

## The Relevance of Contemporary Islamic Education in the Thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas

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### ABSTRACT

The findings of this study indicate that the crisis of contemporary Islamic education is fundamentally rooted in the loss of adab, which results in confusion of knowledge and value disorientation. According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the erosion of adab undermines the proper recognition and placement of knowledge within its hierarchical order, thereby weakening the ethical and spiritual foundations of education. The concept of *ta'dib* proposed by Al-Attas proves to be highly relevant as an educational paradigm that holistically integrates intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions. It emphasizes not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the cultivation of moral consciousness and the embodiment of ethical conduct, ensuring the harmonious integration of faith, reason, and action. Moreover, the idea of the Islamization of knowledge serves as a crucial epistemological foundation in responding to secularization and the dominance of the Western worldview within modern educational systems. By affirming that knowledge is shaped by particular metaphysical and cultural assumptions, Al-Attas calls for a critical reconstruction of educational frameworks grounded in the Islamic worldview, thereby safeguarding education from subtle forms of secularization and value fragmentation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of globalization, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and digital transformation has significantly reshaped educational systems across the globe. Education is no longer understood merely as a process of knowledge transmission; rather, it has evolved into a comprehensive endeavor aimed at shaping character, identity, and the value orientation of learners (Santoso et al., 2019). Within this context, Islamic education faces increasingly complex challenges, particularly in relation to the penetration of secular values, moral relativism, and pragmatism that tend to marginalize the spiritual orientation of education.

This reality gives rise to a fundamental issue, namely the persistent dichotomy between religious sciences and secular sciences within the practice of Islamic education. Such separation not

only results in curricular fragmentation but also fosters a dualistic mindset among students. Consequently, knowledge is often understood in a partial and compartmentalized manner, detached from the dimension of tawhid, which should constitute the foundational principle of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Within the contemporary discourse of Islamic educational thought, the ideas of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas are highly relevant in addressing these challenges.

Al-Attas situates the problem of education within a profound philosophical framework rather than reducing it to purely technical or methodological concerns. He argues that the crisis afflicting the Muslim community fundamentally stems from an error in understanding and properly situating knowledge (Arifin et al., 2022). Al-Attas firmly asserts that the primary crisis of the Muslim ummah is the "loss of adab." He states that "the loss of adab has led to the rise of confusion in knowledge, which in turn has brought about injustice and the rise of unqualified leaders" (Al-Attas, 1978, p. 99).

This statement underscores that confusion of knowledge constitutes the root cause of social injustice and incompetent leadership. Thus, the problem of education is not merely a matter of declining academic standards but also involves a profound moral and epistemological crisis. Furthermore, Al-Attas rejects an educational paradigm oriented solely toward producing skilled laborers or "good citizens" in a secular sense. He emphasizes that "the aim of education in Islam is not to produce a good citizen, but rather a good man" (Al-Attas, 1979, p. 32). This conception reflects the transcendental orientation of Islamic education, which seeks to cultivate individuals who recognize God, understand their true nature, and are capable of placing all things in their proper order according to the hierarchy of truth.

Within this framework, Al-Attas introduces the concept of ta'dib as the core of Islamic education. Ta'dib transcends the notions of instruction (ta'lim) and nurturing (tarbiyah); it encompasses a holistic process of instilling adab across intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions. Through ta'dib, learners are guided to comprehend the proper hierarchy of knowledge and reality, thereby achieving an integrated synthesis of knowledge, faith, and action. In addition, Al-Attas advances the concept of the Islamization of knowledge as a response to the dominance of secular Western epistemology.

He asserts that "we must first isolate the elements and key concepts that form the culture and civilization of the West from every branch of knowledge" (Al-Attas, 1978, p. 43). This statement highlights that knowledge is never value-neutral but is shaped by a particular worldview. Consequently, a critical process of filtering and integration is required to ensure that knowledge aligns with the Islamic worldview (Khoirudin et al., 2020). In the contemporary digital era characterized by the unrestrained flow of global information and the proliferation of diverse value systems Al-Attas's thought becomes increasingly pertinent.

Contemporary Islamic education requires a solid philosophical foundation to avoid falling into pragmatism and subtle forms of secularization. Therefore, examining the relevance of contemporary Islamic education in the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is essential for strengthening the conceptual foundation of Islamic educational development, particularly in fostering morally grounded and intellectually integrated individuals amidst the dynamics of modernity.

## 2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research design, as the focus of the inquiry lies in a conceptual analysis of the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas on contemporary Islamic education. This approach is selected to explore, understand, and interpret Al-Attas's philosophical ideas in depth, particularly his concepts of ta'dib, the loss of adab, and the Islamization of knowledge in relation to the challenges of education in the modern era. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary materials. Primary data are derived from Al-

Attas's major works, such as *Islam and Secularism* (1978) and *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education\** (1979), as well as other writings that directly articulate his perspectives on education and Islamic epistemology.

Secondary data are obtained from scholarly journals, books, dissertations, and academic articles that discuss Al-Attas's thought and contemporary issues in Islamic education relevant to the focus of this research (Hidayah, 2020). Data collection is conducted through documentation study, involving the identification, critical reading, classification, and systematic note-taking of key ideas related to the research theme. This process is carried out rigorously to ensure that the data collected maintain direct relevance to the research questions and objectives. The data analysis technique employs content analysis with a descriptive-analytical approach. The analysis proceeds through three stages:

- 1) Data reduction, by selecting and focusing on the principal concepts within Al-Attas's thought;
- 2) Data presentation, by organizing the ideas thematically within the framework of contemporary Islamic education; and
- 3) Conclusion drawing, by interpreting the relevance of these ideas to the dynamics of education in the global and digital age.

To ensure validity and credibility, this study applies source triangulation by comparing and reexamining Al-Attas's ideas through various reputable academic references. In addition, a hermeneutical reading of the primary texts is undertaken to understand the historical and philosophical contexts underlying Al-Attas's intellectual framework. Through this methodological design, the study aims to produce a comprehensive, systematic, and scholarly analysis of the relevance of contemporary Islamic education in the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, while contributing conceptually to the development of Islamic educational theory in the modern era.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. The Crisis of Islamic Education Rooted in the Loss of Adab

The findings of this study indicate that, according to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the fundamental problem of Islamic education does not lie merely in curricular structure or pedagogical methods, but rather in the loss of adab. This crisis gives rise to a confusion of knowledge, resulting in errors in understanding and properly situating knowledge within its correct hierarchy. Such confusion ultimately leads to intellectual and social injustice.

This conceptual framework remains highly relevant to contemporary educational realities, particularly in light of moral degradation and value disorientation that characterize many modern educational systems (Arifianto, 2021). When knowledge is detached from ethical and spiritual foundations, education risks producing individuals who are technically competent yet lack moral integrity and a coherent worldview. In this sense, Al-Attas's diagnosis of the loss of adab provides a profound philosophical explanation for the deeper crisis underlying modern Islamic education.

#### 3.2. The Objective of Islamic Education Oriented Toward the Formation of a Civilized (Adab-Oriented) Human Being

In the perspective of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the ultimate aim of Islamic education is the formation of a good man (*insan adabi*), rather than merely producing skilled professionals or productive citizens (Kusmanto, 2021). Education, therefore, is not confined to functional or utilitarian objectives, but is directed toward cultivating a human being who recognizes God, understands the proper order of reality, and is capable of placing things in their rightful positions.

### 3.3. The Relevance of the Islamic Worldview in the Development of Contemporary Curriculum

The study finds that the Islamic worldview (*ru'yat al-Islam li al-wujud*) constitutes the foundational framework for formulating a holistic educational system. In the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, education must not be detached from the Islamic vision of reality, which places *tawhid* as the central principle integrating all branches of knowledge. The unity of God serves not merely as a theological doctrine, but as an epistemological and metaphysical foundation that determines the structure, purpose, and hierarchy of knowledge. This perspective carries direct implications for contemporary curriculum development.

It requires that curricular design reflect the integration of revealed and acquired sciences within a coherent value framework. Likewise, pedagogical methods must cultivate intellectual discipline alongside spiritual and ethical consciousness (Fanani et al., 2021). Furthermore, the academic culture of educational institutions should embody the principles of *adab*, ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge remains aligned with moral responsibility and transcendental awareness. In this way, the Islamic worldview provides a comprehensive paradigm for shaping contemporary education that is both intellectually rigorous and spiritually grounded.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the crisis of Islamic education identified by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is fundamentally rooted in the loss of *adab*. From the perspective of normative educational theory, this concept aligns with the view that education is not merely a cognitive process but also a moral and character forming endeavor (Ainissyifa & Nasrulloh, 2025). When related to character education theory, as articulated by Thomas Lickona, education must encompass the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The concept of *adab* in Al-Attas's thought bears substantial similarity, as it emphasizes the internalization of values, moral consciousness, and the embodiment of ethics in concrete action.

Thus, the notion of the loss of *adab* may be understood as a systemic failure to integrate knowledge and morality within the educational framework. Furthermore, the objective of Islamic education oriented toward the formation of the good man (*insan beradab*) may be analyzed through the lens of humanistic educational theory. Figures such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers emphasize self-actualization as the ultimate aim of education. However, unlike secular humanism, which centers primarily on individual potential, Al-Attas situates human actualization within the framework of *tawhid* and the recognition of God.

The formation of the civilized person, therefore, is not merely psychological but also metaphysical and theological (Thohir et al., 2021). This distinction marks a fundamental difference between the paradigm of Islamic education and that of modern Western educational philosophy. The concept of *ta'dib* as the core of Islamic education may also be connected to the theory of the integration of knowledge. In contemporary Islamic educational discourse, this idea intersects with the thought of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi on the Islamization of knowledge (Rahmaniah et al., 2025). Both emphasize the necessity of integrating revelation and reason within the structure of knowledge. Nevertheless, Al-Attas places stronger emphasis on *adab* as an epistemological foundation namely, the capacity to situate knowledge according to its proper hierarchy of truth.

In this sense, *ta'dib* transcends curricular integration and extends to the integration of intellectual and spiritual consciousness within the learner. From the perspective of philosophy of science, Al-Attas's proposal of the Islamization of knowledge may be examined through the theory of the social construction of knowledge (Bachtiar et al., 2024). Thinkers such as Thomas Kuhn argue that scientific development is shaped by paradigms that structure how scholars perceive reality. In a similar vein, Al-Attas maintains that knowledge is not value free but is shaped by a particular

worldview. Consequently, the dominance of secular Western epistemology in modern education necessitates a paradigmatic reconstruction grounded in the Islamic worldview, ensuring that knowledge remains connected to transcendental dimensions.

The relevance of the Islamic worldview in contemporary curriculum development may further be understood through value-based curriculum theory, which asserts that curricula are never neutral but always reflect particular values and ideological commitments. Within this context, Al-Attas's thought offers a curricular foundation centered on tawhid as an integrative principle. This implies that instructional design, learning materials, and assessment strategies must reflect the integration of cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions (Arifin et al., 2025). Moreover, in the context of the digital era, Al-Attas's ideas resonate with critical literacy theory, which emphasizes learners' capacity to critically evaluate and filter information.

The rapid flow of global information demands strong epistemological grounding to prevent students from falling into value relativism (Saputra et al., 2024). The concept of ta'dib may thus be understood as a value-based foundation for critical literacy within an Islamic framework, as it underscores precision in understanding and situating knowledge according to its proper hierarchy of truth (Mahzumi et al., 2025). Overall, this discussion demonstrates that the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is not only normatively and theologically grounded but also exhibits coherence with various modern educational theories.

The distinguishing feature lies in its metaphysical foundation, which places tawhid at the center of the integration of knowledge and life. In this way, Al-Attas offers an alternative paradigm capable of bridging contemporary educational demands with foundational Islamic principles, thereby contributing to the formulation of a holistic, integrative educational system oriented toward the cultivation of the civilized human being amid the challenges of modernity.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al Attas possesses significant relevance in addressing the challenges of contemporary Islamic education. The crisis of Islamic education manifested in the secularization of knowledge, the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences, and moral degradation essentially originates from the loss of adab. This concept underscores that the primary problem of education does not lie merely in its technical or operational dimensions, but rather in the epistemological and axiological foundations upon which the educational system is constructed. The research further concludes that, according to Al-Attas, the objective of Islamic education is oriented toward the formation of the good man (*insan beradab*) a human being who is capable of recognizing and situating all things according to their proper hierarchy of truth based on the Islamic worldview. Within this framework, the concept of ta'dib constitutes the core of education, as it integrates intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions in a holistic manner. Islamic education, therefore, is not limited to producing academically competent individuals, but seeks to cultivate persons endowed with integrity and transcendental consciousness. Moreover, Al-Attas's concept of the Islamization of knowledge demonstrates that knowledge is not neutral or value-free; rather, it is shaped by particular paradigms and worldviews.

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