

Fethullah Gülen's Epistemology of Integrated Islamic Education: Is it Possible to Realise?

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the fact that education in most Muslim countries is still lagging behind and there is still a dichotomy between Islamic education and secular education. As a result, the Muslim generation has experienced obstacles in contributing to the development of world civilization where Muslims should reflect the Islamic principles of "*rahmatan lil 'alamin*". This is because Islamic education does not adjust to the progress and competition of the times. Fethullah Gülen's educational epistemological thought tries to provide a solution to this problem by eliminating the dichotomy of education by creating an integrated Islamic education system. The purpose of this study is to find out in depth the epistemology of Islamic education from the perspective of Fethullah Gülen and its implementation in integrative Islamic education. The results of this study are: 1) The essence of the epistemology of Gülen's Islamic education is *wisdom*, which is being able to combine useful knowledge accompanied by its practice in daily life; 2) The source of the epistemology of Islamic education comes from the five senses, intellect, and reliable reports (news) that come from other people or Allah's messengers; 3) The purpose of Islamic education is to create kamil people who are able to master scientific, social and religious knowledge and practice it in their lives in order to create a world of global peace and progress; 4) The integrated Islamic education model according to Fethullah Gülen is similar to the integration model of neo-modernism, which is to combine Islamic traditions with the modernity of civilization.

Keywords

Islamic Education, Fethullah Gülen, Integrative Education

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INTRODUCTION

In general, education in most Muslim countries is dominated by the humanities and social sciences. There are relatively few places available for science. Worse, in the teaching process, memorization tends to dominate not only in the humanities and social sciences but also in the teaching of science. To a significant extent, the survival of rote learning in the educational institutions of the contemporary Muslim world shows that many Muslims still believe that knowledge is something to be acquired rather than discovered and developed; therefore, the attitude of thinking in most Muslim countries is still passive and receptive rather than creative and curious. In addition, all knowledge is considered immutable, and all books tend to be memorized or respected (Azra, 2013: p. 264).

Education in Muslim countries must not continue to be left behind. However, the world is constantly changing. Globalization is changing the world we live in in many ways: those who are highly educated and live in parts of the world rich in human resources and nature can look forward to a good life, and those who live in parts of the world that are poor in

human resources and nature will almost certainly be marginalized. Countries or regions where access to technology, information, and communication is high will benefit from these conditions and can at least enhance the next generation in the perspective of civilization's hope and progress, while populations from other regions face bleak prospects (Pinxten, 2011: p. 34).

Islam is a religion that obliges every believer to seek and deepen knowledge. For Muslims, seeking knowledge and religion is an obligation that cannot be separated. The Qur'an obliges every reader to seek knowledge, both general knowledge and religious knowledge (Ródenas, 2006: p. 43). Science is usually defined as coherent knowledge relating to a particular fact, object, or phenomenon that adheres to universal laws and is verified by experimental methods. The experimental approach and demonstrative argumentation are two characteristic elements of science that are often excluded in religion. While religion is generally based on intuition without showing experimental or verified evidence. The highest belief generated by this intuitive thinking escapes all experiments because God is supposed to exist in the supernatural world, that is, beyond what is accessible to human senses and logic (Baril, 2018: p. 5-6).

Gülen sees religion and science as not only compatible but also complementary. So Gülen encourages scientific research and technological development for the good of all mankind (Gülen, 2005: p. 222). Gülen's overall goal to overcome the dichotomy in education is to create a 'golden generation' armed with the tools of science and religion. By combining scientific knowledge with human values, this new generation will solve the problems of the future. For Gülen, education should prepare students to become useful citizens of character. A good school fosters moral virtue and is equipped with the best technology to enhance its scientific character (Mohamed, 2014: p. 409). Schools that return to their educational vision are characterized by having highly dedicated teachers, collaboration with families in the education of students, the use of high technology, the availability of boarding schools for students, and teaching universal values through the example of each other (López, 2013: p. 205-206).

Gülen proposed a progressive interpretation of the Islamic faith in which Muslims can engage with the world through education, science, technology, and philosophy. He promoted the Ottoman model of society (not the Ottoman Caliphate) to the Muslim world to return to 21st-century reality and establish a fruitful relationship with the West. Therefore, to promote the positive side of Islam, he emphasized Muslims are a part of globalization and invited them to engage with different people around the world. Gülen inspires to educate and equip generations with Islamic ethics and modern knowledge (Khan and Khan, 2018: p. 186-187).

Character education has been woven into the curriculum structure of Gülen schools around the world. Through this education, students develop good academic and moral skills that prepare them to reach the highest intellectual and moral potential to become wise human beings and good citizens. The media has repeatedly reported on the increase in violence, crime, teenage pregnancy, and disruptive behavior in schools. Educators are now aware that there is a moral crisis in our education system. As a result, character education received serious attention because research showed a positive correlation between good character education and academic achievement. Moral education also helps to create a safe

environment for students, which is also an important factor in their academic achievement ([Mohamed, 2014: p. 407](#)).

Gülen has urged his followers to invest in modern schools rather than traditional madrassas and mosques. True education, according to him, combines modern science with Islamic knowledge. In his view, science without religion can lead to atheism, while religion without science can lead to fanaticism. Gülen argues that both increase students' faith and knowledge. With a balanced education, students can become agents of positive change. Teachers, Gülen said, must be trained in nurturing the whole person, must lead by example, and must reject their inner world full of jealousy, hatred, and hatred; and dress their outside world with all sorts of kindness. They must combine the study of science with character development. In Gülen's view, success must be measured by scientific and moral progress ([Mohamed, 2014: p. 409](#)).

From the description above, schools and related parties such as parents and the community. It is necessary to provide solutions to the actual problems that are being faced by the community. The problems that exist do not always come from the realm of religion but also from the fields of science, society, and so on, so it is necessary to develop the concept of integrated education to integrate everything. Islamic education on the one hand can guide the morals of students, while science on the other hand can be a guideline in living and regulating life in the world as human nature as a caliph on earth.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method. This type of research is literature research focused on the Epistemology of Fethullah Gülen's Islamic Education and its Implementation towards Integrated Islamic Education. The primary data of this study are books, articles, and speeches by Fethullah Gülen.

DISCUSSION

How does Fethullah Gülen view Education?

Fethullah Gülen is a new model of Islamic scholars, well-versed in modern intellectual trends and Islamic traditions. He draws knowledge from various disciplines such as Sunni teachings, Sufism, and European secular ideas. Unlike conservative clerics in Turkey, Gülen disseminates eclectic sources of information. Gülen opposes *taqlid* which he sees as introducing intellectual laziness to Islamic thought ([Gulay, 2007](#)). Gülen's relationship with modernity and the West is very different from Wahhabism, Tablighi, and Jihadism. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani believed that Islam was compatible with science and that in order to compete with Europe, Muslims had to embrace modernity ([Hourani, 1983](#)). Muhammad Abduh emphasized that Islam can be the moral basis of modern society. For Gülen, Muslims should not shy away from areas related to the way the universe works such as science, history, art, politics, and philosophy that help to understand the world better and Muslims should be interested in these areas ([Esposito & Yilmaz, 2014](#)).

Gülen became committed to a philosophy of education that sought to combine theological, spiritual, and scientific knowledge. His main concern is that in the country's highly secular education system, Turkish youth are losing touch with their Islamic heritage. Therefore, Gülen came up with an approach to help reverse this trend. Starting with holiday camps, Gülen and those interested in his ideas sought ways to provide Islamic education

that would complement the secular education provided by the state (Agai, 2002). One of Gülen's strengths is its openness to scientific research as a religious endeavor, and to avoid the impression of being a religious school, many Gülen-inspired schools have excelled in science teaching, as demonstrated by the awards their students have won in science competitions and Olympics around the world (Kurtz, 2005).

Fetullah Gülen had several views on education. For example, in one of his writings, Gülen stated that people who need education must be willing to learn how to utilize the knowledge and views of others, as this can benefit them, their minds, and the world. Gülen emphasized that they should always look for the benefit of the experience of people with good experiences. Such as Muhammad Abduh believed that it was necessary to assimilate or borrow what was good from them (Hourani, 1983).

The most important thing that inspired Gülen to rethink and redefine education was the failure of the existing education system that did not provide students with a holistic education that could encourage individual growth and development. To reverse this situation, Gülen advocated a different type of education that could unite the mind and soul; allowing conscience and logic to complement each other; allowing physics and metaphysics; to assist in building life at school and at home to enable the flow of happiness and education that allows people to coexist harmoniously regardless of ethnic, cultural, or religious affiliation. This is like Nursi's view of education that Nursi's education model is very comprehensive and progressive, meeting the needs of religion, science, and morality, so as to provide a harmonious blend of the three holistically (Jamshed, 2016).

In support of his educational ideology, Gülen asserted that a lack of adaptation to the current conditions in life would lead to extinction. According to Gülen, it is possible that the enforcement of justice is hampered by a lack of comprehensive education and recognition of human rights and an attitude of acceptance and tolerance towards others. The only remedy for this is proper education that can enable people to think for themselves and support social justice, human rights, and tolerance thereby turning them into agents of change in society. To achieve this, Gülen asserts that a new style of education is needed that can combine religious and scientific knowledge with morality and spirituality if the world is to produce truly enlightened people with hearts illuminated by the religious sciences and spirituality and minds enlightened with positive sciences who are aware of the socio-economic and political conditions of their time (Gülen, 2009).

Gülen felt that the authorities were using a lack of education as a strategy to find the masses. Gülen believes that when people don't have access to the knowledge they need, they will have no alternative but to submit to the authorities. Gülen further points out that the only practical solution to such a situation is to provide adequate education that will equip people with knowledge on how to have adequate understanding and tolerance to respect the rights of others (Ünal & Williams, 2000).

Integrated Islamic Education Fethullah Gülen's Perspective

The purpose of education and related charities is to fulfill the obligation of individuals and societies to submit to God's will. As Gülen stated, The main task and purpose of human life is to seek understanding. The effort to do so, known as education, is a process of refinement even though what we acquire, in the spiritual, intellectual, and physical

dimensions of their beings, is a designated rank for us as a perfect pattern of creation (Gülen, 2009).

Gülen proposed education as an effective method to bring about global peace and progress and to curb extremism. Gülen emphasized that education is essential for society and individuals to meet the needs of individuals and society and in turn to solve humanitarian problems, such as terrorism, anarchism, and conflicts caused by ignorance, poverty, and division. Gülen believes that these problems can only be solved by knowledge (through education), working capital (through labor), and unification (through interreligious or intergroup dialogue) (Gülen, 2009).

In order to meet the goals of Gülen education, it is necessary to have an education system in which there are educational components, such as educators and education personnel, students, curriculum, educational materials, educational infrastructure and facilities, school environment, funding, and finance. Educators according to Gülen are 'holy teachers' who shape a lifelong life for people. Gülen considers that there is no equal job with a teacher who can guide his people, lift his morale and character, and instill a sense of eternity (Gülen, 2016).

Calling teachers 'sacred teachers' or calling teaching activities 'sacred duties' is not an exaggeration, according to Gülen. On the contrary, Gülen argues for his approach to the roots of Islamic philosophy that shows every human being as the noblest being created by God. Therefore, teachers who are in charge of improving human abilities are honorable and their duties are sacred. According to him, a true teacher is a cultivator and protector of pure seeds. It is also their duty to keep them strong and good and to lead and guide them during life events (Gülen, 2016).

According to Gülen, no matter how good preschool education is in the family, the main role of increasing students' potential belongs to teachers (Gülen, 2016). According to Gülen, to be an ideal educator, an educator must have perfect faith, a lot of love, thinking and reinforcing nature, high-level thinking skills, must discuss science with full consideration, logic, and feelings, must think freely and respect freedom of thought, must be thoughtful and responsible (Gülen, 2016).

Being a student, according to Gülen, is a very rewarding task and Gülen recommends lifelong learning to his followers. Gülen asks them to remain students of knowledge throughout their lives and devote their lives to the study of religious, social, or natural sciences (Gülen, 2016). Therefore, according to Gülen, being a student of knowledge is very important, not only beneficial for the present life but also for the afterlife. In addition to highlighting the importance of being a student of knowledge, Gülen also described the profile of the ideal student in his speech.

One of the most important points in Gülen's educational ideas channeled through Gülen-inspired schools is to use the local curriculum in each country. Unlike other progressive education movements, Gülen-inspired schools do not have their own unique subjects or curriculum. Instead, they embrace their school's local curriculum and enrich the program with their philosophy and additional teaching activities (Altin, 2020). As an example of the case in Indonesia, Gülen-inspired schools in Indonesia use a national curriculum that is reinforced with a curriculum developed by PASIAD that is oriented towards the international curriculum (Ünsal, 2014). With an active learning approach, the

curriculum is developed into active, creative, effective, and fun learning. Students become the subject of learning, while teachers become inspirations and motivators.

Gülen-inspired schools around the world essentially use the local curriculum. This is mainly due to the localization strategy of the Gülen movement and in accordance with the policy of the Gülen movement to 'avoid contradictions', as Gülen views that synergy and interaction with local culture are essential (Gülen, 2016). Educational materials, in Gülen's view, have two orientations, namely: Modern educational materials and religious education materials. Gülen argued: "The spirit of madrasah education and the spirit of modern education can be united. They can make a new marriage, and the radiance of the mind and the light of the heart can be reunited. With their unity and integration, the spirit of students will take wings and fly," (Gülen, 2020).

Gülen's educational materials combine intellectual, spiritual, and physical education. In other words, Gülen's education aims to elevate students as children who develop their intellectual and intellectual abilities, improve the quality of faith and devotion to Allah, develop noble morals, and have health, fitness, and skills in daily life. Educational materials are delivered using approaches based on: (a) Problem-solving that involves students in critical, systematic, logical, and analytical thinking; and (b) Based on creativity, which encourages students to think originally, flexibly, and creatively.

Educational infrastructure and facilities are very important in Gülen's view of education. Gülen stated that any effort made to build the country in terms of economy and education is worship. Therefore, building infrastructure and educational facilities also means worship. Of course, this inspired Gülen's followers to compete to build educational institutions with the best facilities. One of the common features of Gülen-inspired schools is the modern school facilities. Each school has complete laboratory facilities. The Gülen School prioritizes the development of schools with quality educational support equipment, such as the provision of laboratories in chemistry, physics, biology, languages multimedia-based learning, and computer technology.

For Gülen, building a quality school is more important than building a place of worship. Building a place of worship is considered more than enough. A well-equipped education system along with dormitories, laboratories, and other facilities is the main goal of Gülen's education. This facility is used to support the study of religion, science, and morality which are very often mentioned in Gülen's sermons and are then applied practically in Gülen-inspired schools. The dormitory is used as a place for students to live to be taught morals and religion practically which is exemplified daily by pesantren supervisors after teaching and learning activities at school. A complete laboratory is used to support student research practices in developing knowledge. Meanwhile, other supporting facilities such as sports fields are used to facilitate the needs of students in developing physical needs (Gülen, 2016).

Integrated Islamic Education Design Fethullah Gülen's Perspective

The ideal form of the Gülen perspective education model recommends: (1) Teaching universal human values through the example of teachers and advisors; and (2) teaching modern and scientific knowledge and technology (Johnson, 2010). The method used to implement the Gülen educational model is through boarding schools. Dedicated and sincere teachers inspire a love of learning in the classroom in a culture that values respect for

teachers, while in the evenings the advisors who live in the dormitories with the students, nurture them, help them learn and most importantly serve as role models for them.

The pesantren supervisor is supervised by the pesantren manager, and the pesantren manager works under the deputy principal who is responsible for guidance. There is also a vice principal who is responsible for classroom teaching. Thus, the administrative hierarchy includes both branches (one for boarding school life and the other for school life). In this way, Gülen's emphasis on dealing with the hearts and minds of students is achieved. Usually, students are not allowed to leave school. Generally, they have a canteen inside the school for their needs. During playtime, meal time, study time, and leisure time, students communicate with the boarding school advisor, play and exercise together. Pesantren supervisors live in school dormitories, and they do their personal activities in the morning and evening for lectures or other activities. However, the main task of pesantren supervisors is to be a role model for students and make big changes in their lives. Boarding school advisors make Gülen-inspired schools unique. They show dedication and altruism in such a way that they basically give their lives to serve (Johnson, 2010).

Gülen provides methodological principles in teaching and educating that educators should really pay attention to in teaching, namely: First, educators must explain at a level that students can understand. The point is that an educator must understand and know which students are smart and slow to understand, educators must also understand which ones are appropriate and suitable to be taught according to the conditions and thinking power of students. This must be considered so that the lessons presented can be understood, digested, and applied in daily life by students and are beneficial to them. Educators must be able to modify information so that it can be received accurately and thoroughly by students. Educators need to have competent teaching skills so that students can learn participate and achieve learning goals.

Second, educators must be able to accompany their students step by step (Gülen, 2016). Do not move to a new course before it is fully understood by the student. This is to prevent students from misunderstanding the lessons they are learning and to avoid weakening their minds and obscuring their understanding. Third, educators must always educate happily and nurture students to always be better (Gülen, 2016). Educators must teach with love and teach in the best way to get the best results.

Fourth, educators are expected to teach absolute truth with scientific evidence (Gülen, 2016). When educators explain, they should give a clear and detailed explanation without hiding anything, and even better if it is supported by valid evidence. Fifth, educators should not leave doubts on students (Gülen, 2016). Educators who leave their students doubting science cannot be called educators, nor can they be called schools if educators cannot lead their students to good results.

The characteristics of integrated Islamic education in Gülen's perspective have several characteristics, including: First, integrated education, which is Islamic education that does not recognize the separation between religion and science. Instead, the two must be integrated (Gülen, 2016). Integration between religion and science is possible because it is based on the idea of *monotheism*. In this context, science, or the study of nature is considered related to the concept of *monotheism*. In Islam's view, nature is an integral part of his holistic view of God, humanity, and the world. According to Islam, science and nature have continuity with religion and God. This relationship implies a sacred aspect in the quest for

scientific knowledge of Muslims because nature itself is seen in the Qur'an as a collection of evidence pointing to God.

Second, holistic education. Gülen argued that God is the educator of the universe and He created the universe as a whole. If the universe is considered a poem, humans are part of this poem as a verse and must rhyme with other verses of the poem (Gülen, 2016). Therefore, according to its vision, education must meet all individual abilities, and moreover, it must produce individuals who interact harmoniously with society and the wider environment. Third, character education. Gülen states that in order to bring others to a better world, he must purify his inner world of hatred, hatred, and jealousy, and decorate his outer world with all sorts of virtues (Gülen, 2009). In other words, educators must combine teaching with character development. Character education aims to instill certain character values in students with components of knowledge, awareness, or willingness and action to realize these values.

Fourth, balanced education, namely education that balances various aspects. Gülen wants Islamic education to be an education that builds a balance between the interests of this world and the hereafter, combines heart and mind, and balances knowledge and charity. To realize a balanced education, Gülen created the concept of *Altın Nesil* (Golden Generation). This Golden Generation is a concept in forming a generation of Muslims who are educated in modern science and religious morality, and practice their knowledge in the form of concrete actions. Gülen education is a continuous effort to further develop individual potential in a comprehensive and integrated manner to create a balanced and harmonious human being in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical based on faith and obedience to God (Gülen, 2016).

Fifth, is dynamic education, which is education that has dynamic principles and always changes with the times. With the advent of modernity, humanity has turned its attention to technological advancements and this has been accompanied by a moral decline. Gülen initiated the construction of modern Islamic educational facilities that can attract people to want to learn about morals and teach modern knowledge that suits the needs of Muslims in facing the changing times.

Sixth, longevity education. According to Gülen, being a student is a very rewarding task and Gülen recommends lifelong learning to his followers. Gülen asks them to be students of knowledge throughout their lives and devote their lives to the study of religious, social or natural sciences (Gülen, 2016). Therefore, according to Gülen, being a student of knowledge is very important, not only beneficial for this life but also for the good in the hereafter. Seventh, education is not only about teaching but also about educating. Gülen distinguishes between the performance of more superficial technical aspects, which he calls teaching, and deeper, more meaningful, and holistic activities, which he calls educational. As Gülen said: "Education is different from teaching. Most people can teach, but few can educate." (Gülen, 2016). Because educators not only teach but also educate, educators are responsible for creating an atmosphere or conditions that allow students to thrive while learning. Therefore, educators must also be responsible for student discipline, which must be controlled in every student activity so that their behavior does not deviate from the norm.

Eighth, Education to form ideal human beings (*kamil people*). According to Gülen, education is about developing something to the highest level. This highest level is known as the *kamil people*. *Kamil people* always aim to be useful to others and seek knowledge that

will add to their knowledge insights. *Kamil people* live with good morals and always show kindness. *Kamil people see the good*, think well, say good and useful words, and always do good deeds (Gülen, 2016).

CONCLUSION

There are two main focuses that need to be underlined, namely: the epistemology of Islamic education from the perspective of Fethullah Gülen and the implementation of the epistemology of Gülen Islamic education on integrated Islamic education. These two points are interrelated because they come from Gülen's thoughts related to education. The author tries to describe and analyze the above thoughts so that a formulation of the Islamic education system that is relevant to the development of the times can be found.

Based on the basic epistemological framework of Fethullah Gülen, the epistemological framework of Islamic education in the perspective of Fethullah Gülen is broadly as follows: 1) The essence of the epistemology of Gülen's Islamic education is *wisdom*, namely being able to combine useful knowledge accompanied by its practice in life; 2) The epistemological source of Islamic education comes from human senses, reason and true reports (news) that come from others or messenger of Allah; 3) The method of acquiring Gülen's knowledge uses inductive reasoning and continues with deductive reasoning.

Fethullah Gülen's idea of integrated Islamic education has the following characteristics: 1) The purpose of Islamic education is to create *kamil people* who are able to master religious, social, and scientific sciences and practice them in life in order to create a world full of peace and global progress; 2) The integrative Islamic education model according to Fethullah Gülen is similar to the integration model of neo-modernism, which is to integrate Islamic tradition with modernity civilization. This study of Fethullah Gülen focuses only on epistemological studies. There is an opportunity for the development of other studies on Gülen's thoughts in the field of ontology and axiology, as well as other studies that can develop research in the field of integrative Islamic education.

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