

Utilizing the Human Development Approach and Values to Advancing Education in Muslim Societies

The public schooling model, which separates values from the academic curriculum, is inherently problematical for schooling in most Muslim societies

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ONE YEAR AGO WE SHARED THE GOALS of the Advancing Education in Muslim Societies (AEMS) initiative, part of the International Institute of Islamic Thought's (IIIT) contribution to the evidence-based research agenda in Muslim societies. In this article, we delve deeper into the main component of the empirical research and, more specifically, the "Mapping the Terrain" study. This empirical study, an expansion of IIIT's ongoing theoretical and theological work of integrating knowledge and universal Quranic values, examines the existing views of these values and their significance for the human development trajectory of youth and stakeholders in Muslim societies.

The AEMS initiative, as we define it, is unique in its emphasis on education utilizing a human development lens for its appeal to the individual and groups in ecological contexts. In addition to the wider view of education as part of growth, we chose this lens because of its attention to academic as well as non-academic education.

This approach also allows the emphasis and inclusion of a values-based approach to reform beyond the schooling systems. According to S. F. Yap, attempts in some Muslim countries to follow the public schooling model, which separates values from the academic curriculum and keeps them in the private sector, haven't been showing results in either academic and non-academic gains (<http://www.iier.org.au/iier24/yap.html>).

Adopting a human development approach infused with values that are both Islamic and universal brings a new and situated approach to education reform, one that is as intentional and long term as it is developmental. After all, as C. Vincent argues, the literature contains evidence that values increase social cohesion and reduce extremism (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1477878518774128?journalCode=treb>).

In our research framework, we distinguish values-based education from moral

education, character and ethics education. These latter types of education were prominent during the 1980s, when the major goals of education were to promote moral reasoning and moral behavior via character education.

Although it is difficult to distinguish among these types because they are often used interchangeably, the main difference, in our view, is in the role(s) that values play in the developmental trajectory and how they influence decision making, meaning making and peaceful living. For example, the Oxford English dictionary defines ethics as the philosophical study of moral values of human conduct and judgment, whereas morals are more concerned with human behaviors and ways to determine right from wrong.

According to R. Thornberg and E. Oguz (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0742051X16300026>), a value is "an overarching concept that includes areas such as moral education, character education, ethics education, civic education, and citizenship education" (p. 110). And, as T. Lickona writes, it is also a drive to help humans live together and in community with others (<http://www.hi-ho.ne.jp/taku77/refer/lickona.htm>). For us, (universal Islamic) values are principles that guide a person or a group on how to expand beyond themselves in order to meet others who have other faiths and beliefs for the common good.

Recently, values education has reemerged as a prime focus in the curriculum of schools and higher education institutions (Acar, Turkmen, & Roychoudhury, 2010) (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09500690902991805?journalCode=tsed20>) and as a way to develop "ethical reasoning" and decision making as 21st-century educational outcomes. Yap contends that including Islam's universal values as an alternative framework provides another avenue for exploring the more prominent moral and ethical

aspects of educational decision making. Recent calls among Islamic education specialists to bring values back into the classroom because of their universal relevance and Islamic grounding have intensified. In addition, Vincent posits that universal values are also seen as a way to prevent and counter extremism. The AEMS' initiative argues that values are critical for the human developmental trajectory and, as a result, should be part


of us to customize this specific model to AEMS' vision and mission, for *tawhid* also includes all of Islam's operational values, such as peace, justice and tranquility. This model is unique in that the individual may move among the states (or stages) as he or she is impacted by life's conditions such as poverty, wars and other dramatic situations (<https://iiit.org/en/home>). This also means that intervention and motivation may support one's transformation on the trajectory.

(ethnocentric) to "all of us" (worldly) — a good example of the unfolding waves of consciousness (p. 34).

Our model takes this a step further by emphasizing the "beyond us" state as a higher goal in the developmental trajectory. A person's understanding of *tawhid* and the depth of its manifestation may, in fact, go through a developmental process from the lowest state of consciousness (the tribal and egocentric) to the highest one in the model (the holistic) and beyond to incorporate a universal consciousness in which the only distinction with clear boundaries is that between the Creator and the creation.

The values, as well as the constructs that may be operationalized into competencies, examined in our empirical study have educational implications for interventions in curriculum and pedagogy, as well as in policies that utilize education as a way to capitalize on a person's development potential to reach higher states, such as the holistic (defined in the Spiral Dynamic model as the state of transpersonal living where common goals and systems are synergized) and *tawhid*. In this process, educational programs that infuse the values included in the study, such as empathy and forgiveness, and a values-based approach into education could make a difference for the next generation of Muslim youth.

The results of our study show a high correlation between the values and the various states of the human development model that we adapted. The hope is that over the coming few years, we will accumulate enough knowledge about the values and how they are expressed in the countries participating in the study and share that (including the data sets publically on our website and other repositories). Our unique contribution is providing accurate, high quality and authentic knowledge grounded in universal Islamic values as infused in the next generation's growth and development.

Finally, the accumulated wisdom gathered from AEMS' various projects and studies can be an asset for interventions and larger global initiatives, such as the United Nations Global Citizenship agenda (<https://unchronicle.un.org/issue/global-citizenship>), by demonstrating how a value system grounded in the developmental approach can inform and enrich the various programs based on this UN initiative and others. 

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THE AEMS' INITIATIVE ARGUES THAT VALUES ARE CRITICAL FOR THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY AND, AS A RESULT, SHOULD BE PART OF ANY REFORM EFFORT, ESPECIALLY WHEN 84 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION CLAIMS A RELIGION AND/OR A SPIRITUAL BELIEF SYSTEM ([HTTPS://WWW.PEWFORUM.ORG/2012/12/18/GLOBAL-RELIGIOUS-LANDSCAPE-EXEC](https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec)).

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To reflect the above approach, we adopted the Spiral Dynamics model (Beck & Cowan, 2006) (<https://journal.fi/ar/article/view/67574/27870>) of human development as a basis for infusing values such as empathy, gratitude and forgiveness in education. To the original model, which contains eight states of consciousness, we added a ninth one — one that highlights *tawhid* (God's oneness) as the highest state of being.

The developmental trajectory begins with the most basic form of existence, which places survival needs and belonging to the immediate group (the clan and the tribe) at the center of growth. This egocentric state continues in an increasing order of magnitude until it reaches the *worldly* state, defined as one's arrival at an inclusive state of existence. In other words, bonding and human-to-human empathy are at the center of being.

For us, *worldly* was inappropriate because *tawhid* is the central premise of any Muslim's being and belief systems (Aslan, 2011) (<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/5837>). In addition, doing so permitted

In our study, we define *tawhid* as the state of consciousness in which Oneness with God and others is achieved. This working definition forms part of the model, and any theological interpretation of it is beyond the scope of our research. We take this approach because a simple view of the concept may be taken in the wrong direction. For example, some of those who believe in *tawhid* are confident that their beliefs are superior to others, even though a more in-depth view reveals a more complex revelation of God's Oneness that applies to monotheism in general and to the unity of all of God's creations.

Our view is based on those of previous Islamic philosophers and scholars who elaborated on *tawhid* to not only describe God as the Creator, but also as the universal power that enables humans and creatures to live in harmony with self, others and their surroundings. In our approach, the *tawhid* state may be the ultimate one for devout Muslims. But it is not exclusive to them, for it is also relevant for individuals from other religions and convictions as well. This model is aligned with Wilber's articulation (2007) (<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/190452/the-integral-vision-by-ken-wilber>) that moral development tends to move from "me" (egocentric) to "us"