



## A Portrait Of Educational Reform In Ibn Ashur's Tafsir

Zamakhsyari bin Hasballah Thaib<sup>1</sup>, Mukhamad Hadi Musollin<sup>2</sup>, Vina Annisa<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Dharmawangsa, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universiti Islam Antarbangsa Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Dharmawangsa, Indonesia

[dr.zamakhsyari@dharmawangsa.ac.id](mailto:dr.zamakhsyari@dharmawangsa.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This article aims to describe the views of Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr regarding educational reform and improvement through his interpretation of Qur'anic verses in his exegetical work al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir. This study is a library-based research employing a descriptive-analytical method, in which the author outlines various perspectives of Ibn Ashûr on educational reform derived from his interpretation of verses related to the educational objectives (maqâšid) in the Qur'an. Among the findings of this research is that Ibn Ashûr not only implemented educational reforms during his tenure as Sheikh of al-Zaytuna University on a practical level, but also laid important theoretical foundations concerning the principles, means, and priorities of reform and improvement in the field of education through his Qur'anic interpretation. His approach is notably centered on the maqâšid of the Qur'an as guidance for humanity.

**Keywords:** Ibn Ashûr, Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir, Educational Reform, Tafsir Tarbawi

### Article Info

Article History:

Received: 2026-06-10 Accepted: 2026-06-26 Publish: 2026-06-30



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



: 10.51590/waraqat.v11i1.1359

## Introduction

The aspects of Qur'anic interpretation are highly diverse, with different emphases shaped by the unique perspectives of each exegete (mufassir). These interpretations are influenced by the interpreter's personal interests, ranging from grammar, rhetoric, science, and jurisprudence to education and beyond. Therefore, it is essential to analyze reformist perspectives and educational ideas expressed by influential Muslim scholars who have impacted their societies.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, studying the educational views of reformist figures and Muslim educators such as Imam Ibn Ashûr is valuable in strengthening inner conviction, which in turn shapes human behavior in accordance with Islamic educational principles. Those seeking to understand contemporary educational theories, directions, and systems must recognize that these are products of a long historical process and deep human experience. It would be challenging to comprehend the meaning of many modern educational outcomes without investigating their origins and historical background. Hence, reviving Islamic intellectual heritage is necessary to build the future.

In this context, the present study aims to explore the characteristics of educational reform in Ibn Ashûr's Qur'anic interpretation. It seeks to uncover the various insights and mysteries related to educational themes within his tafsir. Furthermore, this research highlights and preserves these elements, as they play a significant role in strengthening faith, purifying the soul, and guiding individuals toward higher moral conduct.

It is important to note the significant lack of academic research addressing education and reform among Muslim scholars, particularly as represented by Imam Ibn Ashûr. This gap becomes evident when attempting to locate dedicated scholarly works about his educational thought. The educational characteristics of Muslim scholars remain insufficiently recognized, resulting in missed opportunities for enriching our educational curricula.

The significance of this study lies in formulating an educational reform framework that addresses contemporary challenges faced by individuals and communities—particularly in the education sector—based on the principles articulated by Imam Ibn Ashûr, which can serve as a reference when needed.

## Method

This study is a library research using a descriptive-analytical method, in which the researcher presents various perspectives of Ibn Ashûr on educational reform. These views are drawn from his interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to educational objectives (maqāsid al-tarbiyah) in his tafsir, *al-Tabrîr wa al-Tanwîr*.

The researcher also refers to other key works by Ibn Ashûr outside of his tafsir, including *Al-Laysa as-Subhu bi Qarib*, *al-Nizām al-Ijtima'i fî al-Islām*, and *Maqāsid al-Shari'ah*, all of which address his views on educational development and reform.

## Result and Discussion

### 1. Biography of Ibn Ashûr

This study does not aim to present an exhaustive biography of Imam Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashûr, who lived from 1296 H (1879 CE) to 1393 H (1973 CE)<sup>2</sup>, as his name is already

---

<sup>1</sup> M I S Afrizal Nur, Mukhlis Lubis, and Hamdi Ishak, "Sumbangan Tafsir Al-Tahrir Wa Al-Tanwir Ibn 'Ashur Dan Relasinya Dengan Tafsir Al-Mishbah M. Quraysh Shihab," *Jurnal Al-Turath* 2, no. 2 (2017): 63–78.

<sup>2</sup> Sheik Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashur joined Zaytuna University in the year 1310 AH (1892 AD), and graduated in the year 1317 AH (1899 AD). He was appointed as the Sheik of the University twice and held various positions in the fields of judiciary and fatwa, including as Qadi al-Qudat and later Sheik al-Islam. He is renowned for his oratory and writing skills,

widely known and celebrated. It suffices to cite Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, who called him “*The ambassador of da’wah at Zaytuna University*”<sup>3</sup> and the Algerian reformer Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, who described him as “*a treasure of history*”<sup>4</sup>. Instead, this research focuses on a particular aspect of his rich life and intellectual contribution—his advocacy for educational reform during the most productive years of his life. His work significantly contributed to the reform movement that had begun in the Islamic world in the 19th century and continued into the 20th. He articulated his reformist vision notably in his book “*A Laysa as-Subhu bi Qarib*” (“Is Not the Dawn Near?”)<sup>5</sup>.

Indeed, Ibn Ashûr enriched the educational reform movement not only with theoretical insights in his writings but also through his committed practical engagement. After receiving his teaching certification in 6168 H / 6722 CE, he was appointed as the Rector of Al-Zaytuna University in 6136 H / 6216 CE. His active involvement in public life further demonstrated his dedication to applying and disseminating his ideas, as will be elaborated in the following sections.

## 2. The Role of Ibn Ashur in Educational Reform

Ibn Ashûr was a prominent figure who dedicated his life to renewal and reform in various sectors, one of the most notable being education<sup>6</sup>. His educational vision through Jami’ Al-Zaytuna contributed significantly to the development of Islamic law (shari’ah), Qur’anic exegesis, and pedagogy, leaving a substantial and lasting influence. Al-Zaytuna University continued this legacy, actively contributing to thought leadership and educational advancement.

In general, education holds a vital role in societal awakening and transformation—even in the broader context of human civilization. According to Ibn Ashûr, education “can enhance human understanding and refine noble instincts; it illuminates humanity and presents it in its most beautiful form, enabling individuals to transcend their animalistic nature—limited to fulfilling personal needs—toward seeking benefit for both themselves and others, avoiding faults and deficiencies in accordance with the level of civilization of their time”<sup>7</sup>.

It is undeniable that individuals engaged in education have goals, whether spiritual or secular. However, Ibn Ashûr emphasized that the noblest and most meaningful goal is “to produce leaders for society in both religious and worldly affairs, providing guidance that serves as a light for them, a point of reference, and a source of peace for their anxious souls”<sup>8</sup>.

The special mention of Al-Zaytuna University compared to other religious institutions is justified by two primary reasons:

1. Sheikh Ibn Ashûr was more deeply familiar with the university’s history, context, and figures involved; having completed his education and begun his teaching career there, he understood its condition through personal experience and struggle<sup>9</sup>.

---

with his famous works including the commentary “al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir,” which has become a subject of study in research, “Maqasid al-Shari’ah al-Islamiyyah,” “Usul al-Nizam al-Ijtima’i fi al-Islam,” and “al-Waqf wa Atharuhu fi al-Islam.” He also has many works in the field of research on Arab and Islamic heritage books. See: Muhammad al-Khidr Hussein, Tunis and the University of Zaytuna, (Damascus: al-Matba’ah al-Ta’awuniyyah, 1971), p. 10. See also: Muhammad al-Fadhil Ibn Ashur, The Literary and Intellectual Movement in Tunisia, (Tunisia: al-Dar al-Tunisiyyah, 1972), p. 22. See also: Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, A’yun al-Absar, (Algeria: al-Sharika al-Wataniyyah lil-Nashr, 2007), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Fadhil ibn Ashur, *Al-Tafsir wa Rijaluhu*, (Egypt: Dar al-Salam, 1st ed, 2008), p. 199

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *A’yun al-Absar*, (algeria: al-Syirkah al-Wathaniyah li an-Nasyr, 2007), p. 628.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ghālī, A. B., *Shaikhal-jami’ al-a’zam: Al-Ṭābir Ibn ‘Ashūr, ḥayātuhu wa athāruhū*, (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1996), p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Hassan Suleimān, Alwi Alatas, Saheed Abdullah Busari, “Examining The Reformist Thoughts of Al-Ṭābir Ibn ‘Ashūr”, dalam Malaysian Journal of Sharia and Law, USIM, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2024, pp. 272-281

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr, *Maqasid Syariah Islamiyyah*, Dirasah and Tahqiq: Muhammad Thahir Al-Misawi, (Yordania Dar Al-Nafaes, 3rd ed, 2011), p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *A laysa as-Subhu bi qarib*, (Tunis: Dar Sahnun, 3rd ed, 2010), p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Sheik Ibn Ashûr was closely tied to the Al-Zaytuna Mosque since he was a prominent student in his academic achievements until he was chosen as a teacher at the mosque. He rose thru the ranks to achieve a high position and participated in debates,

2. Al-Zaytuna University represents a model Islamic educational institution that deserves recognition equal to the honor it has received, and must be treated according to appropriate educational standards.

From his experience as both student and teacher, Imam Ibn Ashûr realized an urgent need for comprehensive reform across all aspects of the institution: the educational system, its levels, curriculum content, the textbooks used, teacher qualifications, and their alignment with student abilities and developmental stages<sup>10</sup>.

He worked closely with his colleagues at Al-Zaytuna to design and implement educational reform measures that he believed could achieve these goals—revitalizing the university, which he considered a cornerstone for the progress of the Muslim ummah, achievable only through educational reform<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, the Imam introduced a range of changes in the educational sector, including a comprehensive review of the curriculum and instructional methods used at Al-Zaytuna. A group of scholars under his leadership evaluated the textbooks across levels, with Ibn Ashûr seeking to replace outdated content that had long been accepted with a reverence no longer appropriate for a modern era.

He placed great emphasis on two central pillars of Zaytuna education: the principles of shari‘ah and the Arabic language. He advocated for selecting textbooks renowned among experts for their depth, organization, and ability to enhance intellectual and writing skills—books that would help produce scholars capable of analysis and critique<sup>12</sup>.

Ibn Ashûr also prioritized the inclusion of natural sciences and mathematics within the university curriculum. He focused on higher education for specialized disciplines and considered introducing various new teaching methodologies.

In his efforts to reform education, he expanded Al-Zaytuna’s branches. Between 1949 and 1956, the number of branches grew from eight to twenty-five—including two specifically for women in Tunis and Sfax. By 1956, Al-Zaytuna and its branches had a combined student population of around twenty thousand<sup>13</sup>.

The Al-Zaytuna network even extended into Algeria, establishing branches in cities like Constantine<sup>14</sup>. Ibn Ashûr ensured that these branches were under the direct oversight of the University Sheikh's Office, rather than local authorities.

Reforms also addressed students' living and social conditions. To uplift the morale of students—particularly compared to their more privileged peers—student cafeterias were established to offer three affordable meals a day, despite limited infrastructure and financial constraints. This reflected Ibn Ashûr’s deep commitment and intellectual investment in developing a comprehensive, functional educational system that could prepare students to face life’s challenges and meet national expectations.

In his book *A Laysa as-Subhu bi Qarib*, Ibn Ashûr identified several reasons for the decline of education. Chief among them was the lack of attention to moral and ethical instruction. He noted that: “The failure of education to emphasize manners, ethics, and beneficial habits is

---

excelling above all his peers. In addition to teaching, Sheik also carried out administrative tasks and high-level Sharia functions. He was appointed as the Minister of Science, then as a Judge and Chairman of the Shura Council in the Sharia Council. He led the Mosque in 1932, then was reappointed in 1945, where he served until 1952. After that, he was appointed as the Dean of Al-Zaytuna University from 1956 to 1960. See: Khairuddin Al-Zirkli, *Al-A‘lam*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Ilm Lil-Malayin, 2003), 686/0, and see: Muhammad Al-Fadhil Ibn Ashûr, *Al-Harakah al-Adabiyah wa al-Fikriyyah fi Tunis*, (Tunisia: Dar Tunisia, 1972), p. 80, and also see: Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *A laysa as-Subhu bi qarib*, pp. 2-7.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad al-Habib Ibn Khujah, *Syekh al-Islam Imam al-Akbar Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur wa kitabuhu Maqasid al-Shari‘ah*, (Tunis: Dar al-Arabiyya lil-Kitab, 2008), p. 198.

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *A laysa as-Subhu bi qarib*, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *Maqasid al-Shariah*, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, h. 25

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad al-Fadhil ibn Ashur, *Maqashid al-Syari‘ah, al-Tafsir wa Rijaluhu*, p. 200.

a key reason why Muslims have declined in character and custom. Early Muslims paid great attention to these elements, learning ethics from the Qur'an and the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and reinforcing them during the early revival through ethical sciences and moral instruction. The subsequent neglect of these values is due to the intellectual stagnation of the ummah and a narrow view of knowledge, believing it to be limited to scientific rules such as grammar and fiqh<sup>15</sup>.

He further lamented that many individuals lacking virtue and good character occupied positions of authority in education. "It is shameful," he wrote, "to see individuals ready to teach youth whose appearance is impressive, whose outward image is attractive, but upon closer examination—through conversation or interaction—it becomes clear that they are void of moral values, dignity, and noble conduct. Such individuals represent a loss of one of the most essential elements of human excellence—morality"<sup>16</sup>.

Accordingly, Ibn Ashûr advocated for strong support of the educational process at Al-Zaytuna University and beyond, through the implementation of ideal moral principles aimed at purifying the souls of both educators and students. Among the methods he proposed were: training in various forms of wisdom, critical awareness of contemporary demands, cultivating high aspirations, love for truth, disregard for trivial ambitions, and the avoidance of miserliness and narrow-mindedness that trigger envy, injustice, and conflict. He emphasized steering clear of anything contrary to one's purpose, promoting courage, decisiveness, originality of thought, love for order in all aspects of life, obedience to the law, hard work, appreciation for harmony, understanding things as they are, and avoiding ignorance, carelessness, rigidity, laziness, negative assumptions, and illusion—so that justice would become a defining trait in every circumstance<sup>17</sup>.

Ibn Ashûr offered this vision with a highly ethical orientation, much like Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, who criticized Al-Azhar's curriculum and public schooling systems for prioritizing academic knowledge over moral education<sup>18</sup>.

After explaining numerous factors that led to educational decay and stagnation, Ibn Ashûr concluded his book *A Laysa as-Subhu bi Qarib* with a series of proposals for reform in education and teaching. These reforms were intended to enhance and elevate the education system, aligning it with the demands and developments of the time.

These reforms covered a wide range of aspects. One focus was improving written materials and textbooks. According to Ibn Ashûr, writing is the first teacher for students and a reminder and guide for teachers, thus deserving special attention in any reform effort. Writing greatly influences students' character and serves as a primary motivator for learning<sup>19</sup>. Improving written works, he argued, should not rely solely on the legacy of the past, nor should one believe that what predecessors produced represents the peak of human achievement. Teachers should not overly depend on these classical sources to comprehend knowledge. Instead, they should realize that those earlier works laid the foundation upon which to build, expand, and further intellectual horizons<sup>20</sup>.

Therefore, it is essential to improve and modernize textbooks so they may reflect the times, advances in knowledge, changing conditions, and evolving ideas. Ibn Ashûr stressed that this process must avoid irrelevant additions or mixing in unnecessary information. For instance, a student learning basic grammar might encounter unnecessarily abstract

---

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad at-Thohir ibn Ashur, *A laysa as-Subbu bi qarib*, p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.113.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.114.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Mas'ud Jibrân, "Manhaj as-Syeikh Muhammad at-Thohir Ibn Ashur fi islah al-Ta'lim al-Islami", in Majallah kulliyah ad-Dakwah al-Islamiyyah, 5<sup>th</sup> ed, 1988, p. 223.

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad at-Thohir ibn Ashur, *A laysa as-Subbu bi qarib*, p. 142

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

concepts, even though they haven't yet mastered the grammar itself—how, then, can they grasp more advanced linguistic details?

He also recommended that scholarly works be revised by a team of leading scholars tasked with reviewing and improving curriculum books. These scholars should add knowledge and ethical content that fits current societal needs. He wrote: “There must be a committee of respected scholars to identify shortcomings in textbooks, restore what has been lost, and translate scientific books that have significantly advanced beyond what our predecessors left behind—books in fields such as astronomy, physics, geography, and geology—while ensuring moral and ethical values are preserved and academic excellence is encouraged”<sup>21</sup>.

Suggestions like these are particularly relevant for today’s universities across the Islamic world, where curricula and courses may no longer reflect present realities or meet modern demands. These institutions require innovation and renewal in the hands of scholars and academics—just as Ibn Ashûr envisioned.

Among the aspects of reform Ibn Ashûr mentioned in education and instruction is:

First, teacher improvement—because upgrading the quality of educators is a foundational step in advancing education. He emphasized the need to select only experienced teachers who understand developmental stages, who can guide students in truly engaging with their lessons rather than enduring boredom that dulls their intellect. Thus, teaching methods should be studied before assigning someone to teach<sup>22</sup>.

Ibn Ashûr also argued that educators should avoid trivial topics in their instruction that offer no real benefit and only leave students confused or indifferent. He gave examples of excessive debates over the grammatical attachment in “*bismillāhir-rahmānir-rahīm*” or the seventy-plus explanations of the definite article in “*al-ḥamdu lillāh*”—all discussions that, in his view, waste time and fail to address core issues<sup>23,24</sup>.

Moreover, as Ibn Ashûr stated, teachers should refine their interaction with students—avoiding pretentiousness or rigidity in how they walk, speak, and dress, which often hinders the transmission of knowledge. Conversely, some teachers exhibit disorganized appearances, inappropriate speech, or engage in petty behavior such as harboring resentment, mocking colleagues, or spreading negativity—all of which diminish their stature in students' eyes<sup>25</sup>.

One of the most critical responsibilities of educators, according to Ibn Ashûr, is to serve as role models for their students. “They are expected to inspire a love of knowledge, to strive for self-improvement and social betterment, and to educate with qualities such as perseverance, courage, independence, honor, respect for rights, justice, purity, and noble character—so that all students may grow into useful and productive individuals, whether they pursue further academic study or enter other professions”<sup>26</sup>.

In this way, it becomes clear that Ibn Ashûr made an enormous contribution, pouring fifty years of his life with vigor and dedication into educational reform—developing programs, diagnosing challenges, identifying systemic obstacles, and offering effective, constructive solutions that have helped advance and enrich the world of education<sup>27</sup>.

---

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad at-Thohir ibn Ashur, *A laysa as-Subbu bi qorib*, p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 205

<sup>23</sup> Al-Bān, A. A. A, *Malāmih al-tajdid 'inda a'lām al-nabḍab (Malik bin Nabi wa al-Ṭābir Ibn 'Ashūr Unmūdhajan)*, 2011. <https://islamonline.net/ملاحم-التجديد-عند-أعلام-النهضة/> accessed on 5 Mei 2025.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad at-Thohir ibn Ashur, *A laysa as-Subbu bi qorib*, p. 204

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 206

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 207

<sup>27</sup> Wani, G. Q., “*Islamic perspectives on human nature: Ibn Ashur's fitrah-based theory of maqasid al-shari'ah*”, in ICR Journal, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2017, 234. <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v8i2.197>

### 3. A Portrait of Educational Reform in Ibn Ashûr's Tafsir

#### a. Maqāṣid al-Qur'an (Higher Objectives of the Qur'an) Related to Education According to Ibn Ashûr

Ibn Ashûr believed that one of the main purposes of the Qur'an's revelation was to reform the conditions of individuals, communities, and society at large<sup>28</sup>. In his fourth introduction, he stated, "Indeed, Allah revealed the Qur'an as a book intended to reform the affairs of all people—as a mercy to humanity, to convey His will. Therefore, the principal goal of the Qur'an is to reform individual, collective, and societal conditions."<sup>29</sup>.

He elaborated on this notion of reform by placing emphasis on education. He stated: "Individual reform depends on purification and self-control, which at its core requires the improvement of belief, as belief is the root of ethics and thought. Internal refinement is also necessary, achieved through outward acts of worship such as prayer, and inward efforts to avoid envy, resentment, and arrogance. As for collective reform, it begins with the individual, for the individual is a component of society—and comprehensive reform is impossible without reforming its parts. Civilizational reform is broader in scope, as it safeguards the Islamic world's systems and governs relations between groups and regions in a way that protects everyone's interests"<sup>30</sup>.

Anyone who reflects on Ibn Ashûr's statements will clearly observe his reference to the objectives of education in Islam—namely, the preparation of believing individuals and the building of the Muslim community. Therefore, strengthening faith and teaching the correct methods are among the Qur'an's fundamental objectives. This, as Ibn Ashûr argued, is crucial to improving moral character, for it eliminates blind imitation, purges the heart of illusions brought about by polytheism and materialism, and purifies one's soul.

Allah expresses this in Surah Hūd (11:101):

وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَكِنْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَمَا أَغْنَتْ عَنْهُمْ آلِهَتُهُمُ الَّتِي يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ لَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ ۗ وَمَا زَادُوهُمْ غَيْرَ تَتْبِيبٍ

"We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves. So their gods—those they called upon besides Allah—were of no use to them when the command of your Lord came. They only added to their ruin."

Hence, they attributed their growing misfortune to their idols, whereas, in reality, it was the result of the misplaced beliefs they held about them<sup>31</sup>.

Ibn Ashûr asserted that the affairs of the ummah (Muslim community) would not be properly regulated, nor would their condition improve, unless the majority of individuals were adorned with noble character and practiced it consistently across all areas of life<sup>32</sup>. He stated: "Society's affairs will not be well ordered, and no community can be free from disunity unless noble character dominates the majority of its members and is applied broadly"<sup>33</sup>.

It can also be said that the central aim of Islam's call to noble character and its refinement is the education and purification of the soul. This includes habituating the soul to follow values and guidance that are, by sound reason, recognized as truth, goodness, and benefit—values that Muslims learn from divine teachings that are accurate and free from error<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Islam, T., "Ibn Ashur's views on maqasid al-Quran: An analysis", in *Ma'alim Al-Qur'an Wa Al-Sunnah*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2018, p. 154. <https://doi.org/10.33102/jmq.v14i2.135>

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr, *Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tanwir*, (Tūnis: Dār al-Tūnisīyah li-l-Nashr, 1984), vol. 1, p. 38

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, vol. 1, p. 38

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr, *Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 1, p. 40

<sup>32</sup> Rasyad Afif Ibrahim, Muhd Najib Abd Kadir, *Al-Tafsir Al-Maqasidi: Konsep & Aplikasi Berpandukan Tafsir Ibn 'Ashur*, (Selangor: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2020), p.142.

<sup>33</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr, *al-Nizham al-Ijtima'i fi al-Islam*, (Cairo: Dār al-Salām li-l-Nashr), p. 116.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

## b. A Portrait of Educational Reform in Ibn Ashûr's Tafsir

A deep analysis of Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir reveals that Ibn Ashûr began his work from a position of rich and diverse cultural knowledge, spanning various human disciplines. He drew upon fields such as literature, science, Arabic and foreign languages, and areas related to religion, art, history, politics, economics, psychology, and more<sup>35</sup>. These elements were woven into his interpretation of the Qur'an and can be seen clearly in his educational perspectives expressed in his writings. This reflects the essence of Islam, which is deeply rooted in a broad range of educational concepts, opinions, perspectives, and principles.

Ibn Ashûr frequently emphasized—through his interpretation of Qur'anic verses—the practical meanings and life guidance that could aid those engaged in da'wah (Islamic propagation) and reform. Thus, we see his strong focus on interpreting verses in light of the purposes (maqāṣid) of shari'ah, explaining their impact on the soul, behavior, and life—both individually and socially. This underscores the educational dimension of his tafsir<sup>36</sup>.

On another front, there is a distinctly educational layer in which Ibn Ashûr addressed a range of educational issues. He concentrated on foundational aspects of Muslim character development, including aqidah (faith education), moral values, and social education.

Below are several topics and concepts addressed by Ibn Ashûr in his tafsir that reflect key elements of his vision for educational reform.

## c. The Essence of Education and Its Correlation with Reform

In Ibn Ashûr's concept of education, several meanings are found. These include: conveying knowledge gradually and perfectly<sup>37</sup>, and in its practical and procedural sense—as Ibn Ashûr defines it—education means: “nurturing the child and organizing his life”<sup>38</sup>.

In the context of moral principles, proper education, according to Ibn Ashûr, is that which touches the soul by preventing it from harboring negative thoughts. If evil takes root in the soul, it becomes very difficult—if not impossible—to remove. Furthermore, Islamic law encourages believers to follow Allah's commands directly. Thus, Islam guides people toward goodness in two ways: directly and by restricting access to harmful paths. Most Islamic rulings fall under this second category, particularly those dealing with ambiguous matters (shubuhāt), as described in the hadith:

إن الحلال بين، وإن الحرام بين، وبينهما أمور مشتبهات

“The lawful is clear, and the unlawful is clear, and between them are matters that are doubtful, which many people do not know.” (HR. Muslim)<sup>39</sup>.

While interpreting the verse “And say, ‘My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [rabbayāni] when I was small” (QS. Al-Isra: 24), he explained the meaning of education by stating: “Education serves to perfect existence. It is a favor that deserves gratitude. Compassion is a form of protection from neglect, and this gratitude must be expressed through supplication for one's parents with heartfelt mercy”<sup>40</sup>.

He further elaborated on the objectives of education found behind the Qur'anic commands to honor parents and maintain family ties, combining them into two primary goals. Regarding the first goal, he said: “Islam prescribes honoring parents and preserving family relationships for two reasons. The first is psychological: to educate the soul to recognize divine goodness, cultivating gratitude by

<sup>35</sup> Nafi, N. B. M., *Tābir Ibn 'Ashûr: The career and thought of a modern reformist 'ālim, with special reference to his work of tafsir*, in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Alamī, D. A. A., *Mujaddid al-maghrib al-'arabi al-ṭābir Ibn 'Ashûr wa manbajihī fī tafsir al-tahrir wa-l-tanwir*, (Cairo: Manshūr Shibkah al-Alukah, 2017), p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr, *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 1, p. 166

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, vol. 19, p. 111

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, vol. 2, p. 196.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, vol. 6, p. 73.

imitating the attribute of Allah as the Most Grateful. Just as He commands gratitude for creation and sustenance, He also commands gratitude to parents for physical care and emotional nurturing. This call to acknowledge goodness is an implicit praise and an encouragement to compete in virtuous acts”<sup>41</sup>.

The second goal, according to Ibn Ashûr, is social in nature—to strengthen familial bonds and nurture love and compassion among relatives. He stated: “The second aim is social: to tighten family cohesion by commanding behaviors that reinforce mutual trust, such as good interaction—fostering love and compassion that replaces even maternal affection... In this family bonding lies great benefit for the ummah, manifest in emotional support and unity.”

This is reflected in the verse from Surah Al-Hujurât (49:13):

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware”<sup>42</sup>.

#### d. The Urgency of Reform-Minded Educators

Islam highly esteems the position of educators due to their role in uplifting the ummah and instilling values of compassion, righteousness, and truthfulness among its members. Islam also gives special attention to the role of women, who are the first educators and constitute half of humanity. Ibn Ashûr emphasizes this in his interpretation of Surah Al-Baqarah (2:228):

وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلِمْنَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ

“And for women is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable.”

After discussing the rights and responsibilities of women and the intent behind the phrase “bi al-ma’rûf” (in a fair and customary manner), he noted: “Islam has given great importance to improving the condition of women. How could it not, when women constitute half of society and are the first educators—instilling virtuous knowledge into hearts untouched by corruption and minds untainted by temptation? If that education is rooted in goodness, honesty, truth, and justice, it becomes etched into the noble soul of a woman and bonds with her pure nature—creating fertile ground for positive thought, untouched by evil influence. Islam is a structured system, and thus, it has come to elevate women’s status so that the ummah under Islamic guidance may progress and lead the world”<sup>43</sup>.

When interpreting the verse “And He made her grow in a good manner and entrusted her to the care of Zakariya” (QS. Āli ‘Imrān: 37), Ibn Ashûr explained the function of the educator and how deeply they can influence others and be influenced in return. He wrote: “The phrase ‘and He made her grow in a good manner’ means that she was created in a state of moral and spiritual refinement, with pure character—her creation and upbringing were likened to a plant growing beautifully. This is one of Maryam’s distinguishing features because the educator transmits their character and virtue through what they teach”<sup>44</sup>.

#### e. The Comprehensiveness and Universality of Educational Reform

If we analyze Ibn Ashûr’s interpretation of the verse “And He made her grow in a good manner and entrusted her to the care of Zakariya” (QS. Āli ‘Imrān: 37), and reflect on the verse “Say: Reform for them is best” (QS. An-Nūr: 33), along with the educational meanings embedded in these Qur’anic expressions, it becomes clear how Allah uses the concept of

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, vol. 6, p. 74.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, vol. 6, p. 401.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, vol. 3, p. 235.

islāh (reform) in an unrestricted sense—covering all dimensions of improvement, not just individual reform.

Ibn Ashûr explicitly states: “The reform intended here is not limited to self-improvement alone. Rather, it encompasses the reform of the individuals themselves—who are the primary focus—as well as the improvement of beliefs and ethics through sound education, Islamic norms, and an understanding of the worldly context. It includes mental wellbeing by protecting them from harm, danger, and illness, caring for them, and meeting their basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter according to their norms—without excess or neglect. It also involves managing, maintaining, and protecting their assets appropriately”<sup>45</sup>.

Note how Ibn Ashûr uses the Qur’anic phrase to emphasize the educational objectives within this noble verse. If the verse only mentioned “their reform,” it might appear to imply only personal reform, and the broader educational dimensions highlighted by Ibn Ashûr in his tafsir would be overlooked<sup>46</sup>.

#### f. The Foundation Upon Which Educational Reform Is Built

Ibn Ashûr maintained that the core of reform, or the basis for transformation and its process, must be grounded in the teachings of Islam and divine revelation (fitrah ilāhiyyah). This foundation promotes all goodness and leads to perfection, not destruction. In his tafsir of the verse “Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam” (QS. Āli ‘Imrān: 19), he explained that this foundation is built on fitrah—meaning it aligns only with what is sound according to reason, and not based on any cultural tradition or sectarian affiliation. This is in accordance with Allah’s words in Surah Ar-Rūm (30:30):

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَمًا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. This is the natural disposition (fitrah) of Allah upon which He has created mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah. That is the upright religion, but most people do not know”<sup>47</sup>.

According to Ibn Ashûr, fitrah includes values, ethics, and educational principles endorsed by Islam, which are obligatory upon its followers. These principles render Islam a universally suitable religion for all nations and every era. In his commentary on this verse, he states: “Fitrah contains ancient customs approved by the wise among humankind—customs practiced by their societies so long as they promote human perfection and do not lead to corruption. This forms the basis for preserving lineage and dignity. And it is with this principle of fitrah that Islam becomes a fitting religion for all peoples across all times”<sup>48</sup>.

Ibn Ashûr emphasized that this foundational fitrah manifests in various forms, supporting and preparing individuals to accept it. He highlighted that Islam unites soul purification (tazkiyah) with the organization of social life through sharī‘ah. He said:

“The second aspect: Islam combines spiritual purification (tazkiyah) with societal reform through sharī‘ah. Most religions do not address worldly organization at all—and those that do often give it minimal attention, focusing mostly on advice and acts of worship. The Qur’an, however, combines both elements in many verses.”

As found in Surah An-Nahl (16:97):

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوَةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, vol. 1, p. 356

<sup>46</sup> Alviga Nur Laila, Danang Ochviardi, “Corak Tafsir Maqasidi Dalam Tafsir Al-Tabrir Wa Al-Tamwir”, in JIQTa: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur’an dan Tafsir, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2023, p. 159. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36769/jiqta.v2i2.440>

<sup>47</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr, *Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tamwir*, vol. 2, p. 193.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, vol. 2, p. 194.

“Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer—We will surely grant them a good life, and We will surely reward them according to the best of what they used to do”<sup>49</sup>.

Furthermore, fitrah is reflected—as Ibn Ashûr stated—in the ability to practice religious commands to the best of one’s ability. He wrote: “*The purpose of religious commands is to facilitate their fulfillment. From an ethical perspective, good education is that which prevents the soul from being infected by negative thoughts; for if evil becomes rooted in the soul, it becomes very difficult—if not impossible—to remove it. The shari‘ah encourages direct compliance with its commands. Thus, Islam guides people toward goodness through two methods: a direct path and another that blocks the way to destruction. Most Islamic rulings fall under this second category, and I believe this relates to what is mentioned in the hadith: ‘The lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear, and between them are matters that are doubtful, which many people do not know’*”<sup>50</sup>.

#### g. Instruments of Educational Reform

The reform movement, as described by Ibn Ashûr, must be grounded in mastery and deep insight into religion, along with an understanding of its secrets and profound meanings. This is affirmed in the verse from Surah At-Tawbah (9:122):

وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنْفِرُوا كَآفَّةً فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

“And it is not for the believers to go forth all at once. But why should not there go forth a group from every division among them to obtain understanding in religion and warn their people when they return to them so that they might be cautious?”

According to Ibn Ashûr, this verse serves as a foundation for the collective obligation (fard kifāyah) of seeking knowledge among a group of Muslims, to the extent required to implement Islamic law and protect the interests of the ummah. Without this effort, the strength of the community would decline. He stated in his tafsir: “*This verse establishes the obligation of seeking religious knowledge for a sufficient number of Muslims, based on the principle of fard kifāyah. It must be fulfilled to the degree necessary to achieve its purpose. The verse indicates that not all Muslims are required to do this, only a segment from each group. This shows that those who remain behind to study and educate are not less important than those who go forth. Neither path is absolutely superior, for both depend on the needs of the time—one meets the demands of confronting enemies, while the other sustains spiritual and intellectual readiness*”<sup>51</sup>.

Ibn Ashûr further emphasized that acquiring knowledge and teaching it to the people is one of the core objectives of Islam—to improve belief, thinking, and behavior. He wrote: “*One of Islam’s aims is to spread knowledge and values among the ummah, to build communities grounded in religious understanding, and to educate the minds of Muslims so that their policies align with religious teachings*”<sup>52</sup>.

He also highlighted that the duty of education is equal in status before Allah to the duty of jihad, for both fulfill the shari‘ah mandate to protect and uphold the religion. He commented: “*After encouraging jihad, the Qur’an clarifies that it is meaningless for all Muslims to engage in combat. There is no superiority between those who engage in education and those who fight in the way of Allah. Both are critical to defending the faith: one through expansion and influence, and the other by strengthening and structuring that power. Military expansion alone cannot sustain Islamic leadership without a scholarly class managing and preserving the caliphate*”<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr, *Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 2, pp. 194-195.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, vol. 2, p. 196.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, vol. 5, p. 61.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, vol. 5, p. 59.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, vol. 5, p. 61.

He referenced historical cases to support this argument, stating: “*The rule of the Al-Lamṭūniyyūn<sup>54</sup> in Andalusia did not last, as it weakened over time. In contrast, Mongol rule endured only after they engaged with the scholars of the cities they conquered and entrusted them with governance*”<sup>55</sup>.

One element of *inzār* (warning) is educating the people about their religion and providing the tools to distinguish between right and wrong. In interpreting “and to warn their people” (QS. At-Tawbah: 122), he explained: “*Warning means giving advice. It is emphasized because purification must come before adornment—there can be no guidance without first being warned of what is wrong. One dimension of warning is to teach the people what differentiates right from wrong through religious instruction*”<sup>56</sup>.

Ibn Ashûr concluded his tafsir of this verse by affirming that a nation cannot reach perfection unless it has many scholars among its people, and it will only regress when its scholars diminish. He cited a hadith from Bukhari, narrated by Anas (ra), in which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

من أشراف الساعة أن يظهر الجهل ويقل العلم

“Among the signs of the Hour is that ignorance will prevail and knowledge will diminish.” (HR. al-Bukhari)<sup>57</sup>.

Thus, throughout his tafsir of these and many other verses, Ibn Ashûr worked to develop a comprehensive educational methodology aimed at holistic transformation—spiritually, intellectually, socially, psychologically, and economically. Were it not for space limitations, more of his tafsir could be cited, further illustrating the vital educational dimension in Qur'anic interpretation, and the need to evaluate and understand Qur'anic verses through the lens of education—aligned with the Qur'an's central purpose: to provide guidance.

## Conclusion

From the above discussion, several key points can be summarized:

The Noble Qur'an contains a comprehensive educational curriculum suitable for all times and generations, and it is the best guide for humanity.

It is crucial for students and researchers to refer back to the Qur'an, exploring its noble educational meanings and seeking guidance from the tafsir of great scholars who are equipped to engage with Allah's Book through reading, understanding, and application.

The educational focus of scholars in Qur'anic exegesis is just as important as their focus on linguistics, jurisprudence, rational thought, creed, and other areas.

The significance of educational tafsir lies in its alignment with the central objective of the Qur'an's revelation, which is to serve as guidance and direction.

There must be a focus on cultivating and developing moral values across all levels of education, by connecting them with Islamic belief (*aqidah*), acts of worship, and social interactions (*mu'āmalah*).

---

<sup>54</sup> Al-Lamṭūniyyūn: They are the al-Murābiṭūn and originated from the Lamṭūna tribe in Morocco. They moved to Granada in 671 AH to fight against Prince Abdullah bin Bulqīn bin Bādīs bin Habūs al-Zirī. This movement ended and they became extinct in the year 366 AH. See: Saad Zaghoul Abdul Hamid Tarikh, al-Maghreb al-Arabi, (Alexandria: Manṣharat al-Ma'ārif in Alexandria), p. 169

<sup>55</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibn Ashûr, *Tafsir al-Tabir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 5, p. 59.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, vol. 5, p. 62.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, vol. 5, p. 64.

## Reference

- Afrizal Nur, M. I. S. . M. L. H. I. (2017). *Sumbangan Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tanwir Ibn 'Ashur dan Relasinya dengan Tafsir al-Misbbab M. Quraysh Shihab*. Jurnal Al-Turath, 2(2).
- Al-Bān, A. A. A. (2011). *Malāmih al-tajdid 'inda a'lam al-nabī (Mālik bin Nabī wa al-Ṭābir Ibn 'Ashūr Unmūdhajan)*.
- al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, M. (2007). *A'yūn al-Absbar*. al-Syirkah al-Wathaniyah li an-Nasyr.
- Al-Ghālī, A. B. (1996). *Shaikhal-jāmi' al-a'zam: Al-Ṭābir Ibn 'Ashūr, ḥayātuhu wa athārubu*. Dār Ibn Ḥazm.
- al-Habib Ibn Khujah, M. (2008). *Syekh al-Islam Imam al-Akbar Muhammad al-Tabir Ibn Ashur wa kitabuhu Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. Dar al-Arabiyya lil-Kitab.
- al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, M. (2010). *A laysa as-Subhu bi qarib* (3rd ed.). Dar Sahnun.
- al-Thahir Ibn Ashūr, M. (n.d.). *al-Nizham al-Ijtima'i fi al-Islam*. Dār al-Salām li-l-Nashr.
- al-Thahir Ibn Ashūr, M. (1984-a). *Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tanwir* (Vol. 1). Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr.
- al-Thahir Ibn Ashūr, M. (1984-b). *Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tanwir* (Vol. 2). Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr.
- al-Thahir Ibn Ashūr, M. (1984-c). *Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tanwir* (Vol. 5). Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr.
- al-Thahir Ibn Ashūr, M. (1984-d). *Tafsir al-Tabrir wa al-Tanwir* (Vol. 6). Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr.
- al-Thahir Ibn Ashūr, M. (2011). *Maqasid Syariah Islamiyah* (M. T. Al-Misawi (ed.); 3rd ed.). Dar Al-Nafaes.
- Alamī, D. A. A. (2017). *Mujaddid al-maghrib al-'arabi al-ṭābir Ibn 'Ashūr wa manhajih fi tafsir al-tahrir wa-l-tanwir*. Manshūr Shibkah al-Alūkah.
- Hamid, S. Z. A. (n.d.). *Tarikh al-Maghreb al-Arabi*. Manṣharat al-Ma'ārif.
- Ibn Ashur, M. F. (2008). *Al-Tafsir wa Rijaluhu* (1st ed.). Dar al-Salam.
- Ibrahim, R. A., & Kadir, M. N. A. (2020). *Al-Tafsir Al-Maqasidi: Konsep & Aplikasi Berpandukan Tafsir Ibn 'Ashur*. Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Islam, T. (2018). *Ibn Ashur's Views on Maqasid al-Quran: An Analysis*. Ma'ālim Al-Qur'ān Wa Al-Sunnah, 14(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.33102/jmq.v14i2.135>
- Jibrān, M. M. (1988). *Manhaj as-Syeikh Muhammad at-Thobir Ibn Ashur fi islah al-Ta'lim al-Islami*. Majallah Kulliyah Ad-Dakwah Al-Islamiyyah, 5, 223.
- Laila, A. N., & Ochviardi, D. (2024). *Corak Tafsir Maqasidi Dalam Tafsir Al-Tabrir Wa Al-Tanwir*. JIQTa: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir, 2(2), 151–163. <https://doi.org/10.36769/jiqta.v2i2.440>
- Nafi, N. B. M. (2005). *Ṭābir Ibn 'Ashūr: The career and thought of a modern reformist 'ālim*, with special reference to his work of tafsir. Journal of Qur'anic Studies, 7(1), 7.
- Suleimān, H., Alatas, A., & Busari, S. A. (2024). *Examining The Reformist Thoughts Of Al-Tabir Ibn 'Ashur*. Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law, 12(2), 272–281. <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjsl.vol12no2.467>
- Wani, G. Q. (2017). *Islamic Perspectives on Human Nature: Ibn Ashur's Fitrah-Based Theory of Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*. ICR Journal, 8(2), 230–243. <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v8i2.197>