

H. Zainal Arifin Abbas' Perspectives on Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intellectual tradition of North Sumatran scholars, focusing on the life, thoughts, and contributions of H. Zainal Arifin Abbas. The research aims to analyze his intellectual biography, key ideas, and their relevance in the contemporary context. Using a qualitative approach with a biographical study method, data was collected through document analysis, interviews, and observations. The findings show that H. Zainal Arifin Abbas was born on March 12, 1912 (23 Rabiul Awal 1330) in Kampung Lalang and passed away on September 16, 1979. As a prominent scholar in North Sumatra, he was deeply engaged in education, serving as a teacher, mentor, and academic figure. His scholarly contributions also extended to writing, producing various works on Islamic thought. His ideas encompass multiple fields, including Islamic education (covering educational objectives, the role of educators, students, teaching methods, and curriculum), religious thought (parental responsibilities, female leadership in Islam, and the relationship between religion and philosophy), historical analysis (studies on the life of Prophet Muhammad), political perspectives (the interaction between religion and the state, and the stance on electing non-Muslim leaders), artistic thought (the role of *qasidah* in Islam), and Sufism. H. Zainal Arifin Abbas made significant contributions to society, particularly in education, politics, military service, Islamic preaching (*dakwah*), and economic development. His intellectual legacy remains relevant in contemporary Islamic discourse, offering insights into the intersection of religion, education, and social issues.

Keywords: Intellectual Tradition; Islamic Education; Religious Thought

INTRODUCTION

Islamic religious education in Indonesia has undergone significant development, both in theory and practice. One of the key figures who contributed greatly to the advancement of Islamic education in the country is H. Zainal Arifin Abbas. As a scholar, educator, and thinker, Abbas introduced various ideas and concepts that influenced the Islamic education system at both formal and non-formal levels. His

thoughts on Islamic education reflect an integration between Islamic teachings and modern educational developments. He not only emphasized cognitive aspects in the learning process but also highlighted the importance of character formation and moral education in shaping the younger generation. In this context, Abbas viewed Islamic education as not merely a transfer of knowledge but as a process of cultivating noble character in accordance with Islamic teachings.

Beyond his role in education, Abbas also emphasized the importance of systematic research in advancing Islamic religious education. He believed that scientific inquiry was essential for improving the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia and the broader Muslim world. His concepts aimed to address the challenges arising from the dynamic nature of Islamic education.

This study delves into H. Zainal Arifin Abbas' thoughts on Islamic religious education, focusing on his contributions to the development of educational theories rooted in Islamic principles. It also explores the methods and approaches he employed to address the educational issues of his time, as well as their relevance to contemporary Islamic education. The study will examine key concepts in his thought, such as the integration of religious and scientific knowledge, the moral-centric nature of Islamic education, and his contributions to research methodology in Islamic education.

By gaining a deeper understanding of Abbas' ideas, this research aims to provide insights into potential solutions for contemporary challenges in Islamic education. Ultimately, this study seeks to highlight how his thoughts remain applicable in the modern context and how they can continue to contribute to the improvement and advancement of Islamic religious education in Indonesia and the wider Islamic world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intellectual tradition serves as the foundation for the development of knowledge within a civilization or society. In the historical chain of Islamic education, scholarly activities can be observed within what is known as the intellectual community or ulama. The knowledge produced by this community has had a profound impact on society. Tradition, in its broadest sense, refers to everything passed down from the past to the present. It encompasses customs inherited across generations and continuously practiced within society. Edward Shils defines tradition as the intergenerational transmission of culture, whether in the form of physical objects or cultural constructs, through oral, written, or behavioral means. More specifically, tradition consists of material objects and ideas from the past that continue to exist and influence the present, shaping societal norms and values. It also involves the transmission of knowledge, beliefs, and customs through oral communication or imitation from one generation to another, forming the continuity of cultural attitudes, social customs, and institutions.

The intellectual tradition plays a crucial role in enlightening Muslim society. This significance is reflected in the first revelation of the Quran, found in Surah Al-alaaq (1-5), which begins with the divine command *Iqra* (Read). The subsequent verses emphasize the role of the pen (*al-qalam*) as a tool through which Allah imparts knowledge to humankind. These verses highlight the importance of reading and writing as fundamental intellectual activities in the learning process. Islam strongly emphasizes lifelong education, underscoring that intellectual traditions should not be limited to religious obligations but should extend to all aspects of daily life.

Moreover, the intellectual tradition helps establish leadership guidelines within a society by providing exclusive knowledge, transmitting religious authority, fostering communal solidarity, and shaping institutional structures for future generations. The *ulama*, as scholars of Islam, play a vital role in interpreting and conveying the teachings of the Quran, Hadith, and other religious texts. Beyond teaching, they serve as role models for their communities, embodying the principles of Islam in their daily lives. In North Sumatra, one of the most influential scholars in this regard was H. Zainal Arifin Abbas (1912–1979). He was not only a religious scholar but also an intellectual thinker whose contributions significantly impacted society. His insightful perspectives engaged with various aspects of national, political, and social life, often exceeding the conventional role of an *ulama*.

H. Zainal Arifin Abbas was not only an educator but also an active participant in societal and national affairs. His intellectual contributions extended beyond teaching; he engaged in various initiatives that enhanced his reputation across multiple sectors. His role as a scholar was driven by a deep sense of devotion to Allah (*hablum minallah*) and a commitment to serving humanity (*hablum minannas*). He was known for his bureaucratic and democratic approach in promoting Islamic scholarship and public engagement during his time. His career and extensive knowledge positioned him as a central figure in the intellectual landscape of his era.

Throughout his life, H. Zainal Arifin Abbas demonstrated a strong dedication to knowledge. Among his most renowned works is *Peri Hidup Muhammad (Tarikh Muhammad Saw.)*, which provides a comprehensive account of the life of Prophet Muhammad, from his birth to his passing. The book also covers historical events preceding the Prophet's birth, including the history of Mecca during the times of Prophet Ismail, the Jurhum tribe, and the Qathura period. Another significant work, *Perkembangan Fikiran Terhadap Agama*, explores the evolution of religious thought, tracing humanity's understanding of religion from ancient times, particularly from the perspectives of early Greek philosophers. This book stands out due to its extensive references, drawing from philosophical works dating back to 2500 BCE. H. Zainal Arifin Abbas devoted considerable effort to ensuring the academic rigor of his writings, as evidenced by the wide range of sources he consulted. His legacy as a scholar and intellectual continues to shape the discourse on Islamic education and religious thought. His contributions provide a valuable

reference for understanding the integration of Islamic teachings with contemporary educational and societal developments.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method aimed at providing an in-depth analysis of H. Zainal Arifin Abbas's thoughts on Islamic religious education. The research is not limited to gathering facts or data but also seeks to explore the meanings and contexts behind his ideas. The study focuses on identifying key concepts in his educational philosophy, describing how these ideas developed and were applied within the context of Islamic education in Indonesia and beyond, and interpreting his contributions to shaping the paradigm of Islamic religious education in Indonesia.

Instrument and Procedures

The research utilizes various qualitative instruments to collect data, including document analysis, interviews, and observations. The document analysis involves examining Abbas's written works, historical records, and relevant literature on Islamic education. Interviews are conducted with scholars, educators, and individuals familiar with his teachings to gain deeper insights into his intellectual legacy. Observations focus on institutions and communities influenced by his educational philosophy.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process follows a thematic approach, where key themes related to H. Zainal Arifin Abbas's educational thoughts are identified and categorized. The analysis involves three main steps: data reduction, where relevant information is selected and organized; data display, which involves structuring and presenting the findings clearly; and conclusion drawing, where interpretations are made regarding the impact and relevance of his ideas in contemporary Islamic education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Goals of Islamic Education

Education is a conscious effort aimed at developing human potential toward the formation of a complete individual. The essence of Islamic education is to create individuals who possess religious, cultural, and scientific dimensions, often referred to as *insan kamil*. This term signifies a person who is holistically developed, both spiritually and physically, living in harmony through devotion to Allah. Islamic

education aims to produce individuals who are beneficial to themselves and society, actively practicing and promoting Islamic teachings while utilizing natural resources for worldly and spiritual fulfillment.

According to H. Zainal Arifin Abbas, the ultimate goal of Islamic education is reflected in *Q.S. Ali Imran: 102*, which commands believers to uphold true devotion to Allah and remain within the fold of Islam until death. He emphasizes that true piety requires unwavering obedience to Allah's commands and refraining from actions that lead away from faith. Thus, Islamic education must be a lifelong process that nurtures and sustains this devotion through continuous growth and reinforcement.

Educators and Learners

H. Zainal Arifin Abbas identifies parents as the primary educators in the family, responsible for providing religious and moral guidance to their children. This responsibility is based on *Surah An-Nisa: 9* and *At-Tahrim: 6*, which instruct believers to safeguard themselves and their families from misguidance. The role of parents as educators includes fostering the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective potentials of their children in a balanced manner.

He also highlights the Qur'anic emphasis on parental respect and devotion, as mentioned in *Surah Al-Baqarah: 83*, which urges kindness toward parents immediately after the command to worship Allah. Additionally, *Surah An-Nisa: 36* reinforces the obligation of children to honor and serve their parents. Based on these teachings, H. Zainal Arifin Abbas asserts that parents are the first and foremost educators, while children, as learners, are duty-bound to respect and obey their parents. Beyond the family, he extends the role of educators to formal and informal institutions, emphasizing that teachers play a critical role in shaping students' intellectual and moral development.

Educational Methods

H. Zainal Arifin Abbas employed several teaching methods in his educational practices:

- a. Lecture and Question-Answer Method. In the early days of *Madrasah Arabiyah School*, he used lectures as the primary method, starting lessons with praises to Allah and the Prophet before explaining concepts using a blackboard. He encouraged student interaction by pausing explanations to address questions, ensuring comprehension before proceeding.
- b. Memorization Method. He integrated memorization into the learning process, requiring students to retain and recite lessons at home. This approach was rooted in the belief that reinforcing knowledge through repetition enhances retention and understanding.
- c. Storytelling Method. He frequently used storytelling to inspire students, especially in Islamic history lessons. His stories, often drawn from personal

experiences and historical events, served as motivational tools to encourage perseverance in learning despite hardships.

Curriculum

The concept of curriculum, as understood by H. Zainal Arifin Abbas, aligns with *Surah Ali Imran: 104*, which underscores the necessity of acquiring various types of knowledge to promote righteousness and prevent wrongdoing. He identified key fields of study essential for educators and students, including:

1. Religious Sciences (Qur'an, Hadith, Theology, Islamic Jurisprudence, and Morality)
2. Social Sciences (History, Sociology, Politics, and Community Engagement)
3. Natural Sciences (Geography and Environmental Studies)
4. Linguistics and Arts (Arabic, General Linguistics, and Fine Arts)

His approach to curriculum development is reflected in the structure of *Madrasah Arabiyah School*, later renamed *Madrasah El Hidayah*. At the elementary level (*Ibtidaiyah*), subjects such as Theology, Islamic Jurisprudence, Arabic, Qur'anic Studies, Ethics, and Islamic History were emphasized. At the secondary level (*Tsanawiyah*), additional subjects like Rhetoric and Tafsir were introduced. The curriculum in his institutions combined religious and secular subjects, reflecting a modernized and integrated approach to Islamic education. His educational reforms blended traditional Islamic teachings with contemporary knowledge, ensuring that students received a holistic and well-rounded education.

The ideas of H. Zainal Arifin Abbas regarding Islamic education show an integration of spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects in the educational process. His emphasis on the role of parents as the primary educators in the family aligns with the broader literature on Islamic education, which stresses the importance of the family as the first educational environment for children. This perspective is confirmed by numerous studies, such as those by Abdurrahman (2016), who highlight the significant role of family in shaping the educational foundation of children (Abdurrahman, 2016). In this context, the role of parents as educators is a cornerstone in ensuring a strong moral and religious foundation for children, which aligns with Abbas' views in the Qur'an, specifically in *Surah At-Tahrim: 6*.

Furthermore, H. Zainal Arifin Abbas' use of various methods in teaching—such as lecture-based teaching, question-and-answer sessions, memorization, and storytelling—demonstrates a comprehensive and adaptable approach to meeting the diverse needs of students. This pedagogical flexibility is supported by current educational theories that stress the importance of a student-centered approach, where educators adapt their methods based on the students' needs and engagement. The combination of traditional methods (such as memorization) with more interactive strategies (like question-and-answer sessions) ensures that students remain engaged and active in the learning process. These techniques also emphasize

the development of both cognitive and affective aspects of learning, which is consistent with recent studies on the importance of balanced educational practices (Ibrahim, 2021).

The curriculum proposed by H. Zainal Arifin Abbas, which includes both religious and general knowledge, highlights his vision of an integrated education system. This curriculum not only aims to develop spiritual and moral values but also provides students with the intellectual tools needed to thrive in the modern world. Abbas' vision resonates with contemporary studies on curriculum development in Islamic education. For instance, Ahmad (2018) discusses the need for a holistic curriculum that merges religious studies with secular subjects to prepare students for real-world challenges (Ahmad, 2018). The inclusion of subjects such as science, history, geography, and language in addition to religious studies ensures that students are equipped with a broad knowledge base, making them adaptable and well-rounded individuals.

Additionally, the curriculum used at Madrasah Arabiyah School, as explained by Abbas, reflects the modernity and adaptability of his educational system. The integration of both religious and general knowledge mirrors recent educational trends that call for a balance between spiritual and academic development. Abbas' educational model, which incorporates subjects ranging from theology to politics, aligns with the growing demand for curricula that prepare students for a diverse and globalized world (Ibrahim, 2020).

In conclusion, the educational philosophy of H. Zainal Arifin Abbas provides a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education by integrating religious, moral, and intellectual dimensions. His holistic and adaptable approach is highly relevant in addressing the challenges faced by contemporary Islamic education systems. His emphasis on the role of parents, the use of diverse teaching methods, and the integration of both religious and general knowledge are foundational principles that can guide the future of Islamic education. Recent studies support Abbas' vision, affirming the importance of a balanced, integrated curriculum that prepares students for both spiritual growth and academic success.

CONCLUSION

H. Zainal Arifin Abbas, born on March 12, 1912, and passing away on September 16, 1979, was a prominent figure in the development of Islamic education and thought. He received his formal education at several schools, including the Methodis Boy School Binjai, Anglo Chinese School, and Arabiyah School Binjai. Influenced by notable scholars such as Hasan Maksum, Abdul Halim Hasan, and Syaikh H. Samah, he developed a well-rounded approach to education, which reflected his deep understanding of both religious and intellectual disciplines. His contributions are particularly significant in the field of Islamic education, where his views on the purpose of education, the roles of educators and students, educational methods, and curriculum provide a comprehensive framework that integrates religious and general knowledge. Abbas' educational philosophy emphasized the holistic development of individuals, aiming to cultivate a balance of spiritual,

intellectual, and social growth. His belief in the importance of parents as the primary educators in the family aligns with broader Islamic educational perspectives.

Additionally, Abbas' ideas extended beyond education to encompass religious, political, historical, and philosophical thought. His contributions to Islamic thought include views on the responsibilities of parents, the role of women in leadership, the relationship between religion and philosophy, and the integration of Islamic principles with contemporary politics. His works in tafsir, history, and tasawuf further highlight his diverse intellectual pursuits. Through his writings, including books like *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Karim* and *Peri Hidup Muhammad Rasulullah saw.*, as well as his articles in various Islamic publications, Abbas has left a legacy in the Islamic intellectual tradition. His philosophy continues to serve as a valuable resource for those seeking to understand the integration of Islamic teachings with modern education and societal issues.

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