

Inclusive Education as a Maqāṣidic Obligation: Addressing the Needs of Students with Learning Disabilities in Light of *Hifẓ Al-‘Aql*

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Abstract

Ensuring both inclusivity and equity remains a central challenge in education, particularly for a significant proportion of children worldwide with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. Often erroneously perceived by their teachers as being “slow”, these children frequently suffer from low self-esteem, withdrawal from academic and social engagement, and a heightened risk of psychological and emotional problems if they do not receive timely intervention. Highlighting the case of children with dyslexia, this conceptual and analytical essay focusses on the application of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah* in the preservation of the ‘*aql* (intellect), which would entail the providing of a good and sound education to all members of society, leaving no child behind. It then proceeds with a

discussion on the challenges these children face in school; the preparedness of teachers in addressing their educational needs in an inclusive education setting; and the importance that Islam places on the inclusion of students and individuals with physical and learning disabilities in the education system. The authors conclude the article by emphasising the fact that when viewed from the higher purposes and intent of the *maq̄sid*, or objective, of the *sharī‘ah*, addressing the needs of children with learning disabilities is a *darūriyyah* (necessity) and thus, an urgent obligation for us to fulfil.

Keywords: *Maq̄sid al-Sharī‘ah*; preservation of ‘*aq̄l*; *ḥifẓ al-‘aq̄l*; inclusive education; education for all; neurodiversity; learning disabilities; dyslexia

Introduction

Children with learning disabilities¹ such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia are often misunderstood and misjudged both in schools and in society. Despite the progress in inclusive education, misconceptions about their abilities remain widespread. These children—who

¹ The Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) defines “learning disabilities” (LD) as an umbrella term that covers a range of learning conditions where neurological differences affect how the brain processes information, impacting how individuals acquire, retain, understand, and use information, causing specific difficulties with specific skills such as reading (dyslexia), writing (dysgraphia) or math (dyscalculia); despite having average or above-average intelligence. It is important to note that the term, “learning disabilities” *does not* denote that an individual with the condition is incapable of learning. The term is used for legal purposes to ensure that these individuals are recognized under national disability legislation, enacted in various forms across countries, and are thus afforded corresponding rights and protections.

experience difficulties in reading, writing, and arithmetic respectively—are often erroneously perceived as being slow, lazy or less intelligent², when in reality, their struggles arise from specific neurodevelopmental differences that affect their brain’s ability to receive, process, analyse, or retain information.³ Such misinterpretations—and the reactions they receive as a result—can lead to their diminished self-esteem and reinforce a cycle of underachievement that could have been avoided if given the right support.

In addition to the misconceptions surrounding children with learning disabilities, there is also the concern about the kind of instruction we need to provide to help them succeed. Authoritative reports from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)—a leading U.S. advocacy and research organization dedicated to improving policies and practices for individuals with learning issues—have consistently underscored this concern. For instance, the NCLD’s *State of Learning Disabilities Reports* (2014; 2017) reveal that approximately one in five children in the United States experience learning and attention difficulties.⁴ The 2017 edition of the report, authored by

² Suzanne LaGrande, “Unconscious Bias and Stigma around Dyslexia,” 2025, accessed January 10, 2026, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/unconscious-bias-stigma-around-dyslexia-dr-suzanne-lagrande-g3ovc?utm_

³ Learning Disabilities Association of America, “What Are Learning Disabilities?” accessed January 10, 2026, <https://ldaamerica.org/advocacy/lda-position-papers/what-are-learning-disabilities/>

⁴ Sheldon H. Horowitz, Jamie Rawe, and Mimi Corcoran Whittaker. *The State of Learning Disabilities: Understanding the 1 in 5*. New York: National Center

Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, expands on the 2014 findings by providing updated national data and policy analysis, illustrating the persistence of these challenges. In the 2017 edition, the authors report that students with learning disabilities often do not receive timely nor effective intervention—and estimate that only 1 in 16—or about 6% of them—receive specialised instruction that would help to address their learning issues⁵. The Report also stresses that students with learning disabilities have a 31% greater chance of being bullied when compared to their peers; are twice as likely to be suspended; and three times more likely to drop out of school⁶. In addition, as reported by the Mental Health Foundation of the UK,⁷ they are also 4.5 times *more likely* to have mental health issues than children without a learning disability. If their condition remains undiagnosed, and if we fail to address their learning issues, these children face a high risk of reading and academic failure, which frequently leads to frustration, psychological and emotional issues, and problems such as absenteeism, suspension, delinquency, and dropping out of school. In fact, the NCLD reports that many of these students consequently have problems with the law, often leading to their being incarcerated.⁸

For children with dyslexia, the extended time they require to read and process written material has often given rise to teachers'

for Learning Disabilities, 2017.

⁵ Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, *The State of Learning Disabilities*.

⁶ Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, *The State of Learning Disabilities*.

⁷ The Mental Health Foundation, UK.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/mental-health-statistics/learning-disabilities-statistics>

⁸ Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, *The State of Learning Disabilities*.

misconceptions about their cognitive abilities or motivation. Indeed, children with dyslexia are constantly being exposed to negative messages that “there is something wrong” with them and that they are “a failure or stupid”.⁹ They are also often ridiculed by other students when asked to read aloud in class.¹⁰ Some dyslexic children in mainstream schools have even experienced criticism or humiliation by their own teachers, who perceive them as “lacking in ability”.¹¹ The shame, confusion, and resentment that they feel may continue into their adult lives if they fail to be diagnosed and given intervention treatments. Some undiagnosed adults with dyslexia have sometimes been typecast as being mentally deficient, illiterate, or unable to learn, causing them to struggle to hold jobs, form relationships, and maintain good health.¹² Indeed, as stressed by Riddick,¹³ the educational needs of children with dyslexia must be met by the time they are ten or twelve years of age or the negative consequences that are often associated with frustration and demoralisation, such as social withdrawal or aggression, will become apparent, and may lead to grave consequences such as social isolation, dropping out of school,

⁹ Micheal Hart. “Embracing Dyslexia – Crossing the Chasm and Saving Lives.” Edited by C. Scherkenbach. *The Blue Dot*, no. 5 (2017): 10–13.

¹⁰ Sally Shaywitz, and Bennett Shaywitz. “Dyslexia and Bullying.” Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, 2016. https://dyslexia.yale.edu/articles_directors/dyslexia-and-bullying/.

¹¹ Riddick, Barbara. *Living with Dyslexia: The Social and Emotional Consequences of Specific Learning Difficulties/Disabilities*. (Routledge, 2010).

¹² Hart, “Embracing Dyslexia”.

¹³ Riddick, *Living with Dyslexia*.

and a greater likelihood of “becoming involved with the criminal justice system”.¹⁴

In examining the emotional and psychological consequences of inadequate educational support for students with learning disabilities, this paper primarily draws on data from the National Center for Learning Disabilities, USA. These reports were selected because they synthesise authoritative, nationally representative datasets, including federal education statistics and large-scale national surveys, and provide updated analyses of educational outcomes and policy implications for students with learning disabilities in the USA. Comparable large-scale datasets of this nature remain limited in many other contexts, including Malaysia, Oman, and Bosnia. Nevertheless, empirical research indicates that challenges in implementing inclusive education persist, particularly in relation to teachers’ preparedness, attitudes, and professional competence in supporting students with learning disabilities.

These patterns underscore the global urgency of providing early identification and instructional support for learners with learning disabilities, who often remain under-identified and misunderstood in mainstream classrooms. Given that these conditions are often not visually apparent, the children often do not receive the kind of instruction they need to succeed academically, limiting their access to quality education and their ability to participate in academic, social, and economic life. The academic, psychological, social, and economic repercussions of reading failure arising from not addressing the needs of students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities are enormous and profound. This is especially unfortunate given the fact that they

¹⁴ Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, *State of Learning Disabilities*.

have between average to high intelligence and can learn—if provided with the right support.

In response to these challenges, the discourse on inclusive education has increasingly been shaped by the neurodiversity¹⁵ paradigm, which challenges deficit-based understandings of neurodivergent¹⁶ learners and instead, recognises cognitive differences as natural variations of the human brain rather than conditions to be “fixed.” This perspective is especially important in reframing how learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities should be understood, as it shifts the focus away from perceived deficits toward differences in cognitive processing that require the appropriate forms of support. From this perspective—as well as those within inclusive approaches to teaching—learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities are not lacking in ability but possess cognitive profiles that may remain unrecognised in mainstream classroom settings. This not only limits their access to effective learning but may

¹⁵ “Neurodiversity” is a concept that recognises neurological differences as natural variations of the human brain rather than deficits to be corrected, emphasising diversity in cognitive functioning as part of human variation. It is commonly used as an umbrella term encompassing conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, Tourette’s Syndrome, among many others. See Judy Singer, “Why Can’t You Be Normal for Once in Your Life?” in *Disability Discourse*, ed. Mairian Corker and Sally French (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999); and Nick Walker, “Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms and Definitions,” *Neuroqueer*, 2014, <https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/>

¹⁶ While *neurodiversity* refers to the natural variation in human neurocognitive functioning, the term *neurodivergent* refers to individuals whose neurological development differs from what is typically expected.

also obscure their intellectual potential, thereby hindering the development and realisation of their intellectual capacities. In this regard, recognising and responding to such differences is a crucial issue that raises essential questions about the principles that ought to guide educational responsibility and the conditions necessary for the full development of human intellectual potential.

The cumulative impact of these challenges raises fundamental questions about the obligations of society to ensure that all learners are able to develop their intellectual potential. In light of the far-reaching consequences associated with the failure to support learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities, there is a need for a principled framework through which the urgency and nature of this responsibility can be more fully understood. It is within this context that the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* provides a valuable analytical lens for examining the provision of inclusive education, particularly in relation to the preservation of the intellect (*hifẓ al-'aql*).

The *Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah* as a Framework to Address the Educational Needs of Students with Learning Disabilities

Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, to put it literally, are the objectives, purposes, or principles behind Islamic laws and the divine intents or the wisdom behind its rulings. Rooted in the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions, they also represent the fundamental Islamic concepts such as human dignity, justice, and benevolence, among others, upon which Islamic law is built.¹⁷ Aimed at providing benefits to the individual and the community, “its laws are designed to protect these benefits and to

¹⁷ Auda, Jasser. “A Maqāṣidī Approach to Contemporary Application of the Sharī'ah.” *Intellectual Discourse* 19, no. 2 (2011). <https://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id/article/view/231>.

facilitate the improvement and perfection of the conditions of human life on earth.”¹⁸ Hence, the *maqāsid* are aimed at addressing the needs of the *ummah*—and humanity in general—in order that orderliness, facilitation, freedom, equality, and the preservation of *fitrah* may be maintained.¹⁹ Addressing current and changing conditions, but still within the fabric of the *sharī‘ah*, the *maqāsid* also deal with and respond to global issues and concerns—such as environmental preservation and sustainability, accountability, and human rights, to name a few—and has evolved from “the wisdoms behind the rulings to practical plans for reform and renewal”²⁰. Under the *maqāsid*, the benefits are aimed at not only Muslim individuals and society, but also non-Muslims,²¹ as Islamic law is aimed at “promoting people’s benefit and welfare and protecting them from harm”.²²

¹⁸ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariah, Ijtihad and Civilisational Renewal* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 1.

¹⁹ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Ibn Ashur: Treatise on Maqasid al-Shariah* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007) as cited in Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shari‘ah: A Beginner’s Guide*, Occasional Paper series no. 14 (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc67c6>.

²⁰ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 2, <https://iiit.org/wp-content/uploads/Maqasid-Al-Shariah-as-Philosophy-of-Islamic-Law-A-Systems-Approach.pdf> (accessed 22 April 2025)

²¹ Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariah, Ijtihad and Civilisational Renewal*.

²² Adis Duderija, *Maqasid al-Shari‘a and Contemporary Reformist Muslim Thought: An Examination*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

Educating Learners with Learning Disabilities as a *Darūriyyah*

In light of the foregoing discussion on learners with learning disabilities, the question of how best to respond to their educational needs calls for a principled framework that addresses the broader objectives that ought to guide educational responsibility. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* offers such a framework, providing a means through which human welfare may be understood in relation to the higher purposes and intents of the *sharī'ah*. Central to this framework is the preservation of the intellect (*hifẓ al-'aql*), which encompasses not only the protection of the mind from harm but also the cultivation, development, and realisation of human intellectual capacity. In this regard, the educational experiences of learners with learning disabilities raise important questions about the extent to which existing practices support—or hinder—the fulfilment of this fundamental objective.

Within the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* framework, the preservation of the intellect (*hifẓ al-'aql*) is recognised as one of the essential necessities (*al-darūriyyāt al-khams*) upon which both individual well-being and the proper functioning of society depend.²³ While classical jurists such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī often illustrated the preservation of the intellect through legal prohibitions such as that of intoxicants, this objective more broadly encompasses the safeguarding and development of human intellectual capacity.²⁴ In this regard,

²³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustasfā min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997); Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law (Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah)*, trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee (Garnet Publishing, 2015).

²⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustasfā min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*; al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-*

education constitutes a *primary* means through which the intellect is developed and actualised. In *maqāsid* terms, this reflects the principle that essential objectives are preserved not only through the prevention of harm but also through the provision of the means *necessary* for their realisation. When learners with learning disabilities are not provided with the appropriate form of instruction to help them succeed in learning, their ability to acquire knowledge and to participate meaningfully in intellectual, social, and economic life is significantly constrained. This does not merely constitute a failure in providing education to these learners, but an impairment of the very objective that the *sharī'ah* seeks to preserve.

This reasoning is further reinforced by the foundational principles of Islamic legal theory, particularly the removal of hardship (*raf' al-ḥaraj*), as reflected in the juristic maxim that hardship necessitates facilitation (*al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr*).²⁵ For learners with learning disabilities, the absence of appropriate pedagogical support may give rise to prolonged educational hardship, which places disproportionate barriers to learning that hinder their intellectual development. From this perspective, the provision of appropriate support is not merely an act of accommodation but a *juristic necessity* aimed at removing hardship and enabling access to knowledge.²⁶

Sharī'ah.

²⁵ On the principle of removing hardship and the juristic maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr*, see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003); Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*.

²⁶ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah Made Simple* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008); Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*

Accordingly, the provision of education that meets the needs of these learners is not to be understood as merely being supplementary (*hājīyyah*), but rather, as a necessity or obligation (*darūriyyah*), given the central role of such provision in preserving and enabling the intellect. This classification is not merely a theoretical construction, but a principle that is firmly grounded in the central place accorded to knowledge and learning within the Islamic tradition, as discussed in the next section.

The Centrality of Knowledge in Islam

Knowledge (*ilm*) is accorded a position of primary importance in Islam, as its pursuit is viewed as a divine command, a form of worship (*ibadah*), and a necessary means for understanding Allah and cultivating one's faith. This is evident in the Qur'ān, where those who are endowed with knowledge are described as engaging in contemplation (*tafakkur*) and understanding (*ta'qqul*), leading to a deeper awareness and recognition of divine truth and reverence of Allah. In Surah al-Zumar (39:9), the Qur'ān states: "Are those who know equal to those who do not know? But only men of understanding will pay heed."²⁷ This is further affirmed in Surah Fāṭir (35:28), where Allah says: "Only those among His servants who have knowledge truly fear Allah."²⁸ In his interpretation of these two verses, Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur²⁹ explains that these distinctions reflect the elevation of human understanding through knowledge, whereby individuals develop

²⁷ Qur'ān 39:9, *Surah al-Zumar*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, <https://quran.com/39/9> (accessed 22 July 2025)

²⁸ Qur'ān 35:28, *Surah Fāṭir*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, <https://quran.com/35/28> (accessed 22 July 2025)

²⁹ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, commentary on Qur'ān 39:9 and 35:28

clarity of perception and sound judgment. He further interprets *khashyah* in Surah Fāṭir as evidence that true knowledge is not merely an intellectual acquisition, but a transformative state that leads to the recognition of Allah (*maʿrifatullāh*) and the attainment of spiritual refinement.

The centrality of knowledge in Islam is further reinforced through the teachings of the Prophet, which emphasise *both* its acquisition and dissemination as religious obligations. The hadith, “The search for knowledge is an obligation laid on every Muslim,”³⁰ establishes the pursuit of knowledge as a fundamental duty incumbent upon *all* believers. This is complemented by the Prophet’s exhortation, “Convey from me, even if it is one verse,”³¹ which underscores the responsibility to share knowledge, even if it is only a little. Similarly, the hadith, “May Allah beautify a man who hears a saying of mine, understands it, remembers it, and conveys it,”³² highlights the importance of understanding and internalising the beneficial knowledge we have received and conveying it for the benefit of others.

From the Qurʾān and hadith of the Prophet, we may understand that knowledge is not only to be sought but also to be actively disseminated in a manner that enables understanding; reinforcing the view that facilitating access to education constitutes a fundamental responsibility. This is particularly significant in the context of neurodiverse learners, including those with dyslexia, autism,

³⁰ Sunan Ibn Mājah, “The Book of the Sunnah,” hadith no. 224, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:224> (accessed 10 March 2026).

³¹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, “The Book of the Prophets,” hadith no. 3461, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3461> (accessed 10 March 2026).

³² Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī, “Chapters on Knowledge,” hadith no. 2658, <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:2658> (accessed 10 March 2026).

and ADHD, for whom differences in processing, attention, and expression may affect conventional modes of access and comprehension.

To realise the *maqāṣid* of developing and preserving the intellect (*hifẓ al-‘aql*), the *sharī‘ah* urges Muslims to promote the establishment of wholistic education and make it available to all members of society as this would enable an individual to think and read critically and discern good from bad, right from wrong, and truth from falsehood; leading them to be true servants of Allah as His Vicegerents on Earth. As articulated by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and further explicated by Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, education is “the recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of Allah in the order of being and existence.”³³ In al-Attas’s philosophy, education is intimately connected to the concepts of *fitrah* (innate human nature), *adab* (right order and discipline), and *insān* (the holistic human being). Education, understood as *ta’dīb*, seeks to cultivate harmony between intellect, soul, and action in accordance with the divine order of reality.

Within this framework, learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities may be understood as being the expressions of human *fitrah*, each endowed with inherent worth and potential. Consequently, the marginalisation of these learners can be seen as

³³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization [ISTAC], 1999), 14–15; see also Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (ISTAC, 1998), 79–80.

being a form of injustice (*zulm*), insofar as it denies them their rightful place within the educational order and undermines the ethical purpose of *ta'dīb*. Responding to the educational needs of these students thus becomes a moral responsibility—grounded in the Islamic understanding of education, justice, and human nature.

These perspectives reinforce the established position that education occupies a central place in Islam. However, recognising the importance of education does not, in itself, guarantee its effective realisation in practice. The extent to which learners are able to benefit from education depends, to a large extent, on the capacity of educators to understand and respond to their needs. This raises a critical question regarding the preparedness of teachers to fulfil this responsibility within the inclusive classroom context.

Teacher Preparedness to Meet the Needs of Learners with Learning Disabilities

To achieve the objective of meeting the educational needs of students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities, teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and preparedness are critical. However, research indicates that this remains a persistent concern in many countries.

Mather, White, and Youman, in their global overview of dyslexia-related services and educational opportunities, for instance, highlight that a common challenge across countries is the scarcity of teachers with specialised knowledge of dyslexia-specific instruction.³⁴ Similar findings were obtained in Folia and Malisiova's systematic review of 16 studies involving a total of 2,519 English as foreign

³⁴ Nancy Mather, Jennifer White, and Martha Youman, "Dyslexia Around the World: A Snapshot," *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 25, no. 1 (2020): 12-13 <https://doi.org/10.18666/LDMJ-2020-V25-I1-9552>

language (EFL) teachers across multiple countries on their perceptions and preparedness to teach students with dyslexia. The researchers found that the teachers had limited conceptual understanding of, and lack of formal training in dyslexia. They also reported having low confidence in tailoring instruction to their students' individual needs, causing them to receive insufficient classroom support.³⁵

Beyond dyslexia-specific research, large-scale meta-analytic evidence further demonstrates that teacher preparedness is a central factor influencing the implementation and success of inclusive education. Dignath et al., in a meta-analysis of 102 studies across 40 countries published in 2022, found that teachers' beliefs about inclusive education are strongly shaped by factors such as professional training, self-efficacy, and prior experience in inclusive settings.³⁶ The researchers point out that although teachers may frequently express positive attitudes toward inclusion, this does not always translate into effective classroom practices if they do not have sufficient confidence and knowledge of pedagogy.³⁷ Systematic reviews of research by de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert further substantiate the fact that teachers' acceptance of students with special educational needs is closely linked

³⁵ Vasiliki Folia and Anastasia Malisiova, "Teachers' Perceptions and Preparedness for Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Students with Developmental Dyslexia: A Systematic Review," *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education* 15, no. 4 (2025): 64, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe15040064>

³⁶ Christina Dignath, Sara Rimm-Kaufman, Roel van Ewijk, and Mareike Kunter, "Teachers' Beliefs about Inclusive Education and Insights on What Contributes to Those Beliefs: A Meta-Analytical Study," *Educational Psychology Review* 34 (2022): 2609–2660, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-022-09695-0>

³⁷ Dignath et al., "Teachers' Beliefs about Inclusive Education," 2615.

to their perceived competence, training, and access to professional support.³⁸

Within the Malaysian context, Zalizan Mohd Jelas and Manisah Mohd Ali argue that the implementation of inclusive education in Malaysia is shaped by factors such as the interpretation of educational policy and its translation into practice in schools, availability of resources, class sizes, and school environments; highlighting that the success of inclusive education is not solely dependent on individual teachers, but also shaped by the broader systems and contexts within which they work.³⁹ Complementing this perspective, Amar Singh emphasises that mainstream teachers frequently lack specialised pedagogical knowledge and professional preparation to support students with special needs, and that their efforts are further constrained by insufficient institutional and professional support.⁴⁰ He emphasises that without sustained support, teachers are unlikely to be able to teach these students in a meaningful and sustainable manner. His analysis underscores the fact that teacher preparedness to teach special needs children must therefore be understood not only as individual competence but as a condition

³⁸ Anke de Boer, Sip Jan Pijl, and Alexander Minnaert, “Regular Primary Schoolteachers’ Attitudes towards Inclusive Education,” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15, no. 3 (2011): 331–353, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360311090303008>

³⁹ Zalizan Mohd Jelas and Manisah Mohd Ali, “Inclusive Education in Malaysia: Policy and Practice,” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 18, no. 10 (2014): 991–1003, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2012.693398>.

⁴⁰ Amar-Singh HSS, *Education in Malaysia for Children with Special Needs: Progress, Critical Gaps, Efforts under Way and Policy* (Kuala Lumpur: National Early Childhood Intervention Council [NECIC], 2020).

shaped by policy frameworks and systemic constraints within the educational environment.

Empirical evidence further substantiates these analyses. Manisah Mohd Ali, Ramlee Mustapha, and Zalizan Mohd Jelas found that Malaysian teachers often report limited understanding of inclusive education practices, inadequate training in special education, and difficulties in adapting instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners in mainstream classrooms.⁴¹ Broader critical analyses highlight further challenges. In his critical review of special needs education provision in Malaysia published in 2021, Alshoura identifies issues such as inadequate teacher preparation, limited resources, and insufficient support services with regard to the teaching of students with special educational needs.⁴² As a result, these limitations constrain teachers' capacity to carry out effective classroom practices to help these learners succeed in the inclusive classroom.

The Malaysian evidence parallels that of international research in showing that teachers' ability to cater to the needs of neurodivergent students in the inclusive classroom cannot be realised through teachers' dispositions alone, but requires policy commitment, *sustained* investment in teacher education, institutional support, and coherent implementation strategies.

⁴¹ Manisah Mohd Ali, Ramlee Mustapha, and Zalizan Mohd Jelas, "An Empirical Study on Teachers' Perceptions towards Inclusive Education in Malaysia," *International Journal of Special Education* 21, no. 3 (2006): 36–44, ERIC, EJ843603, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ843603>

⁴² Hamza Alshoura. "Critical Review of Special Needs Education Provision in Malaysia: Discussing Significant Issues and Challenges Faced." *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 70, no. 5 (2021): 869–884. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2021.1913718>

This brings us to the following: Since most of a student's education is acquired through formal schooling, and given the critical role of teachers, schools, and educational institutions in this setting, the following questions arise: How can we best support students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities in actualising their full potential? How do we show sensitivity to their emotions and educational needs? Is it enough to set up separate educational institutions and programmes for them, or should we reconsider the way we teach, the pedagogy we use, and the way we handle them?

On this issue, there are many lessons that we can derive from the teachings of Islam, the practice of the Prophet, and our Islamic history, which will be presented in the next section.

Inclusion in Islam: Text, Prophetic Practice and Historical Institutions

Inclusion, in Islam, is a moral imperative, rooted in justice (*ʿadl*), mercy (*raḥmah*), and human dignity (*karāmah*). The core teachings of Islam require Muslims to treat people with disabilities kindly and fairly and include them as full and valued members of the community. This can be seen in how the Qurʾān has consistently emphasised the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings, regardless of physical ability, social status, or ethnic background. In Surah al-Isrāʾ (17:70), Allah declares, “*We have certainly honoured the children of Adam,*” affirming the divinely granted honour (*karāmah*) of every human being. Ibn Kathīr explains that this honour is reflected in capacities such as the intellect (*ʿaql*) and the ability to exercise sound judgment, which point to the distinctive status of human beings among Allah’s creation.⁴³

⁴³ Ismāʿīl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)*, trans. Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī et al., 10 vols. (Darussalam, 2000),

This Qurʾānic principle is repeated in *Surah al-Hujūrāt* (49:13), where Allah says, “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you.”⁴⁴ Ibn Kathīr explains that this verse affirms the shared origin of all human beings from Adam and Ḥawwāʾ, establishing their fundamental equality in humanity. Hence, as Ibn Kathīr further clarifies, distinctions among people are not based on lineage, tribe, or ethnicity, but on *taqwā* (piety and moral consciousness), which alone determines honour in the sight of Allah.⁴⁵

The Prophet Muḥammad (may peace be upon him) embodied these and other Qurʾānic principles in his dealings with people, including those with physical disabilities and learning challenges, indicating his unconditional acceptance of them and his respect for them; treating them with dignity and compassion, and providing us with lessons for education and community life. One famous example was that of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm, a blind man who was very devoted to the Prophet and among the first to accept Islam. The Prophet treated ‘Abd Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm with great honour, entrusting him with leading the prayers in Madinah, and appointing him to lead Medina when he left the city for battle⁴⁶. As far as the Prophet was concerned, ‘Abd Allāh’s blindness did not impede his ability to carry out his duties. Hence, rather than marginalising him,

commentary on Qurʾān 17:70.

⁴⁴ The Qurʾān 49:13, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

⁴⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, commentary on Qurʾān 49:13.

⁴⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Azān*, ḥadīth no. 617; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, *Kitāb al-Masājīd*, ḥadīth no. 412.

the Prophet recognized his abilities and gave him meaningful responsibility. Authentic reports also describe the Prophet as being exceptionally patient and gentle with those who struggled in understanding, communication, or learning, never humiliating or dismissing them but offering encouragement and guidance suited to their capacities. For example, Anas ibn Malik reported that he served the Prophet for ten years and never heard him say even, “Uff”—an expression of annoyance—illustrating his extraordinary patience and supportive demeanour.⁴⁷ This conduct, combined with Qur’ānic guidance to “invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction” (16:125), demonstrates the principle of teaching with patience and consideration for the learner’s abilities.⁴⁸ These examples reflect not only the Prophet’s compassion but also his wisdom, showing his sensitivity and attentiveness to their emotional and social needs as well as his recognition of the abilities of individuals beyond their impairments.

These are only a few examples of how the Prophet treated people with disabilities. These examples illustrate that the Prophet valued people for their faith and sincerity, recognizing their abilities rather than their limitations, and setting a timeless model of inclusivity for those with both physical and learning disabilities. These lessons

⁴⁷ *At-Tirmidhī* 2015, hadith on the Prophet’s exemplary patience, accessed February 11, 2026, <https://www.prophetmuhammad.com/tirmidhi/chapters/27>. This hadith, while not explicitly about students or learners, illustrates a general principle of compassionate and patient guidance, which can be applied to educational contexts where individuals struggle or need support.

⁴⁸ Qur’ān, Surah al-Nahl (16):125.

underscore the fact that Islam views disability not as a barrier but as part of human diversity within Allah’s creation.

Beyond the Prophet’s time, early Muslim societies also carried out their responsibilities in caring for people with disabilities. Under the caliph al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, the first recorded Islamic hospital (or *bīmāristān*) was built in Damascus, aimed at treating the blind as well as those with mental and chronic illnesses—with stipends provided to patients to ensure their dignity and independence.⁴⁹ These *bīmāristāns* mushroomed across Muslim countries and provinces, set up and supported by the caliphs, the sultans, the governors, as well as the people who resided there.⁵⁰ Later, during the Ottoman period, schools and endowments (*awqāf*) were established to support blind Qur’ān reciters and others with impairments, reflecting a communal commitment to inclusion.

The Golden Age of Islamic civilisation also witnessed a significant number of deaf, blind, or physically disabled people playing important roles “as philologists, transmitters of the law, teachers, poets, and social commentators.”⁵¹ All this would not have been possible without the commitment of the rulers, the community, and the

⁴⁹ Sharif Kaf Al-Ghazal, “Bīmāristāns in Islamic Medical History,” *About Islam*, January 28, 2023, <https://aboutislam.net/muslim-issues/science-muslim-issues/bimaristans-islamic-medical-history/>.

⁵⁰ Amine Lahhab, “Bīmāristāns: When Medicine and Compassion Transformed History,” *Neuro et Psycho*, March 25, 2025, <https://www.neuroetpsycho.com/en/bimaristans-history-medicine-middle-ages/>.

⁵¹ Hurisa Guvercin, “People with Disabilities from an Islamic Perspective,” *The Fountain*, 2008, <https://fountainmagazine.com/all-issues/2008/issue-63-may-june-2008/people-with-disabilities-from-an-islamic-perspective/>

individuals who were motivated by the desire to follow the Islamic exhortation of having love, respect, and compassion for people with disabilities; and showing kindness to them such that they are included and welcomed as valued and respected members of society.

These examples demonstrate that respect for and support of persons with disabilities is deeply embedded in the Qurʾān, the practice of the Prophet, and Islamic history. This reflects how Islamic civilization recognized the importance of inclusion, ensuring that both medical care and educational opportunities were accessible to individuals of all abilities.

Helping Learners with Learning Disabilities: From Islamic Principles to Classroom Practice

From the examples in the previous section, there are lessons to be learned for teaching students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. First, the Qurʾān and Sunnah stress the *intrinsic dignity of every learner*. Second, the Prophet’s actions highlight the need for *patience, empathy, and individualised support*, such as giving extra time to those who struggle to understand and adapting instruction to students’ strengths and areas in which they need extra help. Third, early Muslim institutions remind us that inclusion is not merely an expression of personal kindness but is also grounded in broader social and institutional arrangements that promote equitable access to learning opportunities. Within contemporary classrooms, these principles can inform teachers’ efforts to recognise students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities as individuals with different strengths and needs, and to use teaching approaches that are responsive to how they are able to engage with knowledge. In this regard, teachers stand at the heart of this endeavour, translating these principles into practice through their engagement with learners.

The Role of Teachers in Meeting the Needs of Students with Learning Disabilities

Helping learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities requires informed and responsive teaching practices. Teachers occupy a central role in shaping how learning difficulties are understood and addressed in school contexts. When teachers possess limited knowledge of learning disabilities, for example, learners may be misjudged as slow, unmotivated, or less capable. Conversely, teachers who are knowledgeable about learning disabilities can foster supportive learning environments that recognise learners' strengths while addressing their specific needs. This highlights the critical role that teachers play in determining the educational outcomes of these learners—a role that, within the Islamic tradition, carries profound intellectual and moral responsibility.

Such a role is underpinned by the view that teachers are pivotal in shaping the minds and intellect of their students. They not only impart knowledge or facilitate learning, but also cultivate their students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. In Islam, teachers hold a noble position because they are entrusted with guiding those under their care toward knowledge and wisdom. The Prophet said, *“The best of you are those who learn the Qurʾān and teach it,”*⁵² a hadith narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* that highlights both the honour and responsibility of teaching. This hadith underscores the elevated status of teachers in Islam by linking excellence (*khayriyyah*) to both the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. While the hadith refers specifically to the teaching of the Qurʾān, it is widely understood to extend to the teaching of *all* beneficial knowledge (*ʿilm nāfiʿ*).

⁵² Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān* [Book of the Virtues of the Qurʾān], Hadith no. 5027, available at <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5027>.

In addition, the act of teaching is described as one that draws the prayers of the angels and all of creation. The Prophet said, “Indeed, Allah, His angels, the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth—even the ant in its hole and the fish—send blessings upon the one who teaches people goodness.”⁵³

These hadith are a powerful reminder of the honour accorded to those who impart knowledge and guide others towards knowledge, wisdom, and goodness. Teachers, as seen in Islam, are not merely transmitters of information but nurturers of faith, character, and intellect—entrusted with shaping future generations. Indeed, the virtues of teachers are deeply rooted in their role as *inheritors of the prophetic mission*,⁵⁴ for the Prophet himself was sent as a teacher to mankind, as affirmed by the Qurʾān: “*He is the one who raised among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom*” (Q. 62:2).⁵⁵ Classical scholars such as Ibn Kathīr understand this as a comprehensive process that encompasses both academic instruction and moral development. This understanding is closely linked to the Prophetic statement that

⁵³ Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, book of knowledge (*Kitāb al-ʿIlm*), ḥadīth no. 2685. Classified as *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*.

⁵⁴ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, trans. Ahmad Hasan (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1984), kitāb al-ʿilm, ḥadīth no. 3641; al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, trans. Abu Khaliyl (Darussalam, 2007), ḥadīth no. 2682. The hadith states: “The scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets; the Prophets do not leave behind dinar or dirham, but they leave behind knowledge”, indicating that their legacy is preserved through the transmission, teaching, and preservation of knowledge.”

⁵⁵ Qurʾān 62:2 (Sūrah al-Jumuʿah).

“the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets,”⁵⁶ as it is through teaching and the dissemination of knowledge that this mission continues. Hence, the verse and the *ḥadīth* suggest that those engaged in teaching are participating in a legacy that seeks to cultivate both the intellect and the character of learners.

When viewed through this lens, teachers carry both dignity and responsibility. For neurodiverse learners—such as those with dyslexia—this responsibility is especially meaningful as their ability to access and benefit from education is closely tied to how their brains are able to process information they receive and the extent to which teaching is adapted to their learning needs. By embodying patience, compassion, and creativity, teachers can ensure that these students are not left behind but are given the tools and encouragement to learn and develop their abilities. In carrying out their responsibility (*amānah*) of nurturing diverse learners with wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and compassion (*raḥmah*), today’s teachers can extend this prophetic legacy by creating classrooms where neurodiverse students will be given the maximum opportunity to develop their unique strengths and succeed.

Teaching Approaches to Support Students with Learning Disabilities

The preservation of the intellect, for neurodiverse learners, requires that we enable their access to learning by using teaching approaches that are responsive to how they process, and engage with knowledge. This section highlights two of such approaches, designed to support students overcome their barriers to learning and achieve meaningful educational success. The first of these is *differentiated instruction*, which

⁵⁶ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ḥadīth no. 3641; al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, ḥadīth no. 2682.

involves designing or adapting teaching and assessment to meet the varied readiness levels of students in inclusive classrooms. This approach moves beyond one-size-fits-all teaching by using flexible grouping and varied resources—and allowing learners with differences in cognitive and learning profiles to engage with the same content through varied instructional approaches so that they can participate in learning despite their different learning needs.

Differentiated instruction is especially important when teaching students with learning disabilities as empirical research has shown that this practice contributes to enhanced engagement and improved academic outcomes among students with dyslexia, autism spectrum conditions, and ADHD studying in inclusive classrooms.⁵⁷ To support teachers and educators in understanding not only *why* differentiation matters but also *how* to enact it in real teaching contexts, numerous teaching resources have been developed by educators, among which is Tomlinson’s “The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners” and “How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms”, which provide both the theoretical foundation and clear practical guidance on planning lessons, designing assessments, and tailoring instruction to

⁵⁷ Anna Gheysens et al., “Differentiated Instruction in Secondary Education: A Systematic Review of Research Evidence,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02366>; Doolaard et al., “Supporting Primary School Teachers in Differentiating in the Regular Classroom,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 66 (2017): 107–116, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.04.002>; Nargiza Goyibova et al., “Differentiation Approach in Education: Tailoring Instruction for Diverse Learner Needs,” *MethodsX* 14 (2025): 103163, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2025.103163>

student needs,⁵⁸ hence helping to translate differentiated instruction from concept to classroom practice.

Another important and beneficial approach to teaching students with learning disabilities is the use of *multisensory teaching methods*, which involve engaging multiple senses—such as the visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile—during instruction to strengthen comprehension, memory, and skill acquisition. Rather than relying solely on verbal explanation or written texts, multisensory instruction enables learners to process information through complementary sensory pathways, thereby reducing cognitive overload and supporting different learning profiles.⁵⁹

Multisensory approaches are also supported by empirical evidence⁶⁰, including the results of a systematic review and meta-

⁵⁸ Carol Ann Tomlinson, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2014); Carol Ann Tomlinson, *How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms*, 3rd ed. (ASCD, 2017)

⁵⁹ See Judith R. Birsh, ed., *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 2011), which includes chapters on multisensory instructional strategies—with examples of activities in teaching phonemic awareness, reading, comprehension and vocabulary, to name a few.

⁶⁰ M. U. A. Siddiqui and R. A. Othman, “The Use of Multisensory Approach in Teaching Children with Dyslexia,” *Education* 4, no. 2 (2014): 9–14; Linnea C. Ehri et al., “Systematic Phonics Instruction Helps Students Learn to Read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel’s Meta-Analysis,” *Review of Educational Research* 71, no. 3 (2001): 393–447; Joseph K. Torgesen et al., “Longitudinal Studies of Phonological Processing and Reading,” *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 34, no. 1 (2001): 33–44.

analysis of 53 studies conducted over a period of 40 years—between 1980 and 2020)—which consistently indicate that structured and multimodal reading interventions significantly improve literacy outcomes among students with learning difficulties, particularly in phonological awareness, decoding, and comprehension skills.⁶¹

Hence, there is a substantial body of empirical evidence that have demonstrated the positive impact of these two approaches on these students’ reading achievement over time. However, while the two approaches offer meaningful ways of supporting such learners, it is important to recognise that their implementation may be shaped by practical constraints, including resource limitations, varying levels of teacher preparedness, and lack of institutional support. Nevertheless, these strategies remain valuable in helping to *reduce barriers* to learning and supporting their intellectual and educational development, allowing teachers to operationalise the values of compassion, accessibility, and responsiveness to individual differences in mainstream classrooms.

Conclusion

Islam places a great deal of emphasis on justice. Students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities will always be at a disadvantage if proper thought and care are not put into their education. The failure to provide teachers with the support and relevant training to help them carry out positive strategies to bridge educational, emotional, and social gaps will affect the quality of education we provide. We will have

⁶¹ Hall, C., R. L. Simpson, and J. A. R. Odegard. “Forty Years of Reading Intervention Research for Elementary Students with or at Risk for Dyslexia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” *Reading Research Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2023): 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.477>

failed in protecting and preserving the sanctity of the *‘aql* (intellect) if we continue to have situations in which adults with dyslexia suffer because of their illiteracy due to their not having received any intervention to address their reading disability. Therefore, the move towards adopting a stronger stance in preparing teachers with the essential and practical knowledge needed to succeed in inclusive classrooms must be expedited so that *all* children can benefit. It is crucial that teachers be supported through sustained professional development, including access to specialised training in teaching neurodiverse learners. However, such efforts must be understood as a *collective* educational responsibility, where supportive policies, the availability of trained personnel, and collaborative structures collectively enable inclusive practice. Ensuring that *all* learners are supported requires the committed and coordinated efforts of institutions, policymakers, teachers, and parents alike so that the principles of justice (*‘adl*) and compassion and (*rahmah*) in meeting the educational needs of learners can be realised.

The preservation of everything that matters to the human *‘aql* (intellect) must be supported through the providing of wholistic education to enable the individual to acquire knowledge and to gain wisdom. The reality that the Qur’ān is, in the words of al-Attas, “the final authority that confirms the truth in our rational and empirical investigations”⁶² may not be able to be fully understood and appreciated by those with learning disabilities such as dyslexia if remedial intervention is not provided to help them succeed in reading, and consequently, in learning and acquiring knowledge. However, grounded in Qur’ānic injunctions and the example of the Prophet, and guided by sound knowledge of effective practices in

⁶² al-Attas, *The Concept of Education*, 7.

teaching students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties, teachers should be better able to nurture every learner in ways that honour both their intellect and their dignity.

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