

Muhammad Abduh's Perspective on Taqlid

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada pemikiran Muhammad Abduh tentang *Taqlid*. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengetahui dan menganalisis konsep *taqlid* yang dipahami dan di kritik oleh Muhammad Abduh. Rumusan masalah pada penelitian ini adalah Bagaimana konsep *taqlid* dipahami dan dikritik dalam kerangka rasionalisme Muhammad Abduh. Metode Penelitian ini adalah kepustakaan (*library research*) yang bersifat kualitatif. *Library research* adalah penelitian yang dilakukan dengan cara mengumpulkan data, informasi dan berbagai macam data lainnya yang terdapat dalam kepustakaan. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi konsep *taqlid* yang berarti mengikuti pendapat ulama tanpa mengetahui bukti atau argumen yang mendukungnya telah menjadi subjek perdebatan yang panjang. Di satu sisi, *taqlid* dianggap sebagai cara untuk menjaga tradisi hukum Islam (*fiqh*) tetap hidup. Di sisi lain, orang mengkritiknya karena dianggap menghambat kemajuan pemikiran dan *ijtihad*. Hasil penelitian ini adalah bahwa kritik Abduh terhadap *taqlid* tidak bertujuan untuk menghapus otoritas ulama sepenuhnya. Sebaliknya, itu bertujuan untuk memastikan bahwa otoritas ulama didasarkan pada kemampuan ilmiah dan pemahaman kontekstual. Oleh karena itu, Poin-poin kritik Muhammad Abduh adalah adanya penghargaan berlebihan kepada guru, banyaknya kitab tentang hukum, melemahnya *daulah Islamiyah*, otoritas sultan, mujtahid dianggap final, minim perhatian terhadap ilmu pengetahuan dan munculnya mazhab-mazhab.

Kata Kunci: *Taqlid; Pemikiran; Muhammad Abduh*

Abstract

This study focuses on Muhammad Abduh's thought on *taqlid*. The aim of the research is to examine and analyze the concept of *taqlid* as understood and criticized by Muhammad Abduh. The research problem addressed is: How is the concept of *taqlid* understood and critiqued within the framework of Muhammad Abduh's rationalism? This study employs a qualitative library research method, which involves collecting data, information, and various sources available in the literature. The background of this research lies in the notion of *taqlid*, which refers to following the opinions of scholars without understanding the underlying evidence or arguments a subject of long-standing debate. On the one hand, *taqlid* is seen as a means to preserve the continuity of Islamic legal tradition (*fiqh*). On the other hand, it has been criticized for hindering intellectual progress and the exercise of *ijtihad*. The findings of this study reveal that Abduh's criticism of *taqlid* was not aimed at abolishing the authority of scholars altogether. Rather, it sought to ensure that scholarly authority is grounded in scientific competence and contextual understanding. Accordingly, the key points of Muhammad Abduh's critique include: excessive veneration of teachers, the proliferation of legal texts, the weakening of the Islamic state (*daulah Islamiyah*), the political authority of the sultan, the finality ascribed to *mujtahid* positions, the lack of attention to scientific knowledge, and the emergence of multiple legal schools (*madhhab*).

Keywords: *Taqlid; Thought; Muhammad Abduh*

Introduction

Throughout the history of Islamic thought, the concept of *taqlid*, which means following the opinions of scholars without knowing the evidence or arguments that support it, has been the subject of a long debate. On the one hand, *taqlid* is considered a way to keep the tradition of Islamic law (*fiqh*) alive. On the other hand, people criticize it because it is considered to hinder the progress of thought and *ijtihad*. It is very important for a Muslim to do reflection so that their faith remains firm and does not waver so that they fall into the nature of the devil or animals. However, Allah SWT has given reason to all people, both Muslims and infidels, at the age of *puberty*, which allows them to find the truth (Palgunadi T. Setyawan, 2004). The history of Islamic thought has been colored by the phenomenon of *taqlid*, which is following the opinions of scholars or religious leaders without knowing or understanding the basis of the evidence. This is especially true in the context of the renewal and rationalization of religious teachings.

Taqlid emerged historically in response to the need to simplify the application of Islamic law in the midst of the complicated life of society. Schools of *fiqh* such as Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali were created by scholars in the early centuries of Islam and serve as the main guideline for Muslims in practicing the sharia. However, *taqlid* eventually dominated Islamic society, causing them to tend to follow certain sects without examining the underlying postulates of that sect (Hallaq, 2001). This has led to criticism from Islamic thinkers, especially in the modern era, who see *taqlid* as one of the causes of the decline of Muslims in facing the challenges of the times, such as advances in science, technology, and social change.

There are other groups of scholars who allow *beraqlid*. For example, Said Ramdan al Buthi in *Allamadzhabiyahya* encourages Muslims to pray *madhhab* to one particular imam; *Al-madzhabiyah* is the *taqlid* of laymen or people who do not have the competence to perform *ijtihad* to the imam of the *madhhab*, whether they follow one *madhhab* or move to another. Shaykh Ramadan Al Buti said that *Almadzhabiyah* followers who claim to understand the Qur'an and Hadith are directly wrong because they leave *taqlid* to the *mujtahid* while laypeople who do not have *malakah* are obliged to perform *ijtihad*, even just by reading sources from books (Mubarak et al., 2024). In the context of thought in Islam, the attention paid to the issue of *taqlid* has been highlighted by Muslim thinkers, namely Muhammad Abduh. Among the increasingly significant contributions that Muslim scholars made to make Islam a religion that could always participate in the progress of the world, Muhammad Abduh was one of the most prominent. Muhammad Abduh himself was a scholar of Egyptian descent whose influence could not be underestimated, both in the Islamic world and the West. Muhammad Abduh's own beliefs were based on his life experiences, and Muslims from the early 19th century to the end of the Islamic era were mostly still in a state of *jumud*.

In addition, bigotry towards traditional religious understandings has been handled with great care. Islam is characterized by a strong understanding of

traditional religion and new interpretations that are accepted as something true or understood that originate from Islamic education (Harun Nasution, 1985). Muhammad Abduh became a reference on important issues in the idea of Islam. Likewise with the concept of *taqlid*, there needs to be a comprehensive study on the theme of *taqlid*. Considering that *taqlid* is a habit that most Muslims do.

Based on the explanation above, the author is interested in researching Taqlid in the Thought of Muhammad Abduh. Considering that Muhammad Abduh was a prominent Islamic thinker and reformer who understood the concept of *taqlid* with a rationalist approach. Therefore, it is necessary to draw conclusions from his various thoughts so that a complete and authentic formulation of his thoughts is produced. The formulation of this research problem is How is Muhammad Abduh's criticism of Taqlid, The purpose of this research is to find out the concept of *taqlid* understood and criticized in the framework of Muhammad Abduh's rationalism.

Method

This research is a *library research* is carried out by collecting data, information and various other kinds of data contained in literature (Joko Subagyo, 1991). Thus, the preparation of this scientific paper is based on the results of literature studies related to the concept of *taqlid* in the thought of Muhammad Abduh. This research was carried out with a qualitative approach. This approach collects descriptive data from people through written and spoken words and observable behaviors (Zuchri Abdussamad, 2021). The primary data sources in this study were collected by the researcher himself directly from the first source or the works of the research object, namely Muhammad Abduh. Meanwhile, secondary data sources are collected for purposes other than solving the problem at hand so that this data can be found quickly. In this study, the secondary data sources are books, literature articles, journals and internet sites that are relevant to the research being conducted.

Result and Discussion

Biography of Muhammad Abduh

Muhammad Abduh was a famous Islamic cleric, theologian, and reformer from Egypt who led Islamic modernism. He lived from 1849 to 1905. He is best known for his efforts to combine Islamic teachings with rationality, oppose *taqlid* (blind follow-up), and encourage *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) as a way to address modern problems. Here, his biography, his works, and relevant international references are presented. Muhammad Abduh, a member of a simple family, was born in the village of Mahallat Nasr in the Egyptian Nile Delta in 1849. In the surrounding mosques, he studied the Qur'an and conventional religious science. In 1866, Abduh enrolled at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, but he did not like his teacher's approach that emphasized memorization and *taqlid* (Haddad, 1982).

Muhammad Abduh was asked to learn to memorize the Qur'an. In two years, he managed to memorize the entire Qur'an. He was sent to Tanta in 1862 to study religion at the Sheikh Ahmad Mosque. After two years of studying there, he felt that he didn't understand anything because the memorization methods used there were unclear. He

eventually left college and returned to his hometown to work as a farmer. At the age of 16, she also married in 1865. She had to return to Tanta to study after forty days of marriage, but she did not go to Tanta. At the house of Abduh's uncle, Sheikh Darwisy Khadr, Abduh hid. Sheikh Darwisy knew Abduh's reluctance to learn, so he always asked the young man to read books together. After that, Abduh changed his opinion and went to Tanta to study (Harun Nasution, 1975). It was there that he met Jamaluddin al-Afghani and became his most devoted disciple, and from al-Afghani he learned logic, Sufism, theology, and philosophy. A 19th-century Islamic thinker and activist, Jamaluddin al-Afghani is not known as the author of many books. Instead, he wrote more essays, articles, magazines, and polemic writings in support of Islamic reform, Pan-Islamism, and against Western imperialism.

Many thinkers and students in Al-Azhar and Egypt were influenced by Muhammad Abduh, who was an important figure in the Islamic reform movement. Muhammad Abduh's disciples included Muhammad Rashid Ridha, Mustafa Al-Maraghi, Qasim Amin, Taha Husain, Ali Abd. Raziq, Sa'ad Zaghlul, Luthfi Sayyid, and Khalid Muhammad Khalid. Muhammad Rashid Ridha supported the caliphate and emphasized a return to pure Islamic teachings and opposed fatalism, bid'ah, and tasawu. Despite the difficulties, Mustafa Al-Maraghi focused on the educational reform of Al-Azhar. Qasim Amin, in addition to opposing gender inequality, supports women's emancipation.

Taha Husayn has come under criticism for his radical opinions about the truth of pre-Islamic texts. Ali Abd. Raziq rejected the idea of a caliphate saying that the Qur'an and Hadith had no clear evidence. Sa'ad Zaghlul and Luthfi Sayyid opposed colonialism and the caliphate, combining Egyptian nationalism with Islamic reform. Khalid Muhammad Khalid opposed the lifestyle of the clerics and supported modernization, such as family planning. Overall, these ideas sought to modernize Islam by changing its teachings to suit the needs of the times. They did so through education, emancipation, and political and religious reforms.

The Works of Muhammad Abduh

Muhammad Abduh left behind a number of writings, most of which were published in newspapers and magazines. These books include Muhammad Abduh's major work, *Risalah al-Tawhid*, published in 1897. Abduh's book discusses Islamic theology systematically using a rational approach. He emphasized the concept of tawhid, or the oneness of God, as the basis of Islamic thought, which he believed could be understood in line with revelation through reason. This work was written as an answer to the problem of Western secularism and the stagnation of Islamic thought. Asserting that the human mind can understand the truth of religion without contradicting revelation, Abduh used the rational Mu'tazilah approach. In addition, the book emphasizes the importance of freedom of thought, countering *taqlid*, which is blind acceptance of tradition, and encouraging Muslims to interpret the Qur'an according to the times. *Risalat al-Tawhid* served as an intellectual foundation for Islamic modernism and had an impact on reform movements in several Islamic countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia. These works were translated into various languages and taught at universities such as Al-Azhar University. (Abduh, 1897)

Tafsir al-Manar, written by Muhammad Abduh and continued by his disciple, Rashid Rida, in the journal Al-Manar, includes several juz of the Qur'an.

It is well-known for the rational and contextual approach used. Abduh emphasized the interpretation of the Qur'an as it relates to contemporary education, science, and social justice. Avoiding literal interpretation, he explains the verses using linguistic and historical methodologies. In addition, this interpretation emphasizes the importance of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and rejecting superstitions and absurd actions. By offering a flexible and rational model of interpretation, al-Manar's tafsir influenced Islamic reform movements around the world, including in Southeast Asia.

Modern scholars such as Fazlur Rahman took this work as inspiration for their hermeneutic approach to the Qur'an.(Abdullah, 2005) *Al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyya ma'a al-'Ilm wa al-Madaniyya (Islam and Christianity with Science and Civilization)* This work was published in 1902 in response to criticism from secular and Christian intellectuals who argued that Islam was not in line with progress in science and civilization. Abduh argues that Islam encourages science, rationality, and the ability to adapt to modernity. He said that Islam and Christianity do not have a conflict with science as is the case in the Catholic Church. In addition, the book provides ideas for social and educational changes to revive the intellectual spirit of Islam. This work is very important in religious conversations and reinforces the idea that Islam can merge with modernity, having an impact on reformist thought in Europe and the Middle East (Albert Hourani, 1983).

Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani founded the journal *Al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* in Paris in 1884. The journal has only been published for a few months, but it has become an important platform for disseminating ideas of Islamic reform. Abduh's article in this journal discusses such things as the importance of modern education, opposing colonialism, and reviving *ijtihad*. The journal encourages the unity of Muslims (pan-Islamism) to resist Western domination and support social progress. *Al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* had a great influence in the Islamic world because it had encouraged nationalist and reform movements in Indonesia, India, and Egypt. This work demonstrates Abduh's ability to combine anti-colonial spirit and rationalism (Keddie & Afghānī, 1968).

Al-A'mal al-Kamila is a collection of writings, speeches, and fatwas of Muhammad Abduh published after his death. This collection includes Abduh's thoughts on education, Islamic law, and social reform. He emphasized the importance of modern education that combines religious science and science, and how important it is to change Islamic law to meet the needs of the times. In addition, this work expresses her opinion on the role of women, social justice, and the role of morality in community development. This collection became an important resource for understanding Abduh's thought as a whole and was used by academics to analyze how he contributed to Islamic modernism (Scharbrodt, 2010). Muhammad Abduh's work reflects his efforts to revive Islamic thought through rationalism, empiricism, and social reform. His works in *Al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* show anticolonialism and global reform, and *Risalat al-Tawhid* and *Tafsir al-Manar* are prime examples of how he combines reason and revelation. He is still influential in contemporary discussions of Islam and modernity.

Muhammad Abduh's Criticism Of Taqlid

Abduh developed his critique of *taqlid* in the context of the intellectual and social decline of Muslims in the 19th century, which he considered to be largely due to relying on tradition without conducting in-depth research. According to him, *taqlid* is the practice of following the opinions of scholars or madhhab (such as Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, or Hanbali) without understanding the basics of the Qur'an and Hadith. Abduh stated in *Risalat al-Tawhid* that *taqlid* inhibits the use of reason ('*aql*'), which he considered to be God's gift to understand reality and revelation. He believes that *taqlid* is the main factor that causes Islamic thought to stagnate and lag behind compared to the rapidly developing Western civilization.

Abduh argues that *taqlid* closes the door to *ijtihad*, which is the ability to interpret Islamic sources independently using reason and the context of the times. In *Tafsir al-Manar* (1906–1935), he emphasized that early Islam was characterized by a dynamic spirit of *ijtihad*, as did the Prophet's companions and classical scholars (Ghani et al., 2023). However, after the schools of fiqh were formed, *taqlid* became the norm, limiting the creativity of scholars and making Islamic law rigid. According to Abduh, *taqlid* causes Muslims to lose the ability to adapt religious teachings to modern challenges, such as advances in science and technology.

Abduh criticized *taqlid* for often leading to dogmatism and the acceptance of irrational practices, such as superstition, tomb worship, or rituals that are not supported by the Qur'an and Hadith. In *Al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyya ma'a al-'Ilm wa al-Madaniyya* he highlights that *taqlid* has allowed the entry of local traditions that are contrary to the spirit of tawhid (oneness of God). Abduh argues that these practices undermine the purity of faith and hinder social progress, because people prefer to follow tradition rather than verify its truth through reason or authentic Islamic sources. Abduh stated that *taqlid* has a social and intellectual impact. In the journal *Al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* founded by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, he criticized *taqlid* as something that weakens the bonds of Muslims and makes them more vulnerable to Western colonialism. He argued that Islamic societies could not develop or compete with other civilizations because they were too dependent on traditional authority without critical consideration. Abduh demanded social reform through education and *ijtihad* to overcome poverty, injustice, and backwardness (Keddie, 1983).

Abduh, who was influenced by Mu'tazilah's rationalism and classical Islamic philosophy such as Ibn Rushd, affirmed that reason is a God-given tool to understand revelation. In *Risalat al-Tawhid*, he argues that *taqlid* is contrary to the Qur'an's invitation to use reason, as in verses that encourage reflection on God's creation (e.g., QS. Al-Ghashiyah: 17–20). He criticized *taqlid* for encouraging passivity and hindering the development of critical thinking, which he said was essential to revive the spirit of Islam. In the field of jurisprudence, Abduh criticized *taqlid* for limiting the flexibility of Islamic law. He gave examples of practices such as polygamy, which are often taken for granted without considering the conditions of justice in the Qur'an (QS. An-Nisa: 3). In *Tafsir al-Manar*, Abduh emphasized that *ijtihad* should be used to adapt the law to the needs of the times,

such as limiting polygamy or reforming inheritance law for the sake of social justice. He argued that *taqlid* against the schools of fiqh had made Islamic law rigid and unresponsive to social change.

Maintaining *taqlid* as a guideline for laypeople who do not have the ability to *ijtihad* is a counter-idea. Traditional scholars, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi contradict Abduh's opinion that he rejected *taqlid* because it was considered to hinder reason. They believe that *taqlid* is still necessary to maintain sharia compliance among people who are not educated in religious science. *Taqlid* maintains social and religious stability because it allows laypeople to follow the fatwa of trusted scholars without the need to understand complex fiqh proposals.

Abduh emphasized that *taqlid* closes the door of *ijtihad*, which he believes is essential to adapt Islamic law to the needs of the times. In *Tafsir al-Manar*, he gives an example that the Prophet's companions used *ijtihad* to face new challenges, a practice that was stopped because of *taqlid*. Abduh not only criticizes *taqlid* but also offers practical solutions. According to him, Islamic education reform is a solution, which according to him must integrate modern sciences and religion. In addition, he encouraged the reopening of the "door of *ijtihad*" so that Islamic teachings can be interpreted in a way that suits the needs of the times.

According to Abduh, *taqlid* limits the creativity of scholars and limits them to classical texts. Scholars are criticized in *Al-A'mal al-Kamila* for only memorizing madhhab fatwas without understanding the context or basis of reasoning. He states that *ijtihad* requires a deep understanding of the Qur'an, Hadith, and social reality, while *taqlid* encourages scholars to repeat old opinions without adding any new ones. This hinders scholars in developing solutions to contemporary problems such as advances in science and technology.

Abduh changed the curriculum of Al-Azhar University to encourage *ijtihad* by combining modern sciences such as science and philosophy. He criticized the *taqlid*-based education system for producing scholars who are incapable of critical thinking or handling modern problems. In *Risalat al-Tawhid*, Abduh states that education should teach the intellect to perform *ijtihad*, but *taqlid* hinders this effort by maintaining a rigid approach to education. Abduh believed that *taqlid* hindered the scientific progress of Muslims. As Muslim scholars such as Ibn al-Haytham pointed out, he showed that Islam encourages scientific discovery. However, *taqlid* has stopped the desire for scientific exploration by limiting thinking to traditional fatwas. Abduh argues that *taqlid* hinders the *ijtihad* process to integrate modern science with Islamic teachings.

Analysis of Muhammad Abduh's Criticism

Abduh said that *taqlid* emerged during the decline of Muslims from around the VII to the XIII centuries. Because the scholars no longer wanted to do *ijtihad*, the science of fiqh was stagnant for several centuries. They only distinguish between strong and weak evidence. Muhammad Abduh said that the following factors cause the culture of *taqlid* to develop: *First*, there is excessive appreciation for teachers, one of which is the belief that every adult must adhere to one of the

mahzab and that leaving the mahzab is haram. In addition, it is haram to take opinions other than those of the imam he adheres to. In addition, because today's teachers do not understand Nash than the teachers of the past. Second, there are many books about the law. The Prophet forbade the bookkeeping of hadith during the time of Abu Bakr and Umar. The Prophet was worried that after the advent of the books of fiqh, the companions would abandon the Qur'an because they were busy collecting and writing Hadiths. He was also worried that scholars were busy with activities related to the book of fiqh, such as making summaries (*almukhtashar*), syarah (syarh), and *hasyiyah* (explanations).

The weakening of the Islamic State. As is known, scientific activities are greatly influenced by government support. After the caliph encouraged the development of science and the translation of works in the fields of philosophy, astronomy, and medicine into Arabic, the Islamic world began to develop and advance. On the contrary, the decline of government means a decline in the development of knowledge as well. There is the authority of a successor sultan, the sultan who advocates to follow the school he adheres to. The position of the Sultan has an effect on *taqlid* because the Sultan only raises *the qasli* or hukim from the madhhab he adheres to. On the other hand, mujtahid is considered final. The belief of some scholars that the opinion of every mujtahid is correct. Scholars are of the opinion that the opinion of every scholar is acceptable because it is in accordance with the sharia. The opinion of scholars seems to be religious and must be embraced without reservation.

The lack of attention to science shows that political shifts have caused Islamic countries to be divided into small countries that are always experiencing war, slander, and chaos. So, because it is too busy, the progress of science is not noticed. The emergence of various madhhabs emerged under a mujtahid imam, each with a unique thought. As a result, the followers of the mahzab seek to defend their mahzab without strengthening their own foundations or beliefs. They do this by saying that their mahzab is correct and praising the imam they follow for opposing the opinions of other mahzab. Lastly, people do not concentrate on the Qur'an and Hadith; Instead, they used these two sources to support the opinion of their priests.

Thus freedom of thought is lost, scientists become laymen, and people can finally only be self-righteous. People are only looking for easy things because the opinion of mahzab is booked. To solve the problem of sharia', the previous fuqaha had *ijtihad*. However, after the results of *ijtihad* are booked, the seekers of knowledge only use the existing opinions. Because the impulse to move forward has decreased. Judges are appointed from people who are righteous in the opinion of a certain mahzab, even though they originally come from people who can do *ijtihad* themselves.

Conslusions

This study shows that Abduh's perspective on *taqlid* was not only relevant in his time, but also relevant for today. His critique of *taqlid* provides a perspective that encourages Muslims to use reason and *ijtihad* in facing modern challenges such

as globalization, technological advancement, and social issues such as justice and gender equality. But Abduh's approach has also caused debate, especially among traditionalists who see *taqlid* as a tool for maintaining social and religious stability. This discussion shows the conflict between tradition and modernity that still exists today. Moreover, this study shows that Abduh's criticism of *taqlid* does not aim to remove the authority of the ulama completely. Rather, it aims to ensure that the authority of scholars is based on scientific ability and contextual understanding. Therefore, Abduh offered the idea of a balanced reform, one that respected Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith, and prioritized rationality and flexibility. Various reform movements around the world have been influenced by his ideas that adopted the teachings of *ijtihad* and contemporary educational methods. The points of criticism of Muhammad Abduh are the excessive respect for teachers, the number of books on law, the weakening of *the Islamic State*, the authority of the sultan, the mujtahid considered final, the lack of attention to science and the emergence of sects.

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