The Concept and Theory of Al-Hikmah Education: A Structured Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary education is often trapped in a framework of superficial pragmatism, neglecting spiritual and ethical dimensions—this leads to a significant crisis of values in global society. The failure of existing educational systems to cultivate individuals with integrity and foresight is strikingly evident, triggering an alarming moral deficit. Ironically, studies on the concept of 'Al-Hikmah' as a philosophical foundation for education, although mentioned in some discourses, are rarely analyzed in a structured manner to delineate its comprehensive theoretical framework. This study involves a critical conceptual analysis of relevant classical and modern literature, examining key arguments and their methodological implications. Three main themes emerge: first, Al-Hikmah demands the integration of revealed knowledge and intellect; second, this education centers on the formation of ethical individuals through exemplary conduct; and third, it emphasizes the attainment of wisdom through deep reflection, not merely the memorization of facts. This framework offers an alternative paradigm that may guide educational reform towards the construction of a more meaningful civilization.

Keywords: Al-Hikmah, Islamic Philosophy of Education, Epistemology, Values Education, Human Development

INTRODUCTION

The modern education system, with all its sophistication, seems to be increasingly distant from its original purpose. Questions about the meaning and purpose of knowledge—whether it is merely a tool to achieve material success or a path to a deeper understanding of existence—continue to haunt educators and thinkers. In reality, we observe graduates who are academically excellent but often deficient in human, social, and ethical aspects, indicating a serious imbalance in current pedagogical goals. This failure may well be rooted in a fragile philosophical foundation—a void rarely openly acknowledged. A paradigm that overly emphasizes quantitative measurement and market competition has, perhaps, diminished the very meaning of 'education', hindering the true potential of individuals to develop holistically. Criticism of utilitarian approaches in education is not new; thinkers from various backgrounds have long pointed fingers at a system that seems only to want to produce 'skilled workers' rather than 'wise citizens'. However, we rarely see serious efforts to seek and apply a philosophical framework truly rooted in the tradition of wisdom—a tradition capable of uniting intellect and heart, the worldly and the otherworldly. Why does the discourse of 'Al-Hikmah', rich with such potential, remain marginalized or merely mentioned in passing in discussions of educational reform? It is a surprising collective

failure. We need to be more aggressive in seeking solutions. The lack of in-depth and structured analysis of 'Al-Hikmah' in the context of education has left a significant gap in academic literature, hindering the development of a more principled pedagogical model. This study attempts to fill this void, delving into the fundamental concepts of Al-Hikmah to formulate a relevant theoretical framework for education in these increasingly confused times.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on Islamic philosophy of education has never ceased, yet the depth of discussion sometimes feels superficial, often straying into debates about form rather than essence. Many scholars, such as Al-Attas (1979) and Nasr (1976), have long emphasized the necessity of integrating revealed knowledge and intellect, viewing education not merely as a process of acquiring information—a process now increasingly accessible—but as the formation of the soul. This perspective, which places adab (manners/discipline) and akhlaq (morality) at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of knowledge, contrasts with Western approaches that tend to separate knowledge and values, creating increasingly complex ethical dilemmas in science and technology. Al-Attas, for instance, through his renowned work, argues that the ultimate goal of Islamic education is to produce an adab-infused human being, an individual who recognizes their place in the order of existence, aware of their responsibilities towards God, self, and society. However, interpretations of these views often stop at the rhetorical level, failing to be translated into operational pedagogical frameworks. Studies such as Hasyim (2010), which attempt to examine the contributions of classical figures like Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, although valuable, sometimes get trapped in purely descriptive narratives, offering less critical analysis of how these ideas can be pragmatically applied in a postmodern educational context. This is a major problem. The paradigm of 'Al-Hikmah' itself, meaning wisdom, is often mentioned in the context of philosophy in general but rarely specifically articulated in educational theory, particularly how it can become the backbone of curriculum or teaching methodology. A small number of scholars like Sazelin (2017) have attempted to link Al-Hikmah with moral education, but its scope remains limited, not encompassing the broader epistemological, ontological, and axiological aspects contained within the concept. Furthermore, there is a tendency to view Islamic education as a monolithic entity, ignoring the diversity of thought and interpretation throughout history—this is a dangerous simplification. Orientalists, and ironically, some Muslim scholars themselves, often fail to appreciate the intellectual dynamism within the Islamic tradition, causing discussions about the philosophy of Al-Hikmah education to be trapped in stereotypes or biased interpretations. A significant challenge is how to combine the Al-Hikmah framework, rooted in metaphysical tradition, with the needs of the contemporary world that demands critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities—something often misunderstood as contradictory. Mohd. Kamal Hassan (2014) has endeavored to unite these two dimensions, proposing a harmonious integration between religious knowledge and modern knowledge, but the 'Al-Hikmah' framework as a philosophical basis still needs further clarification. The history of Islamic civilization itself is replete with examples of Al-Hikmah-oriented educational institutions, such as the House of Wisdom (Baitul Hikmah) in Baghdad or centers of learning in Andalusia, which were not only centers of translation and research but also of the personal development of scholars. Unfortunately, modern studies rarely delve deeply into how this 'spirit' of Al-Hikmah was applied in daily pedagogy, how teachers at that time instilled wisdom in their students—not just knowledge. What specific techniques were used? How were these values naturally absorbed? These are important questions that require more serious research, going beyond merely admiring past greatness. Clearly, there is an urgent need to formulate an Al-Hikmah framework that is not only descriptive—telling what has happened—but also prescriptive, i.e., how it can be revived as the backbone of a more relevant and morally and intellectually competitive education system. Views such as those by Freire (1970), albeit from a different context, emphasize education as a tool for liberation and enlightenment, which can be said to align with the essence of Al-Hikmah that views knowledge as a path to freedom from ignorance. However, Freire is more oriented towards socio-political liberation, while Al-Hikmah touches deeper ontological and spiritual dimensions—viewing knowledge as a tool to understand the reality of self and God. These similarities and differences are rarely studied comparatively, causing the potential synergy between these approaches to be overlooked. Similarly, the debate about integrated curriculum, which has been a hot discourse in Islamic education for several decades (Misbach, 2020), often fails to formulate a solid philosophical basis; the unification of subjects does not guarantee the unification of the soul without the guiding philosophy of 'Al-Hikmah'. This requires more than just curriculum planning. Thus, while many papers have touched on different aspects of Islamic educational philosophy, a structured analysis specifically focusing on the concept of Al-Hikmah as a coherent theoretical framework is still lacking—a gap this study hopes to fill.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a pure conceptual research, based on critical document and literature analysis—not a random study. We did not conduct field surveys, no interviews, and no focus groups, as its primary purpose is to construct a theoretical framework. This approach was carefully chosen, not for convenience, but because it is most suitable for the purpose of excavating, synthesizing, and restructuring complex philosophical ideas widely dispersed in the corpus of knowledge. To understand 'Al-Hikmah' as an educational concept, one needs to delve deep into classical and modern texts, examining not only literal definitions but also its metaphysical and epistemological implications. This demands patience and intellectual acumen. Our analysis process began with the identification and collection of key literature discussing Islamic philosophy of education, wisdom in the Islamic context, Islamic epistemology, and studies on 'Al-Hikmah' itself. These sources included books, peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral theses, and classical works from prominent Muslim scholars. We did not merely collect; each source was filtered, its argumentative quality assessed, and its relevance to the formation of the Al-Hikmah educational theoretical framework examined. We consciously set aside texts that were apologetic or less critical, choosing to focus on works that demonstrated depth of philosophical analysis and rigor of argument. This approach ensured that only intellectually robust materials would be used. The next step involved deep and repeated reading of the selected literature. Each text was broken down into its conceptual elements, such as the definition of Al-Hikmah, its sources, the educational goals it supports, the roles of teachers and students, and proposed teaching methodologies. We looked for common threads, recurring themes, and also contradictions—because contradictions themselves often reveal the richness of interpretation. The goal was not merely to summarize what each author said; it was to construct a coherent and comprehensive narrative from the fragments of information available. The thematic analysis was conducted manually, not using software, because this process demands intuitive understanding and subjective interpretation that can only be performed by a trained human mind. After identifying the main themes, we moved to the synthesis process. This was the most challenging phase—connecting disparate points, reformulating complex ideas into clear and concise propositions. The construction of the Al-Hikmah theoretical framework as an educational model involved an inductive process, where from specific details drawn from various sources, we attempted to encapsulate the general principles that form the basis of this educational philosophy. This process also involved a critical assessment of the robustness and internal consistency of each theme, ensuring they were complementary and not contradictory. We constantly asked: does this truly reflect the essence of Al-Hikmah, or is it merely a superficial interpretation? Finally, the constructed theoretical framework was conceptually tested—not with empirical data, but by evaluating its ability to explain existing educational phenomena and offer prescriptive guidance for reform. We examined whether this framework could answer fundamental questions about the purpose of education, curriculum content, and pedagogical approaches from the perspective of Al-Hikmah. This methodology, although document-based, demands a high level of critical thinking, rejecting simplistic notions and instead encouraging in-depth research—a form of intellectual 'archaeology' essential for producing meaningful theoretical contributions. Thus, this study is absolutely an interpretive and constructive endeavor, building upon what already exists, but with a fresh perspective and a new synthesis.

FINDINGS

This conceptual study reveals several important aspects of the Al-Hikmah philosophy of education, which are often overlooked in contemporary educational discourse. This is not just an old theory. It is a profound system of thought. Wisdom, or Al-Hikmah, is not merely synonymous with cleverness or intelligence; it transcends that, encompassing an understanding of the true nature of things, the ability to make sound decisions, and a high spiritual awareness. First, the Al-Hikmah educational framework demands an absolute integration between revealed knowledge and intellectual knowledge—not just combining two syllabi. Attempts to separate religious knowledge and worldly knowledge are the main cause of confusion and the crisis of values in modern education systems. Al-Hikmah asserts that both sources of knowledge—revelation as divine guidance, and intellect as a tool to understand the universe—must move in tandem, indeed mutually reinforcing each other. Students need to realize that science is not just about exploring the physical world, but also about uncovering signs of God's greatness; this drastically changes perspective. This separation, a hallmark of secular education, has produced individuals who are intelligent in one field but blind to the ethical or spiritual implications of their discoveries. So, Al-Hikmah education is about building bridges, not gaps. Second, Al-Hikmah education is deeply centered on the formation of ethical individuals through exemplary conduct—this is its core essence. An Al-Hikmah

teacher is not merely a conveyor of facts or a learning facilitator; they are a living model, a murabbi (educator/mentor) whose soul has been shaped by wisdom. Al-Hikmah teaching methods do not solely rely on lectures or exercises, but more on personal interaction, moral guidance, and exposure to character-forming experiences. Students are taught to internalize values such as justice, patience, honesty, and humility—not just to memorize their definitions. This is a slow process and requires high commitment. An Al-Hikmah school might look very different from our current conventional schools, with an emphasis on the moral character of teachers and an environment conducive to moral reflection. Third, Al-Hikmah emphasizes the attainment of wisdom through deep reflection, not merely boring memorization of facts. An Al-Hikmah curriculum would encourage critical thinking, in-depth analysis, and the ability to see connections between various fields of knowledge—not just swallowing information. Students are trained to ask "why" and "how" at every stage of learning, prompting them to seek meaning behind every fact. This goes beyond the short-term memory often measured by standard examinations. Assessment in Al-Hikmah education might be more qualitative, evaluating students' ability to think synthetically, make ethical judgments, and apply knowledge in real-life contexts. Therefore, it requires a complete change in how we define educational success. Fourth, Al-Hikmah education fosters a sense of social and cosmological responsibility—a dimension missing in many systems. Knowledge acquired is not for self-interest alone; it is a trust. Students are taught to use their wisdom for the good of the community, to protect the environment, and to contribute to universal harmony. This shapes individuals who are aware of their role as stewards (khalifah) on earth, not just consumers of resources. This is a different worldview. Al-Hikmah education, therefore, rejects the extreme individualism often associated with Western education systems and instead emphasizes the interconnectivity of all beings. Finally, it was found that Al-Hikmah outlines a process of lifelong learning—knowledge is not just for school benches or universities. Wisdom is a continuous quest, evolving with experience and reflection. This means education does not end with a degree; it is an ongoing journey to better understand oneself, the world, and God. This implication requires educational institutions to provide a support framework for continuous learning, as well as to instill an ethos of thirst for knowledge in every individual.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, which outline the principles of Al-Hikmah education, raise profound questions about the direction of our education system today—what exactly are we achieving? Clearly, the gap between the noble goals of education and the reality of its implementation is widening. The emphasis on the integration of revealed knowledge and intellect, for example, is not just academic rhetoric; it is a prerequisite for building a balanced civilization. The failure to unite these two domains has created an epistemological confusion, where science is considered value-neutral and religion is marginalized as a private matter, irrelevant to worldly progress. This is a dangerous way of thinking. Consequently, most graduates today, although perhaps technically proficient, struggle with identity crises and complex ethical dilemmas, because they lack a comprehensive framework to understand their place in the larger scheme of existence. The implications of the findings regarding the exemplary role of teachers in Al-Hikmah education are also very significant. We live in an era where the teaching profession is increasingly dominated by bureaucratic pressures, an emphasis on test results, and a decline in professional status—this is very disheartening. How can a teacher, trapped in a system overly focused on numbers, become a murabbi (mentor) who guides the soul, as demanded by the Al-Hikmah philosophy? It is a dilemma that requires a radical paradigm shift, not just additional pedagogical training. The system needs to re-value the moral and spiritual qualities of an educator, not just their academic qualifications. Perhaps, universities that train teachers need to reform their curricula, incorporating modules that seriously emphasize character building and the ethics of knowledge—not just superficial courses. Otherwise, the idea of teachers as role models will remain an empty dream, far from the reality of the classroom. The emphasis on deep reflection rather than memorization of facts also challenges the hegemony of standardized test-based assessment systems that dominate global education. Are we truly measuring wisdom or just short-term memorization ability? This is a serious question. The current system, which rewards the ability to regurgitate information, indirectly kills critical thinking and creativity, two essential elements in the pursuit of wisdom. Al-Hikmah education would demand a more holistic assessment, perhaps through portfolios, real-world problem-based projects, and philosophical debates, which encourage students to think independently and make mature judgments. This requires courage to leave the comfort zone of quantitative assessment. Of course, there are practical objections regarding the scale of implementation, but will we let practical constraints kill our highest pedagogical aspirations? Furthermore, the concept of social and cosmological responsibility emerging from Al-Hikmah is a sharp critique of the extreme

individualism prevalent in contemporary society. We often view success as purely a personal achievement, without considering its implications for the community or the environment. Al-Hikmah education strives to instill the awareness that every individual is part of a larger whole, that acquired knowledge has social and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored—this is an important message. This means the curriculum needs to be redesigned to include community-based learning, environmental projects, and deep ethical discussions, making students more sensitive to their role as agents of change. This is more than just superficial "civic education." However, there are also significant challenges in applying this Al-Hikmah framework. One is the risk of narrow interpretation, where 'Al-Hikmah' is misunderstood as a form of religious dogmatism that rejects rational thought or scientific progress—this is very inaccurate. Such an interpretation would betray the essence of Al-Hikmah itself, which always emphasizes intellect and reflection. Therefore, any reform effort must be careful to ensure that this Al-Hikmah approach is presented as an inclusive, open to dialogue, and progressive framework, not a regressive one. It needs to be clarified as a philosophy that embraces knowledge from various sources, as long as it leads to truth and goodness. Only with the correct interpretation can Al-Hikmah become a new 'landmark' in our education. Finally, Al-Hikmah implies a process of lifelong learning. This is not a new idea, but its implementation in practice is still weak. Society often views education as a specific phase in life, not as a continuous journey. The practical implication is that educational institutions need to move beyond their traditional role as 'degree providers' to 'community learning centers' that provide opportunities for continuous self-development. This requires significant investment, a change in mentality, and a shift in focus from certification to continuous personal growth. Without these changes, education will remain a fragmented process, failing to cultivate truly wise and relevant individuals in facing life's challenges.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the concept of Al-Hikmah offers more than just another educational theory; it is a profound philosophy of life, capable of reshaping how we understand and implement the learning process. This research has uncovered the essence of Al-Hikmah as a framework that demands the integration of revealed knowledge and intellect, highlights the critical role of teachers as moral exemplars, and emphasizes the importance of deep reflection over superficial memorization. It also stresses social responsibility and the process of lifelong learning. All these elements, if truly applied, have the potential to resolve the crisis of values and epistemology currently afflicting the global education system—this is a great hope. However, this potential will only be realized if we are prepared to make a significant paradigm shift. This means moving beyond cosmetic curriculum reforms and instead re-examining the philosophical foundations of our education. We can no longer be content with a system that produces technically competent graduates but who are morally and spiritually impoverished. Society needs individuals who are not only intelligent, but wise—individuals capable of making just decisions, possessing foresight, and being responsible towards themselves, society, and the universe. This is not an easy task. It requires political commitment, intellectual investment, and a willingness to confront the comfortable status quo. For future research, it is highly recommended that empirical studies be conducted to test how these Al-Hikmah educational principles can be practically translated into school or university curricula. For example, the development of pilot modules focusing on the integration of knowledge and character building through Al-Hikmah methodology, followed by an assessment of their impact on students—how it influences their worldview, critical thinking skills, and moral development. This could be a long-term project. It is important not just to talk about theory but to demonstrate evidence of its effectiveness in the field. Without concrete action, Al-Hikmah will remain mere academic idealism, failing to truly transform our educational landscape. Ignoring this wisdom could lead to a slow but certain collapse of civilization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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