

Contextualising *Adab* in Islamic Education from the Perspective of Al-Attas

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Abstract

This study examines Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas's distinct approach to Islamic education, focusing on his conceptualization of *adab* within the educational framework. Character research methods are employed, involving an in-depth review of Al-Attas' works, alongside relevant literature on his philosophy. This research aims to analyse and articulate Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' practical contributions to Islamic educational thought, particularly in the contextualization of *adab*. The study utilises Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic method, specifically the processes of distanciation and appropriation, to interpret Al-Attas' ideas. Findings reveal that Al-Attas perceives each culture as possessing distinct, often irreconcilable, educational values despite their surface-level similarities. Central to Al-Attas' educational vision, it is found that the contextualisation of *adab* in his thoughts relates to the purpose of education, focusing on producing a good human being, or in the Islamic tradition referred to as *insan kamil*.

Keywords: Contextualisation, *adab*, orientation, education, Al-Attas, *insan kamil*

Introduction

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas asserts that the crisis of knowledge, particularly education, is the root cause of most issues facing the Muslim community. However, Al-Attas does not refer to educational structures such as curriculum, methods, or strategies. Instead, he identifies a more profound issue: the content of education itself, which, according to him, is imbued with a worldview misaligned with the Islamic perspective and heavily influenced by Western civilisation.¹ The derivatives of various Muslim problems related to social, political, legal, economic, and other phenomena are only the result of the main root of the problem, namely science.² Al-Attas's critique of science is centred on the idea that incorrect interpretations of the science that Western civilisation comprehended and propagated around the world have caused the fundamental goals of research to be obscured. Science is supposed to create justice and peace. Instead, it leads to chaos, confusion, and scepticism in life. The science that the West has socialised internationally has damaged the three kingdoms of nature (animals, plants, and minerals).³

Science,⁴ according to Al-Attas, is what the West calls episteme, and it is no longer pure science. Al-Attas argues that key Quranic words such as *zhan* (conjecture), *hawa* (personal opinion), and *mira'* (doubting the truth) cannot be called science, even though they resemble science. Al-Attas does not deny that the term science is still found in the Western worldview, but its meaning has been confused. Hence, the terms' *zhan*, *hawa*, and *mira'* are more formulated as science by Western society.⁵ Therefore, Al-Attas criticises contemporary science as not being neutral. He considers that science contains a worldview from each culture that is different from one another, although it is not denied that there are similarities in certain matters. For Al-Attas, the similarities are only external and not in the real substance. Thus, there is a very far and absolute difference related to science between Islamic and Western cultures.⁶

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¹ Syed Muhammad Al-Naquib Al-Attas, *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu Dan Pandangan Alam* (Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2007).

² Syed Muhammad Al-Naquib Al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin* (ISTAC, 2001).

³ Mohd Faizal Musa, *Naquib Al-Attas' Islamization of Knowledge* (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021).

⁴ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Quran Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (PT Mizan Pustaka, 2007).

⁵ Syed Muhammad Al-Naquib Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (ISTAC, 2001).

⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *Logika Agama: Kedudukan Wahyu Dan Batas-Batas Akal Dalam Islam* (Lentera Hati, 2005).

According to Al-Attas, the crucial problems of Muslims today are both internal and external. The internal problem begins with a misunderstanding of science.⁷ Starting from the error of knowledge, this situation will lead to the loss of *adab*⁸ and the breakdown of *adab* will produce leaders unfit to hold and assume responsibility at all levels of life.⁹ According to Al-Attas's observation, Muslims today have lost the *adab* in seeking,¹⁰ teaching, developing, and practising knowledge. This is the fundamental internal problem of Muslims, which he calls a "loss of *adab*."¹¹ Interestingly, Al-Attas describes the "loss of *adab*" as a "loss of discipline"; that is, the erosion of discipline about one's physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects. According to him, a civilised person recognises one's rightful position in relation to oneself, society, and the community, while also understanding one's physical, intellectual, and spiritual potential. Furthermore, such an individual possesses the correct attitude toward the hierarchical nature of both knowledge and existence.

The absence of *adab*, or correct manners and attitudes, has resulted in a profound crisis within the Muslim community. Al-Attas believes that the solution lies in cultivating *adab* within Islamic education, a process he refers to as *ta'dīb* (education). Al-Attas is adamant that the fundamental goals of Islamic education is to instil good manners in people. Education is defined as a deliberate and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have religious and spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed by themselves, society, nation, and state. As articulated in the 2003 Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 on the national education system,¹² education is very important for individuals and society because it does not only provide knowledge and recognition,¹³ it also teaches politeness and civility, which leads individuals and societies to become civilised human beings (*insan adabi*).

Research Method

This study adopts an approach rooted in Islamic intellectual history, focusing on character studies and examining a person's concepts or ideas. The study of characters is included in the study of qualitative methods.¹⁴ This research explores the thoughts and circumstances of a specific individual or group at a particular time, employing narrative techniques, namely, the hermeneutic or interpretation method.¹⁵ This method aims to discover the meaning behind texts, symbols, myths, scriptural texts (revelations) and texts in the form of works (inscriptions).¹⁶ Meanwhile, the critical analysis of Al-Attas' thoughts adopts Paul Ricoeur's theory, which incorporates methods of *distanciation*¹⁷ and *appropriation*.¹⁸ In the interpretation, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic method was chosen through three levels of the interpretation process: semantic, reflective and existential stages.

In addition to the technical steps mentioned above, documentation and interviews were also conducted. Documents were obtained from various parties, especially from Metsrawirman, M.Litt., M.Phil. who is an alumnus of CASIS UTM Malaysia and is a research assistant (RA) of Wan Daud as well as the founder of *Wacana Fikir Islam* (WAFI) Padang. Furthermore, additional documents about Al-Attas were also obtained through Prof. Madya Dr Khalif Muammar A Haris when he visited Malaysia to take part in the Saturday Night Lecture (SNL) at CASIS UTM Kuala Lumpur in October 2019. Two of Al-Attas's most significant books,

⁷ Al-Attas, *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu Dan Pandangan Alam*.

⁸ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

⁹ M. N. W. Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization* (Philpapers, 1998).

¹⁰ Mohd Anuar Mamat, *Pemikiran Pendidikan Imam Abu Hanifah Al-Nu'man: Al-Alim Wa Al-Muta'allim* (Pusat Pengajian Tinggi Islam, Sains dan Peradaban (CASIS) dan Himpunan Keilmuan Muslim (HAKIM), 2016); B. A. I. Zarnuji, *Ta'lim Al-Muta'allim Tariq Al-Ta'allum* (Toko Kitab Al-Hidayat, 1947).

¹¹ Syed Ali Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Al-Naquib & Ashraf, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1979); Alvin Qadri Lazuardy, "Adab Pengajaran Sains Dalam Islam," in *Prosiding Konferensi Integrasi Interkoneksi Islam Dan Sains*, 3, 2021, 156–70.

¹² Republik Indonesia, "Undang-Undang RI No 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional" (2003).

¹³ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

¹⁴ Arief Furchan, *Studi Tokoh: Metode Penelitian Mengenai Tokoh* (Pustaka Pelajar, 2005).

¹⁵ Eugenius Sumaryono, *Hermeneutik: Sebuah Metode Filsafat* (Penerbit Kanisius, 1995); Paul Ricoeur, *Main Trends in Philosophy* (Philpapers, 1979); Hans Georg Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, 1960, 181–86.

¹⁶ M. Hery, *Tren Baru dalam Studi Islam: Teks Agama sebagai Objek Kajian* (Idea Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Ricoeur, *Main Trends in Philosophy*.

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and The Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

“*Tarikh Sebenar Batu Bersurat Trengganu*” and “*The Concept of Education in Islam*” were given to the author during the visit.¹⁹ Previously, the author only had a translation of “*The Concept of Education in Islam*” by Haidar Bagir.

The interviews conducted in this study are semi-standardised or free-guided, a combination of structured and unstructured formats. While the researcher outlines the main points of the conversation, in practice, the interview process allows for flexibility. The formulated questions do not need to be asked in sequence, and the wording is also not standardised but adjusted based on the flow of conversation.

The primary sources used to analyze Al-Attas’ ideas include his seminal works, such as *Islam and Secularism* (1993) and *The Concept of Education in Islam, A Concise Review of Science and the View of Nature* (2007), *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin* (2001), *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (2001), and *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (1989). Secondary sources, which serve as a tool to find Al-Attas’ views on education, include research by experts on Al-Attas’ educational thought in journals, books, and others.

Education Orientation

Philosophers and educators have long been interested in the purpose and orientation of education as two interrelated concepts. The disparities in how these two components are conceptualised and explained stem from different perspectives on nature, function, and orientation of human life. These perspectives turn out to be strongly tied to several issues regarding the nature of science and ultimate reality. So it is not surprising that thinkers, especially in the West, hold diverse and sometimes contrasting views on what education should aim to accomplish and what it should include.

Generally, two overarching approaches guide educational thinking, each with its own internal diversity. The first is a societal-oriented approach, which views education as the primary means of creating a good society, whether the system of government is democratic, oligarchic, or monarchic. The second is more individual-oriented, focusing on the needs, capacities, and interests of the learner.²⁰

In general, the education system implemented in countries around the world is orientated towards society and the state. This view is also shared by the perennial school or the school of cultural transmission that is often associated with Plato, medieval Western scholars, and some modern scholars, such as William T. Harris, Robert Hutchins, and Adler in the United States, as well as the modern school of social reconstruction, and feminists who are active in shouting the principles of freedom. However, the latter has some differences in certain aspects.²¹ In contrast, almost all of the world’s major religions hold an individual-orientated view. Some ancient moral systems that are still influential today, such as Kung Fu Tze, also strongly emphasise the development of the individual. Nonetheless, the individual is seen in his capacity as the basis for the development of society and the state.

In the secular-modern context, the roots of individual-oriented education can also be found in the romantic philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the psychological teachings of Abraham Maslow, and the educational system brought about by A.S. Neill.²² Whilst neither in theory nor in practice are mutually exclusive, neither view can stand alone without the other, at least as found in modern secular education systems.²³

Based on the assumption that humans are social animals and that science is essentially built on the foundations of social life, those with a societal outlook argue that education aims to prepare people who

¹⁹ Ahmat Adam, *Batu Bersurat Terengganu: Betulkah Apa Yang Dibaca Selama Ini?* (Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2017).

²⁰ Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization*.

²¹ David Pratt, *Curriculum Planning: A Handbook for Professionals* (Harcourt Brace College, 1994).

²² Walter Humes, “AS Neill and Scotland: Attitudes, Omissions and Influences,” *Scottish Educational Review* 47, no. 1 (2015): 66–85; Ciaran O’Neill, “Literacy and Education,” *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*, no. 244–260 (2017).

²³ Roger Dale, “Education and The Capitalist State: Contributions and Contradictions,” in *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education*, 2017, 127–61.

can play a role and fit into their respective societies. Based on this, the goals and targets of education are naturally drawn from and seek to reinforce the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills that are already accepted and useful to society. Consequently, since the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills that are useful and accepted by a society are constantly changing, they argue that education in that society should be able to prepare its learners to deal with any form of change.²⁴

Those who believe in education as something that plays an important role in shaping society assume that society is far more important than the individual. In 1987, Paulo Freire, for example, said, "I do not believe in the idea of individual freedom. Freedom is a social act and freedom in education is the process of society towards enlightenment."²⁵ Although not completely ignored in the practice of community-orientated education, the needs and interests of learners take second place to the needs and interests of society, or as the community reconstructionists put it, to the extent that the needs and interests of learners are related to the needs and interests of society. In modern times, socialist and communist philosophers of education overtly emphasise the social dimension over the liberal democratic dimension that favours the individual over society.

In the realm of individual-oriented education, two main schools of thought have emerged. According to the first school, education should primarily focus on preparing students to succeed socially and economically—far beyond what their parents were able to do—in order to maximise happiness. In other words, education is the level of socio-economic mobility of a given society. The second school emphasises the intellectual improvement, wealth and equanimity of learners. According to them, despite having many similarities with other learners, a learner is still unique in many ways.²⁶

Traditional Islamic education²⁷ has always prioritised individual success and happiness, both in this world and the hereafter, as its core goals. However, this more individual-focused philosophy of education has gradually changed to a more societal-focused form since Muslims came under the influence of Western thought and institutions. A number of Muslim political leaders, such as the Turkish sultans, the Tanzimat reform bureaucrats, the Khedives in Egypt, and those who followed their lead in other parts of the Islamic world, can be grouped with those who placed a societal orientation on education. Even those who see education as individually orientated are more likely to favour the first of these schools of thought, seeking to achieve socio-economic success for every learner in the hope that they will strengthen the socio-economic status of the state. Socialist leaders see the state or society as more important than the individual. They see education as an investment,²⁸ and a tool for social engineering to reshape the socio-economic order of newly independent countries.

Today, education has become a tool for the socio-economic mobilisation of individuals or countries.²⁹ This mindset's dominance in education has given rise to a psycho-social condition known as "diploma disease," which is an attempt to get a degree for social and economic reasons rather than education's own sake. It is particularly prevalent among parents and students. In a society that is poor in natural resources and not equipped with a good economic order, this educational attitude contributes to the creation of a chaotic socio-political situation. In addition to poor planning and mismanagement, such a situation stems from intellectual confusion and loss of cultural identity caused by the influence of continuous secularisation programmes and the Western concept of the community state.³⁰

²⁴ Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization*.

²⁵ Moacir Gadotti, "Paulo Freire: Education for Development," *Development and Change* 40, no. 6 (2009): 1255–67.

²⁶ Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization*.

²⁷ Muhammad Zaki Badawi, "Traditional Islamic Education: Its Aims and Purposes in The Present Day," in *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*, 1979, 104–17.

²⁸ George Psacharopoulos, "Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update," *Education Economics* 12, no. 2 (2004): 111–34.

²⁹ Jan Polcyn, "Quality of Education and Socio-Economic Growth: The Methods of Ishikawa, Deming and Pareto as Tools for Establishing Cause-Effect Relationships," in *E3S Web of Conferences*, 2021.

³⁰ Philip S. Gorski, "After Secularization?," *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 34, no. 1 (2008): 55–85; Bryan R. Wilson, "Aspects of Secularization in The West," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 3, no. 4 (1976): 259–76.

That phenomenon has never struck Muslims before and is very dangerous for the basic principles of Islamic education philosophy, which is to seek the pleasure of Allah.³¹ Some Muslim scholars, such as Muhammad Abduh, a theologian in Egypt and Hali, a poet who was a disciple of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India, have noticed and criticised the negative results of such pragmatic educational goals.³² Abduh, for example, realised that the purpose of education³³ was not to mobilise socio-economically but to develop the personality of the learner. Abduh criticised the pragmatic side of the Egyptian education system and added, “This education is delivered so that the student can obtain a degree that will enable him to get a job as an administrative officer in a department. But the fact that his soul should be moulded by education and by inculcating noble values so that he becomes a pious man by whom he can perform the duties entrusted to him in governmental or other establishments, does not enter the heads of the teachers and those who appoint them.”³⁴

Muhammad Iqbal has also criticised the way that the Indian educational system, which is modelled after the British educational system, applies education in a dehumanising and demeaning way. He asserts that the creation of men is the goal of education.³⁵ Hence, Iqbal, as found in his poems, especially *Asrar-i Khudi*, articulates the importance of self-improvement (*Khudi*).³⁶ However, it would be a grave mistake to immediately accuse Iqbal of being a defender of free individualism, as his views on the individual stand on par with his concerns for active and responsible social renewal. However, the true ideal of education derives from the elevation of strong individuals.

While analysing the decay and backwardness of the *Ummah*, Iqbal criticised the early scholars and their modern imitators and those who thought that society was superior to capable individuals. Iqbal states that, in fact, the destiny of man does not depend so much on society, not as much as it depends on each person’s individual qualities and abilities.³⁷ Due to his consistent emphasis on the value of the individual in reconstructing a civilisation and due to the influence of the spiritual tradition developed by Sufi scholars on Iqbal, Al-Attas does not consider Iqbal a modernist. Muslim modernists, according to Al-Attas, always emphasised the improvement of society and believed that society was more important than the individual, thus focusing more on politics and law than on areas that sought to improve the human mind and soul.³⁸

In general, the call to learn from the West while retaining the Islamic values that have been inherited for generations in dealing with the problems plaguing the *Ummah* today has been accepted by everyone. The goals of this reform have not yet been met, though, after almost a century in the case of Turkey and Egypt and forty years in the case of other Muslim nations. Today, the changing socio-economic and political situation is considered an inevitable reality, and education is required to respond to and adapt to these changes. In this case, Islam is often used to justify societal-orientated educational goals or those that suit the tastes of the governing party to the exclusion of the individual’s true development and happiness that should be attained during the educational process.³⁹

Al-Attas and Education

For Al-Attas, the goal of education in Islam is not to create law-abiding citizens and productive labourers. Instead, the objective is to produce a decent man. Education, as he saw it, is to instil morality or justice in

³¹ Syed Muhammad Al-Naqib Al-Attas, “Islamic Philosophy: An Introduction,” *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2005): 11–43; Mian Mohammad Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy (Vol. 1)* (Harrassowitz, 1963).

³² Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition (Vol. 15)* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

³³ M. Tajudin Zuhri, “Muhammad Abduh’s Islamic Educational Thoughts And Its Relevance To Education In The Contemporary Era,” *AL-WIJDÂN Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 8, no. 3 (2023): 474–89; Fatimah Az-Zahra, “The Concept of Thinking of Islamic Religious Education By Muhammad Abduh,” *Al-Ulum: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2021): 58–66.

³⁴ Embong Rahimah, “Educational Development in Egypt and Turkey: Abduh’s Integration Versus Atatürk’s Unification,” 2016, dac.umt.edu.my; Ahmad Amir, “Muhammad Abduh’s Contributions to Modernity,” *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education* 1, no. 1 (2012): 163–75.

³⁵ Islam Ali, “Muhammad Iqbal,” in *Reappraising Modern Indian Thought: Themes and Thinkers* (Springer Nature Singapore, 2022), 317–46.

³⁶ Sir Mohammad Iqbal, *Asrar I Khudi* (Jalasutra, 2001).

³⁷ Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

³⁸ Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization*.

³⁹ Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization*.

people on an individual basis as well as citizens or members of society.⁴⁰ Al-Attas emphasised that a good worker or citizen in a secular state is not the same as a good human being; rather, a good human being is unquestionably a good worker and citizen.⁴¹ It follows that being an employee or a citizen is equivalent to being a good human being if the employer or the state upholds Islamic moral principles. On the other hand, critical Muslims must actively participate in an Islamic state. Al-Attas highlights that placing a strong emphasis on the individual is both a smart approach and a guiding concept at this particular time.⁴²

Discussing the concept of the “ideal state” (*al-Madinah al-Fadhilah*) in Islam, Al-Attas explains that the goal is not to build and develop perfect citizens as emphasised by Western thinkers, such as Plato, but more importantly, it is to develop perfect human beings, and it is to this end that education should be directed towards.⁴³ However, Al-Attas also says that Islam can also accept the idea of forming good citizens as a goal of education, but by ‘citizens’ he means citizens of other kingdoms that enable him to become a good human being. According to Al-Attas, the concern for the individual is of paramount importance, as the highest goal and ultimate concern of ethics in the Islamic perspective is for the individual. Islam holds that on the day of reckoning, man will be rewarded or punished due to his status as a moral actor (Q.S. 74: 38). At the First World Conference on Islamic Education held in Makkah in April 1971, Al-Attas methodically proposed that the definition of Islamic education be changed to the cultivation of *adab* and that the term education in Islam be changed to *ta’dīb* to reflect the ideal human being. According to Al-Attas, an educated person who embodies *adab* is a decent man. The “good” that Al-Attas speaks of is *adab* in the broadest sense, which includes a person’s spiritual and worldly existence as well as their efforts to instil the virtues they encounter.⁴⁴ Therefore, a truly educated person from an Islamic perspective is defined by Al-Attas as a civilised person. Al-Attas writes: “A good person understands and treats himself and others in his society with justice; one who continuously strives to improve every aspect of himself towards perfection as a civilised human being; and one who is fully aware of his responsibility to God.”⁴⁵

Ta’dīb, or the sowing and cultivation of manners in a person, is what Al-Attas refers to as education. The Quran affirms that the Prophet Muhammad—the majority of Muslim scholars refer to as the ideal human being, the universal human being, or *al-insan al-kully*—is the best example of a civilised person.⁴⁶ Therefore, the administration of education and science in the Islamic education system must reflect the perfect man, which Al-Attas symbolically did by putting the name “Muhammad” in the middle of the logo of the educational institution he founded and led, namely ISTAC (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization), Kuala Lumpur.

At the First World Conference on Islamic Education, he appeared as one of the main speakers and chaired the committee that discussed the ideals and objectives of education. Al-Attas’ rationale for proposing a new definition and term for Islamic education is consistent with his concern for accuracy and authenticity in understanding Islamic ideas and concepts. Because the terms *ta’līm*, *tarbiyah*, and *ta’dīb* are now fundamentally used differently than they were previously, it makes sense that the committee decided to accept the proposal in a compromising way. When the phrases *tarbiyah*, *ta’līm*, and *ta’dīb* are used together, their meanings together include the overall concept of education.⁴⁷

At the second global conference on Islamic education, which was held in Islamabad in 1980, Al-Attas voiced his disagreement with this compromise. In contrast to the terms *tarbiyah* or *ta’līm* that were in use at the time, Al-Attas claims that the notion of *ta’dīb*, when correctly understood and conveyed, is the most appropriate concept for Islamic education. The notion of Islamic education does not need to be stated in terms of the triad of *tarbiyah-ta’līm-ta’dīb* since, according to Al-Attas, the concept of *ta’dīb* already comprises aspects of knowledge (*‘ilm*), instruction (*ta’līm*), and good direction (*tarbiyah*). The word *adab*

⁴⁰ Darrin James Hodgetts, “Case-Based Research in Community and Social Psychology: Introduction to The Special Issue,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 2, no. 2 (2012): 379–89.

⁴¹ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

⁴² Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Al-Naqib & Ashraf, *Aims Object. Islam. Educ.*

⁴³ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

⁴⁴ Az-Zahra, “The Concept of Thinking of Islamic Religious Education By Muhammad Abduh.”

⁴⁵ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

⁴⁶ Nurfadilah Nurfadilah, “Konsep Kompetensi Peserta Didik Dalam Perspektif Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas” (IAIN Purwokerto, 2020).

⁴⁷ Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization*.

and its branches are cited in the sayings of the Prophet, the Companions in poetry, and the writings of Muslim scholars who followed after, even though the Quran does not use the name *adab* or any other term with the same root.⁴⁸

Since the word “*adab*” originally meant an invitation to a banquet that already included the idea of honourable and decent social ties, it has a very deep and comprehensive meaning. But later on, *adab* was only employed in specific contexts, including when discussing literary studies, professional ethics, and social ethics.⁴⁹ Al-Attas contends that by incorporating spiritual and intellectual components into the semantic area of this saying, the thought it contains has been Islamised from its pre-Islamic setting, based on a hadith recounted by Ibn Mas’ud. According to this new interpretation, the Quran is seen as God inviting humanity to a feast on earth, which we must attend by learning about it.⁵⁰

Then, al-Attas cites another hadith, which says, “Because God has educated me, he has perfected my education.” Al-Attas defines the term *ta’dīb* as education after carefully translating the hadith’s verb “*addaba*” as “has educated me.” This means that “God has educated me and made my education the best education” is how the hadith should be translated.⁵¹ Al-Attas cites Ibn Manzhur, who conflates *addaba* with ‘*allama*, a claim that bolsters his argument that *ta’dīb* is the proper understanding of Islamic education.⁵²

Al-Attas was the first, in Wan Daud’s opinion, to comprehend and translate the phrase “*addabani*” as “educate me.” Prior academics have stated that morality is the subject of *ta’dīb*. The Qur’an, which upholds the Prophet’s noble position as the greatest example, lends credence to the idea that God created the education of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be the best. The Prophet’s hadith, which declares that his goal is to elevate human morality, supports this. “I was sent only to perfect manners.” (H.R. Al-Baihaqi) A person whose faith is most perfect according to the Prophet is the one who has the best character. This indicates that the Prophet’s actions in instructing the people in the Qur’an and knowledge and cleansing them are clear examples of the function of *ta’dīb*. Thus, according to Al-Attas,⁵³ since the inception of Islam, *adab* has been actively engaged in the intellectual discourse of the Prophet’s sunnah and has been conceptually replete with accurate knowledge (*‘ilm*) and honest and appropriate acts (*amal*).

Based on the Islamicised meaning of the word *adab* and drawing on his semantic analysis, Al-Attas proposed his definition of *adab*: “*Adab* is the recognition and acknowledgement of the reality that everything that exists, including knowledge, is arranged in a hierarchy according to its levels and categories, and that each person has a unique place concerning reality, capacity, and intellectual, spiritual, and physical potential.”⁵⁴ What is meant by recognition is the re-knowledge of the first covenant between man and God. It also shows that all matter was already in its proper place in the various hierarchies of existence due to its ignorance and arrogance. The man then changed these places, resulting in injustice. What Al-Attas means by acknowledgement is doing something according to what is already known. It is a kind of affirmation and confirmation or realisation and actualisation within oneself of what one already knows, without which education becomes nothing more than a process of learning (*ta’allum*).⁵⁵

When it is realised that knowledge and recognition, the action, of the proper place is closely related to other keywords in the Islamic worldview, such as wisdom (*hikmah*) and justice (*‘adl*), reality and truth (*haq*), the significance of the meaning of *adab* and its relevance to education, to the good human being, becomes even more pronounced. It is believed that reality and truth itself correlate and make sense in their appropriate

⁴⁸ Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization*.

⁴⁹ Syed Muhammad Al-Naquist Al-Attas, *The Concept of Islamic Education in Islam: A Framework for An Islam Philosophy of Education* (ISTAC, 1991).

⁵⁰ Peter Lilly, “Al-Attas, Islamization and Pancasila: The Impact of Attasian Thought on Political Islam in Indonesia,” *Muslim Politics Review* 3, no. 1 (2024): 84–116.

⁵¹ Syed Muhammad Al-Naquist Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1980).

⁵² Jarman Arroisi, “The Relevance of Contemporary Epistemology on Existing Knowledge: A Critical Analysis of Western Scientific Worldview According to Al-Attas Perspective,” *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 2 (2023): 225–56.

⁵³ Az-Zahra, “The Concept of Thinking of Islamic Religious Education By Muhammad Abduh.”

⁵⁴ Nor Aadha Abdul Hamid, “The Inculcation of ‘Adab’ as the Essence of Education,” *Asian Journal of Management Sciences & Education* 3, no. 4 (2014): 135–41.

⁵⁵ Robert Barr, “From Teaching to Learning—A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 27, no. 6 (1995): 12–26.

contexts.⁵⁶ Al-Attas provides numerous illustrations of how manners exist at all echelons of the human experience. Adab towards oneself starts with seeing that one is made up of two things: reason and animalistic tendencies. A person has placed both of his animalistic tendencies in their rightful context and himself in the right position when his intellect triumphs over and governs them.⁵⁷ For him, the circumstances are reasonable; otherwise, they are unjust (*zalim*).

Al-Attas and *Adab*

In the context of human interactions, the term "*adab*" refers to the idea that moral principles should be applied in a way that satisfies various requirements depending on the status of the individual, such as within the family and community. In this instance, a person's status is decided by the Qur'an according to its standards of knowledge, reason, and honourable actions rather than by humans based on the criteria of power, riches, or ancestry.⁵⁸ A person demonstrates that they understand their actual station in regard to their parents, siblings, children, neighbours, and community leaders when they truly display humility, affection, respect, and concern towards them. The term "*adab*" refers to an intellectual discipline in the context of knowledge that recognises and acknowledges the existence of a hierarchy of knowledge based on levels of glory and nobility. This enables the recognition and acknowledgement that someone whose knowledge is based on revelation is far more sublime and noble than those whose knowledge is based on reason; that is, that *fardu ain* is far higher than *fardu kifayah*.

Everything that contains instructions for life is far more noble than everything that is used in life. *Adab* towards knowledge will result in the proper and correct ways of learning and applying the different fields of science. Along with this, respect for scholars and teachers is in itself one of the direct manifestations of *adab* towards science. Thus, the real goal in the pursuit of knowledge and education is for one to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter. When it comes to nature, *adab* refers to the training of the practical mind to deal with the hierarchy that exists in the universe. This is so that one can decide what is valuable, whether in the context of serving as sources of information, signs from God, or tools for human spiritual and physical advancement. Furthermore, practising *adab* towards the environment and nature entails placing trees, rocks, rivers, lakes, valleys, and plants in their right locations.⁵⁹

To be able to read and write fluently, one must be aware of the proper context for each word, whether spoken or written, to avoid misunderstandings regarding meaning, pronunciation, or concepts.⁶⁰ Simply said, literature in Islam is referred to as *adabiyah* because it is seen as the defender of civilisation and the repository of sayings and lessons that can instil manners in people's spirits and elevate them to a high status in society. Regarding *adab* in the context of the spiritual realm, this refers to acknowledging and recognising the various spiritual stations that are founded on worship, the levels of sublimity that define the spiritual realm, and the spiritual discipline that has correctly given up the animalistic or physical soul to the spiritual or the intellect.⁶¹

The definition of *adab* given by Al-Jurjani is similar to that of *ma'rifah*, which is a specific type of knowledge in the context of science that keeps its possessor from making various mistakes.⁶² Therefore, it should come as no surprise that *hikmah*, wisdom, and *adab* are seen as a reflection of justice.⁶³ Because of their incompatible meanings, Al-Attas rejects both the terms *tarbiyah* and *ta'lim*, which have been taken to represent a comprehensive view of education in Islam. Al-Attas disapproves of the term *tarbiyah* because it limits its meaning to the emotional and physical parts of animal and human growth and development, and it only refers to the physical aspects of growing plants. Ibn Maskawaih, for example, uses the term *ta'dib* to indicate intellectual, spiritual, and social education, both for young people and adults. Meanwhile, the

⁵⁶ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

⁵⁷ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

⁵⁸ Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization*.

⁵⁹ Lilly, "Al-Attas, Islamization and Pancasila: The Impact of Attasian Thought on Political Islam in Indonesia."

⁶⁰ Muhammad Ardiansyah, "The Concept of Adab by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and Its Relevance to Education in Indonesia," *Ibn Khaldun Journal of Social Science* 1, no. 1 (2019): 52–63.

⁶¹ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

⁶² Ahmad bin M., *Kitab Al-Ta'rifat* (Dar al-Fikr, 1983).

⁶³ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Islamic Education in Islam: A Framework for An Islam Philosophy of Education*.

word *tarbiyah* is used by Ibn Maskawaih to teach animals, whether it is done by humans or fellow animals. Therefore, *tarbiyah* is only related to human physical and emotional problems.⁶⁴

According to Al-Attas, the term "*tarbiyah*," which is used by Muslim academics to denote education, is a combination of the Latin word "educatio" and the English word "education." Both words in the Western educational perspective emphasise physical and material aspects. Education in Islam is not only meant to fulfill physical needs but also includes the metaphysical. The term "*tarbiyah*," according to Al-Attas, is improper from a semantic standpoint and does not adequately describe education in the context of Islam.⁶⁵ Al-Attas gives several reasons for his rejection of the term *tarbiyah* as education, namely: Firstly, not all of the main Arabic lexicons contain the term "*tarbiyah*," interpreted in the modern sense of education. Al-Attas further clarifies that while Asma'i said that Ibn Manzhur recorded the word *tarbiyah* in addition to multiple other forms of the root "*raba*" and "*rabba*," these terms have the same meaning. According to al-Jauhari, the meaning of *tarbiyah* and some of the other forms stated by al-Asma'i is feeding, nurturing, and caring for; this is because they are derived from the root "*ghadza*" or "*ghadzw*." This interpretation encompasses everything that develops, including kids, plants, and other things.⁶⁶

In essence, the word "*tarbiyah*" means "to develop, bear, feed, make, increase in growth, raise, produce mature products, and tame." Its semantic fields encompass other species (minerals, plants, and animals), and its application in Arabic is not restricted to human beings alone. Plantations, fish farming, animal husbandry, cattle farming, and chicken and poultry farming are all examples of *tarbiyah*. In contrast, Islam views education as unique to humans.⁶⁷

The fundamental qualitative components of *tarbiyah* and the actions or processes it includes are not the same as those found in the Islamic conception of education. It should be noted that *tarbiyah* also encompasses the idea of "ownership," such as when parents own their children and that it is typically these parents that exercise *tarbiyah* over the pertinent objects of ownership, such as their children or others. The ownership referred to here is only of the relational kind, given that the real ownership lies with God alone, the Creator, Sustainer, Guardian, Giver, Manager, and Owner of all things, all of which are encompassed and indicated by the single term *al-Rabb*.⁶⁸

Thus, the word "*rabba*" and its derivatives, when applied to humans and animals, indicate a "borrowed property." What they do with this borrowed property is *tarbiyah* if what they do is nurture, bear, feed, develop, maintain, raise, increase in growth, produce, tame and so on. All of these are certainly not the work of educating if education is referred to primarily as the imparting of knowledge pertaining to human beings alone, and to the human intellect in particular. Describing *tarbiyah* as education by infusing an essential meaning that includes knowledge would be an artificial insertion, as knowledge is not inherent in the conceptual structure of *tarbiyah*. Now, in the case of humans, *tarbiyah* is typically performed by parents over their progeny in relation to the parents' *borrowed* property rights over their offspring.

There is a genuine risk that education will turn into a secular profession if the organisation known as *tarbiyah*—which is viewed as education—is moved to such a setting. This is the case because the goals of *tarbiyah* are typically material, physical, and quantitative in nature, as all of the term's inherent notions are only concerned with the development and maturation of the body, and because the values set by that state are adapted to the goal of producing a good society—values that are naturally governed by utilitarian principles that tend to the physical and material aspects of human social and political life. The process by which man recognises and acknowledges his position in relation to God and by which he acts in accordance

⁶⁴ Merri Yulia Muchlasin, "Strengthening the Character Education Based on Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas (a Case of Study of Al-Ishlah Cibinong Junior High School)," *Islamic Management: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 1 (2021): 223–34; Komaruddin Sassi, "Ta'dib As A Concept of Islamic Education Purification: Study On The Thoughts of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas," *Journal of Malay Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 53–64.

⁶⁵ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*.

⁶⁶ Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

⁶⁷ Eka Puspitasari, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of Islamizing Science and Its Relevance to Islamic Education," *Al-Misbah (Jurnal Islamic Studies)* 10, no. 2 (2022): 91–108; Al-Attas, *The Concept of Islamic Education in Islam: A Framework for An Islam Philosophy of Education*.

⁶⁸ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Islamic Education in Islam: A Framework for An Islam Philosophy of Education*.

with that recognition and acknowledgement is not essentially a matter of *tarbiyah* but rather of *ta'dīb* since *adab* towards God is nothing other than the expression of sincerity declaration as expressed in worship. This is because the intellectual component is not an inherent element of the concept of *tarbiyah*. Thus, man's response to the work of God as his employer is *ta'dīb*.⁶⁹

Secondly, concerning the reason that *tarbiyah*, viewed as education, is developed from the Qur'anic use of the terms "*raba*" and "*rabba*", which carry similar meanings. However, as previously discussed, the fundamental definitions of these phrases do not inherently include the knowledge, wisdom, and virtue that are, in reality, the components of true education. Muslims are encouraged by Allah SWT to lower the wings of humility out of love for parents and pray as signaled "*And out of kindness lower to them the wing of humility and say: 'My Lord! bestow on them Thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.'*" (Q.S. 17: 24) Thus, "*rabbayani*" there refers to "*rahmah*," which is another word for compassion or mercy. It refers to the supply of clothing, food, love, shelter, and care—that is, the attention that parents provide to their offspring. The "*ka*" of "*ka ma*" in the sentence "*irhamhuma kama rabbayani shagira*" is referred to as "*kaf al-tashbih*," which is a comparative "*kaf*." The reason for the name's etymology is the resemblance between the fundamental ideas of the terms under comparison, which in this instance are "*irhamhuma*," or *rahmah*, and "*rabbayani*," or *tarbiyah*. The phrase "grant them forgiveness as they nurtured us" is an etymological interpretation. *Tarbiyah*, which is the *masdar* of "*rabbaituhu*," means forgiveness or kindness. If God is the one who creates, raises, protects, bestows, tends, and does all of the things that make God worthy of the title "*al-Rabb*," then those are *rahmah*, or acts of kindness. When analogous human beings perform such acts on their offspring, it is called *tarbiyah*. Indeed the primary meaning of the term "*al-Rabb*" is *al-tarbiyah* which means: bringing something to a state of completeness gradually, as acts of mercy—and hence also analogously acts of *tarbiyah*—do not involve knowledge. It rather refers to an existential condition that is distinct from knowledge. That "*ilm*" or knowledge is different from "*rahmah*" or compassion,⁷⁰ It is already evident from the Quran itself when it says: "*O' our Lord, Your mercy and knowledge encompass all things.*" (Q.S. 40:7)

Thirdly, if it is said that a meaning related to knowledge can be inserted into the concept of "*rabba*," that meaning refers to the possession of knowledge and not to its cultivation. Hence, it does not refer to education in the sense that it refers to the term "*Rabbani*," which is the name given to wise men who are learned in the knowledge of "*al-Rabb*." It is narrated that Muhammad al-Hanafiyah has called Ibn Abbas the "*Rabbani*" of the people. It is also reported that Ali ibn Abi Talib categorised people into three levels. The first level is the '*alim Rabbani*, Sibawaihi said that the "*alif*" and "*nun*" in the term were added to imply specialisation in the knowledge of "*al-Rabb*" while ignoring other branches of knowledge. Ibn al-Athir said the same about adding the two letters to emphasise the meaning. He further said that the term is derived from "*al-Rabb*" in the sense of *al-Tarbiyah*. However, according to Ibn Ubaid, the term "*Rabbani*" is not essentially an Arabic term but a Hebrew or Syriac term, and is not known among the masses except among jurists and scientists.

From the explanation above, according to the author, Al-Attas is one of the Muslim figures who emphasises the importance of the purpose of education in order to form a good individual, not a good society. Al-Attas argues that society is a collection of individuals therefore the individual is the main concern in education. A good society will come from good individuals and is accomplished by instilling *adab* (*ta'dīb*). In Al-Attas' thinking, *adab* or ethics is a central concept that encompasses good behaviour and manners. *Adab*, in the context of education orientation, according to Al-Attas, is very important because education, according to him, is not only about mastering knowledge but also about forming good character and morals in individuals.

Here are some significant *adab* in education orientation elements from Al-Attas's point of view: 1. The primary goal of education. Al-Attas contends that the fundamental goal of education is to develop civilised

⁶⁹ Mesut Idriz, "Expounding The Concept of Religion in Islam as Understood by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas," *Poligrafi* 25, no. 99/100 (2020): 101–15; Omar Nakib, "The Nature of the Aims of Education: Quranic Perspectives," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 13, no. 1 (2015): 25–46.

⁷⁰ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*.

individuals⁷¹ with profound knowledge and admirable morality. Spiritual and moral development should be a part of a quality education, not merely academic development; 2. Learning and knowledge. Al-Attas emphasises that knowledge must be acquired in the right way,⁷² that is, with respect for knowledge and its teachings. This includes an attitude of humility, earnestness in learning, and responsibility for the knowledge gained; 3. Student and teacher relations. Al-Attas taught that the relationship between students and teachers should be based on mutual respect.⁷³ Teachers not only act as teachers but also as moral role models for students. Good manners are especially needed in treating the teacher as a guide and mentor; 4. Character development. Al-Attas asserts that education should produce individuals with strong character and good morals.⁷⁴ *Adab* includes attitudes such as patience, honesty, humility, and concern for others; 5. Integration of science and values. Al-Attas rejects the separation between science and moral values.⁷⁵ For him, knowledge that is not accompanied by good manners can be a source of inability to produce positive changes in society.

Conclusion

In Al-Attas' thinking, the contextualisation of *adab* concerning the purpose of education should be carried out in an educational process in which every individual in the educational environment has a role and responsibility to create a good human being known as *insan kamil*. In the context of educational orientation according to Al-Attas' perspective, *adab* is not just a rule of behavior, but rather a deep foundation in shaping individuals with knowledge and noble character. This is important to achieve the main goal of education in Al-Attas' view, which is to form civilised and responsible people in their lives and in the society.

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⁷¹ Surya Hidayat, "Islamisation of Science: Al-Attas' View and Its Implementation at Qur'anic Boarding School Darul Fattah Junior High School," *Journal of Social Science Utilizing Technology* 2, no. 1 (2024): 402–12; Puspitasari, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of Islamizing Science and Its Relevance to Islamic Education."

⁷² Nirhamna Hanif Fadillah, "The Concept of Science in Islamic Tradition: Analytical Studies of Syed Naquib Al-Attas on Knowledge," *Tasfiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 7, no. 1 (2023): 25–62; Fahmi Zarkasyi Hamid, "Knowledge and Knowing in Islam: A Comparative Study between Nursi and Al-Attas," *GJAT* 8, no. 1 (2018): 31–41.

⁷³ Zikry Septoyadi, "The Concept of Ta'dib According to An-Naquib Al-Attas And Humanism According to Paulo Freire and Their Relevance with Islamic Education," *Al-Abshar: Journal of Islamic Education Management* 2, no. 1 (2023): 1–25; Omar Khasawneh, "Teacher Education from An Islamic Perspective," *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 10, no. 3 (2020).

⁷⁴ Sassi, "Ta'dib As A Concept of Islamic Education Purification: Study On The Thoughts of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas"; Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*.

⁷⁵ Arroisi, "The Relevance of Contemporary Epistemology on Existing Knowledge: A Critical Analysis of Western Scientific Worldview According to Al-Attas Perspective"; Adi Setia, "Al-Attas' Philosophy of Science An Extended Outline," *Islam & Science* 1, no. 2 (2003): 165.

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