

Re-actualization of Quran's Perfection: Questioning the Concept of Ali Abdul Halim Mahmud's Quranic Education

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Abstract: The Quran is believed to be an eternal marvel with teachings that shall remain relevant regardless of the time and place. Such a fundamental conviction has led to various perspectives and lively discussions. Some consider the Quran as an open text that can continuously be reinterpreted, while the others consider it as the ultimate book that provides guidance concerning all matters of human life. Given this context, it is of great interest to critically discuss the views of Ali Abdul Halim Mahmud who considered the Quran as a comprehensive source of guidance for addressing the various problems of life as well as a text filled with a myriad of educational prescriptions. Based on this assumption, Mahmud actively elaborated his views on the Quran's perfection and the inevitability of Muslims to relentlessly abide by it. He believed that the solution for Muslims, who are currently suppressed by a broken and deceptive system, is none other than returning to the guidance of the Quran and the Sunnah.

Keywords: Comprehensive source of guidance, Education prescription, Ikhwanul Muslimin, the Quran's perfection.

Introduction

In the Islamic civilization, the Quran functions as the central text, that its existence has been basic in determining the cultural formation and scientific characteristics of Muslims. Thus, exegesis is a crucial instrument in all efforts of knowledge production (Abu Zayd, 2000). It was not uncommon that subsequently, various schools of exegeses had proliferated, given that there were differences in the epistemological preference of the exegetes and the scientific design being used. The Quran's standing as the central text or the most authoritative text (Bennett, 2005) is supported by the principle that this Holy Text contains a system of teachings to develop Islamic civilization on the basis of creed (*aqidah*) and rules and regulations stipulated within the text pertaining to matters of life, behaviour, and knowledge (al-Jundi, 1984). Despite its all-encompassing system of teachings, there are quite many Quranic verses that stimulate

the human mind to dig deeper into various fundamental issues (Musa, 1985). This indicates that this all-encompassing system of teachings is not necessarily instantly ready-to-use and thorough.

The Quran is a source of values that ceaselessly inspires and guides Muslims in responding to the various problems in life (al-Qaradlawi, 2000). One of the Quran's characteristics, as emphasized by Ali Abdul Halim Mahmud (1994), is its presence as an eternal marvel throughout the ages and as a source of guidance that we should abide by in order to overcome the various problems in life. Accordingly, Muslims are constantly required to explore the contents of its teachings and not be complacent with the existing results of exegeses. Yet, unfortunately, the Quran's standing as an eternal marvel and as a source of guidance in life has not been constructively appreciated due to a shallowing perspective. Firmly, Muhammad al-Ghazali (1997) stated, "Muslims, particularly

following the first century of Hijriyah, had put much emphasis on problems relating to Quranic recitals, tajweed principles, and were fixated solely on the memorization of Quranic texts. They did not consider its dialogical aspect as something important, and this had resulted in the faltering [of Muslims]". Izzuddin (2006) added, "All this time, the marvel of the Quran had largely been observed through its tangible aspects, such as its linguistic features". As a result of a shallowing perspective, Mahmud (2000 & 2005) considered that Muslims tend to demonstrate a partial attitude in their interaction with the Quran hence dissociating them from the Islamic *manhaj* (system of teachings).

As an ultimate holy scripture, the teachings of the Quran is believed to remain relevant regardless of the time and place (Mahmud, 1998). The principle of the Quran's universal relevance is understood in various ways. Some scholars are of the view that the Quran is a living text or an "open" text (al-Jabiri, 2007), keeping in mind that the ideas and verses in the Quran continually engage in a dialectical process with human reasoning and greets all Muslims through the ages (Izzuddin, 2006). This point of view considers the literal writings or text of the Quran remains the same, yet the contents of its meanings are highly dynamic, developing in line with the development of its exegete's reasoning, which is dialectical with surrounding life issues and cultural development. The constantly changing reality of life, with all its cultural achievements, challenges, and opportunities, demands the exegete's vigilance in interacting with the Quran in order to acquire sharp and concise answers to life's questions. Here, we can understand the point of view emphasizing that cultural development is generated by two different means: through the exegete's dialectic with actual reality, and through the exegete's dialogical communication with the Quran's texts (Abu Zayd, 2000).

Meanwhile, some other scholars consider the Quran as an all-encompassing text (*jâmi'*) (al-Jundi, 1984). Like a feast from God, the Quran is bestowed to provide nourishment for Muslims willing to accept His invitation. Quran's guidance is ready to enjoy and is filled with educational prescriptions as a manifestation of His universal

and perfect way (*manhaj*) (Qutb, 2004). No one is capable of saving the Muslim community from devastation unless Muslims themselves hold firmly onto His *manhaj* that is found in the Quran and the Sunnah (Mahmud, 2005). According to Mahmud, the Quran has a myriad of special features, of which among them are: the Quran is a form of God's "feast" bestowed upon humankind to obtain sufficient nourishment; it is a system that is relevant throughout all generations of humankind (the Muslims Brotherhood) movement in Egypt (see Lav, 2012), with an expansive scope of influence, Mahmud actively voiced the importance of elaborating His *manhaj* about education, which indeed had not been much considered by scholars. The approach was regarded as a breakthrough that had not been conducted by other authoritative figures such as al-Abrasyi (d.1981), al-Nahlawi (b. 1876), and N. Ulwan (d. 1987). Even his numerous studies on the Islamic education system have been supported as a new referential source, particularly to activists of Quranic studies and communities oriented towards "returning to the Quran", like the Purwokerto regional branch of KAMMI (Association of Indonesian Muslim Students Action).

Materials and Methods

A Literary Study

As a literary study that attempts to criticize the concept of Qur'anic education, the implementation of the holistic method, which is a method of critical thinking to capture the complete meaning, and not a mere "atomistic" meaning (Bakker & Zubair, 1990), is based on content analysis using textual investigation on Mahmud's works beginning from the problems he sought the answers to, and then the scientific efforts to delve deeper into the problems through the process of incubation, illumination through creating a dialog between the problems and various concepts and actual phenomenon, explication with analyzing and clarifying the problems, and creative synthesis with formulating new insights that are creatively combined from various theoretical and textual elements (Moutakas, 1994).

A Hermeneutic Analysis

In a hermeneutic analysis, there are at least three interlinked functions in the efforts of understanding the contents of a holy text, namely: (1) the historical function, which is oriented to revealing textual meaning according to its historical context; (2) the meaning function, which attempts to explore its contextual meaning; and (3) the implicative meaning, which aims to elaborate the intended requirement for the current context (Gracia, 1995). Such hermeneutic analysis was utilized to observe the methodological steps of Mahmud in integrating the necessities of text meanings, the contexts, and the contextualization in order to formulate his educational exegesis. To reveal the meaningfulness of the text for education, the interpretive understanding of the Quran's guidance needs to be based on the fundamental assumption relating to Islam, which is founded on two main pillars, namely: (1) to have faith in one God and self-submission to Him alone and (2) obedience to all of His commands and prohibitions (Mahmud, 1999).

Results and Discussion

Fundamental Educational Thoughts of Ali Abdul Halim Mahmud

Prof. Dr. Ali Abdul Halim Mahmud passed away on Monday, March 10th 2014, at the age of 86. He was born in Tahta, the Province of Suhaj, Egypt in 1928, and his parents were academicians at Al-Azhar University. He was an industrious writer who had written 56 books, and he was a prominent figure to the Ikhwanul Muslimin organization in Egypt. From a young age, Mahmud had joined Ikhwanul Muslimin, and he had been a student under the care of Imam Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), who was the founder of the organization (Basaer, 2019). In Indonesia, the ideology of Ikhwanul Muslimin, as an ideology that was widely expressed by Mahmud, has been proven to have an expansive influence in the formation of organizational and intellectual networks driving various education (*tarbiyah*) and da'wah movements in campuses and communities (Khalikin, 2012). Several last writings elaborating

the movement of Ikhwanul Muslimin used Mahmud's work as one of their main references (see Farida, 2014; Akmansyah, 2013).

As a scholar (lecturer) at Cairo's Al-Azhar University, he had abundant opportunities to interact with intellectuals and write various scientific work, particularly about studies on Islam, dawah, and education. As mentioned on the www.worldcat.org website, no less than 12 (twelve) of Mahmud's work have been published in three languages, and they have become a part of the references collection in 23 reputable libraries around the world. It is not easy to gain detailed information regarding the biography and life records of this figure, especially after the Mursi administration in Egypt that was supported by Ikhwanul Muslimin had fallen and been replaced by the administration of General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi. Due to very similar names, some authors consider the figure of Mahmud is the same as Syaikh Abdul Halim Mahmud, who is an expert in spiritual asceticism (*tasawwuf*), who was the 40th Grand Imam of al-Azhar (see Andiko et al., 2015). Whereas, Syaikh Mahmud was born in 1910 and died in 1978, which is a different generation from Mahmud.

It is mentioned in the attachment of the last part of Mahmud's work, *Al-Tarbiyah al-Islâmiyyah fi al-Bayt* (2005), that the scientific work he had produced amounted to more than fifty pieces of which among them are: (1) *Al-Ghazw al-Şâliby wa al-'Âlam al-Islâmy*, (2) *Ma'a al-'Aqidah wa al-Harakah wa al-Manhaj*, (3) *Al-Tarbiyah al-Islâmiyyah fi Sûrat Al-Anfâl*, (4) *Al-Tarbiyah al-Islâmiyyah fi Sûrat Ali Imran*, (5) *Al-Tarbiyah al-Rûhiyyah*, and (6) *Al-Tarbiyah al-Khuluqiyyah*. From the several scientific work he wrote, more than a dozen discussed the issue of Islamic education. Mahmud did indeed have a strong intention of being able to elaborate on Allah's comprehensive and perfect system of teachings for a way of life (*manhaj*) as specified in the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet. His extensive experiences of visiting numerous countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, made him become more aware of the significance of Islamic education, *da'wah*, and Islamic movement (Mahmud, 2004a).

The role of education is considered as a vital and strategic part of human life. As without education, there is no dignity in human life (Mahmud, 2004b). In line with the history of humankind's progress, education recognizes several schools of thought. In brief, Mahmud mapped out these schools of thought as follows: the Moral School in Education, the Intellectual School in Education, the Religious School in Education, the Naturalistic School in Education, the Social School in Education, the Political School in Education, the Esthetic School in Education, and the Pragmatic School in Education (Mahmud, 2004b).

Given such mention about the various schools of thought in education above, Mahmud intended to place the distinctive concept of Islamic education within a broader spectrum. However, the concept of Islamic education was not much discussed within that spectrum; it was merely limited to revealing the excellence of Islamic education with some simple comparisons that are reinforced by normative argumentations instead of comparative analyses. Some of his work about the core concepts of Islamic education are *Al-Tarbiyah Al-Ijtimâ'iyah*, *Al-Islâmiyyah*, *al-Tarbiyah al-Jamâliyyah al-Islâmiyyah*, *Al-Tarbiyah al-'Aqliyyah*, and *Al-Tarbiyah al-Khuluqiyyah*, which embody his reactionary response to the various schools of education above. Mahmud would on occasion mention the names of Western figures who were widely influential, such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi, but they were not positioned as "dialogue partners". He had considered that their brilliant thoughts had only emerged in the 18th century, whereas Islam through the Quran and Sunnah had formerly introduced an education system long before that century (Mahmud, 2001). Compared to the above schools, Islamic education has a noteworthy distinction, namely: Islamic education maintains complimentary, comprehensive, and practical-applicable features (Mahmud, 2004b).

Mahmud's (1996) educational ideology is based on a "fundamentalist" paradigm (*al-ta'sîl*), which refers to the uncovering of educational objectives, values, and basic principles by using the Quran and the Sunnah. According to Mahmud, such paradigm is seldom used in books about education,

while it is much needed by the Muslim community in this modern era, which is an era for the revival of Islam and the revitalization of various religious issues. In this context, it is interesting to consider the statement made by Mahathir Mohammad (1997) that fundamentalism is a term that has been experienced a great deal of misunderstanding and it is deemed identical with terrorism, while the fact of the matter is that the best of Muslims are those who are essentially fundamentalists, namely people who are strongly committed to following the basic tenets of Islam, such as peace. In contrast to the concept mentioned by Mahathir Mohammad, Herriot (2009) uses the term fundamentalist to identify religious movements that have the following characteristics: (1) reactive since they believe that their religion is currently under the threat of modern secularism, (2) dualistic since they believe that their religious understanding is truth that stands in full opposition to enormous wickedness, (3) the supremacy of a religious source of authority (holy scripture) in regulating their beliefs and actions, (4) selective religious exegesis, and (5) millennialist historical point of view.

Regardless of the difference in the definition of fundamentalist above, the fundamentalist paradigm (*Al-Ta'sîl al-Shar'î*) is utilized by Mahmud to mention his type of approach in formulating Islamic education that is grounded on the sources of Islamic teaching: the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Both sources of Islamic teachings are believed to be the basic structure in formulating a perfect, comprehensive, and universal way of life (*manhaj*). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the practice of *ijtihad* and the willingness to adopt positive traits and practices from other civilizations are no longer deemed necessary (Mahmud, 1995). His view on the need to adopt from other civilizations is asserted in his first book on the formulation of the Islamic education concept, *Al-Tarbiyah al-Rûhiyyah*, but its implementation is not much to be found in his subsequent publications. There are more or less finalistic, reactive, and dualistic features indicating his fundamentalist paradigm in elaborating the concept of Islamic education (see Bruce, 2000). Hence, he did not develop much of an inclusive-

dialectical reasoning model, but an exclusive-reactive reasoning model instead. When formulating concepts of Islamic social education, he employed an approach of: (1) elaborating Quranic verses and hadith of the Prophet that contain key moral values pertaining to interhuman relationship; (2) collecting Quranic verses and hadith of the Prophet that provide guidance about communal life to be like a "family"; and (3) using Quranic verses and hadith as a basis and altering the prescriptions into a perspective (*al-Istishād wa al-Isti'ānah*) (Mahmud, 2001).

Mahmud's (1995) point of view that considered the global world as being exceedingly unfair towards the Muslim community reinforced his belief of the urgency to have an Islamic education concept for the sake of humankind, and this is in line with the exclusive-reactive reasoning model that he developed as a response to the modernization of his community and the pressure of negative influences from the West. Modernization and negative influences from the West had led to two grave problems, namely the deideologization of Islam and the colonization of the Islamic world. Both of these problems have weakened and tormented the Muslim community, even today; these problems remain unmanageable on account of Muslims not putting the Quran and the Sunnah to use as their guidance in life. Instead, they have turned their back on the two and abide by "other" systems in order to resolve the various life problems they encounter (Mahmud, 2001).

The exclusive-reactive reasoning model Mahmud developed found its correlation and similarity in the fundamentalist ideology of Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), one of the figures of Ikhwanul Muslimin, who firmly stated, "Islam does not allow Muslims to learn the bases of their creed and the basic tenets of its ideology; the interpretation of the Quran, hadith, or the history of the Prophet... the political *manhaj* and other similar fields, from non-Islamic references, even though they have an extremely consistent level of piety and religiosity" (Qutb, 2009). Mahmud and Qutb had developed a model of reasoning that is based on the underlying assumption that the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet are the solutions to disputes among the various schools of thought,

and that non-Islamic references are a representation of ignorance that is impossible to amalgamate with the two sources of Islamic teachings to arrive at a conclusion.

Mahmud's Approach to Interpreting the Quran

The Quran has prepared a comprehensive and perfect *manhaj* (a system; a way of life). Accordingly, every Muslim must explore and formulate this *manhaj* so that it can be utilized as a useful guide in living life and responding to all problems in life. Mahmud (1999) firmly said, "the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet must be obeyed, keeping in mind that both are well-defined and comprehensible texts that neither neglect nor leave matters of life and death unexplained to the Muslim community". Through such statement, Mahmud had intended to build up people's faith in the Quran's perfection and the obligation for the Muslim community to willingly let it be their guide. Why did he consider these two values significant? According to his analysis, the Muslim community is currently being suppressed by erroneous, damaging, and deceptive thoughts, ideologies, and cultures (Mahmud, 2005). The only solution is by returning to the Quran and the Sunnah (al-Qaradlawi, 2000).

The belief of the Quran's perfection and the obligation to abide by it is a fundamental issue. Normatively speaking, such a belief is embraced by the majority of the Muslim community, yet in practice, they tend to stay away or be alienated from the Quran. They would prefer other thoughts and ideologies that do not align with the teachings of Islam instead. One of the evidence for this is the fact that the Ikhwanul Muslimin movement, which firmly upholds this belief, has often been opposed and considered hostile. While Ikhwanul Muslimin's organizational movement and educational model is much needed for the rise of the contemporary Muslim community (Mahmud, 2005), what this organization has to offer is analogous to drops of water that continue to drip and flow from its source, and they will inevitably fall upon an appropriate patch of land subsequently capable of cultivating remarkable plant life. As a driving agent in Ikhwanul Muslimin, Mahmud fully supported the

organization's educational and movement model. He even contributed substantially to formulating the basic structure that underlies the organization's education and movement.

According to Mahmud, Islam is a divine system and order. Elaborations of the system and order can be found in the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. If the Muslim community, as of current, is still incapable of establishing a proper and comprehensive system (order) of life, then this would in most part be caused by their attitude of alienating themselves and turning their back from the Quran and the Sunnah. While in fact, every Muslim is obligated to abide by the *manhaj* bestowed by Allah constantly. Any actions conducted outside of the God-given way of life are clear indications of disbelief (*kufr*), and they may indistinctly be identified as hypocritical (*nifâq*) (Mahmud, 1999). Mahmud had repeatedly asserted the concept of Allah's *manhaj* and the obligation to abide by the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. When interpreting Surah Al-Mâ'dah/5: 44 for instance, Mahmud (1994) underlined the strong message in this verse, which is that people who have abandoned God's law are unbelievers for having denied God and His rule of law. The Muslim community is thus confronted with two options: to believe wholeheartedly or to deny entirely, and in this case, partial denial is considered to fall into the category of full denial (Mahmud, 1998).

Given that Islam is Allah's way (*manhaj*), then Islam surely has a *manhaj* for education. In the education context, *manhaj* is a system, a means/method and elemental devices that are systematically associated with one another to create a whole (Editorial Team, 2003). According to Mahmud (1995), the most fundamental problem confronted by the Muslim community in this day and age is the lack of an Islamic education system. The development of an Islamic education system must be based on the Quran and the Sunnah. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Muslim intellectuals are forbidden to gain benefit from other cultures and the thoughts and ideas of prominent figures, so long as it does not violate the provisions stipulated in the Quran and the Sunnah. Accordingly, Mahmud (2001) appreciated the

significance of the empirical-deductive method in order to develop an Islamic education system, such as the descriptive method, experimentation, and the historical method that underlies the scientific investigation process. However, an additional aspect is required to appreciate those methods, namely the intention of obtaining Allah's blessing by considering Islamic *morality*, for instance: sincerity (*ikhlas*), honesty, and the goal of achieving a *good* life (Mahmud, 2001). Unfortunately, his thoughts regarding the possibility of adopting other cultures/thoughts and the significance of appreciating the scientific method to develop an Islamic education system seem to be obscured by his tendency of reinforcing perspectives about the perfection of the Quran and the Sunnah.

Such opinion illustrates the model of ideological Islam he carried, which is the aspiration of an Islamic group that has been fighting hard for the sake of upholding Islamic sharia (*hâkimīyyah*). To this Islamic group, upholding Islamic sharia is no mere compulsion or obligation; it is also a necessity in order to resolve the numerous problems afflicting the contemporary Muslim community. Returning to the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet is the first and foremost demand that continues to be advocated since it is believed to be the root of the solution and the basis of ideology. According to Mahmud, the Muslim community is faced with choosing one of two choices: follow Allah's path by returning to the Quran and the Sunnah, or leave His path thereby resulting in disbelief and hypocrisy.

The narrow understanding of the slogan "Returning to the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet" advocated by the ideological Muslim group confronts numerous *oppositions*. Muhammad Imârah (2004), for example, criticizes the ideological perspective of *hâkimīyyah ilâhiyyah* (absolute sovereignty of God's law) which he considers "extreme" as it is unable to distinguish between definite, clear, and stringent (*qaṭ'iy*) Islamic laws that are contained in the Quran and the Sunnah, and Islamic laws that are of *ijtihadi* (reasoning) character. Concerning the first type of law, we cannot instantaneously consider those who do not abide by it as unbelievers, even more so concerning the second type of law. It is an *imperious*

manifestation of judging another as an unbeliever because it undermines an attitude of tolerance and moderateness.

Based on the underlying assumption of the Quran's perfection, Mahmud selected several particular verses in the Quran, such as Ali Imrân/3, Al-Nisâ'/4, Al-Tawbah/9, and Al-Mâ'idah/5, and elaborated the core concepts of education from the perspective of the Quran. When interpreting the verses of the Quran, he frequently made use of several citations taken from the exegesis work of prominent ulemas, like Imam al-Qurṭubî, Imam Fakhruddin al-Râzi, and Sheikh Tâhir bin Asyûr (Mahmud, 1999). That shows that he considered the previous ulamas' views are reliable as authoritative references to explore the contents of the Holy Text.

In line with his view of the Quran's perfection, Mahmud paid great attention to efforts in interpreting the contents of the Quran. In a variety of his work, exegeses of the Quran was done by using a specific orientation and perspective. These orientations and perspectives influenced the interpretation direction he had developed, on account that the Quran essentially has multiple facets allowing the exegete to employ their textual interpretation capacity to reinforce the efforts of maintaining the spirit of sharia or otherwise (Huwaiti, 1996). As evidence that the exegete's perspective and orientation influences the direction of the exegeses, we can conduct a comparative analysis between Mahmud's interpretation and Syaikh Abdul Halim Mahmud's (2000) interpretation (d. 1978) who had both elaborated the contents of Qs. Ali Imran. Syaikh Abdul Halim Mahmud (2000) was willing to cite the opinions of a number of orientalists whom he regarded as objective individuals who affirmed the truth of the fundamental principle in the teachings of the Quran, namely that sharia is enforced under principles of justice, morality is based on principles of love and affection, and faith is founded on principles of justice, love, affection, and comradery that are embodied in the teachings of *tawhid* (oneness and unity of God). In this case, Syaikh Mahmud underlined the basic principles of Quranic teachings that are substantive and inclusive.

Contrastingly, Mahmud in his elaboration of the content of the surah broadly highlighted the Quranic teachings as a manifestation of Allah's path (*manhaj*), which, when compared to other holy texts, possesses exclusive univities, which are: (1) it is the ultimate and final text that God has guaranteed to be under His auspices to maintain; (2) it serves as a "control" and standard (*muhaiminan*) for the other texts; (3) it is the most perfect and comprehensive text; (4) all worldly and religious matters are contained in it; (5) the Quran was indeed set to be the ultimate holy text as a religious guidance for mankind until the end of time; (6) the Sunnah of the Prophet functions to provide more detailed elaborations of the Quran's global contents; (7) the Quran is considered as an eternal marvel that is distinct from the other temporary holy texts; (8) the Quran is filled with educational prescriptions keeping in mind that it is God's feast; (9) there is an education system within the Quran that is characterized as being derived from God, comprehensive, always relevant no matter the time and place, in balance and harmony with human nature, having practical application, contextual, and aiming to achieve happiness of humankind in this world and the next; and (10) introduction of the scope of Quranic education system that covers individual human, family, community, and nation (Mahmud, 1998).

Mahmud (1998) did indeed explore the contents of the Quran very seriously. No less than seven series of his work talk about studies on the educational interpretation of several surahs in the Quran, namely: Al-Mâ'idah/5, Al-Nûr/23, Ali Imrân/3, Al-Ahzâb/33, Al-Anfâl/8, Al-Nisâ'/4, and Al-Tawbah/9. He dedicated his work to the Muslim community in general and religious preachers as well as Muslim activists in particular. Therefore, it is clear that Mahmud's perspective and orientation is to raise awareness among and "move" the Muslim community so that they would try and improve themselves together through joint efforts. Education and *da'wah* (religious preaching) are two critical media required in order to develop awareness and social movement, outside the realms of politics. In terms of hermeneutical analysis, Mahmud had the role of shaping and producing the meanings of the Quranic verses

being interpreted (see Qattan, 2011). In terms of methodology, the role of producing the meanings of verses is supported by the view that acknowledges the need to carry out *ijtihad* in two areas, which are: in matters that no text is found and when no text description is found, implying that it is not clear and stringent or *sarih*, which is required by the true principle of *takwil* (text description) (Mahmud, 1999).

Most of Mahmud's interpretations of the Quranic verses were results of his hermeneutical process (*ijtihad*), since concerning the interpretations he attempted to elaborate and define the verses that have not been explicit according to the model that he employed. Interpreting one verse with another, associating them with relevant hadith narrations, and citing the opinions of some prominent ulamas (exegetes) were a part of the methodological implementation of the said model. The "ideological" implementation is indicated by his interpretation that is oriented towards the efforts in raising the Muslim community's awareness to return to the path of Allah, in pumping their spirit of struggle to continue preaching and engaging in social movements, and in igniting their flame to incite in them the courage to fight all kinds of disbelief by prioritizing the use of nonviolent approaches. He continuously emphasized the existence of a consecutive (sequential and interconnected) relationship among Allah, the Quran, and the happiness of humankind. It means that to achieve happiness in life, human beings are required to return to the Quran, and the Quran is a manifestation of Allah's *manhaj*. By this opinion, Muhammad Qutb, one of the figures of Ikhwanul Muslimin, firmly stated, "Living with the Quran is living with Allah...when a person lives with [along the path of] the Quran, that person lives with [along the path of] Allah... Thus, Muslims need to engage in interactions with the Quran bearing in mind that it is a guide for humans to live this life" (Qutb, 2009).

Based on such perspective, Mahmud and Muhammad Qutb both underlined the importance of an education system capable of transforming belief into concrete life behavior in order to achieve the goal of developing a Muslim community that is

structured under God's law (Qutb, 2009; Mahmud, tt.). It is an education system that is able to guide mankind to achieve their goals in life: (1) to believe in the oneness of Allah and to worship only Him in accordance with the guidance of sharia, (2) to abide by the *manhaj* of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet in living life, and (3) to spread prosperity throughout the earth and advance towards a better life for humankind (Mahmud, tt.). Here, Mahmud presented two kinds of argumentations to emphasize the urgency of Islamic education, namely: a positive-affirmative argument that declares the perfection of the Quran's *manhaj* as a basis for education and a negative argument that tends to reject the adequacy of other sources which do not return to the Quran.

Application of Mahmud's Approach in Interpreting Quranic Verse

Islamic education is the pillar that supports those Islamic values. With a proper education system, Islam will be able to resolve the various problems of life faced by humankind (Mahmud, 2002). Such conviction had reinforced Mahmud's intent to try and formulate a comprehensive Islamic education concept, keeping in mind that education is considered as a useful and fundamental Islamic endeavour. Since without education, the Muslim community would have no knowledge, no understanding, and would not live according to the provisions of Islam (Mahmud, 2002). He thought that the perfection of Islamic teaching and Islamic education is integrative, mutually asserting, and mutually reinforcing. As an individual who was active in *da'wah* (preaching) activities in numerous places and the community of Ikhwanul Muslimin, Islamic education had seized his attention for nearly fifty years. He had subsequently toiled in excavating values, basic principles, objectives, and the core concept of education (Mahmud, 1995).

According to Mahmud (2001), the relation between Islam and the education system can be described through the Islamic teaching that calls to "Learn, Be Knowledgeable, and Teach", and the Islamic mission of producing individuals/generation that is able to contribute to the development of an Islamic human civilization

(Mahmud, 1995). An education system can be considered as "Islamic" when it is enforced upon these three key foundations, namely (1) a system of faith in monotheism, (2) a proper system of worship (self subjugation) in accordance with provisions in the Quran and the Sunnah, and (3) a system of morality provisioned by Islam (Mahmud, 1995). Based on this point, Mahmud viewed Islam, a religion that the Prophet PBUH brought, as an eternal, universal, and ultimate teaching. The actualization of Islamic teachings requires an "Islamic" education system that aims to: (1) form proper faith, (2) teach proper worship, (3) cultivate the spirit of mutual understanding among human beings, (4) spread the spirit of mutual help, (5) work hard for the sake of making the earth prosperous, (6) teach people to have a firm/committed attitude, (7) teach people to foster an Islamic household, (8) form a social spirit, (9) form individuals that are nationalistic, (10) form individuals that maintain Islamic ideology, (11) form individuals that actively engage in da'wah, and (12) form individuals that are able to take part in Islamic activities/movements (Mahmud, 1995).

As a system, Mahmud (1995) attempts to formulate elements of Islamic education covering its: (1) definition and feature, (2) objective, (3) means/media, (4) source/foundation, (5) scope, and (6) method. Upon close examination of Mahmud's work, there are at least two models (approaches) he had used to formulate an education system based on the Quran, namely by (1) selecting a specific verse to interpret and elaborate on its educational meanings, and (2) raise particular educational theme and describe relevant contents of Quranic verses. The two approaches actually begin from the same underlying assumption, which is as a book of guidance; there is not a single matter in human life overlooked by the Quran. This basic assumption had been the basis of his perspective in elaborating the contents of the Quran. Through the first approach, he attempted to establish a theoretical framework from analyses of the main contents of Quranic verses. Whereas through the second approach, he attempted to communicate the problems of education and life by using prescriptions found in the Quran.

In line with the employed basic assumption, i.e. Islam is an ultimate religion and that there is no salvation other than Islam, Mahmud interpreted the content of Qs. Ali Imran/3: 85, "all adherents of any religion are required to embrace Islam that was brought by the Prophet Muhammad, as there is no other religion that is accepted except Islam. If they reject embracing Islam, in the Hereafter, they will be included among the losers and punished" (Mahmud, 1999). Following the advent of the Prophet, any religion other than Islam will not be accepted (Mahmud, 2000). According to Mahmud, the Muslim community should constantly be cautious of the efforts made by a group of people, be it Muslims or non-Muslims, who intend to mislead the Muslim community with their idea that there is salvation outside of Islam.

Mahmud's interpretation is different from the interpretations of several contemporary Muslim thinkers, such as Muhammad Shahrur, Gamal al-Banna, and Sayyid Husein Fadlullah. They interpret Islam not merely limited to the followers of Muhammad PBUH (Shahrur, 1996). Generically, Islam encompasses all heavenly messages that demonstrate total submission to God, not only Islam as the religion revealed by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH (Rakhmat, 2006). Meanwhile, Syaikh Abdul Halim Mahmud and Sa'id Hawwa interpret the word *Islam* in the above verse by not referring to a specific individual, a specific race, a specific place, and a specific time. The word *Islam* refers to a universal meaning, not solely limited to Muhammad's message. However, for the current context, true manifestation of Islam is no longer found except within the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Mahmud, 1998; Hawwa, 1981), because the teaching of "Islam" revealed by the previous messengers had been forgotten, altered, or replaced thus only falsehood remains (Hawwa, 1981).

Despite its exclusive interpretation, Mahmud did not justify acts of violence or compulsion in acceptance of religion. When interpreting the subsequent verses concerning the case of apostasy, he had not at all mentioned any possibility of death to apostates who has no intention of repenting as stipulated by the law formulated by most experts of Islamic jurisprudence. By using the perspective

of da'wah and movement, he advocated the importance of sacrificing one's self or continuing the struggle using one's material wealth, time, sincerity, and perseverance in facing the challenges posed by the oppositions of Islam (Mahmud, 1998). In this case, Mahmud had put morality at the forefront so that the belief in the absoluteness of Islam does not cause people to easily judge others or react harshly to those who are opposed to them. The Muslim community is indeed obligated to uphold the teachings of God. However, they should be in harmony with principles of morality. The educational message that the verse above tries to convey, among others, is the need for the Muslim community to be cautious of any attempt to mislead them from the truth of Islam. Such an attempt always exists, and Islamic preachers should prioritize preaching etiquettes (Mahmud, 1998).

The Muslim community is obligated to engage in jihad. A firm and strict attitude to the enemies of Islam still needs to be shown. The obligation to engage in jihad is gradually required (Mahmud, 2000), which implies that it should be understood comprehensively. In the final stage of the command to engage in jihad, the Muslim community is required to fight against all unbelievers without exception in order to free mankind from *shirk* and to uphold values of humanity through various means, among others: self readiness and preparation, sacrificing one's wealth, body, and soul on the battlefield, education and dawah activities (Mahmud, 2000). Mahmud's elaboration regarding gradations in the command to conduct jihad indicates that he did not interpret Quranic verses that call for war and Quranic verses that contain messages of peace in the framework of *naskh* (abrogation), or the framework of particular and universal provisions. Jihad, wherein one of the conducts is to fight against the enemies of Islam, is indeed an eternal obligation until the end of time (*fariḍah mustamirrah ilâ yaum al-qiyâmah*) (Mahmud, 2000). Quite elaborately, Mahmud explained the concept of *al-walâ' wa al-barâ'* that is indeed closely related the command of jihad, this concept concerns the conduct of believers who make friends with infidels as defenders, protectors, and allies. When a Muslim supports infidels who

blatantly oppose the Muslim community, then she/he has performed a great sin and kufr (Mahmud, 1998).

When the condition of the Muslim community is weak and incapable of putting up a fight against the infidels, then there are only two options available: momentary dissimulation or denial of religious belief (*taqiyya*) as long as it does not sacrifice truth, strengthen falsehood, and resemble hypocrisy (Mahmud, 1998). Aside from infidels, Muslims are also required to be ready to confront opponents of truth, namely (1) group of people who deny the truth of religious teachings, (2) group of people who deny the prophecy of Muhammad, (3) group of people who believe in Allah and the Prophet PBUH, but they are of the opinion that the teachings of the Prophet only regulates religious, not worldly matters, and that he did not establish a government, (4) group of people who deny the teachings of the Prophet PBUH concerning the faith in the unseen, (5) group of people who deny the ability of the Prophet's system of teachings to overcome various problems in the life of man (Mahmud, 1998).

Several core adages presented by Mahmud, for instance: *jihâd* (great effort for virtue), *hijrah* (departure from badness), *taqiyya* (keeping faith a secret), and enemies of Islam, are concrete evidence that he did bear an understanding of Islam as an ideology that has various empirical manifestations, from those that are soft and academic in character to those that indicate extremist and terrorist features (Desai, 2007). According to the classification of ideological Islam from Meghnad Desai's theory, Mahmud's understanding of ideological Islam is demonstrated by moral and political orientations. Mahmud's moral orientation is apparent in his strong will to enforce a more pious lifestyle for the Muslim community, while his political orientation is described through his strategy of fighting for the glory of Islam and the enforcement of his system of teachings in regulating the life of man. Because, as followed by exponents of ideological Islam, Islam does not only concern religious belief and moral system, it also deals with religion and politics/state. Islam is a perfect and comprehensive teaching that regulates all aspects of human life (Musa, 1980).

Mahmud's interpretation model of the Quranic verses can be seen as a manifestation of the hermeneutics of enquiry that attempts to explore the contents of the meanings in the holy text in order to elaborate the prescriptions and formulation of educational perspective (Arif, 2016). His interpretation model is founded on the basic assumption of the holy text's clarity, the ability of the holy text in providing a comprehensive system, and the critical-corrective function of the teachings in the holy text regarding the existing education reality. Education is a fundamental matter. Hence, it is given that the contents in the holy text are filled with educational prescriptions. Using this frame of thought, Mahmud had been proven to be successful in uncovering the various aspects of educational contents in the Quranic verses coupled with the Sunnah of the Prophet through a conclusive interpretation model, i.e. a sufficient interpretation claim to a Divine system that is comprehensive and applicative for human life. In the hermeneutical context, conclusive interpretation should be given a critical note, bearing in mind that it does not pay much attention to the historical elements in the interpretation, even more so with "interpreted" histories. Recognition of the historical aspect sees the interpreted text as a living experience (*tajribah hayyah*), thus, it is not enough to merely have the ability of linguistic mastery, grammatical expertise, and the context of the socio-cultural settings, because a mastery in the aspect of dynamic Muslim community benefits is also required (Hanafi, 2004).

By referring to Hafiz Dayyâb's (2005) opinion on the mapping of Islamic discourse, particularly in the Egyptian region, into: Radical Islam, Islam Left, Islamization of Knowledge, Islamic Hermeneutics, and Independent Islamism Groups, Mahmud's (1994) interpretation model can thus be categorized into the independent Islamism groups which are largely affiliated with the Ikhwanul Muslimin organization. This can at the very least be observed from: (1) Mahmud's elaboration of some jargons of radical Islam, such as *hijrah* and *jihad*, with a style of language that is relatively lenient as he employed a nonviolent approach, and (2) his elaboration on the Islamic education system is based on the Quran in order to renovate the

modern education system that he considered as being muddled. As a figure affiliated with Ikhwanul Muslimin, Mahmud appreciated the success of the organization in offering the concept and practice of Islamic education through a distinctive, particular, and unique education system compared to other organizations' education system (Mahmud, 1997). The education program they introduced is one that is in sync with the principles of Islam originating from the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Mahmud, 1997), and it also functions as a distinctive appeal for Ikhwanul Muslimin. The issue of Christianization in Egypt, the division between religion and politics (secularism), westernization projects, accusations of the Islamic system's inability to follow modern life, and various pressures on the Ikhwanul Muslimin organization had strengthened his will and influenced his perspectives in describing the education system within the mind frame of Islamic teachings' universality, nobility, and perfection.

Conclusions

Mahmud viewed that there is no other way for the Muslim community that is situated in the middle of a misleading, destructive, and flawed cultural, ideological suppression, except to return to the guidance of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. He persistently developed the conviction on the perfection of the Quran and the obligation that Muslims have to abide by it. Islam is a Divine order (*manhaj*) in which its elaborations can be found in the Quran and the Sunnah. The Muslim community that has not been able to establish an excellent and comprehensive system (order) of life is a result of their attitude, which is, in fact, contrary to the guidance of the two sources above. Meanwhile, it is a known obligation that every Muslim should always and tenaciously stay within the path of God.

Mahmud used two models in elaborating the content of the Holy Text, namely (1) by selecting certain verses then the educational meanings were interpreted and explained, and (2) by raising specific educational themes and elaborate the contents of relevant Quranic verses. The two

models originate from his fundamentalist ideology that affirms the excellence of an education system that is grounded on the noble, perfect, and universal path of God. By using the first model, he attempted to develop a theoretical framework by analyzing the main contents of Quranic verses. Meanwhile, using the second model, he tried to create a dialogue between the issue of education and life using prescriptions from the Quran. These are the contextualization (concretization) of interpretation measures that he took in order to socialize the life guidance of the Holy Text.

The belief in the existence of Quranic education system had driven him to insist on elaborating the prescriptions of the verses into an educational perspective that is abundant with moral messages, calls to da'wah, and drives social movement. An interpretation model with an educational perspective is considered as a perspective that has not been much implemented, keeping in mind that as of current the most dominant perspective followed by the majority of Muslims is to place the Quran and the Sunnah a source of determining Islamic jurisprudence. Nevertheless, the educational perspective that Mahmud formulated seems to strongly head towards reinforcing the function of the Quran as guidance for Muslim in dealing with all aspects of life. Not much interpretation dialectics were constructed. In line with his fundamentalist view, Mahmud was more inclined to develop clarifying interpretation that responds to misunderstandings about the Quran and acts that discredit Islam, comparative interpretation that elaborates the excellence of Islamic teachings in comparison to other system of teachings, and conclusive interpretation that promotes the perfection of the sources of Islamic teachings: the Quran and the Sunnah. Observed from an interpretation ideology point of view, conclusive interpretation lacks appreciation to the historical aspects of interpretation that are necessary to establish an open attitude to contextualization, dialectics, and critical-interpretation.

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