LOUGKA - KALAM Reçu le: 29/06 / 2026 Accepté le: 26/10 / 2026 Publié le: 26/11 / 2026

Indicators of the Selection and Organisation of Grammatical Content in the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldoun

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ABSTRACT:

This study highlights the standing of the Arab heritage and its precedence in addressing questions of education and pedagogy, by deriving the criteria of selection (such as learnability and validity) and the criteria of organisation (such as continuity, sequencing, and the integration of knowledge) that govern the construction and organisation of grammatical content in the Muqaddimah of the eminent scholar Ibn Khaldoun. To this end, the study adopts the descriptive method, together with the tool of textual analysis, in order to trace these criteria. The research came to multiple results. Most significantly, it showed that Ibn Khaldoun offered an advanced approach of teaching grammar that emphasizes the useful role of grammatical rules to support effective language use. Additionally, he emphasizes the necessity of connecting the grammatical content to its instructional objectives while taking into account the mental capacities and individual differences of the learners. Furthermore, the study confirmed that this method was based on the attainment of continuity and the integration in the teaching of the language and its grammar, as well as the gradual sequencing of knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Educational Heritage; Ibn Khaldoun; Grammar Teaching; Content Selection; Content Organisation.

لغة – كلام الاستلام: 2026/06/29 القبول: 2026/10/26 النشر: 2026/11/26

مؤشرات اختيار المحتوى النحوي وتنظيمه في مقدمة ابن خلدون

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ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى إبراز مكانة التراث العربي وأسبقيته في الإشارة إلى قضايا التربية والتعليم، من خلال استنباط معايير الاختيار (كالقابلية للتعلم، ومعيار الصدق)، ومعايير التنظيم ("كالاستمرارية، والتتابع، والتكامل المعرفي) التي تحكم بناء المحتوى النحوي وتنظيمه في كتاب المقدمة للعلامة ابن خلدون. ولتحقيق ذلك، اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي وأداة التحليل لتتبع هذه المعايير المبثوثة في الكتاب بمعانيها ومدلولاتها التربوية لا بألفاظها المعاصرة .وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى جملة من النتائج، أبرزها : أن ابن خلدون قدّم رؤية متطورة لتعليم النحو ترتكز على وظيفية القاعدة لخدمة ممارسة اللغة، مع ضرورة ارتباط المحتوى النحوي بأهدافه و مراعاة القدرات العقلية والفروق الفردية للمتعلمين. كما أكدت اعتماده على معايير تنظيمية دقيقة تقوم على التدرج في التلقين، وتحقيق التتابع والتكامل في تعليم اللغة وقواعدها.

الكلمات المفتاحية :

الكلمات المفتاحية: التراث التربوي؛ ابن خلدون؛ تعليم النحو؛ اختيار المحتوى؛ تنظيم المحتوى.

1. Introduction:

Out of a wish to highlight the standing of our Arab heritage and its precedence in addressing questions of education and teaching, we have chosen as our subject the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldoun, one of the works of our heritage that contains a great many of his views, which lay the groundwork for the study of education long before the emergence of the modern educational disciplines.

It is from this standpoint that the present study, entitled "Indicators of the Selection and Organisation of Grammatical Content in the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldoun", seeks to answer the following research question: **What are the indicators of the selection and organisation of grammatical content in the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldoun?** from which the following sub-questions follow:

- What are the indicators of the selection of grammatical content in the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldoun?
- What are the indicators of the organisation of grammatical content in the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldoun?

In order to answer these questions and attain the aims of the research, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

- We assume that the indicators of the selection of grammatical content in the Muqaddimah are represented by validity and learnability, and that these are dispersed throughout the text in their underlying senses and implications rather than in their contemporary terminology.
- We hold it probable that the indicators of the organisation of grammatical content in the Muqaddimah are manifested in continuity, sequencing, and integration, and that these likewise are dispersed throughout the text in their underlying senses and implications rather than in their contemporary terminology.

In order to arrive at precise findings, we have followed the descriptive method, as being best suited to the nature and aims of the study, and have made use of the tool of analysis to interrogate the texts of the corpus. Before doing so, however, we shall first address, in the theoretical section, the author of the corpus, "the eminent scholar Ibn Khaldoun" , and introduce his celebrated work, the Muqaddimah, so as to proceed directly thereafter to the applied section of the study.

2.Introducing Ibn Khaldoun

He is Abu Zaid Wali Eddine ʻAbd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad, known as Ibn Khaldoun: his given name was ʻAbderrahman, his patronymic (kunya) Abu Zaid, his honorific title (laqab) Wali Eddine, and his renown attaches to the name Ibn Khaldoun, by which he became known after his ninth-generation ancestor. The title Ouali Eddine was conferred upon him after he assumed the office of chief judge in Egypt, and it appears that he acquired the kunya Abu Zaid from the name of his eldest son, in keeping with Arab custom regarding such patronymics. He is frequently further described as al-Maliki, in reference to his school of Islamic jurisprudence, and as al-Hadrami, in reference to his Hadrami origins.

He was born in Tunis on the first day of Ramadan in the year 732 AH/1332 CE, descending from an Andalusian family originating in Seville. He died while still holding the office of chief judge of the Maliki school, on the twenty-sixth day of Ramadan in the year 808 AH, at the age of approximately seventy-six, and was buried in the Sufi cemetery outside Bab al-Nasr. (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, pp.12-13, 21)

3.Introducing the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldoun

The title **"Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldoun "** ("The Introduction of Ibn Khaldoun ") designates the first of the seven volumes that together make up the **Kitab al-'Ibar wa-Diwan al-Mubtada wa-l-Khabar fi Ayyam al-'Arab wa-l-'Ajam wa-l-Barbar wa-man 'Asarahum min Dhawi al-Sultan al-Akbar** ("The Book of Lessons and the Record of News & Information Concerning the History of the Arabs, the Persians, and the Berbers, and Their Powerful Contemporary Rulers"). Ibn Khaldoun wrote this Muqaddimah during a four-year retreat, from 776 to 780 AH, in the castle of the Banu Salama in the province of Oran, in western Algeria , of which he said: "There poured forth within it showers of words and meanings upon my thought, until its cream was churned and its results composed, in the manner to which I was guided during that retreat." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2001, p. 3)

In it, he treated what we would today call 'social phenomena' and what he himself termed the 'realities of human civilisation' (waqi'at al-'umran al-bashari) or the 'conditions of human society'. The volume stands as the first treatise on the nature of civilisation within creation and on what arises within it ; nomadism, sedentary life, conquest, livelihood, trades, the sciences, and the like ; together with the causes and reasons underlying these phenomena. It comprises an introduction in which he discusses history and its subject matter, the causes of error in the transmission of historical events, and the reasons that led him to undertake the inquiry contained in this first book of his work; and it sets out the six principal areas of inquiry that the book comprises, which he called chapters (abwab), namely:

Chapter One: On human civilisation in general, comprising six introductory sections.

Chapter Two: On Bedouin civilisation, savage nations and tribes, comprising twenty-nine subsections.

Chapter Three: On dynasties, kingship, the caliphate, and royal ranks, comprising fifty-three subsections, all concerned with systems of government and the affairs of politics.

Chapter Four: On countries, cities, and other forms of civilisation, comprising twenty-two subsections concerned with the emergence of towns and cities, the sites of human settlement, and the respects in which cities are distinguished from other forms of settlement — architectural, social, economic, and linguistic.

Chapter Five: On livelihood and its various forms, earning a living and the trades, and all that pertains thereto, comprising thirty-three subsections all concerned with matters of economy and subsistence.

Chapter Six: On the sciences, their various kinds, education and its methods, and all the conditions pertaining thereto, comprising fifty-one subsections concerned with the different branches of the sciences, the arts, literature, and methods of education and teaching. (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.22)

It is this sixth chapter that contains the material relevant to pedagogy, and which forms the foundation of the present research paper.

4.Indicators of the Selection and Organisation of Grammatical Content according to Ibn Khaldoun

Content is regarded as one of the most important elements constituting the educational process, given the considerable role it plays in achieving its aims. Content may be defined as the body of knowledge that is **selected and organised** in a particular manner in order to achieve the objectives sought by the educational process. (Al-Hashimi & Atiyya, 2006, p.40)

Grammatical content, like other forms of content, is subject to a number of criteria in its **selection and organisation**, criteria for which a clear trace is to be found in the Muqaddimah of **Ibn Khaldoun** . In his views and statements, he pointed to a series of criteria that must be observed in the selection and organisation of grammatical content, criteria which he did not name explicitly but expressed rather through their underlying senses and implications. These are as follows:

4.1. Indicators of the Selection of Grammatical Content according to Ibn Khaldoun

Validity: "This means that the content should be valid in the sense of bearing a close relationship to the objectives of the curriculum, content being regarded as a means towards the achievement of curricular aims. It is incumbent upon us to attend to the relationship that obtains between the two, for validity does not stop there but extends also to the scholarly soundness of the material selected and the knowledge it contains, to its currency , in that it represents the most recent findings of scholarship in its field , and to its necessary freedom from error, while also taking into account the degree to which this knowledge is applicable across a wide range of fields and varied situations." (Al-Hashimi & Atiyya, 2006, p.244)

Ibn Khaldoun holds that the purpose of teaching the rules of grammar at the stages of general education is the formation of a sound linguistic faculty, rather than the memorisation of abstract rules, stating in his Muqaddimah that the science of grammar is not a science for the teaching and learning of the craft of grammatical rules as such, but rather a science for the cultivation of the linguistic faculty.('Id, n.d., pp. 142–143)

The aim of teaching the rules of grammar is, accordingly, realised only when these rules are treated as a means within speech rather than as an end in themselves, **a point to which he alludes in his Muqaddimah when he states** that grammar belongs among the instrumental sciences rather than the sciences that constitute ends in themselves, observing: "Those rules are but means to instruction." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.774)

He likewise indicates that the teaching of grammatical rules as a means within speech is realised only when they are put to practical use, **stating** that, in order to acquire a sound linguistic faculty, the learner must attain it through "practice, habituation, and the repeated use of the speech of the Arabs." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.777)

This means that **Ibn Khaldoun** was the first to point towards "the communicative approach, which is concerned with the use of language and the practice of its various systems and rules, putting them to actual practical use" (Atiyaa, n.d. p.82) in as much as he situates language and its activities within the domain of practical use rather than reliance upon the memorisation of rules and laws. (Atiyaa, n.d. p.81)

The mastery of grammatical rules is, accordingly, to be measured not by the ability to recite them from memory, but by the ability to use and apply them.

He further states in this connection: "Know that language, as commonly understood, is the expression by the speaker of his intended meaning, this expression being a linguistic act arising from the intention to convey speech." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.753) For Ibn Khaldoun , language is thus an acquired faculty possessing a performative dimension , evident in his phrase 'this expression is a linguistic act' , and when the speaker succeeds in conveying his intended meaning through speech, his mastery of the rules of grammar is thereby realised, **as he confirms when he states** that, through grammar, "the foundations of intended meanings are made clear by indication, so that the agent is distinguished from the object, and the subject from the predicate, without which the basis of communication would remain unknown…"(Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.753) This is because language fulfils its function only when it is free of solecism and error, both of which can be avoided through the learning of grammatical rules in the course of communication , since man, **as Ibn Khaldoun**

states, is by nature social, 'of a civic disposition' (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.594), which necessarily entails communication with others, and such communication attains its highest level only through sound language.

Here, **Ibn Khaldoun** focuses on language use as a means of helping learners to exercise the most important functions of language, namely the capacity for thought, communication, and expression, **a point which he confirms** when he states that "knowledge of the rules of inflection is knowledge of how the act is performed, and is not the act itself." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.773)

In the light of this conception, it may be said that grammar is a means towards correct expression and articulation, whether in speech or in writing; and that, in order to achieve this end, the speaker requires of grammar only what secures sound communication and protects his speech from solecism. This points to functional grammar, which calls for the selection of functional topics within grammar teaching.

Al-Jahiz likewise advises teachers of Arabic and those engaged with it in this regard: "As for grammar, do not occupy the child's mind with it beyond what is needed to secure him against gross solecism."(Al-Jahiz, 2000.p.31)

Through this statement, he calls for teaching the learner those functional rules by which sentences are constructed, so that the tongue is preserved from solecism in speech and the pen from error in writing, thereby enabling the learner to deploy grammatical rules in the service of mastering the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Among the modern scholars who have addressed this question is Nihad al-Musa, who states: "At the level of grammar, we are in need of a sifting that distinguishes only those rules which describe the phenomena present in the language material, setting aside causes, interpretations, and disputes… (…) If we do this, we shall find that grammar has been reduced in our hands to a tenth of its size, and whoever reads this grammar will find that he is reading something with a close functional bearing on what he reads, what he hears, and what he needs to express."(AL-Musa, 2003, pp. 38–39)

The idea, then, that the aim of learning grammatical rules is realised by putting them to actual practical use and teaching them functionally is not a new one; rather, our Arab heritage has precedence in pointing to the sufficiency of confining grammar teaching to what secures sound communication and protects speakers' tongues from solecism and error.

Ibn Khaldoun indicates in his Muqaddimah the necessity of linking grammatical content to its objectives, stating that the aim of teaching grammar is the acquisition of a sound linguistic faculty. He links this aim to a content through which this linguistic faculty is acquired, taking the speech of the ancient Arabs, the Qur'an, and the noble hadith of the Prophet as the content through which this faculty is acquired, since all of these comprise grammatical, morphological, and rhetorical experience… In this, he calls for the study of grammatical rules through the texts of the Qur'an, the speech of the Arabs, and the noble hadith, **as he states**: "The proper method of instruction for one who seeks this faculty and aspires to attain it is that he should take it upon himself to memorise their ancient speech, conforming to their ways of expression, drawn from the Qur'an, the hadith, the speech of the early generations, and the discourses of the great masters of Arabic in their rhymed prose and their poetry (…), so that this faculty is acquired through such memorisation and use, and becomes ever more firmly rooted and stronger through repetition." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.771)

He further states: "The attainment of a faculty in the Arabic tongue comes only through extensive memorisation of the speech of the Arabs, until the pattern upon which they wove their constructions becomes imprinted upon the imagination, so that he weaves accordingly, attaining thereby the standing of one who grew up among them and was steeped in their modes of expression

in speech, until he attains the settled faculty of expressing his intended meanings after the manner of their speech." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.774) In this, he follows the lead of **Ibn Jinni** in his definition of grammar as "…the emulation of the distinctive features of the speech of the Arabs in its various forms, whether in inflection or otherwise…" (Ibn Jinni, n.d, p.34)

Ibn Khaldoun recognised that the grammatical rules devised to preserve the Qur'an and the Arabic tongue from solecism were themselves extracted and derived from the speech of the Arabs, **stating in this regard**: "They thus derived from the figurative usages of their speech consistent laws for that faculty, resembling universal principles and rules, to which they referred other kinds of speech by analogy, classing like with like , such as that the agent takes the nominative, the object the accusative, and the subject the nominative , then they observed that meaning varied according to the variation of the inflectional endings of these words, and so they agreed to call this inflection (i'rab), and to call that which brought about this variation an agent ('amil), and the like; and all of this became conventions peculiar to them, which they then fixed in writing and made into a craft proper to themselves, agreeing to call it the science of grammar." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.754)

In this, **Ibn Khaldoun** confirms that their speech, conforming to their own ways of expression, drawn from the Qur'an and the hadith, constitutes content closely bound up with the aim of teaching grammatical rules.

The closer content is linked to objectives, the more valid and meaningful it becomes, and this is precisely what we observe in the content to which **Ibn Khaldoun** points, namely the Qur'an, which is suited to every time and place (being a fixed and constant source), the noble hadith of the Prophet (a derivative of that fixed source), and the speech of the Arabs, which is recognised as a foundation for grammar and a source of analogy invoked in establishing grammatical rules and their soundness.

The learnability of content: "This is realised by ensuring that the content takes account of the learners' level, their readiness, and their capacities , that is, their level of intellectual, emotional, and psychomotor maturity , since learners' capacities vary from one level to another, and a learner should not be given more than he is able to absorb, out of regard for his intellectual well-being and in keeping with the principles of sound reasoning."(Al-Hashimi & Atiyya, 2006, pp. 245–246)

In his discussion of the correct approach to teaching, **Ibn Khaldoun points to the importance of taking account of learners' capacities and characteristics in the selection of content**, whatever its kind, **stressing the importance of attending to the learner's intellectual development and readiness in preparing him for the learning process, stating**: "…and in this regard, the strength of his intellect and his readiness to receive what is presented to him should be taken into account, until he reaches the end of the discipline." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.734) **He likewise stresses the necessity of attending to the learner's capacity, stating**: "The teacher should not require of his pupil more than an understanding of the particular book on which he is concentrating his instruction, in proportion to his capacity and his readiness to receive instruction." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.735)

Ibn Khaldoun also points to the question of individual differences in learners' differing capacities for comprehension and attainment, some grasping the information at the first attempt while others require repetition and reiteration before learning takes place, **stating**: "…This is the manner of effective instruction, and as I have observed, it is generally achieved through three repetitions, though for some it may be achieved in fewer, according to what is granted and made easy for them…" (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.734)

4.2Indicators of the Organisation of Grammatical Content according to Ibn Khaldoun

Among the most important criteria contributing to the organisation of grammatical content, as indicated by **Ibn Khaldoun** through the views and statements dispersed throughout his Muqaddimah, are the following:

Continuity: "This denotes the organisation of material in a manner that allows the learner to engage with the various aspects of learning across successive stages at the level of both grade and educational phase, characterised by vertical repetition , such as movement from the general to the particular, from the easy to the difficult, from the concrete to the abstract, from the simple to the complex, and from the superficial to the profound." (Al-Hashimi & Atiyya, 2006, p.41)

Ibn Khaldoun indicates that the matter of continuity is bound up with gradualness in the transmission of knowledge, **stating**: "Know that the transmission of the sciences to learners is beneficial only when it proceeds gradually, little by little and step by step…" (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.735), since "the acceptance of knowledge and the readiness to understand it arise gradually" (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.735), and here he affirms the importance of gradualness in the acquisition of language and, consequently, in the gradual acquisition of its rules.

He further holds that the natural course of development in the reception of knowledge requires gradual progression from the particular to the general and from the simple to the complex, **stating in this regard**: "The child hears words used in their meanings and is taught these first; he then hears constructions afterwards and is taught these likewise…" (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.765) The acquisition of vocabulary thus precedes the acquisition of constructions.

He further holds that the engagement of the senses in teaching is essential, since what falls under the learner's senses is more readily perceived, more comprehensive, and of more complete benefit, **stating**: "For the acceptance of knowledge and the readiness to understand it arise gradually, and the learner is at first incapable of understanding things as a whole, save in small measure, and by way of approximation, summary, and concrete examples."(Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.735)

Sequencing: The principle of sequencing means that new experiences should be built upon prior experiences, and that present experiences should in turn lay the foundation for subsequent ones. (Al-Hashimi & Atiyya, 2006, p.41)

Ibn Khaldoun affirms that each item of knowledge is connected to what precedes it, in that the more knowledge a learner possesses, the readier he becomes to receive further knowledge, **stating**: "When the learner has attained a faculty in one of the sciences, he becomes thereby readied to receive what remains, and there arises in him an eagerness to seek more and to advance further, until he masters the furthest ends of the science (…), for faculties are attained only through the successive repetition of an act, and when that act is neglected, the faculty that arose from it is likewise forgotten." (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.735)

Integration: The principle of integration means that knowledge should be presented to learners in an interconnected manner, such that learners feel the integration and unity of knowledge, both at the level of topics within a single subject and at the level of subjects within a single grade and educational phase. (Al-Hashimi & Atiyya, 2006, p.41)

Ibn Khaldoun points, **in his statement, to the importance** of having the learner memorise the speech of the Arabs, the noble Qur'an, and the noble hadith of the Prophet, so that he might thereby attain the faculty (Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.771), for through such memorisation he acquires a faculty in grammar, rhetoric, eloquence, and sound formation alike, since the speech of the Arabs is a single body of knowledge that nonetheless encompasses grammatical, morphological, and rhetorical

dimensions… This represents an instance of the horizontal integration that occurs between subjects and disciplines.

We likewise discern the vertical integration that occurs between the topics of a single subject, activity, or discipline, **in his statement**: "…Likewise, you should not prolong the learner's engagement with a single discipline by multiplying sessions and dividing them up, for this leads to forgetfulness and to the separation of the discipline's individual questions one from another, so that the attainment of the faculty becomes difficult through such dispersal."(Ibn Khaldoun, 2009, p.735)

In this, **Ibn Khaldoun** ranks among the early Arab scholars who grasped the idea of integration between the branches of language, taking as their centre and foundation "the literary texts they selected, around which various kinds of linguistic inquiry would converge in order to explain the vocabulary of the text and elucidate its expressions, and to clarify the rhetorical figures and grammatical questions it contains…" (Samak,1998, p. 55)

This is the view to which **Nihad al-Musa** also subscribes when he affirms that the idea of integration between the branches of language is owed to the ancients rather than the moderns, since "their teaching of language was always built upon a text, which might be the Qur'an, a collection of poetry or several such collections, or a body of varied texts, around which the various forms of lexicographical, morphological, grammatical, and rhetorical study would revolve…" (Al-Musa, 2003, p.75)

Ibn Khaldoun thus has precedence in establishing criteria for the selection and organisation of content in general, and grammatical content in particular, criteria which some modern researchers have claimed to have originated and theorised.

5.Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldoun constitutes a great scholarly encyclopaedia containing original and, for its time, highly advanced ideas, in which he anticipated most of the educational and pedagogical ideas current in our own era. He has the distinction of having been the first to lay down the principles governing the study of education, particularly with regard to the pedagogical criteria underlying the selection of grammatical content and the mechanisms of its organisation.

In numerous passages of his Muqaddimah, he draws attention to the criteria governing the selection and organisation of grammatical content, given the considerable role they play in achieving the aims of grammar teaching, pointing in particular to the following:

- The teaching of grammatical rules aims at a practical end, namely helping the learner to use the language and communicate through it; grammar is a means to correct expression and articulation, and this end can be achieved only by putting grammatical rules to actual practical use and teaching them functionally.
- The necessity of linking grammatical content to its objectives, since the more closely content is linked to objectives, the more valid and meaningful it becomes.
- The importance of taking account of learners' capacities and characteristics in selecting content, by attending to their intellectual capacities and their readiness to receive learning, so that they are not burdened beyond their powers, lest their motivation to learn be weakened.
- Attending to individual differences between learners in comprehension and attainment.
- Gradualness in the transmission of knowledge and the engagement of the senses in teaching, particularly in the early stages of education.

- Sequencing and integration in the teaching of language and its rules.

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