

REDEFINING SINCERITY FROM RISALE-I NUR PERSPECTIVE IN MODERN LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary student population is diverse; making it even more difficult to define, causing less conventional learning opportunities. This includes changes in learning that are influenced by deconstructionist attitudes associated with the postmodern era. Modernization also challenges individuals' morality and spirituality; where morality is not easily found in specifically tailored programs but embedded in the process of education itself. In higher education, sincerity appears to be an important necessity to equip both students and educators to understand each other's insights and experiences, to engage efficiently, and reflect in learning. Sincerity, especially in a modern learning style, is a concept which merges the ideas of honesty, transparency, accountability, and integrity. Hence, in this review article, the authors focus on the value of sincerity, which is an essential value in learning, defined from the perspective of Risale-i Nur by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, a treatise of light that discusses how sincerity is a strong opponent against conflicts in learning. Also, factors that diminish sincerity value and how being sincere is a spiritual remedy against spiritual sickness are addressed.

Keyword: Sincerity; Modern Learning; Nursi; Spiritual Value

INTRODUCTION

Modernization in industry has affected learning styles and the system. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when education (the same applies to working and re-learning new method) flipped, and individuals had to adapt to the use of technology. Despite catching up with time and technologies, the modern age also challenges new generations. Knox et al. (2020) conclude that the contemporary student population is diverse and more difficult to define resulting in less conventional learning opportunities as well as challenges to the current approaches to teaching. Knox et al. also note how changes in learning are influenced by deconstructionist attitudes associated with the postmodern era. This is applicable to general beliefs and attitudes towards education which results in the continuous redefinition of students and their desired learning environment. Nevertheless, educational policies barely reforms accordingly, hence this results in less optimal learning outcomes, processes, and environments (Knox et al., 2020). However, despite these challenges, modernization also challenges individuals' morality and spirituality where morality is not easily found in specifically tailored programs but embedded in the process of education itself (Krettenauer, 2020). Krettenauer also adds that formal education has the role to shape and transform individuals' morality. This is where the importance of moral values come in, especially sincerity in modern learning, be it teaching or studying, for educators or learners.

Sincerity in Arabic is known as '*ikhlas*'. Sincerity relates to any deed accomplished for the sake of Allah or God as orientation. Doing everything only to gain God's pleasure, free from the desire to attain praise or recognitions from people (Abdullah, 2020). Abdullah also analyzes how sincerity is a concept which merges the ideas of honesty, transparency, accountability, and integrity. In Arabic, *ikhlas* also portray pure, clean, and not mixed with one another. In other words, being sincere is truly not expecting any self-respect from human beings. It is only accomplished for God's sake. For Glasse (1996), a person's sincerity lies in serving God with one's whole heart, mind, and soul. Qardawi (1996) defines it as an act that is justified physically and from the heart. Hence, in this review article, the authors focus on the value of sincerity, which is an important value in today's modern learning, be it personalized or learning in general.

In higher education, sincerity appears to be an important necessity to equip both students and educators to understand one another's insights, experiences, to engage efficiently and reflect on learning (Soler-Costa et al., 2021). It is important to implement values; to be selective with information, receive knowledge with meaning and later be able to have meaningful achievements with memorable outcomes and most importantly, lifelong knowledge (Nawawi et al., 2020). From the perspective of religion, the integration of Islamic values and practices in the conventional education system should not be missed out as Rosli et al. (2019) manages to demonstrate. Islamic spiritual concepts, values, practices, and their applicability require educating and embracing spiritual values. Stonehocker (2020) also insists that moral intellect should be based on religious practices despite the notion that spiritually should be an internal commitment for personal integrity, with or without the command of God.

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and Risale-i Nur

Imam Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) had been a symbol of *ikhlas*. He was an influential Muslim scholar in Turkey and philosopher of the late Ottoman who produced a thematic interpretation of the Holy Quran, known as the Risale-i Nur. His whole life was an exemplary manifestation of *ikhlas*. According to his students in many places in the Risale-i Nur, speaking with others and being shown excessive respect, affect him adversely and severely. This is because in this age of egotism they are signs of worship, hypocrisy and artificiality (Vahide, 2005). The Holy Quran (1983) chapter 98 verse number 5, describes the vitality of *ikhlas*, as: "*yet all that they had been commanded was that they serve Allah, with utter sincerity, devoting themselves exclusively to Him, and that they establish Prayer and pay Zakat, that is the right faith*".

Nursi aimed to restore and enhance Islamic spirituality after the fall of the Ottoman Turkish Empire under secularism (Thomas, 2019). Nursi was once invited to give a sermon in Damascus which was witnessed by nearly 10,000 pilgrims comprising 100 religious scholars at the time (Abdulrahman, 2011). The Damascus sermon (Nursi, 1989) is not only valuable and effective with a strong heritage that transcends geography, philosophy, boundaries, and time, it even describes the spiritual illnesses that were prevalent at the time and are highly relevant to the present accompanied by spiritual medicines as cures (Thomas et al., 2018). Thomas also highlights how Nursi elaborates on spiritual medicine as an equivalent to "pharmacy of the Quran". The Risale-i Nur collection helps its reader with guidance from the Holy Quran and reaches to a Muslim audience to pay attention to the revelation of the Quran as the basis for Islamic faith. The Risale-i Nur collection, also known as the "Treatise of Light", has now been translated into almost 50 languages (Tuna, 2020). It is studied and regularly read by students in *madrasah* (religious schools) and is perceived as a shortcut to learn *tawheed* (monotheism) and to strengthen one's belief towards Allah (Ishak et al., 2019). The Risale-i Nur collection includes various topics such as (1) theological conversations to jurisprudential matters in The Letters (Nursi, 2013); (2) deep reflection of longing for God's help in The Flashes collection (Nursi, 2000; 2020a); and (3) topics dealing with ways to strengthen faith (Mohammad, 2015) as thoroughly discussed in The Words (Nursi, 2011; 2021). At the same time, it integrates sciences in religious aspect, which is needed in education to produce an integrative personality in future generation that empowers both an excellent knowledge in science and faith (Sempo, 2020), hence rebuilding the glories of Islam.

Nursi also highlights spiritual values in all his magnum opus writing, especially regarding modern wars that no longer involve physical combat but instead, internal war and challenges in civilization including ones that threaten Islam and Muslims. These obstacles are also part of spiritual challenges; hence it is important to mold a barrier against moral destruction (Gülerce & Yapar, 2020). In the same analysis, Gülerce and Yapar (2020) also explain values from Nursi's approach to be applied as expected moral outcome which is values in education related to forms of moral resistance known as *jihad manawi* (spiritual resistance).

Sincerity from the Perspective of Risale-i Nur To Fight Against Conflicts

Nursi (2020b) defines sincerity (be it in worldly deeds or spiritual deeds) as the most important foundation, the greatest strength, the most dependable helper, the most solid support, the shortest path to realization, the most acceptable meaningful prayer, the means of achieving the most noble goal, the most important character, as well as the purest form of *ubudiyah* (obedience to God). Nursi (2012) explains how pursuing God's love is far more important than world titles, ranks or positions; hence sincerity means remaining aware of one's worldly obligations and acting on them with the right intention and the right method. This explains how sincerity can be applied in every aspect of daily lives for everyone in societies, in communities, and even in working environments. According to Rokhman (2010), Muslims who follow the ethics of Islam tend to be more contented with their job or roles in their organization and even more committed and responsible. Satisfaction can be related to one's sincerity in handling one's job and role in an organization. It is also part of adding spirituality growth in the workplace since working is one's commitment to the community (Benefiel et al., 2014). Knowing that everything we work for is for the sake of Allah leads to an ethical fulfillment of duties. The same concept applies to education. Both students and teachers are entrusted with the task and responsibility to learn and contribute to the next generation. When duties are carried out without sincerity, the teacher's knowledge may not reach the hearts of students. Hence, teachers would be unable to lead students towards understanding resulting in their failure. Therefore, pure sincerity in genuinely handling duties leads individual to the right path, avoiding calamities and harm, which are not easily applicable to everyone. Hence, it is a form of moral resistance to perform the value of sincerity.

Factors Diminishing Sincerity

Nursi (2014) explains and concludes that conflicts amongst Muslim scholars are caused by seven factors. These factors are due to the lack of sincerity and at the same time can easily be resolved with sincere acts. The first factor resides in the indefinite promised reward. Unlike in professional organization and work, for the people of religion, the scholars, and those who follow the path, in regard to the duty of each concerning all that are involved; their material reward is not set and specified (Nursi, 2020b; Nursi 2000).

The second factor is the absence of need to cooperate to find the right path, since all Muslims see their paths as the righteous one. Third, high enthusiasm in delivering the truth results in ego boosting, a quest for a higher rank, order and position. The fourth factor is the lack of *istiqomah* (consistency), where sincerity is inconsistent meaning attributing reaching one's goal to receive help from others and God, thus suppressing arrogance. The fifth factor occurs when societies do not seek unity; hence, communities fight and are prone to enmity. The sixth factor is when believers focus on rewards in the hereafter (also known as *akhirah*) instead of focusing on their duties in this world which is as important and rewarding. Finally, the seventh factor is allowing disqualified individuals to take the authority and cause destruction consequently resulting in disputes and fight that harm one another. Nursi claims these seven factors as the source of disunity that triggered enmity and war amongst among Muslim societies at the fall of the Ottoman empire. Nursi concludes that the solution for each factor resides in sincerity itself where being sincere is being capable of making an individual see beyond worldly profits to reach the real reward. Sincerity comes with the good intention of working together on a straight path instead of arguing about being right. The need for unity creates strengths and prevents war.

Remedies for Spiritual Sickness

As said by Nursi (2014) in his sermon, spiritual sickness is inevitable during modern times. Nursi (2020a) describes the importance of sincerity that benefits society. If the principle of sincerity is contaminated with worldly affair, one should expect a reminder as a punishment. This is because sincerity that is oriented away from God prevents good deeds and affects the *ukhuwah* (relationship). Hence, it disrupts peace and harmony. Nursi also adds how this chronic disease of wanting fame, title and respect from others, which can be given but should not be requested, can be healed through sincerity (Nursi, 2020a).

Nursi (2021a, 2000, 2020a, 2020b) wrote a nine-fold rule to preserve and ensure that sincerity can be perfectly function. First, to act positively out of love towards one's passionate outlook; at the same time avoiding enmity with other outlooks, not criticizing them, interfering in their beliefs and sciences or in any way concerning oneself with them. Second, to unite within the fold of Islam irrespective of outlook, remembering the numerous ties of unity that induce love, brotherhood and harmony. Third, to adopt a just rule of conduct that a follower of any right outlook has the right to say, "my outlook is true or the best" instead of "my outlook alone is true" or that "my outlook alone is good" which implies that all other outlooks are a fallacy and repugnance. Fourth, to consider that union with the people of truth is a cause of Divine support assistance and high dignity of religion. Fifth, to realize that individual resistance of the most powerful person against the attacks through the mighty collective force of the people of misguidance and falsehood, which arises from their solidarity, will inevitably be defeated; as well as through the union of people of truth in creating a joint and collective force, in the bid to preserve justice and right in the face of the fearsome collective force for guidance. Seventh, to abandon the self and its egotism. Eighth, to give up mistaken concept of self-pride. Ninth, to stop all insignificant feelings aroused by rivalry.

Risale-i Nur advises readers to always remain sincere and pure from greed of attention and popularity. However, Nursi insists that being sincere can be practiced by a community that follows the guidance of the Quran, shares the pride of others' success, leaves out ego in assuming others are always better than oneself and realizes that every small deed is rewarded due to sincerity (Nursi, 2016). In alignment with the goals of education in the 21st century, this is somehow easily understood as we learn that to be sincere is to hide away from the community and learn to love ourselves first before we give back to the community. However, Nursi advises the opposite. Din (2015) also suggested how knowledgeable learners with developed generic skills should innovate to enable learning objects or knowledge be shared. Hence, the values will be transferable to their daily life. As stated by Prophet Muhammad Rasulullah SAW: "Humans will perish except for those who are knowledgeable. Knowledge will also perish except those who practice their knowledge. Who practices his knowledge will also perish except the sincere and sincere people will face great danger," (Al-'Ajlūnī & Muhammad, 2009). It is clear in this saying, that education is essential, but knowledge is preserved with practice, and this can only be achieved through involvements with the community. Involvement with people should be equipped with sincerity as a precaution to preserved peace and harmony as well as curing one's spiritual sickness that involves greed or selfishness.

CONCLUSION

Sincerity is the key factor in today's learning due to technology and modernity that are too often focused on individualism, deficits, and selfishness. Although personalized learning mainly focusses on students' strength and interests, it does require their sincerity and other nourishing values which help nurture their interest during teaching and learning sessions. As sincerity will multiply with other good values as this study had elaborated, sincerity in learning will further create abundance of goodness as it is expected to benefit not only learners but also teachers, parents, and the community at large. The Risale-i Nur collection has deep treasures of treatise for various needs especially for formal education and individual or personalized learning. Hence, it should be a fundamental subject in all educational system and integrated into the curriculum or co-curriculum directly or indirectly across curriculum.

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