

THE CONCEPT OF *TAWHĪD* IN MUSLIM TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to discuss the function of *tawhīd* (monotheism) in enhancing Muslim teacher education. Since education is almost always associated with formal institutions, particularly schools, teachers nowadays have significant roles in developing the students' personalities. Every teacher should also have good characteristics or *akhlāq*, since they are generally regarded as the role models or exemplars for their students. In Islam, *tawhīd* is not limited to divine or metaphysical aspects, but it should also be regarded as the universal principle or rule that will guide all human activities in order to conform to the will of Allāh. This primary concept is related to the human being's temporal duty in this world as *khalīfatullāh* (vicegerent of Allah), and with his or her permanent duty as *'abdullāh* (servant of Allah). As a result, education in Islam cannot be separated from the concept of *tawhīd*. Thus, this concept of *tawhīd* should be correctly understood by Muslim teachers in carrying out their duties; as Muslims, they should refer to the concept of *tawhīd*, and the monotheistic concept of *tawhīd* must be taken into account in teacher training.

Introduction

The development of teacher professionalism is one of the most important aspects in the implementation of any educational system. Based on excessive challenges today, every teacher should be trained professionally and equipped with the latest skills and current knowledge. For Muslim teachers, they must be comprehensively nurtured, particularly in terms of their *akhlāq* and inner human development. This is because, due to the complexity and development of modern life, the duty of educating the younger generation today seems to be given to teachers from formal education institutions such as schools and universities. Based on the significant roles of teachers today, it is important that they have the criteria of good teachers who possess high levels of professionalism based on Islamic ethics. The Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) is witnessed as the authentic role model who, through his examples and desirable qualities in every human aspect, inspires Muslim educators in developing the Islamic education system. In addition, from the traditional point

of view of Islamic education, teachers are accorded the highest status in the educational system and in the community.

The concept of *tawhīd* and education in Islam

The term *tawhīd* is one of the fundamental terms of Islamic teaching, meaning the conviction and witnessing that “There is no god but God (Allāh).” Basically, this concept of monotheism is the starting point of Islam and also the differentiation between a believer and a non-believer. This primary factor is the only reason why a person is considered as a Muslim. Therefore, the Islamic education system should direct the whole process of the growth of Muslims to belief in Allah as well as to achieve prosperity in this world and the Hereafter. Khurshid Ahmad (1967:15) has insisted that:

They [students] should be taught the meaning and purpose of life, man’s position in the world, the doctrines of *Tawheed* (unity of God), *Risalah* (Prophethood), *Akhirah* (Life Hereafter) and their bearing upon individual and social life, the Islamic values of morality, the nature and content of Islamic culture, and the obligation and the mission of a Muslim.

Thus, the purpose and process of education in Islam are a reflection of the Islamic worldview of the role of the human being as *khalīfatullāh*, as well as ‘*abdullāh*. In the same vein, Ashraf (1994:4) has asserted that the intention of the process of education in Islam is “... the attainment of the status of a true representative of God on the earth (*khalīfatullāh*)”.

This fundamental concept is the kernel and heart of Islamic faith and teaching, from which flow other important aspects of human life. In other words, *tawhīd* is not limited to divine or metaphysical aspects, but it should be regarded as a universal principle or rule that guides all human activities in order to conform to the will of Allāh. This central thought of Islam inspired Al-Faruqi (1982) who made an attempt to explain and discuss its significance in his book, *Al-Tawhīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life*. It is also clear that the ramifications of *tawhīd* can be recognized from the two words, i.e. ‘*abdullāh* and *khalīfatullāh*.

Indeed, human beings have two interconnected duties that are significantly related to the concept of *tawhīd*, i.e., that of *khalīfatullāh* and ‘*abdullāh*. In fulfilling his or her duty as a temporal *khalīfatullāh* and permanent ‘*abdullāh*, there are certain ethical principles and rules provided by Allāh through the Qur’ān and Allāh’s Prophet (pbuh) that should be followed. Every human being, who is a servant of God as well as a vicegerent of Allāh in the world, has certain moral obligations to accomplish. Al-Faruqi has also mentioned, “...the divine trust is the fulfillment of the ethical part of the divine will, whose very nature requires that it be realised in freedom, and man is the only creature capable of doing so” (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi, 1986:81). Their role as *khalīfatullāh* as well as ‘*abdullāh*, therefore, should be rightly understood by all Muslims. Mohd Kamal Hassan (1995:9-10) has stated:

Man is therefore basically a servant (‘*abd*) of God who is entrusted to manage and develop the world in accordance with God’s plan. In that

sense he is *khalīfah* (vicegerent) of the Earth ... As vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth and trustee of God, man is directly responsible and accountable to Allāh for all his deeds.

Accordingly, all Muslims should follow the guidelines of actions and ethical principles, whether commandment or prohibition, provided by the Creator through His Book and Prophet (pbuh). Since He alone knows what is good for His creations, anything which is permitted by Him is considered suitable for human beings, and whatever is forbidden is damaging for human life. Sa'ad Moustafa (1990:120) has argued:

The positive commitments essentially act as perpetual reminders and energisers of faith, the continual strong link with The Creator. ... The negative prescriptions are preventive and precautionary measures to safeguard, maintain the original quality of the human value system, and protect it from degeneration, devaluation, perversion, indecency and temptation.

This is why every single moment of a human being's activity is evaluated by Allāh. Allāh says:

Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it, and anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it (Qur'ān, *Al-zalzalah*:7-8).

Therefore, the main principle of human activities in Islam is that everyone is only responsible for his or her own actions and will be evaluated by Him, as Allāh says:

Namely, that no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another. That man can have nothing but what he strives for (Qur'ān, *An-najm*:3-39).

Whoever works righteousness benefits his own soul; whoever works evil, it is against his own soul: nor is thy Lord ever unjust [in the least] to His servants (Qur'ān, *Al-fuṣṣilat*:46).

After understanding how the concept of *tawhīd* is manifested in the daily life of a Muslim, it becomes necessary to simultaneously consider the acquisition of knowledge and the development of faith, which are based on the concept of *tawhīd* in the process of education. Husain and Ashraf (1979:38) have argued that if knowledge is isolated from faith, it becomes:

... not only partial knowledge, it can even be described as a kind of new ignorance. ... Such a person, however extensive his acquaintance with books, has but acquired only a fragmentary view of the universe.

The education system in Islam cannot be separated from the religion of Islam, and the concept of *tawhīd* becomes the kernel of its education system. Undoubtedly, there is an integrated relationship among *tawhīd*, knowledge and action, since they complement one another and must not only remain in the

individual's intention and mind, but should be interpreted or implemented into real actions. Allāh says:

By [the Token of] time [through the Ages], verily Man is in loss, except such as have Faith and do righteous deeds, and [join together] in the mutual teaching of truth and of patience and constancy (Qur'ān, *Al-ʿaṣr*:1-3).

Syed Ali Ashraf argued that the faith of Islam, which is based on the concept of *tawḥīd*, cannot be ignored in the Islamic education system. He has stated:

Faith and knowledge must go hand in hand. Faith is a spiritual gift and knowledge is an intellectual acquisition through the use of man's intellect, *ʿaql*. ... Islam does not allow the Muslims to dichotomize life and divide it into that which belongs to God (Divine) and that which belongs to Caesar (secular). Islam wants education to be a process in which curriculum and teaching methods help each individual to unfold its own unique potentiality as a representative of God on the earth (Ashraf, 1988:74).

Basically, a strong belief in Allāh and the true understanding of the concept of *tawḥīd* should prevent any Muslim from committing any kind of sin or evil, since he or she realises that there are rewards and punishments from Allāh in the Hereafter. From the Islamic educational point of view, the "metaphysical authority" or "divine authority" which is based on the six pillars of *īmān*, should restrain any Muslim from doing any kind of evil act. That is why it is essential to take the concept of *tawḥīd* as the foundation of the educational system.

In fact, the negative attitudes among Muslims are also caused by their negligence towards Islamic teaching, as well as problems in their understanding of *tawḥīd*. It seems that Muslims have disregarded the "metaphysical authority" by doing unethical and un-Islamic activities. For example, there are many Muslims who fail to fulfill basic Islamic responsibilities such as the five times daily prayers and fasting, and they are unable to practise Islamic ethical values. Essentially, as Muslims, the belief in the six pillars of *īmān* should be manifested through good and right behaviour. However, due to a crisis of *ʿaqīdah* or belief in Allāh, there are some Muslims who have failed to observe the concept of *tawḥīd* and have disrespected the teaching of their own religion.

As Islam recognizes and respects education as a never-ending process and regards education as an obligation for every Muslim, the understanding of the concept of education is very important, particularly for teachers. As discussed earlier, the principle of monotheism or *tawḥīd* is regarded as the most important element in terms of human development, since it is the central or the basic element of the Islamic educational system. In other words, the concept of *tawḥīd* is the central issue that must be clearly understood, along with its role in the current Islamic educational system. It is not merely a concept, but also has a significant impact on the educational system, which should finally produce a pious servant of Allāh.

If we look critically at several definitions and aims of Islamic education, we may understand how the concept of *tawḥīd* becomes of primary importance in

influencing the philosophy, aims, objectives, processes and products of Islamic education. There are several definitions and aims of Islamic education given by its scholars. For example, Haque (1992:58) defined Islamic education as:

... an educational system which seeks to fuse the spiritual and the material aspects of man's growth and imparts a training which infuses faith into the whole personality, creating a spiritual or religious attachment to Islam. This enables an individual to follow the *Qur'ān* and the *sunnah* and be governed by the Islamic system of values.

Thus, Islam rejects the view of secular-liberal educationists who have ignored the importance of religion in educational systems, and the relationship between individuals and their Creator in terms of human development. In another definition, Sarwar (1996:9) viewed Islamic education as:

... the process through which human beings are trained and prepared in a concerted way to do their Creator's bidding in this life (*dunyā*) to be rewarded in the life after death (*ākhirah*).

Therefore, these definitions suggest that the process of education has a significant relation with Allāh and they reject any kind of separation. Thus the relationship with Allāh must always be reflected in the Islamic educational system (Jasmi & Tamuri, 2012).

To understand the concept of education in Islam, it is also important to look at some statements regarding the aims of Islamic education. In fact, the First World Conference on Muslim Education (1977) agreed that the aim of education for Muslim should clearly emphasize human development and the relation between Allāh and man:

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of Man through the training of Man's spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily sense. Education should therefore cater for the growth of man in all its aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively and motivate all these aspects towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. The ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realisation of complete submission to Allāh on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large.

Therefore, in Islam, education chiefly aims to develop and nurture students to understand their responsibilities as devoted Muslims who recognise the Islamic ideals of individual and of collective life.

In same vein, while analysing the aims of Islamic education, Syed Ali Ashraf has stated:

It aims at the 'balanced growth' of the total personality of man so that his mind and body, his worldly ambitions and bodily desires are kept under the control of his Spirit (*rūḥ*) which alone can respond to revelations and hence to revealed knowledge and thus have faith in the

Qur'ān and the *sunnah* (1993:3).

Halstead has critically analysed the Islamic education system, and from the discussion we may summarize that there are three main aims of Islamic education (1995:27-31):

To develop and nurture children with positive guidance to be good and perfect human beings.

To encourage and develop the individual's social values, responsibilities, and consciousness based on the *sharī'ah*.

To transmit knowledge through both the divine revelation and human intellect for the purposes of Allāh.

Based on the above statements, we may agree that the concept of Islamic education has a close relationship with the Islamic worldview or *Weltanschauung* that focuses on the discussion of the concept of God, the concept of man, the concept of the universe, and prophethood. The Islamic worldview, which is based on the Islamic concept of *tawhīd*, will therefore, determine the characteristics of Islamic education. In other words, the whole process of education, according to Islam, must be based on God's principles and the teaching of His Prophet (pbuh). Thus, there is no such division or separation between religious and worldly values, and the forms of education must refer to Qur'ānic concepts.

Teacher and education: Islamic perspective

Today the role of school has gradually become more significant since, as a formal educational institution, school is not only for transmission of knowledge and skills, but is also concerned with social and moral development, which previously had been the parents' responsibility in traditional societies. People usually perceive education as schooling, and school has come to mean a place that provides the student with knowledge, culture and skills. According to Sahadat (1997) school is the second level of environment after family in the educational process of children. A recent study has shown that the role of Islamic education teachers in school is more significant than the role of family in terms of the development of students' *akhlāq* (moral character) (Mohd Yusof et al., 2011). Since school has a vital role to play in the development of students, it is useful to look at the role of the teacher as the person who is directly responsible for implementing the educational policy and programmes at the school level.

Rosnani Hashim (1997) has described the role of the Muslim teacher in Muslim schools with reference to the ethical term of *adab*, where in her view, a teacher is a *mu'addib*; Rosnani has argued that the teacher is not only concerned with the transmission of skill and knowledge but also "...the inculcation of *adab* which is the discipline of mind, body and soul..." (Al-Attas, 1979:37). Jasmi and Tamuri (2012) also have explained that the teacher in Islam has several duties, i.e. as a *murabbī* (trainer of souls), *mu'allim* (transmitter of knowledge), *murshid* (leader in teaching and learning), *mu'addib* (trainer of *akhlāq* and personalities), and *mudarris* (effective teacher). As Islam is rooted in the concept of *tawhīd* and faith in God, the Prophet and

the Hereafter, the role of teachers in Islam has both ethical and religious dimensions with implications for total development of students. For example, Basheer El-Tom (1981:40) has explained that:

He [teacher] is expected to do his utmost to impress upon the minds of his pupils the general ethos and the morality of Islam at both the social and the individual level. ... Primarily, to be a moral tutor ... The teacher is endowed with a further responsibility—that of a moral mentor and guide in loco parentis to the pupils under his care.

Thus, Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) is the supreme model or teacher for Muslim teachers, since all his practices were under divine guidance. Khurshid Ahmad (1980:9) has stated, “To believe in him means to accept his authority as representative of the Supreme Ruler and to follow his example in thought and behaviour.” Therefore, for Muslim teachers, they must comprehensively examine and experience the *sunnah* of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), as the Prophet (pbuh) is considered to be the perfect exemplar sent by Allāh for all Muslims. In fact, as an educator, he had practised, demonstrated, and exemplified all aspects that he preached and asked his adherents to follow. His role has been described by Allāh Himself:

And thou [Muḥammad (pbuh)] [standeth] on an exalted standard of character (Qur’ān, *Al-qalam*:4).

Ye have indeed in the Apostle of God a beautiful pattern [of conduct] (Qur’ān, *Al-aḥzāb*:21).

Based on the above discussion, Muslim teachers should have several characteristics such as a correct understanding and deep knowledge of Islamic teaching; a strong belief and clear understanding of the Islamic concept of *tawhīd*; an observance of proper *akhlāq* with his Creator, other people, and the universe; the acquisition and practice of professional knowledge and skills of teaching and learning; excellent and competent leadership skills; and motivation and positive attitude and thinking.

That is why in Islam, teachers are highly regarded, since they are not only transferring knowledge and information to their students in the process of teaching and learning, but more importantly they are nurturing and developing the students’ faith in Islam and the students’ inner development towards the balanced growth of the total personality of human being. In other words, as mentioned earlier, Islamic education is a reflection of the Islamic worldview of the role of the human being as the *khalīfatullāh*, as well as the ‘*abdullāh*, having a significant relation to the Islamic concept of *tawhīd*. In carrying out their daily duties, all Muslim teachers should have the highest quality of faith and personalities that are based on the Qur’ān and *sunnah*. Thus, it is important to look at the way the concept of *tawhīd* significantly influences Muslim teachers.

From the Islamic point of view, it is necessary for Muslim teachers to exercise and exemplify in themselves what they know and teach, in order to establish virtuous and practical examples to the students. Furthermore, this type of teaching is done through a long process of training and continual observation. The duty as a teacher

is, therefore, an *amānah* (trust), which must be rightly implemented in accordance with Islamic principles, since in Islam the teacher is not merely entrusted with social responsibilities, but their actions also have more important religious implications. In carrying out their duties, all teachers, particularly Muslim teachers, should have a correct understanding of the very fundamental concept of Islam, i.e. *tawhīd*. As argued by Ashraf (1988:76), “*Īmān* must be manifested through ‘*amal* (deeds)’”. In other words, *tawhīd* and belief in Allāh’s commands must be followed by appropriate exercises and actions.

Muslim teachers should act on the basis that every one of them is regarded as *khalīfatullāh* as well as ‘*abdullāh*, who is responsible for implementing the commands of Allāh. They should also believe that their duties are regarded as *da‘wah* and ‘*ibādah* for Allāh, for which they will be rewarded by Him in the Hereafter. As a result, they will stay away from doing anything that has been prohibited by Allāh, since they believe that there is a life after death and reward or punishment from Him based on actions in this world. The teachers will maximize all their efforts in carrying out their responsibilities, since they are evaluated and rewarded not only by their principals but more importantly by their Creator, i.e. Allāh. If the teachers really understand that their performances are recognized by Allāh, they will carry out their duties and perform sincerely, as they are motivated by the promise of Allāh’s great rewards.

A school today may be regarded as a student’s second “house” and teachers as second “parents” as the majority of our students, especially at the secondary level, spend a long time at school, usually between seven to nine hours a day, during term times. A teacher is not simply a transmitter of knowledge, but ideally he or she is also a guide for his or her students. Every teacher is a role-model for his or her students, and continuously nurtures noble values in the process of teaching and learning. The role of a teacher becomes more significant for those who are living in school hostels. Due to an increase in current school activities and extra-curricular programmes, the relationship between students and teachers becomes more significant.

As a central part of an education system, teachers should be professionally trained through consistent pre-service and in-service training. They should be exposed to more knowledge, wider experience and better training, to ensure effective implementation of teaching and learning processes. In producing effective Muslim teachers, the concept of *tawhīd* should become its foundation. Since every aspect of a teacher’s activities is based on the fundamental concept of the Oneness of Allāh, this concept will ensure that the teacher believes that all actions will be evaluated by Allāh. The rewards and punishments from Allāh are the indispensable factors that should be considered by teachers in carrying out their duties.

Furthermore, the teachers should also realize that their deeds, efforts and actions would significantly contribute to the development and betterment of the *ummah*, since the *ummah*’s ideological common ground is based on the concept of *tawhīd*. The teachers also realize that all their virtuous activities and contributions are ‘*ibādah* and *a‘māl jāriyah*. They also recognize the duty of a teacher as an *amānah*. With the right understanding and the proper implementation of the concept of *tawhīd* in their daily lives, teachers will ensure that they fulfil their duties sincerely and successfully. Therefore, the concept of *tawhīd* should be affirmed in four aspects of teacher education, namely: in the ideological foundation of teacher training; in the

aim of teacher education; in the teacher education curriculum; and in the role of educational institutions.

(a) Ideological foundation of teacher training

The philosophy of teacher education should be re-examined to ensure that the philosophy is in line with the teaching of Islam. Thus, Islamic religious values should be seriously considered in the Muslim educational system. The teachers should uphold *tawhīd* as the basis of their lives and activities, which will eliminate other outside or worldly interests that may influence their actions. The ideological basis for teacher education should also be examined. Hassan Langgulung (1988:97) has argued, “The Islamic concept of teacher education should have been derived from our past intellectual tradition and achievement”. Therefore, the ideal of a teacher in Islam should be referred to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), his companions and also great Muslim scholars, as the foundation of a teacher training programme. Halstead (1995:31), in his analysis on role of teacher in Islamic tradition, has stated that: “... teachers were expected not only to be learned, but also to have a deep personal commitment to faith and to be a living example of virtue and piety which students could unhesitatingly emulate.” The secular heritage and negative western influence in the educational system should be removed and replaced by the local and Islamic system, which is based on the religion of the community. Since teachers are the persons who are directly involved in implementing educational programmes, they should be trained according to the principles of Islamic teacher education.

(b) Aims of teacher education

The aims and objectives of teacher education, particularly for Muslim teachers, should be clearly based on the *tawhīd* paradigm. The main aim of teacher education is to produce teachers who have belief in and devotion to God, knowledge, high moral standards, competence and responsibility. The teacher trainees must also have an understanding that they are implementing the *amānah* from Allāh and that it is a part of propagating Islam to the *ummah*. Thus, all teachers should be experienced, educated and trained to ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning process. The emphasis of teacher education, both in pre-service courses and in-service training, should be on moral and ethical development, effective teaching methodologies, educational theories and practices as well as the latest educational technologies (Hashim, 1997; Jasmi and Tamuri, 2012). It is argued by Rosnani Hashim (1997:67) that the aim of Islamic teacher education is “... not only to produce professionally qualified teachers but also teachers with strong moral and Islamic values, and at the same time critical in their thoughts”. Through right teacher education program, it is hoped that they will be professionally trained and equipped with sufficient knowledge and able to practise the skills they have gained.

(c) Teacher education curriculum

The emphasis on the *tawhīd* paradigm will ensure that the contents of teacher education curriculum are consistent with the concept of education in Islam. Thus, the

teaching of the Qur'ān and *sunnah* must be seriously taken into account. The *sīrah* (biography) of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh)—in the context of education—must also be critically studied by all Muslim teacher trainees. In addition, the western and modern theories of teaching and learning should be examined before they are taught to Muslim teachers. The reconstruction of the teacher education curriculum based on Islamic teaching must include both curriculums of the pre-service courses and the in-service training. The concept of *da'wah* must also be clearly presented and understood by the teachers since it is a part of the central duties of a Muslim. In facing the challenges of globalization, the new *tawḥīdic* curriculum of teacher education should also educate them to consider themselves as part of the universal Muslim *ummah*. It is because the building of the *ummah* is based on the same doctrine of *tawḥīd*, which is the root of Islamic brotherhood.

(d) *Role of educational institutions*

Debates, forums, discussions, seminars and workshops must be frequently organized at all educational institutions where teachers are able to freely express their ideas, opinions and suggestions to improve and strengthen their training modules and courses based on the *tawḥīdic* paradigm. It is hoped that all teachers and educators at every level are able to discuss the *tawḥīdic* paradigm critically. At the higher educational institutions, researchers should more actively carry out studies in planning and integrating the concept of *tawḥīd* in knowledge and education. At the school level, teachers should also be reoriented, re-trained, exposed to, and allowed to discuss the *tawḥīdic* approaches in the process of teaching and learning. It is important that they should understand that knowledge and education are related to the Islamic faith. The whole process of education, according to Islam, must be based on God's principles and the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). There is also no separation between religious and worldly values, and the forms of education must refer to the Qur'ānic conception. (Mohammad Muslehuddin, 1980; Jasmi and Tamuri, 2012)

Conclusion

The right understanding of the concept of *tawḥīd* in the daily lives of all Muslim teachers is essential to ensure that they are able to fulfil their duties professionally. *Tawḥīd* is not just a concept in Islam—of which there is no doubt—but it has also an important role in education. As discussed by Halstead (1995), in Islam education is a process of *tarbiyah*, which is concerned with the process of developing and nurturing children with positive guidance to be good and perfect human beings. Education is a process of *ta'dīb*, which is the process of developing the individual's social values, responsibilities and consciousness based on the *sharī'ah*. Furthermore, education is a process of *ta'līm*, which refers to the transfer of knowledge through both the divine revelation and human intellect for the purposes of the worship of Allāh. With this understanding, it is hoped that several pertinent issues regarding teachers, such as the negative behaviour of teachers, the burn-out phenomena among teachers, negligence of duties and the decline in teacher discipline, can be reduced. The duty of the teacher not merely has social implications, but also and more

importantly, it has religious implications as an *amānah* from Allāh. Therefore, the concept of *tawhīd* must be included in the four components of Muslim teacher development, i.e. in the ideological foundation of teacher training, in the aim of teacher education, in the teacher education curriculum, and in the role of educational institutions.

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