

## SAID NURSI EDUCATION CONCEPT: INTEGRATION OF SPIRITUAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND MORAL DIMENSIONS

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### Abstract

*Recently, many people have made Western education a model for the advancement of civilization. Western curriculum education is, therefore, offered as an alternative system. In the case of Turkey, this adoption of the idea produced the gap between traditional madrasa graduates and the graduate of the secular school, which impacts the emergence of a crisis of civilization. This article tries to offer a solution to this crisis by bringing up the idea of a contemporary Turkish thinker, Said Nursi, in his concept of reformed Islamic education. This concept has three essential elements of education: spiritual, intellectual, and moral, realized by Said Nursi through Medresetuz Zahra. Nursi expresses the integration of these three aspects in his masterpiece, Resale-I Nur. This is qualitative library research using documentary techniques to collect the data. The collected data are analyzed utilizing the descriptive-analytical method.*

**Keywords:** *Said Nursi, civilization, education, spiritual, intellectual, moral.*

## A. INTRODUCTION

The presence of a secular worldview brought by Mustafa Kemal Attaturk into the Turkish government system has implications for education, which is influenced by Western science (Kholis, 2018: 167, 171). Society at first did not pay much attention to the negative impact that would be affected by the understanding of Western science on which all forms of knowledge are based (Shami, 1989:649-654). The nature of modern science offered by the West is wholly born of value-free presumptions (al-Attas, 1995: 117) and is not based on revelation. The adoption of modern Western science will lead to secularization and liberalization as the main goals of the West (Furlow, 1996: 259-271). In addition, this Western system can also be sure to create a cultural gap between *madrasa* graduates and graduates of schools with the Western curriculum. This gap will then trigger the crisis of civilization (Dekmejian, 1980: 1-12). This condition encourages Muslim scientists to deal with and find a way out of society's crisis, which is slowly starting to undermine the thinking of the Muslim community.

The best solution to save the people from this crisis is to rediscover the concept of a superior Islamic education that can overcome the problem caused by the Western-style education system introduced by Ataturk. Said Nursi came at the right time by carrying out the concept of education reformed holistically by integrating three essential elements in education; spiritual, intellectual, and moral (Nursi, 2003: 379 and Algar, 2001: 291-311). Said Nursi's great idea was realized through *Medresetuz Zahra* as an educational model that combines religious knowledge, modern science, and morality.

Nursi outlined the integration of these three aspects in his monumental work *Resale-I Nur*. In this work, Nursi used al-Qur'an and al-Hadith as his primary references. For Nursi, all kinds of knowledge are science because all the concepts are based on the Qur'an. Even natural science, arts, or theology. How did Nursi integrate the spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions into an educational concept? It is this question that this paper seeks to answer by referring to *Resale-I Nur*, Nursi's monumental work.

## **B. METHOD**

This study is qualitative library research. The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data derived from Said Nursi's works directly related to the issue discussed in this paper. While the secondary data consists of the works of other researchers dealing with both Said Nursi and the related issues. The data in this research were collected utilizing documentary techniques from the above primary as well as secondary sources. The collected data will then be analyzed using the descriptive critical analysis method. The steps are at first to collect primary and secondary data, then be selected, classified, and then described objectively. Finally, the data are analyzed by connecting, describing, sometimes comparing, and even clashing with the views of other figures and thinkers to find out Said Nursi's position and thoughts on the issues.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Biography of Said Nursi**

Said Nursi, known by the nickname *Badiuzzamān* (Nursi, 2011c: 87), was born and raised in Nurs, Ispir, in the Bitlis region, East Anatolia, Turkey. Nursi began to know the Qur'an under the guidance of his brother, Abdullah when he was nine years old. Then Nursi completed the fundamental lessons of the religious sciences with local *ulama'* and religious leaders. Nursi is the fourth son of seven children of the couple Molla Mirza and Nuriyah. They are already familiar with Sufistic nuances in their family. Nursi and his family are also part of the Naqsyabandiyah order (Mulyati, 2004: 89); even his father is familiar with Mirza's Sufi (Vahide, 2007: 4-5). In addition, both of Nursi's parents are from the *Ahl al-Bait* lineage, the father of the descendants of Hasan ibn Ali and the mother of the descendants of Husayn (Ali, 1995: 8). Nursi's vital intelligence and passion for exploring religious knowledge made him someone who was thirsty for knowledge and liked intellectual odyssey.

In his intellectual odyssey, for the first time, Nursi came to Molla Mehmet Emin in the village of Tag, which he walked about two hours from the town of Nurs. A year later, Nursi met a Naqsyabandiyah *murshid* named Sayid Nur Muhammad at Hizan (Vahide, 2007: 6). In 1888 AD, Nursi studied with Shaykh Muhammad Celali at Beyazid, which lasted only three months. In this *madrassa*, Nursi claimed a scientific basis that underlies all his thoughts in Islamic education. While studying with Shaykh Celali, it became increasingly apparent that Nursi's extraordinary talent in intelligence and understanding was obvious. Even though he was only fifteen years old, Nursi could read and understand complex subjects such as the books of *Jam'u al-Jawami'* and *Syrah al-Mawafiq* (Vahide, 2007: 12).

In 1894 AD, when Nursi lived in the Mardin area, he became involved in political movements. Nursi began to be aware of political affairs and responded to all conditions during the Islamic world. Nursi's political views are influenced by Namik Kemal's thoughts (Sani, 1998: 100-102) which promote freedom, progress, education, rights, and justice for the citizens. Then, Nursi has a political activist at a relatively young age. For 30 years, Nursi lived in exile because he was considered against the secular authority and deconstruction of Islamic law proclaimed by the Republican People's Party founded by Mustafa Kemal (Talib, 2011: 2). Nursi was exiled three times to remote areas around 1927-1950M. Under these circumstances, Nursi produced his masterpiece, *Resale-i Nur*, written in secret and then distributed to his students to be taught throughout Turkey and several other Islamic regions.

While in Van, Nursi began to initiate the concept of education. He believed this concept is a solution to all the problems of the Turkish nation in particular and the Islamic world in general. This idea originated from Nursi's belief that to improve the country requires a long process and must be done in all positive ways (Vahide, 2007: 35-36). Nursi's idea was manifested in *Medretus Zahra* that combines three critical elements: religious knowledge, modern science, and moral values obtained directly from *Tekke*.

## **2. Spirituality: Teaching Religion in *Madrassa* (*Medrese*)**

In an increasingly pressured and cornered condition with secularization spreading throughout Turkey, Nursi was inspired to make spirituality the foundation of all scientific fields. For Nursi, religious education is an essential foundation in all areas of Muslim scholarship (Khamami, 2015: 57-58). The purpose of teaching religious knowledge is not just learning the values of faith. Moreover, this spiritual power will realize by strengthening the worship and the meaning of all dimensions of life based on the Shari'a (Irzal, 2011: 159). In short, Nursi emphasized the importance of the spiritual world by placing God as the Creator and affirming the Qur'an as a book of guidance for human progress (Maghfiroh, 2021: 31-32).

More than that, Nursi believes that religious knowledge is the light of the heart that will illuminate people from all ignorance and prevent them from narrow thinking. For Nursi, religious knowledge is like one wing, while the other wing is modern science (Nursi, 2011c: 159). A person cannot fly with only one side of his wing. Therefore, there must be a balance between religious knowledge with its spiritual content and modern science with all its advances.

Nursi thought that outlining five central principles in religious school could support his idea in religious teaching. The five basic ideas include (Sakir, 2002: 1-2): (1) Examining the concept of understanding and the relationship between modern science and religion; (2) Reviving the integralist tradition of science; (3) Exploring *Resale-i Nur* through reading, dialogue, and discussion activities; (4) Disseminating the teachings of *Resale-i Nur* to the general public; (5) Establishing a dormitory that is the center of all activities.

The harmonization of the five vital elements above should be the primary goal of every school. For Nursi, religious schools (*medrese*) must also teach modern science and vice versa. Public schools (*mektab*) must also teach spiritual lessons. This rule is considered appropriate for creating good human beings in this world and the hereafter. Because of balancing religious knowledge and modern science, students in modern schools will be protected from *kufr*, and religious knowledge in *madrasas* will be safeguarded from fanaticism (Zaidan bin Mat, 2003: 8).

Nursi's idea shows that modern science can align with the times without losing the Quran as its primary foundation by emphasizing spiritual values. In addition to stressing the education of religious values in schools, Nursi also established a university named *Medresetuz Zahra* to continue education in religion and modern science to a higher level. The name *Medresetuz Zahra* itself is taken from al-Azhar University in Egypt as the oldest Islamic university, the center of knowledge in the Islamic world (Nursi, 2011c: 565). *Medresetuz Zahra* was founded for a reason, among other things, that the spread of Western ideology was accelerating, which undermined the thinking of Muslims at all levels of education. Therefore, the university, established in the Eastern Turkey region, is expected to play an active role in spreading peace and reducing the racism (Nursi, 2011c: 561-566).

The presence of this university is also expected to increase people's insight and think to reduce fanaticism and conflict that pivots on the assumption that science and technology have no basis in Islam. For Nursi, Islam is the master of all knowledge and, at the same time, the source for the birth of other scientific fields. Modern science is no exception (Nursi, 2011c: 571). So, in this case, Nursi called religious science the light of the heart and modern science the light of reason and harmony between the two will give birth to the essence of truth. On the other hand, without them, it will only lead to fanaticism and intellectual confusion.

Nursi's injection of spiritual values in the *Medretus Zahra* university is formulated in 12 essential principles. These principles were created to protect the university from the dangers of secular thought that were rife in Turkey at that time. The twelve fundamental principles are (Nursi, 2000: 102): (1) Education based on the primary sources of Islam, namely the al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah; (2) The life of the world and the hereafter is one unit; (3) Religion and modern science are taught in a balanced way; (4) A sense of nationality does not have to be shown, but the spirit of Islam must be the primary basis; (5) Education is carried out based on brotherhood, unity, and unity; (6) Education must reflect Quranic values; (7) Students must have an enthusiastic, grateful, and hopeful spirit; (8) Islamic education must start from the individual;

(9) Human talents, abilities, and desires must be considered; (10) Education is free and open to the general public; (11) Students and schools should not be involved in political activities; (12) Education must have high goals and targets.

The principles above explain that the relationship between religion and modern science is not preferable, or one has advantages over the other. However, both are an inseparable unity (Nursi, 2011b, 575). Thus, Nursi combines religious knowledge and modern science and emphasizes the importance of the primary sources of education, the al-Qur'an and al-Hadith, to achieve happiness in the world and the afterlife.

### **3. Intellectuals: Teaching Science and Technology in Public Schools (*Mekteb*)**

Nursi developed science as an answer to intellectual barrenness by teaching science and technology at the *Mekteb*. Solely to develop a suitable science for the Muslim community, especially to clarify the common thread of the relationship between science and Islam. Through the use of modern scientific methodologies, Nursi tries to "find" God. The point here is that knowledge can be accepted even if it comes from intuition. The source of knowledge is not only the senses (empirical) as the West has glorified so far. Because for Nursi, intuition has a more factual truth than material science which depends on the senses with limitations (Yusuf, 1999: 347). Nursi admits that science can be a source of truth as long as science is under the umbrella of Islam with correct principles as the basis in it.

Nursi's view above gives a spiritual color to the physical world by straightening out scientific deviations that do not want revelation to intervene in using ratio. Nursi pointed out that the integration effort between Islam and science and technology is very open. It can be done by making the Qur'an the basis of science and technology and using a religious approach in observing the object of knowledge (Khamami, 2015: 59). In other words, Nursi combines deductive logic, contemplative observation, and analogical thinking guided by the Qur'an (Faiz and Ibrahim, 2015: 5).

Nursi believes that science can be a source of truth if it is under the umbrella of Islam. Because for him, science and Islam are not contradictory. Therefore, Islam must incorporate factual scientific findings into religious interpretation, not reject them (Abu Rabi, 2003, Mardin, 1989: 81; and Ma'ruf, 2017: 66). It is one of Nursi's efforts to integrate science and religion. One of the Qur'an-based science presentations that Nursi alluded to in *Resale-I Nur* was about energy changes. Nursi took a small example, namely that energy changes require a setting that never changes. A significant power to move the smallest particles throughout the galaxy and its contents. This power comes from all-powerful energy with the ability to create, regulate, change, and at the same time destroy the existence of all objects in this universe. The essence of this energy is God (Helmi, 2015). This kind of explanation is the method used by Nursi in introducing God. In this method, each student must use logic and dialectics to find a problem with all confidence.

In addition to introducing God by using science, Nursi also uses nature as a medium of knowledge for humans. For him, natural principles are part of divine principles. Humans then conclude or take formulas with all their abilities (Nursi, 2003: 578). In short, the natural principles used as the basis for the formulation of science are not derived from nature but from Allah.

It concluded that Nursi taught modern scientific methodologies and corrected all things that are not under Islamic values. This aims to protect Muslim intellectuals from the trap of Western secular and liberal ideas.

#### **4. Morality: Teaching Sufistic Values at *Tekke (Zawiyah)***

Studying Sufism is talking about the deepest and universal aspects of the Islamic tradition. Moral values are the implications of faith in the highest reality, namely Allah (Nasr, 1983: 80). Therefore, morality is one of the elements of integration in Nursi's education born of faith. High faith will form Qur'anic morality that is in harmony with His Shari'a.

Nursi, a Sufi leader, emphasized that to achieve the highest degree of morality, humans must behave following the morality of Allah (*al-takhalluq bī akhlaqillah*) (Nursi, 2011a: 329). It means to be a pure servant to Him by practicing His values. The application of God's values becomes a necessity with the main foundation in the form of a soul full of faith. Therefore, Nursi carries mental education as the primary education and, at the same time, the basis for all forms of science (al-Ansari, 2004: 365). It is this mental education that ultimately shapes the morals of each individual in line with the morals of the Qur'an.

Nursi formed the model for teaching moral values through the teaching of Sufism with an emphasis on the object. This teaching emphasized the essence of faith and the revelation of the nature of God's word (al-Qur'an) as the basis and guide for humankind. The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW is used as a guide for the journey of a Sufi to reach a level of closeness to Allah SWT or better known as *ma'rifatullah*. Continuous remembrance and meditation must support the approach process (Nursi, 2011b: 564).

*Fardlu* practice is the primary basis for obedience to His Shari'a, and sunnah practices support all His commands (Nursi, 2002: 83). Thus remembrance should not be a virtue beyond fard practice. This is not like lay followers of the *tariqa* in general, who prioritize remembrance and *wird* over *fardl* practice.

Said Nursi explains in his phenomenal work *Resale-I Nur* about his views on Sufism. For him, Sufism is a spiritual path to know the nature of faith and the Qur'an through the guidance of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. It starts from the heart step to reach a feeling (*dhauq*) which is closer to the level of witnessing (*shuhūd*) to Allah (Nursi, 2011b: 563; Bahri, 2021: 128).

Nursi's view emphasizes the nature of faith and the nature of the Qur'an as the foundation and guide of human life. The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad is used as a guideline that guides a person's Sufistic journey to reach the level of *ma'rifatullah*. The primary purpose of the application of Sufistic values by Nursi is to give birth to humans who are moral

or have God's character (*al-takhalluq bi akhlaqillah*) (Nursi, 2011a and al-Ansari, 2004: 329).

For Nursi, humans' morals will only be realized if each individual serves God and applies all the attributes of God according to human abilities as a servant.

#### **D. CLOSING**

As described above in this paper, Nursi believes that education is an aspect that determines the progress of civilization. Quality education will build a quality civilization. Quality education will be achieved by integrating three essential dimensions of education: spirituality, intellect, and morality. In practice and its formulation, the spiritual dimension is obtained from the teaching applied in *madrasas*. The intellectual dimension, which contains all knowledge about modern science and technology, is carried out at the *Mekteb*. In contrast, the moral dimension is obtained from the *tariqa* teaching carried out at *Tekke*.

Furthermore, Nursi is of the view that all kinds of knowledge must end with *ma'rifatullah*. The essence of *ma'rifatullah* is emitted from the values of spirituality and morality. Nursi described this as the primary consumption for the soul of every human being. Therefore, Nursi tried to restore the contemporary Muslim paradigm to refer to the values of Islam, both the Qur'an and Hadith, to help each individual in discovering the nature of God.

From all the above discussion, it can be inferred that the concept of Nursi's education results from an understanding of the seminal concepts in the al-Qur'an and al-Hadith. The concepts of faith, knowledge, and morality were extracted from and formulated based on the two primary sources, concluding that the three are one unified whole and inseparable. The results of this formulation must be a model that is applied in all efforts to develop various fields of science. Nursi's thoughts become very important, especially for those who live in modern times with various complex challenges due to the secular, liberal, and even atheist Western worldview.

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