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Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 24 July 2025
Revised 10 November 2025
Accepted 16 November 2025
Published online 01 January 2026

How to cite this article:
Parnian, F., Davoudi, A., & Zargam, M. (2026). The Integrated Model of Growth in Islamic Educational Psychology: A Deductive Analysis of the Relationship Between the Three Stages of Education and the Macro-Cycle of Human Life. *Assessment and Practice in Educational Sciences*, 4(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.61838/japes.160>

The Integrated Model of Growth in Islamic Educational Psychology: A Deductive Analysis of the Relationship Between the Three Stages of Education and the Macro-Cycle of Human Life

ABSTRACT

This fundamental research was conducted with the aim of explaining and deriving a coherent developmental psychology model from the perspective of Islam, with a specific focus on educational psychology. In the contemporary era—where Western educational systems face numerous challenges such as identity crises, loss of meaning, and the weakening of the family institution—the reinterpretation and systematization of educational models based on authentic Islamic texts emerge as both a scientific and cultural necessity. The research method employed was a library-based approach combined with deductive and *ijtihādī* analysis of original Islamic religious sources (the Qur'an, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt), examined in interaction with contemporary findings in developmental psychology. The results indicate that Islam, by presenting two classifications that appear distinct but are in fact deeply complementary—one detailed, practical, and educational (the three developmental stages of ages 0–7, 7–14, and 14–21), and the other holistic, philosophical, and ontological (the stages of first weakness, strength, and second weakness)—offers a comprehensive and multidimensional representation of the human growth and development process. This article argues, through an *ijtihādī* approach, that the unique and golden developmental period from birth to age 21, formed under purposeful parental nurturing, functions not only as the foundation of an individual's personality but also as the primary determinant of the quality of one's transition into the stage of strength (youth and middle adulthood), and even of the lived experience of the stage of second weakness (old age). Within this model, rational education is presented and explained as the core and backbone of the harmonious and integrated development of a child's other existential dimensions—emotional, social, moral, and physical. Ultimately, the study proposes an “Integrated Islamic Growth Model,” which can serve as a foundation for theorization and practice in the domain of Islamic education.

Keywords: Islamic developmental psychology, educational psychology, three stages of education, cycle of weakness and strength, rational education, *ijtihādī* deduction, integrated growth model.

Introduction

Childhood and adolescence, as the most sensitive phases of human life, have always been a focal point for scholars in educational sciences. Within the intellectual framework of Islam, this period holds such significance that it may rightly be called the “golden age of education.” The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, “*Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave*”—a narration preserved in classical hadith sources such as *Bihar al-Anwar* (1). This narration not only emphasizes the lifelong nature of learning but also highlights the special priority of early life in shaping the foundations of knowledge and

understanding. The central question of this study is a systematic examination of this “golden age” from the perspective of Islamic educational psychology.

In the contemporary world, despite significant advances in developmental psychology, we witness deep crises in the upbringing of younger generations. Identity confusion, existential emptiness, weak life skills, generational gaps, and the weakening of the family structure are among these challenges—concerns highlighted in various works on Islamic philosophy and spirituality (2). Many Western psychological theories, despite their strengths, have been unable to offer comprehensive solutions, largely due to their neglect of the metaphysical dimension and the *fitrah*-based nature of the human being. Hence, the need to reinterpret and derive indigenous, faith-based educational models rooted in the culture and beliefs of the Islamic community becomes increasingly evident.

The guiding question of this research is whether Islam, as a comprehensive religion, merely provides scattered moral and educational instructions, or whether it possesses a “coherent developmental model” that can be applied in the modern era. In other words, is it possible to extract from authentic Islamic texts (the Qur'an and hadith) a comprehensive roadmap for understanding the human developmental process and the educational requirements of each stage?

A key focus of this study is the presence of two seemingly different classifications within Islamic sources. On one hand, narrations from the Imams divide the educational process into three seven-year stages. One well-known narration attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq states: “*The child is a master for seven years, a servant for seven years, and a minister for seven years*”—a narration found in primary hadith sources such as *Al-Kafi* (3). This perspective offers a detailed, practical, and pedagogical classification directly related to parent-child relationships and methods of education.

On the other hand, the Qur'an presents a holistic, philosophical view of the human life cycle: “*Allah created you in weakness, then after weakness granted strength, and then after strength placed weakness and old age*” (Qur'an 30:54), a verse extensively discussed in Qur'anic exegesis such as *Al-Mizan* (4). This verse outlines the overall trajectory of human life in three stages: “first weakness,” “strength,” and “second weakness.”

The question arises: what is the relationship between these two divisions? Are they in conflict, or can they be combined into a single “integrated model” that offers a deeper understanding of Islamic developmental psychology? This study is based on the assumption that the two perspectives are not contradictory; rather, they function in a complementary dialectical relationship, each incomplete without the other. The threefold pedagogical classification serves as a “practical roadmap” for successfully traversing the first half of the “journey of life” (from first weakness to the threshold of strength).

In the domain of Islamic educational studies, several valuable contributions can be categorized as follows:

Category One: Classical ethical and educational works.

Books such as *Jami 'al-Sa 'adat* by al-Naraqi provide essential anthropological foundations, even though they do not directly address developmental psychology (5). Additionally, core hadith compilations such as *Al-Kafi* (3) and *Wasa'il al-Shia* (6) include numerous chapters on education.

Category Two: Contemporary works on the stages of upbringing.

Modern authors such as Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini in *The Methods of Education* (7), and scholars of religious pedagogy such as Ghaemi (8), have elaborated on the stages of Islamic upbringing, often structured around the three seven-year developmental stages. While these works offer practical guidance, they generally lack deep psychological analysis and do not integrate the Qur'anic macro-perspective on human growth.

Category Three: Works in Islamic psychology.

Recent efforts toward establishing “Islamic psychology” include works such as *Developmental Psychology with a Look at Islamic Sources* (9, 10). These studies compare Western developmental theories with Islamic concepts but seldom derive a coherent developmental model directly from the core Islamic texts.

Category Four: Works related to the cycle of weakness and strength.

Qur’anic exegetes have long discussed the philosophical implications of Qur’an 30:54. Interpretations such as those in *Al-Mizan* (4) shed light on its ontological dimensions, though they rarely connect this macro-view with detailed pedagogical models.

A clear gap becomes evident: the absence of a “unified and systematic model” that simultaneously analyzes the threefold educational stages, examines their relationship with the overall Qur’anic life-cycle, and extracts their anthropological foundations. This research attempts to fill that gap.

This study, therefore, aims to explain and present an integrated Islamic developmental model by synthesizing the detailed pedagogical division and the holistic philosophical division, clarifying the central role of rational upbringing, outlining the developmental progression of rationality in each of the three stages, and finally offering an integrated model of growth from the standpoint of Islamic educational psychology, with analytical comparisons to non-Islamic developmental models.

Research Method

This study belongs to the category of fundamental-theoretical research and employs the following combined methods:

- Library Research: Data were collected through extensive review and note-taking from: – Primary sources: the Qur’an (with emphasis on anthropological and educational verses), classical Shi‘a hadith collections such as *Al-Kafi* (3), *Man Lā Yahduruhu al-Faqīh*, *Wasa'il al-Shia* (6), and *Bihar al-Anwar* (1).
- Secondary sources: major Qur’anic commentaries (e.g., *Al-Mizan* (4)), classical and modern educational texts (e.g., *Jami' al-Sa'adat* (5), *The Methods of Education* (7)), and contemporary works in developmental and Islamic psychology.
- Analytical-Deductive Method: After data collection, qualitative content from the texts was analyzed. Key concepts were extracted, relationships among them identified, and scientific-educational propositions were formulated. For instance, by synthesizing the concept of “mastery” in the first seven years with the Qur’anic notion of “first weakness,” one may deduce the principle that “*love and security constitute a wise response to the existential vulnerability and absolute dependency of the child.*”
- Ijtihadi Analysis: This study does not merely collect and describe narrations; instead, it employs ‘*aql* (reason) and *tadabbur* (reflective analysis) to derive universal educational principles from specific narrations—reflecting the traditional method of *ijtihād* applied to pedagogical issues. This methodology is consistent with Islamic scholarly approaches to deriving general principles, as emphasized in works on human nature and rationality (11). For example, from the narration “*The child is a master...*” one may infer the fundamental principle that “*educational methods must align with the learner's level of cognitive and emotional capability.*”

Research Findings

The findings of the research are presented within the framework of two classifications which, in reality, reflect two levels of analysis of a single phenomenon. These two classifications are compared, and the role of rational upbringing across different stages of human life is examined:

A. The Holistic Classification (A Macro-Level View of the Human Life Cycle)

The Transformational Course of Human Life in the Qur'an: An Analysis of the Threefold Stages Based on Qur'an 30:54

The Qur'an contains numerous verses describing the developmental trajectory of human life. Qur'an 30:54 specifically outlines the existential evolution of the human being: *"Allah is He who created you in weakness, then after weakness granted strength, then after strength placed weakness and gray hair. He creates whatever He wills, and He is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful."*

This threefold model includes:

1. First Weakness: The Stage of Formation and Emergence

This stage, spanning birth through the end of childhood, is interpreted in classical Islamic scholarship as a period of "foundational weakness." Qur'anic exegetes such as those following the intellectual lineage represented by *Al-Mizan* describe this as the natural and universal course of human development: beginning in weakness, growing into strength, and eventually returning to weakness (4). In this stage, the human being is in a state of complete dependence and vulnerability, a state that naturally prepares the ground for gradual growth in cognitive, emotional, and physical capacities.

2. Stage of Strength: The Apex of Human Flourishing

The stage of strength, encompassing youth through middle adulthood, is traditionally understood in Islamic scholarship as the era of human capacity and agency. Commentaries aligned with mainstream exegetical tradition describe this as the phase in which an individual reaches the peak of capability and is able to assume major responsibilities. It is a period of productivity, influence, and social contribution (4).

3. Second Weakness: The Stage of Reflection and Wisdom

This stage accompanies aging and advanced years. Classical exegetical perspectives—such as those preserved within major Shi'a hadith compilations (1)—characterize this period as a "return to the self," in which physical strength declines but reflective, experiential, and spiritual capacities reach maturity. Although bodily faculties weaken, cognitive and experiential wisdom often intensifies.

Islamic scholars emphasize that these three stages reflect the divine wisdom embedded in the human life cycle. The first weakness provides the ground for learning and formation; the stage of strength enables meaningful action and responsibility; and the second weakness grants the opportunity to transmit experience and deepen insight (12).

Pre-modern scholars also noted the pedagogical relevance of these stages. Narrations transmitted in classical collections highlight that awareness of this natural cycle leads to humility and recognition of human dependence upon the Creator (3). Understanding one's existential condition at each stage enables a person to act responsibly and in accordance with their capacity.

This holistic Qur'anic perspective guides the human being toward profound self-awareness and ultimately toward knowledge of God (2). Recognizing that life is marked by constant change encourages reflection upon one's existential purpose.

Thus, the threefold structure of life outlined in Qur'an 30:54 reveals the precise and purposeful divine order governing human existence. It is not merely a description of physical transformation; it is a roadmap for spiritual and intellectual maturation, inviting the human being to contemplation and growth (12).

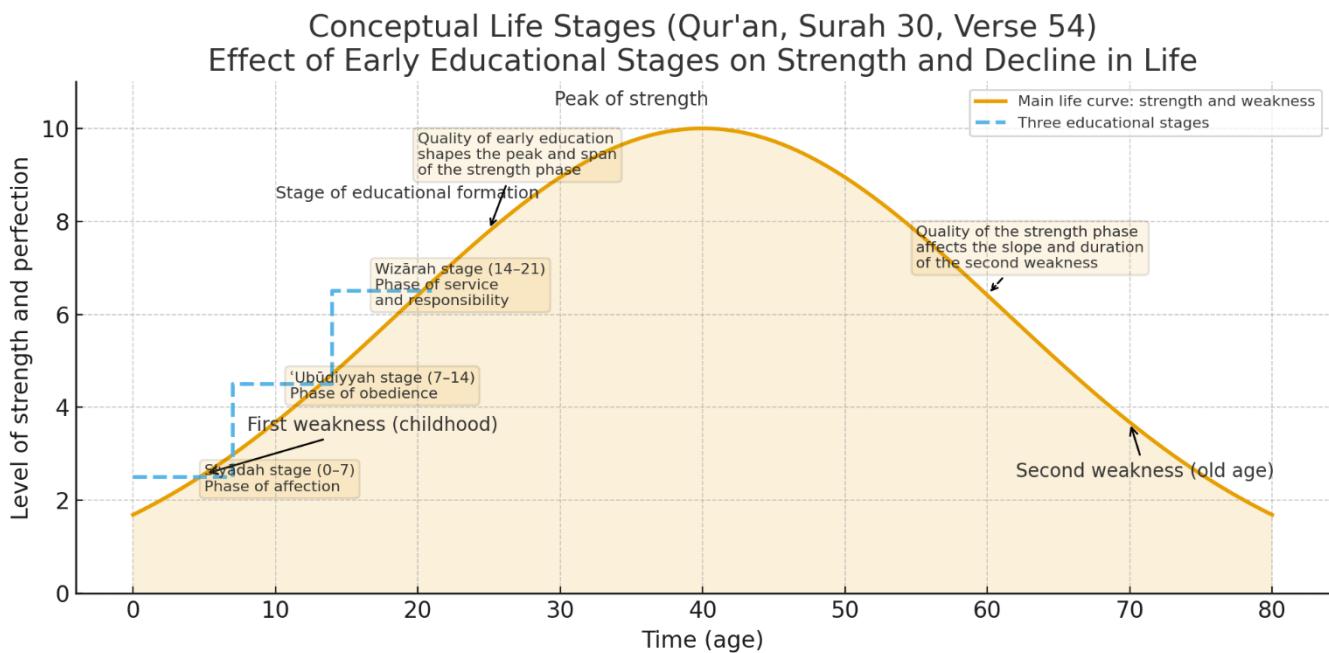


Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram of Life Stages

B. Stages of Rational Upbringing Across Different Age Periods

Stage One: The Period of “Leadership” (Ages 0–7)

The period of *siyādah*, extending from birth to seven years, is described in Islamic narrations as the phase of the child’s “mastery.” During this time, the child should be enveloped in affection and attention, with their emotional and physical needs fully met. Classical narrations preserved in foundational hadith collections describe the child as “a master for seven years” (3).

The primary pedagogical method in this stage is *play and ease*. Through play, the child discovers the surrounding world and develops essential skills. This corresponds with Islamic teachings that encourage leaving the child to explore during the early years.

The ultimate objective of this stage is to cultivate a sense of *self-worth* and *emotional security*. When the child receives consistent affection and respect, they become prepared to enter the next developmental phase—the stage of obedience and discipline. A firm emotional foundation ensures readiness for future responsibility.

Rational Upbringing in the Siyādah Stage

The educational responsibilities of parents during the first seven years include three major components:

1. Establishing Foundations Based on the Divine Model of Lordship

Parents are expected to emulate aspects of divine *rubūbiyyah*—ownership, nurturing, and mercy—toward their children. Qur'anic teachings on divine sovereignty, such as “Say: O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty” (Qur'an 3:26), offer a model for compassionate guardianship. Islamic ethical works describe this responsibility as so significant that parents who neglect it fall into moral failure (6).

Parents must provide a nurturing and merciful environment that supports the child’s gradual physical, emotional, moral, and cognitive development.

2. Integrating Two Complementary Roles: Exploration and Command

The educational system of this stage relies on the intelligent integration of two roles:

- **The exploratory-analytical-active role**, exercised indirectly through observation, interaction, and play, fostering creativity and self-awareness.

- **The commanding role**, which is direct, gradual, and structured. Foundational Islamic teachings emphasize that repeated exposure to core religious concepts—such as *tawhīd*—awakens the child’s innate nature (1).

3. Implementation Through Three Key Activities

These complementary roles manifest through the three primary activities of **education**, **ease**, and **play**, with *education* being central. Through nurturing behavior imbued with wisdom and mercy, parents guide the child in a setting filled with love and Islamic values. This environment allows the child to gradually assume responsibility for *self-regulation* and to begin the journey toward spiritual refinement.

Connection Between the Siyādah Stage and the Qur’anic “First Weakness”

The 0–7 age period represents the peak of the Qur’anic “first weakness.” The child is fully dependent physically, emotionally, and cognitively. The Islamic emphasis on love and granting the child a sense of mastery is a wise response to this existential condition.

Affection creates a secure psychological refuge that empowers the child to outgrow vulnerability and develop inner strength. If this stage is marked by harshness or excessive discipline, the child instead forms feelings of helplessness and distrust toward the world—effects that echo across later stages of life (13).

Thus, early childhood education in Islam is essentially the wise and compassionate management of human weakness—laying the foundation upon which all subsequent stages of growth depend.

Second: The Stage of Servanthood and Discipline (Ages 7–14) – Transition from Weakness to Strength

This stage represents the transition from emotional dominance to norm-governed behavior, in which the core characteristic of the child on the correct educational path is “servanthood.” The term ‘abd (servant) here signifies the cultivation of a “spirit of servanthood” and “inner discipline.” This is the transitional phase from childhood to adolescence which, in Erikson’s developmental psychology, overlaps with the stages of “industry vs. inferiority” (ages 6–11) and “identity vs. role confusion” (ages 12–18) (14–16). In this stage, the child reaches a cognitive level at which they can understand rules, causality, and the consequences of their own behavior.

In the age range of 7 to 14, the child grows with the central feature of being a “servant” (4). This concept denotes the gradual acceptance of the role of servitude to God and responsibility toward the norms of life. At this stage, the child—rather than acting purely under external compulsion—progressively comes to understand the meaning of obedience, courtesy, and fulfilling duties through the growth of rational and cognitive capacities (10, 11). The primary goal of education in this period is to transform mere outward conformity into inner, conscious servanthood, such that the child is able to regulate behavior based on a genuine discernment of right and wrong.

Servanthood in this age can manifest on three levels: “out of fear,” “for the sake of reward,” or “out of love and affection” (3). The role of parents here is decisive. If they interact with the child through wisdom, affection, and sound reasoning (17, 18), they can guide the child from fear- or reward-based servanthood toward the “servanthood of the free,” which rests on love and understanding. Such an educational style lays the foundation for the emergence of a committed, responsible, and spiritually oriented personality in the child’s future (19).

Proper Conduct Toward the Child in the Servanthood Stage (Ages 7–14): An Educational Framework Based on Compassionate Guardianship

The foundations of this educational relationship are rooted in the “master–servant” model of supplications attributed to Imam ‘Ali, in which *wilāyah* (guardianship) is defined as nurturing authority combined with responsibility and mercy (1, 20). This approach has three dimensions—emotional, educational, and supportive—that are expressed through core principles such as mercy and wisdom, acceptance and mutual respect, and guidance combined with gentleness (21, 22).

At the operational level, six detailed principles are implemented: *jūd* (responsible generosity), *karam* (noble magnanimity), *fadl* (giving beyond what is deserved), *tawl* (continuity in support), *ihsān* (conscious benevolence), and *imtinān* (constructive awareness-raising), all drawn from Islamic educational ethics (19, 23). The wise integration of these principles within a secure and predictable environment enables the child to develop a layered understanding of unconditional love, awareness of blessings, and responsibility toward them.

Implementing this educational style leads, in the short term, to the development of trust and cooperative behavior, and in the long term to a transition from fear- and greed-based servanthood to conscious, love-based servanthood (3, 6). This process shapes a balanced personality characterized by responsibility, moral growth, and spiritual development, rooted in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (1).

As a result, the framework of compassionate guardianship, through the integration of these six principles, both preserves the child's human dignity and smooths the path of their moral development. This approach nurtures a balanced generation that is both grateful for blessings and responsible toward them (22). Ultimately, this framework brings about a deep transformation in the child's outlook and character. First, the child gradually shifts from being a passive recipient of affection and blessings to becoming an active partner in the educational process. They learn that parental love is not accidental but a conscious and responsible expression of will that, while meeting emotional and material needs, simultaneously calls them to moral growth. This realization forms the basis of a reciprocal relationship in which the child advances not under coercion but through understanding and affection, perceiving responsibility not as a heavy burden but as a natural response to the love received.

In the final stage, this process comes to fruition as the child attains a level of intellectual and emotional maturity where gratitude and responsibility become integral to their identity. Such a person, even when facing life's hardships and limitations, maintains a grateful disposition, seeks solutions instead of complaining, and structures relationships—with others and with God—on the basis of conscious love and voluntary responsibility (2). In truth, this educational style raises a generation that can be seen as the true inheritor of the Ahl al-Bayt's educational legacy, capable of embodying authentic human and religious values amid the complexities of the contemporary world (1).

We must also remember that in this sensitive period, the issues of religious obligation (*taklīf*) and differentiated, gender-appropriate educational content become highly significant. This includes the critical matter of puberty and its psychological and behavioral implications, which require careful, gender-sensitive guidance informed by Islamic teachings (21, 24, 25).

The Responsibility of Guardians in Rational Education Between Ages 7 and 14

The primary responsibility of guardians toward children aged 7 to 14 is their rational education, built upon two foundational pillars: *adab* (proper conduct) and “learning the Book”, which, as indicated in narrations attributed to Imam al-Jawād, function as inseparable complements. The Imam explains that true *adab* is the *adab* of the Sharī‘ah—comprehensive alignment with divine law (3, 26).

Teaching True Adab (Religious and Moral Education):

From an Islamic perspective, as emphasized in narrations attributed to Imam al-Jawād, *adab* is not limited to “speaking good words,” but extends to harmonizing all dimensions of life with the Sharī‘ah and seeking divine pleasure (12). This *adab*—embodied in adherence to religious rulings and emulation of the example of the infallibles—forms the bedrock of the child's personality, much like character education frameworks that integrate moral virtues with daily practice (21, 27).

Teaching the Book (Acquisition of Knowledge and Intellectual Growth):

This pillar refers to the acquisition of knowledge through engagement with texts, which, according to Islamic narrations, is a multidimensional process involving reading, understanding, writing, memorizing, and disseminating knowledge (3, 28). Writing, in particular, is portrayed as a means to preserve and systematize knowledge—“tie knowledge by writing it down”—

an idea that aligns with contemporary models of self-regulated and reflective learning (29, 30). Books thus become tools for intellectual development and vehicles for safeguarding and transmitting the scholarly heritage.

Therefore, complete education at this sensitive age is achieved only when religious *adab* provides the framework and orientation for knowledge acquisition, and when knowledge acquired through the Book leads to a deeper understanding and more concrete realization of “true *adab*.” Together, these two pillars prepare the child for a life that is both wise and pleasing to God (2, 25).

Relation of the Second Stage to the Overall Cycle: A Practical Workshop for Entering the Stage of Strength + Living in the Presence of God

This stage, like the final part of the first seven-year period, functions as a “practical workshop” for entering the peak of the stage of strength. From the onset of religious obligation (*taklīf*), the individual becomes fully responsible for the consequences of their actions in view of eternal life. Thus, the quality of relationships and educational content in this period, and the character of the guardians, critically determine the success of nurturing divinely oriented rationality (4, 29). This, in turn, shapes how the person will deploy their “strength” in youth and middle age—whether it will be devoted to construction, altruism, and nearness to God, or squandered in pursuit of egoistic and purely material aims. Proper education in this stage guarantees a positive orientation during the golden period of strength (13).

Stage Three: Ages 14 to 21 (The Stage of “Ministry”)

The stage of ministry and consultation (ages 14–21), known in prophetic narrations as the “ministerial” phase, marks the transition from adolescence to youth and prepares the individual for full independence. In this period, as the Prophet stated—“The child is a master for seven years, a servant for seven years, and a minister for seven years”—the role of the young person shifts from a largely passive position to an active and consultative one (3, 5). This corresponds to the developmental peak of cognitive, emotional, and social capacities (16).

The Responsibility of Parents During Ages 14 to 21

At this stage, the primary responsibility of parents is the comprehensive and practical teaching of what is lawful and unlawful (*ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*). The young person must be able to correctly discern Islamic rulings in all areas of life—financial, social, familial, and cultural—and apply them in decision-making. Instruction should be designed to guide the youth toward self-sufficiency in identifying concrete instances of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (12, 22).

Based on a well-known prophetic statement to Imam ‘Ali—“You hear what I hear and see what I see, except that you are not a prophet but a minister”—the youth in this stage is like a minister participating in the affairs of the family (23). This participation not only fosters the young person’s growth and sense of responsibility but also gives parents the opportunity, through interaction with their child, to remain steadfast on the divine path—an embodiment of the concept of “*alzimhu nafsak*” (bind him to yourself in mutual responsibility). During this period, the youth, while preserving proper boundaries and respect for parents, is gradually prepared to assume social responsibilities and to form a family in the future.

The Relationship Between the Ministerial Stage (Ages 14–21) and the Stage of Strength

The ministerial period (ages 14–21) coincides precisely with the rise of “strength.” This strength is not merely physical; it includes:

- **Rational strength:** the ability to analyze, reason, and make decisions along a divinely guided path.
- **Spiritual strength:** the formation of identity, will, and the capacity to manage personal and social life based on deep self-knowledge.
- **Practical strength:** the ability to act, assume responsibility, and assist oneself and others for the sake of God.

· **Spiritual-ethical strength:** the capacity to behave in accordance with divine rulings, perform acts of worship, and sustain a living relationship with God (14-16, 29).

In reality, “ministry” has no meaning in adolescence without this multi-dimensional strength.

Ministry as the Wise Manifestation of Strength

The ministerial stage is essentially the wise channeling of this strength. If youthful strength is left without guidance and consultation, it can lead to rebellion or deviation. Within the framework of ministry, however:

- Rational strength is directed toward critique and analysis in a divinely oriented manner.
- Practical strength is guided through the delegation of responsibilities, enabling the youth to manifest actions aligned with Islamic norms of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*.
- Spiritual strength is moderated through the practice of “conscious obedience” to parental counsel.
- Strength in supporting one’s guardians is enhanced by offering sincere reminders and assistance that help the family remain on the divine path (2, 22, 23).

Preparation for the Second Weakness

The metaphor of ministry prepares the youth to manage their “strength” properly so that when they later reach “weakness and old age”:

- They can draw upon the experiences accumulated during this period.
- They are ready to play a similar role as advisers to the next generation.
- They will have laid a solid foundation for a felicitous life in both this world and the hereafter (4, 31).

Thus, the ministerial stage is the phase in which youthful strength is put into practice within a wise framework. Qur’ān 30:54 reveals the existential rationale behind this phase: transforming raw “strength” into responsible “power,” preventing the waste of this golden opportunity, and preparing for subsequent stages of life (4, 28).

This model shows that the active educational period from ages 0 to 21 is, in fact, a “foundational investment phase” for the entire life cycle, and it includes:

Managing the First Weakness: Transforming Threat into Opportunity

If the first weakness is accompanied by neglect or harshness, it can become a source of psychological complexes and personality disorders. However, the Islamic educational model, by offering appropriate strategies for each phase, transforms this “weakness” into a “golden opportunity” for growth. Affection in the *siyādah* stage turns weakness into “security”; discipline in the servanthood stage turns it into “inner order”; and consultation in the ministerial stage transforms it into “mature independence.” In other words, correct education manages the child’s inherent weakness and converts it into a bridge toward future strength (13, 17, 18).

Constructing Qualitative Strength: Beyond Physical Power

From the Qur’ānic perspective, the stage of “strength” is not limited to bodily capability. It signifies the apex of “strength of character,” “strength of faith,” “strength of rationality,” and “strength of will.” This qualitative strength is built during the 0–21 period through the three stages. A child who grows in a secure atmosphere of affection (*siyādah*), an adolescent who learns discipline and responsibility (servanthood), and a young person who acquires critical thinking and the power of choice (ministry) becomes an adult capable of making the best use of their strength. Such a person is neither enslaved by desires nor a plaything of the environment, but a wise, responsible, and influential human being. As Imam ‘Ali states: “*The strength of the intelligent lies in his protection from ignorance*”—a maxim transmitted in collections of wisdom sayings (16, 20, 29). This protection is gained during the golden period of upbringing.

Preparing for the Second Weakness: Old Age with Dignity and Wisdom

The fate of the “second weakness” (old age) also depends on the quality of passage through the golden period. If, during the stage of strength, a person uses the spiritual and moral capital accumulated in the first 21 years for growth, service, and the pursuit of knowledge, old age will not be a phase of mere decline but the “culmination of wisdom” and “storing provisions for the hereafter.” The Prophet is reported to have said: “*Knowledge acquired in childhood is like engraving on stone*”, a narration preserved in classical hadith works (1, 30). The deep-seated learning and character training achieved in youth later manifest in old age as “practical wisdom” and “inner tranquility.” Such a person, in the second weakness, is honored and respected, for their being is filled with spirituality and knowledge. In contrast, if the golden period is squandered, the second weakness becomes a time marked by regret, loneliness, and emptiness (31).

The Responsibility of Guardians in Rational Education During Ages 14 to 21

Based on the content presented, the role of parents toward their child in the 14–21 age period can be categorized into two main axes:

A) Reciprocal Educational Relationship: The Role of “*alzimhu nafsak*”

In this stage, the relationship between parents and child becomes a two-way interaction. According to the concept of “*alzimhu nafsak*” (that is, “bind your own soul to the right path through him”), the child is no longer a merely passive recipient but plays an active role in reinforcing the spiritual trajectory of the parents. This role is manifested in the following forms:

1. **Moral mirror:** The child’s adherence to moral principles reflects the effectiveness of the parents’ educational performance and strengthens their faith and commitment.
2. **Reminder of responsibility:** Through his or her behavior, the child constantly reminds the parents that they must be reliable spiritual role models.
3. **Stimulus for growth:** The educational challenges of this period push parents toward continuous learning and spiritual growth.
4. **Factor of steadfastness:** The parents’ sense of responsibility to remain role models motivates them to be more steadfast in practicing religious teachings.
5. **Source of feedback:** The child’s questions, views, and behaviors create opportunities for parents to review and correct their mistaken attitudes and assumptions.

B) Transformation in Instruction: From General Training to Specialized Education

At this stage, the content of instruction undergoes a fundamental transformation:

- **In the second seven-year period (ages 7–14):** Teaching about what is lawful and unlawful (*halāl* and *haram*) is delivered in a general way, embedded in the comprehensive Islamic lifestyle within the family (7, 19).
- **In the third seven-year period (ages 14–21):** With the complexity of the modern world and the specialized nature of many legal-religious issues, teaching *halāl* and *haram* must be pursued in a structured, precise, and specialized manner. This specialized instruction is necessary in the following dimensions:
 - **Lifestyle:** Daily choices such as clothing, nutrition, occupation, and social interactions.
 - **Digital space:** Use of media, social networks, and online content.
 - **Financial matters:** Awareness of rulings on usury, transactions, lawful income, zakat, and khums.
 - **Social relations:** Regulation of friendships, family relations, and preparation for marriage (22, 25, 32).

Thus, in adolescence and early adulthood (ages 14–21), parents, on the one hand, draw upon the role of “*alzimhu nafsak*” to benefit from the presence of their child for consolidating and deepening their own spiritual path; and on the other hand, by consistently pursuing specialized instruction in religious rulings, they prepare the child for informed decision-making and for

confronting the complex challenges of the contemporary world (12, 23). This reciprocal relationship leads both to the child’s growth and to the parents’ spiritual refinement.

The Integrated Growth Model in Islam

According to the findings of this research, these two classifications are two sides of the same coin:

- **First level (ontological):** A metaphysical roadmap that shows which stations the human being must pass through on the journey of life.
- **Second level (educational):** A practical “GPS” of the journey that teaches parents and educators how to navigate each station.

The synthesis of these two levels yields a wise, comprehensive, and practical educational model that both respects the “wisdom” of creation and attends to the “method” of sound upbringing (2, 4). This model is neither merely descriptive—like some psychological theories—nor purely prescriptive and rigid—like certain overly strict educational approaches. Rather, it is a balanced combination of describing reality and explaining strategies, which makes it highly effective and reliable for nurturing human beings in today’s complex world (21, 32). This is precisely the “practical wisdom” that is rooted in authentic Islamic sources.

Examining Rational Education in Light of the Developmental Stages

One of the key findings of this study is the identification of “**rational education**” as the **unifying axis** of all stages and dimensions of education in the Islamic model. This form of education is gradual and developmental. The findings reveal a deep and systematic connection between different types of rational education and the three educational stages (siyādah, ‘ubūdiyyah, wizārah) and the natural life course (weakness, strength, second weakness), as follows:

1. Siyādah Stage (Ages 0–7) – First Weakness: Laying the Foundations of Sensory, Emotional, and Spiritual Rationality

In this stage, rational education occurs indirectly through concrete experiences:

- **Mechanism:** Through *play* and *imitation*, the child begins to perceive basic cause-and-effect relationships.
- **Type of rationality:** Practical–sensory rationality emerges. The child learns, “If I do this, that result will follow.”
- **Steps toward self-knowledge:** Under the protective shade of parental care, the child takes fundamental steps toward discovering their own self and inner world.
- **Foundations of reflective thinking:** The emotional security that flows from *siyādah* is the most essential prerequisite for curiosity, exploration, and cognitive risk-taking. An anxious and insecure child does not possess the courage to explore their true self and the world (7, 13).
- **Ultimate goal:** Transforming the child’s “questioning conscience” into an “inner logic” which, in the servanthood stage, will be ready to receive more general and abstract rules.

Thus, in this stage, rationality is nurtured in a pre-reflective form within an environment of affection and play, gradually enabling the child to benefit practically from their God-given intellect (9, 10).

2. Servanthood Stage (Ages 7–14) – Emerging Strength: Forming Rule-Governed and Theocentric Rationality

This stage marks the peak of qualitative transformation in rational education and advances along two primary axes:

a) Systematic rationality (through “*yata’allamu al-kitāb*” – learning the Book):

- The child learns to acquire knowledge not as scattered information but within a coherent structure (the Book).

- Writing, memorizing, and transmitting knowledge—practices emphasized in Islamic narrations—are essentially the cultivation of systematic thinking, analysis, and the logical communication of information (3, 28).

b) Value-oriented rationality (through “*adab al-shari‘ah*”):

- Here, rationality transcends the boundaries of mere material gain and loss to recognize “true benefit.”
- The child learns that the most rational behavior may be one that brings material loss but yields “divine pleasure” and “eternal reward.”
- This reflects the realization of what is attributed to Imam al-Jawād: that true *adab* is anchored in seeking God’s satisfaction and Paradise (12, 21).

Therefore, in this stage, instrumental rationality (for problem solving) and value-based rationality (for discerning good and evil) are integrated, and “theocentric rationality” is born (25, 27).

3. Ministerial Stage (Ages 14–21) – Peak Strength: Institutionalizing Critical and Responsible Rationality

At this stage, rationality approaches its highest level—*hikmah* (wise reason):

- **Critical rationality:** With the shift of parents’ role to that of “consultants,” the young person learns to think, analyze, critique, and then choose, rather than accepting ideas blindly. This is the concrete expression of the “*alzimhu nafsak*” dynamic (29, 30).
- **Responsible rationality:** The youth realizes that rational choices have consequences for themselves, their family, and society. They learn that true rationality is not merely “thinking correctly” but also “acting responsibly” in line with that thought (31).
- **Identity rationality:** Rationality becomes central to identity formation. Based on the rational system built in the previous two stages, the young person provides a reasoned and conscious answer to the question, “Who am I?” (14, 16).

As a result, rationality in this stage ceases to be passive and transforms into an “active executive faculty” for constructing one’s life and identity.

Ultimately, the educational model of siyādah, ‘ubūdiyyah, and wizārah harmonizes in a remarkably wise way with the natural life trajectory depicted in Qur’ān 30:54 (first weakness, strength, second weakness) (4, 28). A key subtlety is that the siyādah stage (0–7 years) is itself a gradual strengthening process: the child moves from “absolute weakness” in infancy to “relative strength” at the threshold of age seven. This stage is a practical workshop of *sensory–emotional–spiritual rationality* that transforms the child into a “fearless explorer.”

Simultaneously with entering the “strength” phase at around seven, the servanthood stage begins. Here, the child’s mental and physical capacities are guided by “rule-governed and value-based rationality,” turning them into a “committed learner.” Then, at the peak of strength (ages 14–21), the ministerial stage begins with an emphasis on “critical and responsible rationality,” transforming the adolescent into a “deliberative chooser.”

This educational model not only moves in step with the natural course of life but converts each phase into an opportunity to prepare the person for the next stage. By the ministerial phase, the individual is prepared both to make optimal use of the peak of their strength and to face the “second weakness” (old age), equipped to serve as a wise adviser to the next generation (2, 22).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted with the aim of explaining an integrated model of rational upbringing within an Islamic framework. The findings showed that the educational model based on the stages of Siyādah (ages 0–7), ‘Ubūdiyyah (ages 7–

14), and Wizārah (ages 14–21) is not merely a practical guideline, but rather a wise and coherent roadmap that aligns perfectly with the natural developmental course of human life—referred to in Qur'an 30:54 as “first weakness,” “strength,” and “second weakness.” The unifying core of this model is the gradual cultivation of “divine rationality.”

This study arrived at several key and innovative findings, including the following:

- **A wise integration of two developmental maps:** The most significant achievement of this research is its demonstration of the remarkable harmony between the three educational stages (Siyādah, 'Ubūdiyyah, Wizārah) and the three existential stages of life (weakness, strength, weakness). The model illustrates that Islamic education not only aligns with human nature, but actively accompanies the wisdom embedded in creation.
- **Rational upbringing as the unifying axis:** In this study, “rational upbringing” was identified as the connecting thread across all stages and dimensions of education. This rationality is not merely an intellectual capacity but an “active executive faculty” that develops a unique quality in each stage of life.
- **A dynamic and practical model:** The model is not static. Each stage functions as a “practical workshop” designed to prepare the individual for the next stage and ultimately for the entire life cycle. For example, the Siyādah period is the workshop for forming a “fearless explorer,” who is then transformed in the next stage into a “committed learner.”

To apply this model in the contemporary world, the following recommendations are offered:

- **Designing parenting curricula:** Training programs and educational materials for parents and educators should be developed based on the distinct responsibilities associated with each of the three stages (Siyādah, 'Ubūdiyyah, Wizārah).
- **Revising school curricula:** Educational systems—particularly in Muslim-majority societies—can benefit from this model by shifting their teaching methods and curricula from a memory-centered focus toward nurturing critical, value-driven, and responsible rationality.
- **Producing specialized content for adolescents and youth:** Given the complexities of the modern world, creating engaging and structured content about lawful and unlawful matters across digital life, economics, and lifestyle is an urgent necessity.

Because this study is theoretical and library-based in nature, it has limitations that point the way for future research:

- **Practical testing of the model:** Future studies may employ qualitative methods (such as case studies) or quantitative approaches (such as longitudinal surveys) to assess the effectiveness of this model in different family and educational settings.
- **Cultural adaptation for diverse societies:** Understanding how this Islamic model can be implemented across different cultural and social contexts requires cross-cultural research.
- **Deepening psychological foundations:** More profound interdisciplinary work can further clarify the connections between Islamic concepts (such as *fitrah* and *'aql*) and contemporary psychological constructs (such as emotional intelligence and cognition).

In conclusion, the educational model of Siyādah, 'Ubūdiyyah, and Wizārah constitutes a foundational 21-year “investment period.” This period transforms the child’s initial weakness into an opportunity for emotional security, gives direction and meaning to the strength of youth, and prepares the individual to face the second weakness (old age) as a wise adviser and spiritual heir. This model is not merely a theoretical construct—it is a form of “practical wisdom,” living and dynamic, capable of nurturing a generation that leads life both wisely and in a manner pleasing to God.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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