

Seeking Knowledge in Islam: Obligations and Ethical Foundations in Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam, focusing on the obligations and ethics within the Islamic educational tradition. Although numerous studies have discussed Islamic education and the virtue of knowledge, limited attention has been given to the integrated relationship between the obligation of seeking knowledge, its ethical dimensions, and their relevance to contemporary Islamic educational practices. Addressing this gap, this study offers a comprehensive analysis that connects these three aspects within a unified conceptual framework. Through literature analysis and classical Islamic sources, this research demonstrates that seeking knowledge is not only regarded as a religious duty but also as a means for personal and societal development. The ethics of seeking knowledge, as outlined in the Islamic tradition, emphasize humility, honesty, and sincere intentions. This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research method, chosen as it is suitable for examining and analyzing written sources related to the theme of the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam, its obligations, and ethics within the Islamic educational tradition. This article also discusses the relevance of these concepts in the context of contemporary Islamic education. The Islamic educational tradition underscores the importance of sincere intentions, respect towards teachers, and proper etiquette in knowledge gatherings. Patience and perseverance are also highlighted as key factors for success in acquiring knowledge. The concept of lifelong learning has long been recognized in Islam, encouraging individuals to continually develop themselves.



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INTRODUCTION

Islam places knowledge in a very high and noble position. Since its inception, Islam has emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge as one of the fundamental obligations for every Muslim. This is reflected in the first revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), which begins with the command "Iqra" or "Read" – "Read in the name of your Lord who created" (Al-Quran, 96:1). This command not only marked the beginning of the spread of Islam but also became the foundation for a strong scholarly tradition in Islamic civilization (Azra, 2002).

Throughout the history of Islamic civilization, various scholars and intellectuals have emerged, making significant contributions to the development of global knowledge (Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023; Mukhlis, 2025b). From Al-Kindi to Ibn Sina, from Al-Biruni to Ibn Khaldun, they all serve as real examples of how Islam views knowledge as something extremely important and noble (Nakosteen, 2003).

However, in this modern era, where technological and informational advancements are progressing rapidly, it is crucial for Muslims to revisit and truly understand the concept of seeking knowledge from an Islamic perspective (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulfaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulfaidah, et al., 2025). It should not only be seen as a religious obligation but also as a means for personal development and for benefiting society at large (Al-Attas, 1979). Despite the extensive discussion of knowledge in Islamic intellectual tradition, contemporary Islamic education still faces a conceptual problem: the obligation to seek knowledge is often discussed normatively, while its ethical, pedagogical, and practical implications are not always articulated in an integrated and systematic

manner. As a result, the relationship between legal obligation, ethical conduct, and contemporary educational practice remains insufficiently clarified.

This gap is important because the pursuit of knowledge in Islam is not merely a matter of acquiring information or fulfilling a formal religious duty. Rather, it involves moral discipline, proper intention, ethical interaction between teacher and student, and social responsibility. Therefore, a systematic re-examination of the obligation and ethics of seeking knowledge is needed to strengthen the theoretical foundation of Islamic education and to make it more relevant to contemporary educational challenges.

The aim of this article is to delve deeper into the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam, focusing on two main aspects: obligation and ethics within the tradition of Islamic education. By examining classical and contemporary Islamic sources, this article seeks to: Analyze the legal and philosophical foundations of the obligation to seek knowledge in Islam (Al-Ghazali, 2005; Ibn Khaldun, 2015), Identify the types of knowledge that are considered obligatory to learn from the Islamic perspective (Al-Zarnuji, 2008), Explore the ethics and etiquette of seeking knowledge as outlined in the tradition of Islamic education (Al-Attas, 1979; Wan Daud, 1998), Evaluate the relevance of the concepts of obligation and ethics in seeking knowledge within the context of contemporary Islamic education (Hashim & Rossidy, 2000), Offer recommendations for revitalizing the spirit of seeking knowledge among Muslims, in accordance with the principles outlined in Islamic tradition (Husain & Ashraf, 1979).

The scholarly contribution of this article lies in its attempt to integrate three dimensions that are often treated separately in previous discussions: the normative-legal basis of seeking knowledge, the ethical framework of Islamic learning, and its relevance for contemporary Islamic education. By bringing these dimensions together, this article offers a more systematic conceptual framework for understanding knowledge-seeking as both a religious obligation and an ethical educational practice.

By addressing these aspects, this article aims to provide a deeper understanding of the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam (Mukhlis et al., 2024; Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023), as well as to inspire readers to continue developing themselves through the pursuit of knowledge that aligns with Islamic values.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research method. This method is chosen because it is suitable for examining and analyzing written sources related to the theme of the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam, its obligations, and ethics within the Islamic educational tradition. The steps taken in this research are as follows:

1. Data Collection

Data is collected from various primary and secondary sources, including the Quran, Hadith, classical Islamic books, contemporary books, academic journals, and relevant scholarly articles. The selection of sources is based on several criteria: relevance to the research topic, scholarly credibility, textual authority, publication quality, and contribution to the discussion of knowledge-seeking, obligation, and ethics in Islamic education. Primary sources include Qur'anic verses, authentic Hadith collections, and recognized classical Islamic texts, while secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and contemporary studies published in reputable outlets. Sources that are not directly related to the research focus, lack academic credibility, or contain unsupported interpretations are excluded from the analysis. (Zed, 2008).

2. Classification and Categorization of Data

The collected data is then classified and categorized based on the main themes of the research, such as the legal foundations of the obligation to seek knowledge, types of knowledge that must be studied, ethics in seeking knowledge, and its relevance in the context of contemporary Islamic education (Krippendorff, 2004).

3. Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted using content analysis and hermeneutics. Content analysis is used to interpret the meaning of the texts under study, while the hermeneutic approach is applied to understand the historical and social context of the sources used (Gadamer, 2004; Mayring, 2000). In the content analysis process, key concepts, recurring themes, and normative statements related to seeking knowledge are identified, coded, compared, and interpreted. The hermeneutic analysis is conducted by considering the linguistic meaning, textual context, historical background, and relevance of the sources to contemporary Islamic educational discourse.

4. Interpretation and Synthesis

The results of the analysis are then interpreted and synthesized to produce a comprehensive understanding of the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam, its obligations, and ethics within the Islamic educational tradition. This process also involves comparing and contextualizing classical thoughts with contemporary realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

5. Validation

To ensure the validity of the research findings, source triangulation is conducted by comparing various perspectives from different sources. Additionally, peer review is carried out by involving experts in the field of Islamic education to provide feedback and critique of the analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

6. Conclusion Drawing

Based on the results of the analysis and interpretation, conclusions are drawn that address the research objectives and contribute to the understanding of the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam and its implications in the context of contemporary Islamic education (Patton, 2015).

Through this research method, it is hoped that a deep and comprehensive analysis of the obligation and ethics of seeking knowledge within the Islamic educational tradition, as well as its relevance in contemporary contexts, can be produced.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Islamic Institutions in the Modern Era in Pursuit of Educational Quality**

This study confirms that the obligation to seek knowledge has a strong foundation in Islamic teachings. The Quran and Hadith explicitly emphasize the importance of knowledge. Verses such as Surah Al-Mujadilah: 11 and Surah Taha: 114 highlight that Allah elevates the ranks of those who possess knowledge (Quraish Shihab, 2002). Additionally, the Hadith narrated by Ibn Majah, which states that seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim, reinforces the significance of knowledge in Islam (Al-Ghazali, 2005). However, these textual foundations should not be treated merely as normative declarations. In the context of modern Islamic education, they function as an epistemological basis for evaluating whether educational institutions are capable of producing morally grounded, socially responsive, and intellectually competent graduates.

The analysis reveals that classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali classify knowledge into two main categories: Fardhu 'Ain (Individual Obligation): Includes fundamental knowledge of faith (aqidah), worship (ibadah), and social transactions (muamalah), Fardhu Kifayah (Communal Obligation): Encompasses various disciplines essential for societal welfare (Ibn Khaldun, 2015; Al-Attas, 1979).

The findings indicate that the principles of obligation and ethics in seeking knowledge in Islam remain highly relevant in the context of contemporary education. However, challenges arise in integrating these values into modern educational systems (Wan Daud, 1998; Naquib al-Attas, 1993). Some recommendations include:

- a) Reformulating Islamic education curricula to integrate religious and secular sciences.
- b) Emphasizing character development and ethics in the learning process.
- c) Enhancing the quality and integrity of teachers as role models.

Several classical texts highlight that ethics play a central role in the Islamic educational tradition. Key ethical principles include:

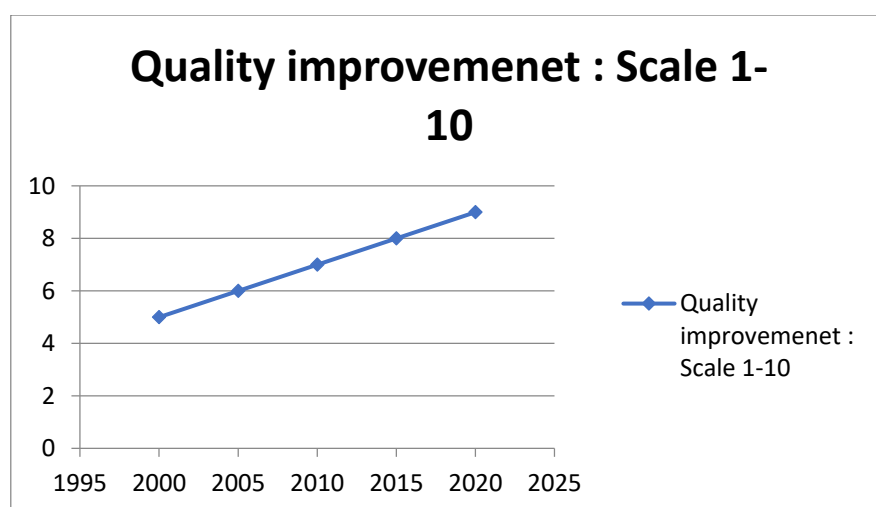
- 1) Sincerity in Seeking Knowledge: Pursuing knowledge with a pure intention (Al-Zarnuji, 2008).
- 2) Respect for Teachers and Knowledge: Maintaining proper etiquette towards teachers and the learning process (Ibn Jama'ah, 1974).
- 3) Consistency and Patience in Learning: Demonstrating perseverance in acquiring knowledge (Al-Ghazali, 2005).
- 4) Applying Acquired Knowledge: Practicing the knowledge gained (Al-Shafi'i, 1990).

The research reveals that classical scholars like Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun classified knowledge into several categories. The general classification into *fardhu 'ain* (individual obligation) and *fardhu kifayah* (communal obligation) influences priorities and methodologies in Islamic learning traditions (Ibn Khaldun, 2015; Al-Attas, 1979). In Islam, seeking knowledge is not merely an individual endeavor but also carries significant social and spiritual implications. Knowledge is viewed as a means to enhance societal well-being and draw closer to Allah SWT (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2006; Fazlur Rahman, 1982).

An analysis of Islamic educational institutions in the modern era shows significant efforts to improve the quality of education, though several challenges persist:

1. Integration of Knowledge: Many Islamic educational institutions strive to integrate religious and secular sciences but face methodological and curricular obstacles (Azra, 2012; Naquib al-Attas, 1993).
2. Modernization of Educational Systems: Pesantren and madrasas have modernized their systems by adopting contemporary teaching methods and technology (Dhofier, 2011).
3. Enhancing Teacher Qualifications: Efforts are being made to improve the qualifications of teachers and lecturers, though these efforts are often hindered by limited resources and infrastructure (Lukens-Bull, 2013).
4. Accreditation and Standardization: Islamic educational institutions increasingly recognize the importance of accreditation and standardization to improve education quality (Azra, 2012).
5. Challenges of the Digital Era: Islamic educational institutions are striving to adapt to the digital age, but challenges remain in terms of infrastructure and digital literacy (Wekke, 2015).

Figure 1. Islamic Institutions in the Modern Era and Efforts to Improve Educational Quality



Aspects Improved:

- Curriculum
- Teaching Methods

- Infrastructure
- Teacher Qualifications
- Educational Technology

The analysis shows that the digital era presents both challenges and opportunities in the context of seeking knowledge. On one hand, access to information has become easier, but on the other hand, there is a risk of unverified information.

Enhancing Ethics in Seeking Knowledge in Today's Educational Landscape

This study confirms that the obligation to seek knowledge is firmly rooted in Islamic teachings. The Quran and Hadith explicitly emphasize the importance of knowledge:

- a) Quran, Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1-5, commands to read, which serves as the gateway to knowledge (Ibn Kathir, 1999).
- b) The Hadith narrated by Ibn Majah states, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim," reinforcing the position of knowledge in Islam (Al-Albani, 1988).
- c) Quran, Surah Al-Mujadilah verse 11, explains that Allah will elevate the ranks of those who possess knowledge (Al-Qurtubi, 2006).

Classical scholars like Al-Ghazali classify knowledge into two main categories:

- 1) Fardhu 'Ain: Knowledge that every individual Muslim is obligated to learn, such as theology (tauhid), jurisprudence (fiqh ibadah), and ethics (akhlaq) (Al-Ghazali, 2005).
- 2) Fardhu Kifayah: Knowledge that some members of the Muslim community must learn to fulfill communal needs, such as medicine, engineering, and economics (Ibn Khaldun, 2015).

The research identifies several strategies for enhancing ethics in seeking knowledge in the current educational era:

- a) Integration of Ethical Values into the Curriculum: Educational institutions need to incorporate Islamic ethical values into formal curricula (Naquib al-Attas, 1993).
- b) Role of Educators as Models: Teachers and lecturers must serve as role models in practicing Islamic ethics (Wan Daud, 1998).
- c) Wise Use of Technology: Utilizing technology to enrich learning while maintaining ethics and decorum (Bunt, 2003).
- d) Strengthening Character Education: Focusing on character development based on Islamic values in the education process (Lickona, 1991).

The Obligation to Seek Knowledge in Islam

Legal Basis

Islam establishes the pursuit of knowledge as an obligation for every Muslim, both male and female. Prophet Muhammad SAW stated, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" (Ibn Majah). This obligation is not limited to religious knowledge but also encompasses all knowledge that benefits individuals and society.

Types of Knowledge That Must Be Learned

Classical Islamic scholars, such as Al-Ghazali, categorized knowledge into two types: Fardhu 'Ain (Individual Obligation) This includes fundamental knowledge of religion Fardhu Kifayah (Communal Obligation) (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). This includes knowledge necessary for societal progress, such as medicine, engineering, and other sciences (Al-Ghazali, Ihya Ulum al-Din).

Ethics in Seeking Knowledge

- a. Sincere Intentions

Islam emphasizes the importance of sincere intentions in seeking knowledge. The seeker must aim to gain Allah's pleasure and benefit society, not for fame or worldly gain (Ibn Jama'ah, Tadzkirat al-Sami' wa al-Mutakallim).

b. Respect for Teachers

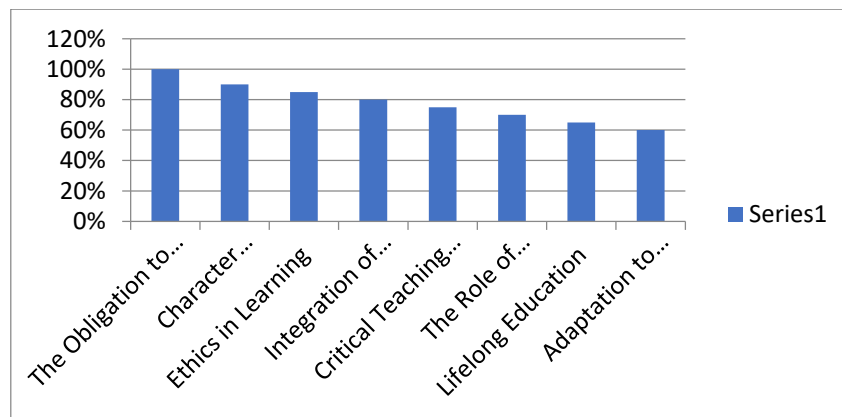
Islamic tradition greatly values the role of teachers. Students are expected to honor and obey their teachers and maintain humility during the learning process (Al-Zarnuji, Ta'lim al-Muta'allim).

c. Perseverance and Patience

Seeking knowledge requires diligence and patience. Islam mandates every Muslim to pursue knowledge based on the Prophet Muhammad's Hadith: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" (Ibn Majah). This includes both religious knowledge (fardhu 'ain) and beneficial worldly knowledge (fardhu kifayah) (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

Seeking knowledge must be grounded in sincere intentions for Allah's sake. Imam An-Nawawi, in his book "Riyadhus Shalihin", highlights the importance of intention in every action (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025), including the pursuit of knowledge (An-Nawawi, 2007). Islam also teaches the significance of lifelong learning. The Prophet Muhammad SAW stated: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" (Bukhari).

Figure 2. Main Components of Education Today



CONCLUSION

This study affirms that Islam obliges every Muslim to seek knowledge, both religious and beneficial worldly knowledge. This obligation is based on the Hadith and teachings of the Quran. Seeking knowledge must be grounded in sincere intentions for the sake of Allah SWT. Ethics in seeking knowledge include respect for teachers, politeness in scholarly assemblies, and avoiding arrogance. The process of acquiring knowledge requires patience, whether in learning, facing challenges, or applying the knowledge gained.

Islam teaches the importance of lifelong learning, from birth to death. Knowledge must be pursued with the right purpose not for pride or argumentation, but to be practiced and to benefit society.

In conclusion, seeking knowledge in Islam is not only an obligation but also a process that must be carried out with ethics, patience, and sincere intentions. The tradition of Islamic education emphasizes the importance of balancing knowledge, morality, and the application of knowledge in daily life. However, this study is limited to a conceptual and literature-based analysis of Islamic teachings on seeking knowledge and does not include empirical data to examine how these principles are implemented in contemporary educational settings. Therefore, the findings may not fully capture the diverse experiences and challenges faced by Muslim learners in different social and cultural contexts. Future research is recommended to conduct empirical studies involving students, educators, and Islamic educational institutions to explore the practical application of these values. In addition, comparative studies across different educational environments and Muslim communities may provide a deeper

understanding of how Islamic principles of knowledge-seeking contribute to personal development and social progress in the modern era.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This study did not receive any financial support or funding from any institution or party. All research activities were conducted independently without external funding influencing the process or results of the research.

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