



Reforming Madāris with Compassionate Prophetic Pedagogy: Rejecting Harshness and Reviving Educational Excellence through the Seerah

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Abstract:

This paper re-evaluates the disciplinary culture of contemporary Islamic madāris in light of the Seerah (biography) of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Historically, madāris were vital institutions for nurturing knowledge, spirituality, and ethical character in the Muslim world. However, in many regions today, they are often associated with harsh disciplinary methods, authoritarianism, and, in some instances, corporal punishment. These practices, often justified as “traditional,” are not only ethically problematic but also **inconsistent with the prophetic model of education**. The Seerah reveals a radically different paradigm—one rooted in *rahmah* (mercy), *tarbiyyah* (nurturing moral development), and *ihsan* (spiritual excellence). Drawing on Qur’anic verses, Prophetic traditions, classical works of Islamic pedagogy, and modern educational ethics, this article argues that any form of harshness, fear-based discipline, or physical punishment has **no place in madāris** committed to prophetic ethics. The paper proposes a reform framework based on compassionate structure, emotional mentorship, and ethical accountability—values that are at the heart of the Seerah.

Keywords: *Madāris reform; Seerah; Islamic pedagogy; Prophetic education; tarbiyyah; ihsan; ethical discipline; corporal punishment; Islamic ethics; compassionate teaching*

Introduction

For centuries, Islamic madāris have served as the backbone of Muslim intellectual and spiritual life. They cultivated the ulama, imams, jurists, and reformers who shaped Islamic civilization. These institutions were grounded in the Islamic imperative to seek knowledge (*talab al-ilm*), a duty enshrined in Prophetic tradition:

“Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim.”¹

Yet today, a number of madāris—especially in South Asia, parts of Africa, and some Gulf states—have become **synonymous with authoritarian control**, rigid hierarchy, and **harsh disciplinary culture**.² Reports from rights-based organizations, independent researchers, and first-person narratives describe incidents of verbal abuse, psychological trauma, and physical punishment.³ These practices, often defended as “necessary” for educational control, are **neither rooted in the Qur'an nor the Seerah of the Prophet ﷺ**.

The Prophetic Educational Model: A Contrast

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was the **greatest educator** the Muslim world has ever known. Yet, nowhere in the corpus of authentic Prophetic traditions does he use physical violence or humiliation to teach. Instead, his pedagogy was marked by:

- **Empathy and emotional intelligence**, even with errant youth;
- **Correction through advice and parables**, not intimidation;
- **Affectionate mentorship**, especially toward children and beginners.

Anas ibn Malik, who served the Prophet ﷺ for ten years, testified:

“I served the Messenger of Allah for ten years, and not once did he say to me ‘Why did you do that?’ or ‘Why didn’t you do that?’”⁴

This is not an anecdote of leniency but of **deep moral education** through emotional safety. Similarly, when a Bedouin urinated in the mosque, and the companions rushed to reprimand him, the Prophet ﷺ said:

¹ Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash‘ath, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ed. al-Albānī, Hadith 3641.

² Ali Riaz, *Faithful Education: Madrassahs in South Asia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 97–101.

³ Human Rights Watch, “*What is a Madrasa?*”: *Abuse and Reform in Pakistani Islamic Schools*, (New York: HRW, 2004), 1–35; see also Saeed, A. (2007). *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge), 183–85.

⁴ Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Hadith 6038, Kitāb al-Adab.

“Do not interrupt him. Let him finish.” Afterward, he gently explained to the man that mosques are sacred places.⁵

Such examples demonstrate the Prophet’s method of **compassionate correction**, which treated mistakes as teachable moments, not moral failings worthy of punishment.

The Problem of “Strictness” as Cultural, Not Prophetic

The term “strictness” is often celebrated in some madāris contexts without a clear definition. Upon closer inspection, what is often referred to as “strictness” includes:

- Fear-based classroom environments;
- Immediate punishment for minor mistakes;
- Shouting, public shaming, or hitting with sticks;
- Emphasis on rote obedience rather than understanding.

These practices reflect a **cultural residue of colonial-era discipline models and patriarchal authority**, not prophetic tarbiyyah. Scholars like **Ibn Khaldun**, **Imam al-Ghazālī**, and **Ibn Sahnūn** explicitly warned against excessive or harsh treatment of students. Ibn Khaldun writes:

“Severity toward pupils is harmful to them, especially those of noble descent. It makes them shy, causes them to lose their self-confidence, and teaches them hypocrisy.”⁶

In contemporary Islamic ethics, these concerns are echoed by scholars like **Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas**, who argues that *adab* (etiquette and virtue) must guide the entire educational process, not authoritarian control.⁷

This article contends that any revival or reform of madāris must include:

1. **Complete rejection of physical punishment and psychological coercion**, both of which are antithetical to the Seerah;
2. **Restoration of the prophetic model of teaching**, based on love, mentorship, patience, and deep understanding;
3. **Integration of moral and spiritual goals** (*tarbiyyah*, *ihsan*) with intellectual ones (*‘ilm*), ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge shapes not only minds but hearts.

This is not a call for educational laxity. On the contrary, the prophetic model is a paradigm of **compassionate rigor**—where accountability, consistency, and purpose are achieved **without fear, pain, or humiliation**.

⁵ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Hadith 285, Kitāb al-Ṭahārah.

⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 357.

⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1979), 16–18.

The Case for Compassion in Islamic Educational Tradition

Classical Islamic Scholarship on Pedagogy and Discipline

The tradition of Islamic education has never endorsed harshness as a pedagogical ideal. Classical scholars repeatedly emphasized that **adab (etiquette)**, **tarbiyyah (moral cultivation)**, and **hikmah (wisdom)** form the foundation of effective teaching. Far from justifying physical punishment or emotional coercion, early Muslim educators advocated for moderation, mercy, and emotional development of the learner.

Imam al-Ghazālī: The Ethical Educator

In *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) outlines the responsibilities of both students and teachers. He insists that the purpose of education is not information transfer but the **transformation of the soul**. Teachers must act with care and humility, never using anger or pride to assert authority. He warns against humiliating students and emphasizes the **gentle correction of mistakes**.⁸

Al-Ghazālī describes teaching as a **form of moral guardianship**, where students are akin to patients and the teacher a healer, not a punisher. This analogy makes harshness in education not only counterproductive but ethically reprehensible.⁹

Ibn Sahnūn: Early Warnings Against Excessive Discipline

Ibn Sahnūn (d. 870), a Maliki jurist from North Africa, authored *Adab al-Mu'allimīn*, one of the earliest treatises on Islamic education. He clearly warns against the overuse of corporal punishment. Teachers, he says, may only discipline in cases of grave ethical failure—and even then, within strict limits.¹⁰ The idea that **beating could be educational** is rejected by Ibn Sahnūn, who equates excessiveness with oppression (*ẓulm*).

Ibn Khaldūn: Damage from Harshness

Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), a renowned historian and sociologist, offers one of the most explicit critiques of harsh teaching. In his *Muqaddimah*, he observes that students who are raised under constant threat become:

“...more inclined to lie, pretend, and become hypocritical... they lose their intellectual vitality and grow up fearful.”¹¹

⁸ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 89–95.

⁹ Ibid., 92–93.

¹⁰ Ibn Sahnūn, *Adab al-Mu'allimīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 1981), 21–25.

¹¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 355–357.

He concludes that **excessive discipline breaks a student's inner spirit** and hinders both creativity and sincerity in religious commitment.

Contemporary Islamic Critiques of Harsh Madāris Culture

While classical texts provide clear ethical guidance, many contemporary scholars have extended this tradition by critiquing how **modern madāris have diverged** from the Prophetic model. In particular, scholars have noted how **post-colonial cultural residues**, poor teacher training, and misplaced emphasis on “strictness” have led to morally and pedagogically damaging practices.¹²

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: Knowledge and Adab

Al-Attas, in *The Concept of Education in Islam*, re-centers the Islamic educational enterprise around the concept of *adab*. He defines education as the **instillation of right action and discipline within the soul**, not the enforcement of behavior through external force. He writes:

“The loss of adab leads to the corruption of knowledge, and in turn to the loss of justice.”¹³

His work rejects authoritarianism and urges madāris reform to root itself in **ethical formation, not external obedience**.

Muhammad Qasim Zaman: Disconnected Authority

In *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, Zaman critiques the modern madrasah as an institution whose **disciplinary culture often prioritizes control over understanding**.¹⁴ He warns that harsh discipline, justified as “tradition,” erodes student autonomy and diminishes the moral authority of the teacher.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi: Corporal Punishment is Un-Islamic

In his work *Fiqh al-Tarbiyyah*, Yusuf al-Qaradawi calls for a **moratorium on all physical punishment in Islamic education**. He argues that the **ethical spirit of the Qur'an and Sunnah opposes humiliation, beating, and fear-based correction**. According to him, educators must practice forbearance, positive reinforcement, and above all, love and empathy.¹⁵

¹² Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 115–18;

Human Rights Watch, “*What is a Madrasa?*”: *Abuse and Reform in Pakistani Islamic Schools* (New York: HRW, 2004), 15–19.

¹³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1979), 15–17.

¹⁴ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 82–85.

¹⁵ Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, *Fiqh al-Tarbiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2000), 110–118.

International Educational Norms and Human Rights Standards

Beyond Islamic scholarship, international human rights frameworks also oppose physical and psychological punishment in all schools—including religious ones. The **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** condemns all corporal punishment as a violation of children's dignity.¹⁶

Numerous Islamic education reformers (including those in Jordan, Indonesia, and Egypt) have adopted these standards without compromising Islamic principles.¹⁷

Thus, we find **converging voices from Islamic tradition and global pedagogical standards**: harshness is not only ineffective but unethical.

Both classical and contemporary Islamic scholars strongly oppose punitive educational models. The dominant theme across centuries is that Islamic education must:

- Develop the soul, not control the body;
- Inspire love of learning, not fear of error;
- Be led by teachers who **model adab**, not assert authority through violence.

The Seerah as a Model of Compassionate Teaching

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was not only the recipient of divine revelation but also its **first teacher and interpreter**. His mission included the **educational transformation of a society** emerging from tribal ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*) into a community rooted in knowledge, ethics, and justice. Central to that mission was his role as a **murabbī** — a moral cultivator — who taught with compassion, mercy, and wisdom. His Seerah presents a profoundly humane educational method that **categorically rejects fear-based or punitive discipline**.

The Prophet ﷺ as Murabbī: A Teacher Who Loved His Students

The Prophet ﷺ's treatment of youth and new Muslims reflects a deep understanding of **emotional development, cognitive maturity, and moral potential**. He never used humiliation, public scolding, or physical punishment. Instead, he corrected mistakes **gently**, modeled behaviors **consistently**, and offered **personal mentorship**.

¹⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 8: The Right of the Child to Protection from Corporal Punishment*, CRC/C/GC/8 (Geneva: UNCRC, 2007), 3–5.

¹⁷ Abdurrahman Wahid and Zainuddin Maliki, *Islamic Education Reform in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2010), 22–26.

One of the most powerful testimonies comes from Anas ibn Mālik, who served the Prophet ﷺ for a decade:

“I served the Prophet for ten years. Never once did he say to me, ‘Why did you do that?’ or ‘Why didn’t you do that?’”¹⁸

This hadith reveals a pedagogy centered on **tolerance and trust**, not punitive control. Even when Anas erred or forgot tasks, the Prophet ﷺ focused on **moral guidance rather than blame**. Such restraint shows an understanding of **developmentally appropriate teaching**, rare even in modern child psychology.

The Incident of the Bedouin: Mercy Over Retribution

A famous educational moment in the Prophet’s ﷺ life was when a Bedouin man urinated in the mosque. The companions immediately sought to discipline him. Yet, the Prophet ﷺ said:

“Let him finish. Then clean the area and explain to him.”¹⁹

After the act, the Prophet ﷺ gently told the man that the mosque was a sacred space. The man reportedly replied:

“O Allah! Have mercy on me and Muhammad, and no one else!”²⁰

This incident reveals several pedagogical principles:

- **Correction must not shame or traumatize.**
- **Education begins with context and compassion.**
- **The objective is transformation, not punishment.**

This type of prophetic discipline **honors human dignity**, even in transgression.

Encouragement and Emotional Intelligence

The Prophet ﷺ also corrected behaviors using encouragement. He said to Ibn ‘Abbās:

“O young man, I will teach you some words: Be mindful of Allah, and He will protect you...”²¹

This counsel is tender, not authoritarian. The Prophet ﷺ uses endearment (“*yā ghulām*”) to initiate a lesson in *taqwā* and moral consciousness. The phrasing reveals the importance of **emotional safety** in learning environments.

¹⁸ Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Hadith 6038, Kitāb al-Adab.

¹⁹ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Hadith 285, Kitāb al-Ṭahārah.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Abū ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī, Hadith 2516, Kitāb Ṣifat al-Qiyāmah.

Similarly, when Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal lengthened the prayer, causing fatigue among congregants, the Prophet ﷺ rebuked him, but **without anger or insult**, stating:

“Are you putting people on trial, O Mu‘ādh?”²²

The purpose was to remind Mu‘ādh of the social consequences of his action, not to shame or degrade him.

The Prophet’s ﷺ Absolute Prohibition of Physical Abuse

Importantly, the Prophet ﷺ never used **physical punishment** in teaching, nor did he condone it. This is verified by multiple reports, including one from ‘Ā’ishah:

“The Messenger of Allah never hit anything with his hand, not even a woman or a servant, unless he was fighting in the cause of Allah.”²³

This hadith demonstrates the **normative principle** that the Prophet ﷺ’s educational method **excluded physical coercion entirely**. The Qur'an describes the Prophet as:

“A mercy to the worlds”.²⁴

That mercy was embedded in his method of education. He did not demand blind obedience; he **cultivated inner conviction**.

Summary of Prophetic Pedagogical Principles

The Seerah demonstrates that Prophetic education was:

Principle	Description
Compassionate	Always prioritized <i>rahmah</i> (mercy) over retribution.
Relational	Built trust and love between teacher and learner.
Constructive	Addressed mistakes without shaming.
Transformative	Aimed at moral growth, not behavioral control.
Non-violent	Never involved in hitting or harsh physical discipline.

Thus, any modern model of Islamic education that claims to follow the Prophet ﷺ **must reject harshness, coercion, and corporal punishment**.

²² Al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, Hadith 6106, Kitāb al-‘Ilm.

²³ Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, Hadith 2328, Kitāb al-Faḍā’il.

²⁴ Qur’an 21:107

Harms of Harshness and Corporal Punishment in Madāris

Although justified by some as necessary for maintaining "discipline" or "tradition," **harsh disciplinary practices** in madāris—particularly corporal punishment and verbal humiliation—are not only un-Islamic, but they also produce profound harm.²⁵ This harm extends across three core domains: **moral integrity, psychological development, and intellectual vitality.**

Moral and Spiritual Harm

From an Islamic standpoint, any action that humiliates, breaks the dignity (*karāmah*) of a child, or violates their right to respectful treatment is ethically impermissible. The Qur'an commands believers to:

*“Speak to people with excellence”*²⁶

Teachers are not exempt from this command. When students are **shamed, mocked, or hit**, it instills not humility—but resentment, duplicity, and fear. Ibn Khaldūn warned:

“Children who grow up in fear will become deceitful and cowardly, afraid to speak truth or act with independence.”²⁷

This directly undermines the Islamic goals of education: cultivating God-consciousness (*taqwā*), truthfulness (*ṣidq*), and courage (*shajāʿah*).

Additionally, humiliation can lead students to **resent religious authority**, undermining the very reverence for sacred knowledge that madāris seek to instill.²⁸ A student who fears his teacher does not internalize *adab*—he mimics submission to avoid punishment.

Psychological Harm and Long-Term Trauma

Corporal punishment, especially when repeated or public, causes **psychological damage**, including:

- Anxiety and depression
- Aggression and antisocial behavior
- Low self-esteem and fear of authority
- Post-traumatic symptoms

²⁵ Save the Children Pakistan, *Corporal Punishment in Religious Schools: A Study of 50 Madaris in Punjab* (Lahore: Save the Children, 2005), 23–30;

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 8: The Right of the Child to Protection from Corporal Punishment* (CRC/C/GC/8, Geneva: United Nations, 2007), 4–6.

²⁶ Qur'an 2:83

²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 356–357.

²⁸ al-Nawawī, *al-Majmūʿ Sharḥ al-Muhadhdhab*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1997), 350.

Studies in Muslim-majority countries have documented high levels of psychological distress among students in madāris that practice corporal punishment.²⁹ In a survey by *Save the Children* (Pakistan, 2005), over **75% of students reported being hit**, and a significant number displayed symptoms of withdrawal, aggression, or mental health distress.³⁰

Even Islamic legal texts, such as those by **Ibn Sahnūn** and **al-Nawawī**, impose **strict limits** on any disciplinary physical contact and consider excessive force an act of *ẓulm* (oppression).³¹

Intellectual Harm and Decline in Learning Outcomes

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Knowledge is acquired by learning, and gentleness is in all things”.*³²

Fear inhibits curiosity and memory. Neuroscientific and pedagogical research has established that **stressful environments impair cognitive function**, especially in young learners.³³ When students associate Islamic studies with trauma, they disengage from learning and develop **negative associations with religion itself**.

In contrast, the Prophet ﷺ cultivated environments where questions were welcomed, mistakes corrected with kindness, and learners praised for effort. His method fostered **cognitive confidence** and **critical thinking**, both essential for producing genuine scholars (*‘ulamā’*) and moral leaders (*rabbānīyūn*).

Damage to the Moral Legitimacy of Madāris

Madāris have historically been seen as custodians of moral and religious guidance. However, the continued tolerance of abusive practices—however rare—**erodes public trust** in these institutions. Human rights organizations, news reports, and academic studies have increasingly portrayed some madāris as **backward, oppressive, or violent**.³⁴

While many of these portrayals are exaggerated or politicized, the failure to **root out real abuse** lends them credibility. Reforming disciplinary practices based on Prophetic compassion is essential for preserving both **religious authenticity and institutional credibility**.

²⁹ Asim, F. & Ali, T. (2010). "Effect of Corporal Punishment on Students' Learning and Behavior." *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* 1(1): 22–28.

³⁰ *Save the Children Pakistan, Corporal Punishment in Religious Schools: A Study of 50 Madaris in Punjab* (Lahore: Save the Children, 2005), 3–12.

³¹ Ibn Sahnūn, *Adab al-Mu‘allimīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 1981), 24–27.

³² Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, Hadith 24417.

³³ Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. (New York: Bantam), 25–30.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, “What is a Madrasa?”: Abuse and Reform in Pakistani Islamic Schools, (New York: HRW, 2004), 7–11.

Summary Table: Documented Harms of Harsh Discipline

Domain	Harm
Spiritual	Loss of <i>adab</i> , resentment toward Islamic knowledge
Moral	Teaches deceit, hypocrisy, submission over sincerity
Psychological	Fear, anxiety, low self-worth, trauma
Cognitive	Reduced memory, focus, motivation; stunted learning
Institutional	Erodes trust in madāris; damages public image

Framework for Reforming Madāris through Seerah-Based Pedagogy

While recognizing the historical contributions of madāris, meaningful reform requires a return to the **spirit and ethics of the Prophet ﷺ's educational model**. This model was neither authoritarian nor punitive. It emphasized *rahmah* (compassion), *ta'dīb* (moral refinement), *tarbiyyah* (holistic nurturing), and *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification). The following framework outlines practical reform strategies aligned with these Prophetic values.

Re-Educating the Educators: Teachers as Ethical Murabbīs

The teacher (*mu'allim*) in Islam is not merely a conveyor of knowledge but a **moral exemplar and guide** (*murabbī*). The Prophet ﷺ said:

“Verily, I was sent only to perfect good character.”³⁵

Thus, teachers must embody **the character and pedagogy of the Prophet ﷺ**:

- Speak gently, correct privately, and model patience.
- Avoid anger, sarcasm, and threats.
- Seek students' hearts, not just their performance.

Institutes must establish **certification and training standards** for teachers rooted in:

- **Prophetic methods of instruction** (ḥilm, sabr, shafaqah),
- **Child psychology**, and
- **Islamic ethics of interpersonal conduct**.

³⁵ Al-Muwatta' of Mālik ibn Anas, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), Hadith 1614.

Curricula such as *Fiqh al-Tarbiyyah* (Qaradawi), *Ihya’* (Ghazālī), and *Adab al-Mu‘allimīn* (Ibn Sahnūn) should be mandatory for all instructors.³⁶

Centering Students: From Fear to Flourishing

The Prophet ﷺ recognized the dignity of each student. He remembered names, affirmed efforts, and adapted lessons to different cognitive levels. Reforms should:

- Eliminate **all corporal punishment** by policy.
- Prohibit **public shaming**, insults, or humiliation.
- Promote **student feedback** mechanisms to report misconduct safely.

Institutions should implement **positive behavioral models**, such as:

- Praise before correction (as seen with Ibn ‘Abbās),
- Use of parables and questions instead of scolding,
- Mentorship circles (*ḥalaqāt*) that encourage emotional and spiritual growth.

These approaches build **trust**, not terror—and that trust is essential for knowledge to transform the heart.³⁷

Curriculum Reform: From Rote to Reflective Learning

Many madāris remain focused on rote memorization (*ḥifẓ*) without emphasis on comprehension, reflection, or real-world application. While memorization is a valued Islamic tradition, it should be paired with:

- **Moral themes from Seerah and Qur’ān**, integrated across subjects.
- Lessons in **critical thinking**, ethics, and emotional intelligence.
- Storytelling and Prophetic case studies that convey **values through lived examples**.

The Prophet ﷺ taught companions using analogies, questions, and situational lessons—a model ideal for modern pedagogical integration.³⁸

Building a Prophetic Institutional Culture

A school’s spiritual tone matters. Madāris must nurture an environment of **mutual respect, shared goals, and Prophetic manners**. This includes:

- Designating teachers as *murabbīs*, not just *mu‘allims*.

³⁶ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 89–95; Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, *Fiqh al-Tarbiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2000), 111–118; Ibn Sahnūn, *Adab al-Mu‘allimīn*, 21–27.

³⁷ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī*, Hadith 2516.

³⁸ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, Hadith 24417.

- Instituting **daily practices of dhikr, du‘ā’**, and ethical reflection.
- Replacing fear-driven discipline with **ethics-based behavior contracts**.
- Encouraging students’ **agency and self-discipline**, not enforced compliance.

This shift creates **thriving rather than surviving students**, committed to their own moral and academic growth.

Accountability and Community Engagement

True reform is sustained by accountability. Steps include:

- Clear **policies banning abuse**, with public charters of rights and responsibilities.
- Regular **parental feedback mechanisms** and **student well-being surveys**.
- Partnerships with trained counselors, child protection officers, and academic evaluators.
- Community workshops that clarify **the Seerah-based model of education** so that cultural notions of “strictness” are replaced with **spiritual discipline**.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock.”³⁹

This hadith affirms that **educational institutions must treat their moral responsibility as a sacred trust**, not a personal authority to enforce unchecked discipline.

Summary Framework Table

Domain	Reform Action
Teacher Conduct	Mandatory ethical training; ban on harsh speech; emulate the Prophet’s gentleness
Student Treatment	Eliminate hitting/shaming; promote trust-based relationships.
Curriculum	Seerah themes, values integration, ethical reasoning, and reflection
School Culture	Prophetic language, mentorship programs, and no fear-based motivation
Accountability	Complaint systems, parent-student rights charter, and transparent policies

³⁹ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Hadith 1829, Kitāb al-Imārah.

Conclusion:

This study has examined the deeply entrenched but fundamentally flawed association between Islamic educational rigor and harsh disciplinary practices in many contemporary madāris. It has been shown that the **Prophetic model of education**, as preserved in the Seerah and supported by classical and modern Islamic pedagogical scholarship, is not one of coercion, corporal punishment, or authoritarian control. Rather, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ modeled a paradigm of teaching rooted in **mercy (rahmah), wisdom (hikmah), moral nurturing (tarbiyyah), and spiritual refinement (ihسان)**.

From **Anas ibn Mālik's decade-long experience** of loving service, to the **compassionate correction of a Bedouin in the mosque**, and the **emotional intelligence displayed in mentoring young companions**, the Prophet's ﷺ approach was consistent: he taught through love, modeled ethical excellence, and cultivated hearts before commanding actions.

This paper has also reviewed the harmful effects of harshness—spiritually, psychologically, cognitively, and institutionally—and demonstrated that such approaches contradict both **Islamic ethics** and the **objectives (maqāṣid)** of education. The works of **al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sahnūn, Ibn Khaldūn, al-Attas, Qaradawi**, and others reinforce this ethical framework, emphasizing that Islamic education must aim not only at intellectual advancement but moral transformation.

Therefore, the call to reform madāris is not a break with tradition, but a **return to the true Sunnah** of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Reforming teacher ethics, classroom practices, curricula, and institutional policies must be guided by **compassionate rigor**, not coercive control. This paper offers a Seerah-based framework that reclaims the integrity, credibility, and transformative power of Islamic education. In doing so, it invites madāris to fulfill their rightful mission: not just to transmit knowledge, but to shape **minds, hearts, and souls** in the light of Prophetic mercy.

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