A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF AKHLAQ BASED ON BADIUZZAMAN'S THOUGHTS: RISALE-I NUR COURSES AT UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education

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ABSTRACT

Today, because of the spread of Western philosophy and anti-Islam propaganda, turbulence and doubts are on the rise among the society and its approach towards Islam. To make things worse, the concept and practice of akhlaq (Islamic Ethics) are being neglected by even its followers. Moreover, Muslims are encountering with a myriad of external and internal problems in both personal and social lives. This study aimed to explore and analyze the concept of akhlaq according to Badiuzzaman's thoughts, with special reference to his magnum opus, Risale-i Nur. In order to support the findings, a total number of 10 structured interviews were conducted among five students from Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), who regularly attended Risale-i Nur course at the university. The data collected were thematically analyzed, from which three major themes emerged, i.e., participants' understanding of akhlaq based on Badiuzzaman's thoughts, their views on Said Nursi's concept of akhlaq and its significance in facing the challenges in life, and the perceived relevance of Said Nursi's concept of akhlaq in achieving happiness in life. It is expected that this study will be insightful for educators and parents.
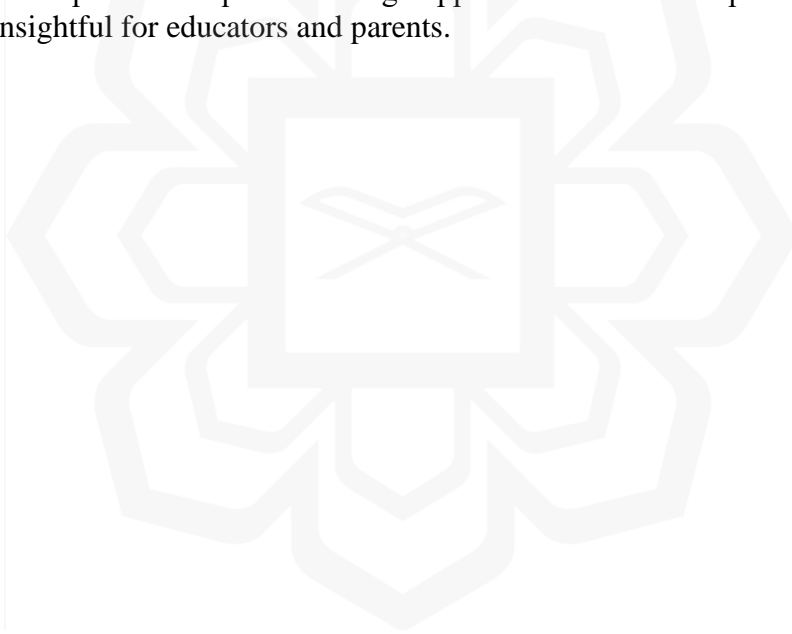
ملخّص البحث

اليوم ، بسبب انتشار الفلسفة الغربية والدعاية المعادية للإسلام ، فقد ازدادت الاضطرابات والشكوك في المجتمع ونهجها تجاه الإسلام رغم أن مفهوم وممارسة الأخلاق قد تم إهمالهما حتى من قبل أتباعه. و مع ذلك يواجه المسلمون عديدا من المشكلات الخارجية والداخلية في حياتهم الشخصية والاجتماعية. و قد هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف وتحليل مفهوم الأخلاق في أفكار بديع الزمان الشيخ سعيد النورسي مع إهتمام خاص إلى أعظم إبداعاته، رسالة النور. و لدعم النتائج ، تم إجراء عشر مقابلات منظمة بين خمسة طلاب من جامعة العلوم الإسلامية في ماليزيا (USIM) الذين حضروا دورة رسالة النور في الجامعة بانتظام. وبعد أن تم تحليل البيانات بشكل موضوعي ، انبثقت منه ثلاث موضوعات رئيسية، وهي فهم المشاركين للأخلاق بناءً على أفكار بديع الزمان، ووجهات نظرهم حول مفهوم سعيد النورسي للأخلاق وأهميته في مواجهة التحديات في الحياة ، والأهمية المتصورة لنظرياته عن الأخلاق في تحقيق السعادة في الحياة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Education.

..……..…………...........................
Norwati Mansor
Supervisor

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Education.

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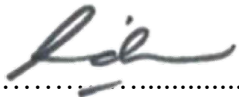Siti Rafiah Abd. Hamid
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This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyyah of Education and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education.

..…………...........................
Noor Lide Abu Kassim
Dean, Kulliyyah of Education

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Celal Akar

Signature …………………………….   Date …………………………………...
                    Celal Akar   30th January 2023

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Affirmed by Celal Akar

....   30th January 2023
    Signature   Date

This study is specially dedicated to my dear parents and my beloved wife who have

always supported me.
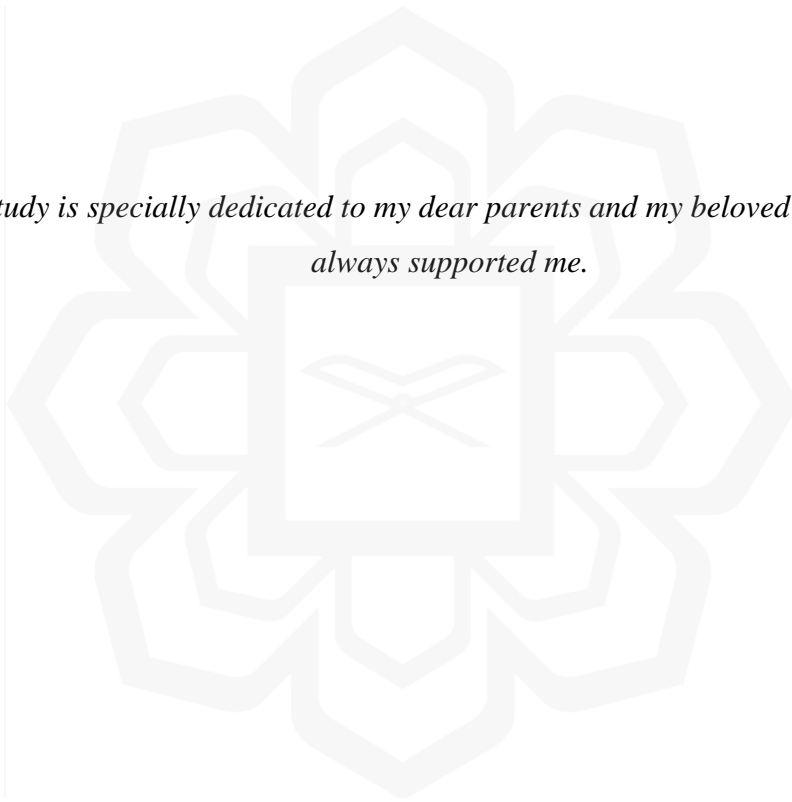
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my endless gratitude to Allah (SWT) for giving me strength to write a thesis on such a significant topic.

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May Allah (SWT) make me understand and internalize the concept of akhlaq that I searched in my thesis and always keep me in the straight path. May Allah also grant this work to be useful for many people.

With greetings and prayers...

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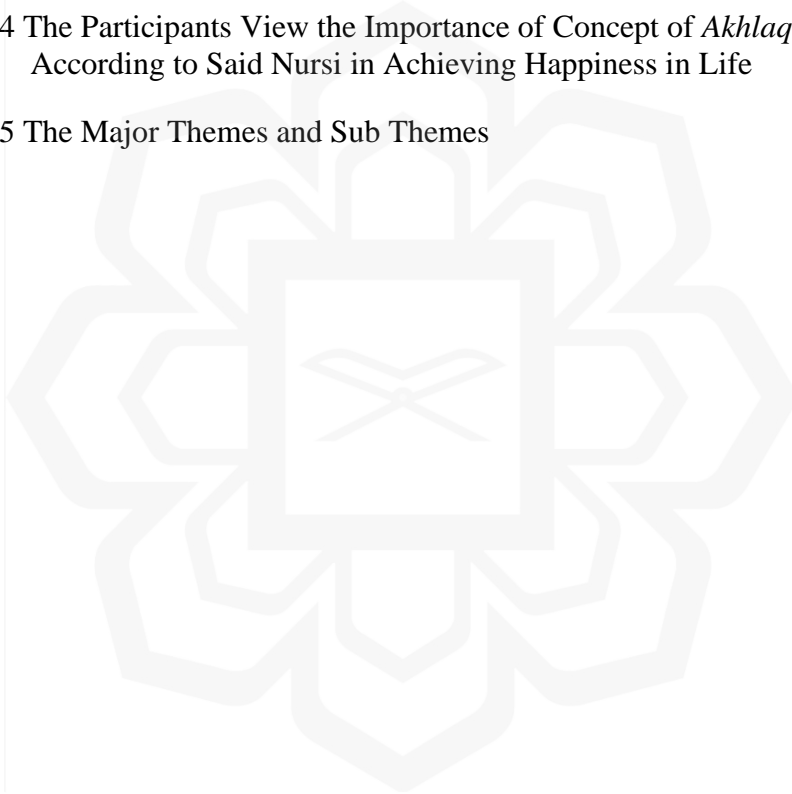
INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The materialist Western philosophy, that started negatively influencing the Muslim societies since 9th century, appeared to be more rampant in the 20th century. As a result, turbulence and doubts arose in society's approach towards Islam. Simultaneously, *akhlaq* (The Muslim *akhlaq*) deteriorated, opinions against Islam increased, and society moved away from living Islam. Being a Muslim has started to become a reactionary situation, a situation to be ashamed of. In addition, anti-religious and non-religion groups have emerged, who were initially the followers of Islam and had practiced the religious values and traits. As such, radical groups that could not match the requirements of the period they lived with Islamic values in their own mental world have started to show themselves (Heyeti, 2014).

Although the works written by Islamic scholars of the past and the methods used in their works were valid and effective for that period, they do not qualify to strengthen the loyalty of today's society, especially the youth, to their needs and religions. They did not speak according to the conditions of the day, even though the rhetoric was to say a mutual word, they pulled people to the corners of the old times, so they could not be effective in reforming the society (Nursi, 2019).

In such a period, Said Nursi developed a new teaching method with a psychological approach, by addressing the mind of the society for knowledge transmission. The most distinctive feature of this method was that the truths of the Quran were expressed in accordance with the conditions of the day. Although *Badiuzzaman* gives great importance to reason, resembling the modernists who put the mind to the fore, he differs from them by preserving the traditional line, that is, the *Ahl al-Sunnah* line. With these two features, his ideas are located between the two

extremes of modernism and traditionalism (Nursi, 2016). That is why *Risale-i Nur* is arguably more effective on large masses of people, especially on young minds.

Said Nursi stated that if the youth, who constitute a large part of the society, do not stay on the right direction, they can be a significant factor in deterioration of the social order (Nursi, 2018). In order to keep them on the proper direction, he generally addressed young people in many parts of the corpus.

The *Risale-i Nur Collection*, a 6,000 pages Qur'ānic commentary (*tafsīr*), comprises individual treatises with names such as rays, flashes, and gleams. Thus, *Risale-i Nur* "models itself as a sort of hermeneutical prism catching what its author considers to be the effulgence of divine light from the Qur'ān and refracting it as colours visible to, and understandable by, the eye of the human heart" (Turner, 2013). What is noteworthy is that the 'flashes' captured from the Qur'ān are those that Nursi believes are most needed to address the problems faced by Muslims of today. Furthermore, Nursi provides a commentary on these verses in a style that a contemporary person can relate to (Keskin, 2015).

Apparently, *Risale-i Nur* is not a traditional type of exegesis. According to Nursi, there are two types of *tafsīr*: those that expound on the words of the Qur'ān (*lafzi*) and those that focus on the inner and indirect meaning of the Qur'ān (*ma'nawi*). While more than 350,000 *lafzi tafsīrs* have been written, *ma'nawi tafsīrs* are much more of a rarity (Akgunduz, 1993). *Risale-i Nur* is believed to be a *ma'nawi tafsīr*, a spiritual commentary, and many would claim it is the most powerful and valuable of this type (Nursi, 1995). Having said that, Nursi also provides commentaries on the words of the Qur'ān (*lafzi tafsīr*) from time to time. Thus, it is difficult to compartmentalise Nursi into conventional categories of scholars or exegetes.

As a *tafsīr*, *Risale-i Nur* expands on the teachings of the Qur'ān by incorporating classical Islamic sciences and modern scientific knowledge, simultaneously refuting the bases of materialist philosophy (Vahide, 2003). It prioritizes the question of affirmative belief (*tahqīqī imān*), or 'belief by investigation', and does this in a way that is relevant to the needs of today (Turner, 1993). *Tahqiqī imān*, the conscious verification of belief, is the opposite of belief by

imitation (*taqlīdī imān*). Nursi felt that *taqlīdī imān* "could be easily negated by the scepticism of the scientific age" (Vahide, 2008). It is common among scholars to criticise *taqlīdī imān* and warn people against its potential dangers. However, they have not been successful in replacing *taqlīdī imān* with *tahqīqī imān*. In this regard, Nursi was different as he not only warned against the potential dangers and shortfalls of *taqlīdī imān*, but also was successful in instilling *tahqīqī imān* into the hearts, by fully cognizing that only *tahqīqī imān* provides inner peace to believers (Keskin, 2015).

Nursi argued that it is essential to have faith grounded on knowledge enabling to resist all challenges. In his own words, Nursi reflects on how he was searching for a "short way to obtain firm faith and a complete understanding of Islam that would not be shaken by the attacks of the numerous damaging currents." In response to this search, he explains how *Risale-i Nur* was bestowed on him "which is a safe, short way inspired by the Qur'ān for the believers of the present time." Therefore, Nursi emphasises making the Qur'ān the solution for today's problems, but he also highlights that the revealed text is explained in a way that addresses today's challenges (Keskin, 2015).

This point brings the researcher closer to the topic of this thesis; Nursi attributes the success of *Risale-i Nur* to its ability to demonstrate how one can attain good *akhlaq*. This, he explains, is through belief. When Nursi's works are reviewed, the concept of *akhlaq* he describes is the state of goodness.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At present, honesty and integrity have faded away from our social and political life (Nursi, 2019). Some people can easily be terrorized; power is misused as those who have it crush the powerless; the oppressed do not get their rights, the little ones do not respect the elders; and the elders do not show compassion to each other.

Based on the crime statistics reports in Malaysia published by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM), the crime rate has increased drastically from 66000 cases in 1990 to 182000 cases in 2000. In addition, there were about 210000 criminal cases occurred throughout 2009. In other words, there are approximately 575 crimes occurring in Malaysia per day or around 24 cases per hour (Tang & Sezali, 2015).

Al-Nu'man ibn Bashir reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

أَلَا وَإِنَّ فِي الْجَسَدِ مُضْغَةً إِذَا صَلَحَتْ صَلَحَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ وَإِذَا فَسَدَتْ فَسَدَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ أَلَا وَهِيَ الْقَلْبُ

''Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body; if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good; but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart'' (Muslim, 2006).

All types of immorality and disgrace are committed openly while racism and sectarianism separate Muslims from each other. Unethical conduct and malpractices are exemplified by officials, who have tripped over corruption cases, as well as educators, who are teachers treating their students with sexual harassment and other types of physical violence. In a nutshell, the Western ideology has an adverse impact on *akhlaq*. (Tuzun, 2021)

The primary cause for negligence of *akhlaq* is that it is rare to find role models, who walk the talk in their real life. At this point, the following statement of *Badiuzzaman* Said Nursi in his 16th Flashes Treatise seems to be relevant and could be taken into consideration in solving the problems: "The most important danger of Muslim these days is the corruption of heart and the damage of faith, with the signification (perverted ideas) from sciences and philosophy. The only remedy for this is light, to show light so that hearts can be corrected and beliefs can be saved" (Nursi, 2020).

Evidently, *Badiuzzaman* does not count the sins, disgrace, and immoralities as the most important danger of the time. They are the consequences of each. But, the

real danger is corruption of hearts with perverted ideas and the destruction of beliefs that causes these consequences.

In his Damascus Sermon, *Badiuzzaman* states that faith leaves a permanent prohibitionist in the heart and mind, and once the bad desires and inclinations emerge from the feeling, the faith in the heart and mind will say, 'forbidden!', and it kicks those desires and inclinations out (Nursi, 2019).

He also postulates that if faith gets corrupted, the inherence (ability to sense) that comes from faith will be lost; one cannot distinguish between friends and foes; the enemy who breaks his bloodstream will be considered a friend, and as a result, he will become open to all kinds of deception and hatred.

Perverted ideas and superstitious ideologies first blow the light of faith in the hearts and minds. This emptiness will be filled with the darkness of disbelief and heresy. Once they are in, all sacred and moral values go out of the heart. The heart of a person who does not believe in the sacred and disregards *akhlaq* is invaded by all bad feelings such as enmity, hatred, envy, bias, and racism. People with such hearts are corrupt in all aspects of their life.

As such, what kind of remedies should be taken to prevent immoralities, and stop the persecution? Is it enough to state and condemn the ugliness of the crime committed or increase the panalties? Of course not. That is why it seems relevant to study the impact of *Risale-i Nur* on the participants at the Universiti Sains Malaysia in particular and Malaysia in general. It is hoped that the results of this study will help produce a a special model of the moral approach.

If there is a strong and sound faith in human hearts, it would be possible to prevent them by reminding them about the punishment for the immorality and persecution in the hereafter. By giving the good news of reward for good efforts, good deeds, good *akhlaq*, and prayers in Paradise, the interest and attraction towards them could be increased. However, there are beliefs and ideas based on behaviours. In other words, beliefs and ideas are the basis of all actions, movements, and behaviours. Just

as a building's foundation is weak, it is always in danger of collapse and nobody will be confident to live in there. Again just as after the first button is wrongly buttoned, all the other buttons will be incorrectly buttoned. Likewise, if there is a weak and incomplete faith at first place, all kinds of immorality, cruelty and disgrace are inevitable.

The mentioned factors suggest that the religious affairs officials need to take actions to strengthen the faith and religious commitment of the young generation. They should give priority to the principles of faith itself to be firmly rooted and settled in minds and hearts, prior to deeds, which are a result of faith. Only in this way is the purification of hearts possible. At a time when deviant philosophical views shake faiths, create suspicious minds, and spoil the hearts, it is vital to provide all kinds of support to protect faith. If there is weakness in faith, all activities of guidance will be inconclusive.

From all of this discussion, it is important to promote the concept, model and execution in producing person with good *akhlaq*. There are several studies on the concept of *akhlaq* connecting to various scholars such as al-Ghazali by Ahmat, Anas, Aziz, Zulkipli, and Ismail (2018), Imam Ibn Miskawayh by Ayu Lestari (2017), and Imam Al-Mawardi by Ahmad Khairunni'am Bin Nurhamim (2015). As mentioned earlier, Said Nursi has played a vital role in promoting concept of *akhlaq*. However, to the best knowledge of the present researcher, a couple of scholar or researcher has explored the concept of *akhlaq* based on *Said Nursi*'s thought such as Agus Setiawan (2016) who studied the relevance of *akhlaq* education in modern time. Futhermore, Muflih & Haji Mod Yusoff (2013) examined *Bediuzzaman* Said Nursi's Methodology in the Discourse of Moral Education in His Thematic Exegesis, Rasā'il Al-Nūr. Simultaneously, Gamon (2020) investigated the moral teaching of Imam Bediuzzzaman in *Risale-i Nur*.

It is crucial to state that the above-mentioned studies used document analysis while the researcher intends to explore the concept of *akhlaq* thoroughly and contextually from understanding of the learners of Said Nursi's thought which there is no other research has been done the same before this.

Hence, with the clear gap in the academic world of this issue, it is important for the researcher to explore Said Nursi' thought of *akhlaq*, solutions, what types of solutions he offers for obtaining and preserving *akhlaq*, and how he depicts the consequences of lack of *akhlaq*.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims to study the works of the twentieth century Muslim thinker and scholar *Badiuzzaman Said Nursi* (1877-1960) and his magnum opus *Risale-i Nur*, in order to explore the concept of *akhlaq*.

Specifically, the research aims to:

1) explore the understanding among *Risale-i Nur* course participants on the concept of *akhlaq* based on *Badiuzzaman*'s Thoughts
2) find out their perspectives on the importance of concept of *akhlaq* according to *Said Nursi* in facing the challenges; and
3) explore participants' understanding on the importance of the concept of *akhlaq* according to *Said Nursi* in achieving happiness in life.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were addressed to guide the study's design and the process and the process of collecting data:

1) What are the perspectives among *Risale-i Nur* course participants on the concept of *akhlaq* based on *Badiuzzaman*'s thoughts?
2) How do the participants view the importance of concept of *akhlaq* according to *Said Nursi* in facing the challenges in life?
3) How do the participants view the importance of concept of *akhlaq* according to *Said Nursi* in achieving happiness in life?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study aims to look at the concept of *akhlaq* in a wider scope as a foundation of peace and happiness. Said Nursi's thought, specifically his conception of *akhlaq*, will be thoroughly examined. It is important to bring his concept closer to the society to make it easy for implementation. This study also aims at affirming that practicing good *akhlaq* can be a concrete solution to the problems of human being. The study of Said Nursi's conception of *akhlaq* regarding the pursuit of happiness would create a contemporary epistemology.

In *Risale-i Nur*, *Badiuzaman* Said Nursi has concentrated on proving the truths of faith in conformity with modern science through rational proofs and evidence, by describing the miraculous aspects of the Quran. This collection now has millions of readers both in and outside Turkey who use either the original Turkish version, the modern adaptation, or the translated version.

Thereby, this research is significant as it adds value to parents' knowledge on the skills in parenting their children with all aspects of *akhlaq*. Besides, the findings of this study will assist educators and trainers for further developing a guideline to build the *akhlaq* values. It is like giving concentrate to the lessons of faith and creating a spiritual atmosphere for new generations in the way Said Nursi showed. This research will also support education and developmental psychology fields. Moreover, the school and university authorities can benefit the information to enhance the expressiveness of their teaching methods and manner.

1.6 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Akhlaq: The plural form of *khuluq*, refers to innate disposition or character and, by extension in Muslim thought, to ethics. In the Qur'an, the term is used to refer to the Prophet Muhammad's exemplary ethical character (68:4). The Qur'an also emphasizes the significance of ethically guided action as the underpinning for a committed

Muslim life. In addition, the emphasise is also on the dignity of human being, accountability, justice, care and compassion, stewardship of society and environment, and obligation to family life and values. Faith and ethics are thus intertwined in the Qur'an and linked further to the Prophet as a moral exemplar.

Badiuzzaman (بديع الزَّمان, Badī' al-Zamān): The word '*badi*' is defined as 'an object which is formed without sample and model' and '*al-zaman*' means age in Arabic. Hence, the phrase of '*Badiuzzaman*', also spelled '*Bediüzzaman*' in Turkish language refers to the 'wonder of the age'. According to this definition, we could say that *Risale-i Nur* should be the recipient of the title '*bedi*' because of its unique and original style which does not resemble any previous Islamic books. "*Risale-i Nur*, which is like a spiritual current is neither a light borrowed from the disciplines of knowledge of the East, nor a product transferred from the philosophy and science of the West. Maybe, we could say, it has been taken from the lofty highest heaven of the celestial Qur'an which is superior to both the East and West." (Nursi, 2019b)

Of course, the person who has authored such a work should also be the recipient of the title '*bedi*', which also bears another meaning, i.e., 'a person who forms and establishes an object without sample and model'. For that reason, it is quite meaningful that the Imam has for many years been called '*Badiuzzaman*'. However, he did not consider himself being deserving of such a title. "The title '*Badiuzzaman*' which has been given to me since my earlier years, though it was not deserved, did not belong to me. Possibly, it was a spiritual name of *Risale-i Nur*; and given to its interpreter as a loan temporarily. Now this borrowed name has been returned to its real owner." (Nursi, 2019).

Risale-i Nur: The Book of Light (*Risale-i Nur*), also spelled as *Risalah An-Nur*, is one of the most influential and original works of Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic theology written in the past two hundred years; and yet considering its stature, it is relatively little-known in the West, even amongst Muslims. Comprising around 130 epistles across 5000 pages, there are few books that treat a larger range of questions related to every aspect of Islam, from creed and theology to ethical, social, and liturgical questions (Nursi, 2019e).

Yet, after establishing the correct creed that constitutes the basis of all else, *Risale-i Nur* also answers everyday problems; in the Epistle on the Sick, it helps us understand the Divine wisdom underlying tribulations, in a manner that renders illness almost endearing to the reader (Nursi, 2019e).

In short, *Risale-i Nur* is a work of exceptional and indeed nonpareil relevance to the times we now live in (Nursi, 2019e).

1.7 DELIMITATION OF THIS STUDY

The study comprises a small group of participants, selected three lecturers and two university students. Being *Badiuzzaman*'s thoughts are still a new phenomenon in Malaysia, the researcher found that there are challenges to choose many participants who have thoroughly investigated on his views and concepts in this context.

Secondly, the researcher has limited this study only to four core books in *Risale-i Nur* from 14 books including *Sözler* (The Words), *Lemalar* (The Flashes), *Mektubat* (The Letters), and *Şualar* (The Rays), since it is difficult to search Nursi's entire book collection which is compiled in six thousand pages.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to study the concept of *akhlaq* based on *Badiuzzaman*'s Thoughts, the researcher chose the Psychobiography as a main guidance, because it provides the researcher a framework to explore the subject's socio-historical background, cultural experience, process of socialization, and familial history (Runyan, 1982). Through the thoughtful choice of life history materials, the detailed consideration of a variety of socio-historical contexts is allowed (Carlson, 1988).

Furthermore, the *akhlaq* problems that occur among youngsters and Muslims need to be identified as the real cause so that effective solutions can be implemented. Leaning on the theory of the view of nature (Al-Ghazali 2003, Al-Attas 2013), this

study examines the role of understanding of *iman* and critical attitude towards the Western worldview for understanding the concept of *akhlaq*. The following figure (Figure 1.1) illustrates a theoretical framework for this study based on the theory of view of nature:
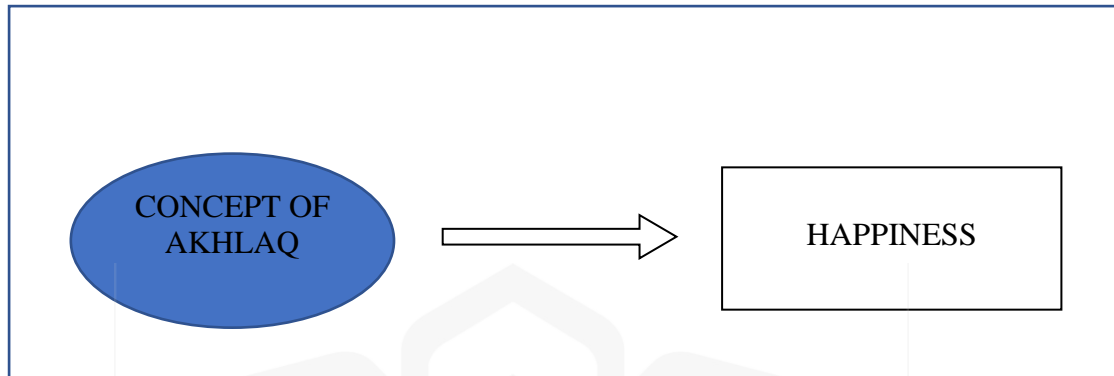

Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study Based on the Theory of View of Nature (Al-Ghazali, 2003; Al-Attas, 2013; Said Nursi, 2019)

1.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework serves to drive the entire journey of the study to achieve its objectives. In this study, the researcher intends to explore the concept of *akhlaq* through text analysis and participants' perspective. The conceptual framework of this study is formed based on the theoretical framework that has been elaborated. The following figure (Figure 1.2) illustrates the conceptual framework of the present study:
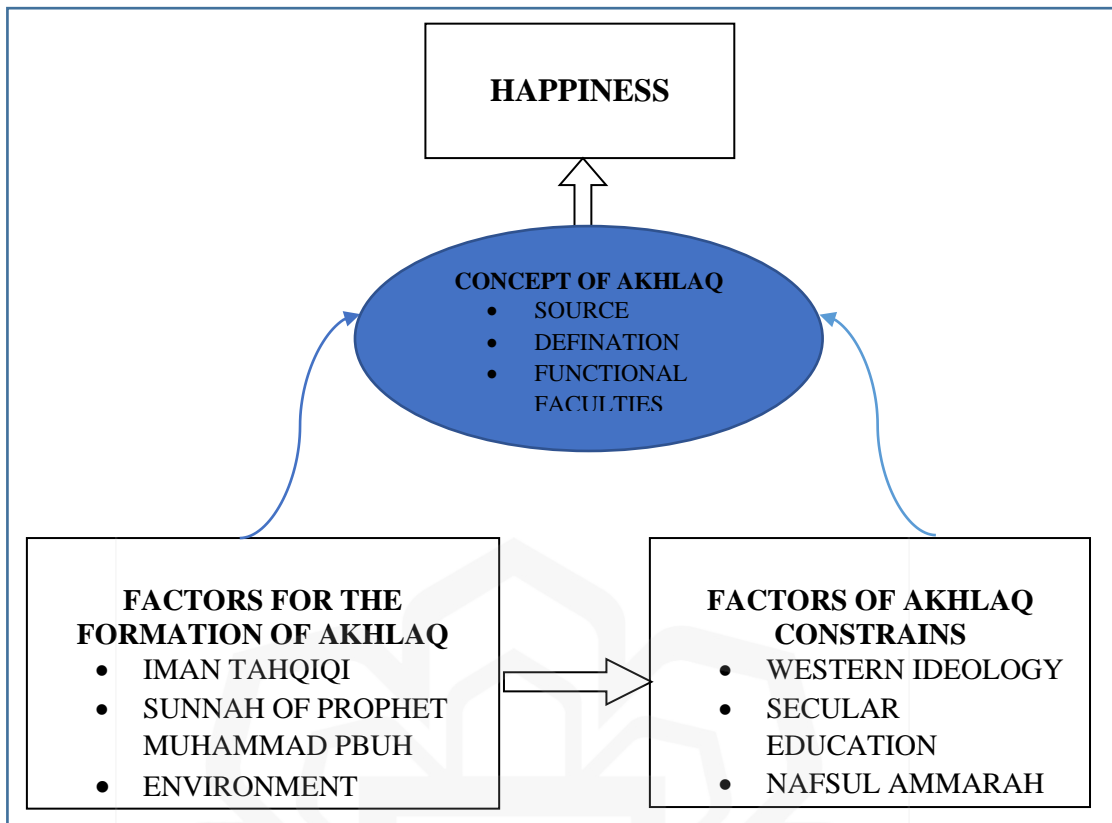
Figure 1.2 Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the background of the study, research questions, and research objectives to address the purpose of the study. In addition, the significance of the study is included to address the benefits that may be obtained from the study and how the result may assist the relevant parties in future. The limitation is set to make sure that the researcher will be able to conduct the study efficiently. Lastly, the terms used in the research are defined to give a precise understanding of the topic before moving into literature review.