

# Inclusive Tawhid as an Epistemology of Islamic Education

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## Abstract

This research examines the concept of inclusive tawhid not merely as a theological doctrine but as a basic epistemology in Islamic education that encourages reflective awareness and pluralistic values. By integrating the philosophical-anthropological dimensions of humans as 'abd Allah and khalifah fī al-ardh, inclusive tawhid views humans as unfinished beings who need mujahadah, spiritual and intellectual struggle through a meaningful educational process. Amid global challenges such as Islamophobia, ideological polarization, and identity crisis in a multicultural society, inclusive tawhid offers a transformative education model that builds solidarity based on universal spirituality, not doctrinal uniformity. This research uses an exploratory qualitative approach with a comprehensive literature study of scientific publications related to inclusive tawhid-based Islamic education. Data were collected from accredited journal articles, academic books, and public secondary sources, then thematically analyzed to identify patterns, values, and philosophical foundations in the discourse of inclusive Islamic education. The results show that inclusive tawhid is a strong epistemological basis for reconstructing a more dialogic, tolerant, and humanistic Islamic education paradigm. In addition, this study emphasizes the urgency of reforming the national curriculum to be more sensitive to religious and cultural plurality and to get out of the normative-liberal and conservative-literal dichotomy. This study provides a theoretical contribution to the philosophy of Islamic education and a strategic foundation for curriculum development based on universal ethical and spiritual values.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Tawhid; Theological Consciousness; Educational Epistemology

## Introduction

Clashes between civilizations often stem from cultural and ideological tensions, where religious teachings usually serve as a motive that triggers conflict.<sup>1</sup> Ian G. Barbour, as quoted by Amin Abdullah, outlines the distinctive characteristics of religious conflict: *First*, the tendency to prioritize loyalty to one's group is extreme. *Second*, there is personal *involvement* (*involvement*) and appreciation that is so thick and concentrated on theological teachings that are believed to be accurate. *Third*, expressing feelings and thoughts using the actor's language rather than an observer's.<sup>2</sup> This pattern reinforces social barriers and hinders the formation of understanding between religious communities.

In this context, the urgency of internalizing pluralistic values early in the education system cannot be ignored. Education needs to accustom students to living in diversity and understanding that differences are an inevitable social reality and part of *Sunnatullah* or divine law.<sup>3</sup> Alex R. Rodger, in a view quoted by Sumartana, asserts that religious education is not only to strengthen orthodoxy of faith but also to equip individuals in building interfaith understanding.<sup>4</sup>

As a follow-up to the importance of pluralistic education, the Islamic concept of *tauhid* (monotheism) needs to be developed towards an inclusive theology. In this framework, *tauhid* is a bridge of religious awareness that affirms belief in One God and opens up space for openness and dialogue with other religious adherents. Thus, *tauhid* can become the basis for building tolerance and harmony among religious communities.

Furthermore, *tauhid* is not only dogmatic but also has epistemological power that can encourage the advancement of civilization. Understood progressively, *tauhid* becomes a transformative force that combines reason (*fikr*) and spirituality (*zikir*) in a unified paradigm of thinking. In this context, religion is a blessing for

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<sup>1</sup> H A R Tillar, "Multiculturalism: Future Global Challenges in the Transformation of National Education" (2022).

<sup>2</sup> M Amin Abdullah, *Religious Studies: Normativity or Historicity?* (Student Library, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Lihat QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13 dan Ar-Rum [30]:22 sebagai dasar normatif pluralitas dalam Al-Qur'an.

<sup>4</sup> PLURALISM CONFLICT, "Pluralism, Conflict, and Religious Education in Indonesia" (Interfidei, 2001).

the universe (*rahmatan lil'alam*). This teaching remains steadfast to the Qur'an and Sunnah but accepts the realities and challenges of modernity.<sup>5</sup> A moderate approach to *tauhid* allows people to avoid two extremes: liberalism, which is all about freedom, and literal fundamentalism, which is rigid.<sup>6</sup>

In Islamic education, the concept of *tauhid* as an epistemological basis is becoming increasingly urgent, especially in an increasingly pluralistic society.<sup>7</sup> Religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity often become potential sources of conflict that require an inclusive approach.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, *tauhid*-based education that synergizes the intellectual and spiritual dimensions in a balanced manner is a primary need for shaping reflective and open-minded Muslims who embrace diversity.<sup>9</sup>

Several previous studies have explored the relationship between tawhid and inclusive Islamic education. Saffari, in his article Tawhid Paradigm and an Inclusive Concept of Liberative Struggle proposes a tawhid approach that liberates and integrates universal human values in social struggles, but has not systematically outlined its application in the context of Islamic education institutions.<sup>10</sup> Mahmud and Ilyas emphasize the role of tawhid in tolerance education for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Still, their discussion is more normative and has a less developed epistemology of tawhid-based education.<sup>11</sup> Qodir, in his study of Imam Zarkasyi's thought, introduces the Tawhidic Worldview paradigm as the basis for developing inclusive Islamic education, but focuses more on institutional narratives and does not discuss aspects of students' theological awareness in depth.<sup>12</sup> Sahin raises the convergence of Islamic values and

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<sup>5</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Islam Sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, Dan Etika* (Teraju, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Shabri Shaleh Anwar, *Philosophy of Contemporary Da'wah* (PT. Indragiri Dot Com, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Eka Prasetawati and Habib Shulton Asnawi, "Insight of Islam Nusantara; Pribumization of Local Wisdom Values in Indonesia," *FIKRI: Journal of Religious, Social and Cultural Studies* 3, no. 1 (2018): 219-258.

<sup>8</sup> Khoirunni'm Linda, "THE CONCEPT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION ACCORDING TO JALALUDIN RAKHMAT IN THE BOOK OF EDUCATIONAL THEOLOGY" (UNDARIS, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> PLURALISM, "Pluralism, Conflict, and Religious Education in Indonesia."

<sup>10</sup> Siavash Saffari, "Tawhid Paradigm and an Inclusive Concept of Liberative Struggle," *Religions* 14, no. 9 (2023): 1088.

<sup>11</sup> Abdullah Mahmud and Hamim Ilyas, "Islam and Tolerance Education for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," *Profetika: Jurnal Studi Islam* 25, no. 02 (2024): 387-404.

<sup>12</sup> Abdul Qodir, "The Concept of Human Unity and Islamic Inclusive Education: A Study of KH. Imam Zarkasyi's Thought in Social Change (Similarity)," 2020.

secularism in studying Islamic education, mentioning tawhid as an ethical framework but not formulating an explicit epistemological framework.<sup>13</sup>

Most studies still work on the issue of inclusivism in Islamic education from a value or institutional perspective, not yet from an educational epistemological approach rooted in the concept of tawhid. This indicates a theoretical and methodological gap that has not been filled in the existing literature.

This research occupies an unexplored space by constructing inclusive tawhid not just as a normative principle but as an epistemological framework for Islamic education. This approach combines theological consciousness with the praxis orientation of fitrah-based pluralistic education. Unlike previous studies that mainly discuss the value or ethics of tawhid in the social or pedagogical realm, this research formulates inclusive tawhid as the foundation of ways of knowing that are integrated into the overall process of Islamic education at the level of curriculum, teacher-student relations, and orientation of educational goals. Thus, this article offers a new contribution to building an Islamic education paradigm that is not only adaptive to plurality but also originates from the transcendental essence of Islam itself.

### **Research Methodology**

This research uses an exploratory approach through literature studies from various journals on inclusive tawhid-based Islamic education patterns.<sup>14</sup> Explorative research was chosen to provide an initial speculative or theoretical view of this subject, namely the pattern of Islamic education based on inclusive tawhid. The purpose of this research is to study further the process of internalizing theological awareness for each student at school to understand the essential holy nature (*fitrah*) that is already embedded in the heart of every human being. This approach allowed for adaptation and became the basis for additional studies with the investigated sources, including public secondary data, information from other research results, observations of the object of study, and views on the pattern of Islamic education based on inclusive tawhid.

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<sup>13</sup> Abdullah Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religions* 9, no. 11 (2018): 335.

<sup>14</sup> Bambang Mudjiyanto, "Exploratory Communication Research Type," *Journal of communication and media studies* 22, no. 1 (2018): 65-74.

The leading information for this research was gathered from library data and published journal articles in the context of inclusive tawhid-based Islamic education patterns. This data was collected, read, and processed to create a deep understanding of the topic and the importance of theological awareness for every student in the school. The data collection process began with identifying and selecting key literature relevant to the research topic. The literature included books, scholarly journals, articles, and other documents pertinent to Islamic education and inclusive tawhid. Each selected source was analyzed to identify key themes, patterns, and relationships relevant to the research objectives. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative analysis techniques. First, the collected data was reduced by sorting out relevant and essential information. This process involved organizing and categorizing the data to create abstractions that could be used for further analysis. The data was then presented as organized descriptive narratives, tables, or matrices to facilitate understanding and additional study. The presentation of this data was designed to display the main patterns and themes found in the literature.

### **Islamic education reform towards inclusive tawhid**

Dr Harun Nasution says renewal can be carried out without abandoning religion. What needs to be abandoned in renewal is a tradition contrary to the times. Islam does not prevent renewal as long as it does not violate the provisions brought by revelation.<sup>15</sup> Islamic education must not only *survive* amid increasingly sharp and intense global competition but also hope to be able to appear at the forefront.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, Islamic education needs to develop a dual approach strategy to combine short-term situational approaches with long-term conceptual approaches. This is because Islamic education is an effort to prepare Muslims to face and answer the demands of life and the development of the times humanely.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the relationship between Islamic education efforts and life and challenges must be a principal relationship, not an incidental and incomplete one.

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<sup>15</sup> Harun Nasution, "Reform in Islam: History of Thought and Movement" (1982).

<sup>16</sup> Abd Haris, *ETIKA HAMKA; Construction of Rational-Religious Based Ethics* (Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> H Abuddin Nata, *Islamic Education Reform in Indonesia* (Prenada Media, 2019).

Thus, objective and creative approaches and innovations are needed to create educational efforts based on students' interests, Islamic society, and humanity.<sup>18</sup>

So far, Islamic education today is arguably experiencing an *intellectual deadlock*. The indications are the lack of renewal efforts in Islamic teaching, the practice of Islamic education so far still maintains an old culture that does not do much creative, innovative and critical thinking on actual issues, learning models that still emphasize the *verbalistic intellectualism* approach and override the urgency of *interactive education* and communication between teachers and students, the orientation of Islamic education focuses more on the formation of people as Abdul (servants) rather than on their faith as khalifa on earth.<sup>19</sup>

Mohammad Abduh, as quoted by Syamsul Nizar, says that good education is education that, in the process, can develop the entire nature of students, especially their religious beliefs. With this fitrah, students will be able to develop rational thinking power. Through the nature of religion, the pillars of goodness will be embedded in students, who are then implicated in all their life activities. In this perspective, the main task of religious education is to create a learner with a complete personality (*Insan Kamil*).<sup>20</sup>

The spirit of tawhid as an approach to Islamic education reform needs to be actualized more concretely in its intensive involvement with the dynamics of culture and change. Because education is part of the dynamics of change in people's lives, education must be able to be part of an effort to make itself a *rahmatan li al-alam*, which brings the welfare of human life and all that exists in the universe.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the *monoculture-normative-dichotomic* approach in Islamic education fundamentally opposes the vision of inclusive theology.

According to Fazlur Rahman, Islamic reform in any form oriented towards realizing original and modern Islam must start with education. Islamic education

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<sup>18</sup> Agus Salim, "Curriculum in the Perspective of Islamic Education Philosophy," *EduTech: Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>19</sup> H Abuddin Nata, *History of Islamic Education* (Kencana, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Samsul Nizar, "History of Islamic Education: Tracing the History of Education from the Prophet's Era to Indonesia," (*No Title*) (2007).

<sup>21</sup> Musa Asy'arie and Sunnah of the Prophet in Thinking, "Yogyakarta: LESFI," *Islamic Philosophy of Culture* 157 (1999).

must be made one of the central themes of the agenda for the reconstruction of thought in the future.<sup>22</sup> This is because the pulsating "heart" pumps the spirit of renewal into all parts of the body of the building of Islamic thought, so that it can grow and develop dynamically and progressively. In other words, the progress of Muslims will be difficult to realize if it is not supported by educational progress.

### **Reconstruction of Islamic education**

Islamic education must develop a dual approach strategy to combine short-term situational approaches with long-term conceptual ones. This is because Islamic education is an effort to prepare Muslims to face and answer the demands of life and the development of the times humanely.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the relationship between Islamic education efforts and life and challenges must be partial, not incidental, and incomplete. Herein lies the importance of a revamping effort in the education system.

Ramayulis argues that at this time, the projective and innovative ability of all Islamic education personnel is required to capture the trends that will occur in the future based on the conditions and situations in society today. Therefore, Islamic education must be reformed, restructured, and innovated to adapt to the dynamics of society and meet the demands and needs of the free market era.<sup>24</sup>

Ramayulis further explained five things that must be considered when facing the free market: First, Islamic educational institutions must improve competitiveness in earnest and planned ways so that they are worthy of competing in international relations. *Second*, Islamic educational institutions offer a variety of study programs. Islamic academic institutions must strengthen critical functions and be *future-oriented*. *Third*, Islamic educational institutions must be accountable.

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<sup>22</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, vol. 15 (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Esei-Esei Muslim Intellectuals and Islamic Education* (Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Haji Ramayulis, "Science of Islamic Education" (2004).

*Fourth, Islamic educational institutions must carry out continuous and sustainable evaluation to ensure quality assurance.*<sup>25</sup>

Efforts to reform and develop the Islamic education system have not been maximized or comprehensive. Because most of the Islamic education system has not been managed professionally. Most Islamic educational institutions still work with the spirit of "sincerity" so that nothing essential happens in Islamic education.

Renewal, which contains thoughts, flows, movements, and efforts to change old understandings, customs, institutions and so on, so that all of them can be adjusted to new opinions and conditions arising from the goals of modern science and technology, is essential for societal progress and adaptation in a rapidly evolving world. Modernization or renewal also means shifting the attitudes and mentality of citizens of society to live by the demands of today's society. Modernization is the process of adjusting Islamic education to the progress of the times.<sup>26</sup>

The Dutch colonials initially introduced the modernization of Indonesian Islamic education in the early 19th century. The Dutch colonials implemented the program by establishing *Volkshoolen*, folk schools, or village schools (Nagari) with a 3-year learning period in several places in Indonesia since the 1870s. In 1871, there were 263 such primary schools with about 16,606 students, and by 1892, this had increased to 515 schools with about 52,685 students.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, Islamic education changes or modernization came from Muslim reformers or modernists. The Muslim reformist movement, which gained momentum during the 20th century, argued that reform of the Islamic education system was needed to address the challenges of colonialism and Christian expansion. The response of traditional Islamic education systems such as *surau* (Minangkabau) and *Pesantren* (Java) to the modernization of Islamic education,

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<sup>25</sup> Sulistri Sulistri, "Model and Problems of Islamic Education According to Azyumardi Azra," *Edugama: Journal of Education and Social Religion* 10, no. 1 (2024): 528-547.

<sup>26</sup> Aisyah Nursyarief, "Islamic Education in Indonesia in the Trajectory of History (Islamic Kingdom Perspective)," *Lentera Pendidikan: Journal of Tarbiyah and Keguruan Science* 17, no. 2 (2014): 256-271.

<sup>27</sup> Institute for Islamic and Community Studies (Jakarta, *History of Islamic Education in Indonesia: The History of Growth and Development* (RajaGrafindo Persada, 1995).



according to Karel Steenbrink, in the context of traditional surau is rejecting and imitating, in the context of pesantren, is rejecting while following.<sup>28</sup>

### **Inclusive tawhid orientation as an epistemology of Islamic education**

According to Fazlu Rahman, the essence of Islamic education is not to be equipped with the physical or quasi-physical teaching tools, such as the books taught or the external structure of education. However, it is what Rahman calls "Islamic intellectualism".<sup>29</sup> Islamic intellectualism is the growth of original and adequate Islamic thought, which must provide the criteria for judging the success or failure of an Islamic education system. The formulation of Islamic higher education thought must be based on the correct method of interpretation of the Quran.<sup>30</sup> Memorizing the Quran should be placed at the centre of Islamic intellectualism, the answer being that for Muslims, the Quran is the word of God revealed literally to the Prophet Muhammad, and perhaps no other religious document is held in such esteem.<sup>31</sup>

Ahmad Syafii Maarif stated that if Rahman's proposition can be accepted, then the new paradigm of Islamic education must still depart from a correct and intelligent understanding of the Holy Quran, which serves as guidance, enlightenment, and antidote, even though the possible risk is that some classical Islamic thought buildings must be rejected or questioned.<sup>32</sup> This method must be taken because all ideas about philosophy, theology, Sufism, legal systems, morals, education, socio-cultural, and politics must be influenced by the atmosphere of time and space.

Some of the principles of inclusive tawhid as an epistemology of Islamic education are:

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<sup>28</sup> Sofyan Rofi, *History of Islamic Education in Indonesia* (Deepublish, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Fazlur Rahman, "The Qur'ānic Solution of Pakistan's Educational Problems," *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 4 (1967): 315-326.

<sup>30</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, vol. 15, p. .

<sup>31</sup> Wardani Wardani, "Integration of Islamic Science and Philosophy: A Scientific Journal of Ushuluddin Sciences 18, no. 1 (2019): 1-18.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, "Fazlur Fazlur Rahman, The Qur'an and His Thought in Islam," *Indonesian Edition, Bandung: Pustaka* (1984).

## 1. Democratizing Islamic Education

Democratization is the process towards democracy. Meanwhile, according to Azra, democratization of education is the process towards democracy in the field of education. Thus, democratization of education is a process towards democracy in Islamic education.<sup>33</sup> The democratization of Islamic education aims at the final formation of a democratic, clean, moral, and civilized Indonesian society that adheres to the values of civilization.

According to Mely G. Tan's study, there are two realities: one is open based on academic ability and personal endeavour, while the other is closed based on class or descent.<sup>34</sup> The democratization of education will automatically favour the open principle so that every citizen enjoying education should no longer be based on certain tribes or groups with money and power. There are several characteristics of the democratization of Islamic education, namely:

- a. The existence of a dynamic curriculum that provides space for the realization of students' creativity has the spirit to make social changes.
- b. Changes in the paradigm of Islamic education, from authoritarian to democratic, closed to open, doctrinal to participatory.
- c. Synchronization between Islamic educational institutions and the community.<sup>35</sup>

## 2. Modernizing Islamic Education

The idea and program of modernizing Islamic education have their roots in the concept and program of modernizing Islamic thought and institutions as a whole. For him, the modernization of thought and institutions is a prerequisite for the revival of Muslims in modern times. Therefore, Islamic thought and institutions, including education, must be modernized and updated within the framework of modernity.<sup>36</sup> There is a need for modernization in all aspects of

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<sup>33</sup> Yeni Oktarina, "Azyumardi Azra's Thought: Demo of Crastization of Islamic Education," *Jakarta: UII Master Program in Islamic Studies* (2013).

<sup>34</sup> M G Tan, "Social Stratification: Who Gets What, When, How. In Pardede, S. (Ed) 70 Years of Dr. Tan," *IB Simatupang* (1990).

<sup>35</sup> Indonesian Community Counselors, "Kapita Selekta Pemasyarakatan" (2020).

<sup>36</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization Amidst the Challenges of the Third Millennium* (Prenada Media, 2019).

the life of the Muslim community, especially related to the concept of thought, which is the basis for all activities and ideas. The framework of thinking should undergo changes and adjustments over time. An open mind with broad and adaptive insights is needed to select trends and lifestyle developments.

Fazlur Rahman sees two directions in which reform efforts have gone so far. *First*, this reform has taken place almost entirely within the framework of traditional education itself. The phenomenon of pre-modernist reform has primarily driven this change. It has tended to "simplify" the traditional educational syllabus, which it sees as laden with "unnecessary extra" material such as medieval theology and certain branches of philosophy (such as logic). *Secondly*, various developments have taken place, which can be summarized by saying that they all reflect attempts to combine and integrate modern branches of knowledge with the old.<sup>37</sup>

With an open mind and insight, it can filter relevant developments and technological advances as a form of service to the public. The modernization program of Islamic education has its roots in the "Modernization" of Islamic thought and institutions as a whole. In other words, the modernization of Islamic education cannot be separated from the ideas and programs of Islamic modernization. The basic framework behind the modernization of Islam as a whole is that the modernization of Islamic thought and institutions is a prerequisite for the revival of Muslims in modern times.<sup>38</sup>

According to Ibn Taimiyah, renewal in Islam generally arises because of *the* culture of khurafat among Muslims. *Second*, ignorance or the closing of the door to ijtihad is considered to have dumbed down Muslims. *Third*, the disunity of Muslims makes it challenging to build and advance. *Fourth*, contact between the West and Islam has made Muslims aware of the decline.<sup>39</sup> As a result of efforts to reform Islamic education to catch up with the shortcomings and lag

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<sup>37</sup> Fauzi Muhammad, Adrianus Chatib, and Fuad Rahman, "The Socio-Historical Criticism Toward Sunnah and Ijma'In Fazlur Rahman Perspective," *INNOVATIO: Journal for Religious Innovations Studies* 21, no. 2 (2021): 85-98.

<sup>38</sup> Azumardi Azra, "Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization Towards the New Millennium (Jakarta). Logos Discourse of Science," *2nd Cet.* (2000).

<sup>39</sup> Abuddin Nata, *History of Islamic Education: The* (Rajagrafindo, 2004).

behind the Western world in all aspects of life, there is a tendency towards dualism in the Islamic education system. Modern educational efforts are oriented towards three patterns of thought (pure Islam, Western, and nationalism), which take the pattern of the Western education system by adjusting to Islam and national interests.

## **Conclusion**

Inclusive tawhid is not just a theological doctrine but an existential awareness that invites individuals to recognize and appreciate diversity as part of God's will (Sunnatullah). In the epistemological framework of Islamic education, inclusive tawhid functions as a starting point that connects humans' philosophical and anthropological dimensions as 'abd Allah (servants of God) and khalīfah fī al-ardh (leaders on earth). This view realizes that humanity is an unfinished project (unfinished being), which requires spiritual and intellectual struggle (mujahadah) through a meaningful educational process.

In this context, Islamic education does not merely instill dogma but forms a reflective consciousness that appreciates the value of openness, tolerance, and harmony in diversity. This is becoming increasingly relevant amid increasing global phenomena such as Islamophobia, ideological polarization, and identity crises in multicultural societies. Inclusive tawhid challenges exclusivism by offering a transformative approach: building solidarity through universal spiritual commonalities, not just doctrinal uniformity.

Furthermore, implementing inclusive tawhid epistemology in education requires adjustments to the national curriculum sensitive to religious and cultural pluralism. The current curriculum challenge is often trapped in a normative-liberal or conservative-literal dichotomy without a national curriculum sensitive to religious and cultural pluralism.

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