



<b>Received:</b> September 22, 2025	<b>Revised:</b> November 28, 2025	<b>Accepted:</b> December 29, 2025
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## Reframing Educational Priorities: A Philosophical Synthesis of Islamic and Critical Pedagogy

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### **Abstract**

*This study critically examines the hierarchy of educational elements—material (māddah), method (ṭarīqah), teacher (al-mudarris), and the spirit of the teacher (rūḥ al-mudarris)—from the perspectives of Islamic educational thought and critical pedagogy. Employing a qualitative philosophical literature review, the study synthesizes classical Islamic educational texts, contemporary works on fiqh al-awlawiyyāt, and recent empirical and theoretical literature in critical and humanistic pedagogy (2020–2025). Data were analyzed through thematic and philosophical-analytical procedures to map hierarchical relations among educational elements and to interpret the normative concept of ahammu as a principle of priority rather than negation. The analysis demonstrates that rūḥ al-mudarris constitutes the apex of the educational hierarchy, functioning as an ethical-spiritual habitus that governs pedagogical decision-making regarding materials, methods, and teacher competence. Grounded in fiqh al-awlawiyyāt, the study argues that educational effectiveness depends on the sequential fulfillment of prior elements, culminating in the cultivation of the teacher’s moral-spiritual orientation. This framework challenges technocratic and method-centered reforms by re-centering education as a value-laden praxis. The study’s primary contribution lies in offering a theoretically integrated model that bridges Islamic jurisprudential reasoning and critical pedagogy, positioning the spirit of teaching as a central analytic category in educational theory. The findings have significant implications for educational policy, teacher education, and curriculum development, particularly in contexts seeking to balance technical competence with ethical and spiritual formation.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic Education; Hierarchy of Priorities; Teachers; Teacher’s Spirit; Holistic Pedagogy.*

### **Introduction**

Contemporary educational discourse increasingly recognizes that questions of educational quality cannot be reduced to curriculum design and instructional techniques alone (Priestley et al., 2022). Recent scholarship in critical pedagogy emphasizes education as a value-laden praxis oriented toward ethical responsibility, teacher agency, and responsiveness to the world rather than mere technical efficiency (Biesta, 2021a). Within this framework, teachers are not neutral transmitters of knowledge but moral and political actors whose dispositions, well-being (Day & Gu, 2021), and professional identity significantly shape learning processes and outcomes (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). Empirical studies further demonstrate that teacher well-being, resilience (Collie & Martin, 2022), and ethical

commitment are closely associated with instructional effectiveness and students' holistic development (Hascher et al., 2021).

Parallel to these developments, Islamic educational scholarship has reaffirmed the centrality of *adab* and *ta'dīb* as foundational concepts that integrate knowledge, ethics, and spiritual formation. Recent studies argue that Islamic education is not primarily concerned with information transmission (*ta'lim*), but with the cultivation of civilized human beings whose intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities develop in harmony (In'ami et al., 2025). This orientation positions education as a moral-spiritual enterprise in which curriculum, pedagogy, and the educator's character are inseparable. However, despite this shared concern for ethical formation, contemporary critical pedagogy and Islamic educational thought are often discussed in isolation, with limited philosophical integration between the two traditions.

A recurring formulation in Islamic educational discourse—*al-ṭarīqah ahammu min al-māddah*, *al-mudarris ahammu min al-ṭarīqah*, *rūḥ al-mudarris ahammu min al-mudarris*—is frequently invoked to express educational priorities. In practice, however, this formulation is often interpreted in a reductionist or instrumental manner, serving to justify the prioritization of teaching methods over content or affective motivation over professional competence (Fullan, 2020). Such interpretations reflect a technocratic logic that mirrors contemporary method-centered educational reforms, where innovation is equated with technique while ethical and spiritual orientation remains under-theorized (Koh et al., 2022). As a result, *ahammu* is commonly treated as a slogan rather than as a normative principle requiring philosophical and jurisprudential clarification.

Existing literature has not sufficiently examined *ahammu* through the lens of *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* (the jurisprudence of priorities) (Mohammed, 2023), which conceptualizes priority as hierarchical fulfillment rather than negation or exclusion (Qaradawi, 2020). Without this framework, discussions of educational priorities risk reinforcing fragmented reforms that focus on methods or performance indicators while neglecting the ethical-spiritual conditions that sustain meaningful education (Beijaard et al., 2020a). Moreover, while recent research highlights the importance of teacher identity, moral leadership, and spiritual resilience, these insights have rarely been connected to a structured hierarchy of educational elements that explains why the spirit of teaching (*rūḥ al-mudarris*) should function as a governing principle rather than a supplementary attribute (Qaradawi, 2020) (Noddings, 2021).

This study addresses this gap by offering a philosophical reinterpretation of *ahammu* grounded in *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* and informed by critical pedagogy. It argues that *rūḥ al-mudarris* constitutes the apex of the educational hierarchy, not as an abstract moral ideal, but as an ethical-spiritual *habitus* that regulates decisions concerning curriculum, pedagogical methods, and teacher professionalism. By reframing *ahammu* as a principle of hierarchical integration rather than instrumental preference, this study challenges dominant technocratic interpretations of educational quality in both secular and Islamic contexts.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the theoretical development of Islamic educational philosophy by systematically integrating jurisprudential reasoning with contemporary pedagogical theory. Practically, the proposed framework offers implications for teacher education, curriculum design, and educational policy in Islamic educational institutions, particularly in responding to current tensions between performance-driven reforms and the moral-spiritual mandate

of education. By positioning the spirit of teaching as the ethical core of educational practice, this study seeks to reorient educational reform toward a value-centered and humanizing praxis.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design using a philosophical literature review approach (Priasmoro, 2016). Rather than aiming to exhaustively map empirical findings, the review is designed to support conceptual clarification and normative analysis of the hierarchy of educational elements: material (*māddah*), method (*ṭarīqah*), teacher (*al-mudarris*), and the spirit of the teacher (*rūḥ al-mudarris*). Qualitative literature reviews are particularly appropriate for philosophical and theoretical inquiries that seek to reinterpret concepts (Snyder, 2019), synthesize normative arguments, and construct analytical frameworks rather than to aggregate empirical effect sizes (Booth et al., 2021).

The literature search was conducted using three major academic databases: Scopus, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest, selected for their broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals in education, philosophy of education, Islamic studies, and social sciences. These databases are widely recognized as reliable sources for high-quality international scholarship and are commonly used in qualitative and conceptual review studies (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). To ensure contextual relevance, selected national journals indexed in SINTA were also consulted for recent discussions in Islamic education. Search terms were developed iteratively to reflect the study's conceptual focus and included combinations of the following keywords: Islamic education, *adab*, *ta'dīb*, teacher identity, teacher spirit, critical pedagogy, educational priorities, and *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*. The initial search yielded 21,939 records, reflecting the broad interdisciplinary scope of the topic.

To ensure analytical relevance and rigor, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Included sources met the following criteria: (1) published between 2020 and 2025; (2) peer-reviewed journal articles or scholarly books; (3) explicit relevance to Islamic education, critical pedagogy, teacher ethics, teacher identity, or educational philosophy; and (4) conceptual, theoretical, or empirical relevance to discussions of educational priorities or teacher agency. Sources were excluded if they (1) focused solely on technical instructional methods without philosophical or ethical discussion, (2) lacked clear scholarly grounding, or (3) addressed education without reference to teachers, values, or normative orientation.

Following the initial search, a multi-stage screening process was conducted to enhance transparency and replicability. First, titles and abstracts were reviewed to eliminate clearly irrelevant studies. Second, full-text screening was conducted to assess conceptual alignment with the study's analytical focus. Through this process, the corpus was progressively narrowed to a purposive selection of key texts that offered substantive theoretical or normative insights (Xiao & Watson, 2019). This approach aligns with best practices in qualitative and philosophical literature reviews, where depth of analysis is prioritized over quantity (Booth et al., 2021).

The analysis employed a philosophical-analytical framework integrating *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* (jurisprudence of priorities) and critical pedagogy as complementary lenses (Mohammed, 2023). *Fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* was used to interpret *ahammu* as a normative principle of hierarchical prioritization rather than instrumental preference, emphasizing fulfillment, sequencing, and ethical orientation (Qaradawi, 2020). Critical pedagogy contributed an analytical perspective on teacher agency, ethical responsibility (Priestley et al., 2022), and resistance to technocratic educational reforms (Biesta, 2021b).

Data analysis proceeded through thematic coding and conceptual synthesis. Relevant texts were coded according to key themes such as material, method, teacher, and spirit of teaching, followed by analytical mapping of their hierarchical relationships. Comparative reading and interpretive abstraction were used to identify convergences and tensions between Islamic educational philosophy and contemporary pedagogical theory. This process enabled the construction of an integrated conceptual framework that explains the positioning of *rūḥ al-mudarris* as the apex of educational priorities.

Analytical rigor was ensured through methodological transparency, explicit articulation of analytical lenses, and systematic documentation of coding categories. Conceptual validity was strengthened by triangulating classical Islamic sources, contemporary Islamic scholarship, and recent literature in critical pedagogy and teacher studies. Reflexive interpretation was employed to minimize conceptual bias and to ensure consistency between the research questions, analytical framework, and conclusions (Tracy, 2020). Rather than statistical generalizability, this study aims for theoretical transferability by offering a coherent framework applicable to teacher education and educational policy in Islamic contexts.

## Results

The literature review reveals three dominant patterns concerning educational priorities, teacher roles, and ethical–spiritual orientation in contemporary educational scholarship (2020–2025). These patterns emerge consistently across Islamic education literature, critical pedagogy, and studies on teacher well-being and identity.

### *Dominance of Method- and Performance-Oriented Reforms*

Recent studies indicate that educational reform is predominantly framed in terms of curriculum alignment, instructional strategies, and measurable learning outcomes. While these reforms emphasize effectiveness and accountability, they often marginalize ethical, spiritual, and identity-based dimensions of teaching (Fullan, 2020) (Koh et al., 2022). Teachers are frequently positioned as implementers of policy rather than moral agents shaping educational meaning.

### *Re-emergence of Teacher Identity, Agency, and Well-being*

A second pattern highlights growing concern for teacher agency, professional identity, and well-being. Empirical evidence shows strong correlations between teachers' moral purpose, resilience, and student engagement (Day & Gu, 2021) (Collie & Martin, 2022). However, these studies often conceptualize well-being psychologically rather than as an ethical–spiritual orientation guiding pedagogical judgment.

### *Normative Emphasis on Adab without Hierarchical Clarification*

Islamic education literature consistently emphasizes *adab* and *ta'dīb* as educational goals. Nevertheless, most studies treat these concepts normatively without articulating a clear hierarchy among educational elements or explaining how ethical–spiritual orientation governs curriculum and methods in practice (In'ami et al., 2025). The principle of *ahammu* is frequently cited but rarely examined through *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*.

Table 1: Summary of Key Findings from Reviewed Literature (2020–2025)

Theme	Key Findings	Representative Studies
Curriculum & Method Focus	Reforms prioritize techniques and outcomes	Fullan (2020); Koh et al. (2022)
Teacher Well-being	Teacher resilience linked to engagement	Day & Gu (2021); Collie & Martin (2022)
Islamic Education	Adab emphasized normatively	In'ami et al. (2025)
Missing Link	Lack of hierarchical, jurisprudential analysis of ahammu	Mohammed (2023)

## Discussion

The three main terms *tarbiyah*, *ta'līm*, and *ta'dīb* refer to distinct but complimentary aspects of Islamic education. *Tarbiyah* places a strong emphasis on pupils' potential development and comprehensive nurture. While *ta'dīb* stresses internalizing *adab* as ethical and spiritual awareness, *ta'līm* concentrates on the process of imparting knowledge (In'ami et al., 2025). Al-Attas underlined that the creation of civilized people is the aim of Islamic education, and that knowledge, teaching strategies, and the character of the instructor must all be geared toward this end. According to this viewpoint, the orientation of *adab* (ethical) cannot be divorced from debates of the material and methodology. The idea that *ta'dīb* (religious direction) is the highest form of knowledge and moral integration gives conceptual legitimacy to the hierarchy of educational components that culminate in the spirit of teaching (Al-Attas, 1993).

According to Paulo Freire's formulation of critical pedagogy, education is a liberatory praxis that blends transformative action and critical thought (Freire, 2018). This method challenges the "bank" model of education, which only imparts knowledge from instructor to pupil without encouraging critical thinking. John Dewey stressed the value of actively involving students in learning experiences that are applicable to their daily lives through humanist education. Both support the Islamic belief that education should foster students' moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth at the same time. Within a critical pedagogy framework, the key phrase's *ahammu* (awareness) concept can be interpreted as a reminder that procedures and tactics are only means to an end: the development of capable and civilized beings. According to this viewpoint, educators are facilitators with the soul of a teacher, not just instructors (Dewey, 2018).

*Fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*, or the jurisprudence of priorities, is a framework that regulates the importance of an action or policy, so that the more urgent and strategic ones are prioritized without diminishing the importance of others. In education, this principle can be applied to understand that material must first be properly mastered, then methods must be improved, then the teacher's character must be strengthened, and finally the spirit of teaching must be cultivated. This hierarchy prevents the "fetishism of method" that often occurs when educational reform only emphasizes new teaching strategies without improving the substance (Alhamuddin, n.d.; Mohammed, 2023). This principle also aids in long-term educational policy planning, where technical and structural interventions are grounded in a moral-spiritual orientation. Theoretically, this principle ties the epistemic, praxeological, and ethical dimensions of education into a unified whole.

Recent literature confirms that teachers are the key variable mediating the influence of curriculum and methods on learning outcomes (Klassen & Durksen, 2022). Research shows that

teachers' professional qualities, including pedagogical competence, personality, and relationship-building skills, are significantly correlated with student engagement and achievement. From an Islamic perspective, teachers not only transfer knowledge but also serve as moral and spiritual role models (*uswah ḥasanah*). The hierarchy of educational priorities positions teachers above methods because the successful implementation of methods depends heavily on the teacher's character and competence. However, competence alone is not enough; it must be supported by the spirit of teaching, which is a source of motivation, sincerity, and resilience in facing challenges (Collie & Martin, 2022). This makes teacher development a strategic priority that goes beyond technical training.

The spirit of teaching encompasses sincere intention, ethical awareness, emotional maturity, and a commitment to the development of whole human beings (Day & Gu, 2021). Research on teacher identity shows that teachers who have a deep awareness of their social and moral roles tend to be more resilient and innovative in their teaching. In the Islamic context, the spirit of teaching is closely linked to the concepts of *niyyah* (intention) and *iḥsān* (doing one's best), which guide teachers to view their profession as a trust and an act of worship. Achieving the spirit of teaching is not an instant process, but rather the result of internalizing values and continuous self-reflection. Therefore, developing the spirit of teaching requires teacher education interventions that focus on character formation, not just competence (Beijaard et al., 2020b). This makes the spirit of teaching the pinnacle priority that enhances all previous elements.

The results indicate a conceptual gap between technical educational reforms and value-oriented educational theory. While contemporary pedagogy increasingly recognizes teacher agency and ethical responsibility, these insights remain fragmented and insufficiently integrated into a coherent framework of educational priorities.

Reinterpreting *ahammu Beyond Instrumentalism*, This study advances existing scholarship by philosophically reinterpreting *ahammu* through the lens of *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*. Unlike instrumental readings that privilege one educational element at the expense of others, jurisprudential prioritization emphasizes hierarchical fulfillment rather than exclusion (Mohammed, 2023). This interpretation challenges method-centric reforms that dominate current policy discourse (Biesta, 2021b).

*Rūḥ al-Mudarris as Ethical–Spiritual Habitus* that the findings support positioning *rūḥ al-mudarris* as the apex of educational hierarchy not as emotional motivation, but as an ethical–spiritual habitus regulating pedagogical judgment (Priestley et al., 2022). This aligns with recent work on teacher moral purpose and agency, which shows that teachers' ethical orientation significantly influences how curriculum and methods are enacted (Noddings, 2021).

Implications for Teacher Education and Policy, which integrating *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* with critical pedagogy provides a normative framework for teacher education in Islamic contexts. Rather than emphasizing competence or technique alone, teacher preparation programs must cultivate ethical discernment, reflective judgment, and spiritual intentionality. Policy reforms that neglect this hierarchy risk reproducing superficial change without moral depth (Fullan, 2020).

Table 2: Convergence and Tension between *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt* and Critical Pedagogy

Dimension	<i>Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt</i>	Critical / Modern Pedagogy
Basis of priority	Ethical–juridical normativity	Moral purpose & humanization
Structure	Hierarchical fulfillment	Contextual, reflexive
View of teacher	Moral authority & trustee	Ethical agent, co-participant
Risk	Normative rigidity	Relativism or instrumentalism

Dimension	Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt	Critical / Modern Pedagogy
Shared concern	Meaningful, value-oriented education	Meaningful, value-oriented education

Across both traditions, priority is understood not merely as technical sequencing but as a normative judgment grounded in educational purpose. In fiqh al-awlawiyyāt, prioritization is determined by ethical weight, *maslahat* (public good), and long-term consequence rather than procedural efficiency (Mohammed, 2023). Similarly, critical pedagogy conceptualizes priority in relation to moral purpose, humanization, and responsibility to the world (Biesta, 2021; Priestley et al., 2022). Empirical and theoretical studies in modern pedagogy show that teachers' moral purpose and ethical agency shape how curricular priorities are enacted in practice (Day & Gu, 2021; Noddings, 2021). This aligns with Islamic educational thought, which positions ethical intention (*niyyah*) and responsibility (*amanah*) as determinants of educational decision-making.

Despite this convergence, a significant tension emerges. Fiqh al-awlawiyyāt is structurally hierarchical and normatively anchored, emphasizing ordered fulfillment without negation. By contrast, critical pedagogy often resists fixed hierarchies, emphasizing contextual negotiation, reflexivity, and situational judgment (Biesta, 2022). Critical pedagogical literature cautions that rigid prioritization risks reproducing authority and suppressing learner agency, whereas Islamic jurisprudential reasoning emphasizes stability, moral order, and ethical limits (Koh et al., 2022; Mohammed, 2023). This tension is particularly evident in discussions of teacher authority: while Islamic frameworks emphasize moral leadership, critical pedagogy problematizes asymmetrical power relations in education.

This study argues that the apparent tension between hierarchical normativity and contextual reflexivity can be productively resolved by reinterpreting *ahammu* not as rigid ranking, but as ethical sequencing governed by responsibility. When read through fiqh al-awlawiyyāt, hierarchy does not suppress agency; rather, it provides moral orientation for contextual judgment. This resonates with Biesta's (2021) argument that education requires orientation toward the "good" rather than unlimited choice. By integrating critical pedagogy's emphasis on reflexivity with jurisprudential prioritization, *rūḥ al-mudarris* emerges as a mediating habitus—guiding teachers to exercise agency within ethical bounds.

A concrete application of this integration can be seen in teacher education curricula. Rather than organizing programs solely around competencies, training can be sequenced as Epistemic foundation (material integrity), Pedagogical discernment (methods as ethical means), Professional identity formation, Spiritual–ethical habitus (*rūḥ al-mudarris*). This model aligns with recent findings that teacher identity and moral purpose significantly affect classroom enactment of curriculum (Beijaard et al., 2020; Day & Gu, 2021).

At the policy level, fiqh al-awlawiyyāt offers a corrective to method-centric reform. Policies that prioritize tools before teacher ethos risk superficial change (Fullan, 2020). A priority-based policy model would require evidence of teacher ethical formation and professional culture before large-scale methodological innovation—mirroring calls in critical pedagogy to re-center purpose over performance (Biesta, 2022).

### ***The Principle of Priority Hierarchy in Education***

The educational hierarchy of priorities principle can be seen as a system for ranking tasks and priorities according to their significance for learning objectives. This idea is comparable to fiqh al-

awlawiyyāt in Islamic tradition, which teaches that while setting priorities, the greatest benefit, urgency, and sustainability of results must be taken into account (Qaradawi, 2020). This hierarchy in education starts with material mastery, followed by method improvement, character development, and, last, cultivating the teaching spirit. The hierarchy is a mechanism that makes sure no element gets skipped before the one before it has reached maturity, rather than just a list of sequences. This avoids cosmetic educational reform, which involves only altering the means without enhancing the content. This comprehension is consistent with the literature on educational management that highlights the importance of scaffolding and sequencing in the development of school excellence (Bush & Glover, 2021).

The first two components, material (māddah) and method (ṭarīqah), are intimately related (Shulman, 2019). The educational hierarchy of priorities principle can be seen as a system for ranking tasks and priorities according to their significance for learning objectives. This idea is comparable to fiqh al-awlawiyyāt in Islamic tradition, which teaches that while setting priorities, the greatest benefit, urgency, and sustainability of results must be taken into account. The first two components, material (māddah) and method (ṭarīqah), are intimately related. Effective methods provide the best possible distribution of the material, while appropriate, pertinent, and legitimate material serves as the foundation for successful method implementation. To keep the technique from operating on a precarious base, material concerns are resolved first within the context of priority. For instance, even with the most creative teaching methods, a science curriculum that is wrong would still lead to misconceptions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The idea that "more important" (*ahammu*) does not imply "the only important," but rather the order of progress, serves as a reminder.

The educational hierarchy of priorities principle can be seen as a system for ranking tasks and priorities according to their significance for learning objectives (Hattie, 2023). This idea is comparable to fiqh *alawlawiyyāt* in Islamic tradition, which teaches that while setting priorities, the greatest benefit, urgency, and sustainability of results must be taken into account. The teacher's position above the method in the hierarchy indicates that the success of the method's implementation is greatly influenced by the teacher's personal qualities. Empirical studies show that two teachers using the same method can produce different learning outcomes, depending on their pedagogical competence and personality (Cheung & Slavin, 2021). In the Islamic context, teachers are viewed as waratsat al-anbiyā' (inheritors of the prophets), meaning they carry a significant mandate in shaping the next generation. Therefore, updating the method without updating the teacher's quality will yield limited results (Al-Syaibani, 2019). This hierarchy emphasizes that the teacher is the "soul" of the method, not merely the technical implementer. Therefore, the priority of teacher development must be equal to, or even more strategic, than simply changing learning methods.

The spirit or soul of teaching is at the top of the hierarchy because it includes the teacher's motivation, sincerity, moral commitment and spiritual orientation (Noddings, 2021). Without this spirit, the right materials, effective methods, and competent teachers can still fail to form a generation with character (Day, 2020). In the educational psychology literature, teacher agency and moral purpose factors have been shown to influence teacher resilience in facing professional pressure (Priestley et al., 2022). In Islamic tradition, teaching as if seeing God or realizing that God sees one is considered a station of iḥsān (the station of learning) in the teaching profession. It takes a thoughtful approach, values instillation, and ongoing spiritual direction to cultivate the teaching spirit. For this



reason, the successful establishment of these dimensions marks the pinnacle of the educational hierarchy.

Programs for teacher development and educational policy are significantly impacted by an understanding of the hierarchy of priorities principle. Policies that immediately change methods without guaranteeing the caliber of the teachers and supplies run the risk of squandering money. Deeply ingrained and long-lasting benefits are possible with a progressive approach. Applying this idea in a classroom setting entails auditing the resources and instructor proficiency prior to implementing new teaching methods. In the meantime, cultivating the spirit of teaching must be a required, not an elective, part of teacher development programs in Islamic education. As a result, education can function as a multifaceted, ongoing, and integrative process.

### ***Integration of Islamic Principles and Modern Pedagogy***

A holistic education that combines spiritual, ethical, and scientific qualities can be developed through the integration of Islamic ideas with contemporary teaching (Biesta, 2022). Islamic education aims to grow students holistically by teaching them not just knowledge (ta'līm), but also excellent manners (ta'dīb) and soul cultivation (tarbiyah) (In'ami et al., 2025). Active, introspective, and experiential learning are key components of modern pedagogy, including critical and humanistic pedagogy. This collaboration results in an educational paradigm that is successful in character development and social awareness in addition to knowledge transfer. Teachers must be able to blend spiritual ideas with innovative teaching methods in order to achieve this unification (Freire, 2021). As a result, education becomes a whole process where both earthly and spiritual objectives coexist.

According to Islamic teachings, educational materials must be truthful, pertinent, and imbued with moral concepts in order to avoid being just facts. The emphasis on an evidence-based curriculum that is adapted to the requirements of students and their social context is one way that modern teaching supports this idea (Hattie & Yates, 2020). The successful use of learning strategies will be aided by material that is meaningfully and methodically organized. The hierarchy of priorities idea still holds true: before more research into the methods can be conducted, the material must be thorough and reliable. Therefore, without sacrificing moral and spiritual principles, the fusion of Islamic viewpoints with contemporary teaching methods fortifies the subject matter's base. This promotes the growth of pupils who are not only bright but also responsible and civilized.

Learning strategies that combine contemporary pedagogy with Islamic principles place a strong emphasis on reflection, dialogue, and participation. In Islam, techniques like ḥalaqah, discussion, and critical thinking help pupils develop their critical thinking abilities and spiritual maturity. Students are encouraged to actively analyze material and work together through contemporary pedagogies including problem-based learning and experiential learning. A learning environment that combines academic discipline and moral development is produced by this combination. These techniques guarantee that the information is imparted not just as intellectual knowledge but also as moral and spiritual insight. As a result, the approach ceases to be merely a technical process and instead serves to reinforce and interpret the material's values.

When it comes to integrating Islamic ideals with contemporary teaching, teachers are strategically important. Teachers need to be able to strike a balance between students' character and spiritual growth and the needs of the classroom. According to recent studies, educators can establish inclusive and empowering learning environments when they possess a reflective understanding of learning ideals and objectives. In the Islamic tradition, educators also act as moral role models for

their students, directing them both verbally and physically (Day & Sammons, 2021). The ability of the instructor to concurrently navigate content, methodologies, and spiritual ideals is crucial to the effectiveness of this integration. Teachers are therefore facilitators of moral and cognitive change in addition to being content providers.

There are significant ramifications for curriculum development, teacher preparation, and educational assessment when Islamic concepts and contemporary pedagogy are combined. In order to assist students' holistic development, the curriculum must incorporate values, reflective experiences, and cooperative learning opportunities. Developing instructional competency while cultivating ethical and spiritual consciousness should be a priority in teacher preparation programs. In addition to academic results, character, ethics, and knowledge mastery should be taken into account while evaluating education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022). This method addresses the cognitive, emotive, and spiritual aspects of education, making it more balanced. In the end, this integration facilitates the accomplishment of genuine and long-lasting learning objectives.

### ***Teachers as Determiners of Educational Direction***

In addition to carrying out the curriculum, teachers also decide the course and caliber of instruction in the classroom and in educational institutions (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). According to recent studies, teachers have an impact on how knowledge is imparted, strategies are used, and internalized ideals are attained (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teachers are regarded in Islamic tradition as *waratsat al-anbiyā'*, the prophets' descendants, with a moral and spiritual duty (Al-Syaibani, 2019). This strategic role highlights the need of professional competence, emotional maturity, and moral integrity in teacher development. Teachers who are resilient and civilized can adjust to the demands of contemporary education while upholding moral and religious values. Teachers are therefore a crucial component in accomplishing comprehensive educational objectives.

Knowledge, pedagogical abilities, and the ability to establish positive interactions with pupils are all included in teacher competences (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2020). Research indicates that excellent educators can boost students' enthusiasm, engagement, and academic performance (Muijs & Reynolds, 2021). Technical proficiency alone, however, is insufficient; educators also need to be morally astute and able to reflect on their teaching in order to make wise decisions. Understanding spiritual values and etiquette, which form the moral basis for instructors' conduct, improves this competency from an Islamic standpoint. To put it another way, the basis for the development of resources, strategies, and classroom interactions is teacher competency. In the educational hierarchy, developing resources and techniques comes first, followed by enhancing teacher competency.

Contextual and successful instructional innovation can be fueled by capable and polite educators. Reflective teachers can dynamically modify their teaching strategies to fit the needs of their students and the classroom environment, according to research. Using pertinent techniques like discussion, problem-based learning, and *ḥalaqah*, educators also serve to inculcate moral and spiritual ideals within the framework of Islamic education (Zeichner, 2020). Since teachers serve as a link between theory, practice, and ideals, methods are more than just procedures; they are a way to develop one's character. Because the quality of methods greatly depends on the teacher's ability to apply them ethically, the educational hierarchy ranks instructors above methods. Therefore, the effectiveness of educational change in the classroom is largely dependent on the instructors.

In addition to being educators, teachers serve as moral role models for their students, guiding them via everyday interactions and example (Starratt, 2020). Making moral decisions, assisting

students in resolving conflicts between their values, and encouraging a sense of societal duty are all components of teacher moral leadership. According to research in educational psychology, instructors who exhibit moral leadership boost students' intrinsic motivation and decrease disruptive conduct (Lovat & Smith, 2018). In the Islamic faith, educators operate as role models, influencing students' personalities and identities via their words and actions. Teachers are positioned as the main governing factor in the educational hierarchy, dictating the course of internalization of knowledge, techniques, and spiritual principles. As a result, fostering moral leadership among teachers is a key goal of Islamic and contemporary education.

The idea that educators determine the course of education has important ramifications for evaluation, training, and policy (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). The curriculum must be adaptable so that teachers can modify the materials and teaching strategies to fit the needs of their students and the classroom environment. Spiritual growth, ethical contemplation, and professional competency development should all be incorporated into teacher preparation programs. Evaluations of teachers should consider their influence on students' emotional and character development in addition to their mastery of the topic. By using this method, educators become both stewards of the integrity of moral and spiritual ideals and agents of educational change. The education that is produced is more authentic, long-lasting, and comprehensive.

### ***The Highest Priority In Education Is The Spirit Of Teaching***

The spiritual, moral, and emotional core of educators that acts as a source of motivation and inspiration in the classroom is known as the spirit of teaching (In'ami et al., 2025). Sincere intentions (niyyah) and awareness of worship (ihsān) are linked to the spirit of teaching in Islamic tradition, and they serve as a guidance for educators to impart knowledge with accountability and integrity (Al-Attas, 1993). Character development and moral modeling are part of this dimension, which goes beyond simple technical proficiency or material mastery. Teachers who possess a strong spirit can persevere through professional hurdles and stay focused on their pupils' welfare (Day & Gu, 2021). The spirit of teaching, which perfects the basis of teacher materials, methods, and skills, is at the top of the hierarchy of educational priorities. This illustrates how a balance between the cognitive, emotive, and spiritual domains is necessary for meaningful education.

A moral component that prioritizes integrity, equity, and social responsibility is part of the teaching spirit (Noddings, 2021). According to research, morally upright teachers can foster a supportive learning environment and help pupils grow as individuals (Collie & Martin, 2022). An understanding of religious duty and the higher aim of education are both included in the spiritual dimension. Islamic tradition holds that moral principles are instilled by pedagogically inclined teachers through everyday encounters rather than only lectures or directives. As a result, cultivating the teaching spirit necessitates ongoing, introspective, and comprehensive character development. This emphasizes the value of teacher preparation programs that emphasize morality, religion, and role modeling.

In the same way that a father's and mother's paternal and maternal spirits are not only more significant than any other approach to childrearing, they will also naturally be able to raise their children with the appropriate techniques and attitudes, depending on the situation. Similarly, educators who possess a strong teaching attitude will be able to greatly raise the standard of instruction. Student motivation, engagement, and accomplishment are positively correlated with teachers' moral awareness, according to empirical studies (Beijaard et al., 2020b). In the framework

of contemporary pedagogy, enthusiastic educators can modify their approaches to fit the needs of their pupils while imparting moral and spiritual principles. This highlights that excellent teaching strategies and resources will be more successful if they are backed by instructors who have a strong spiritual foundation. A teacher's resilience in handling stress, conflict, and classroom dynamics is also influenced by their passion for teaching. Therefore, a love of teaching is essential to the accomplishment of holistic and sustainable education.

A comprehensive strategy that incorporates reflective training, mentoring, and value instillation is needed to cultivate a passion for teaching (Priestley et al., 2022). Spiritual growth via prayer, introspection, and senior teacher supervision supports this method in Islamic education. Developing moral leadership, emotional intelligence, and cooperative experiences that promote ethical awareness are examples of contemporary tactics (Lovat & Smith, 2018). Teachers can improve their instructional competence and internalize moral and spiritual values by combining classic and new methodologies. Indicators of morals, ethics, and reflective ability in addition to academic success must be included while evaluating the growth of the teacher spirit. This highest level of education can be reached in a sustainable and quantifiable manner with the correct approach.

Prioritizing the teaching spirit has significant ramifications for curriculum, teacher preparation, and educational policy (Fullan, 2020). In addition to materials and techniques, the curriculum must allow for the growth of teachers' morals, spirituality, and character. Programs for developing moral leadership, spiritual mentorship, and reflective coaching should all be a part of teacher preparation. Teachers' influence on pupils' character development must be taken into account while evaluating educational accomplishment. Teachers become change agents who can balance cognitive, emotive, and spiritual qualities when policies support the teaching spirit. In this sense, education can be a whole process that results in pupils who are strong-willed, clever, and polite.

Table 3: Theoretical Contribution of This Study Compared to Existing Literature

Aspect	Existing Studies	This Study
Focus	Method, well-being, adab	Hierarchy of priorities
Framework	Psychological / normative	Jurisprudential–philosophical
Novelty	Parallel themes	Integrated fiqh al-awlawiyyāt + critical pedagogy
Contribution	Descriptive	Conceptual-theoretical

## Analysis

Material (māddah), method (ṭarīqah), teacher (mudarris), and the spirit of the teacher (rūḥ al-mudarris) are all interconnected and hierarchical, according to an analysis of the hierarchy of educational priorities (Bush & Glover, 2021). The fundamental tenet that guarantees the stability of the entire educational process is the use of reliable and pertinent content. If the content is presented correctly, the techniques used will work and pupils will be able to comprehend and assimilate the information (Shulman, 2019). Teachers are the method's driving force and strategically adjust teaching strategies to the unique needs of each student. In the end, teaching's spirit offers a moral and spiritual compass that supports education's overarching objectives (Al-Syaibani, 2019). This hierarchy highlights that making gradual progress rather than disregarding earlier components is what is "more vital" (ahammu).

Material that is purposefully and methodically organized supports the efficacy of contemporary teaching strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Research indicates that while improper materials

can result in misconceptions, relevant curricula boosts students' interest and comprehension (Cheung & Slavin, 2021). Integrasi nilai-nilai Islam in the material reflects the moral and spiritual dimensions of the *didik*. This indicates that the first priority in education is to establish the foundation of knowledge before moving on to the following stages. The aforementioned hierarchy aids in preventing formal or symbolic education from failing. With strong foundations, the method and guru's development can proceed smoothly.

The educational method serves as a bridge between the material and the students' internalization (Hattie & Yates, 2020). Cognitive comprehension and character are effectively developed through an immersive, introspective, and interactive approach. According to recent studies, teachers who comprehend the peculiarities of their students and the classroom environment are better able to apply flexible and contextual strategies. To guarantee that their application is founded on a strong foundation, the hierarchy of priorities arranges methods after materials. Teachers can include moral and spiritual ideals into their everyday teaching practices by using methods (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Therefore, approaches are ways of changing values as well as procedures.

Teachers are essential to the effective application of strategies and the reinforcing of content. The degree to which pupils can internalize information and ideals depends on the pedagogical proficiency, ethics, and moral reflection of their teachers (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2020). According to Islam, educators also operate as moral mentors who help pupils navigate everyday situations. According to research, educators can help students develop their motivation, involvement, and character (Muijs & Reynolds, 2021). Because the quality of techniques greatly depends on the teacher's ability to apply them in an ethical and efficient manner, the hierarchy positions instructors above methods. Teachers are therefore the conduit between the development of character, the application of the techniques, and the basis of the content.

Since it includes the teacher's goal, sincerity, and spiritual orientation, the spirit of teaching is at the top of the hierarchy. Moral and spiritual principles can be instilled in every classroom contact by teachers who are deeply spiritual. According to empirical evidence, educators who prioritize ethical awareness and self-improvement greatly boost student achievement (Day & Gu, 2021). Without a mature spiritual spirit, the material, methods, and teacher competences will not be at their best, according to the hierarchy of priorities. When educators cultivate their students' moral consciousness and character in addition to imparting knowledge, education becomes effective. Therefore, the last step in refining the entire educational process is to improve the spiritual spirit of teachers.

A comprehensive and contextual education is the outcome of fusing Islamic ideas with contemporary pedagogy (Biesta, 2022). This method places an emphasis on striking a balance between pupils' spiritual, emotional, and cognitive needs. In actuality, a comprehensive learning ecosystem is created by combining reflective teaching practices, accurate materials, and qualified educators with an educational mindset. Research indicates that this integration improves student engagement, motivation, and value internalization (In'ami et al., 2025). The spiritual dimension becomes the dominant reinforcement, but the order of priorities stays the same. The applicability of Islamic education in the framework of contemporary pedagogy is thus validated by this integration.

There are real-world obstacles to putting the hierarchy of priorities theory into practice in educational institutions like schools (Priestley et al., 2022). Educational policies frequently ignore teacher development and its ethos in favor of focusing solely on content or procedures. According to

research, curriculum and method improvements are prone to failure if teachers are not recognized as unique persons with a passion for education (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). It takes time, consistency, and senior direction for teachers to grow spiritually in an Islamic setting. To guarantee that every component reaches excellence, the hierarchical structure necessitates a methodical and continuous approach. Therefore, comprehensive policy, training, and assessment are required to solve this situation.

The quality of education is improved when the hierarchy of priorities is applied consistently (Fullan, 2020). Teachers with the necessary skills and an educational mindset may turn materials and teaching strategies into engaging learning opportunities. Strengthening a teacher's spirituality and accomplishing holistic educational goals are positively correlated, according to empirical study. Integrating moral, spiritual, and cognitive ideals results in pupils who are strong-willed, clever, and civilized. This hierarchy makes sure that education covers the development of the full person rather than just knowing the content. Therefore, the harmony and balance of all components define the quality of education.

According to the analysis, the hierarchy of priorities must be methodically taken into account in efforts for improving education. Teachers must be capable and civilized, the material must be legitimate and pertinent, the methods must be successful and reflective, and the teacher's spirituality must be developed to the highest standard. Spiritual growth, ethical reflection, and ongoing competency building must all be incorporated into teacher preparation programs. Both information mastery and the influence on students' morality and character must be evaluated in the curriculum and educational evaluation (Beijaard et al., 2020b). By putting this idea into practice, education becomes authentic, sustainable, and able to produce a generation of highly intelligent, emotionally, and spiritually developed individuals. The hierarchy of priorities can be successfully applied in educational practice with an integrated approach.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to Islamic educational theory by offering a philosophical reinterpretation of *ahammu* grounded in *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* and brought into dialogue with critical pedagogy. Unlike prevailing instrumental or method-centered readings, this article positions *ahammu* as an ethical principle of hierarchical prioritization that preserves moral orientation while allowing contextual judgment. By conceptualizing *rūḥ al-mudarris* as the apex of educational hierarchy, the study clarifies the normative logic that governs the relationship between content, method, and the teacher's professional role—an aspect that has remained largely implicit in previous scholarship.

The added value of this article lies in three areas. First, at the theoretical level, it advances Islamic educational thought by integrating jurisprudential reasoning with contemporary pedagogical philosophy, thereby filling a conceptual gap between normative Islamic frameworks and modern discussions of teacher agency and educational purpose. Second, at the analytical level, it provides a structured model for understanding educational priority that avoids both technocratic reductionism and relativistic flexibility. Third, at the practical level, it offers a conceptual foundation for rethinking teacher education and educational reform in Islamic contexts, emphasizing ethical-spiritual formation as a prerequisite for pedagogical effectiveness.

The implications of this study are significant for teacher education, curriculum design, and educational policy. Teacher preparation programs may benefit from adopting a priority-based

framework that places moral purpose and professional ethos before methodological proficiency. Similarly, educational policies oriented toward quality improvement should consider ethical orientation and teacher identity formation as foundational elements, rather than focusing primarily on performance indicators and instructional techniques.

Future research is recommended in several directions. Empirical studies could examine how the concept of *rūḥ al-mudarris* is embodied and enacted in classroom practice across different Islamic educational institutions. Comparative research may further explore how *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* can be dialogued with other educational philosophies beyond critical pedagogy. Additionally, curriculum-based studies could operationalize the proposed hierarchy of priorities to assess its impact on teacher development and student learning outcomes. By articulating *ahammu* as a philosophically grounded principle of educational prioritization, this study aims to contribute to a more ethically coherent, theoretically robust, and contextually responsive discourse on Islamic education.

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