

Strengthening Character Through Comparative Rhetoric and Istifham: A Study on E. Abdurrahman's Thoughts on Character Education

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Abstract

This article examines the Strengthening of Character through Comparative Rhetoric and Istifham (Rhetorical Questions): A Study of E. Abdurrahman's Thoughts on Moral Education. As a second-generation activist of the PERSIS organization, besides being proficient in the field of fiqh, E. Abdurrahman demonstrated significant attention to moral education. He published at least 87 articles on moral education in various Islamic magazines between 1936 and 1983. The findings of this study indicate three key principles of moral education: moral education should be elevated from mere ability (*bisa*) to habitual practice (*biasa*); it must culminate in loyalty to God; and it should be student-centered, grounded in the philosophy of *ngajeujeuhkeun*. The concepts of "giving and sustaining life," "ensuring and promoting safety," and "establishing and maintaining security" are three essential terms used to define the goals of moral education. From the 87 articles, E. Abdurrahman's core materials on moral education can be categorized into eleven topics: the purpose of life, the profile of the ideal human, the urgency of moral education, heart cultivation, life resources, justice, balance, the inner dimension of worship, food and drink, death, and shame. From the perspective of strengthening moral education, Abdurrahman positioned *tawahum* (empathy) as a pillar for determining the methods of moral education. At the implementation level, *tawahum* is associated with the teacher's ability to engage in persuasive communication by employing various rhetorical styles that touch emotions, such as comparative rhetoric and *istifham*.

Keywords: Character Education, E. Abdurrahman, Jeujeuhan, comparison, *Istifham*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji Penguatan Budi Pekerti Melalui Seni Perbandingan dan Istifham. (Studi Terhadap Pemikiran Pendidikan Budi Pekerti E. Abdurrahman). Sebagai aktivis organisasi PERSIS generasi kedua, di samping kompeten dalam bidang fiqh, beliau memiliki perhatian besar terhadap pendidikan budi pekerti. Paling tidak terdapat 87 artikel budi pekerti yang beliau publikasikan di beberapa majalah Islam antara 1936-1983. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat tiga prinsip pendidikan budi pekerti, yakni: pendidikan budi pekerti harus ditingkatkan dari bisa ke biasa, harus bermuara pada kesetiaan pada Tuhan dan harus berorientasi pada peserta didik yang didasarkan pada filosofi *ngajeujeuhkeun*. Hidup-menghidupkan, selamat-menyelamatkan, aman-mengamankan merupakan tiga istilah penting dalam menetapkan tujuan pendidikan budi pekerti. Dari 87 artikel, materi pokok pendidikan budi pekerti E. Abdurrahman dapat dipetakan menjadi seblas topik kajian: tujuan, profil manusia ideal, urgensi pendidikan akhlak, pembinaan hati, modal hidup, keadilan, keseimbangan, batin ibadah, makan-minum, kematian dan malu. Sementara dilihat dari aspek penguatan pendidikan budi pekerti, Abdurrahman menempatkan *tawahum*/empati sebagai pilar dalam menentukan metode pendidikan Budi Pekerti. Pada tataran implementasinya, *tawahum* berelasi dengan kemampuan guru untuk melakukan komunikasi persuasif dengan menggunakan berbagai gaya bahasa yang bisa menyentuh rasa seperti gaya bahasa perbandingan dan *istifham*.

Kata kunci: Budi Pekerti, E. Abdurrahman, Jeujeuhan, perbandingan, *istifham*

BACKGROUND

Character education, popularly known as *akhlak* in religious terminology, remains a central educational issue in Indonesia today (Muthohar, 2014; Nurhisam, 2017). Key points discussed among Muslim intellectuals include the intensifying multidimensional crisis, characterized by high rates of violent incidents (Azra, 2004, p. 34; Komarudin, 2021, p. 229; Revalina, Moeis, & Indrawadi, 2023, p. 53); issues of free sex and drug abuse (Shiddiq, Ulfatin, Imron, & Imron, 2024, p. 2277); moral decay marked by a hedonistic lifestyle and societal indifference toward ethics (Cahyo, 2017; Mudlofir, 2016, p. 231; Sarbini, Rahtikawati, & Syamsudin, 2021, p. 2686); a decrease in societal honesty indicated by rising cases of fraud and envy; declining respect for parents, teachers, and figures deserving of respect; the growth of behavioral deviations like free sex and drug abuse; fading compassion among individuals; and increased corruption, collusion, and nepotism (Iskarim, 2016, p. 2; Listari, 2021, p. 9; Setiyawan, 2015, p. 128).

Essentially, moral degradation is not a new issue in human life; it has been a central concern since the rivalry between Qabil and Habil, which led to the first murder (Afwadzi, 2024, p. 38; Hariyadi & Subki, 2022, p. 674; Nugraha, 2016, p. 41). Even Prophet Muhammad lived amidst a *jahiliyah* society—one associated with barbaric, harsh, and cruel behaviors, indicative of low moral standards (Abdurrahman, 1965b, p. 5). Thus, it is not surprising that the core mission of his prophethood centered on *liutamim makarim al-akhlak* (to perfect noble character) (Asyur, 2006, p. 120; Dewi, 2015, p. 356).

This reality shows that moral issues are universal challenges humanity will always face, irrespective of time and place. Substantially, the problem remains the same, with differences only in form and terminology. Hence, scholars have shown particular concern for moral issues, contributing various ideas through books and treatises, such as *at-Targhib fi al-'ilm* by Ismail al-Muzani, *Bidayat al-Hidayah* and *Minhaj al-Muta'alim* by Imam al-Ghazali, *Washaya al Aba' li al Abna'* by Muhammad Syakir, *Akhlaq li al Banin* and *Akhlaq li al Banat* by Umar bin Ahmad Barja, *Irsyad al 'Ibad* by Zain al Din al Malibari, and *Nashaih al 'Ibad* by the Indonesian scholar Nawawi al Bantani (Fattah & Afwadzi, 2016, p. 198; Sodiman, 2013, p. 57).

Similarly, scholars in the Nusantara region also dedicated attention to the discourse of character education. One such figure is E. Abdurrahman (1912–1983), acknowledged as a charismatic scholar well-versed in various fields of Islamic knowledge, especially in *fiqh*, *hadith*, and *tafsir* (Khaeruman, 2010, p. 72). Demonstrating his commitment to character education, he wrote no fewer than 87 articles on character education over 40 years (1940–1983), with some articles published in the magazine *Risalah* (1962–1983) and others distributed as mimeographed papers.

However, E. Abdurrahman's ideas on character education are relatively unknown in the Muslim community, even among PERSIS members. This contrasts with his thoughts on legal matters, which are well-known for his *istiftas* (legal rulings). Consequently, researchers have tended to focus more on Abdurrahman's contributions to *fiqh*, politics, and *tafsir*. For example, studies by Mubarak examine Abdurrahman's legal reasoning in addressing various *fiqh* issues (Mubarak, 2009, p. 62). Berbeda dengan Mubarak, Wildan, Bahtiar dan Sutisna fokus mengkaji Abdurrahman dari sisi politik E. Abdurrahman selama kepemimpinannya sebagai Ketua Umum PERSIS (1962-1983) (Bachtiar, 2008, p. 94; Wildan, 1997, p. 138).

Nugraha and Rohmana, meanwhile, focused on Abdurrahman's interpretative approach within *tafsir*. As a PERSIS ideologue, Abdurrahman tended to interpret the Qur'an within the ideological framework he embraced (Nugraha, 2024, pp. 993–1012; Nugraha & Rohmana, 2021, p. 359) (Nugraha & Rohmana, 2021: 359). This study aims to strengthen the scope of previous research, particularly regarding E. Abdurrahman's dimension of character education.

This study is crucial because researchers have generally prioritized character education ideas published in complete book forms over those appearing in magazines or collections of articles. However, these magazine-published ideas reflect more clearly the author's dialectic with the social realities he faced (Rohmana, 2019, p. 4). This is evident in E. Abdurrahman's character education ideas published in *Risalah* between 1963 and 1980. Additionally, his character education ideas in magazines hold a significant role in enlightening the Muslim community on character education issues, concisely explained in a popular and accessible style. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze another dimension of Abdurrahman's thought in addressing moral issues within society in the 1970s.

This study focuses on the issue of E. Abdurrahman's moral education. The primary sources consist of 87 articles on moral education published in the *Risalah* magazine (1967-1983) and related manuscripts. The analysis is conducted using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach to explain the socio-cultural practices behind the texts. Critical discourse analysis of the texts is not only concerned with linguistic aspects but also with discourse practices in the production and consumption of texts, as well as the socio-cultural practices behind the texts (Fairclough, 1995, p. 87).

The Life Portrait of E. Abdurrahman

Endang Abdurrahman was born on June 12, 1912, in the village of Pasarean, Bojong Herang, Cianjur, as the eldest of eleven siblings. His father, Ghazali, was a tailor, and his mother, Hafsa, was a batik artisan (Wildan, 1997, p. 121). After learning to read and write the Qur'an under his parents' guidance, E. Abdurrahman continued his studies at the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Al-I'alah Islamic boarding school in Cianjur, which was led by Muhammad Nuh bin Idris and the prominent scholar and prolific writer Abdullah bin Nuh (1905-1987) (Anas, 2015, p. 239).

Upon graduating from Al-I'alah, Abdurrahman went to Bandung to teach at the NU Madrasah Al-I'alah at the request of Pak Swarha, also known as Hassan Wiratmana (1928-1930). In 1930, Alkatiri, a wealthy individual in Bandung, invited E. Abdurrahman to teach his children. Alongside his merchant role, Alkatiri founded the Islamic Primary Education Council (MPDI) in Kebonjati, Bandung, which was managed by E. Abdurrahman and O. Qomaruddin Shaleh, an Islamic reformist who also managed Madrasah Al-Hikmah in Rancabali Padalarang. During his time at MPDI, E. Abdurrahman became interested in PERSIS teachings from A. Hassan on Pangeran Sumedang Street in Bandung (Minhaji, 1997). Initially, Abdurrahman was shocked and offended by A. Hassan's views, leading to a debate that A. Hassan won. Abdurrahman eventually accepted Hassan's teachings, becoming his student, joining the PERSIS movement, and becoming the second principal teacher after A. Hassan.

When Alkatiri learned of Abdurrahman's shift in views, he dismissed him from managing MPDI, revoked his status as a *khatib* (preacher) at Pakauman, Bandung, and expelled him from his residence. E. Abdurrahman contributed significantly to Islamic education within the PERSIS community (Abdurrahman, n.d.-i, p. 1). In 1934, Abdurrahman began teaching at the Islamic Education Institute (Pendis) under M. Natsir's leadership and taught at HIS, MULO, and Kweekschool. He also taught and developed the Pesantren Kecil, especially after A. Hassan relocated to Bangil, East Java, in 1940. During the Revolution (1945-1949), the PERSIS Pesantren under Abdurrahman's leadership was evacuated to Gunung Cupu, Ciamis, and later moved back to Bandung once conditions stabilized.

In addition to his active role in teaching at the pesantren, Abdurrahman was also active in teaching at the Tamhid al-Mubalighin institution (a religious course for prospective preachers). Over a span of 20 years, he completed a book in Sundanese to be used as a teaching guide for the participants of Tamhid.

This book served as a summary of studies on moral issues, which were used as sermon themes by PERSIS preachers.

Since 1934, E. Abdurrahman was known as a committed and loyal scholar to PERSIS. His first position was Head of Propagation and Education (1952), then General Secretary of PERSIS (1953), assisting Isa Anshary as Chairman. In 1962 (during the 7th PERSIS Congress), he was elected as General Chairman. In 1957, he was also elected as a member of Indonesia's Constituent Assembly from the Masyumi Party. He was member number 246. When the Assembly was dissolved by Sukarno, Abdurrahman withdrew from politics (Bahtiar, 2019, p. 114).

Known for his simplicity and expertise in Islamic law, E. Abdurrahman avoided praise despite his broad recognition outside of PERSIS. He spent his time reading, teaching in pesantren and mosques, and writing books and articles in magazines. His madrasah education did not hinder his access to broad knowledge. In addition to mastering Arabic, Sundanese, and Malay, he also learned English and Dutch, influenced by his close association with A. Hassan. He subscribed to numerous Malay and Sundanese newspapers, such as *Sipatahoenan*, *Kompas*, and *Pikiran Rakyat*, as well as the English-language newspaper *The Indonesia Observer*. He also received Arabic magazines from Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

His expertise encompassed many fields of Islamic studies, including *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *kalam*, *tafsīr*, *hadith*, astronomy, and more. He also served as a lecturer at Bandung Islamic University (UNISBA) in 1959 and at IKIP Bandung in 1967. Throughout his life, Abdurrahman actively wrote for several magazines, particularly PERSIS publications such as *at-Taqwa*, *Risalah*, and *Iber*. He authored numerous Islamic books, including *Sababaraha Naséhat Tina Qur'an Surat al Hudjurot* (Bandung Korps Muballigh, 1971); *Jihad dan Qital; Darul Islam; Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah; Dirasah Ilmu Hadits; Perbandingan Madzhab* (Bandung: Sinar Baru, 1986); *Risalah Wanita* (Bandung: Sinar Baru, 1987); *Ahkamusy Syar'i; Risalah Jum'at; Istifta: Tanya Jawab Masalah Agama* (Bandung, TB. Al-Huda, 1991); *Recik rek Dakwah* (Bandung: Sinar Baru, 1993); *Renungan Tarikh* (Bandung: Sinar Baru, 1993); *Seputar Masalah Tarawih; Takbir dan Shalat 'Ied Dilengkapi Khutbah Iedul Fitri; Hukum Qurban; Aqiqah dan Sembelihan; Petunjuk Praktis Ibadah Haji; Mernahkeun Hukum dina Agama; Syiatu 'Ali*; and others.

E. Abdurrahman passed away on Thursday, April 21, 1983, at Hasan Sadikin Hospital due to asthma. He was buried in the Karang Anyar cemetery in Bandung. His youngest son, Deddy Rahman (deceased in 2018), was known as a popular scholar in Bandung (Nugraha & Rohmana, 2021, p. 353).

The Principles of Character Education by E. Abdurrahman

The three dimensions of religion—faith (*iman*), Islam, and excellence (*ihsan*)—form an inseparable unity. Together, they serve as the foundational pillars in shaping the perfect human being, characterized by noble morals that result from a blend of education and practice (Abdurrahman 1981, 33). Moral perfection cannot be achieved solely through the transmission of theoretical knowledge. True perfection requires integration of the brain, intellect, and heart, working in harmony. The intellect must synergize with the heart (Abdurrahman, 1973f, pp. 118–119). Abdurrahman states:

“Moral values are not fulfilled simply by the ability to perform them; they require a Muslim to internalize them until they become habitual. Moral character is not merely pleasing words, a sweet smile, or warm respect; it demands actions grounded in sincerity throughout the journey, not just at the beginning, middle, or end. If good deeds lack sincerity, they turn into mere pretense and persuasion” (Abdurrahman, n.d.-e, p. 1).

A good intention brings a sense of enjoyment when performing an action (Abdurrahman, n.d.-g, pp. 1–2), becoming an indicator that the action has become an intrinsic part of one's character (Daud,

Muthalib, & Djuned, 2017, p. 181; Lubis, 2022, p. 141; Saepullah, 2021, p. 119). To support this view, Abdurrahman provides an example of a person giving charity or helping others out of obligation. The lack of genuine joy in such charity indicates that the act has not yet become an intrinsic part of their character (*akhlak*). Conversely, when someone reluctantly performs a wrongful act with hesitation and stiffness, these are indicators that the act is not yet ingrained in their character, even if they are capable of performing it (Abdurrahman, n.d.-b, pp. 1–3).

For Abdurrahman, sincerity, ease, and joy are inner dimensions that stem from self-awareness as a servant of God, linking them to the transmission of knowledge and practice through example. Therefore, Abdurrahman believes that moral character is not simply knowledge to be memorized; it must be enforced and cultivated until it becomes a habit (Abdurrahman, n.d.-d, pp. 1–3).

The second principle of E. Abdurrahman's character education can be observed in the philosophy of *atikan*—"education is not instant" (Abdurrahman, n.d.-j, p. 2, 1967a, p. 9). This emphasizes that achieving moral perfection requires a long-term, continuous educational process, which, in educational terms, is referred to as lifelong education (Hasan, 2020, pp. 259–261). Additionally, a Muslim must be aware of Satan as an adversary who will constantly hinder the journey towards wisdom. Thus, when one falters, they should be guided back to the path of righteousness through repentance, rooted in the understanding of the God-human relationship as one of mercy and humility.

The third principle relates to the philosophy of *jeujeuhan*. Abdurrahman bases this principle on his understanding of the verse in Surah Yunus: 87, "And prepare houses for your people in Egypt, and make your houses a place of worship, and establish prayer, and give glad tidings to the believers." This verse is interpreted by Abdurrahman as *ngajeujeuhkeun*, which means striving to ensure that people have homes and families. Having a decent home for human beings does not mean providing a house like an employer providing a shack for workers. *Ngajeujeuhkeun* carries the meaning of education so that people are willing to accept their position according to God's decree, namely *walaqod karamna bani adama* (And We have certainly honored the children of Adam). The children of Adam will not have a decent home or a good family if they are not *jeujeuhkeun*, guided by the strength and power composed of rights and justice (Abdurrahman, 1975, p. 81).

In Sundanese culture, the term *ngajeujeuhkeun* is commonly used to guide, direct, and train a person according to their potential and strength. It originates from the word *jeujeuh*, which fundamentally means "measurement of length," as in the expression, "Move forward by an arm's length, move backward by a span" (Munggaran, 2019, p. 102). This concept becomes more evident in the lives of Sundanese children, who often ask adults to create a *jeujeuhan*, or boundary, as a play area. The size of this boundary is adjusted based on the child's age (Danadibrata, 2015, p. 291).

In the modern context, the philosophy of *jeujeuhan* points to education that is student-centered and aims to provide freedom and flexibility for students, educators, and educational institutions in determining the learning approaches that best meet the needs and potentials of each student. Teachers give students the space to choose and delve into fields that align with their interests, talents, and potentials, while still providing guidance and control.

The Purpose of Character Education According to E. Abdurrahman

Similar to previous scholars, Abdurrahman believes that the purpose of character education is connected to the purpose of human life itself (K. Salsabila & Firdaus, 2018, p. 45; Zaim, 2019, p. 255). Determining this purpose aligns with an understanding of human origins and life's characteristics

(Abdurrahman, 1390, p. 182). Ontologically, human life is characterized by limitations in time and space, changeability, dependency, and relativity (Abdurrahman, n.d.-f, pp. 1–3). These characteristics imply the need for a constant existence that serves as both the source and ultimate return for all existence.

Thus, Abdurrahman asserts that the true purpose of humanity is to return to its source, symbolized by the cyclical movement of celestial bodies like the moon, earth, stars, and sun. The passing of hours, days, and years is marked by the return of the clock hand to its starting point—just as the ultimate goal of human life is to return to its origin (Abdurrahman, n.d.-f, pp. 1–3). In Sufism, there is an axiom stating that the end is a return to the beginning (*an-Nihâyah ar-rujû' ila al-bidâyah*), with the initial movement as a downward curve and the return movement as an upward curve. When objects move along this upward curve, it appears as if they are pushed from behind and pulled from the front (Murtadha, 1997, p. 66).

If humans originate from Allah in a state of *fithrah* (purity), then the goal of their journey is to return to Allah in a state of *salama* (peace). The term *salama* derives from the root *s-l-m*, meaning "to be at peace," "to be in tranquility," and "to be in perfect harmony" (Zakaria, 1994, p. 487). Abdurrahman interprets *salama* as total surrender to Allah, leading to a state of a sound heart (*qalb salim*) (Q.S. Ash-Shu'ara: 89; As-Saffat: 84) (Abdurrahman, 1967b, p. 7, 1970, p. 39). These verses emphasize that a sound heart is crucial for righteous behavior in serving Allah by preserving and developing the earth for humanity's benefit, rather than causing destruction that would lead to suffering (Abdurrahman, 1966b, p. 10). Abdurrahman describes such a heart as one that brings life, peace, and security to others (Abdurrahman, 1966a, pp. 6–8, 1973f, p. 226).

Therefore, when the Prophet Muhammad established the city of Medina, the first step he took was to foster a spirit of love for collective well-being. It was considered sinful if someone became prosperous at the expense of their companions, sinful if one gained wealth by impoverishing others, and sinful if someone ascended to success by trampling on their peers. Secondly, he sought to eradicate hunger, ensure food security, cultivate the spirit of giving and mutual assistance through lawful efforts, strive to collect and distribute zakat, and emphasize the importance of worship (Abdurrahman, n.d.-d, pp. 1–3).

The three terms proposed by Abdurrahman seem to have been introduced from a hadith of the Prophet: "...The person who is able to protect another Muslim from the harm of their tongue and actions." (Bahjat, 1998, p. 263; Muhsin & Muhtarudin, 2019, p. 80). This hadith suggests that the heart is the place of faith and humanity. If the heart is dominated by lustful desires, faith and humanity will be pushed aside (Abdurrahman, 1967c, p. 6). Given the importance of the heart's safety in the journey of human life, it is not surprising that in Abdurrahman's study of character education, the cultivation of the heart becomes the issue that receives the most attention.

The ultimate goal of moral education as defined by Abdurrahman remains abstract; it cannot be achieved without the formulation of intermediate goals (*ahdap*) that are more concrete. At least three intermediate goals of moral education are outlined by Abdurrahman: First, the *syakirin* (those who are grateful). According to Abdurrahman, *syakirin* is closely related to human awareness of Allah's blessings, starting from the early stages of creation until the end of life. Creation itself is the greatest blessing for humanity, serving as the key to attaining other blessings and as a foundational basis for the development of a healthy mindset (Abdurrahman, n.d.-k, pp. 1–3).

Second, the *mukhlisiin* (those who are sincere). This term refers to an awareness of the human function as *'abd* (servant), whose fundamental attitude is total submission to the will of their master. In Islam, total obedience to all commands without any ulterior motive is referred to as *'ibadah* (worship) (Abdurrahman, 1973a, pp. 143–149; Ficki Padli Pardede, 2022, p. 73).

Third, the *muttaqin* (those who are pious). The term *taqwa* is derived from the root letters *w-q-y*, which have the fundamental meaning of "protecting, avoiding, and staying away" (Zakaria, 1994, p. 1100). Ar-Raghib defines *taqwa* as protecting the soul from sinful behavior, which is manifested by abstaining from all of His prohibitions and fulfilling all of His commands (Al-Isfahni, 1972, p. 531; Mahmud, Hamzah, & Imran, 2022).

Based on the definition of *taqwa* formulated by Ar-Raghib, Abdurrahman concludes that the starting point of *taqwa* is justice. It stems from Allah's "commands and prohibitions" directed at the believers, which evoke a sense of "fear" of His punishment. This fear, in turn, inspires courage to uphold justice, avoid oppression, and align humans and the universe along a unified trajectory, moving together toward the apex of the triangle, which is occupied by Allah. Therefore, *taqwa* must be understood as fear that culminates in finding a way out (Abdurrahman, 1967b, 1968, p. 79, 1977b, pp. 112–113, 1979a, p. 225).

Abdurrahman's Character Education Material

From the perspective of content, Abdurrahman's 87 studies on moral education can be mapped into eleven core topics:

1. The purpose of human life. This topic serves as a guide for Muslims in determining their steps and differentiates humans from animals (Abdurrahman, 1390, p. 182).
2. The profile of the ideal human being. This topic discusses the characteristics of an ideal human being and the indicators associated with it (Abdurrahman, n.d.-j, pp. 1–4, 1973d, pp. 3–6, 1974, p. 2).
3. The urgency of moral education. This includes discussions on the definition of morality, the relationship between morality and other beings, the criteria for good morality, and the significance of morality in human life (Abdurrahman, 1965a, p. 8, 1967b, p. 223).
4. Balance between the physical and the spiritual. This topic highlights the balance between the physical and spiritual aspects, reason and spirituality, and worldly and hereafter-oriented perspectives, grounded in the fact that humans are dual-dimensional beings: *nasut-lahut* and physical-spiritual (Abdurrahman, 1973c, pp. 280–284).
5. Heart cultivation. Abdurrahman emphasizes that the heart is the central point of human life. Its importance is underscored by the fact that 30 out of 87 articles on moral education focus on heart cultivation to achieve predetermined goals (Abdurrahman, n.d.-n, pp. 1–3).
6. Time. Time is considered a fundamental asset of life and is one of the critical issues in Abdurrahman's moral education (Abdurrahman, n.d.-a, p. 1, 1977a, p. 3).
7. Food and drink. Abdurrahman views food and drink as closely related to moral education (Abdurrahman, n.d.-h, pp. 1–3).
8. Justice. The topic of justice in Abdurrahman's moral education can be divided into two areas: justice among humans and divine justice in the afterlife (Abdurrahman, 1973b, p. 4, 1973e, pp. 2–3).
9. Death. This topic focuses on how death can serve as a lesson for the living. The discussion begins with the reality of death, the grave, resurrection, and the importance of frequently remembering death, which is believed to reduce wrongdoing (Abdurrahman, 1973d, p. 226).
10. The inner dimension of worship. Abdurrahman's studies on formal rituals, known as the Five Pillars of Islam, tend to focus less on the technical aspects (*kayfiyat*). Instead, they emphasize the

inner dimensions of worship, which are categorized into three aspects: form (*shurah*), sound (*sawut*), and energy (*ruh*) (Abdurrahman, n.d.-g, p. 3).

11. Shame. Shame is one of the critical topics in Abdurrahman's moral education writings. This includes discussions on the essence of shame, its indicators, the relationship between faith and shame, and the steps that need to be taken (Abdurrahman, n.d.-o, p. 1).

Empathy, Comparative Art, and Istifham

In Abdurrahman's view, the achievement of predetermined goals is related to the teacher's accuracy in assessing the state of the *mukhatab* (the person being addressed), which will serve as one of the considerations in determining the method (Jamaluddin, 2015, p. 109; Qowim, 2020, p. 36). On the other hand, human behavior has two dimensions that are interrelated: the external and internal dimensions (Abdurrahman, 1973f, pp. 280–284). Therefore, Abdurrahman maps the method of character education into two categories: one method is oriented towards nurturing the heart, which serves as the driving force for behavior, while the other method is oriented towards facilitating habituation processes.

Based on Abdurrahman's ideas disseminated in the *Risalah* magazine between 1962 and 1980, and in various pamphlets, it can be identified that the primary method Abdurrahman used to cultivate awareness of the heart is *at-Tawahum/at-Tasya'ur*, which encourages the audience to reflect on how it would feel if the disasters, sufferings, anxieties, and hardships that others experience were to happen to them (Abdurrahman, 1968, p. 169). This method appears to be introduced from the practice of scholars when reading the Qur'an, where they always relate the content of the sacred text to themselves. When reading verses about hell, for example, they would reflect on how it would feel to be cast into hell. Al-Ghazali referred to this effort as *takhshis* (Shadra, 1343, p. 63).

Abdurrahman contends that the awareness of the importance of virtuous character will be felt by a person when they are willing to reflect on how they would feel if what others dislike were to happen to them. He states:

“One way to address this is by correcting one's thoughts as objectively as possible, avoiding excessive emotion that leads to distorted reasoning, until one loses self-awareness, believing that only others are wrong, and only others are required to uphold what is right. Hasn't the Prophet Muhammad emphasized that sometimes human thought goes astray, losing self-awareness, leading one to feel: 'Death is only for others, and only others must fulfill what is right'? As though death will only strike others, and as though the duty to uphold the truth is only for others, while we do not feel affected by it” (Abdurrahman, n.d.-l, p. 2).

Based on this narration, Abdurrahman concludes that one of the ways Muslims can minimize reprehensible morals, such as gossip, false accusation, slander, ostentation, envy, and so on, is *tawahum*, which in psychological terms can be equated with the concept of empathy. He views this as the driving force behind the success or failure of character education (Kusasi, 2014; Rogers, 1995; A. T. Salsabila, Astuti, Hafidah, Nurjanah, & Jumiati, 2021). To support his view, Abdurrahman quotes a historical event in which a young man approached the Prophet Muhammad asking for dispensation to engage in fornication. The Prophet responded by inviting him to practice *tawahum*, asking him to imagine if the request for dispensation were to concern the women he loved: his mother, daughter, or sister. If the petitioner would not want others to commit fornication with his mother, daughter, or sister, then this is how others would feel. (Abdurrahman, n.d.-i, p. 3).

Thus, Abdurrahman illustrates that a person who refuses to practice *tawahum* is like a grave-digger who is diligently working, seeing death as an exciting news, forgetting that death is approaching him every day (Abdurrahman, n.d.-f, pp. 1–3). On the other hand, when someone refuses to practice *tawahum*, all goodness will be oriented towards themselves. Conversely, evil will be projected onto others. One's own deeds towards others will seem apparent, while the deeds and kindness of others will not be recognized. Abdurrahman firmly states: "When you do a favor, it feels like you are the one who has done the greatest good on Earth. When others do not appreciate your favor, your heart feels small, and your soul is restless, feeling ignored. However, when others do good, it feels like it was just a fleeting moment. Like rain falling on the desert: while the rain falls, it feels refreshing, but when it is gone, it is quickly forgotten without leaving a trace." (Abdurrahman, n.d.-p, p. 1).

In practice, *tawahum* is related to the use of *uslub* (style of language) that a person chooses to express ideas and feelings through a series of words directed at readers or listeners (Keraf, 2015; Muzakki, 2015; Rahayu, 2019). At least, there are two styles of language commonly used by Abdurrahman to provoke the reader's heart to practice *tawahum*:

Comparison

The comparative style of language is a form of figurative expression used to equate one thing with another through comparative words (Oktaviani & Sukardi, 2024, p. 2191). In its implementation, comparisons are sometimes made without explicitly naming the subjects of discussion. Through such comparisons, the reader is invited to reflect on the realities of daily life with the expectation that it will lead to self-awareness and an identification of one's values and self-image. One example of this approach can be found in the article "*Tidak sedikit yang Silau karena cahaya, dan banyak yang merasa terang karenanya*" (Many are dazzled by light, and many feel enlightened by it), which explores the function of light in human life. Abdurrahman begins this reflection by inviting the reader to contemplate daily life. He states:

"Let us observe when two cows or buffaloes meet in a meadow—aren't they both able to eat together in a peaceful atmosphere full of friendship? Unlike cows, the behavior of dogs and cats is different. When two dogs find a bone at the same place and time, even though they initially search together, once the bone is found, the story changes. Suspicion, jealousy, and envy become so apparent, and a fight breaks out. The strong get the bone, while the weak are pushed aside, filled with disappointment and burning resentment. If we reflect on this repeatedly, the truth is, the fighting between the dogs and cats is not caused by the bone. If it were simply about the bone, there would be no fight when a large or abundant bone is found. But the fact is that, regardless of the size or abundance of the bone, the dogs and cats will still fight. Therefore, we can conclude that the primary cause of the fight between the dogs is due to the nature embedded in them." (Abdurrahman, n.d.-n).

This illustration shows that, in explaining the strategic value of moral conduct in human life, Abdurrahman does not use direct instructions. He prefers to use comparisons between two groups of animals without explicitly showing the connection between these animals and humans, who are the intended subjects of his message. The first step is to invite the audience to imagine the behavior of two groups of animals while eating—cows and buffaloes versus dogs and cats (or a pack of dogs). In terms of eating, the two animal groups exhibit different characteristics. No matter how many cows and buffaloes there are, when they eat in the meadow, they will do so without quarrels, even if the available food is insufficient for both communities. In contrast, when a group of dogs searches for food, they may initially cooperate, but this cooperation disappears when food is found. A fight will inevitably occur, even when

plenty of food is available. The characteristic behavior of the two groups of animals is presented to emphasize that the quarrels do not occur because of the amount of food. The fight is driven by ingrained character. If their character is greedy and prone to fighting, no matter how much food is found, the quarrels will persist.

Indirectly, this comparison between two groups of animals serves as a rebuttal to the view that conflicts and bloodshed among humans occur due to the scarcity of food, employment, or livelihood. Thus, in Abdurrahman's view, when greed becomes a person's character, wherever and whenever they will strive to seize the rights of others, resulting in conflict and bloodshed as part of their identity.

The two animal groups are not compared to humans explicitly. The comparison is made only between the two animals that have different natural tendencies. The dog, with its greed and gluttony, is contrasted with the gentle nature and cooperative spirit of the cows and buffaloes. Here, Abdurrahman invites the reader to measure themselves (to practice *tawahum*) and consider whether they resemble the dogs, cats, or the cows and buffaloes when it comes to eating and searching for food.

Comparisons are sometimes made explicitly, naming the subjects and their counterparts, drawing comparisons between the source and target realms. Such comparisons are used to highlight the contrasts in how two groups of humans address the same issue. One example of this can be seen in the contrast between believers and non-believers in their responses to the Qur'an, which is briefly analogous to Plato's allegory of the cave. In the allegory, some people have been chained in a cave from birth, with limited light, and their vision is restricted to the cave's wall (Setiawan, 2021, p. 100).

To help his readers understand the concept of guidance and misguidance in the Qur'an, Abdurrahman illustrates it by contrasting two human conditions: those accustomed to darkness and those accustomed to light. For those who have lived in darkness, light is often perceived as a threat. In contrast, for those who have lived in light, darkness becomes the threat. Abdurrahman writes:

"When someone has lived long enough in a dark place, darkness no longer frightens them. Now, the greatest fear is light, which they once longed for when they lived in the light. If someone enters with light in hand, it will blind their eyes, and they will scold the visitor, asking them to extinguish the blinding light. Similarly, when they leave the dark room, their eyes cannot bear the light, their mouths continue to curse it, and their feet quickly move to return to the dark space."

This illustration of two concrete human conditions in response to light is used to understand an abstract reality—the different attitudes that humans take toward the Holy Book, which is equated to light. Abdurrahman continues:

"Such is the light of God. While it is fundamentally needed by every human, not everyone is ready to accept it. In fact, some may feel tormented when they witness the divine light, and they may run away toward darkness. When this happens, what should be blamed? The answer is clear—don't blame the light. Isn't the blinding effect caused by the eyes being unaccustomed to light? Therefore, when the blinding effect is felt, it is not the light that should be extinguished, but the eyes and perspectives should be healed so that light is no longer seen as an obstacle. It is not the Qur'an and the Hadith that need to be replaced or changed, but the way of thinking that must be restored. It is not technology that should be opposed because it is believed to distance humans from God, but reflection and contemplation that need to be organized so that they provide direction for knowledge." (Abdurrahman, n.d.-m, pp. 1–3).

The third model of comparison is between humans and lower strata of life (the atomic, plant, and animal realms). This comparison is used to highlight the superiority of humans while showing God's compassion and the importance of laws for human life. One example of this comparison appears when Abdurrahman discusses the essential nature of human beings. According to him, the existence of a stone

or a commemorative monument is far longer than the duration of human life. A monument can survive for tens of thousands of years, and even a stone used for building can last millions or even tens of millions of years. In contrast, human life on Earth is relatively short, and reaching the age of 100 is already considered old (Abdurrahman, n.d.).

The comparison of the duration of existence between stones, buildings, and humans is then redirected to the realm of feeling, which only humans possess. According to Abdurrahman, even though the existence of pyramids, sphinxes, and stones lasts a long time, they will never experience sadness, joy, or anger. Therefore, they are not required to consider the purpose of their existence. In contrast, even though human life is short, they have feelings and intellect, which oblige them to understand the ultimate purpose of their life.

Not content with the comparison between humans and stones, Abdurrahman further invites the audience to reflect on the comparison between humans and animals. He argues that if humans lived as animals, even though their life span would be limited, they would never be constrained by laws. They would live freely, without direction or purpose, merely passing time without ethics. Market fluctuations would not confuse them, nor would they become hot topics of conversation, because animals do not know the price of basic needs, nor do they know the price of their own worth (Abdurrahman, n.d.-c, p. 2).

After discussing the existence of these two lower strata of life, the conversation shifts to the existence of human life. Abdurrahman asserts: "The stone is different, the animal is different, and human beings are different. Humans are created in the most perfect form (*fi akhsan at-taqwim*). Their perfection is not measured by their physical appearance alone. The measure of perfection is the morality that is visible in their actions as they fill the time given by God. They should feel ashamed and lowly if their behavior resembles that of animals. Their actions are guided by reason in choosing the best path for their future life. When their considerations are dominated by immediate, worldly interests, as described in the Qur'an as 'the mindset of haste,' they will fall and become trapped in the life of animals (*radaddnahu asfala safilin*)."

In addition to these comparisons, there are also comparisons between daily habits and the commands or prohibitions of Allah in the Qur'an. One such comparison can be seen in Abdurrahman's discussion of eating and morality. He begins by inviting the audience to reflect on the fact that eating is a basic human need, and yet Allah commands it in the holy texts. Therefore, it can be said that, even without divine command, humans would still eat.

To address this issue, Abdurrahman invites the audience to reflect on their experiences in school, where teachers sometimes instruct students who are already seated to sit down. According to Abdurrahman, the teacher's command for students to sit, even though they are already sitting, is not because the teacher thinks they are standing. The command is a reminder for students to sit properly. This fact is then compared to Allah's command to humans to eat. Thus, the command to eat in the holy books is not to instruct humans to eat, but to remind them to eat properly. After all, if it were merely about eating, animals could also eat (Abdurrahman, n.d.-h, p. 1).

Istifham

Istifham originates from the root word *f-h-m*, which has the basic meanings of understanding, comprehension, and clarity. This root word is then extended with the addition of *alif*, *sin*, and *ta'* at the beginning (*istafhama*), and one of its functions is to request clarification (*thalab al-fahmi*). In its technical sense, *Istifham* refers to the act of seeking understanding about something that is unknown, or inquiring

into the essence, name, quantity, and characteristics of something (Nasrudin & Nadia, 2016; Saleh, 2008; Yulizar, 2021). Recognizing the importance of *Istifham* in awakening empathy, Abdurrahman often employs this rhetorical device to encourage the audience to engage in *tawahum* (imagining or reflecting deeply).

The use of *Istifham* is sometimes grounded in the verses of the Qur'an or the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Hadith. Even though the question in the quoted verses or hadiths is typically asked only once, when Abdurrahman invites his audience to reflect, the question is repeated several times. This technique can be seen, for example, in Abdurrahman's discussion of the purpose of human life. At the beginning of his text, Abdurrahman quotes the question posed by God: "Fa aina tadzhabun?" (Q.S. At-Takwir: 26). This question is then expanded into three sub-questions: "Where do we come from? Where are we now? Where are we going?". Meanwhile, the main question, *fa aina tadzhabun* (Where are you going?), is repeated up to nine times. Each time the question *fa aina tadzhabun* is posed at the end of a paragraph, follow-up questions are introduced with the hope that the audience will reflect on the essence of their own existence. This can be seen, for instance, when Abdurrahman compares being carried along by the current with moving forward. To raise awareness about the nature of progress, after posing the main question (*fa aina tadzhabun*), Abdurrahman presents follow-up questions:

"Are we advancing, carried along by the current, tossed around by waves without a clear direction? Are we drifting aimlessly, blown by the wind, like a kite cut loose from its string? Or are we moving with a definite purpose, stepping forward along a path that has been planned, fully aware of where we are today and where we are headed?" *Fa aina tadzhabun?* Look around carefully! Look to the right, the left, ahead, and behind. Where are we now? Isn't it true that we live in a time when it is difficult to see anything that refreshes the spirit and awakens us to the reality of God? Perhaps some of us are still struggling, searching for something to hold onto because we cannot resist the powerful current that sweeps us along. We are carried away, and we are unable to ask ourselves where we are going. Aren't many of us still fascinated by the progress of other nations? Does the progress they have achieved guarantee inner peace and happiness? Is this peace and happiness felt by everyone, or just a select few?" *Fa aina tadzhabun?* (Abdurrahman, 1390, pp. 1–5).

According to Abdurrahman, such questions must continuously be asked to ensure that one's conscience remains in a state of primordial awareness. Knowing the direction and purpose one is aiming for is an absolute prerequisite for attaining salvation. On the other hand, these questions also remind humans of God's mercy, which does not offer a single, fixed path to salvation—many doors have been provided; it is up to each person to choose which door they will use to return.

These examples illustrate that, from Abdurrahman's perspective, asking questions of oneself is a necessary step when practicing *tawahum*. This is further reinforced by Abdurrahman's discussion of anger, where he begins by inviting the reader to reflect on what it feels like to be angry. Abdurrahman states:

"Perhaps you have experienced anger, or perhaps you have seen someone who is angry; they spew out harsh or even vulgar words, cursing sharply, revealing the secrets and flaws of the person they are angry with, mocking and insulting them as much as they can. They feel a sense of relief, as all the things that weighed on their heart and annoyed them are now unleashed. They feel lighter and happier. They feel like a hero, bravely emerging from their battlefield, as if they have done something few others would dare to do."

The description of someone in a state of anger serves as a point of departure for posing various questions that will stimulate *tawahum* in others, helping them manage their emotions of anger. Therefore,

this description is followed by an invitation for the audience to reflect on how they would feel if they were in the shoes of the person being yelled at, framed as questions posed by Abdurrahman: *How would the person being scolded feel? How would the neighbor, friend, spouse, or child of the person being yelled at feel? Would they feel the same relief and satisfaction as the angry person? Would the emotional state of the person who is angry be the same as the emotional state of the one they are angry with? What would happen to the person being yelled at? Would their heart be hurt? Would their soul be wounded? Would they harbor resentment in their heart that may later manifest in the same form?* (Abdurrahman, 1967a, p. 3).

CONCLUSION

The explanation above highlights three principles established by Abdurrahman in moral education: the orientation of moral education should progress from ability (bisa) to habit (biasa); moral education should lead to lifelong loyalty to God; and it should be student-centered, based on the philosophy of ngajeujeuhkeun (reinforcing stability). The concepts of "giving and sustaining life," "ensuring and promoting safety," and "establishing and maintaining security" are three key terms used to define the objectives of moral education. At the level of ahdap (intermediate goals), these are referred to as gratitude (syukur), sincerity (ikhlas), and piety (taqwa). To achieve the defined objectives, 87 moral education materials are categorized into eleven key topics: the purpose of life, the ideal human profile, the urgency of moral education, heart cultivation, life resources, justice, balance, the inner dimension of worship, food and drink, death, and shame. From the perspective of strengthening moral education, Abdurrahman positions *tawahum* (empathy) as a foundational pillar in determining the methods of moral education. In its implementation, *tawahum* relates to the teacher's ability to engage in persuasive communication using various rhetorical styles that appeal to emotions, such as analogies and rhetorical questions (istifham).

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