of social justice (Duderija, 2017). Consequently, a curriculum imbued with this spirit will inherently encourage students to understand the relevance of Islamic teachings to the most pressing contemporary issues. Education is no longer a space isolated from reality, but rather an arena for training *ijtihad* in facing modern challenges. Issues such as environmental ethics, for example, are no longer seen as a secular domain, but are analyzed through the lens of Qur'anic principles of *amanah* and the prohibition of causing corruption on earth (*fasad fi al-ardh*). Similarly, issues of social justice and scientific progress are approached not with a defensive or apologetic attitude, but with the conviction that Islam provides a strong moral foundation for constructive contribution. Thus, the author argues that the paradigm of Islamic education has fundamentally shifted from a passive transmission model oriented towards the preservation of tradition, towards a formative framework that prioritizes the development of intellectual capabilities and moral integrity. The main goal is to produce Muslim subjects who have the agency to engage critically and constructively with the discourse of modernity, rather than merely being objects of doctrinal inheritance (Fernadi, 2025).

The Double Movement Method and Its Relevance in Education

At the heart of Fazlur Rahman's intellectual project, which serves as the core of his educational philosophy, is a hermeneutic framework he calls the *Double Movement* Method. This methodology is not merely an interpretive technique, but rather an epistemological intervention fundamentally designed to address the intellectual crisis in the Muslim world. According to Rahman's diagnosis, this crisis stems from a methodological failure in approaching revelation, resulting in atomistic, decontextualized, and ahistorical understandings (Strand & Papastephanou, 2023). As a result, Islamic teachings are often reduced to a set of rigid legal rules (legalism) or speculative theological dogmas, disconnected from their dynamic ethical-moral spirit. The Double Movement is designed as a bridge to reconnect sacred texts with contemporary reality through a systematic and responsible reasoning process. This method consists of two complementary dialectical movements. The First Movement is a socio-historical investigation process that moves from the present to the past to understand the text in its original context. This step requires more than just linguistic understanding; it requires critical analysis of the social, political, and cultural situations to which the revelation responds. The goal is to distill universal ethical principles, or *ratio legis*, from particular and time-bound legal formulations or narratives. This is a process of abstraction from the specific to the general, from particular laws to the underlying universal moral ideals (*maqasid*) (Syauqi, 2022). The Second Movement is a process of re-concretization that moves from the past back to the present. After these universal principles have been identified, interpreters must reformulate them and apply them creatively to address specific challenges in the contemporary era. This movement is the essence of authentic and dynamic

ijtihad: not merely a mechanical application of old rules, but a re-actualization of the spirit of revelation in a new form that is relevant to current conditions (Duderija, 2017).

Its Relevance in Education and Application in the Curriculum:

The *double movement* method has transformative implications for the Islamic education curriculum: Principle-Based Curriculum, Not Just Rules: The curriculum should train students to understand the basic principles behind religious teachings, not just memorize fiqh rules. Development of Critical and Innovative Thinking: This method directly encourages the development of critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills in students. Islamic studies are no longer a discipline disconnected from reality, but become relevant to contemporary issues such as environmental ethics, human rights, and science (Fernadi, 2025). The pedagogical implications of this methodology are transformative for the design of Islamic curriculum and educational practice. First, it requires a shift from a nomocentric (rule-based) curriculum to an ethocentric (ethical principle-based) curriculum. The focus of learning is no longer on dogmatically memorizing fiqh rules, but rather on instilling “hermeneutic competence” in students, namely the ability to understand and apply the moral principles behind these rules. Second, this method is inherently a model for the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, historical analysis, and creative synthesis. By training students to constantly move between texts, historical contexts, and contemporary contexts, education is no longer a passive transmission process, but rather an active and continuous intellectual exercise (Waghid, 2004). Finally, the application of this method makes Islamic studies existentially relevant, dissolving the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. Modern issues such as environmental ethics, social justice, and human rights are no longer seen as foreign “external” domains, but as arenas in which Islamic ethical principles must be actively articulated and fought for. Ultimately, the author concludes that this educational transformation can be understood as an ontological project: it seeks to forge a new Muslim subjectivity. This subjectivity is characterized by epistemic self-reliance and moral agency, which enable sophisticated and confident engagement with the challenges of the modern era.

Integration of Religious and General Knowledge: Overcoming the Dichotomy of Education

One of the fundamental issues of primary concern to Fazlur Rahman was the dichotomy between religious knowledge (*ulum al-diniyyah*) and general knowledge (*ulum al-kauniyyah*). He saw this separation as the root cause of the intellectual decline of Muslims (Strand & Papastephanou, 2023). This separation resulted in two distinct types of intellectuals: scholars who lacked an understanding of modern science, and scientists who were disconnected from Islamic spiritual values. Phenomena such as corruption among the educated (Rosikah & Listianingsih, 2022) are manifestations of the failure of education to integrate morality with intellectual intelligence. To overcome this dichotomy, Rahman proposes a holistic model of knowledge integration based on the principle of *tawhid*. This integration is not merely the addition of religious subjects, but a paradigm shift that views all knowledge as part of a single entity. This idea has inspired various reform efforts, such as the transformation of IAIN into UIN in Indonesia and the establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) (Maragustam, 2018).

Modernization and Democratization of Islamic Education

For Rahman, modernization is not westernization, but an essential process to restore the dynamism of Islamic education. This includes: Renewal of Teaching Systems and Methods: Shifting from passive memorization methods to active, critical, and participatory learning, where teachers act as facilitators. Renewal of Educational Goals: Expanding the goal from simply producing scholars to producing professionals in various fields who have an Islamic ethical foundation. Freedom of Thought and Creativity: Democratization of education means creating an environment that values *intellectual* freedom, encourages ijtihad, and stimulates creativity to find innovative solutions (Strand & Papastephanou, 2023).

Challenges and Issues in Contemporary Islamic Education

The implementation of Rahman’s philosophy of education faces various challenges, including: Conservative Resistance: The biggest obstacle comes from conservative groups who view Rahman’s approach as a form of liberalization that threatens tradition (Safi, 2003). Resource Gap: Many Islamic educational institutions, especially at the grassroots level, lack funds, modern facilities, and qualified

teachers capable of implementing Rahman's paradigm. Adaptation of Technology and Digital Curriculum: Islamic education is challenged to integrate technology effectively and ethically, as well as to develop quality Islamic digital content. Globalization and Ideological Pluralism: Education must equip the younger generation to face ideological pluralism with a strong foundation of faith and critical thinking (Maragustam, 2018). Current Issues (Moral Decadence and Corruption): Issues such as moral decadence (Rusnali, 2020) and corruption (Rosikah & Listianingsih, 2022) reflect the failure of character education, which demands the strengthening of moral education as the core of the curriculum.

Contributions and Criticism of Fazlur Rahman's Thought

Fazlur Rahman's thoughts have left an indelible mark on the discourse of modern Islamic education science and philosophy. His contributions are very significant, but they are not without criticism. The Impact and Contribution of Rahman's Thought: Revitalization of Hermeneutics of the Qur'an and Sunnah: The *double movement* method has become a powerful methodological tool for understanding Islamic teachings contextually and inspiring many Muslim scholars to engage in contemporary *ijtihad* (Syauqi, 2022). Integration of Knowledge as a Paradigm: His critique of the dichotomy of knowledge has become the philosophical foundation for educational reform in many Muslim countries, inspiring the development of holistic modern Islamic universities. Future-Oriented Education: Rahman encourages Islamic education to not only preserve tradition but also become an agent of change and progress, with the aim of forming well-rounded *individuals*. Emphasis on Reason and the Spirit of *Ijtihad*: His thinking restores confidence in the role of reason as an important tool for understanding religion and the world, and encourages the spirit of *ijtihad*, which had long been extinguished.

Criticism and Limitations of Implementation: Intellectual Elitism: One major criticism is that Rahman's hermeneutic approach is highly complex and elitist. The *double movement* method requires a deep mastery of history, sociology, and philosophy, which is difficult for educators and the general public to access and implement. This makes it more of a discourse among academics than a mass educational movement. Lack of Practical Models: Although Rahman provides a brilliant philosophical framework, he does not offer detailed and practical curriculum models or implementation guidelines. His work is more theoretical-philosophical in nature, leaving educators with the enormous task of translating his ideas into concrete classroom practices. Potential for Excessive Subjectivity: The hermeneutic approach, which emphasizes contextual interpretation and the exploration of "moral ideals," has raised concerns among some critics that it could open the door to excessive subjectivity, whereby interpreters could impose modern ideologies onto sacred texts in the name of relevance.

CONCLUSION

According to Fazlur Rahman, Islamic educational philosophy is a visionary and fundamental intellectual project that aims to respond to the crisis of dualism and stagnation of thought in the Muslim world. Rooted in a sharp critique of the separation of religious and secular knowledge, Rahman offers an integral, holistic, and dynamic educational paradigm. The core of his thinking is the formation of *insan kamil*—individuals who are intellectually, morally, and spiritually balanced—through an educational system that unites all branches of knowledge under the principle of *tawhid*. The double movement method he conceived is at the heart of his educational epistemology, functioning as a hermeneutic tool to explore the universal principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah and apply them in a relevant way in the modern context. This is a call to revive the tradition of *ijtihad* and critical thinking, transforming education from a passive process of dogma transmission into a creative and innovative dialogical process. His vision of modernization and democratization of education emphasizes the importance of freedom of thought and the development of the full potential of human beings as the foundation of civilization's progress. Despite facing serious challenges such as conservative resistance, resource gaps, and implementation complexities, the relevance of Fazlur Rahman's thinking to contemporary Islamic education cannot be denied. His ideas provide a solid philosophical foundation for building an education system capable of equipping the younger generation with strong faith, noble character, and intellectual skills to face the challenges of globalization. Ultimately, Fazlur Rahman invites the Islamic world not to choose between tradition and modernity, but to creatively synthesize the two in order to produce an authentic, progressive Muslim generation capable of contributing to humanity.

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