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Ibn Khaldun's Educational Thought and Its Relevance to Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education remains a global challenge in providing equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, as many educational systems still face barriers in accessibility, discrimination, and student participation. While previous scholarship has explored Ibn Khaldun's views on human development, knowledge acquisition, and socialization, their specific relevance to disability-inclusive education remains largely unexamined. This study investigates Ibn Khaldun's educational thought and evaluates its applicability to contemporary inclusive educational frameworks. Adopting a qualitative library research method, data were gathered from Ibn Khaldun's seminal work, the Muqaddimah, alongside contemporary literature on inclusive education and disability studies. The material was analyzed through content analysis to identify foundational educational principles that foster inclusion. The findings indicate that Ibn Khaldun strongly emphasized individual differences, gradual learning, environmental influence, and human dignity. These insights closely align with modern inclusive frameworks championing accessibility, active participation, and diversity. Moreover, his perspective on human potential implies that education must be accessible to everyone regardless of physical or cognitive differences. Ultimately, Ibn Khaldun's humanistic philosophy provides profound theoretical insights for advancing disability-inclusive educational practices, educational equity, and broader social inclusion.

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Introduction

Education is the most important factor in a civilization. In building civilization in any countrywhether developed, developing, or less developed education must be prioritized after fundamental issues such as food security and health care. Education is not merely understood as a process of transferring knowledge; it is also a means of moral formation, spiritual development, and intellectual growth within a civilized society (Haritsah, 2018). **The right to education is one of the most fundamental human rights. The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) affirms the obligation of states to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels for persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, students with disabilities continue to face various barriers,

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including inaccessible learning environments, discriminatory attitudes, and inadequate educational support.

These challenges include limited physical access to educational facilities, a shortage of teachers trained to support students with special needs, and low public awareness of the importance of inclusive education. Furthermore, many schools have yet to implement the principles of universal design or provide supporting facilities such as wheelchair-accessible pathways, Braille materials, and special education support teachers (SETs) (Efendi, 2018). Furthermore, many schools have yet to implement the principles of universal design or provide supporting facilities such as wheelchair-accessible pathways, Braille books, and special education support teachers (SETs) (Widya Wicara, 2022). According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), the distribution of inclusive schools remains concentrated in urban areas, while remote and rural regions still lack adequate inclusive education services (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2021).

In addition, stigma and discrimination within the social environment remain major obstacles for people with disabilities in achieving their full potential in education. In many cases, parents choose to keep their children hidden due to feelings of shame or fear of social stigma and prejudice (Sunardi et al., 2012).

Therefore, inclusive education aims to eliminate the various barriers that hinder participation and learning processes. Unlike the medical approach, which views disability as an individual's deficiency, contemporary disability studies predominantly adopt the *Social Model of Disability*, which explains that limitations arise from social and environmental barriers rather than from the individual's impairment itself (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, educational institutions are expected to create learning environments that can accommodate the diverse abilities and needs of all learners.

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, education has always been regarded as the primary means of human development. One of the scholars who made a significant contribution to this field was Ibn Khaldun. Through his monumental work, Al-Muqaddimah, he developed theories on society, education, and civilization that remain relevant for scholarly study to this day (Khaldun, 1951).

According to Ibn Khaldun, education is a process of developing human potential through gradual learning, social interaction, and practical experience. He criticized harsh educational methods and emphasized the importance of considering learners' abilities and developmental stages. This perspective aligns closely with the principles of inclusive education, which emphasize learner-centered instruction and respect for diversity.

A few studies have examined Ibn Khaldun's educational thought. Franz Rosenthal highlighted the concepts of intellectual development and social learning in Ibn Khaldun's thought. Meanwhile, Syed Farid Alatas demonstrated the relevance of Ibn Khaldun's sociological ideas to modern educational system (Alatas, 2014). Other studies have also examined the relationship between Islamic concepts and their relevance to disability education (Musyarofah et al., 2026). However, studies that specifically examine the connection between Ibn Khaldun's educational thought and inclusive education for people with disabilities remain very limited. Based on the foregoing background, this study aims to analyze the educational principles in Ibn Khaldun's thought and to explain their relevance to inclusive education for people with disabilities. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of a more inclusive and equitable Islamic education system.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. The primary data source is the work of Ibn Khaldun, particularly Al-Muqaddimah, which discusses education, human

development, and the process of knowledge formation. The secondary data sources consist of books, journal articles, reports from international organizations, and previous studies related to inclusive education and disability studies.

Data was collected through a documentation study of relevant literature. The data collected were then analyzed using the content analysis technique to identify aspects of Ibn Khaldun's educational thought that are relevant to the principles of inclusive education. The analysis focused on several key aspects, namely the concept of human dignity, individual differences, the gradual learning process, the influence of the environment on learning, and social participation. These concepts were subsequently compared with the principles of inclusive modern education, which emphasize accessibility, equality, and the full participation of people with disabilities

Results

Principles of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an educational approach that guarantees the right of all learners to access quality education without discrimination based on physical, intellectual, social, emotional, cultural, linguistic, religious, or socioeconomic differences. UNESCO defines inclusive education as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of learners' needs through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities while reducing exclusion within and from education (UNESCO, 2024b). Therefore, inclusive education is not limited to learners with disabilities but encompasses all groups vulnerable to educational marginalization.

In 2025, the development of inclusive education continues to emphasize equity, diversity, and human rights. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/25 highlights that educational systems should be capable of accommodating diverse learning needs through inclusive policies, curricula, learning environments, and teaching practices (UNESCO, 2024a). In Indonesia, the implementation of inclusive education is reinforced by Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities, Ministerial Regulation of National Education Number 70 of 2009 on Inclusive Education, and Ministerial Regulation of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 48 of 2023 concerning Reasonable Accommodation for Students with Disabilities (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi RI, 2023, p. 48; Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional RI, 2009).

Principle of Equality,The principle of equality asserts that every learner has the same right to access education regardless of personal or social conditions. Equality in inclusive education does not imply identical treatment for all learners; rather, it means providing fair opportunities according to individual needs and circumstances.

Principle of Non-Discrimination, Inclusive education rejects all forms of discrimination in student admission, learning processes, assessment, and educational services. This principle is grounded in the understanding that education is a fundamental human right that must be guaranteed for every individual.

Principle of Accessibility, Accessibility refers to the capacity of educational systems to provide environments that can be reached, used, and benefited from by all learners. It includes physical accessibility, information and communication accessibility, accessible learning materials, assistive technologies, and inclusive assessment systems (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi RI, 2023).

Principle of Full Participation, the principle of full participation emphasizes the active involvement of all learners in academic and non-academic activities. Inclusive education is not merely about placing learners in the same classroom but ensuring that they have equal opportunities to engage, interact, and develop alongside their peers.

Principle of Respect for Diversity, Diversity is viewed as a valuable resource within the educational process. Inclusive education recognizes that learners possess different abilities, characteristics, needs, and backgrounds. Consequently, schools should cultivate a culture that values and embraces diversity as a natural aspect of human existence.

Principle of Learner, Centered Education, Inclusive education promotes learner, centered teaching and learning. Educators are expected to adapt instructional strategies to learners' needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles through differentiated instruction and curriculum modifications when necessary.

Principle of Reasonable Accommodation, Reasonable accommodation refers to necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments that ensure learners with disabilities can enjoy their right to education on an equal basis with others. Such accommodations may include Braille materials, sign language interpreters, assistive technologies, adapted instructional methods, and modified assessment procedures.

Principle of Collaboration, the success of inclusive education requires collaboration among teachers, parents, school leaders, special education professionals, government agencies, and the wider community. Such cooperation creates a comprehensive support system that promotes learners' academic and personal development.

Principle of a Safe and Supportive Learning Environment, A safe and supportive learning environment is an essential component of inclusive education. Schools must be free from discrimination, bullying, stigma, and all forms of violence so that learners can develop academically, socially, and emotionally in a positive atmosphere (UNESCO, 2020).

Principle of Individual Potential Development, the ultimate goal of inclusive education is to facilitate the optimal development of each learner's potential. Educational success is therefore measured not only by academic achievement but also by the development of character, social competence, independence, and overall quality of life (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

The principles of inclusive education in 2025 encompass equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, full participation, respect for diversity, learner centered education, reasonable accommodation, collaboration, safe and supportive learning environments, and individual potential development. These principles provide the foundation for creating equitable and high-quality educational systems that serve all learners, including those with disabilities.

Ibn Khaldun's Educational Thought

Respect for human dignity and recognition of the capacity of every individual are fundamental values in Islam, as reflected in the practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These principles also permeate Ibn Khaldun's educational thought, particularly in his view of developing human potential through the educational process. Although the concept of inclusive education was not known during his time, several of Ibn Khaldun's ideas concerning the nature of learners, the learning process, and the influence of the educational environment embody values that are consistent with the principles of contemporary inclusive education.

Ibn Khaldun regarded education as the primary means of building civilization (ʿumrān). In his theory of civilization, the concept of ʿasabiyyah serves as the foundation for the formation of communities, political authority, and ultimately civilization itself. ʿAsabiyyah is not merely a form of social solidarity; rather, it emerges from an inner collective force that inspires people to unite, strive, defend one another, and work together in building society (Ibn Khaldun, 2023, p. viii).

In this context, moral character (*akhlaq*) constitutes the most fundamental element, while *adab* functions as its external expression and manifestation. First, *akhlaq* represents inner virtues such as integrity, loyalty, courage, and responsibility. When members of a society possess such qualities, they are willing to make sacrifices for the collective good, uphold justice, and prioritize public welfare over personal interests. This is the essence of positive ʿ*asabiyyah*—a form of solidarity grounded not in selfish interests, but in a moral ethos characterized by trustworthiness, mutual responsibility, and cooperation. An individual who possesses genuine ʿ*asabiyyah* accompanied by noble character is better able, with the guidance of Allah, to fulfill the responsibility entrusted to humanity as His vicegerent (*khalifah*) on earth (Ibn Khaldun, 2023, p. 227).

According to Ibn Khaldun, knowledge is acquired through a gradual process that involves instruction, experience, and social interaction (Ibn Khaldun, 2023, p. ix). One of the important principles proposed by Ibn Khaldun is the recognition of individual differences in ability. He explained that every human being possesses a different capacity for receiving and understanding knowledge. Therefore, teaching methods should be adapted to the learners' respective levels of ability and understanding.

Ibn Khaldun emphasized the importance of gradual learning (tadarruj), progressing from simple material to more complex subjects. Presenting knowledge all at once or in excessive depth to beginners may confuse them and weaken their understanding. Therefore, teachers should deliver lessons incrementally, enabling learners to grasp the fundamental principles of a subject before moving on to more detailed and advanced discussions.

Ibn Khaldun explained that teaching should be carried out through several stages. At the

initial stage, learners are introduced to basic concepts in a general manner. Subsequently, the material is revisited with more detailed explanations, including discussions of differing opinions and the reasoning behind them. Teachers should also avoid mixing various issues or branches of knowledge before learners have fully understood the subject currently being studied. Through this approach, learners can gradually develop their intellectual abilities and achieve a deeper understanding of knowledge. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun asserted that teaching two branches of knowledge simultaneously to beginners is less effective because it may divide their attention and hinder comprehension. Conversely, focusing on one field of study until it is mastered enables learners to understand subsequent material more easily. This approach helps cultivate learning readiness, enhance motivation, and prevent feelings of frustration and aversion toward knowledge and learning (Ibn Khaldun, 2023, p. 99).

Ibn Khaldun also criticized the excessive use of punishment in education. According to him, harsh treatment in the learning process can undermine learners' self-confidence and hinder the development of their creativity. He stated that "educating through violence and coercion is destructive; it leads to laziness and encourages dishonesty and deceit." Ibn Khaldun firmly rejected the use of violence in education, asserting that "harshness in teaching corrupts the character of students, fosters laziness and falsehood, and makes them fearful and hypocritical." This view demonstrates his understanding that children's character and personality should develop in an environment of compassion and care, enabling them to grow creatively and confidently (Ibn Khaldun, 2023, p. 1007).

Table 1. Ibn Khaldun's Educational Principles and Their Relevance to Inclusive Education

Ibn Khaldun's Educational Thought	**Principles of Inclusive Education**
Recognition of Individual Differences	Individualized Learning
Gradual Learning (*Tadarruj*)	Differentiated Instruction
Respect for Human Dignity	Rights-Based Approach
The Importance of Social Interaction	Collaborative Learning
Rejection of Violence in Education	Supportive Learning Environment

(Source: Adapted from Ibn Khaldun's Al-Muqaddimah and the Principles of Inclusive Education, 2023)

Relevance to Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities

The principle of recognizing individual differences is highly relevant to inclusive education. Inclusive education views every learner as a unique individual with distinct abilities, needs, and learning styles (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, learners with disabilities should not be treated as a separate group but rather as an integral part of the diversity of learners. In inclusive education, the curriculum should be adapted to ensure that it is accessible and understandable for students with special educational needs. Such adaptations include modifications to learning materials, educational objectives, instructional approaches, and assessment techniques in accordance with students' characteristics and needs. Teaching methods should also employ a multisensory approach that integrates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements to facilitate better understanding and learning outcomes (Amka, 2021).

The concept of gradual learning proposed by Ibn Khaldun is also consistent with the practice of differentiated instruction in inclusive education. Learners with disabilities often require adaptations in learning materials, instructional methods, and learning pace to achieve educational objectives optimally.

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on human dignity provides a strong philosophical foundation for inclusive education. Every individual possesses potential that can be developed when given adequate opportunities and support. This perspective aligns with the rights-based approach, which serves as a fundamental principle of modern inclusive education policies (Ibn Khaldun, 2023, p. ix).

Another important aspect is Ibn Khaldun's view regarding the influence of the environment, *adab* (proper conduct), and *akhlaq* (moral character), as well as the strength of *ʿasabiyyah*, which serves as a social force and a manifestation of collective responsibility for human development. In the context of inclusive education, the learning success of students with disabilities is determined not only by individual conditions but also by the presence of an accessible, supportive, and discrimination-free school environment (Ibn Khaldun, 2023, p. 973). The success of inclusive education is also greatly influenced by the synergy among families, teachers, and the wider community. Families play a crucial role in providing emotional support and learning assistance at

home, while teachers need to develop the necessary competencies through specialized training to teach effectively in inclusive settings. The collaboration of these three stakeholders is a key factor in creating an educational environment that is welcoming, equitable, and supportive of the holistic development of learners with disabilities.

Human Potential Development and Disability Inclusion

One of the central ideas in Ibn Khaldun's educational thought is that every human being possesses potential (*malakah*) that can be developed through education and habituation. According to Ibn Khaldun, the purpose of education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of the abilities that Allah has bestowed upon each individual according to their respective capacities. This perspective suggests that differences in human abilities are natural and should be taken into consideration in the educational process (Ibn Khaldun, 2023, p. 788). Therefore, learners with disabilities also possess potential that can be developed through educational approaches that are tailored to their individual needs and characteristics.

This concept is consistent with the principles of inclusive education, which affirm that every individual has the right to opportunities for the optimal development of their potential without discrimination. From the perspective of inclusive education, disability is not viewed as a barrier to learning but rather as part of human diversity that requires appropriate support and accommodations. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*CRPD*) emphasizes that states must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels in order to maximize the development of the potential, talents, creativity, and abilities of persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2006).

Ibn Khaldun's thought suggests that human development results from the interaction between innate potential and the social environment. This perspective shares similarities with the Social Model of Disability, which identifies social barriers as the primary cause of the limited participation experienced by persons with disabilities. The implementation of inclusive education for learners with disabilities requires adaptations in curriculum, instructional methods, and learning media to meet their specific needs. Curriculum adjustments should encompass not only learning content and objectives but also more flexible teaching strategies and assessment methods. The use of multisensory approaches and adaptive learning resources such as Braille materials, sign language, audiobooks, and assistive technologies is essential to support students' understanding and promote independent learning.

Furthermore, the role of Special Education Support Teachers (SETs) is crucial in assisting learners with disabilities through the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), the implementation of adapted instructional practices, and effective communication among teachers, students, and parents. Learning assessment should also be conducted flexibly, considering cognitive, social, emotional, and functional skills rather than focusing solely on academic achievement. These efforts should be reinforced through the provision of accessible facilities and the utilization of assistive technologies that enable students to learn more effectively and independently (Amka, 2021). When schools fail to provide physical accessibility, adaptive instructional methods, and adequate social support, learners with disabilities are at risk of experiencing exclusion. Conversely, an inclusive environment enables them to develop their potential and participate fully in educational life (Efendi, 2018).

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be understood that Ibn Khaldun's thought on human potential development has strong relevance to inclusive education for people with disabilities. The recognition of individual differences in ability, the importance of learning tailored to learners' capacities, and an orientation toward the development of human potential are principles that support the realization of fair and inclusive education. Through the application of these principles, learners with disabilities can obtain equal opportunities to grow, participate, and contribute to social life according to their fullest potential.

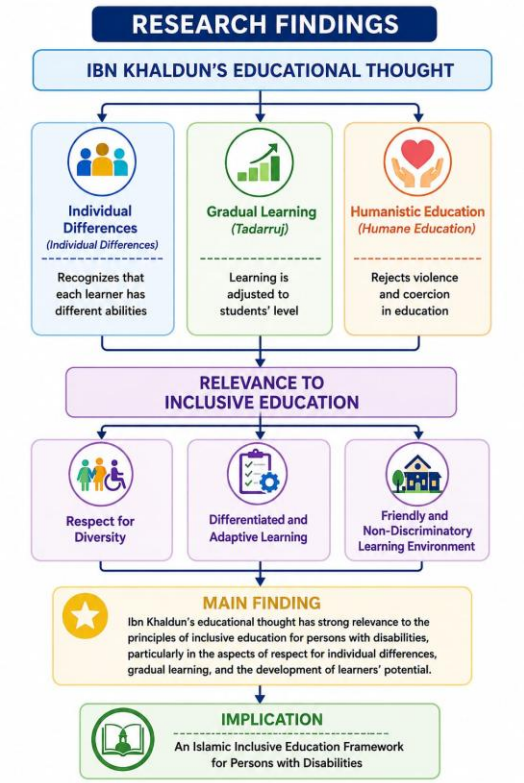


Figure 1. Framework of the Relevance of Ibn Khaldun's Educational Thought to Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities.
Source: Developed by the author based on an analysis of Ibn Khaldun's thought in Al-Muqaddimah and the concept of inclusive education

These findings indicate that Ibn Khaldun's educational thought can serve as one of the conceptual foundations for the development of inclusive Islamic education. Education is not only intended to transfer knowledge, but also to humanize individuals and provide equal opportunities for all learners.

Conclusion

Ibn Khaldun's educational thought has strong relevance to inclusive education for persons with disabilities. Principles such as the recognition of individual differences, gradual learning, respect for human dignity, and the importance of a supportive social environment are in line with the values of modern inclusive education. This study indicates that Ibn Khaldun's educational thought can contribute theoretically to the development of a more just and inclusive education system. Therefore, educators, policymakers, and educational institutions need to integrate these values into educational practices to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities.

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