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Revitalizing the Teacher's Role as *Murabbi* through Fazlur Rahman's Qur'anic Hermeneutics in Digital Pedagogy

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Abstract

The revitalization of the teacher's role as murabbi in the digital era is an urgent necessity to preserve the holistic and spiritual essence of Islamic education. The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed learning interactions, often reducing them to transactional exchanges and diminishing the moral and spiritual bond between teachers and students. This study aims to explore how Fazlur Rahman's double-movement hermeneutic approach to Surah Āli 'Imrān (3:79) can offer a conceptual foundation for restoring the role of teachers as murabbi in the digital context. Using a qualitative library research method that analyzes both classical and contemporary tafsir and studies on hermeneutics and Islamic pedagogy, the research follows three stages: historical analysis of the verse, extraction of moral values, and contextual application in digital education. The findings reveal that the ideal murabbi embodies intellectual mastery, moral integrity, and spiritual guidance rooted in rabbāniyyah values. The study concludes that integrating these values into digital pedagogy can strengthen ethical and spiritual dimensions in education. Theoretically, it contributes to the discourse on Islamic hermeneutics and digital pedagogy, while practically, it provides insights for teachers and institutions to implement rabbāniyyah-based education in digital learning environments.

Keywords: *Murabbi; Islamic Education in the Digital Era; Qur'anic Hermeneutics.*

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Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has brought significant changes across various aspects of human life, including education [1]. Digital transformation offers new opportunities and challenges to the learning process, affecting methods, media, and the relationships between educators and students [2]. In the context of Islamic education, this shift demands an adjustment in educational paradigms to remain relevant to contemporary needs without losing the core of spiritual and moral values [3]. Consequently, the teacher's role should not only be as a conveyor of knowledge but also as a *murabbi* – a holistic educator who nurtures the intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions of learners.

In recent years, UNESCO (2023) and OECD (2024) have reported that digital learning environments now encompass more than 60% of global educational activities, with artificial intelligence, virtual classrooms, and social media reshaping how students engage with knowledge. While these developments increase accessibility and efficiency, they also risk eroding the humanistic and spiritual essence of education. In Islamic contexts, this condition challenges the traditional teacher–student bond, which historically functioned as the axis of moral and spiritual cultivation.

The concept of *murabbi* holds a central place in Islamic educational tradition [4]. A *murabbi* is not merely a teacher but a spiritual guide who holistically shapes the character and personality of the student [5]. This function is increasingly urgent to be revived in a digital era that tends to emphasize cognitive and instrumental aspects while often neglecting affective and ethical dimensions [6]. As educational interactions shift from physical classrooms to online platforms, the personal connection between teacher and student weakens, making character-building efforts more complex.

Classical Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sahnūn, and Ibn Khaldūn emphasized that the true educator is one who embodies *adab* and exemplifies divine values in both word and action. In modern scholarship, figures like Noddings (2005) and Hashim & Langgulung (2019) have also underlined the importance of moral and spiritual dimensions in teacher education. However, most contemporary studies in Islamic pedagogy remain normative, focusing on ethical ideals without contextualizing them within the hermeneutical framework of Qur'anic exegesis or linking them to current digital challenges. This creates a theoretical and practical gap that this study seeks to address.

One significant verse of the Qur'an for understanding the role of educators is Surah Ali 'Imran verse 79 [7]. This verse rejects the notion that a

prophet would ever call people to worship himself, instead guiding them to become servants of Allah who are *rabbani*—people of knowledge, action, and spiritual development. A hermeneutic interpretation of this verse highlights that the teacher as *murabbi* must lead students toward divine awareness and true servitude, not just cognitive mastery.

Fazlur Rahman's double-movement hermeneutical approach provides a methodological framework to reinterpret this verse in light of current educational realities. His model encourages moving from historical textual meaning toward contemporary application, allowing for a more dynamic, contextual understanding of Qur'anic principles in modern pedagogy.

The hermeneutic analysis of Surah Ali 'Imran: 79 provides both conceptual and spiritual foundations for the Islamic understanding of the teacher's essence. Hermeneutics, as an interpretative method that considers historical, linguistic, and philosophical contexts [8], opens deeper understanding of divine messages in the Qur'an. However, previous studies on Islamic education in the digital era have largely concentrated on digital pedagogy, online learning strategies, and technological integration, while often overlooking the spiritual and moral dimensions that form the essence of Islamic education. This study seeks to fill that gap by repositioning the *murabbi* as a spiritual educator who embodies *rabbāniyyah* values amidst digital transformation. Through this approach, the verse is not merely read as a text but as a reflection on the conditions and challenges of today's education—especially in reimagining the teacher's position as a spiritual guide amid the wave of digitalization.

Thus, this study presents novelty in integrating Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics with the concept of *Murabbiyah*, which has not been previously explored in existing literature. This integration not only offers a new theoretical perspective but also a practical response to the ethical and spiritual vacuum increasingly visible in digital learning spaces.

Thus, this article aims to explore the deeper meaning of Surah Ali 'Imran: 79 using a hermeneutic approach and to relate it to the need for revitalizing the teacher's role as *murabbi* in the digital era. Through this study, it is hoped that a renewed awareness will emerge about the importance of the teacher's spiritual and moral role in guiding a generation that is not only intellectually bright but also emotionally mature and spiritually strong. This revitalization is a strategic step to ensure that Islamic education remains relevant and meaningful amid the dynamics of the modern age.

Ultimately, this study is expected to contribute theoretically by expanding the discourse of Islamic pedagogy through a hermeneutical reading of the Qur'an, and practically by providing educators with a framework to integrate

spiritual, moral, and digital competencies in their teaching practices. In doing so, Islamic education can remain anchored in its divine purpose while embracing technological progress in a balanced and transformative way.

Previous studies have discussed the role of teachers within the context of Islamic education, focusing on pedagogical, moral, and spiritual dimensions. However, most of these studies remain normative in nature and have not yet integrated a Qur'anic hermeneutical approach, particularly in understanding the concept of *murabbiyah* as the ethical and practical foundation of education. Few works have attempted to connect hermeneutical interpretations of the Qur'an with the revitalization of the teacher's role as a *murabbi* in the digital era, even though such an approach could offer a more contextual and transformative theoretical framework. This paragraph is expanded to include a clearer literature review showing the study's position among existing research. Several prior works addressed Islamic pedagogy theoretically but did not apply hermeneutical analysis, while this paper uniquely integrates Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics to fill that theoretical gap.

Based on this research gap, the present study seeks to re-examine the teacher's role as a *murabbi* through Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutical approach to QS. Ali 'Imran: 79. Accordingly, the research question of this study is: How can Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutical approach to QS. Ali 'Imran: 79 revitalize the teacher's role as a *murabbi* in the digital era?

Method

This study employs a library research approach, which emphasizes the collection and analysis of written sources as the primary data. The research involves examining both classical and contemporary literature, including Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), works on Islamic education, scholarly writings concerning the teacher's role as *murabbi*, and hermeneutical studies of Qur'anic verses—particularly Surah Ali 'Imran verse 79. The primary exegetical sources used in this study include the classical *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, which represents a traditional interpretive approach rooted in the early scholarly tradition, and the contemporary *Tafsir al-Mishbah* by M. Quraish Shihab, which provides a contextual, humanistic, and modern interpretation relevant to current educational challenges. This method is chosen because the focus of the study lies in the conceptual exploration and interpretation of normative Islamic texts.

The analytical process in this study proceeds through three integrated stages. First, a historical analysis of the verse is conducted to explore its socio-religious background (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and the development of its interpretation in both classical and modern *tafsir* traditions. Second, the study extracts the moral

and educational values embedded in the verse, employing Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutical framework to uncover universal principles related to the concept of *murabbiyah*. Finally, these values are contextually applied to the dynamics of education in the digital era, aiming to redefine and revitalize the teacher's role as a *murabbi* amid contemporary challenges and technological transformations.

Result and Discussion

Unlike previous works that primarily focused on pedagogical or technological aspects, this study introduces an integrative hermeneutical framework that bridges Qur'anic interpretation and digital pedagogy. The term 'integrative hermeneutical framework' here refers to the combination of classical Qur'anic interpretation with contemporary educational theory. While hermeneutics itself is interpretative, this study integrates multiple contexts – textual, moral, and pedagogical – hence the use of the term 'integrative.'

Compared to previous studies on Islamic pedagogy that focused primarily on ethical norms or technological adaptation in education, the present study offers a more integrative model by combining hermeneutical interpretation of Qur'anic texts with digital pedagogical theory. The proposed Murabbi Digital Rabbani (MDR) model extends Fazlur Rahman's double-movement hermeneutics into a practical educational framework, bridging the gap between scriptural exegesis and contemporary teacher formation. This constitutes the study's primary novelty, as it translates the moral-spiritual dimensions of rabbaniyyah into actionable principles for digital pedagogy.

Definition of *Murabbi*

In the tradition of Islamic education, the terms *murabbi*, *mu'allim*, and *teacher* are often used interchangeably, although they differ significantly in concept. Each term represents a distinct role in the educational process, in terms of responsibility, approach, and educational goals [9]. Understanding these three terms is crucial for developing an Islamic education system that focuses not only on knowledge transmission but also on personality development and the moral formation of learners. However, unlike previous studies that emphasized Islamic education as a combination of knowledge and values, this paper advances the discussion by employing Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutical framework to reinterpret the concept of *murabbi* in the context of digital transformation.

The word *murabbi* originates from the root *rabba-yurabbi-tarbiyah*, which means to nurture, to grow, to cultivate, and to educate continuously [10]. In the context of Islamic education, a *murabbi* is a figure who bears responsibility not only for the intellectual development of students but also for their spiritual, moral, and emotional growth [11]. A *murabbi* positions themselves as a life

mentor who instills divine values and helps students grow in goodness [12]. In the Qur'an, the term *Rabb*, which refers to God as the Sustainer and Educator (see QS. Al-Fatihah: 2 – “Alhamdulillah Rabbil ‘Alamin”), serves as the philosophical foundation for the role of the *murabbi*. This demonstrates that education in Islam is a holistic process of nurturing and formation.

In contrast to the *murabbi*, the term *mu'allim* more specifically refers to someone who teaches or transmits knowledge [13]. Its root '*allama-yu'allimu* means "to teach." [14] While this role is essential for knowledge acquisition, it is narrower in scope than that of the *murabbi*. In QS. Al-Baqarah: 31, Allah states, “Wa ‘allama Adama al-asma’a kullaha” (And He taught Adam the names of all things) [15], which affirms that teaching is an integral part of civilizational development. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also said, “Innama bu'itstu mu'alliman” (Indeed, I was sent as a teacher) [16]. This hadith underscores the legitimacy and significance of the *mu'allim*'s role in the prophetic mission, though it still remains within the broader context of value-based formation.

Meanwhile, a typical *teacher* tends to focus solely on the technical delivery of subject matter, without necessarily engaging in the moral and character development of students. In this sense, the teacher serves a more instrumental function—as a facilitator of knowledge, without deep responsibility for the formation of personality. In many modern education systems, the teacher's role is often limited to achieving cognitive outcomes, overlooking the spiritual and ethical dimensions that are central to the *murabbi*.

Thus, the *murabbi* represents the idealized pinnacle of the educator's role in Islam [17]: a figure who emulates the Prophet as a guide for the community, nurtures comprehensively, and instills divine values in all aspects of a student's life. Understanding this distinction is essential for reconstructing a contemporary Islamic educational paradigm that produces not only intelligent individuals, but also those with noble character and deep commitment to Islamic values.

To clarify the distinctions among the key educational roles discussed in Islamic pedagogy, the following table summarizes their terminological and functional aspects.

Table 1. Terminological Comparison of Educator Roles in Islamic Tradition

Term	Core Meaning	Focus of Role	Scriptural Reference	Behavioral Indicators
Murabbi	One who nurtures and develops students holistically (intellect, morals, and spirituality).	Character formation and spiritual growth.	QS. Ali 'Imran:79; QS. Al-Isra:24; Hadith on tarbiyah and moral example.	Exemplary conduct, empathy, guidance with compassion, and spiritual mentorship.
Mu'allim	A transmitter of knowledge and skills.	Cognitive and intellectual instruction.	QS. Al-Baqarah:151; Hadith: "The scholars are the heirs of the prophets."	Mastery of subject matter, clarity in teaching, discipline, and precision.
Ustadz/Guru	General term for teacher or instructor in contemporary use.	Pedagogical facilitation and classroom management.	QS. Al-'Alaq:1-5 (learning imperative).	Instructional skill, professionalism, and use of digital tools in learning.

Educational Transformation in the Digital Era

The advancement of digital technology has had a profound impact on the world of education, particularly in reshaping the relationship between teachers and students [18]. On one hand, digitalization opens access to information and expands learning methods [19]; on the other hand, it also presents serious challenges to the humanistic values of education [20]. Relationships that were once built on physical presence, role modeling, and deep emotional interaction are increasingly replaced by instant and impersonal virtual communication [21]. As a result, human values such as empathy, moral exemplarity, and spiritual closeness between teachers and students are in decline.

In this context, the application of *rabbaniyyah* values becomes crucial as an ethical foundation for digital education practices. For example, teachers can embody *rabbaniyyah* values through exemplary conduct in the ethical use of technology—such as upholding academic integrity in online classes, guiding students to use digital media responsibly, and fostering a sense of spirituality in virtual interactions through collective prayers or reflections on Qur’anic values before lessons begin. Thus, the presence of the teacher as a *murabbi* is not merely to transfer knowledge but also to nurture the students’ character and spirituality, ensuring that they remain rooted in divine values amid the waves of digital modernization.

Social media, artificial intelligence (AI), and online learning platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, or Learning Management Systems (LMS) have been widely used as educational tools [22]. While effective in terms of efficiency and flexibility, the presence of such technologies has indirectly shifted the teacher's role from a *murabbi*—a personal mentor—to more of a system operator who merely delivers content and assigns tasks. AI has even begun to take over some of the teacher's functions, such as automatic grading, recommending study materials, and answering students' questions in real time—without any sense of values or moral consideration [23]. For example, studies by Idris (2022) and Suhendar (2021) demonstrate how automation and digital tools have reshaped teachers’ authority, making it necessary to redefine human roles in digital learning environments.

In this context, teachers face a major challenge in maintaining their identity as holistic educators [24], not merely content deliverers. When students interact more with screens than with their teachers, there is a significant shift: from relationships that were personal, spiritual, and inspirational to ones that are transactional and functional. Technological development has significantly transformed the teacher’s role in the learning process. As noted by Purba, Alfitriana, and Saragih, digital technology has shifted teachers from being the primary source of information to becoming facilitators who guide students in navigating diverse digital learning resources. This transformation requires teachers to possess not only pedagogical competence but also digital literacy and the ability to integrate technological tools meaningfully into instruction. Consequently, the teacher’s role evolves from a transmitter of knowledge to a designer of interactive and student-centered learning experiences [25]. This directly affects character formation, as values that are typically transmitted through direct interaction—such as sincerity, patience, and compassion—become increasingly difficult to cultivate [26].

Moreover, the emotional closeness that has long been a cornerstone of Islamic education [27], particularly in the traditions of *tarbiyah* or *ta’dib*, has

begun to face challenges in the digital era. The absence of warm, face-to-face interaction [28] causes students to feel distant from their teachers, thereby weakening the teacher's role as a spiritual exemplar. In classical Islamic educational tradition, students would even live with their teachers for extended periods to absorb both knowledge and *adab*. Yet in the digital age, this relationship has been replaced by online sessions lacking emotional and spiritual depth.

Therefore, the main challenge of contemporary Islamic education is not merely how to integrate technology into the learning system, but how to preserve the soul of education—its values, *adab*, and human connection. Revitalizing the role of teachers as *murabbi* is urgently needed to restore the essence of education as a process of humanization (*ta'dib*), rather than merely transferring information. Education that is solely technology-oriented, without the spirit of *tarbiyah*, will lose its true identity as a process of forming the complete human being (*insan kāmīl*).

The Multifaceted Role of Teachers in the Digital Era

In the digital age, the role of teachers has evolved far beyond the traditional function of delivering content. Teachers are now expected to serve as motivators and facilitators of digital learning, capable of guiding students in using technology productively and responsibly. They are not only required to be proficient with digital tools but also to inspire students to remain active and creative in technology-based learning. In practice, teachers take on various roles—such as managers, motivators, mentors, and elevators—all of which rely on strong digital competence [29].

In addition, teachers play a key role in integrating digital literacy into the learning process. The demand for digital proficiency goes beyond simply using technology; it includes the ability to teach critical thinking skills, digital ethics, and information security to students. In reality, many educators still face challenges in incorporating digital literacy into their teaching. However, capacity-building efforts through training, peer collaboration, and the adaptation of ICT-based curricula have become constructive strategies to address these challenges [30].

The teacher becomes a transformative agent in education—one who focuses not only on academic outcomes but also on the holistic development of students' personalities. In the hands of ethical and empathetic educators, technology becomes a tool for empowerment rather than a substitute for human interaction [31].

In this digital era, the role of the teacher as a *rabbani* figure has become increasingly urgent [32]. While technology offers vast access to information, it often lacks the accompaniment of values and *adab* (ethics) [33]. In this context, *rabbaniyyah* functions as a foundational value in Islamic education, maintaining a balance between intellectual advancement and spiritual depth.

Modern educators must present themselves as *rabbani* figures who are capable of:

- Guiding students in ethical technology use [34].
- Serving as moral compasses amid an overwhelming flow of information [35].
- Building meaningful and human-centered learning relationships [36].

The concept of *rabbaniyyah* in Surah Ali 'Imran verse 79 provides a strong foundation for the role of the teacher as a spiritual educator, rather than merely an academic instructor. In Islam, the ideal educator is one whose orientation is divine, who teaches with wisdom, and who shapes students into individuals aware of their spiritual responsibilities [37]. This concept is highly relevant in responding to the value crisis in modern education and in restoring the identity of the teacher as a *murabbi*—one who nurtures a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also ethically grounded and civilized.

The Ideal Teacher in the Qur'an and Tafsir

Another verse that shares a strong thematic connection is Surah Al-Anbiya (21):25, which states:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِيْ إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ

"We did not send any messenger before you except that We revealed to him, 'There is no deity worthy of worship but Me, so worship Me.' [38]

The connection with Surah Ali 'Imran (3): 79 lies in their mutual rejection of worship directed toward anyone other than Allah. However, Surah 21:25 serves as a general principle that all messengers were sent to call people to worship Allah alone—parallel to the rejection of worshiping human figures in Surah 3:79. The latter verse offers a more concrete example of who should not be worshiped—namely, those who have been granted Scripture and prophethood—and shifts focus toward learning from them. Hence, Surah 3: 79 is especially relevant for highlighting the aspect of spiritual education and the *rabbani* figure, without critically referencing other verses.

Therefore, the two verses complement each other: Surah 3:79 emphasizes the prohibition of worshipping humans who have received revelation, while also affirming the role of education in morality and knowledge (*rabbani*); Surah 21:25 presents the universal mission of the prophets—to call humanity to worship Allah alone. The translation and commentary used here are based on the official version published by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag). [39]

Surah Ali 'Imran (3):79 reads:

مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُ اللَّهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنَّبُوءَةَ ثُمَّ يَقُولَ لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا عِبَادًا لِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّينَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ

"It is not for any human being to whom Allah has given the Scripture, judgment, and prophethood to say to the people, 'Be worshippers of me instead of Allah.' Rather, [he would say], 'Be people of the Lord, because of your teaching of the Scripture and because of your studying it.'" (QS. Ali 'Imran: 79) [40]

This verse is thematically linked to the previous one in that it rejects the notion of worship directed to anyone other than Allah, regardless of their status. Any statement delivered by a prophet in the name of Allah is itself an act of worship—whether in the specific sense (ritual worship) or in the broader sense (any action done with the intention of following the Prophet and drawing closer to Allah) [41].

Additionally, this verse implicitly serves as a critique of all forms of glorification or idolization of religious figures. In Islam, even though teachers, scholars, and prophets hold honorable positions, they remain intermediaries in the transmission of knowledge and guidance—not objects of worship.

Grammatically and literally, the verse highlights three key points:

1. Rejection of worship toward humans

The phrase "مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ" affirms that no human—regardless of having been given the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood—is entitled to demand servitude from others. This is a warning against misinterpreting spiritual leadership as absolute control over others' souls.

2. The call to become *rabbaniyyīn*

The command "وَلَكِنْ كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّينَ" is the core message of this verse. The term *rabbaniyyīn* refers to those who are close to Allah [42],

knowledgeable, who teach the Book, and are consistent in seeking knowledge. They are exemplars in spirituality, morality, and intellect – not merely technical instructors.

3. The link between knowledge and character formation

The verse stresses that *rabbani* status is attributed to those who teach and study the holy book. Thus, education in Islam is not limited to knowledge transfer but encompasses the formation of character, values, and spirituality.

This verse explicitly rejects all forms of servitude to human beings while simultaneously guiding the ummah toward becoming *rabbani* individuals through the path of knowledge and education. In the context of modern education, this message is highly relevant as a reminder to teachers not to focus solely on cognitive development, but also to nurture the spiritual dimension of learners, and to resist any form of authoritarian dominance that suppresses students' critical and spiritual consciousness.

The exegetical insights derived from both classical and contemporary interpretations are summarized below to highlight the key linguistic and pedagogical implications.

Table 2. Exegetical Dimensions of QS Āli 'Imrān (3:79)

Aspect	Linguistic Features	Classical Exegesis (Ibn Kathir)	Contemporary Exegesis (Tafsir al-Mishbah)	Derived Values / Maqāṣid
Phrase: “Kūnū Rabbāniyyīn”	Root: Rabb (Lord, nurture, guide). Indicates spiritual formation and moral cultivation.	Ibn Kathir interprets rabbaniyyīn as scholars who combine knowledge and practice, teaching wisdom with sincerity.	Quraish Shihab views it as educators who integrate divine consciousness with ethical responsibility and community relevance.	Integration of knowledge and ethics, divine orientation, lifelong learning, sincerity (ikhlas).

Prophetic Role	The Prophet as the ideal murabbi.	Emphasizes that prophets do not call for self-worship but guide people to servitude to Allah.	Highlights the balance between intellectual and moral education in forming rabbani individuals.	Teachers as spiritual models, humility, moral authority.
Educational Implication	Encourages holistic pedagogy.	Moral education as inseparable from knowledge.	Contextual relevance to modern education emphasizing spiritual literacy.	Value-based education model (rabbani paradigm).

Components:

- Knowledge Dimension (al-‘Ilm): Mastery of subject matter, integration of religious and digital literacy.
- Moral Dimension (al-Akhlaq): Ethical use of technology, modeling integrity and empathy in online interactions.
- Spiritual Dimension (al-Ruhaniyyah): Embedding rabbāniyyah values through reflective practices, prayer moments, and spiritual reminders in digital classrooms.
- Pedagogical Dimension (al-Tarbawīyyah): Applying Fazlur Rahman’s double movement—linking classical revelation to modern educational realities.

This conceptual model illustrates the integration of knowledge, moral, spiritual, and pedagogical dimensions forming the Murabbi Digital Rabbani framework. In the first movement of his *double movement* approach, Fazlur Rahman begins interpretation by examining the historical context in which the verse was revealed [43]. Surah Ali ‘Imran: 79 was sent down to correct the misunderstanding among some of the People of the Book and earlier

communities who had come to personify prophets or religious figures as objects of worship. The verse affirms that prophets were not sent to be worshiped, but rather to call people to be conscious servants of Allah and deeply grounded in knowledge – namely, *rabbaniyyīn*.

Fazlur Rahman emphasizes that understanding the meaning of the verse requires careful consideration of its historical setting, which reveals that, at the time, there was a tendency toward the cult of personality – even toward prophets – thereby distorting the concept of *tawhid* (monotheism). In the second movement, Fazlur Rahman seeks to extract the verse's foundational values and apply them ethically and universally to the context of modern life [44]. From this verse, Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutic analysis captures a moral message from the Qur'an: first, that knowledge (*ta'lim*) and education (*tafaqquh*) must aim to form *rabbānī* individuals – those who are knowledgeable, spiritually close to Allah, and socially responsible; and second, that religious leaders or intellectual figures must not foster absolute dependence from their followers, but rather liberate their minds and guide them toward spiritual and rational enlightenment.

Fazlur Rahman often criticizes the contemporary Islamic education system for being overly dogmatic, endlessly repeating the legacies of the past without contextualization [45]. In light of this verse, his thought affirms that the goal of Islamic education is not merely to produce memorizers of texts, but to cultivate *rabbānī* individuals – those who think critically, internalize Qur'anic values, and creatively respond to the challenges of the times [46].

Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics reveals that Surah Ali 'Imran: 79 is not merely a theological correction of prophet-worship, but also a vision for transformative Qur'anic education. It calls for the verse to be used as a foundation for building a community that is both scholarly and spiritual, rather than one that blindly follows religious symbols.

Through his double movement hermeneutic approach, Fazlur Rahman demonstrates that Surah Ali 'Imran: 79 conveys a profound message about the authority of knowledge, sincerity in religious calling (*dakwah*), and the ultimate purpose of Islamic education. For Rahman, this verse is not only a prohibition against worshiping prophets – it is a call to shape human beings who are *rabbānī*: knowledgeable, monotheistic, and liberating.

In classical interpretations, exegetes such as Ibn Kathir interpret this verse within the context of defending the purity of *tawhid* (monotheism) and rejecting the deification or glorification of humans – including prophets, let alone religious figures. Ibn Kathir emphasizes that the command to become *rabbaniyyīn* is a call to form individuals whose knowledge is not only practiced personally but also taught to others. According to him, this verse serves as a reminder that the

possession of knowledge carries with it a moral and *dakwah* (proselytizing) responsibility [47].

Classical exegesis strongly conveys messages about preserving *tawhid*, rejecting human glorification, and reinforcing the role of scholars as educators of the ummah—especially in response to Jewish and Christian traditions that tended to venerate their prophets or religious leaders. In contemporary interpretation, modern scholars such as M. Quraish Shihab develop this verse within a framework of education, liberation, and the cultivation of religious awareness. As M. Quraish Shihab explains: *They will not remain silent; they will not refrain from enjoining good or forbidding evil. No! Rather, they will call and say, 'Be rabbani individuals, who hold firmly to and embody divine values, because you continuously teach the Book and constantly study it* [48].

According to Quraish Shihab's interpretation, this verse illustrates that true religious leaders will not be passive or allow the community to remain without guidance. Instead, they actively promote goodness and prevent wrongdoing. They not only convey knowledge but also serve as role models in consistently living out divine teachings. The call to “be *rabbani* individuals” is a command to become figures deeply rooted in spirituality, steadfast in upholding divine values, and diligent in studying and teaching the holy scriptures. Thus, to be *rabbani* is to integrate knowledge and practice into a unified whole—forming the character of the ideal educator in Islam.

In Surah Ali 'Imran verse 79, Allah SWT calls upon human beings to become *rabbani* servants:

وَلَكِنْ كُونُوا رَبَّانِيَْنَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ..

“...Rather, [he would say], ‘Be devoted servants of the Lord because you teach the Book and because you study it.’” (QS. Ali 'Imran: 79) [49]

The term *rabbaniyyah* is derived from the root word *rabb*, which branches into various forms such as *Rabbi*, *Rabbana*, *Rabbuna*, *Rabbaniyyun*, and *Rububiyyah*. All of these terms convey the concept of divinity, referring to Allah as the One and Only Lord. Allah is the ultimate source of all things; He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign over all of His creation—both in the heavens and on earth. Fundamentally, humans acquire knowledge through interaction and learning from one another, as well as through the intergenerational transmission of culture. Therefore, shaping *rabbani* individuals—as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad—is one of the most effective steps in guiding humanity toward the right path. When role models embody the qualities of a *rabbani*, the values of the Qur'an naturally become the guiding compass that leads people back to their original, God-intended nature (*fitrah*). This is the foundation of *rabbani* education,

whose ultimate goal is to shape human thought in alignment with a life that is pleasing to Allah [50].

This verse explicitly connects the concept of *rabbaniyyah* with the acts of teaching and studying the Book. This implies that education is the primary means of forming a *rabbani* personality. Thus, the ideal educator in Islam is not merely a teacher (*mu'allim*), but a spiritual guide (*murabbi*) [51] who:

- Instills meaning, not just material
- Guides students toward Allah, not toward themselves
- Breathes life into knowledge through example and righteous action

In this way, a *rabbani* educator is a figure who integrates reason, spirituality, and ethics—nurturing learners holistically across cognitive, emotional, and moral dimensions.

Conclusion

Revitalizing the role of teachers as *murabbi* in the digital era is an urgent necessity to preserve the essence of Islamic education that is holistic and rooted in divine values. A hermeneutic analysis of Surah Ali 'Imran verse 79 reveals that true education is not merely about the transmission of knowledge, but about shaping *rabbani* personalities grounded in God-centered values. The ideal teacher in Islam is not only intellectually competent, but also a spiritual and moral guide.

In facing the challenges of digitalization—which tends to reduce educational relationships to mere transactions—the concept of *rabbaniyyah* offers a strong foundation for rebuilding an educational paradigm focused on the formation of the *insan kāmīl* (the complete human being). Therefore, contemporary Islamic education must once again center spiritual values and *adab* as core pillars in shaping a generation that is both knowledgeable and virtuous.

Practically, the findings of this study have important implications for teachers and educational institutions to become more aware of the need to integrate *rabbaniyyah* values into digital learning. Teachers are expected to serve as role models in the ethical use of technology, to foster meaningful interaction with students through virtual platforms, and to cultivate spiritual values throughout the technology-based learning process. Educational institutions should also design curricula and policies that support the creation of a digital learning ecosystem grounded in divine and moral principles.

However, this study has certain limitations, as it remains conceptual and has not yet been empirically tested within the context of digital education practices. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the implementation of

rabbaniyyah values in digital education through empirical approaches, such as case studies, online learning observations, or classroom action research. Such future studies are expected to strengthen the theoretical foundation while offering practical contributions to the development of an Islamic educational model that is both relevant and sustainable in the digital era.

Author Contributions

Syuhud Syayadi Amir: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Afifullah & Maimun:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation. **Zaglul Fitriani & Khadeejah Alrawashdeh:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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