



HAMKA'S AND ZA'ABA'S EDUCATIONAL INSIGHTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This paper explores the educational philosophies of two renowned Malay-Muslim scholars, Za'ba (Zainal Abidin Ahmad, d. 1973) and Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, d. 1981). The aim is to study on the similarities and differences in their thought on education. Using content analysis and comparative study, this research examines their ideas as presented in their respective works. Hamka's educational philosophy is analyzed through his writings, *Falsafah Hidup*, *Lembaga Budi*, and *Lembaga Hidup*, while Za'ba's ideas are drawn from *Jalan Keselamatan bagi Orang-Orang Melayu*, *Kemiskinan Melayu*, and other related texts. The result shows that both scholars emphasized the holistic development of individuals, combining intellectual, physical, and spiritual excellence. Hamka focused on character building to nurture individuals capable of contributing positively to society, while Za'ba emphasized education as a tool for uplifting the Malay community. The paper also highlights their perspectives on integrating Western education with Islamic teachings, their preferred teaching and learning methods, and their approaches to curriculum development. Thus, Hamka's emphasis on individuality character education highlights the importance of personalised learning, critical thinking, and holistic development in modern curricula. Za'ba's focus on skill-based education and Islamic values highlights the need for fair and culturally relevant education policies.

Keywords: Education, Hamka, Malay world, Za'ba.

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INTRODUCTION

مقدمة

In the field of Malay intellectual history, the works of Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah) and Za'aba (Zainal Abidin Ahmad) stand as seminal contributions to educational thought, offering unique perspectives on the role of education in shaping individual and communal identity within the Malay-Muslim cultural context.

The primary goal of this research is to compare and contrast the educational philosophies of Hamka and Za'aba, with a focus on the following topics: Firstly, their viewpoints on the value of education and its contribution to individual and community development. Secondly, their preferred educational procedures include strategies for teaching, learning, and language. In addition, their philosophies cover both spiritual and secular aspects of education. Lastly, their findings have potential applicability and relevance to present educational challenges in Malay-Muslim countries.

While the educational philosophies of Hamka and Za'ba have been individually studied, there is limited comparative analysis of their thoughts on education within the context of Malay

intellectual history. Little attention has been given to study their educational thoughts to address modern educational challenges, such as the integration of spiritual and secular education or the socio-cultural empowerment. Furthermore, their ideas that can guide contemporary educational reforms in Malay-Muslim societies grappling with modernity and tradition should also be discussed.

Hamka, an Indonesian scholar, religious leader, and literary personality, highlighted the necessity of combining spiritual and intellectual education to develop well-rounded individuals. His thought combined traditional Islamic principles with an openness to secular knowledge, calling for a holistic approach to learning that transcends conventional borders.

Hamka categorises educational institutions into formal and informal types. He emphasises that formal institutions serve as essential environments for character development, helping students adapt to societal norms. He envisions schools, particularly boarding schools, as spaces where spirituality and moral values are prioritized alongside academic learning. A capable leader is crucial in guiding students, ensuring they understand the significance of religion, character, and the belief in a higher power (Hamka, 1941).

In contrast, informal education, such as that provided by families, complements formal schooling. Hamka highlights the critical partnership between parents and teachers in nurturing a child's development, underscoring that parents bear the primary responsibility for their children's education, tailored to their individual capabilities. He regards teachers as unsung heroes whose dedication is fundamental to effective education (Hamka, 1941).

Hamka sets forth specific criteria for educators, advocating for their obedience to Allah, the need to model good behaviour, and the pursuit of holistic knowledge beyond mere subject expertise. He stresses the importance of ethical conduct and the necessity for teachers to encourage students' independent thinking, adapting their teaching to suit each student's context and intellectual growth. Additionally, he emphasises the importance of students maintaining healthy habits, including proper nutrition and the cultivation of good principles (Hamka, 1941).

Hamka also outlines the responsibilities of students, urging them to persevere in their quest for knowledge despite challenges. He believes that age should not hinder one's pursuit of learning and that students should embody noble character reflective of their knowledge level. Importantly, he posits that knowledge acquisition extends beyond formal education, encompassing the wisdom gained from life experiences and interactions (Hamka, 1941).

These reasons open up the holistic philosophy of Hamka concerning education, which is that both formal and informal settings must play an important role in the development of all-around or holistic character. His philosophy points to the interconnectedness of family, community, and educators in times of building character and knowledge. The interconnectedness requires an enabling environment that gives priority to moral integrity and lifelong learning. This situation is remarkably applicable today, as it also postulates that cooperation must be developed among all parties concerned in education in training people to be resilient and morally founded.

While Hamka's concept of education concerns refining characters of a person to be a good person, obedient servant to Allah and be able to contribute to the society. His concept of education rooted in the epistemology of knowledge in Islam. Therefore, his discourse on education addressed comprehensive elements in education including the akhlaq or ethical concerns.

Za'aba, a prominent Malaysian linguist, writer, and social thinker, focused primarily on education as a tool for personal empowerment, social upliftment, and cultural preservation. His work in standardizing and modernizing the Malay language reflects his belief in education as an avenue for advancing Malay society and resisting colonial influence.

Za'ba, also known as Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, was a well-known Malay linguist and writer who worked tirelessly to promote and improve the Malay language (AH Omar 2012). Born on September 16, 1895, in Negeri Sembilan, Za'ba was schooled in both Islamic and secular topics, demonstrating an early talent for learning (Kusetiawan, 2024; Rosnani Hashim, 2010).

He began writing professionally in 1916 with a piece in *Utusan Melayu* that skilfully integrated language, literature, and social themes (SZ Isa & CIH Salleh, 2014). Throughout his career, Za'ba wrote several notable works, including *Umbi Kemajuan* (1932) and *Perangai Bergantung pada Diri Sendiri*, which are still relevant today. His legacy includes his efforts to standardise the Malay language, contributions to Malay literature, and honorary recognition as 'Pendeta' and later Tan Sri (Amir, A. N., 2021; Rosnani Hashim, 2010).

Za'ba spent his years of life calling the Malay race to change their fate through education. He also struggled to uphold the Malay language to a higher place than it was. Za'ba also wanted to transform the educational system for the Malays that was left behind during the colonial years.

The study emphasizes their practical relevance to current educational challenges. It bridges the gap between the spiritual and secular dimensions of education through Hamka's holistic approach to character-building and lifelong learning. Simultaneously, it also highlights Za'ba's focus on education as a tool for societal upliftment. By synthesizing these perspectives, the research provides practical insights into creating comprehensive educational policies. The policies are vital to address the specific needs of Malay-Muslim societies today.

METHOD

منهج

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach, using content analysis and library research (Schaefer, 2016; (Astuti et al., 2022). This study aims to compare and contrast Za'ba and Hamka's educational philosophies by examining their writings and relevant research.

Thematic analysis process (Dawadi, 2020) which is the educational philosophies of Hamka and Za'ba were first investigated for recurring patterns and essential subjects using thematic coding. Each text was carefully reviewed and documented, with a focus on their perspectives on curricular content, pedagogical approaches, educational goals, and the integration of secular and Islamic ideals. Furthermore, essential issues were deduced inductively by categorizing data into overarching themes such as socioeconomic empowerment, character development, and holistic education. Iterative cross-text comparison helped to clarify the concepts.

Furthermore, the rationale for text selection is based on source texts, specifically Hamka's works (*Falsafah Hidup*, *Lembaga Budi*, and *Lembaga Hidup*), which express his entire ideas on moral, intellectual, and spiritual development. Similarly, Za'ba's publications (*Jalan Keselamatan bagi Orang-Orang Melayu* and *Kemiskinan Melayu*) were chosen because they capture his educational philosophy, which emphasizes empowerment and cultural identity.

Academic critiques and historical studies were included to contextualize their ideas within their socio-historical milieu and to validate the interpretation of their philosophies. Texts were

chosen based on their relevance to addressing the research objectives, their representation of each scholar's central educational philosophies, and their availability in authentic, accessible formats.

Last but not least, this study will look at the comparative Framework. A between-subjects technique was employed to investigate each scholar's thoughts separately. Their ideas were then compared to uncover commonalities and differences in themes, notably in their efforts to merging Islamic and secular educational objectives.

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah): Works analyzed include Tafsir Al-Azhar, his religious and philosophical essays, and selected novels that reveal his views on morality, education, and intellectual development.

Za'aba (Zainal Abidin Ahmad) discusses language, education, and social empowerment in his self-help books, cultural observations, and Malay grammar essays.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to authentically depict Hamka and Za'aba's early educational perspectives by utilizing primary sources. Furthermore, secondary sources, such as critical reviews and biographical publications, offer insight on their lives and achievements.

Procedure and Data Collection:

Primary Texts: The central focus of this research is the collection and review of primary texts written by Hamka and Za'aba, particularly those with explicit pedagogical and philosophical substance. Sources were acquired from libraries, online archives, and academic databases to guarantee that their work was widely accessible.

Secondary Sources: Academic critiques, biographies, and historical studies of both ideologies were used to gain a deeper understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts that shaped their educational philosophies.

Ethical considerations

Because this study is based on previously published papers and does not include direct interaction with human subjects, no formal ethical approval was necessary. Care was taken to authentically depict both thinkers' points of view while respecting their intellectual heritage and avoiding interpretative prejudice.

The study's rigorous approach, which includes ethical considerations and cross-referencing multiple translations and interpretations, ensures the accuracy and preservation of the original meaning of the texts. Ethical issues are reduced in this study because it only uses previously published papers, avoiding the use of human participants. In conclusion, this comprehensive method ensures a thorough examination of Hamka's and Za'aba's educational philosophies, with findings applicable to current educational issues in Malay-Muslim countries.

RESULT | نتائج

Hamka's Concept of Education

Hamka's philosophy of education is essentially Islamic in nature. It is aiming at the happiness of human life in this world and in the hereafter. Hamka's major works, amongst which are Lembaga Hidup (1941), Falsafah Hidup (1940), and Lembaga Budi (1939), represent a pattern of education that is firmly rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Following the matter, knowledge

serves as the means to achieve Allah's pleasure (Hamka, 1941). He separates teaching from education by embracing a more holistic approach toward the refinement of character and independence (Hamka, 1941).

He encourages children to become productive citizens. However, at the same time, children are taught to be compassionate humans with a great sense of humanity. Hamka underlines moderation, courage, and honesty as central values in education. He states that children must be raised in accordance with their capabilities and according to the needs of the times in which they live. This multi-faceted approach shows that the freedom in childhood must be guided (Hamka, 1940). Apart from that, good values are instilled to prepare the child for later negotiation through life's complexities and challenges with a view to raising a generation constructively helpful for an independent nation.

Hamka's thought in education reveals his profound understanding of the interaction between personal development and societal progress. His thoughts reflect that education should transfer not only knowledge but also inculcate moral integrity and strength to face adversity.

Hamka's Thoughts on the Ideal Educational Institutions

Hamka categorises educational institutions into formal and informal types. He emphasises that formal institutions serve as essential environments for character development, helping students adapt to societal norms. He envisions schools, particularly boarding schools, as spaces where spirituality and moral values are prioritized alongside academic learning. A capable leader is crucial in guiding students, ensuring they understand the significance of religion, character, and the belief in a higher power (Hamka, 1941).

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be resilient and morally founded.

Za'ba's Concept of Education

Za'ba's target viewers were Malays from all walks of life, he serves as the foundation for Malays' religious education, and he also believes in blending religious and secular education (SZ Isa & CIH Salleh, 2014). According to Za'ba, the goal of education is illumination and upliftment. Education should prepare pupils to overcome life's obstacles, become dignified individuals, and achieve success in this world and the next (Rosnani Hashim, 2010).

Aside from that, he feels that women should be treated equally when it comes to receiving a proper education. Za'ba mentions that knowledge may help Malays overcome backwardness, poverty, and discrimination. As a result, Za'ba was teaching the masses of his time to value education in order to improve their life (Rosnani Hashim, 2010).

Furthermore, za'ba had a comprehensive outlook on educating the Malays. If the Malays are always stuck, it is because they lack the high qualifications required to advance (Za'ba, 1927). The first step towards advancement is to prioritise education (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017). Aside from academic achievements, knowledge of vocational skills is critical for a nation's advancement and success (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017).

Following that, Za'ba believes that vocational schools and trade may provide Malay young with a variety of skills that will prepare them to be self-employed. Za'ba regards skilled craftsmen as an essential component of civilization's growth (Rosnani Hashim, 2010).

Moreover, he encourages the government to offer the necessary schools and education to train Malay adolescents (SZ Isa & CIH Salleh, 2014). Za'ba frequently displays anger with Malays' educational shortcomings. He accuses the British administration of purposefully pushing the Malays backwards (A Mohd Nawang, 1995). Aside from that, he advises Malay monarchs to take the initiative to improve Malay education. As a result, he advocates for improved education in order for Malays to achieve the true goal of education, which is to enlighten minds (Rosnani Hashim, 2010).

A government's tasks include supporting its people, providing education, stabilising the economy, and managing a good society (Abdullah, 1997). During British colonisation, the Malays experienced difficulties due to their limited access to education (G Shanmugavelu et al, 2020). The government should offer scholarship aid to the people. People would be able to obtain a suitable education with the help of scholarships. As a result, educated individuals will eventually assist the government (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017).

In addition, Za'ba urged mastery of Islamic knowledge. According to Za'ba, religious teachers should study essential Islamic doctrines like exegesis, hadith, law, and history. (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017). Based on this idea, Za'ba argues that Malays should acquire and understand Islamic subjects because they are the essential and cornerstone of existence (Hashim, Rosnani, 2010).

Za'ba's next notion is to use intellectual discourse as one method of seeking information (Haslina Haroon, 2024). Za'ba says that there is intellectual instruction and discourse among the Malay people. (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017; Za'ba, 1927)

Following that, proper education should cover commerce, trading, exchange, manufacturing, agriculture, and other entrepreneurial and productive activities. (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017; Za'ba, 1927). Aside from that, Za'ba suggests six key attributes that can help

Malays progress in a variety of areas. These attributes should be incorporated into Malaysia's school system. The proposed attributes are self-reliance, perseverance, responsibility, duty, punctuality, industry, self-sacrifice, and civic spirit. All of these proposed characteristics are critical for alleviating poverty in the Malay community (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017; Za'ba, 1927).

The attributes are not only to serve oneself, but also to benefit families, society, and the motherland. If there is no education, the Malays will remain in their current status for generations to come (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017; Za'ba, 1927). Another important concept for sustaining education in Malaysia among Malays is cooperation (Shuang Zhao & Kenny S.L. Cheah, 2023). The cooperative factor could be used in education to bring Malays together and assist them thrive in the future (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017). In addition, education has the potential to eradicate poverty. (EA Rozali & MR Othman, 2017; Za'ba, 1927).

Za'ba's Thought on the Ideal Institution for Education and the Curriculum

Za'ba emphasises the importance of school infrastructure, including textbooks, learning materials, teacher wages, curriculum, administration, and school equipment (Rosnani Hashim 2010). Za'ba also discusses the accessibility of schools. He mentions that the resources should be able to help kids grow their thoughts and knowledge. Za'ba argued that current teaching texts about legendary tales influenced the servant attitude. (Rosnani Hashim 2010).

Za'ba was ahead of his time when he proposed the building of a Malay and Islamic university. His vision for this Malay university is one that combines fardh 'ayn (religious science) and fardh kifayah (academic sciences). (Rosnani Hashim, 2010).

DISCUSSION

مناقشة

During the 7th International Seminar on Philosophy, Civilisation, Ethics, and Islamic Heritage (i-STET) 2024, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah posed a question about the differences in educational thoughts between Za'ba and Hamka. In response, it was highlighted that Za'ba's educational philosophy centres on the Malay community, focusing on developing their identity while prioritising socio-economic progress. He aimed to lift the Malays out of poverty through practical skills and self-reliance. During the British colonial era, Malay vernacular schools were limited to four years of secular education. (Shanmugavelu et al., 2020).

This restrictive educational policy confined Malays to basic roles in the rural economy, stifling their ambitions and preventing intellectual growth, which influenced their actions even post-independence. Conversely, Hamka's educational philosophy, shaped by the less restrictive Dutch colonial policies in Indonesia, emphasised moral and spiritual development. While acknowledging the discriminatory nature of Dutch education, he points out that it still provided Indonesians with opportunities through vocational and higher educational institutions (Thang et al., 2024).

Hamka views education as a means to cultivate akhlaq (good character) and foster individuals who contribute positively to society. His approach transcends racial or national identity, focusing instead on the universal Muslim identity and the development of individuals into functional members of society. In summary, while Za'ba concentrates on practical education to empower the Malay community in overcoming socio-economic challenges, Hamka emphasises holistic education aimed at moral and spiritual growth, fostering a strong Muslim identity that benefits society as a whole. Za'ba's and Hamka's philosophies provide valuable frameworks for

addressing modern challenges in the education of Malay-Muslims, particularly in integrating Islamic and secular knowledge, and overcoming socio-economic barriers. Za'ba's focus on practical skills and self-reliance resonates with contemporary efforts to uplift communities through skill-based education.

In addition, Hamka's emphasis on holistic education that rooted in akhlaq and spiritual values provides a blueprint for integrating Islamic teachings with modern educational practices. His call for moral and intellectual development highlights the need for a balanced curriculum that nurtures ethical leadership and social responsibility while preparing students for global challenges.

The legacy of these thinkers suggests that modern curricula should incorporate Islamic values while preparing students for contemporary socio-economic challenges. Educational system would be more inclusive and effective.

By drawing on their ideas, modern reforms can focus on equitable access to quality education, the cultivation of moral character, and the practical application of skills, ensuring the holistic development of Malay-Muslim communities.

CONCLUSSION | خاتمة

The educational philosophies of Za'ba and Hamka offer valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges in Malay-Muslim education. Their philosophies highlight the significance of integrating Islamic values with modern educational practices. The integration fosters a balanced system that nurtures both character and competence. These principles remain relevant today as it will guide educational reforms that aim to develop resilient, morally grounded individuals capable of contributing to a rapidly changing global society. For the suggestion fo future study, this research is potentially further expanded on the practical implementation of Hamka's and Za'ba's education thought on the current education system particularly in Malaysia. The implementation could be studied on different level of education beginning from early childhood education until the tertiary level of education. This research provides the scholars' thoughts and historical context that influence their ideas. Therefore, it is releveant ot serve as the background for the upcoming studies in the future.

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