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Tauhid Based Education in the Thought of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab: A Conceptual Analysis and Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Education

Okni Aisa Mutiara Sendi[1]
[1]Institut Agama Islam Negeri Curup, Indonesia
Okniaisa10@gmail.com *

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Abstract

Contemporary Islamic education faces challenges in the form of a weakening understanding of tawhid, a tendency towards syncretism in religious practice, and a moral crisis among students. These conditions call for a strengthening of the theological foundations of Islamic education. Muhammad ibn al-Wahhab's ideas on the purification of tawhid offer a relevant conceptual framework for responding to these challenges. This study aims to analyse the concept of tauhid-based education in the thoughts of Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and examine its relevance to the development of contemporary Islamic education. This study uses a qualitative approach through a literature study with a conceptual analysis method of the main works of Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, particularly the book at-Tauhid, as well as relevant secondary literature. The results of the study show that tauhid-based education in the thinking of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab emphasises i) purification of faith, ii) instilling sincerity in worship, iii) strengthening religious orientation based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, iv) and forming critical awareness of religious practices that deviate from the principles of tauhid. These findings imply that the concept of tauhid-based education can be used as a normative foundation in strengthening the curriculum, shaping the religious character of students, and developing a religious culture in Islamic educational institutions as an effort to strengthen the spiritual and moral integrity of the Muslim generation in the contemporary era.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education essentially aims to shape individuals who are faithful, pious, and virtuous by making monotheism the primary foundation of the entire learning process (Chasan, 2021; Novianti et al., 2024). However, in the reality of contemporary Islamic education, strengthening the monotheistic dimension often faces various challenges, both conceptually and practically. On the one hand, globalization and modernization have had a positive impact on the development of science and technology.

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On the other hand, the influx of secularist values, moral relativism, and educational pragmatism has the potential to shift the spiritual orientation of the Islamic education system. This condition causes Islamic education to tend to emphasize the instrumental cognitive aspect, while the development of faith and awareness of monotheism has not been fully internalized in students' personalities (Naufal, 2019; Nurrisma & Suyanta, 2025).

However, the dynamics of contemporary Islamic education indicate a tendency to reduce the meaning of education to the instrumental cognitive dimension. Several studies indicate that the modernization of the education system encourages the strengthening of academic competency and work skills, while the spiritual dimension and the development of faith often become normative complements that are less internalized in practice (Haris, 2020; Rasyidi & Ihsan, 2026). This condition has implications for the emergence of a dichotomy between religious knowledge and religious behavior in students. On the other hand, religious practices in some Muslim communities still display religious traditions mixed with non-normative elements, which theologically have the potential to obscure the purity of monotheism. This phenomenon emphasizes the urgency of reconstructing the Islamic educational paradigm that places monotheism as the central orientation for personality formation (Nafeeza & Suyanta, 2025; Kerwanto & Alfaruqiy, 2025). In the context of 18th-century Islamic renewal thought, the idea of purifying monotheism developed by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab holds historical and theological significance. Through his work, Kitab al-Tawhid, he asserted that the core of Islamic teachings lies in purifying worship to Allah alone and rejecting all forms of religious intermediaries that could potentially lead to polytheism. His thinking stemmed from a critique of the religious practices of the Najd community, which were seen as deviating from the principles of pure monotheism, such as the cult of tombs and supplication to others (Wahyudin, 2018). Conceptually, this idea positions monotheism not merely as a doctrine of faith but as a framework of values that shapes the thought patterns, attitudes toward diversity, and moral orientation of Muslims (Arum et al., 2026).

Although Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's thought has been extensively studied from the perspective of theology and the history of Islamic renewal movements, including debates regarding his relationship with the Salafi movement and political dynamics in the Arabian Peninsula, studies that specifically place his idea of purifying monotheism within the framework of Islamic education are still relatively limited (Syahrizal & Rashid, 2012; Hafid, 2020). Some studies focus more on the ideological implications and polemics of schools of thought, while the pedagogical dimension and its relevance to curriculum development, educational goals, and the development of students' religious character have not been systematically explored. However, when applied to the educational realm, the concept of purifying monotheism has the potential to become a normative foundation in formulating character education based on faith, moral integrity, and awareness of worship. Several contemporary Islamic educational thinkers, such as Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, emphasize the importance of manners and an Islamic worldview as the basis of education (Tumanggor et al., 2024; Jamil et al., 2025). This view aligns with the concept of monotheism-based education, which places knowledge of God at the heart of the process of developing a civilized human being. Thus, there is a conceptual intersection between contemporary Islamic educational discourse and the idea of purifying monotheism in the thought of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, despite emerging from different historical contexts. Both emphasize the urgency of a strong foundation of faith as the basis for character formation and life orientation in students (Airawatta et al., 2025).

Based on this description, there is an apparent academic need to more deeply examine monotheism-based education in the thought of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab using a conceptual analysis approach and to elaborate on its relevance to contemporary Islamic education (Hidayatullah et al., 2023). This study is not intended to affirm or deny all aspects of his thought normatively, but rather to extract conceptual values that can be transformed critically and contextually in developing the current paradigm of Islamic education. Thus, this research is expected to fill the research gap between the study of the thought of Islamic figures and the development of monotheism-based Islamic education theory.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research and conceptual methods to systematically examine the idea of monotheism-based education in the thoughts of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. Data are sourced from the primary works of the figure, particularly the book Al-Tawhid and treatises related to the purification of faith, as well as secondary sources in the form of books, reputable journal articles, and contemporary academic studies on monotheism thought and Islamic education (Engkizar et al., 2026; Wahidi et al., 2025). Data collection was carried out through a documentary study with critical reading of the text, marking key themes, and recording relevant quotations that represent the concept of monotheism, educational goals, principles of purification of faith, and their pedagogical implications. Data analysis was carried out thematically conceptually through the stages of data reduction, conceptual categories, synthesis between themes, and critical interpretation to extract the normative principles of monotheism-based education, while assessing their relevance and applicability in the context of contemporary Islamic education challenges.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of data analysis in this article, four themes related to tauhid-based education in the thinking of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab were found, emphasising i) purification of faith, ii) instilling sincerity in worship, iii) strengthening religious orientation based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, iv) and the formation of critical awareness of religious practices that deviate from the principles of tauhid. A more detailed description of these themes can be seen in Figure 1.

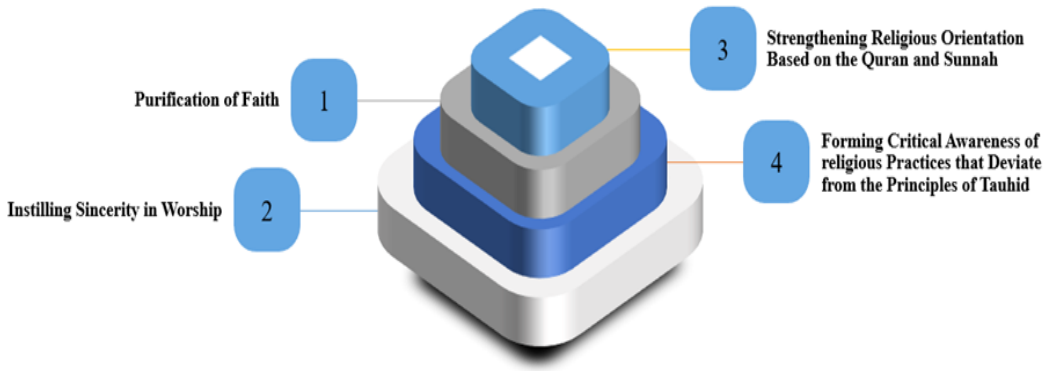

Fig 1. Four Themes Of Tauhid-Based Education In The Thinking Of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab

Purification of Faith

The results of a study of the works of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, especially the book Al-Tauhid, show that the purification of faith is the core of all his reform ideas (Huda, 2011). In this test, he emphasized that the core of the prophets' preaching is to realize the monotheism of Allah SWT in worship and reject all forms of polytheism, both major (shirk akbar) and minor (shirk asghar). This concept has ontological implications in education because it places the knowledge of Allah SWT (ma'rifatullah) as the highest goal of the learning process. The pedagogical method of purifying faith does not stop at the transmission of doctrine but involves a process of conceptual clarification through the evidence of the Quran and hadith. From the perspective of classical Islamic education, this approach has similarities with Al-Ghazali's idea that places the knowledge of faith as the foundation for the formation of true deeds. Without a solid foundation of monotheism, good deeds have the potential to lose their spiritual orientation. Thus, monotheism-based education in the thought of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab can be understood as an effort to build a straight belief structure before fostering moral and social aspects (Huriyudin, 2021; Zifamina, 2022). In the contemporary context, the purification of faith is relevant to addressing the problems of religious relativism and syncretism arising from cultural globalization. Islamic education requires a clear theological foundation so that students have a solid normative framework for thinking in the face of the plurality of religious thought and practice.

Instilling Sincerity in Worship

The second prominent aspect is the emphasis on sincerity in every form of worship. In the book Al-Tauhid, Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab links monotheism with the purification of intentions, as emphasized in various arguments regarding the prohibition of riya' (showing off) and minor polytheism (shirk). This concept demonstrates that monotheism relates not only to external theological aspects but also to the inner dimension (qalbiyyah). Within an educational framework, instilling sincerity has significant implications for the development of students' intrinsic motivation (Bahri, 2018). Tawhid-based education directs students to understand that learning, working, and worship are part of devotion to Allah SWT. This perspective aligns with the idea of the Islamization of knowledge developed by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, who emphasized that the goal of education is to produce civilized individuals who recognize and place things according to the hierarchy of truth (Makhmudah, 2015; Mukhtar, 2025). Thus, sincerity becomes the spiritual motor that drives the educational process. Without sincerity, the learning process risks becoming merely a formal activity without moral transformation. Therefore, monotheism education functions to instill the awareness that every deed will be accounted for before Allah, thus forming internal and sustainable moral integrity.

Strengthening Religious Orientation Based on the Quran and Sunnah

The third finding shows that monotheism-based education in the thought of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is rooted in a strong commitment to the Quran and Sunnah as the primary sources of religious reference. He rejected religious practices lacking a clear textual basis and emphasized the importance of returning to the understanding of the early generations. This approach contains a significant epistemological dimension, as it places revelation as the ultimate source of truth in the educational process (Harahap & Pohan, 2025). In the context of Islamic education, an orientation toward the Quran and Sunnah means that the curriculum and learning process must align with the basic principles of Islamic teachings. This does not mean rejecting modern science, but rather placing it within the framework of monotheism as a worldview (Chasan, 2021; Tumannggor et al., 2024). This

integration is crucial to avoid the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge that has been problematic in the Islamic education system. The text-based approach also encourages argumentative religious literacy (Rustandi et al., 2025; Saefuddin, 2025). Students are not only invited to accept teachings dogmatically but are also encouraged to understand their arguments and context. Thus, monotheism-based education contributes to the development of systematic thinking based on the authority of revelation.

Forming Critical Awareness of religious Practices that Deviate from the Principles of Tauhid

The fourth aspect identified is the development of critical awareness of religious practices that deviate from the principles of monotheism. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, in his various treatises, criticized the practice of grave cults, baseless tawassul (circumcision), and forms of ritual deemed to lead to polytheism. Although this criticism arose within the socio-historical context of the 18th-century Arabian Peninsula, conceptually, it contains a reflective educational dimension (Sahin, 2018). From an educational perspective, this critical awareness can be understood as the ability of students to conduct normative evaluations of socio-religious practices based on the principles of monotheism. Monotheism education not only teaches what is true but also trains the ability to distinguish between normative teachings and cultural practices that are inconsistent with basic Islamic principles. However, in the context of contemporary, pluralistic Islamic education, the implementation of this principle must be carried out proportionally (Fitriani, 2023; Darojat et al., 2025). Monotheism education must continue to prioritize etiquette, scientific dialogue, and a wisdom approach to prevent the development of rigid exclusivism. Thus, appropriate pedagogy, critical awareness based on monotheism can strengthen religious identity while maintaining social ethics in a diverse society.

Overall, the study results show that monotheism-based education in the thought of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab has a comprehensive conceptual structure, namely monotheism as the ontological foundation, sincerity as the affective dimension, the Quran and Sunnah as the epistemological foundation, and critical awareness as the reflective dimension of education (Engkizar et al., 2022). These four elements form an educational paradigm oriented towards fostering authentic faith and sustainable moral integrity. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, this paradigm is relevant for strengthening the foundations of faith, integrating faith and knowledge, and building religious character based on spiritual awareness and textual argumentation (Idoko, 2022; Jamil et al., 2025). With a contextual and moderate approach, monotheism-based education can serve as a normative framework in curriculum development and the development of the Muslim generation in the modern era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that monotheism-based education in the thought of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab is an educational paradigm that places the purification of faith as the main foundation, the cultivation of sincerity as a spiritual driver, orientation to the Quran and Sunnah as an epistemological basis, and the formation of critical awareness of religious practices as a reflective dimension of learning. This concept shows that monotheism is not merely a theological doctrine, but a comprehensive framework that integrates faith, knowledge, and deeds in the formation of a monotheistic personality that is consistent between belief and behavior. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, this paradigm is relevant for strengthening the foundation of faith, building intrinsic motivation based on sincerity, and fostering argumentative and evidence-based religious literacy.

Therefore, monotheism-based education has the potential to become a normative foundation in curriculum development and character education, with the note that its implementation needs to be carried out contextually, proportionally, and pedagogically to remain in line with the dynamics of modern Muslim society.

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