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Islamic Wasatiyyah Teaching in Indonesian Education: An Analysis of the Tasawuf Approach

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Abstract

The objective of this qualitative study is to focus on the role played by the Wasatiyyah concept in Indonesian Education via the exploratory content analysis method. For this purpose, the study analyzed the Tasawuf approach, the Islamic mysticism. As a result the educational institutions included such principles like good (khayr) and bad (fasad) or just and moderation as part of the Indonesian curricula. In conclusion, it can be concluded that the Wasatiyyah concept applied in the Indonesian education is in tandem with the Tasawuf approach considered as the main element of Islamic epistemology.

Keywords: Islamic Moderation; Mysticism, Sufism, Education.

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La enseñanza islámica de Wasatiyyah en la educación indonesia: Un análisis del enfoque de Tasawuf

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio cualitativo es centrarse en el papel desempeñado por el concepto Wasatiyyah en la educación indonesia a través del método de análisis de contenido exploratorio. Para este propósito, el estudio analizó el enfoque de Tasawuf, el misticismo islámico. Como resultado, las instituciones educativas incluyeron principios tales como bueno (khayr) y malo (fasad) o simplemente y moderación como parte de los planes de estudio indonesios. En conclusión, se puede concluir que el concepto Wasatiyyah aplicado en la educación de Indonesia está en línea con el enfoque de Tasawuf considerado como el elemento principal de la epistemología islámica.

Palabras clave: moderación islámica; Misticismo, sufismo, educación.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian education system is subjected to a sort of structural dichotomy catering to two concurrently existing schooling systems first falling under Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC); second popularly known as pesantren, madrasah under Ministry of Religion (MOR). The Islamic teaching was practiced in Madrasas as well as through Halaqahs and mosques which in the Javanese context

were also called pesantren. Pesantren is regarded as pioneering Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and still existing.

Many scholars and critics have however demanded modernization of the Islamic education sector (Andi & Ghani, 2017), which has never been seriously paid heed to. The reason is that the Indonesian authorities do not want to distort the Islamic identity of these institutions. However, the authorities agreed to teach the same curriculum in both types of school systems. The emphasis is on subjects like Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Akidah Akhlak (Islamic Faith and Morality),
Quran/ Hadits (Qur'an and the Prophet's Traditions) and Sejarah Islam (Islamic History).

The term Wasatiyyah is derived from an Arabic word wasat which in its different forms means middle, fair, just, or moderate. This term is used frequently in several contexts in the
Qur'an (Edward, 1972). The Qur'ānic phrase ummatan wasaṭan refers to a Universal Islamic Community or a Nation possessing attributes of justice, fairness and moderation. Allah says: Thus, have we made of you an ummah (Community) justly balanced (wasatan) that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves. In this verse, it is emphasized that the followers of Islam are ummatan wasatan or the Just Community or balanced people. This Qur'ānic phrase ummatan wasaṭan, has also promoted concepts like Tauḥīd (purity) or taqwā (God-fearing mindset). Education plays a

major role in both Tauhid and Taqwa making Wasatiyyah the most suitable teaching ideology in today's turbulent times.

The Wasatiyyah teaching not only will teach humanity about the integrity and purity of Islam but also will inculcate principles of balance and moderation, and help differentiate truth from Falsehood, Good from Evil. It is, therefore, the obligation upon Muslims to become both religious and moralistic, with the attributes of justice as well as morality (Aljunaid, 1988). The term Tasawuf refers to the Islamic mysticism that got reflected in the Islamic Sufism practiced by a spiritual community comprising charismatic teachers or Sufis. The Islamic epistemology has recognized Tasawuf as a psychological or spiritual approach Abu al-Husain al-Nuri (907 C), a Sufi stated that Tasawuf is more than knowledge; it is goodness or khulq, self-surrendering to Allah. Aljunaid (1988) asserts, Tasawuf makes you dead in yourself and alive in Him.

1.1. Problem statement

This study focuses on two levels of inquiries often posed to the Islamic scholars and practitioners. First, whether Islam is just a religion or anything beyond it; second, whether it has wider socio-cultural implications. Several studies (Azra, 1999; Burhanuddin, 2017) have asserted that it is not just a religious system, but a pattern of life, without any separation of religious regulations from social and cultural life. To achieve this, Islamic society has been able to preserve its basic

Islamic principles and internal instruments. These principles have helped Islam to fight radicalism and any inner or outer threats. Wasatiyyah is one such principle which speaks of moderation and rejecting any kind of extremism or radicalism. When it comes to education, the Wasatiyyah principles of teaching takes into account the cultural and religious differences of learners. The principle also believed in free will. Such freedom, from the Islamic point of view, means responsibility or accountability for the choices made by the individual.

The spiritual or intellectual aspect is covered by the Tasawuf approach, which has got its most successful manifestation in the field of education. The basic teaching of the Tasawuf approach is that a Muslim must not initiate any conflict as it is against God's will. The Tasawuf approach in a way extends the Wasatiyyah principle that teaches people to respect and accept each other, welcomes the pluralism of opinions to avoid controversies and construct a perfect Muslim society. However, the modern times have witnessed a violation of these Islamic principles, including the Wasatiyyah and the Tasawuf, in the manner terror and violence has swept across globally. This study proposes that the holy principles of Wasatiyyah and the Tasawuf are now just quoted out of context, and radicalism has taken over its reins. The fall in the education standards is one of the consequences of its moral and spiritual downfall.

This study looks at Wasatiyyah teaching from a different perspective. First, it is a way of life recommended by the Qur'an.

Second, it brings humans closer through a moderate and balanced way of living the life. Third, it encourages such approaches like Tasawuf to educate the masses. The Tasawuf approach is a kind of psychological experience resulting in individual transformation. It stands out as a knowledge system too, a kind of enlightenment that reveals God's wisdom to man. Tasawuf is also the underlying principle of Sufism which directs one to his internal soul and beyond physical existence. It is yet to observe how the Indonesian education system employs the Tasawuf approach or Sufi mysticism in its curriculum and teaching patterns.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Tasawuf

In prior studies related to Tasawuf (Alattas, 1999), the emphasis is given on faith and religious sanctity. Faith reflects a belief in God while religious sanctity stimulates pure thoughts, goodness, behavior, and direction. For instance, Aljunaid (1988) cited and people who struggle for (to find mercy) us, truly we shall show them our ways. And, Indeed, Allah is with those who do well. This is consistent with the scientific principle found in the words of Happold (1981) who suggested that for science to be understood and comprehended, [every] principle is to be accepted as presuppositions which rely on faith. Similarly, Noer (2003) showed how Tasawuf contributed to the

development of the Islamic civilization though Islamic mysticism. According to the author, Islamic mysticism corroborated with Islamic civilization in the advancement of education, literature, dance and music.

The Tasawuf approach was much useful to resolve problems related to modern science explaining the rationale behind all phenomena in this universe. To quote Syed Ali Ashraf, the Tasawuf approach in the spread of Islamic education is not limited to just a few disciplines but to all branches of knowledge taught from the Islamic point of view; hence it governed by the deeply felt ethical values of Islam also insisted upon guiding students toward these values. Students must be reengaged in Islamic and spiritual activities so that they do not engross themselves in religious ignorance (Noer, 2003) it is only through education students can develop these values and come closer in their relationship with God. The Tasawuf approach provides the student positive guidance and helps them to grow into highly moral-embedded adults to live a happy life

2.2. Wasatiyyah

Wasatiyyah is considered in prior writings as a central Islamic message (Edward, 1972). Almost every aspect of Islamic culture or its civilization has been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Wasatiyyah teachings. It is multidimensional; it is corporeal, psychological, intellectual and spiritual, a philosophy of life. The

teachings of Wasatiyyah are so comprehensive that it offers a balance to the most contradictory pre-requisites of man's physical and spiritual existence. Hassan (2013) asserts that Wasatiyyah is synonymous to a Muslim or anything that is Islamic looking at this principle as moderate and justly balanced, hinting at a creed that is complete, full of knowledge, truth and strength (Mendoza Velazco & Rivero Padrón, 2019).

Likewise, Hassan (2013) calls Wasatiyyah as a balancing principle between the permanent principles of Islamic law and the changing conditions of the time. According to him, the principle of Wasatiyyah also brings together individual's religious obligations close to his social ones; allowing his for social intercourse and coexistence. Last, but not the least, it is often claimed that claims that Wasatiyyah presents Islam as the ultimate revival and liberation of the ummah or the Islamic community.

2.3. Education in Indonesia

Sahri (2018) reiterates that schools and universities that are meant to spread knowledge of Islam must produce Islamic religious leaders who can not only teach the Qur'an and its messages but also Islamic subjects such as Islamic law and jurisprudence and Islamic traditions. Another objective of such Islamic educational institutions should be to provide a balanced curriculum and offer a broad education programme to students enabling them to compete for jobs in

a multicultural society (Azra, 1999; Dandan and Marques, 2017; Anyi, 2017; Adedoyin and Okere, 2017; Klapproth and Martin, 2018). In other words, prior literature equates Islamic education with Islamization of knowledge, treating it a secular academic discipline. Jackson & Parker (2008) affirm that Islamization should actually be an educational endeavor aiming to reform the socio-cultural traditions and practices in the Arab Peninsula. The author also analyzed the Islamic epistemology as a rational subject of knowledge, relevant to the educational needs of the current society.

In September 2018 a conference on Islamic Studies was organized in Palu, Central Sulawesi, on Salaf Pesantren Curriculum with the objective to study Islam as a peaceful ideology. Sahri (2018) conducted a research on two Islamic institutions in East Java, Indonesia: i.e Pesantren Langitan and Pesantren Kedinding Lor with a view to understanding the Islamic traditional education in Indonesia (salaf pesantren). The findings reveal that the Islamic curriculum in the sampled organizations was primarily based on religious subjects such as Islamic history, Islamic law and Tasawuf (Islamic mysticism). The researcher also discovered a Sufi approach in the Tasawuf principle making the salaf pesantren more ethical and peaceful.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Owing to the nature of its subject, this study adopted a theoretical and non-empirical approach. A qualitative methodology

was also adopted employing a combination of descriptive and analytical methods. Hence, right at the outset, the concepts of Wasatiyyah and Tasawuf were discussed followed by prior studies, citing Qur'anic sources and those of the Islamic tradition. Next, these concepts were studied in the context of the Indonesian education system where the Wasatiyyah teaching framework was most evidently manifested in both curriculum and methodology (Soo et al., 2019).

The tasawuf approach helped in gaining a convergence of Wasatiyyah in the Indonesian academic environment.
Simultaneously, a critical overview of the Islamic epistemology was also made to highlight such concepts like Sufism and mysticism embedded in the Tasawuf approach. Overall, the analysis in this study is divided into two parts: First, an understanding of the Wasatiyyah teaching is done in the light of Qur'an and Hadith; second, a content analysis is done of the element of Wasatiyyah teaching in the Indonesian education system with a specific focus on the Tasawuf approach.

The study analyzed the Indonesian education system by taking samples of teaching and curriculum at schools in the East Java province and juxtaposing them with the Islamic teaching methods postulated sunder Wasatiyyah. The two Islamic schools where this research was carried out are situated in Yogyakarta and Palangkaraya. These two places were purposively selected as they met the criteria of the research design of finding such places which followed both general and Islamic teaching methods. Besides, both cities have been exposed

to multireligious and multicultural ethnicities (Ahmed, Umrani, Qureshi & Sarmad, 2018; Ali & Haseeb, 2019; Haseeb, Abidin, Hye, & Hartani, 2018; Haseeb., 2019; Suryanto, Haseeb, & Hartani, 2018). The research adopted the qualitative approach with participant observations methods and documentation study as primary techniques. At times, focus group discussions also took place with school authorities, teachers and students to gather data.

4. ANALYSIS

During data collection, it was revealed that the Indonesian were well aware of elements like sincerity (mujahadah), moderation and belief in all the educational components including teachers, students, and infrastructure. As emphasized in prior writings, too, emphasized that sincerity and faith are a priori principles that ensure the adherence to piety and accuracy as Islamic principles. They protect the subjectivity of the human mind against ill-deeds, improve its potential and stimulate pure thoughts in the mind of the individuals.

The inherent pattern of the Islamic education in Indonesia is thus found to be based on two principles: First, the direct education that is gained as Allah's gift or acquired by practicing such Wasatiyyah teaching principles like sincerity and piety; second, the indirect education gained through human intellectual potential. It is believed that the congruence of the two methods created a dynamic

and progressive educational model. This congruence is also the central principle of the Tasawuf approach which the Sufis postulated further and also would be discussed later in this section (Indriastuti, 2019).

As made clear earlier in this study, the term wasata means to be fair and moderate, to adopt a balanced approach by not adopting any one particular extreme. The wasata teaching principle though emphasized upon practicing the teachings of Islam, but not to any extreme of either living the life of a spiritual ascetic, abstaining from all worldly matters or living a materialistic one full of corporeal activities, but it should be balanced of the two extremes (Alhawiti and Abdelhamid, 2017). For this reason, the curricula in the Indonesian education system match with the Wasatiyyah concept. These findings are consistent with earlier findings that have also recommended to teach students to practice or develop an extremist's attitude, that is, not to pursue the belief in its extreme (Abdullah, 2001) nor adopt the earthly matters and neglect the after-life or vice versa.

Hence, the content analysis of the data revealed that the Wasatiyyah teaching style was being applied in the Indonesian education context not only as a process for gaining knowledge and acquiring skills but also as a transformation process of the self and the system. It also taught the teachers and students to look for a point of balance. These findings have implications for those Islamic countries which either do not have an integrated education system or where such knowledge managing systems are underdeveloped with resources deficient. It may be inferred that this deficiency deteriorates the will

power of the people, makes their spiritual quality weak and following such practices become totally difficult to achieve.

The Indonesian education system followed the Wasatiyyah concept to teach subjects in science as well as arts along with Islamic studies. The school authorities normally conduct these classes after the normal school hours. The study found out that the Wasatiyyah concept needs to be brought closer to the Tasawuf approach and consider it as a mandatory subject. This will enable the Indonesian people to develop aspects like mental and spiritual strength. Such education will also help formulate their characters with good behavioral tendencies. During this study, there was clear evidence in documentation as well as textbooks about orientation towards Sufism. It insisted on virtues like self-cleansing and seeking the principle of truth.

While this study focused on the Tasawuf perspective, it found a few facts about it during the course of this study first, Tasawuf is more a way of life, a bridge to achieve spiritual excellence. Second, Tasawuf relates itself with an individual's psychological experiences resulting in mental development and transformation (Yang et al., 2019). Third, it reveals itself as a knowledge system, a kind of enlightenment giving a prescriptive view of a spiritual experience. Sufism is brought to attention while studying the Tasawuf approach building the virtues of spiritual nature more than the physical. The Tasawuf approach revolves around virtues like patience, sincerity goodness; feelings like that of love and kindness; attitudes like being humble and calm; and practices like hunger and self-restraint. All these virtues can be

summed up as a phenomenon when an individual does self-surrendering to Allah. Aljunaid (1988) had stated, Tasawuf makes you dead in yourself and alive in Him.

5. DISCUSSION

The next step in this study was to study him Tasawuf approach as not only esoteric but an intellectual epistemological system in past studies, Tasawuf has emerged more as a philosophy than an approach. It means that Tasawuf makes an effort to understand and interpret reality, as well as the ontological and epistemological truths. Tasawuf goes beyond narrow human issues and responds to the emptiness of social and spiritual dynamics. Epistemologically, Tasawuf builds the foundation to achieve science through intuition theories. Axiologically, Tasawuf shows its significance by using selfpurifying propaganda (tazkiyah al-Nafs) and individual moral development. The educational environment of an Indonesian school ideally suited these purposes, however, the researcher came across the intellectual debate of two ideologies namely idealism and empiricism. The former looks at reality as innate or underlined in the minds of individuals while the latter regards reality as empirical or external which can be understood only through sensory experiences.

A balanced curriculum of course not only provides a platform for the students to a broaden their educational needs but also prepares

them for a competing job market. While teachers and students were seen attempting a socialization process with their Wasatiyyah concept, at the same time a majority of them were found developing appropriate attitudes and behavioral principles towards others. The involvement of such elements in a school's administrative as well as academic system hinted at the consistency in the development of implementation of the Wasatiyyah concept in school education at large. Regular meetings and dissemination of such programs with staff and teachers and community members regarding the planning and implementation of the Wasatiyyah approach were also observed.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on findings, analysis and discussions of this study, it can be concluded that the Wasatiyyah concept applied in the Indonesian education is in tandem with the Tasawuf approach considered as the main element of Islamic epistemology. The study discovered a close relationship between the Wasatiyyah concept and the spiritual and mystical approach of the Tasawuf approach. These findings, however, may appear to be elusive but in the Indonesian context, the Wasatiyyah concept has really paved a way of intellectual wisdom and engendered spiritualism and religious fervor in the society. Through education, this concept has expanded to other disciplines like politics, governance, entrepreneurship, business, commerce and other applications. Future

studies may be carried out to determine the impact of Wasatiyyah concept in these disciplines. This is evidence that the Wasatiyyah concept proves appropriate for various schools of thought and social practices. The Indonesian society comprises numerous socio-cultural norms; hence Wasatiyyah concept would help establish a harmonious relationship across all sections of society

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