

Reframing Ta'dib for Inclusive Early Childhood Education: A Moral–Philosophical Approach Based on Al-Attas

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500268>

Received: 08 May 2026; Accepted: 13 May 2026; Published: 01 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study reconceptualises the concept of ta'dib in the educational thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and examines its relevance to contemporary early childhood education, particularly within the framework of inclusive education. While current early childhood paradigms are largely shaped by developmental and child-centred approaches, they often underemphasise moral formation and the philosophical foundations of education. Using a qualitative methodology based on textual and thematic analysis of primary and secondary sources, this study explores ta'dib as a comprehensive framework that integrates knowledge, moral values and the formation of the human person through the cultivation of adab. The findings indicate that ta'dib extends beyond pedagogical practice and offers a value-based orientation that recognises the dignity, diversity and developmental uniqueness (fitrah) of every child. From this perspective, inclusive education is not merely a technical or policy-driven approach but a moral responsibility grounded in the recognition of human dignity and the proper place of individuals within the order of existence. This study contributes to the field by bridging Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary inclusive education discourse, proposing ta'dib as a holistic framework for nurturing equitable, meaningful and morally grounded early childhood education.

Keywords: Ta'dib, Early Childhood Education, Inclusive Education, Moral Development, Al-Attas.

INTRODUCTION

Education has always been in a state of flux. The purpose and focus of education has shifted in response to the intellectual trends, social changes and expectations of educational institutions. In early childhood education today, prevailing perspectives are heavily influenced by developmental perspectives that prioritise children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development through child-centred teaching and learning approaches. These approaches have greatly contributed to knowledge about children's development and suitable pedagogies for young children. But at times, emphasis on developmental processes has led to neglect of fundamental questions about the goals and purpose of education, such as the development of values, character and moral responsibility. Islamic intellectual history has traditionally considered education not simply as the transmission of knowledge, or the training in skills, but as the shaping of the human person according to truth, justice, and order. One of the modern Muslim thinkers who elaborated this theme is Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. He claims that the term ta'dib best captures the essence of education in Islam as it focuses on the cultivation of adab as the main goal of education and brings together knowledge, ethics and the order of reality in a holistic manner. Unlike tarbiyah and ta'lim, which can be translated as nurturing or teaching, respectively, ta'dib focuses on disciplining the intellect, soul and behaviour of the learner. Current literature in early childhood education is heavily shaped by Western developmental and constructivist approaches that focus on children's inherent capacities, independence, exploration and meaning-making through engagement with the environment.

Although these approaches have contributed significantly to pedagogy, they don't necessarily emphasise the intentional development of moral awareness and ethical character. On the other hand, inclusive education has become a global trend emphasising the right of every child, regardless of their ability, background or developmental status, to be included in meaningful learning opportunities. However, little work has been done to explore the role of Islamic educational philosophy, and in particular ta'dib, in inclusive early childhood education. This is a critical oversight given inclusive education is not just a technical or policy concern; it demands a moral compass that acknowledges the dignity, compassion, justice and diversity of human beings.

The philosophical underpinnings of ta'dib may provide such a framework, as it considers all children as having inherent dignity and individual potential (fitrah), and the teacher's role in cultivating students with balance and wisdom. Yet, little research has been conducted on the relevance of ta'dib to modern early childhood education. In this context, this study explores the concept of ta'dib in the educational philosophy of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and its implications for modern early childhood education in the context of inclusive education. In particular, the study seeks to: (1) understand the philosophical meaning of ta'dib in Al-Attas's educational philosophy; (2) explore its relevance to moral and holistic development of children; and (3) assess its relevance to contemporary inclusive educational practices that emphasise dignity, equity and participation for all children. In doing this, the study aims to link Islamic educational philosophy to current trends in early childhood education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the concept of ta'dib in the educational thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and its relevance to inclusive early childhood education. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to interpret philosophical concepts, educational meanings, and theoretical perspectives rather than measure variables statistically.

As a conceptual and document-based study, no human participants were involved. Instead, the sample consisted of selected primary and secondary textual sources. Primary sources included major works of Al-Attas, namely *The Concept of Education in Islam*, *Islam and Secularism*, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, and *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*. These texts were purposively selected due to their direct relevance to Islamic educational philosophy, worldview, and the concept of *ta'dib*. Secondary sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and previous studies related to Islamic education, moral development, early childhood education, and inclusive education.

The main research instrument was a document analysis framework used to guide systematic reading, coding, categorisation, and interpretation of textual materials. Analytical matrices and note-taking procedures were employed to identify recurring concepts such as ta'dib, adab, fitrah, dignity, inclusion, and holistic development. The study was conducted in several stages. First, relevant literature was identified through academic databases, books, and library resources. Second, sources were screened and selected based on relevance and scholarly credibility. Third, the selected texts were read repeatedly to gain conceptual familiarity. Fourth, key ideas and recurring concepts were coded and organised into thematic categories. Finally, the themes were interpreted and synthesised in relation to contemporary inclusive early childhood education.

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. This involved identifying recurring patterns, conceptual relationships, and dominant themes across the selected texts. Semantic analysis was also employed to clarify distinctions among related terms such as ta'dib, tarbiyah, and ta'lim. Through this process, the study examined how ta'dib may function as a holistic framework for supporting moral development, dignity, equity, and inclusion in early childhood education.

RESULTS

The thematic content analysis of selected primary and secondary sources led to four key findings on the significance of ta'dib for contemporary inclusive early childhood education.

Ta'dib as the Development of Adab in Early Childhood Education

The findings suggest that ta'dib can't simply be seen as a pedagogical approach or a disciplinary practice. It is an integrated approach to education that links knowledge, the human being and reality in an ordered and meaningful way. In this context, early childhood education is not only a preparatory phase for formal education, it is a critical time for the development of children's awareness of order, truth and meaning. The analysis also reveals that the learning of adab in early childhood helps to build self-discipline, moral understanding, respect for others and good behaviour. Moreover, in terms of inclusive education, adab promotes awareness of children's differences such as ability, learning styles, and socio-emotional development. This implies that early childhood education should focus on respect, acceptance and fairness to all learners.

Developing Fitrah for Holistic Development

The second finding suggests that fitrah of children should be understood as an instinctive inclination towards truth and goodness, and should be nurtured through education. This means that ta'dib supports holistic development in terms of physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual aspects. The study also indicates that children's learning differences should not be viewed as deficiencies, but as normal variations that demand suitable guidance. This is in line with inclusive education principles which emphasise the strengths-based approach, support and understanding of individual learning journey.

Family and Teacher's Role in Character Development

The research indicates that ta'dib takes place in the family and school. The home serves as children's initial environment of socialisation of basic values, norms, speech patterns and behaviour. As such, parents and teachers are role models for children. In Al-Attas's model, teachers may be considered as mu'addib, that is, people who not only impart knowledge to others but also demonstrate moral behaviour in their interactions. Through the research it is clear that alignment between learning and the behaviour of adults is crucial for moral development. Creating inclusive classrooms is also supported when parents and teachers exemplify the values of empathy, acceptance, patience and diversity.

3.4 Relevance to Curriculum in Early Childhood

The last finding indicates that early childhood curricula based on the principle of ta'dib should recognise the importance of moral and character development, alongside academic and cognitive development. Curriculum content should not separate values, knowledge and behaviour, but should integrate them into routines, relationships, classroom environment and curriculum. The results also suggest that a product-driven curriculum may neglect values and human development. In terms of inclusive education, accessibility, participation and engagement should be provided for all children, including those with special education needs. Consequently, ta'dib provides a philosophical framework for designing holistic, inclusive and value-based early childhood curriculum.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that the concept of *ta'dib* in Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' educational philosophy provides more than a different lens through which early childhood education can be understood. It offers an educational philosophy that shifts the focus of education from developmental goals to human personhood. This aligns with Al-Attas's understanding of education as not being only concerned with the transmission of knowledge, skills, or even performance, but the training of a person in their proper place in the order of existence through the cultivation of *adab*. When understood in relation to other dominant paradigms of early childhood education, the results present a critical difference. Contemporary approaches are often shaped by developmental psychology, constructivism and child-centred learning, which focus on exploration, independence, and development. Such approaches have played an important role in pedagogical approaches by

acknowledging children's autonomy and readiness to learn. While they might not specifically emphasise moral formation and philosophical intent as much. In this sense, **ta'dib** does not negate developmental growth, but suggests development guided by moral orientation, truth and responsibility. The results about **fitrah** also suggest that early education should not only perceive the potential of a child in a neutral way. On the basis of **ta'dib**, children are endowed with an inherent disposition for good and truth, but this disposition needs to be taught, disciplined and nurtured. This may be significant in relation to holistic education because it suggests that cognitive, emotional, spiritual and behavioural development are equally important. This approach expands the current dialogue in early childhood education by adding moral and metaphysical aspects that are lacking in secular models of child development. The other important implication of the study relates to parents and teachers. The research suggests that the process *ta'dib* starts at home and is continued in education. This implies that good early childhood education cannot rely only on pedagogic design or teaching methodologies. It must also be underpinned by moral adults who act as role models. The teacher, as **mu'addib**, is not simply an educator but a role model who models respect, discipline, compassion and responsibility in the lives of the children. This insight speaks to the importance of teacher quality and parent/school collaboration in early childhood education. There are also curriculum implications. The results indicate early childhood programs driven by **ta'dib** should focus on integrating values, relationships, routines and knowledge, rather than viewing moral education as distinct from academic learning. Although this study does not offer a technical curriculum model, it suggests we need to re-evaluate overly outcome-focused systems that focus on literacy targets, numeracy standards, and indicators without equitable attention to character development. Therefore a **ta'dib**-informed curriculum promotes a more holistic view of quality education. In terms of inclusive education, the study contributes to an important dialogue. In recent years, inclusive education has emphasised the principles of access, participation and equity. While these principles are important, **ta'dib** brings a moral-philosophical perspective affirming inherent dignity and developmental potential for all children (**fitrah**). This view helps shift the deficit thinking associated with children with disabilities or learning differences, and rather promote positive, empathic, and dignified ways of understanding difference. Thus, inclusion is not only a policy but also a moral and ethical imperative based on the value of human dignity. There are also some caveats to this study. This is a conceptual and text-based study, and as such, does not provide empirical evidence of classroom implementation of **ta'dib** in today's early childhood settings. Future research may use qualitative fieldwork, case study, or curriculum intervention methods to explore how **ta'dib** practices may be integrated into teaching and learning, classroom cultures and practices, and teacher education. In conclusion, the analysis shows that **ta'dib** is still pertinent to educational debates. With the revival of **adab** as a concern of education, learning becomes a process of cultivating wholesome persons whose knowledge, behaviour, and relationships are guided by truth, justice and responsibility. In this regard, the study adds to the debate on the philosophy of early childhood and inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study reveals that the notion of *ta'dib* in the philosophy of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas provides a more holistic approach to the aim of education. The concept highlights that education is not only limited to the transfer of knowledge and the development of intelligence. Rather, it seeks to produce individuals who can to understand their role in the world. In this sense, *adab* is the bridge between knowledge and character development. This study shows that the implementation of *ta'dib* in early childhood education emphasises a number of aspects. These include recognition of the importance of *adab* as the foundation of human development, the preservation of children's *fitrah* and the position of the family and the teacher as *mu'addib* in shaping values from early childhood education. At the same time, the study also implies that early childhood interventions that emphasise developmental aspects may overlook the values that are the foundation of human development. This analysis suggests that early childhood education should not only be seen as a development process. But as a "foundational" phase of the child's worldwide and value development. In this context, the term *ta'dib* offers an approach that links children's development with a more coherent and coherent set of values. Hence, this research adds to the educational discourse by recognising the need to re-visit the educational philosophy. It is especially in early childhood education. The redefining of *adab* as the fundamentals of education can make education more relevant in developing balanced children in terms of intellectual, spiritual and moral development. Moreover, the integration of *ta'dib* with inclusive education offers a more holistic approach that allows for diverse learners

in early childhood education, and guarantees that educational practices honour the dignity and individuality of children.

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