



The Development of Reason and Its Implications in Religious Learning

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Abstract

The Psychological Principle is one of the foundational principles underpinning the implementation of Islamic education. This implies that the execution of education must be based on the developmental stages of the child. In this context, the intellect (reason) as one of the psychological components of human beings is a fundamental element that must be optimized within Islamic education. Although numerous books have discussed the human intellect, very few have explored it from the perspective of its developmental stages. Therefore, an in-depth and comprehensive study of each phase of intellectual development is necessary, so that the formulation of Islamic education can be designed appropriately and contextually. This study employs library research with a qualitative approach. The findings reveal, first, that each phase of human brain development possesses its own characteristics and uniqueness. Second, the research identifies various aspects of Islamic education that align with intellectual development, such as the selection of religious learning materials, instructional approaches, and relevant Islamic educational methods and techniques for each stage of intellectual growth.

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INTRODUCTION

The intellect is an essential part of the human being that determines the direction and quality of life. In the context of education, particularly Islamic education, the intellect serves as a primary focus that must be nurtured and developed. Education, in essence, is a process of humanizing humans, and the intellect is the most distinguishing characteristic that sets humans apart from other creations. Without proper guidance in intellectual development, education loses its essential purpose. The emphasis on intellectual development has long been a central value in Islamic teachings. The Qur'an contains numerous verses that encourage humans to use their intellect in understanding the truth and developing spiritual awareness. Words such as *ta'qilun*, *tafakkarun*, and *tadabbur* emphasize the importance of the intellect in understanding religious teachings. This signifies that intellectual development is not merely a physical or biological matter, but is closely related to the spiritual dimension of human beings (Banfatin, 2024; Isnaini & Iskandar, 2021; Nufus & Sodik, 2023; Yahya et al., 2024).

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Nevertheless, in practice, it is often observed that educational approaches overly focus on intellectual development alone without harmonizing it with emotional and spiritual aspects. Modern education tends to separate cognitive components from the wholeness of the human self. For example, several contemporary educational movements like positivism or extreme rationalism overly prioritize logic and neglect the inherent holistic nature of human beings (Asril et al., 2024; Madhar, 2024; Nur'aini & Hamzah, 2023).

On the other hand, there are Islamic educational institutions that neglect the optimal development of the intellect. Some institutions place excessive emphasis on memorization or ritual practices without providing students the space to rationally understand the meaning of religion. As a result, religious learning often becomes a mechanical activity devoid of deep awareness. Such a pattern can hinder the internalization of religious values within learners (Hadini et al., 2025; Jamzuri, 2024; Rohmatillah & Shaleh, 2018; Yahya et al., 2024).

Ideally, Islamic education should be an educational process that addresses all aspects of human potential: physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. This aligns with the vision of Islamic education, which aims to produce balanced, intelligent, ethical, and responsible individuals who act as stewards (*kehalifah*) on earth. Therefore, the intellect must be directed not only to master worldly knowledge but also to understand and internalize divine guidance. However, the development of the human intellect does not occur instantly or all at once. The intellect develops through distinct stages, each with its own characteristics and needs. For example, young children are only capable of concrete thinking, while adolescents begin to develop abstract reasoning abilities. This indicates that intellectual development follows a pattern that must be understood and adhered to progressively, in line with physiological brain development (Fairuz et al., 2025; Ilhami, 2022; Yudelnilastia et al., 2025).

Unfortunately, not all educators or educational institutions have a deep understanding of intellectual development. This lack of understanding often results in educational approaches that are misaligned with the developmental stages of children. For instance, presenting abstract concepts to young children is not only inappropriate but may also hinder their natural interest in learning and cognitive growth. This is an example of the miscommunication between educational practices and the psychology of intellectual development (Jannah et al., 2024; Sudianto & Ismayanti, 2023; Susanti et al., 2024; Wulandari et al., 2024).

Conversely, when intellectual development is properly understood and followed, education can be conducted effectively and can motivate learners. Religious education, in particular, should consider the stages of intellectual development in the delivery of its teachings. Religious material should not be presented merely as dogma, but rather through thoughtful processes, reflection, and experiential learning appropriate to the developmental context of the learners (Ardiati, 2021; Zuhri et al., 2023).

In the context of Islam, intellectual education is not only directed toward sharpening logical reasoning, but also toward knowing Allah and practicing His teachings correctly. This shows that Islamic education seeks to integrate cognitive and spiritual aspects in a balanced manner. A well-developed intellect can serve as a means of understanding religious arguments rationally while also fostering deep faith and piety.

In practice, there are many challenges in implementing Islamic education based on intellectual development. These challenges arise in terms of methodology,

curriculum, and teacher competence. Many educators still apply traditional teaching methods that are insensitive to the cognitive development of children. This becomes even more challenging in the fast-paced and complex digital era, where children and adolescents are exposed to various global ideas and information (Alga et al., 2023; Engkizar, Jaafar, Alias, et al., 2025; Hadi & Manshur, 2025).

Therefore, a comprehensive and in-depth study on the development of the intellect and its implications for religious learning needs to be conducted earnestly. Such a study will not only contribute theoretically to the field of Islamic education but also offer practical solutions for developing adaptive and effective patterns of religious learning. An in-depth examination of intellectual development can also assist educators in designing more conducive learning environments that align with learners' age and cognitive abilities (Shehu, 2015; Thayyibi & Ratnasari, 2022).

In addition, this study serves as an evaluative tool for current Islamic educational practices. Has the implementation of religious education followed the principles of intellectual development? Do educators understand the role of the intellect in the development of faith and character? Are the curriculum and religious learning methods adaptive to the developmental stages of learners? These questions are highly relevant in efforts to improve the quality of religious learning in educational institutions (Nisa & Hamami, 2023; Putra et al., 2023; Susanti et al., 2023; Syamsudin et al., 2024).

By comprehensively understanding the stages of intellectual development, religious education can be strategically aligned in both content and approach. In the initial stage, education should emphasize experiential learning and the introduction of values. In the subsequent stages, it gradually moves towards logical and critical understanding. In adulthood, religious education can be directed toward deeper spiritual reflection and contemplation. Through such a model, Islamic education will be able to guide learners to develop holistically and with quality (Assyakurrohim et al., 2023; Pasaleron et al., 2024).

Based on the explanation above, it is clear that the discussion on intellectual development and its implications for religious learning is an essential study to undertake. This inquiry not only enriches the body of Islamic knowledge but also provides practical contributions to the development of more humanistic and fitrah-based religious education. With the right approach, the intellect becomes not only a tool for thinking but also a path of divine guidance for understanding and implementing Islamic teachings comprehensively.

Therefore, this study aims to thoroughly explore how the human intellect develops at each stage and how this development impacts the design of Islamic religious learning. By understanding the intricacies of intellectual development, educators can determine appropriate learning strategies that align with the cognitive readiness of learners. Thus, it is hoped that this study will provide practical solutions and conceptual reinforcement for Islamic education.

METHOD

This research employs the library research method, a type of study conducted by collecting data and information from various relevant literature, such as scientific books, journals, articles, and other written sources. A qualitative approach is applied to analyze and interpret the data in depth, with the aim of understanding and explaining the concept of intellectual development based on theoretical studies and previous research findings. The focus of the study is directed toward theories of cognitive development, educational psychology, and Islamic education, which are

integrated to produce a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of intellectual development throughout the human lifespan and its relation to religious learning. Data collection was conducted through a process of selection, critical reading, and systematic documentation of the literature. These sources were analyzed using content analysis techniques, which allow the researcher to explore ideas, concepts, and findings relevant to the study from various academic sources. The analysis process involved three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out to select relevant information, data presentation was conducted in the form of logical and thematic descriptions, while conclusions were drawn by formulating the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings. This approach is expected to produce a deep understanding of intellectual development and offer recommendations for Islamic education that are appropriate for each developmental stage (Chu, 2015; Engkizar et al., 2025; Miles et al., 2019; Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that human intellectual development occurs through specific stages. Each stage has distinct cognitive characteristics that educators must understand. This understanding is crucial in determining appropriate strategies for religious education. Education that does not align with intellectual development can hinder the internalization of values in learners.

In the first stage infancy (ages 0–2 years) the brain undergoes rapid development related to sensory-motor functions. The child begins to recognize their environment through senses and motor reflexes. At this stage, religious education can be introduced through the habituation of sounds, loving touches, and recitations of the Qur'an. Such sensory stimulation forms the initial impression of religious values. Entering early childhood (ages 2–6 years), children begin to develop the ability to remember and imitate certain actions or behaviors. They are not yet capable of abstract logical thinking but only understand concrete concepts. Therefore, religious education at this stage should be visual and experiential. Stories of the prophets, Islamic songs, and educational games are appropriate approaches (Muhammad et al., 2021; Rahmi & Zeki, 2023; Sukatin et al., 2023; Wardana et al., 2025).

In the pre-operational stage according to Piaget, children remain egocentric and have not yet fully understood the perspectives of others. Religious learning should be delivered with simple language and in an enjoyable environment. The role modeling of parents and teachers significantly influences the intellectual and moral development of children. This underscores the importance of example-based education in early childhood (Andryadi et al., 2025; Harahap et al., 2025).

In elementary school age (7–11 years), children enter the concrete operational stage. At this stage, they are capable of understanding cause-and-effect relationships based on real facts (Talat et al., 2013). Religious education can begin to incorporate simple logic, such as calculating *zakat fitrah* or understanding the concept of purification (*tabarah*). The use of concrete media such as images and real objects can enhance their understanding. The characteristics of children at this age also include the ability to cooperate and understand rules. This serves as an important foundation for introducing the concepts of congregational worship (*ibadah jama'ah*) and social values in Islam. Religious learning at this stage can be designed in the form of projects and group activities, teaching children to appreciate others and work collaboratively (A'yun & Junaidy, 2025; Luthfiyah et al., 2022; Susanti, 2025).

In early adolescence (12–15 years), intellectual development reaches the formal operational stage. Adolescents begin to think abstractly and idealistically about life. In religious instruction, discussions on ethical values and *aqidah* become relevant. Scientific and rational approaches can be used to strengthen their religious beliefs (Yusup, 2025).

Adolescence is also often marked by identity exploration, including religious identity. Educators must create an open dialogical environment where adolescents feel valued and heard. Religious instruction should no longer be doctrinal in nature but instead be based on argumentation and reflection. Case study discussions or academic debates can serve as effective instructional methods. As adolescents advance into late adolescence and early adulthood, intellectual development becomes more mature. They are capable of considering multiple perspectives and making independent decisions. At this stage, religious education can be directed toward strengthening the understanding of Islamic law (*fiqh*) and its practical application in daily life (Abrori & Ikhwan, 2024; Zhang & Qin, 2023). University students or young adults can be engaged in thematic studies or community service activities based on Islamic values.

Adulthood (ages 21–40) is characterized by the maturation of intellectual, logical, and emotional capacities. At this stage, individuals are able to think critically and solve problems independently. Religious education can be directed towards strengthening character, work ethics, and social responsibility. Experiential learning approaches, such as participation in *dakwah* activities or mentoring programs, are highly suitable for this age group (Andayani, 2025; Khairatunnimah & Latipah, 2024).

In late adulthood (ages 40–60), individuals typically have well-established convictions and emotional stability. Their intellect tends to function in maintaining social and spiritual harmony. At this stage, religious education should be reflective in nature and aimed at fostering inner peace. Islamic exegesis (*tafsir*) studies and Sufi teachings (*tasawuf*) may serve as appropriate approaches (Karimullah, 2023). As individuals enter old age (60 years and above), certain intellectual functions, especially short-term memory, tend to decline. However, life experience often provides older adults with deep spiritual wisdom. Religious education for this age group should emphasize worship practices, remembrance of God (*zikir*), and light social activities. This stage is also an important time for strengthening one's preparation for the afterlife (Efendi et al., 2024; Klein et al., 2015; Wenas et al., 2025).

The study also indicates that the brain possesses a high level of plasticity, meaning it can still develop effectively if continuously stimulated. Religious learning that involves cognitive activity and physical movement can help maintain optimal intellectual functioning. Therefore, methods of religious instruction should not be monotonous, but rather employ creative approaches. This includes technology-based learning that remains grounded in Islamic values (Azzahra et al., 2023).

Theoretically, the structure of the human brain consists of several parts that play an important role in the thinking process. The prefrontal cortex, for example, is responsible for decision-making and rational thinking. Religious educators must understand this to adjust the content and teaching methods. For instance, teaching *fiqh* requires advanced reasoning skills, making it unsuitable for early childhood. Additionally, the development of the intellect is strongly influenced by the environment and external stimuli. The family, school, and media play crucial roles in shaping students' thinking patterns (Imamuddin et al., 2025; Jasman et al., 2023; Rasyid et al., 2024). Therefore, religious education is not only the responsibility of the school, but also of the family and the wider community. This collaboration creates an

environment that supports the simultaneous cultivation of intellect and faith (Judrah et al., 2024).

In Islamic education, the concepts of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) and *ta'dib* (moral and intellectual discipline) are known to integrate the development of the mind and heart (Arifin et al., 2022; Fithriyyah, 2023). The intellect is directed to understand the truth, while the heart is guided to feel and internalize it. Successful religious education is one that is able to balance both. Imbalance can produce individuals who are intellectually smart but spiritually dry. It is also important to remember that the intellect has limitations. In Islam, reason is used to understand revelation, not to replace it. Therefore, religious learning must be based on a combination of logic and scriptural evidence. This will help students understand religion rationally while remaining grounded in authentic textual sources (Bhat & Bisati, 2025; Sulaiman et al., 2018).

Religious learning that aligns with the development of the intellect will also prevent dogmatism and narrow-minded fanaticism. Students will grow into individuals capable of dialogue and appreciating differences. Amid contemporary challenges such as radicalism and secularism, the development of the intellect becomes a primary defense. A sound Islamic education will produce a generation of Muslims who are intelligent, democratic, and of noble character (Dessani et al., 2025; Nurmila, 2025; Susanti et al., 2022).

Practically, educators need to be trained to understand the psychology of intellectual development. Without this understanding, religious instruction becomes merely ceremonial and lacks deeper meaning (Jufri & Tobroni, 2024). Teacher training in cognitive theory and active learning strategies must be a primary program. This will make the learning process more interactive and aligned with the developmental needs of the students. Additionally, the religious education curriculum must be flexible and adaptive. The curriculum should not be rigid or solely focused on memorization. Intellectual development must be integrated into religious education assessment, including through project-based or portfolio evaluations. This will encourage students to be more creative in understanding and applying religious teachings (Engkizar et al., 2024; Martinez & Gomez, 2025).

By understanding and implementing religious education that aligns with intellectual development, Islamic education can guide students toward a comprehensive religious awareness. They will not only know Islamic teachings theoretically but also be able to apply their values in practice. Thus, religious education functions as a way of life, not just a school subject.

CONSLUSSION

This study shows that the development of human intellect progresses through specific stages, each with its own characteristics. At every stage of this development, Islamic religious education must be adapted to the cognitive abilities of learners in terms of content, methods, and approaches. Understanding the dynamics of intellectual development will help educators design more effective learning experiences, ensuring that religious values are not only received symbolically but are also understood, internalized, and applied in daily life. Thus, the integration of intellectual development and religious content is a key factor in creating Islamic education that is relevant and meaningful. Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight the crucial role of educators and the environment in optimizing intellectual development in accordance with the students' natural disposition (*fitrah*). Religious education should not be confined to a purely textual approach, but must be

developed rationally and contextually based on the stages of human intellectual growth. Therefore, synergy between developmental psychology theories, educational principles, and Islamic values is needed in designing curricula and instructional strategies. It is hoped that Islamic education will produce a generation of Muslims who are intellectually capable, spiritually strong, and morally upright.

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