The Concept of *Tauhid* and *Adab* in the Malay World: A Review of the Epistemology of Islamic Educational Philosophy

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Islamic education has two main pillars, namely monotheism and adab, which are the foundation in shaping individual character and knowledge. Tawhid instills awareness of the oneness of Allah as the main basis for pursuing knowledge, while adab is a moral guideline that ensures that knowledge is practiced responsibly and ethically. In the tradition of Islamic education in the Malay world, the integration between tauhid and adab has been inherited by scholars who emphasize the importance of a balance between knowledge, faith, and morals. However, in the era of globalization, this concept faces great challenges due to the secularization of education and rapid technological development. Therefore, it is necessary to revitalize Islamic education based on monotheism and adab through strengthening the curriculum, innovating learning methods, and increasing awareness of the importance of Islamic values in the world of education. Thus, Islamic education can continue to contribute to producing a generation that has intellectual intelligence as well as high moral and spiritual integrity.

INTRODUCTION

The philosophical foundations of Islamic education in the Malay world are deeply rooted in the concepts of Islamic epistemology, especially the notions of tawḥīd *(the oneness of God)* and adab *(ethical-moral conduct, manners).* These foundations mediate the relationship between knowledge, the knower, and the Divine. Recent scholarship underscores the urgency of revisiting these core ideas to respond to contemporary educational challenges (Gaffar & Anees, 2025). In the Malay world, the educational tradition carries a rich legacy wherein religion, culture, and social ethics are intertwined. The notion of tawḥīd functions not only as a theological affirmation but also as an ontological and epistemological orientation: it frames

knowing as an act of aligning with God's unity, thereby integrating metaphysics, ethics, and pedagogy (Rafliyanto, 2025).

Similarly, adab in the Malay-Islamic context moves beyond etiquette to signify the inner cultivation of the self, the proper engagement with knowledge, others, and the Divine. In this way, adab becomes the moral texture of learning, positioning education as not just information transmission but character formation (Febriyani & Chanifudin, 2025). The epistemological dimension of Islamic educational philosophy invites critical reflection on how we know, what we know, and why we know. Within the paradigm of tawḥīd and adab, knowledge is not neutral nor merely instrumental, but ethical and sacred. A recent study argues that *"inclusive tawḥīd is a strong epistemological basis for reconstructing a more dialogic, tolerant, and humanistic Islamic education paradigm"* (Gaffar & Anees, 2025).

In the Malay world specifically, thinkers like Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas have advanced a philosophy of education in which tawḥīd and adab play central roles. Contemporary research shows that Al-Attas emphasises metaphysical dimensions and adab, while other scholars such as Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi emphasise curriculum and integration of knowledge (Zainuddin et al., 2025). The educational context of the Malay world spanning Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and other regions presents unique cultural historical dynamics where indigenous Melayu traditions meet Islamic philosophical frameworks. This intersection calls for a review of how tawḥīd and adab function epistemologically in forming an Islamic educational philosophy responsive to both tradition and modernity (Suhernawati et al., 2024).

One challenge is the fragmentation of knowledge typified by the secular modern educational system, which often separates the intellectual from the moral, the spiritual from the empirical. Against this backdrop, the tawḥīd-adab framework offers a holistic alternative: knowledge is meaningful only when cognizant of its source in the Divine, and when mediated by ethical self-cultivation (Rafliyanto, 2025). In this perspective, education in the Malay world becomes not just the accumulation of skills or facts, but the transformation of the person toward an integrated human being. The epistemology of such education recognises both the external dimension of knowing and the internal dimension of being. Adab thus becomes the bridge between knowing and being (Febriyani & Chanifudin, 2025).

The Malay world also carries a tradition of tarbiyyah *(nurturing),* taʿlīm *(teaching),* and ta'dīb *(discipline/ethics)* in educational discourse. These categories orient the educational process toward not only cognitive outcomes but moral and spiritual formation. Recent work underscores the significance of ta'dīb in Islamic education as reflective of adab orientation (Sassi, 2018). From an epistemological viewpoint, the integration of tawḥīd means viewing knowledge as ultimately derived from Divine revelation and existence *(wahdat al-wujūd)* rather than merely human construction or secular empiricism. This is particularly relevant in the Malay setting where Islamic heritage and pre modern epistemic structures continue to resonate (Febriyani & Anwar, 2025).

Meanwhile, adab in epistemology implies that the knower's ethical orientation, intention *(niyyah),* humility *(tawāḍuʿ),* and proper conduct in relation to the teacher, text, and Divine are inseparable from the knowledge itself. In a Melayu Islamic milieu, this embodies local cultural virtues, communal etiquette, and spiritual decorum. Contemporary educational systems in the Malay world face pressures of globalization, technocracy, secularisation, and market-driven models. Within these pressures, the tawḥīd-adab epistemology offers a robust anchor: resisting

mere instrumentalism of education and reinvigorating its moral-spiritual purpose (Febriyani & Saputra, 2025). Research emphasises the need for a curriculum and pedagogy sensitive to religious and cultural plurality while rooted in inclusive tawḥīd. A critical review of epistemology in Islamic education thus must explore how knowledge is structured, validated, and applied within the tawḥīd-adab framework. In the Malay world, this involves revisiting indigenous metaphysical assumptions, moral cosmology, communal ethos, and their implications for pedagogy, syllabus design, teacher formation, and student character development.

Accordingly, this paper aims to review the epistemology of Islamic educational philosophy in the Malay world by focusing specifically on tawḥīd and adab. It sets out to (a) elucidate the meaning and interrelationship of tawḥīd and adab in Islamic education; (b) review how this epistemology has been applied or can be applied in the Malay world context; and (c) identify challenges, gaps, and future directions for curriculum, pedagogy and educational policy. Through this review, the article contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic educational philosophy by highlighting how in the Malay world the notions of tawḥīd and adab serve as vital epistemic foundations that integrate theology, ethics, and education. It invites educators, curriculum designers, and scholars to reclaim the integrated vision of education where knowing, being and doing are aligned under the banner of Divine unity and moral excellence.

METHODS

This study employs a library research approach, focusing on collecting, analyzing, and interpreting various written sources relevant to the concepts of tauhid *(oneness of God)* and adab *(ethical conduct)* within the Malay world. The method emphasizes the use of secondary data from academic journals, books, conference proceedings, and other credible publications discussing Islamic educational philosophy, Malay epistemology, and the integration of religious and cultural values. The researcher systematically identifies, classifies, and evaluates literature to explore how tauhid and adab function as foundational principles in the epistemological structure of Islamic education (Ahmad, N., & Rahman, 2023).

Data collection involves a comprehensive review of contemporary and classical Islamic scholarship. Primary references include classical works by Muslim philosophers such as Al-Attas and Al-Ghazali, as well as modern interpretations found in recent academic discussions about the Islamization of knowledge and Malay intellectual heritage (Al-Attas, 2023). The data were analyzed using a qualitative-descriptive method, where textual interpretation and comparative analysis were applied to identify conceptual relationships and philosophical underpinnings. The process ensures that the analysis remains rooted in Islamic epistemological perspectives while engaging with the cultural dynamics of the Malay context.

The validity of the findings was ensured through source triangulation, by comparing various viewpoints from Islamic educational theorists, Malay cultural scholars, and modern Islamic philosophers. This method allows a critical synthesis that not only highlights the theoretical significance of tauhid and adab but also contextualizes their role in shaping Malay educational thought. The library research approach thus provides a comprehensive understanding of the epistemological framework of Islamic education as it has evolved in the Malay world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This review found that discussions of tawḥīd *(taughid)* and adab in the Malay world are not merely theological or moral topics but form a mutually reinforcing epistemological axis for Islamic education tawḥīd as ontological unity and adab as the ethical-epistemic comportment that realizes that unity in learning and practice. Textual and secondary-source analysis indicates a clear trend in contemporary Malay Islamic scholarship to treat tawḥīd as an epistemic principle: knowledge is meaningful when it is understood as originating from, pointing to, and accountable to the divine unity *(tawḥīd).* This framing recasts curricula and pedagogy as vehicles for ontological coherence rather than purely instrumental skills.

A recurring theme is the organic integration of adab and tawḥīd in the works of modern Malay and Malay-influenced thinkers: adab supplies the normative traits *(humility, reverence, ethical discipline)* that allow tawḥīd to function as a living epistemology rather than abstract doctrine. Scholars argue this integration is central to a holistic Islamic educational philosophy (Zainuddin et al., 2025). Comparative analysis across recent articles shows two major currents: (a) reconstructive/rehabilitative approaches that seek to re-embed tawḥīd and adab into formal curricula, and (b) contextual ethnographic studies that document how local Malay practices embody the same epistemic commitments in lived ritual and pedagogy.

The reconstructive current emphasizes curriculum reform: integrating tawḥīd-centred content across disciplines, and designing pedagogies that prioritize moral formation *(adab)* and epistemic humility alongside cognitive competence. Several 2024–2025 studies advocate this curriculum reorientation as a corrective to disciplinary fragmentation (Rafliyanto, 2025). Ethnographic studies from the Malay archipelago document that community rituals, family practices, and local educational forms continue to transmit adab-based learning showing that formal institutions can learn from vernacular pedagogies that already embody tawḥīdic epistemic habits (Fatori et al., 2025). The review identified five recurrent epistemic functions of tawḥīd in Malay educational discourse: anchoring meaning, establishing ethical limits on knowledge, providing criteria for truth, unifying fragmented disciplines, and orienting educational purpose toward moral spiritual ends.

Adab appears in the literature with three linked pedagogical roles: (a) as a preparatory disposition for receiving knowledge (etiquette of learning), (b) as an ethical constraint on method and application, and (c) as a socio-cultural mediator that translates abstract truths into community life. A thematic content analysis of recent papers found that invoking tawḥīd as epistemology often accompanies critique of secular modernity and disciplinary specialization; authors frame tawḥīd as an alternative epistemic grammar that can reintegrate fragmented knowledge systems (Rizqullah, M. N., Erman, E. ., Afandi, M. R., Arifin, J. ., Sidik, A. N., 2025). Several contemporary proposals in Malay scholarship recommend pedagogical practices to operationalize tawḥīd-adab integration: dialogic learning, reflective reading of scripture and nature, mentorship models *(teacher as adab exemplar),* and community embedded service learning. The review also surfaced practical barriers: institutional inertia, assessment systems that prioritize measurable outcomes over character formation, shortage of teacher training on adab centred pedagogy, and tensions between plural classroom realities and normative tawḥīdic claims. Digital transformations pose both challenge and opportunity: online learning risks disembedding adab based formation, yet digital platforms can also host reflective modules, virtual mentorship, and multimedia that model tawḥīdic epistemic narratives if intentionally designed.

A cross-case synthesis showed that successful adab tawḥīd pedagogies combine textual study *(Qur'an, Hadith, classical Malay-Islamic texts)* with situated practice *(rituals, craft, communal teaching)* and critical reflection an approach that preserves epistemic depth while engaging modern subjects. In terms of policy implications, the review recommends (1) curriculum frameworks that explicitly list epistemic aims (not just competencies), (2) assessment models that evaluate adab and ethical reasoning, and (3) teacher professional development focused on embodying adab. The epistemological analysis suggests that re-centering tawḥīd can do more than restore religious content: it can reframe what counts as valid inquiry by reintroducing metaphysical and ethical criteria into the formation of knowledge claims. The review found a growing literature that frames tawḥīd not as dogmatic exclusivity but as inclusive epistemic orientation one capable of interfaith and intercultural dialogue when adab *(ethical comportment)* (Gaffar & Anees, 2025).

Methodological reflexivity in the reviewed works is noteworthy: many authors call for mixed methods philological reading, hermeneutic analysis, and ethnography to capture both the textual richness and lived embodiment of tawḥīd and adab in Malay societies. The review acknowledges variation within the Malay world: coastal trading sultanates, inland kampung communities, and contemporary urban settings show different institutional strengths for embedding tawḥīd-adab epistemology; reform strategies must therefore be contextualized. Overall, the results suggest that tawḥīd and adab together constitute an actionable epistemology for Islamic education in the Malay world one that emphasizes unity of meaning, moral formation, and community anchored learning but that realizing it at scale requires curricular, institutional, and teacher training reforms. Finally, the study concludes with an agenda for future research: empirical classroom studies measuring adab outcomes, design experiments for tawḥīd centred curricula in different Malay contexts, and critical work on balancing inclusivity with doctrinal commitments.

This review has shown that tawḥīd *(taughid)* functions not only as a theological proposition in the Malay world but as an epistemological axis that organizes knowledge, values, and educational aims. Tawḥīd in this sense is foundational: it frames what counts as legitimate knowledge and how moral formation is conceptualized in Islamic pedagogy (Hosaini et al., 2024). Complementary to tawḥīd, adab *(ethical conduct, etiquette, and cultivated dispositions)* emerges repeatedly in Malay Islamic sources as the practical and moral unfolding of tawḥīd in human character and social life. Adab mediates between belief and behavior, converting metaphysical commitments into social practice and pedagogical routines (Muhammad Idris et al., 2025).

Epistemologically, the pairing of tawḥīd and adab establishes a holistic knowledge model: knowledge is not merely propositional information but a transformed axis of living where cognition, ethics, and worship converge. This challenges secular instrumental notions of education that separate knowledge acquisition from moral formation. (Wahidi et al., 2025) The Malay intellectual tradition, shaped by local vernaculars, pesantren practices, and the writings of modern Malay Muslim thinkers, adapts classical Islamic categories *(taʿlīm, taʾdīb, tawḥīd)* into context sensitive educational strategies. These adaptations show continuity with broader Islamic philosophical currents while addressing the social realities of the archipelago.

Contemporary scholarship emphasizes tawḥīd based pedagogy as a response to a perceived moral and epistemic fragmentation in modern schooling. Several recent studies argue that recentering tawḥīd can integrate scientific learning with ethical orientation, preventing the disembedding of knowledge from meaning (Hosaini et al., 2024). The review highlights two complementary pedagogical moves in the Malay context: first, epistemic framing *(presenting*

disciplines as integrated within an Islamic worldview), and second, practical cultivation *(adab training through habituation, role modeling and ritual).* Together these moves form a curriculum that is both cognitive and moral.

Al-Attas and other Malay intellectual heirs are frequently invoked as theoretical anchors. Their work supplies conceptual resources for thinking about knowledge as sacred and education as identity formation not merely skill transmission. Recent comparative and interpretive papers continue to refine their epistemological claims for current curriculum debates (Yunita et al., 2025). A recurring theme across contemporary studies is the political and institutional challenge of embedding tawḥīd and adab in formal schooling. While madrasah and pesantren maintain strong traditions of adab pedagogy, mainstream national systems often lack the structural space for deep ethical habituation, creating tension between official curriculum aims and community expectations (Syahroni et al., 2025).

Empirical work in Indonesia and Malaysia points to promising classroom practices: integrated thematic units that link Qur'anic concepts to civic ethics, story based adab lessons, and teacher formation programs stressing moral exemplarity. These reports underscore the practicality of the tawḥīd adab pair when translated into lesson design and teacher mentoring. Methodologically, the epistemology of tawḥīd requires a hermeneutic and normative approach: understanding texts and traditions is inseparable from evaluating their ethical claims and educational consequences. Recent hermeneutic studies demonstrate how Malay exegetical practices shape local conceptions of adab and the aims of education (Hasim et al., 2025). The discussion also draws attention to the language of value transmission. In Malay contexts, adab is taught through narrative, proverbs, ritual practice, and social expectation modalities that operate differently from Western affective moral education but are equally robust in shaping disposition. This culturally embedded pedagogy demands culturally sensitive assessment methods.

A conceptual risk arises when tawḥīd is reduced to a doctrinal slogan; the literature warns against doctrinalism that neglects the practical, formative aspects of adab. Authentic tawḥīd pedagogy, scholars argue, must demonstrate moral transformation rather than mere recitation of creed (Kazeem, 2022). Several recent papers synthesize classical and modern epistemologies, offering a middle path that honors scriptural sources while engaging contemporary knowledge systems. These syntheses provide conceptual tools to incorporate scientific literacy without diluting tawḥīd's normative thrust (Zainuddin et al., 2025). The review identifies teacher identity as central: teachers are primary mediators of adab. Effective tawḥīd based education depends on teachers who embody the integrated epistemology intellectually grounded in Islamic thought and morally consistent in conduct a point reiterated in multiple recent field studies.

A practical implication is investment in pre-service and in-service professional development that moves beyond technical pedagogy to include philosophical formation in tawḥīd and adab, mentoring in character, and reflective practice. This is necessary to align teacher action with the epistemic commitments schools profess (Zain, M., & Arifin, 2023). On curriculum design, contemporary proposals advocate for spiral integration: recurring treatment of tawḥīd and adab across grades where complexity increases with age from simple etiquettes to sophisticated epistemic reflection enabling both habituation and cognitive internalization. Such designs respect developmental psychology while remaining faithful to Islamic aims (Rahman, F., & Syed, 2022). Assessment remains challenging. Standardized testing privileges recall and technical skills; assessing adab and integrated epistemic understanding requires alternative evaluation: portfolios, community based observation, reflective journals, and narrative assessments that foreground

character formation. Recent Indonesian case studies report small scale successes with such instruments.

The review also surfaces intergenerational tensions: older scholars emphasize textual fidelity and spiritual cultivation, while younger educators often seek pragmatic curricular reforms compatible with global competencies. Productive exchange between these cohorts is evident in recent scholarship that marries philosophical depth with practical classroom tools. A further point concerns plurality and civics: tawḥīd and adab grounded in Malay Islamic pedagogy can support pluralist citizenship if adab's social ethics are taught in ways that promote justice, empathy, and public reasoning. Several analyses suggest tawḥīd's insistence on moral accountability can become a resource for democratic citizenship rather than sectarian closure (Wahidi et al., 2025). Technology and digital learning pose both opportunities and risks. Digital platforms can disseminate tawḥīd-centered resources and model adab through multimedia narratives, but they also risk disembedding ethical formation if used merely for content delivery. The literature calls for intentional, ethically guided edtech designs aligned with tawḥīd epistemology.

Comparative studies between Malay practices and other Muslim contexts reveal shared motifs the centrality of tawḥīd, the moralizing function of adab, and the teacher's moral exemplariness while highlighting unique regional *articulations (language, ritual, and institutional forms)* that give Malay practices distinct educational textures. The review suggests research gaps that future scholarship should address: longitudinal studies on adab formation effectiveness, curriculum trials embedding tawḥīd across STEM subjects, and comparative policy analyses on how national education systems can recognize and resource adab pedagogy (Febriyani et al., 2025). These gaps were noted consistently in recent reviews and empirical papers. Ethically, scholars emphasize that tawḥīd-adab pedagogy must resist instrumentalization by political or commercial forces. The normative core of tawḥīd demands educational integrity: knowledge acquisition should serve human flourishing under divine accountability, not merely economic ends. Recent normative essays develop these cautions in the Malay context.

Practically, partnerships between pesantren madrasah, universities, and state institutions offer a promising route for piloting integrated curricula that respect local adab traditions while scaling pedagogical innovations. Emerging pilot programs documented in 2024–2025 show that cross-sector collaboration is feasible and productive. In summary, the epistemology of tawḥīd and the moral grammar of adab provide a robust theoretical and practical framework for Islamic education in the Malay world. Recent scholarship (2023–2025) demonstrates both theoretical refinement and practical experimentation: the challenge now is systematic curricular design, teacher formation, and assessment innovations that can carry this epistemic vision into mainstream educational practice.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the development of Islamic education, particularly in the context of the Malay world. First, the integration of tawhid *(the oneness of God)* and adab *(ethics, manners, and proper conduct)* within the epistemology of Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes that knowledge cannot be separated from moral and spiritual dimensions. This holistic approach challenges the secular and fragmented model of education that tends to isolate knowledge from divine values. Second, the study highlights the importance of returning to a tawhidic paradigm as the foundation for curriculum design, pedagogy, and teacher student relationships. Such an approach ensures that the process of knowledge acquisition remains grounded in faith, moral consciousness, and social responsibility. It implies that educational institutions in the Malay world must reorient their objectives toward the cultivation

of righteous individuals *(insan kamil)* who are intellectually capable and spiritually refined. Third, the research underscores that adab serves as the operational manifestation of tawhid. Therefore, the cultivation of proper behavior, discipline, and respect for knowledge and teachers should be reestablished as the core of Islamic educational practice. This has implications for teacher training programs, which should focus not only on technical competencies but also on character formation and moral exemplarity.

Fourth, from a broader sociocultural perspective, the study implies that the revitalization of Malay Islamic identity depends on the reinforcement of epistemological principles rooted in tawhid and adab. These principles can serve as a counterbalance to modern educational paradigms that prioritize material progress over moral integrity. Consequently, this research calls for the re-Islamization and re Malayization of knowledge as a strategy to preserve cultural authenticity while engaging with global modernity. Finally, the study provides theoretical implications for contemporary Islamic educational philosophy by offering an epistemological framework that harmonizes revelation *(wahy)* and reason *('aql).* This framework may serve as a reference for future research on Islamic pedagogy, curriculum theory, and moral education in various Muslim societies. It suggests that a truly transformative Islamic education system must be built upon the unity of knowledge, faith, and action, guided by the principles of tawhid and adab as envisioned in the Malay intellectual tradition.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relies primarily on qualitative library-based analysis, which focuses on textual interpretation and philosophical reflection rather than empirical data. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the lived experiences or educational practices of Malay Muslim communities in various regions. Second, the scope of the study is limited to selected classical and contemporary Malay-Islamic thinkers, which may not encompass the entire diversity of intellectual traditions within the Malay world. Third, the discussion on tauhid and adab is largely conceptual and normative, leaving limited space for exploring their practical implementation in modern Islamic education systems. Moreover, the epistemological analysis is based mainly on secondary sources. This may lead to interpretive bias depending on the authors and perspectives referenced. The lack of primary fieldwork or interviews with educational practitioners also limits the contextual understanding of how tauhid and adab are integrated into current teaching methodologies and curricula. Additionally, linguistic and cultural variations across different Malay speaking regions could affect the interpretation of key concepts, which were not deeply analyzed in this study.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct empirical studies that examine how tauhid and adab are practiced and internalized in various educational settings across the Malay world. Comparative studies between traditional pesantren or pondok institutions and modern Islamic schools would provide a richer understanding of the epistemological continuity and transformation of Islamic educational philosophy. Future scholars could also employ interdisciplinary approaches by combining philosophy, anthropology, and educational psychology to explore how tauhidic and adabic principles influence moral development, character formation, and identity among Malay Muslim students. Furthermore, it would be valuable to explore how the concepts of tauhid and adab respond to contemporary challenges such as globalization, digital culture, and secular educational paradigms. Research that involves curriculum analysis, interviews with educators, and observations in Islamic learning institutions could deepen the practical dimension of this philosophical inquiry. Finally, expanding the study to include comparative perspectives with other Islamic civilizations, such as the Arab or Persian

traditions, would help contextualize the uniqueness and universality of the Malay epistemological approach to Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

The concept of Tawhid and Adab serves as the fundamental epistemological framework of Islamic educational philosophy in the Malay world. Tawhid provides the ontological foundation that unites all forms of knowledge under the consciousness of the Oneness of Allah, while Adab functions as the ethical and moral manifestation of that belief in human behavior, social order, and intellectual pursuit. Together, they form an integrated system that harmonizes faith, reason, and culture, ensuring that education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of virtue and spiritual awareness. In the Malay intellectual tradition, the synthesis of Tawhid and Adab has shaped the worldview, pedagogy, and character formation of Muslim societies. It has influenced the development of Islamic institutions, the role of scholars *(ulama),* and the articulation of knowledge as a means of achieving human perfection *(insan kamil).* The integration of these two principles underscores the inseparability of knowledge and ethics, revealing that true education must nurture both intellectual excellence and moral refinement.

Therefore, revisiting the epistemological significance of Tawhid and Adab in the context of modern Islamic education is essential for revitalizing the Malay educational paradigm. It enables a return to the authentic Islamic worldview, countering the fragmentation of modern secular education, and fostering a holistic system that aligns knowledge, faith, and character. Such an approach ensures that Islamic education in the Malay world remains rooted in divine principles while remaining adaptive to contemporary challenges, thus maintaining its relevance and transformative power in shaping future generations.

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