

TOWARD AN ISLAMIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BALANCED EDUCATION IN THE BARMM: INSIGHTS FROM AL-ATTAS AND AL-FARUQI

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ABSTRACT

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) presents a unique context for educational reform that seeks to harmonize Islamic identity with contemporary educational needs. This paper proposes a framework for the implementation of balanced education in BARMM, drawing on the perspectives of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. Al-Attas conceptualizes education as the inculcation of *adab* (discipline, justice, and the proper ordering of knowledge), emphasizing the unity of knowledge under the principle of *tawhīd*. Al-Faruqi, on the other hand, emphasizes the Islamization of knowledge through systemic curricular reform and epistemological restructuring. Through documentary analysis of BARMM education policies, particularly the Bangsamoro Education Code (2021), and secondary literature on Islamic education, this paper develops a conceptual synthesis of these two approaches and situates them within BARMM's reform trajectory. It argues that balanced education requires overcoming the secular-religious dualism, investing in teacher professionalization, and embedding epistemological reform within policy structures. The study concludes that Al-Attas' philosophical framework and Al-Faruqi's pragmatic reform program provide complementary foundations for BARMM to achieve a holistic, balanced, and sustainable education system.

Keywords: Balanced Education, BARMM, Islamization of Knowledge, Al-Attas, Al-Faruqi, Integrated Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

The establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in 2019 represented a historic milestone in the struggle for Muslim self-determination in the Philippines. The ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law granted BARMM legislative powers, including authority over education, creating opportunities for structural reform rooted in Bangsamoro values and identity. One of the critical areas where

reform is urgently needed is education. Decades of conflict, marginalization, and systemic neglect have left the region with the country's lowest educational indicators, including poor literacy and numeracy outcomes, high dropout rates, and underfunded schools (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

At the same time, the Bangsamoro people have long expressed the desire for an educational system that affirms their Islamic faith, cultural heritage, and aspirations for peace and development. The Bangsamoro Education Code (2021) codifies this aspiration by mandating an integrated and inclusive education system that incorporates Islamic education, Arabic language, and madrasah traditions into the mainstream system. Yet, implementation challenges remain formidable, particularly in aligning religious and secular knowledge, professionalizing teachers, and ensuring learning outcomes.

Problem Statement

Several years have passed since its creation, the BARMM, until now, has not formulated a framework on implementation of balanced education. The national government has not set a minimum standard for integrated Islamic education either. Thus, the unwelcomed educational status quo, the bifurcation of education into secular and traditional madrasah systems remain unaddressed. This paper tries to present the Islamic framework of implementation of balanced education in the BARMM region, drawing from the educational philosophies of Al-Attas and Al-Faruqi. The research argues that the philosophical framework proposed by Al-Attas and Al-Faruqi's practical reform initiatives offer complementary bases for BARMM to construct an Islamic framework for the implementation of balanced education.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this paper is to examine how Al-Attas and Al-Faruqi's educational philosophies can shape a framework for balanced education in BARMM. Specifically, it tries to-

1. propose a conceptual integration of Al-Attas and Al-Faruqi's methodologies, framed within the context of current educational reforms in BARMM, and;
2. suggest guiding principles and strategies for implementation of balanced education in BARMM

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Balanced Education in Islamic Thought

The concept of balanced education has deep roots in Islamic intellectual traditions. The Qur'anic description of the Muslim community as *ummatan wasatan* (Qur'an 2:143) highlights moderation, justice, and balance as defining characteristics of Islamic civilization. Classical scholars, such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Khaldūn, emphasized that education must cultivate both the rational and spiritual faculties of the human being. Al-Ghazālī stressed that knowledge must lead to moral refinement and closeness to God, while Ibn Khaldūn underscored the role of education in sustaining civilizational development (Rosenthal, 2007).

Contemporary scholars extend this discourse to address modern educational crises. Balanced education is described as one that integrates spiritual and ethical values with scientific and technical knowledge, aiming to produce holistic human beings rather than fragmented specialists (Hashim, 2014). This approach is particularly relevant in contexts like BARMM, where education has historically been fragmented between secular schools and Islamic madāris, leading to dualisms in identity, competencies, and opportunities.

2.2 Educational Reform in BARMM

Education in BARMM has long suffered from systemic weaknesses. According to UNICEF (2023), BARMM records some of the lowest literacy and numeracy rates in the Philippines, compounded by conflict-related disruptions, limited resources, and weak governance. Many madāris operate outside state recognition, offering religious instruction but leaving graduates with limited opportunities in the national system (Lingga, 2005).

The Bangsamoro Education Code (2021) aims to address this fragmentation by legally mandating the integration of Islamic education into the regional education system. It envisions a model where Arabic language, Islamic values, and madrasah traditions are harmonized with mainstream K–12 education. The Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) has initiated programs to strengthen madrasah education, professionalize teachers, and align curricula with national standards (MBHTE, 2024). However, progress is uneven, and challenges such as learning poverty, limited teacher capacity, and institutional fragility persist.

The above review of literatures clearly shows that until today, scholars have not delved into the search for a clear Islamic framework for the implementation of balanced education in the BARMM region. To fill this gap, this study is conducted.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a conceptual and documentary analysis approach. Primary sources include the writings of Al-Attas and Al-Faruqi, particularly

Islam and Secularism (1978), *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (1995), and *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan* (1982). Policy documents, such as the Bangsamoro Education Code (2021), MBHTE reports, and development partner studies (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2022), are analyzed to understand the current state of educational reform in BARMM. Secondary literature on Islamic education in Southeast Asia provides contextual grounding.

The analysis synthesizes philosophical perspectives with policy realities, identifying points of convergence and divergence between theory and practice. The aim is to generate a normative framework for implementing balanced education in BARMM, rooted in Islamic epistemology and contextualized to local challenges.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Towards an Islamic Framework for Balanced Education in BARMM

The ideas put forth by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi serve as significant intellectual assets for constructing a balanced educational framework in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Although their methodologies differ—Al-Attas's being more philosophical and metaphysical while Al-Faruqi's is more practical and programmatic—they both emphasize the need to merge Islamic epistemology with contemporary knowledge systems. This integration can provide a strong basis for educational reform in BARMM.

4.2. Al-Attas' Philosophy of Education

Philosophically, Al-Attas asserted that the aim of education is cultivation of the good man. Al-Attas believes that, education (*ta'dīb*) is not merely the transmission of information or vocational training. Instead, it is the process of inculcating *adab* in the learner, thereby producing the *good man* (*insān ṣāliḥ*). This contrasts with Western liberal education, which often aims to produce the “good citizen” for the modern nation-state (Al-Attas, 1995). The good man, in Al-Attas' conception, is one who lives in harmony with divine law, upholds justice, and pursues knowledge for the sake of truth and wisdom rather than utility.

Al-Attas believes that, *adab* is the essence of education. Hence, he argued that the loss of *adab* is the root cause of the crisis in Muslim education. *Adab* involves recognizing the proper order of things—ontologically, epistemologically, and ethically. Without *adab*, knowledge becomes fragmented, misused, and divorced from its moral and spiritual

grounding (Al-Attas, 1993). Hence, true education restores justice and harmony by instilling *adab* at all levels: personal, social, and cosmic.

Epistemologically, Al-Attas emphasizes that all knowledge must be integrated under the principle of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God). In contrast to modern secular epistemologies that fragment knowledge into isolated disciplines, Islamic education must demonstrate the interconnectedness of all fields of study as reflections of divine unity (Al-Attas, 1978). This ensures that scientific, social, and humanistic disciplines are studied in ways that affirm, rather than negate, spiritual truth.

As one of the earliest Muslim intellectuals to articulate the concept of Islamization of knowledge, Al-Attas defined it as the liberation of knowledge from Western secular worldviews and its reorientation within the framework of Islamic metaphysics and ethics (Al-Attas, 1978). Unlike Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's systemic approach, Al-Attas emphasized the epistemological and linguistic foundations of knowledge. He argued that adopting Western categories without critique leads to confusion and cultural colonization.

Finally, Al-Attas underscored the importance of language in shaping worldview. He argued that many of the conceptual confusions in Muslim thought arose from uncritical translations of Western concepts into Islamic discourse. Preserving the semantic integrity of Islamic terms such as *ʿilm* (knowledge), *hikmah* (wisdom), and *adab* is crucial for maintaining the Islamic intellectual tradition (Wan Daud, 2019).

4.3. Al-Faruqi's Philosophy of Education

As the main pioneer of Islamization of knowledge, Al-Faruqi defines education as the process of producing individuals who embody the Islamic worldview and are capable of integrating it into all fields of human knowledge and activity (Al-Faruqi, 1982). Unlike Western secular education, which often prioritizes utility and individualism, Al-Faruqi emphasized the spiritual, ethical, and civilizational purposes of education. According to this philosophy of education, the ultimate goal of education is to form individuals who contribute to the creation of a just and moral society, guided by Islamic principles.

To this end, Al-Faruqi proposes his systematic program of Islamization of knowledge. He defined this as the process of "recasting knowledge as Islam relates to it" (Al-Faruqi, 1982, p. 15). This process involves: 1) Critiquing Western knowledge systems. This entails identification of assumptions that contradict Islamic epistemology. 2) Recovering Islamic heritage, i.e., revisiting classical scholarship to reclaim intellectual traditions. 3) Integrating modern and Islamic knowledge which could be realized through creating a unified curriculum where modern sciences are interpreted through the Islamic worldview.

Al-Faruqi proposed a structured methodology for Islamization, which included: Mastery of modern disciplines; Mastery of Islamic legacy (*turāth*); Establishing relevance between Islamic heritage and contemporary issues, and; Creative synthesis into integrated curricula (Al-Faruqi, 1982).

Al-Faruqi identified dualism as the core crisis of Muslim education: the separation of religious sciences from modern disciplines. This, he argued, created fragmented individuals unable to harmonize their faith with their professional and intellectual pursuits (Sardar, 1989). His educational philosophy sought to overcome this by integrating all knowledge into a coherent Islamic epistemology.

Finally, beyond technical reform, Al-Faruqi stressed the ethical and civilizational mission of education. He argued that knowledge must be pursued not for material gain but to serve humanity and fulfill the divine mandate of *khilāfah* (vicegerency of humankind). Thus, education must cultivate not only intellectual excellence but also moral responsibility (Osman & Musa, 2017).

4.4. Theoretical Framework: Synthesizing Al-Attas and Al-Faruqi

A workable implementation framework benefits from synthesizing the normative and programmatic. The synthesis adopted here treats Al-Attas as providing the epistemological orientation (the “why” and the ends) and Al-Faruqi as offering the institutional workplan (the “how”). Key combined principles include:

1. Unity of knowledge (*tawhīd*)—All curricular elements should be coherently oriented with ethical and metaphysical bearings (Al-Attas, 1993).
2. Inculcation of *adab*—Education aims to form moral agents, not merely produce labor competencies (Al-Attas, 1995).
3. Critical appropriation—Modern disciplinary knowledge should be critically engaged and integrated, not rejected wholesale (Al-Faruqi, 1982).
4. Institutional capacity building—Create structures (centers, accreditation mechanisms, professional pathways) to sustain reform (Al-Faruqi, 1982).
5. Community legitimacy and participation—Engage ulama, madrasah networks, parents, and civil society to ensure cultural fit and ownership.

This combined framework guides the implementation of balanced education in BARMM, policy environment, and the design of practical implementation steps.

5. ANALYSIS

Al-Attas' emphasis on the centrality of *adab* in education can provide a guiding principle for BARMM. Incorporating *adab* into all levels of education in BARMM necessitates a shift in curricula towards fostering ethical awareness, acknowledging knowledge hierarchies, and embracing the unity of truth. This implies that science, technology, and contemporary fields should not be presented as independent or secularized areas of knowledge, but rather as means to perceive the signs (āyāt) of Allah within creation. Instilling this approach within all levels of BARMM's education would help develop graduates who are not only skilled professionals but also ethically rooted individuals who are able to contribute positively to the community.

Al-Faruqi's Islamization of knowledge project, on the other hand, while complementing Al-Attas' approach, presents a guide for structural and institutional reform in the BARMM. Al-Faruqi's approach can provide a viable solution: redesign educational curricula to weave Islamic principles into every field of study, retrain educators to reflect this integration, and create institutions capable of generating new knowledge rooted in an Islamic perspective. For BARMM, this requires crafting a cohesive curriculum that blends Arabic, Islamic values, and mainstream academic subjects, enhancing the professionalism of madrasah teachers, and promoting institutions such as Islamic universities and research centers that practice critical scholarship.

CONCLUSION

By utilizing the viewpoints of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, the BARMM can construct a viable framework for implementation of balanced education system in the region. Drawing from Al-Attas philosophy of Islamic education, the BARMM should give emphasis on the centrality of instilling *adab* and the unity of knowledge through *tawhīd*. This will address the moral decadence of the present generation of the Moro people. Whereas Al-Faruqi's approach can outlines a plan for curriculum reform, teacher training, and structural institutional changes in the BARMM. Collectively, they provide complementary insights for addressing the divide between secular and religious education and for establishing an integrated educational system in the region. With a solid epistemological foundation, systemic reforms, and robust community involvement, achieving balanced education in BARMM is possible. Ultimately, the strive for balanced education is not merely about overhauling schools but about nurturing a generation of Bangsamoro youth who are intellectually capable, morally sound, and spiritually grounded—reflecting the Qur'anic vision of *ummataṉ wasaṭan*, a community that is justly balanced.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Towards successful implementation of this framework, various recommendations can be made for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders within BARMM. 1) All educational reforms must be based on the principle of tawhīd and the promotion of adab, in line with Al-Attas' perspective. This means that education should not only focus on skill development but also foster ethical and spiritual growth; 2) Apply Al-Faruqi's framework by methodically revising curricula. This entails incorporating Islamic viewpoints into subjects like science and social studies, while also strengthening Arabic and Islamic studies within general education; 4) Initiate extensive training programs for educators in both Islamic and contemporary subjects. Collaborations with Islamic universities from Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Middle East could enhance teacher training; 5) Establish centers of excellence for research in Islamic education within BARMM, focused on curriculum innovation, teacher preparation, and knowledge creation. These institutions should function as think tanks and training centers; 6) Involve religious leaders, educators, and families in the process of shaping and endorsing a well-rounded education system, ensuring cultural relevance and community engagement, and; 7) Increased funding from BARMM's block grant for educational initiatives and seek collaboration with international donors (such as UNICEF and Islamic Development Bank) to facilitate teacher training and curriculum integration.

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