

Sunnatullah as a Principle of Divine Order: A Philosophical Analysis and Its Relevance to the Development of Modern Islamic Education

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze sunnatullah as a principle of divine order from a philosophical perspective and examine its relevance to the development of modern Islamic education. The research focuses on understanding the essence of sunnatullah, exploring the views of classical and contemporary Muslim scholars, and identifying its implications for shaping an educational paradigm that is adaptive to contemporary challenges. This research employs a qualitative method with a library research approach, involving an in-depth study of primary and secondary sources such as Qur'anic exegesis, classical Islamic scholarship, and relevant academic works. Data were analyzed using descriptive-analytical and philosophical-critical approaches to reveal the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of sunnatullah. The findings indicate that sunnatullah encompasses not only the immutable laws governing the universe but also social and historical laws that can be studied and applied. These findings affirm that the principle of divine order serves as a conceptual foundation for developing Islamic education that is integrative, rational, transformative, and responsive to modern challenges.

Keywords:

Epistemology, Divine order, Islamic philosophy, Modern Islamic education, Sunnatullah

Introduction

The development of modern civilization, marked by advances in science, technology, and global socio-political dynamics, has brought significant changes to all dimensions of human life, including education (Miftakhul Rizqi et al., 2023). In this context, education is no longer understood merely as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as a strategic instrument for shaping civilization, character, and collective identity within society. Islamic education, as an educational system based on revelatory values, faces increasingly complex challenges: how to uphold divine principles amid the tide of globalization of values, secularization of knowledge, and ever-evolving technological disruption (Zahraini et al., 2025). Amidst the complexity of these challenges, a solid philosophical foundation is needed as a basis for formulating an Islamic education paradigm that is not only relevant to the demands of the times, but also remains firmly rooted in the basic values of Islamic teachings. One of the fundamental principles that has strategic relevance in this regard is the

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concept of sunnatullah, namely the laws of divine order that govern all existence and the universe in a consistent and continuous manner (Gaffar & Anees, 2025).

Theologically, sunnatullah is understood as Allah's decree that is fixed, consistent, and unchanging in regulating the order of nature, society, and history (Sutarjo et al., 2020). This principle indicates that the universe operates according to certain laws that reflect God's will, wisdom, and justice. Understanding sunnatullah is very important because it provides an ontological and epistemological framework for understanding reality, as well as a basis for designing educational processes that are in harmony with divine will. Education based on the principle of sunnatullah will encourage students to not only master knowledge cognitively, but also to understand cosmic order as a manifestation of divine values (Suryadi, 2019).

The study of sunnatullah has been a focus of attention for both classical and modern Muslim thinkers. Al-Ghazali, for example, asserted that the laws of order governing nature are a manifestation of Allah's will, which is fixed and unchanging (Ibrahim, 2015). In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun refers to social laws as part of sunnatullah that must be understood in order to build a sustainable civilization (Hasan et al., 2023). Modern thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida associate sunnatullah with rationality and the progress of the ummah, emphasizing the importance of using reason in understanding God's laws as the basis for reforming Islamic thought (Gilang Febiyanto & Najib Azka, 2025). Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman and Syed Naquib al-Attas developed a more epistemological understanding by linking sunnatullah to the structure of science and educational ethics, so that the educational process must be in harmony with the laws established by Allah (Hamka, 2021).

Although the contributions of these thinkers are important, a review of previous literature shows that discussions of sunnatullah are still dominated by normative and descriptive theological and cosmological approaches (Sihab & Rozi, 2025). Discussion of the philosophical implications of sunnatullah for the development of contemporary Islamic education paradigms is still relatively limited. In fact, in the context of modern societies experiencing rapid social, economic, and technological change, understanding sunnatullah can be an important basis for building education paradigms that are more responsive, adaptive, and transformative (Kuswandi, 2024). This void is the research gap that this article attempts to address.

The scientific novelty offered in this study lies in its analytical-critical approach to sunnatullah as a principle of divine order, which is then conceptually integrated with the paradigm of modern Islamic education. This article not only explains the conceptual meaning of sunnatullah, but also reexamines and critiques various views of Islamic thinkers, identifies the limitations of these thoughts, and offers a new synthesis that places sunnatullah as a philosophical foundation in the formulation of educational goals, methods, curriculum, and orientation. This approach is expected to broaden the scientific horizon of Islamic education, while also providing a conceptual contribution to the reconstruction of an education system that is oriented towards transcendental values but remains adaptive to the developments of the times.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research, which is research that relies on literature review as the main source of data collection and analysis. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research was not to test hypotheses empirically, but to explore, critically analyze, and synthesize the concept of sunnatullah as a principle of divine order and its relevance to the development of modern Islamic education. This research is descriptive-analytical and philosophical-critical in nature. The descriptive approach is used to describe the thoughts of Islamic figures on sunnatullah, while the analytical-critical approach is used to identify, evaluate, and compare these views, then compile them into a new framework of thought that is relevant to the current educational context.

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from the original works of Islamic thinkers such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Fazlur Rahman, and Syed Naquib al-Attas, which discuss sunnatullah directly. Secondary data was obtained from supporting literature such as books on Islamic philosophy, journal articles, tafsir, and relevant previous studies. Data collection was carried out using the documentation method, which involves searching, reading, recording, and classifying information from various sources, both print and digital.

The main instrument of this research is the researcher himself as a qualitative instrument who plays a role in selecting literature, understanding the context of the text, and interpreting the content of the work. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively and interpretively through three stages: data reduction to select relevant information, content analysis to understand the meaning and context of the text, and conceptual synthesis to formulate new ideas about sunnatullah and its implications for modern Islamic education. This approach produced a reflective and contextual understanding that can enrich the theoretical framework of Islamic education.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of studies and analyses obtained from literature research on the concept of sunnatullah as a principle of divine order and its relevance to the development of modern Islamic education. The discussion is conducted in a philosophical-critical manner based on an in-depth review of various classical and contemporary literature, thereby revealing the conceptual meaning, theoretical basis, and practical implications of sunnatullah in the context of education. This analysis not only focuses on normative-theological understanding but also examines how the principle of divine order can be used as a basis for formulating an Islamic education paradigm that is relevant to the demands of the times. All research results are organized thematically according to the problem formulation, providing a systematic, comprehensive, and in-depth picture of the relationship between sunnatullah and the development of Islamic education that is oriented towards transcendental values while being adaptive to the dynamics of modernity.

The Concept of Sunnatullah as the Principle of Divine Order

A literature review shows that sunnatullah is one of the fundamental concepts in Islamic thought, representing the principles of order, consistency, and divine laws that govern all aspects of life (Sutarjo et al., 2020). Etymologically, the term sunnatullah comes from the word sunnah, which means path, rule, or decree, and Allah, which means God. Terminologically, sunnatullah is understood as the immutable laws established by Allah to govern the universe, human life, and the course of history (Zuhurul Fuqohak et al., 2021). This principle is explicitly stated in the Qur'an, including in Q.S. Al-Fath [48]: 23 and Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]: 62, which state that Allah's decrees will not change and will remain consistent throughout time. These verses show that sunnatullah is universal, objective, and unaffected by changes in space and time.

A review of classical literature shows that scholars agree on emphasizing the regularity and certainty of divine laws (Ünal, 2023). Al-Ghazali, for example, interpreted sunnatullah as a manifestation of God's will that reflects His wisdom and power in regulating the cosmos. Everything in nature, according to him, runs according to definite laws because it is a reflection of divine irādah (will) and hikmah (wisdom) (Yalçın, 2024). In his Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun developed this concept into the socio-historical realm. He referred to social laws (al-sunan al-ijtimā'iyah) as part of sunnatullah that must be understood in order for a civilization to grow, survive, and develop (Derani, 2018). This view shows that sunnatullah not only encompasses natural laws, but also social and historical laws that are causal and can be studied.

A review of contemporary literature reveals a shift towards a more rational and practical approach. Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida emphasize the importance of reason in understanding sunnatullah as the basis for the advancement of civilization. They believe that the decline of the Muslim community is often caused by neglecting the laws of Allah that objectively apply in social life and nature (Gojali et al., 2024). Fazlur Rahman expanded this perspective by placing sunnatullah as an epistemological framework in understanding the relationship between revelation and empirical reality. According to him, Allah's laws are not merely theological dogmas that are passively accepted, but principles that can be studied, tested, and utilized to develop science and civilization (Putra et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasizes the axiological dimension of sunnatullah, namely as the basis of ethics in the educational process that aims to shape humans according to their nature and in harmony with divine order (In'ami et al., 2025).

From all these findings, it can be concluded that sunnatullah has three main dimensions. First, the ontological dimension, which is the fixed laws that govern the existence of all creatures and the reality of life. Second, the epistemological dimension, which is the framework of thinking that encourages humans to understand, explore, and utilize these laws through reason and experience. Third, the axiological dimension, which is the moral and ethical values that form the basis for the development of science and education oriented towards benefit (Ni'mah et al., 2024). These three dimensions are intertwined and show that sunnatullah is not merely an abstract theological concept, but rather a universal principle that can be used as

a basis for the development of Islamic knowledge, culture, and education systems (Yunita et al., 2025).

Thus, the results of this study answer the first research question that sunnatullah is understood philosophically as a principle of divine order that encompasses all aspects of life and has broad implications for the formation of civilization. Sunnatullah not only explains the physical order of the universe, but also provides a basis for human thought and action in social, historical, and educational contexts. A comprehensive understanding of this principle is an important foundation for formulating an Islamic educational paradigm that is oriented towards transcendental values, while also being adaptive to the dynamics of change over time.

Islamic Thinkers' View of Sunnatullah

A review of the literature shows that the concept of sunnatullah has been an important concern in Islamic thought from classical to contemporary times (Haririe, 2024). Muslim thinkers not only understand it as the immutable laws of God that govern the universe, but also relate it to various dimensions of human life, including social, historical, epistemological, and ethical aspects (Putra et al., 2025). This diversity of perspectives shows that sunnatullah is a dynamic and contextual concept, whose meaning continues to evolve with the changing times and challenges of civilization (Saputra & Kurniawan, 2025).

In classical thought, Al-Ghazali made an important contribution to understanding sunnatullah from a metaphysical and theological perspective. According to him, the orderliness that occurs in the universe is a direct manifestation of God's will (irādah) and wisdom (ḥikmah) (Al-Asy'ari et al., 2022). Nothing happens by chance; everything happens according to His predetermined plan. This understanding implies that humans need to adjust their actions and thoughts to the divine order so that their lives are in harmony with God's will. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of realizing that understanding divine laws means understanding how the universe works, and from this, humans can develop useful knowledge and technology without straying from the corridor of sharia (Al-Asy'ari et al., 2022).

Ibn Khaldun provided a different perspective by bringing the concept of sunnatullah into the socio-historical realm (Alatas, 2020). In the Muqaddimah, he argues that societies and civilizations develop according to fixed social laws, such as the cycle of emergence, glory, decline, and destruction of a dynasty or country (Farabi, 2023). These processes, according to him, are not coincidental events, but part of God's causal law (Alatas, 2020). Understanding these social laws enables humans to study historical patterns, learn from them, and formulate strategies for building a sustainable civilization (Erman & Junaidi, 2024). Ibn Khaldun's view shows that sunnatullah is not limited to the laws of nature, but also includes the laws of society that can be observed and analyzed scientifically (Chami & Tlidi, 2025).

In modern thought, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida emphasized the importance of reason as the primary instrument in understanding sunnatullah. They criticized the fatalistic tendency of some Muslims to surrender everything to destiny

without attempting to understand the laws of cause and effect established by Allah. For them, the advancement of civilization can only be achieved if Muslims earnestly study and apply these laws in their social, economic, and political lives (Gojali et al., 2024). This line of thinking indicates a shift from a theological approach to a rational approach, in which sunnatullah is understood as something that can be studied and utilized for the benefit of humanity (Fazeli et al., 2022).

Fazlur Rahman then expanded on this idea by placing sunnatullah within the framework of Islamic epistemology. He emphasized that divine laws can be studied rationally and tested through empirical experience, thus opening up space for integration between revelation and modern science. In his view, sunnatullah is not merely a theological doctrine that is passively accepted, but a scientific principle that encourages exploration, research, and innovation. This integration is important for building an Islamic civilization that is able to compete amid global scientific and technological advances without losing its spiritual foundation.

Meanwhile, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas places special emphasis on the axiological dimension of sunnatullah (Ibrohim & Muhammad, 2022). According to him, divine laws not only govern nature and society, but also form the basis for the formation of moral values and the objectives of Islamic education (J et al., 2024). True education should help humans understand their position as part of divine order and guide them to carry out their role as stewards on earth responsibly (Turhamun, 2023). Thus, sunnatullah functions not only as a law of causality, but also as an ethical guideline in the formation of human personality and civilization (Sihab & Rozi, 2025).

These findings show that Islamic thinkers' views on sunnatullah are multidimensional and complementary. Classical thinkers emphasize metaphysical, theological, and historical aspects, while modern reformers develop more contextual rational, epistemological, and axiological approaches. This diversity of perspectives shows that sunnatullah is not a static concept, but one that continues to be reinterpreted in line with scientific developments and the challenges of the times. Thus, the results of this study answer the second research question that sunnatullah is a dynamic concept that provides a comprehensive framework for understanding reality and building civilization. These ideas also provide a solid foundation for developing a progressive Islamic education paradigm, rooted in divine values and relevant to the demands of the modern world.

The Relevance of Sunnatullah to the Development of Modern Islamic Education

The results of the study show that sunnatullah as a principle of divine order not only plays a role as a theological and philosophical concept in Islamic thought, but also has direct implications for the development of modern Islamic education paradigms (Habibi, 2024). This concept, which reflects the immutable laws of God in regulating the entire order of life, provides an epistemological, ontological, and axiological foundation for an educational process oriented toward the formation of the whole person (Ni'mah et al., 2024). Islamic education based on the principles of sunnatullah aims not only to transfer knowledge, but also to shape character, develop

intellectual potential, and foster awareness of humanity's responsibility as caliphs on earth (Yunita et al., 2025).

From an ontological perspective, sunnatullah teaches that all creation operates according to fixed laws established by Allah (Zuhurul Fuqohak et al., 2021). This principle of regularity inspires us to believe that the educational process must also be designed in a systematic, planned, and continuous manner (Norlianti dkk., 2024). Just as the universe operates according to the laws of cause and effect, education also needs to apply the principles of order, consistency, and clear stages in the learning process (Suryadi, 2019). This concept leads to the development of a structured curriculum, planned learning methods, and measurable educational goals (Norlianti et al., 2024). In addition, awareness of the existence of fixed laws also fosters a scientific attitude and discipline among students in understanding the realities of life rationally (Sholehah, 2025).

From an epistemological perspective, sunnatullah provides the basis for the integration of revelation and reason in the process of seeking knowledge (Bhat & Bisati, 2025). Since Allah's laws can be studied, explored, and tested through reason and empirical experience, modern Islamic education must combine Islamic sciences with contemporary sciences (Sholehah, 2025). This is in line with Fazlur Rahman's view, which emphasizes that revelation and reason cannot be separated, but rather complement each other in forming a complete understanding of reality (Turhamun, 2023). This integration encourages the creation of a holistic curriculum, which not only teaches religious knowledge in a normative manner, but also develops critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills (Rashed & Tamuri, 2022). In this way, Islamic education will produce a generation capable of reading Allah's verses, both those written in revelation (ayat qawliyah) and those spread throughout the universe (ayat kauniyah : Riviana et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, from an axiological perspective, sunnatullah plays an important role in determining the direction and objectives of Islamic education (In'ami et al., 2025). The main goal of education is not only to produce individuals who are intellectually intelligent, but also who have noble character, are committed to moral values, and have a cosmic awareness of their role in the world (Momen, 2024). Values such as justice, honesty, responsibility, hard work, and social awareness are manifestations of sunnatullah that must be instilled through the educational process (Ilmi et al., 2023). In this case, education serves as a medium for shaping individuals who are capable of carrying out their duties responsibly and contributing positively to society and global civilization (Mutamakin et al., 2024).

The relevance of sunnatullah in the context of modern education is also evident in its ability to provide a conceptual framework for responding to contemporary challenges, such as globalization, technological developments, and the crisis of values (Saepudin, 2022). Education based on the principle of divine order will be more adaptive to change because it is based on a deep understanding of universal laws (Suhendi, 2024). This principle guides Islamic educational institutions to develop contextual, adaptive, and solution-oriented learning methods without losing

their Islamic identity (Oktahariana et al., 2025). For example, by utilizing digital technology as a learning tool, integrating Islamic values into science and technology, and instilling scientific ethics as part of the educational process.

Conclusion

These findings clearly answer the third research question that sunnatullah has significant relevance in the development of a modern Islamic education paradigm. The principle of divine order is not only a normative foundation, but also an operational framework that can be used to design an education system that is responsive to the dynamics of change. Islamic education built on the basis of sunnatullah is not trapped in the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, but rather becomes a system capable of combining transcendental values with empirical demands. Thus, Islamic education not only produces intelligent and skilled individuals, but also those with noble character, spiritual awareness, and who play an active role in building a just and sustainable civilization.

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