

AL-ATTAS' PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education in contemporary Islam has suffered degradation, not only on curriculum, teaching content, and teacher, but especially on philosophy as basis of its. This degradation mainly affected by colonialism. After reached independency, Muslim countries adopting Western education system. Western/modern Education has their own philosophy based on secular worldview and values. Western emphasize education to educate student to get competencies on academic and skill. Student is prepared to ready working, get income and contribute to develop country in achieving material prosperity. Those are not in line with Islamic principles of education. Islamic education is developed based on Tawhidic worldview and values. Its aims to educate student in all aspects integrally, including moral and spiritual. To solve the problem, al-Attas has proposed philosophy of Islamic education based on Ta'dib concept, not Tarbiyah. According al-Attas, Tarbiyah term not sufficient to represent education concept in Islam. It has similarity with term of Western education that derived from Latin term 'educere' which has physical and material things connotation. Ta'dib has not only physical and material things but moral and spiritual connotation all together. Islamic education will produce a good man. It is a man of adab, or the man who has incalculated by ta'dib.

KEYWORDS

Islamic education; tarbiyah; ta'dib; philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Islamic civilization suffered by under-development of their educational system, both on curriculum, quality of teacher, learning material, and on philosophy of education as basis of all it. The lack of development in education has caused by

imperialism where the most of Muslim countries got their independency at twentieth century. To pursue progress in all aspects of Muslim life, Muslim countries then follow Western countries. Then the problem happen bigger because Western countries have their own philosophy those different significantly to Islamic philosophy, including worldview, values and way of life. Muslim education institution and its syllabus, teacher and student have been infused by secular worldview and values. Furthermore these all situation affect all aspects of Muslim life nowadays and it formulate crisis for Muslim world.

It is not wrong when al-Attas said that the problem of contemporary Islamic education is paramount. Education in Muslim world does not longer serve the need of Muslim lifestyle. For Muslim, the ideal aims of education is based on spiritual ends of man, while Western education model promote socio-economic ends. In Western education model, student is prepared to ready working for get income. Economy and material need and ambition nurture by education process, while spiritual and moral aspects of life are forgotten. Muslim community must recover from this wrong way. We have to emphasize on proper conception about knowledge and education based on our own philosophy.¹

The problem of contemporary Islamic education is serious because it make young generation of Muslim community lost their true foundation of life. Consequently, they will suffer in their life, lost of happiness and meaningful life because of secular and materialistic way of life those infused by their education. It is a tragedy for the *ummah*. All of this were not happen in traditional Islamic education. Traditional Islamic education has provided their student with true and proper knowledge and education. In traditional Islamic education system the personal success and happiness of the man in this world and particularly in the Hereafter as its most important aim and purpose was putted in higher priority. This person-centred educational philosophy gradually shifted to concentrate on the needs and interests of society when the Muslim world came under the influence of Western ideas and system.²

Quoted Ronald Dore, as he wrote on his book “*The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification and Development*”, Wan MohdNor stated that education now has become a utility for personal or national socio-economic mobility. “The predominance of these positions has created a psychosocial pathology particularly among students and parents, popularly known as the ‘diploma disease’: the hasty chase to acquire diplomas not because of their intrinsic educational significance but because of their economic and social value.”³This is not only happen in Western countries but also in Muslim communities and countries. All of this must changed, and it required new philosophical basis of Islamic education. From this point of

¹ , Wan MohdNor Wan Daud, (1998), *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 71.

²Ibid., 123.

³ Ibid. 123-124.

urgency, we find out the significance study on al-Attas' philosophy of Islamic education, those have developed based on concept of *ta'dib*.

THE ISLAMIC EDUCATION PRINCIPLES

Tarbiyah and Ta'dib

Tarbiyah is the very common and popular term of Islamic education in Muslim world nowadays. Most of Islamic higher learning institution use term *Tarbiyah* for Faculty of education, for example all Indonesian State Islamic universities (Universitas Islam Negeri/UIN), State Institute for Islamic Studies (Institut Agama Islam Negeri/IAIN), and State Islamic College (Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Agama Islam Negeri/STAIN) use this term. But according al-Attas, term *Tarbiyah* is not quite precise connoting education in Islamic sense. He requests Muslim scholar to examine carefully the term we use in education. We need to understand clearly the concept of *Tarbiyah* and furthermore to find out another term which more suite for education in Islam. al-Attas prefer to use term *Ta'dib*.⁴

According al-Attas, *Tarbiyah*, in its present connotation is a recent term, that introduced by Muslim scholars who aligned themselves with Modernist thought. Modern English term of education and educate come from the Latin words 'educare' and 'educatio'. Those terms are conceptually connected with Latin term educere, or English 'educate', its means to bring out, to develop from latent or potential to come into existence. In this sense, the 'bringing out', or 'developing' process refers to physical and material things. The conception of education derived from the Latin concepts cover the animal species, and are not limited to human being. al-Attas added that, even if in that concept infuse with intellectual and moral training, it is not inherent within itself but something added through philosophical speculation. Actually, the intellectual and moral training in their conception referred to physical and material ends of secular man, his society and state. As a matter of fact, in the term *tarbiyah* as concept of education in Islam was in reality reflecting the Western concept of education. Hence, the term *tarbiyah* as the basic meaning covered by it is similar that founds in the Latin counterparts. If the promoter of *tarbiyah* insist that the term is evolved from the Holy Qur'an, their claim are conjecture only, it is not accord with the semantic structure of the Qur'anic conceptual system. Semantically, the term *tarbiyah*, according al-Attas, is neither appropriate nor adequate in conveying the conception of education in the Islamic sense.⁵

The Definition and Aim of Islamic Education

al-Attas defines Islamic education as:

“Recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in order of creation, such that it leads to the

⁴ Al-Attas, (1999), *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 12.

⁵ *ibid*, 27-28.

recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence.”⁶

The concept of proper place consist of two domains of application, namely the ontological domain which include man and empirical reality, and the second one is theological domain, including the religious and ethical aspects of human life. According him, proper place is the real and true place as denoted by *haqq*, that is a suitability to the requirements of wisdom and justice. Furthermore, wisdom (*hikmah*) mean the knowledge given by God, by which the beneficiaries is able to conduct correct judgements as to proper place of things. In other hand, justice means a harmonious condition of things being in their right and proper place.⁷

Regarding this, *adab* is the discipline of body, mind and soul to assure the recognition and acknowledgement of one’s proper place in relation to one’s physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials. Thus *adab* is the method of knowing by which someone actualize the condition of being in the proper place. Furthermore, *adab* also a reflection of wisdom. It is the spectacle of justice which wear by educated man.⁸

Adab occupy the centrum concept of education in Islam. It is also identifies by al-Attas as knowledge of the purpose of seeking knowledge. According him, the purpose of seeking knowledge in Islam is ‘to inculcate goodness in man as man produce a good man and individual self.’ While the aims of education in Islamic perspective is ‘to produce a good man, and not-as in the case of Western civilization-to produce a good citizen.’ Furthermore he adding that the good man is the man of *adab*. It is the man who has incalculated by *ta’dib*.⁹

Three Fundamental Elements of Islamic Education

al-Attas wrote that education is a process of instilling something into human beings. In this sense, ‘a process of instilling’ refers to the method and the system by which what is called ‘education’ is gradually imparted. ‘Something’ refers to the content of what is instilled, while ‘human beings’ refers to the recipient of both the process and the content. In brief, there are three fundamental elements that constitute education, namely: the process, content, and recipient.¹⁰

The Process of Islamic Education

The process of Islamic education is the method on how *Ta’dibis* implemented. al-Attas told that Islamic education is the instilling and inculcation of *adab* in man, it is *ta’dib*. *Adab* has the key role in Muslim life, it must be applied by every Muslim

⁶Ibid., 21.

⁷Ibid., 19-20.

⁸Ibid., 22.

⁹Ibid., 22.

¹⁰Ibid.,13.

if he/she is want to get well and successful life in this world and in Hereafter. ¹¹ By education as *adab*, al-Attas explained it: “as encompassing the spiritual and material life of a man that instils the quality of goodness that is sought after. ”Its definition is in line with what the Prophet, Peace be upon him, told: ‘My Lord, educated (*addaba*) me and made my education (*ta’dib*) most excellent. ’¹² Hence, the definition of education, its aims and purpose in Islamic perspective have already contained in the concept of *adab*. ¹³

According to al-Attas, the process of education in Islam covers every aspects of life, i. e. the spiritual, intellectual, religious, cultural, individual and social dimensions. It means that character of Islamic education is universal and guide man to his salvation. Based on this rational, the organization, inculcation and dissemination of knowledge in Islam must be develop as a system of order and discipline connecting to the *kulliyah*, a concept conveying the idea of the universal. ¹⁴ It means that in Islamic education, the core of knowledge must be composed of ingredients relate to the nature of 1) religion (*din*), 2) man (*insan*), 3) knowledge (*ilm* and *ma’rifah*), 4) wisdom (*hikmah*), 5) justice (*’adl*), 6) right action (*’amal as adab*), and 7) the university (*kulliyah-jami’ah*). These key concepts are the essential elements of and must be articulate in system of education from the lower to the higher level. ¹⁵

Furthermore, in terms of practical application, al-Attas elaborates those concepts. According him, the first (religion/*din*) refers to the purpose of seeking knowledge and involvement in the process of education; the second (man/*insan*) to the scope; the third (knowledge/*’ilm* and *ma’rifah*) to the content; the fourth (wisdom/*hikmah*) to the criteria in relation to the second (man/*insan*) and third (knowledge/*’ilm* and *hikmah*); the fifth (justice/*’adl*) to the deployment in relation to the fourth (wisdom/*hikmah*); the sixth (right action/*amal as adab*) to the method in relation to the first down to the fifth (religion, man, knowledge, wisdom, and justice); and the seventh (the university/*kulliyah-jami’ah*) to the form of implementation in relation to all that precedes it. Beside those key concepts or elements, Islamic education must be referred to concepts of *Tawhid*, Quran, *Shari’ah*, and *Sunnah*. Its curricula have include knowledge of the Principles and Practice of Islam, the religious sciences (*’ulum al-shar’iyyah*), legitimate elements of *tasawwuf* and Islamic philosophy, including valid cosmological doctrines pertaining to the hierarchy of being, knowledge of Islamic ethics and moral principles and *adab*, knowledge of the Arabic language and the Islamic world-view as a whole. ¹⁶

Consistently to his concept of *ta’dib* as system of Islamic education, al-Attas argue that the requirement for an individual to entrance and graduate from university

¹¹al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib, (1979), “Preliminary Thoughts on the Nature of Knowledge and the Definition and Aims of Education”, in *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*, Jeddah and Bucks: King Abdulaziz University and Hodder and Stoughton, 37.

¹²Ibid.,1.

¹³Ibid.,37.

¹⁴ Ibid, 37-38.

¹⁵ Ibid, 43.

¹⁶ Ibid, 43-44.

should not only on basis of good result in formal scientific subjects, but also on moral criteria. In Islam, bad character those considered as the most destructive to self, society, and the state consist of lying, breaking a promise and betraying a trust. Anyone who has acute destructive moral values must be denied to enter university, and in case he/she is as student, he/she must be disqualified and not allowed to graduate as a scholar. Those moral criteria which referred to *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurayrah, concerning the mark of hypocrite, according al-Attas, must seriously systematized into an educational device to applied as a moral checklist on who can pass through the educational process. It is important to assists in minimizing the emergence of perpetration in Muslim society, state, and leadership of betrayal of trust leading to injustice and ignorance.¹⁷

The underlining of *adab* as Islamic education by al-Attas is in line with classic Islamic scholars, especially al-Ghazali. In *Rawdat al-Talibin fi Majmu'at Rasa'il*, Imam al-Ghazali stated that *adab* is physical and spiritual education (*ta'dib al-zahirwa al-batin*). It is covers four aspects of a man, namely his words, deed, faith, and motivation.¹⁸

The Recipient of Islamic Education

The recipient of Islamic education is man, and that is the very important element of education. The generally well known definition of man is a 'rational animal'. al-Attas said that, when we define man as a rational animal, what we mean by 'rational' is the capacity for understanding speech, the faculty who responsible for the formulation of meaning (this process involve judgement, discrimination, distinction and clarification). It is also dealing with the articulation of words or expressions in meaningful pattern. al-Attas stressing to this function because meaning took importance place in Islamic education philosophy. An educated man in al-Attas view is the man who recognize of the place of anything in its system. It means, by rational capacity, man is the creature who know the meaning of the meaning in its own context.¹⁹

Furthermore, the seat of knowledge in man, something important to pay attention in educational system and process, is a spiritual substance. Qur'an sometimes referred it as heart (*al-qalb*), soul or self (*al-nafs*), spirit (*al-ruh*) and intellect (*al-'aql*). The spirituality element of man is very essential, it is imperative that man must life in spiritual way because the duty of man is to obedience to God.²⁰

Interestingly, in line with Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148), al-Attas stated that 'each man is like a kingdom in miniature; a microcosmic representation (*'alamsaghir*) of the

¹⁷ Ibid, 46.

¹⁸ Asmaa Mohd Arshad, (2012), "Konsep Ta'dib: Teras Falsafah Pendidikan Islam. In *Adab dan Peradaban: Karya Pengitirafan untuk Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*. Selangor: MPH Group Publishing, 252.

¹⁹ al-Attas, (1999), 14-15.

²⁰ al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib, (1990), *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul: A Brief Outline and Framework for an Islamic Psychology and Epistemology*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2.

macrocosmos (*al-'alam al-kabir*). He is a dweller in his self's city (*Madinah*) wherein is enacted his din. ' Because of this view, education according al-Attas must place man as centre of it. This is in line with the purpose of seeking knowledge in Islam, i. e. 'to become a good man', and not 'a good citizen of a secular state', as the aim of modern education. This why in the system of education in Islam must reflect man and not the state. Furthermore, since the highest and most perfect implementation of the educational system is the university; and the highest and most perfect systematization of knowledge is the universal, hence the reflection of man in this conception have to reflect the universal man or the perfect man (*al-insan al-kamil*).²¹

The Content of Islamic Education

Another important element that inherent in education is 'content'. It is 'something' offered by education. This key term refer to knowledge, but al-Attas reminded, we have to careful about what we mean by it. He said that the teaching and learning of skills alone, does not necessarily constitute education. Furthermore, the teaching and learning of the human, natural and applied sciences alone does not constitute education also. He underline that there is 'something' in knowledge which if it is not inculcated then it will not make its teaching and learning and assimilation as an education. Indeed the 'something' that we need to be including in this is *adab* i. e. knowledge of the purpose of seeking it.²²

We need to pay attention to the fact that man is both soul and body, physical being and spirit. For every one, his soul ought to govern his body as God governs the universe. He must be integrated as a unity. He should guide and maintain his life in this world by means of his interconnected spiritual and physical faculties and senses. Based on this reality, that man has a dual nature, it must be also reflect on their knowledge. Actually, knowledge also consist of two kinds, i. e. first, God-given; second, acquired. Follow al-Ghazali, al-Attas adding that the first kind of knowledge is absolutely essential for man's guidance and salvation. They are the religious sciences. This kind of knowledge is necessary and obligatory to all Muslims (*fardu 'ayn*). In the other hand, the acquisition of the second kind of knowledge, comprise of the rational, intellectual and philosophical sciences, is obligatory to some Muslims only (*fardukifayah*).²³

Considering the urgency, the *fardu 'ayn* knowledge is to be taught at educational institution not only at the primary level, but at the secondary, pre-university and university levels also. The scope and content of knowledge designed in graduations each as benefitting each level. but, according al-Attas, the scope and content at the university level must first be formulated before they can be projected in successively lesser gradations to the lower levels. He gave and underlined the most importance position of university in education. The successful of education overall determined by on how university success in their mission and it will affect the educational

²¹ Ibid, 38.

²² Ibid, 15-16.

²³ Ibid., 39.

institution in the lower level-primary to secondary and per-university-. He wrote that because the university level represents the highest and most complete formulation and systematization then only when that is achieved it can become the model for the rest. ²⁴

The division of the two kinds of knowledge, that is the religious knowledge in the category of *fardu 'ayn* and the rational, intellectual and philosophical knowledge in *fardukifayah* category is describe by al-Attas follow:

I. The Religious Sciences

1. The Holy Qur'an: its recitation, and interpretation (*tafsir* and *ta'wil*);
2. The *Sunnah*, the life of the Holy Prophet; the history and the message of the Prophets before him; the *hadith* and its authoritative transmission;
3. The *Shari'ah*: jurisprudence and law; the principles and practice of Islam (*islam*; *iman*; *ihsan*);
4. Theology: God, His Essence, Attributes, Names and Acts (*al-tawhid*);
5. Islamic metaphysics (*al-tasawwuf*); psychology, cosmology and ontology; legitimate elements of Islamic philosophy including valid cosmological doctrines pertaining to the hierarchy of being;
6. Linguistic sciences: Arabic, its grammar, lexicography and literature.

II. The Rational, Intellectual and Philosophical Sciences

1. The Human Sciences;
2. The Natural Sciences;
3. The Applied Sciences;
4. Technological Sciences. ²⁵

In Islam, all kinds of knowledge should guide man to *Tawhidic* belief and to readiness to follow the *shari'ah* in accordance to devotion to God. ²⁶

In interlinked scheme we can summarize the state of man, knowledge, and the university in corresponding relationships that establish in al-Attas's education framework as follow:

I. Man

1. His soul and inner being (*ruh*: *nafs*: *qalb*: *'aql*);
2. His body and physical faculties and senses.

II. Knowledge

1. The God-given knowledge;

²⁴Ibid., 41.

²⁵ Ibid, 41-42.

²⁶ Al-Attas, (2001), *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 57-58.

2. The Acquired knowledge.
- III. The University
1. The religious sciences (*fardu 'ain*);
 2. The rational, intellectual and philosophical sciences (*fardukifayah*).²⁷

ANALYSIS

Based on al-Attas' thought, there are some elements in Philosophy of Islamic education those need to underline. *First*, Islamic education must be comprehensive and include to all aspects of human faculties, not only focus on faculty of rational. This is very important point those must pay attention by authorities and educators in Muslim countries. Recent development in psychology support this idea, that actually, man has several kinds of intelligences, such as emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, beside intellectual/rational intelligence. Hence education must be related to various kinds of human intelligence.

Second, Islamic education based on concept *ta'dib*. Islamic education must be an integrated educational system those educate knowledge, morality, spirituality, both theoretically and practically.

Third, Islamic education must use not only achievement in formal scientific subject standard, but also moral standard as criteria of entering and graduating to and from university. It because university will produce medium and high class people in society. Some of them will be as leader, politician, and government apparatus. If university will graduate people with bad moral standard it will affect the society. From this kind of graduate people, if they involve in government, they will create corrupt government.

Fourth, The production of good man, through university those implement philosophy of Islamic education, is pre-requisite to develop good society, government and leadership in Muslim societies and countries. Thus, philosophy of Islamic education, as proposed by al-Attas very importance to implementing in Muslim *ummah*.

Fifth, Islamic education aims to produce good man for his good life in this world and hereafter. We need to stress this point, because almost all universities in the world nowadays aims to produce professional to achieve good life in this world. They do not care with life in hereafter. Universities those apply philosophy of Islamic education must take attention to the happiness of man in this world and hereafter. Education for Muslim have to be cover comprehensive and integral aspects of life.

Sixth, Islamic education must provide knowledge in *farduayn* and *fardukifayah* criteria. Whatever the field of specialization is taken by student, for example in political science, computer science, civil engineering, all of them must take course on *farduayn* criteria, beside their specialization courses.

²⁷ Al-Attas, (1999) 39-40.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, al-Attas has offer great idea about philosophy of Islamic education. His philosophy of Islamic education has developed based on real problem face by Muslim *ummah* in modern era. Islamic education system for long time in modern era has lost their own philosophy and practice based on Islamic teaching because the lack of development in Muslim society and countries. The main reason for this is imperialism by Western countries to Muslim countries. Western countries has introduces and promote their philosophy and model of education in Muslim world. Most of Muslim leader and scholar has influenced by that and became supporter of it. al-Attas has analyze accurately this problem and offer his concepts to overcome the situation.

al-Attas' philosophy of Islamic education based on two things, first the contemporary problem and challenge faced by Muslim *ummah*, and second Islamic worldview and values. He preserve great legacy of Islam and then develop it further according the contemporary reality of Muslim *ummah*. *Ta'dib (and adab)* is the main key term in his philosophy of Islamic education. His philosophy is excellent in concept and applicable for practice.

We need to study al-Attas, idea and develop it furthermore, especially on how it could be apply in our educational system. *Adab* and *ta'dib* offer interesting educational concept because it will educate people in all their human faculties, not only on rational and material aspects, but also include moral, and spiritual, with comprehensive and integrative approach, under *Tawhidic* worldview and paradigm.

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