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## REFRAMING ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL CONCEPT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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**Abstract:** The development of concepts and theories of Islamic Education have started since the First Conference on Muslim Education in Mecca in 1997. However, throughout these concepts, the Muslims scholars fail to link the concept of Islamic Education with the struggle for social justice in the Muslim community. This paper aims to discuss why social justice issues seem to be overlooked, this paper also offers recommendation on reframing of Islamic educational theory. For this purpose, this paper analyzes documents resulted from the World Conferences of the Muslim Education, and from another conference with the theme Toward Construction of a Contemporary Islamic Educational Theory conducted in Amman-Jordan. The author found that Islamic education theories surprisingly devoid of social justice issues, and put more emphasis on individual development, simplification of the concept of society as mere group of individuals, and to avoid resistance (risks if taking confrontative issues such as social justice) from the dictatorial regimes holding power in Muslim countries.

**Keywords:** Islamic Education, Muslim community, Educational theory, Educational sociology

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### INTRODUCTION

One central question in the field of Sociology of Education is what are the roles of educational institutions in current modern society?. The first surprising answer came from Bowles and Gintis (2002) stated that schools and universities were developed to serve the interests of the capitalistic order/mode of production. Education plays the roles to reproduce set of values designed to justify the inequality within the community social system and to nurture obedient and docile characters of the educated people toward the capitalists.

Should Islamic education institutions take different roles for the education activities to put priorities on developing logical way of thinking and critical consciousness of the students which may contribute further to the collective struggle to achieve social justice? Discussion of this topic is important for Aceh based on two reasonings: *First*, there is a strong tide to push for Islamisation of Aceh education system as part of the **syariatization** in all aspects of life of the Aceh society. There are at least three evidences to support the above statement, which is Law of Aceh Education Implementation in 2002 and 2008; Aceh Education Strategic Plan 2007-2012; and set of recommendations resulted from the Seminar on Evaluation of Dinul Islam implementation in conjunction with the Islamic New Year 1435 H. The three documents strive for education in Aceh to be implemented in accordance to the Islamic education concepts. One of the nine important recommendations from the Islamic shariah evaluation is to apply islamization of education in Aceh. *Second*, ideas surrounding Islamic education that have been around since the 70s from the prominent Islamic scholars failed to demonstrate the emancipatory roles of the



education institutions in Muslim communities. To conclude, in Islamic education, issues on critical consciousness, social justice and democratization did not receive sufficient attention.

The discussion in this article is divided into four main parts. The first part discusses the concept of Islamic Education, brief summary of the history, the scope, its prominent scholars and its philosophy foundation. The second part is to discuss the concept fallacy of the scholars on Islamic Education to understand the concept of society. Society, as defined in sociology, is not merely groups of individuals. The third part, the author will highlight the concept of social justice in Islam and the importance of this concept taking the views of two prominent muslim scholars, Qutb (2000) and Hamka (1985). The last part of this paper offers pathways on reframing of Islamic education concept in each of its key elements, these are: philosophical foundation, aim of islamic education, islamic curriculum, islamic teaching methods, and management.

In discussing each of the aforementioned sections, the author analyzes the thinking of a range of references relevant with the issues discussed in this paper, that is the Concept of Islamic Education, complexity of the concept of society, and the central concept which is the social justice in Islam. In addition to examining reference books, the author also did document reviews resulted from the World Conferences on Muslim Education and from the Conference Toward Construction of a Contemporary Islamic Educational Theory.

## CONCEPT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

The discourse on Islamic education concept gained greater attention from the Muslim scholar after the 1<sup>st</sup> World Congress on Muslim Education in Mecca (1977), which had thoroughly dissected issues encompassing philosophical foundation, curriculum, textbooks, and teaching methods in Islamic education. With the aim to construct contemporary Islamic educational theory, a conference was held in Amman-Jordan in 1990 under the auspices of International Institute of Islamic Thought, Islamic Studies and Research Association, Yarmouk University, and Mu'ta University. No fewer than thirty papers were presented by leading Muslim scholars, at the conference, covering wide range of key issues in establishing the Islamic educational theory ranging from philosophical ideas to research methodology and other technical ideas.

There has not been significant development in terms of the discourses on the philosophical foundation of Islamic education. So far, Islamic education philosophy is built based on two fundamental principles, namely the concept of man and the concept of knowledge. Islam conclusions on both concepts serve as a direction for the scholars in determining the objective of education, content, curricula, methods of teaching and other practical aspects. This is clearly the highlight of Al-Attas (1980) in his book entitled "The Concept of Education in Islam: a Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education", and Hashim (2004) explanation on the Islamic Philosophy of education in her book "Educational Dualism in Malaysia".

Al-Attas (1980) and delegates of the World Conference on Muslim Education argue that the ends/pinnacle of education would be to produce a good man (*al-insan al-salih*) or righteous man and God conscious man. As Al-Attas (1980) stated it is more fundamental in Islam to produce a good man than a good citizen, for the good man will also no doubt be a good citizen, but the good citizen will not necessarily also be a good man (Al-Attas, 1980). The review of the aims of education as formulated by various notable Muslim philosophers and thinkers, past and



present reveals some common themes. The focus is mainly on individual development and less on state interest (Hashim, 2004).

The emphasis on ‘full individual development’ of Islamic education concept has been justified based on a simple assumption that society is just the comprise of individuals, thus the ultimate aim of education is to produce good men which eventually will resulted in the establishment of good society or a just society. This assumption will need to be re-examined due to its simplifying interpretation in understanding the nature of society. Obviously, failure in understanding the society will lead to an education system that is built upon it to be a less contributing element in addressing the needs and problems of the society.

Despite the above, the prominent Muslim scholars, many have made significant contribution in formulating the concept of Islamic Education seem to have not given sufficient attention in the debate on the nature of society. To name few of the scholars, e.g. Al-Attas (1980) and Ashraf (1985) and so forth, appear to have lack of interest to incorporating the theories on society from the sociology science field and or other known world thinkers. Which lead to the cause why they have not given sufficient portion to highlight issues on social justice in the discourse of Islamic education.

Although during the conference on Toward Construction of a Contemporary Islamic Educational Theory in Amman-Jordan, some scholars such as Ali (1990), Ghanayim (1990), and Yelcin (1990) have started the initiative to discuss the social aspects in formulating the theory of Islamic Education, yet the interconnectedness between Islamic Education and Social Justice still largely neglected. Most of the discussion focused on the nature of man, rather than the concept of society with its complexities. Obviously, ‘the full individual development’ which is central to Islamic education concept is not an easy concept to relate to social justice, which is as an issue requires a comprehensive and thorough study on society and elements contributing to social injustice.

Qutb (2000) and Hamka (1985) have described the central issue of social justice in Islam over two decades prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> World Conference on Muslim Education was held. Unfortunately, the leading Muslim scholars who have concerned on and specialized in the Islamic education field, be during the conference or in their works published afterward, have not been able to make the essential connection between social justice and Islamic education. Social justice as an issue was merely treated as allusions or side issues in the discourse of Islamic education. In other word, there has not been a clear formulation on the roles of Islamic education in advocating social justice as Paolo Freire formulated the role of critical pedagogy in advocating social justice, emancipation movement, and the formation of a democratic society.

Social sciences are rich with tools and paradigms to better understand the concept of society as an independent and complex reality that cannot be simplified. There are at least two opposite paradigms pertaining to study of society in relation to the education institution, namely functional paradigm and conflict paradigm. Each paradigm differs in its views on the roles of education institution in modern society.

## **COMPLEXITY OF SOCIETY**

Is society simply a collection of individuals? If it is no more than that, how can we explain the way in which seems to control our lives? These are the basic questions proposed by Jureidini and Poole (2000) when explaining the idea of society. They then argue that the concept of society



covers more than a group of individuals, for it includes ideas about order, breakdown and change in social life.

Sociologist as Comte (1798-1857), Spencer (1820-1903), Marx (1818-1883), Durkheim (1858-1917), Weber (1864-1920) and some others provided theoretical framework to understand how societies cohere and change. Some investigate society from the macro view of society in which it examines the broad structural arrangements in society and considers relations at the level of institutions. While some others use the micro view of society in which it discerns on the small-scale commonplace activities such as dressing, eating, and shopping that people are involved in as they go about their daily lives.

It is obvious that the idea of society is complex, and that the term can embrace social relations between individuals and groups, the way in which social group are organised, the patterns of social relationships or social structures, a common identity, a nation-state, norms and social roles (Jureidini and Pole, 2000). Man in a society is not only influenced by other individual, but also controlled, dominated and under the hegemonies of several powers.

Those who perceive society as merely a group of individuals, and convinced that good education will resulted in good individuals which eventually leads to a just society, have placed individuals in a neutral position, free of power relations existed within it. Therefore neglecting the class-based, gender and other conflict relations and ignoring the fact that modern society is heavily controlled by institutions of political and economic power (state and market). The imbalance power struggle between groups within society and the interest of the elites to perpetuate their dominance and power, thus, will always get its justification through the education institutions (Bowles and Gintis, 2002).

This is in line with the conflict theory of society, which stated that human being, according to the conflict paradigm, lives in divided and conflict-ridden society where groups compete for the control of educational system. The struggle between groups has been seen as unequal. Education institutions have been established in such contexts then they play the roles, as mentioned by Bowles and Gintis (1977), which is to serve the interest of capitalist order and to reinforce class inequalities in contemporary society.

Conventional education institutions are solely intended as a credible source to justify the injustices through a whole range of doctrines and dogma, therefore instead of taking the role to instil critical awareness to its students, education institutions function as soft-control that perpetuates the social inequalities resulted from the interests of capital and political elites (Kazmi, 2011).

The Islamic education therefore should redefine its concept on the nature of society in its complexities, power relations and inequalities that exist within it. Departing from the Islamic worldview on the nature of society (in addition to the nature of man and the concept of knowledge) consequently, there should be a reframing of Islamic education in terms of its ultimate aim, curriculum, content and methods of teaching to allow space to instil awareness and set forward agendas as positive advocates for social justice. Most definitely, advocating social justice through Islamic Education will move beyond creating the good men, that is to mend the blindness of the education institutions toward the existing imbalance system which contribute in preserving and perpetuating injustices within our society. This way, Islamic education plays important roles to encourage the emerging and establishment of emancipative social movements which demand re-organising of society in Islamic system which embodied justice.



## SOCIAL JUSTICE

Why Islamic educational theory should highlighting social justice as one of its essential issue? Here are the reasons: *firstly*, it is no doubt that social justice include in the list of central issues in Islam. A view on society has not become Islamic until it explains social justice as integrated part of it. As proposed by Qutb (2000), Islam has set the basic principles of social justice and confirmed the claims of the poor on the wealth of the rich; it provides the principles of justice with regard to power and money, therefore it is not necessary to opiate human consciousness and instead appeal to them to leave their earthly rights for the ultimate purpose of their hope in the hereafter (Al-‘Adalah al-Ijtima’iyyah: 20).

Secondly, given that the muslim society (ummah) is known for its strong inclination toward social justice, therefore the Islamic education theory naturally needs to enable ummah to achieve this ultimate goal. As mentioned by Hashim (2004) that the ends and goals of a society will determine the ends and goals of education. In this regard, the Islamic educational theory needs to accommodate the *ummah* aspiring to realize the social justice. Just as Abdul-Ghani Abboud was aware that education is a social process; for educational systems do not exist in vacuum but within a complicated network of political and economic relations which govern the life of society. According to Ghanayim (1990), every society has a social philosophy in which it believes, and by which it is guided and in light of which it prepare its members. It is scientist, thinkers and leaders of opinion in a society who can translate this social philosophy into an educational philosophy which directs education and thereby leads the society to progress and development. Therefore, Muslim society has been known for its strong inclination toward the themes of justice, (divine justice, personal justice, and social justice) consequently should develop the concept and education institution which are to issues of social justice and contribute to the development that can abstain any form of oppression and injustices treatment.

Last but not least, since the fall of the Ottoman Empire up to this day, the Muslims live mostly in developing countries with chronic problems on social injustice. The number of Muslim family live below poverty line is alarmingly high, and they live below the standard quality of life, and for long, there have not been any serious advocacy efforts. The book edited by Khan (1981) titled Education in the Muslim World asserted that the widening gap between the rich and the poor in most Islamic countries is very troubling.

Today we witness the wave of people emancipative movements are rapidly spreading in the Middle East and North Africa. Islamic Educational theory should perceive this phenomenon as an important stage in the history of contemporary Muslim society. Islamic Education should have given clear direction for the struggling Muslim society on how to achieve the social justice and maintain it, considering the expensive price to pay for the struggle, we cannot let the tyrant to return to power and for the people to be again manipulated in means of soft control and hard control forms in order to preserve the injustices in the society.

Should prominent Muslim scholars perceive the ongoing revolution movement of Tunisian, Egyptian, Yemen, Bahraini, Libyan, Jordan, Saudi, Syrian, and other Muslim countries as an isolated reality, completely detached from Islamic Education? Indeed, the Islamic institutions such as Islamic universities ought to more focus on the concept of social justice. However, the current situation is challenging the Islamic education both from the conceptual aspect and intellectual inclination. Will our prominent scholars follow the footsteps of Saudi



clerics who oppose the people's movement or be like the light at the end of the tunnel? It is the duty of the Islamic universities to provide a clear paradigm, conceptual framework and analysis tools to be able to explain the symptoms of the current wave of people's movement and guide it with influential intellectual discourses.

Scientific discourses on social justice have to be produced as many as possible by Muslim academicians and social activists, certainly with Islamised efforts as have been done by Qutb (2000) in *al- 'Adalah al-Ijtima' iyyah fil Islam* (Social Justice in Islam), Hamka (1985) in his book *Keadilan Sosial Dalam Islam* (social justice in Islam), and Ajijola (1977) in his book *The Islamic concept of Social Justice*, to name a few. We are indebted to these scholars for the work they have started.

According to Qutb (2000), social justice in Islam has its own special character. It sided with the equal opportunities and encourage competition. It guarantees a standard basic life for everyone and oppose extravagant life, yet it does not pursue the equal distribution of wealth. With reference to the Koran and prophet traditions, Qutb (2000) formulates the three foundations of social justice in Islam, viz. freedom of conscience, human equality, and mutual responsibility in society. Hamka (1985) argued that Islam requires the government to enforce social justice as the prophet has led the examples with the model of welfare distribution through zakat and other types of charities. He emphasized that the enforcement of social justice begins with the recognition of the rights of self and family. Whereby Ajijola (1977) said that the doctrine of Islamic social justice is Almighty God is concerned with the welfare of the weak and needy, for He is indeed God not only of the strong and wealthy but God of all, high and low, rich and poor. He never willed that a portion of humanity should roll in luxuries while the other starved and shivered and died in misery.

### **REFRAMING ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL CONCEPT**

More than thirty papers presented by the scholars at the conference took place in Amman-Jordan in 1990 were expected to be the raw materials to construct Islamic educational theory. All papers have been published in two volumes of books titled *bina nadhariah at-tarbiyati al-Islamiyati*. The researcher could not found single paper which clearly defines the roles and contribution of the Islamic education institutions toward the realization of social justice. Majority still imagine that the good man as the end results of education will eventually contribute to the social justice in their context and function as a vicegerent. Previous explanations have discussed two important ideas that form a new way of thinking in reframing the Islamic educational theory viz. Complexity of society with its structures and power relations which clearly negate the notion to reduce society into a mere collection of individuals, and secondly, the importance of social justice issues as demonstrated by the scholars.

When discussing about reframing in this paper, it does not imply deconstruction of the building of ideas contributed by Muslim scholars so far on Islamic education, but it tries to extend the framework or add to – to borrow the term from Yelcin (1990) that the major elements in building Islamic theory of education. Reframing is intended to ensure sensitivity of Islamic education roles in advocating for social justice in Muslim society. Thus, the reframing will certainly have implications on the reformulation of objectives, curricula, teaching methods, contents, attitudes and other aspects in Islamic education. Another important implication is on the management of Islamic education institutions (elementary to university) to provide more



access to the lower classes and marginalized groups, and in how learners are treated in an education environment and not confined to only interaction in the classroom.

The first task in the reframing efforts is to redefine the answer to the question ‘why and in what extend should educational institutions need to be embodied in Muslim modern society?’ Islamic education theory should be able to come up with different answer from that given by the functional paradigm and conflict paradigm. Functionalist said the roles of schools are to provide cognitive skills essential to the performance of increasingly complex jobs in modern society and to become proper mechanism for efficient sorting and selection of talent. On the other hand, conflict paradigm has proven the mentioned rhetoric of functionalism is invalid and inaccurate. Now, the Islamic paradigm should provide its own answers to the same question.

The answer given by Islamic paradigm should allow opportunities for educational institutions to play the role as an eye opener or to mend the blindness about how the world is currently managed and what system controls the human life, and proceed with proposing a concept of an ideal world based on Islamic worldview. The miniature concept of ideal world should be created in Islamic education institutions. Meaning it should demonstrate the ideal way of society should live and interact in a just, equal manner and perfect humanity is to be created at this stage in the Islamic educational institutions. Thus the Islamic educational institutions from primary to university level will transform into a model environment, which will spread and expand from time to time to the wider Muslim society and the world. With this role, the Islamic educational institutions will become the basis of resistance against all forms of injustice in the society created by the current system operational today. Hence, the Islamic educational institutions will directly contribute in advocating for the realization of social justice for the Muslim society and the world.

The next task is to review the aims of Islamic education taking into account the more clearly defined roles of Islamic educational institutions in advocating for social justice. It is undeniably important to have individual development in a balanced way which always has been the main focus of Islamic education as formulated in various world conferences. However, it should be noted also that most graduates of the Islamic universities have been experiencing social blindness, unaware of various injustices happening in the society around them, thus resulted in passive reaction in the face of the arrogant powers played by the state and capitalists. Worse still, without even realizing it, the Islamic education institutions has also been caught up in the education industrialization scheme and jump to the bandwagon serving the interests of market forces. Therefore, it is crucial to have a fresh statement in the formulation of the objectives of Islamic education that is to create a society based upon awareness to Islamic worldview and has sensitivity to issues of injustices arising from despotic system and to be responsive (proactive) in supporting the struggle for emancipation and justice. The miniature model of the aforementioned society is the society within the scope of Islamic education institution itself composed of learners, teachers, leaders (rector, dean, and so forth), administrative and technical staffs, and cleaning service.

Curriculum needs to be re-designed to ensure that learners from every field of sciences and specializations will acquire the same basic skills to analyze the unjust reality in the society as the result of unfair distribution of wealth and unequal power relations; to take a critical stance facing the tyrannical power that simultaneously using soft-control and hard control to occupy and dominate majority of people who do not have access to power and with insufficient



resources. Curriculum must ensure that individuals nurtured by Islamic education will develop into individuals with ability to analyze critically the reality of the current world order and how it affects the society, while at the same time these individuals are equipped with moral readiness to take part in various social movements with various issues that stood for change.

The same is true with regard to teaching methods, creative and innovative methods from the Paolo Freire's concept of critical pedagogy in developing the learning method should be adopted with fitting adaptations. Conventional learning method has been notoriously known of treating their students as mere object, placing the teachers as superior to the students, thus deliberately shaping the individuals as obedient and passive object. In addition to this, Conventional method has also failed to train the people involved within the education institutions to be critical of the governance systems of the world. Islamic education method, in addition to inheriting the early education history in Muslim society, adopting fitting learning methods developed by western society, also should develop new methods that will allow the faculties of the soul of each learners will develop as such that they would be equipped with the ability to liberate themselves from the hegemony of the interests of the political elites and capitalists. Moreover, to nurture new culture in the learners' attitude to always be organized in overcoming social problems created by the system. In short, need to identify and develop learning methods which support the notion that educated people from Islamic educational theory are not only religious people in a general sense, but also embody critical view and active stance in advocating for the realization of social justice in their society. Based on the fundamental thought abovementioned, the writer proposes reframing in the Figure 1.

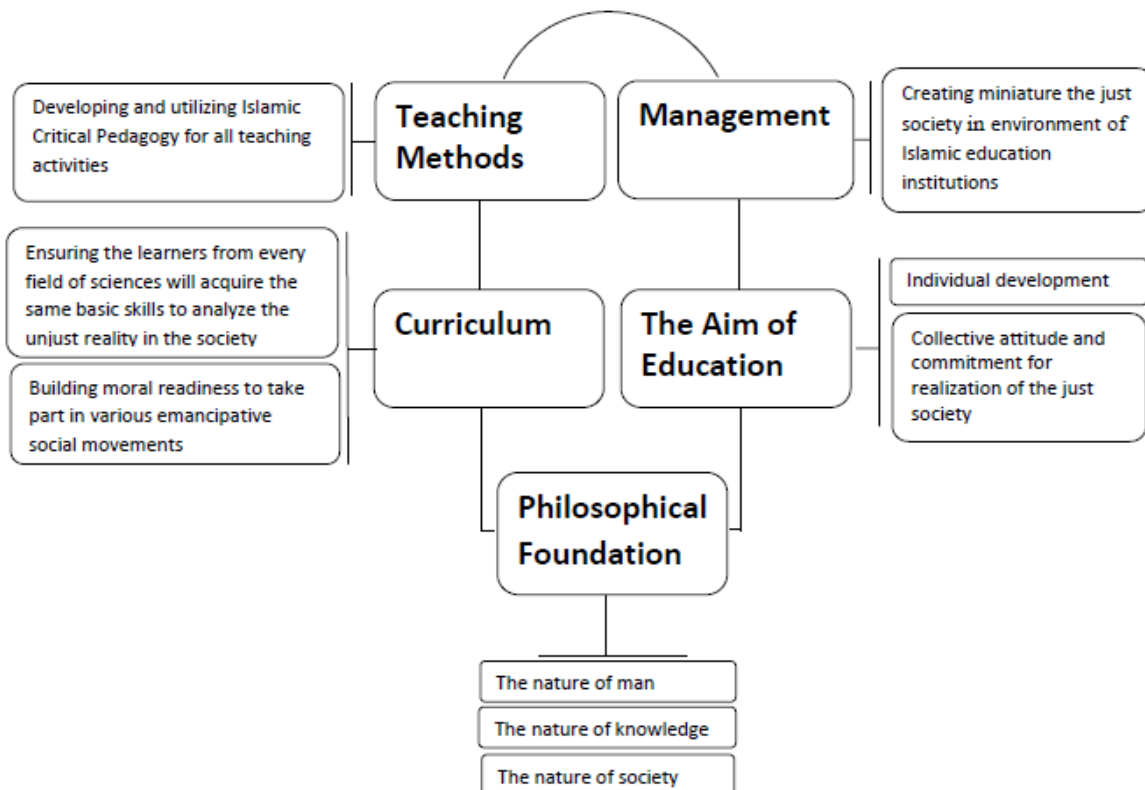


Figure 1. Reframing Islamic Educational Concept





## CONCLUSIONS

The idea of reframing Islamic educational concept in this paper is a proposal to expand our ground and to give new angle for Islamic-based educational institutions of perceiving the world due to its central idea and emphasis on the urgent necessity for the educational institutions to render serious commitment in advocating for social justice. This angle had not yet received proper attention from the Islamic scholars in the discourses on Islamic education. Rational reasons to support the idea of reframing have been presented and discussed in this paper. Two main ideas supporting this proposal are first, the complexity of modern society has put human in a very vulnerable position caused by the unjust power relations and wealth distribution, and second, the central position of social justice issues in Islam. Both ideas are rarely discussed by other Muslim scholars contributing to the constructing the Islamic educational theory.

*Adab* as a notion in Islamic education is actually could be proper premises to make interconnection between the concept of Islamic Education and social justice, in term of some scholars believe that the proper knowledge (as part of meaning of *adab*) which produces wisdom (*hikmah*) resulting in justice (*‘adl*) in the individual self as well as in the state, society, and the natural environment. However, this concept of *adab* should be explored furthermore in clearly formulation of the complete roles of Islamic educational institutions in advocating social justice.

The author views that all notions on Islamization of education, Islamization of economy system and Islamization of political and governmental system which mark the intellectual and political movement of post-colonial Muslim society will lose its substance when it fails to incorporate the issues of social justice in the construction of the aforementioned notions.

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