

The Integration of Knowledge in Islam: Concept and Challenge

*It's time to fill the gap between academic
expertise and public knowledge of Muslims
and Islam.*

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Abstract

Islam is a religion based upon knowledge which is ultimately the knowledge of the Oneness of God combined with faith and total commitment to Him because He saves men. Integrating Islamic knowledge is of a great importance as it is a process/approach which enables the use of educational sector in creating a generation of multidisciplinary knowledge. In fact, integration is defined as a merger between two or several races, factors, or sectors as a consolidation. For that, Muslims are obliged to master the different types of knowledge starting with the Islamic traditional knowledge of especially faith, and morals because being able to understand the Islamic knowledge altogether with the modern world's knowledge can lead to the emergence of new modern knowledge in line with Islamic requirements. Actually, Islam does not forbid the Muslims to learn foreign knowledge and to get in touch with foreigners because this is highly recommended. Through this paper we attempt to highlight the concept of integration of knowledge from Islamic perspectives and the challenges that need to be addressed to make it a crucial reality for the society. Thus, the application of Western knowledge leads to the spread of secular influence in

the educational system of a nation, which in turn leads to the gradual loss of Islamic identity of the society. As a result, the approach to the integration of Islamic knowledge and that of the West needs to be seen as an alternative for the society in leading their everyday lives based upon the true teachings of Islam.

Keywords: Education, integration of knowledge, innovation, Islam, the West,

ملخص

إنّ الإسلام دين يقوم في أساسه على المعرفة التي تبني على معرفة وحدانية الله جنباً إلى جنب مع الإيمان به والالتزام الكامل له لأنه يحفظ الإنسان. لذلك فإن إدماج المعارف الإسلامية في التعليم هو من الأهمية بمكان كبير كما أنه يعتبر العملية أو المقاربة التي تمكّن قطاع التعليم من المساهمة في خلق جيل ذي معرفة متعددة التخصصات. في الواقع، يتم تعريف التكامل على أنه دمج بين عدة أجناس أو عدة عوامل، أو قطاعات متماسكة. لذلك، فإنه من واجب المسلمين التحكم في أنواع مختلفة من المعرفة بدءاً بالمعارف التقليدية الإسلامية وبخاصة الإيمان والأخلاق لأن قدرتهم على فهم المعرفة الإسلامية تماماً مع فهم المعرفة في العالم الحديث يمكن أن تؤدي إلى ظهور المعارف الحديثة الجديدة والتي تتماشى مع المتطلبات الإسلامية. من ناحية أخرى، فإن الإسلام لا يمنع المسلمين من تعلم المعارف الأجنبية و التواصل مع الأجانب لأن هذا الأمر ذو فائدة عظيمة و هو مطلوب بشدة. من خلال هذه الورقة فإننا نحاول تسليط الضوء على مفهوم التكامل المعرفي من منظور إسلامي والتحديات التي تحتاج إلى معالجة لجعله حقيقة واقعة و حاسمة للمجتمع. ومن ثمة، فإن تطبيق المعرفة الغربية يؤدي إلى انتشار النفوذ العلماني في النظام التعليمي للدولة، والذي بدوره يؤدي إلى فقدان تدريجي للهوية الإسلامية للمجتمع. ونتيجة لذلك، فإن المقاربة إلى إدماج المعارف الإسلامية و الغربية

بحاجة إلى أن ينظر إليها كبديل للمجتمع لقيادة حياتهم اليومية استنادا إلى تعاليم الإسلام الحقيقية.

كلمات مفتاحية: التعليم، التكامل المعرفي، التجديد، الإسلام، الغرب.

Introduction

Over the last few decades and because of the negative portrayal that was shown by the media, the picture of Islam has been projected negatively. This picture is based on a total misunderstanding of this precious religion and the principles it is made up of. In fact, this situation has not been assisted by the lack of published academic and intellectual thought, which contribute in the development of more balanced views about the essence of the Islamic principles. Hence, it led to debates on the role of religion in the public space, migration, education, social cohesion and other issues which have revealed increasing social tensions in public opinion. As a result, misperceptions and misinformation often dominate public dialogues about relations between Muslims and others. In March 2012, the British Council and the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies (CIS) at the University of Cambridge invited seventy scholars, civil society leaders, journalists for three days of discussion, training and collaboration in a conference entitled 'Acknowledging a Shared Past to Build a Shared Future: Rethinking Muslim/non-Muslim Relations'. One of the main concerns of this conference was to help fill the gap between academic expertise and public knowledge of cross-cultural relations involving Muslims. Participants formed groups about five themes such as areas of research and partnerships among institutions in the US, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa that can help shed light on deep connections between Muslim and non-Muslim societies in the fields of culture, the arts, humanities and science. The idea they arrived at in the conference was almost based on the main concern of the conference which was mentioned previously. Thus the focus of this paper will be based on three main elements: *Islam, Knowledge and Innovation; Citizenship, Identity and Religion, and Integration of Islamic Knowledge and the West.*

1. Education in Islam

The meaning of education in Islam covers the meanings of both Arabic words 'Tarbiyah' which means 'Educate' and Ta'lim' which means 'knowledgeable'. These terms co-work in order to make a

qualified human being who knows his relation with the society and his relation to Allah. These relations make the scope of both formal and non-formal types of education in Islam (MUIS, 2009).

The objectives behind teaching Islamic education are mainly to provide experiences which constitute the constant fundamentals of Islam and which are embraced in the Quran and the Sunnah without which education is incomplete. In addition the other aims of teaching Islamic education are as follows; developing the sense of accountability towards the Almighty creator so that men can perform and success in the life; bringing brotherhood between the peoples of different countries; developing high quality of good men who are universally accepted and has faith in righteous religion and many others. (Ibid.)

2. Integration of Knowledge from Islamic Perspectives and Innovation

2.1. Integration of Pre-Islamic Sciences

During the first spread of Islam in Syria, Egypt and the Persian Empire; it came face to face with the science of Antiquity which has been preserved for many years. After that, Alexandria has become the main center of sciences and education for centuries. Then a second center of learning has been established in Persia and Indians physicians and mathematicians were invited to teach in this prime seat of learning. In addition to Christian and Persian scholars whose languages were totally different from Arabic; Syriac and Pahlavi respectively (Magazine of Islam: A Global Civilization).

After establishing the new order during the Umayyad period, Muslims turned the attention to these centers of education which they preserved in order to run down themselves with the necessary knowledge and culture they embody. For that, they planned for a collective to translate the philosophical and scientific works available at that time not only from Greek and Syriac (the language of Eastern Christians) but also from Pahlavi (the language of pre-Islamic Persia) and from Sanskrit. Many of the translators were Arb Christians, others were Persians like Ibn Muqaffa' who played the prime role in the creation of a new style of prose writing based upon scientific and philosophical writings loaded with values and wisdom. The movement of translation lasted for a whole century which started from the beginning of the eighth century and lasted till the ending of the ninth century when it reached its peak with the creation of the house of wisdom 'Bayt alhikmah' by the caliph al-Ma'mun at the beginning of the ninth century (Ibid.).

This extensive effort of the Islamic community was the result of confronting the challenge of the different philosophies and sciences present at that time and to fuse and digest them in Islam's own terms which were the basis of the whole movement of translating a huge number of books into Arabic. Consequently, most of the philosophical and scientific works of Aristotle and Plato and their schools, much of the Greek astronomy, Persian mathematics and medicine, and the works of Hippocrates have been transmitted into Arabic. So, the Arabic language became the most important world's scientific language and the repository of much of the wisdom and sciences of the different well-known civilizations at that time (Ibid.).

The reason which pushed Muslims to translate others' scientific and philosophical works was not fear of economic and political domination. In fact, it was because the structure of Islam is built up out of precedence of knowledge. This knowledge has been considered by Muslims to be theirs because these types of knowing confirmed the doctrine of Allah's Oneness which Islam considers to be the core of every genuine revelation from Allah. They cultivated the Islamic sciences through sifting others' sciences which conducted them to using some techniques such as; criticizing, analyzing and assimilating, and rejecting what was not in conformity with Islamic perspective (op.cit.).

After benefited from different sciences of other civilizations, Muslim created their own sciences in different domains. They were the pioneers in different fields such as; astronomy where they created the astrolabe, mathematics where they originated many branches that were not present before, physics where they made contributions in three domains especially weights of objects and the study of the balance, mainly quantifying the Aristotelian projectile theory of motion after criticizing it. In many other domains Muslims were the first to open the doors of knowledge for the West up to the eighteenth century particularly medicine which has survived to this day, natural history and geography, chemistry, technology, and architecture.

2.2. Knowledge, Integration and Innovation: Basic Definitions

Knowledge and innovation are two words which are used in the context of issues related to Islam, but there a certain divergence in the agreement about their meaning. About knowledge, there is the famous Hadith which reflects the value of knowledge which should be sought even in China. In fact, the Arabic word '*ilm*' bears two meanings. It may be translated into English as either '*knowledge*' or '*science*'. If we take the second meaning into consideration, the Arab

word can have a plural form '*ulum*' which means 'science', but in English this does not work because we cannot have '*knowledges*' yet we can have '*sciences*'. In Arabic, there is a common usage which speaks of '*ilm al-ijtima'a*', sociology, '*ilm al-hayat*', biology, '*ilm al-kalam*', theology, '*ulum al-din*', the sciences of religion and so forth.

As far as the Western context is concerned, '*knowledge*' is used in relation with empirical contexts that are verifiable according to the principles of the scientific method. Actually, this is the method adopted in pure empirical sciences after evidence is collected and theories are tested until an assent is reached to choose the best theory. As a result, there plenty of theories which have become real truth after they were only some dreaming propositions around years ago. So, knowledge is used in relation to material things especially those related to physics. However, there are always hot debates which are caused when discussing metaphysical or spiritual knowledge in the West.

Second, '*innovation*' is also used in various ways and in different situations. The Arab word is used as its equivalent indicates. Scientific innovation is highly understood in the universe to be good. Religion, is sometimes does not trust innovation because it is considered as '*bid'a*' according to the saying of the prophet Muhammad that every novelty is an innovation. In fact, the unlawful innovation such as non-Islamic taxes or giving positions of authority to those unqualified to exercise them or the offensive innovation such as ornately embellishing mosques and decorating the Qur'an are the distrustful ones.

These differences in understanding the two words '*knowledge*' and '*innovation*' resulted in two quite different and distant systems of education, one based on the scientific knowledge and empirical studies based upon accepting truths and innovation, and one spiritual religious which encourages acceptance of inherited traditions and memorization and faithfulness to it. This situation obliges us to deal with the concept of integration and its placement in between these two different systems in order to try to collaborate between them if possible.

Integration is defined by Kamus Dewan (2005) as a merger between two or several entities or structures to form unions or consolidations. The concept of integration is explained by Solikin (2008) and Muda (2008) with the corpus of knowledge today by emphasizing that the integration of knowledge and religion directly means the integration of knowledge and Islam as a consolidation. Actually, Muda (2008) gives examples that he cites from programmes at Academy of Islamic Studies Universiti Malaya (APIUM) which integrates Islamic studies and modern studies such as a trend of

innovation in the current era. The integration of Islamic studies has been related to the modern studies such as; management, economics and computer sciences. At some time in the past, researches related to the integration of Islamic studies were conducted on the basis of history because they focused on the evolution of Islamic-based public institutions like the higher learning and the present reality of Islamic studies in the epoch of globalization.

3. The Challenges that Need to be Addressed

Muda (2008) claims that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) does not only offer Islamic studies programmes through its Faculty of Islamic studies but also integrates those programmes based on Islamic knowledge with other domains of studies as economics and ICT. In fact, these integrations enable students to go over Islamic studies and modern studies jointly. Wan Abdullah & Hamat (2008) emphasize on both the diachronic and synchronic developments of Islamic studies at Academy of Islamic studies Universiti Malaya (APIUM). Nowadays, APIUM displays programmes which interlace Islamic studies and the sciences at the basic and the primary level at APIUM Nilam Puri, Kelantan. Therefore, the consolidation between Islamic studies and Bachelor degree in Applied Science result in nine programmes of studies with the following leading specialties; Science and Environmental Management, Information Technology, Biochemistry, Biotechnology, Ecology & Biodiversity, Genetic & Molecular Biology, Microbiology, Bio-health, Science and Bioinformatics. As a result of the integration of Islamic studies in scientific fields, APIUM produced its first promotion of graduates of thirty nine in 2007. These graduates accomplished their studies in the field of Bachelor degree in Applied Science and Islamic Studies (UM, 2007). This proves that Universiti Malaya is the pioneer in producing quality graduates who are proficient and versed in multidisciplinary knowledge.

Bin Mohamad & Salleh (2008) argue on Islamic studies at KUSZA (known as UniSZA) from the historical perspective and the programmes displayed since its construction. Among the aims of KUSZA's construction is to produce Islamic-based professionals and semi-professionals. For that and based on this objective, KUSZA has determined the amalgamation of Islamic studies and modern studies as an objective to realize in the evolution of Islamic society. Diploma in Islamic Studies and Information Technology, Bachelor degree in Social Science (Anthropology) and Bachelor degree in Islamic Studies (Usuluddin and Counseling) are some of the integration programmes offered.

Safar & Awang (2008) shed lights on the history of Islamic studies at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). UTM and especially via its Centre of Islamic Studies and Social Development (PPIPS) has put one of the aims of PPIPS's establishment and which is to create a professional manpower who understands Islam in its different sections such as education, science management and technology. This aim is convenient and proportionate with both the philosophy of the university and the philosophy of education for the nation. Subsequently, to achieve the objective that UTM has set before, UTM has displayed different integration programmes between Islamic studies and other majors like diploma courses and Bachelor degree in Science and Education (Islamic Studies). two major objectives have been set in these programmes in PPIPS and the Education Faculty of UTM. They are as follows:

- ❖ Graduates are able to accomplish tasks in Islamic studies and teaching profession, skilled in applying information technology as well as possess generic skills to fill up the role of a teacher with good morals, originaive, innovative, artistic and effective in education vocation.
- ❖ Graduates are able to spread and integrate Islamic knowledge and willing to make favourable changes in the field of learning and teaching and follow up independent studies in enhancing knowledge and acquiring new skills in Islamic studies. Thus, UTM has successfully created graduates through the integration and the application of knowledge in science and technology along with Islamic knowledge in the same educational programme (Safar & Awang, 2008).

4. Integration of Islamic Knowledge and the West

Muhamad (2010) says that, Islam is a system of life, it is a whole organization which is composed of three types of human relationships: relationships between human and God, human and human, and human and other creatures. Accordingly, for the sake of knowing the three patterns of relationships, three basic axes were formed in Islam as the essence, namely faith, worship and morality. Intrinsically, it can be summarized that knowledge of Islamic studies is mainly based on the three basic patterns mentioned previously. Jasmi & Halim (2011) denote that there are other different names that are used to refer to the knowledge of Islamic faith which are stated in Arabic as the knowledge of tawheed, usuluddin, al-Fiqh al-Akbar and kalam. In reality, the knowledge of faith is particularly about the Divine faith, prophetic and apostolic work that need to be believed as true. The feature of Divine faith embraces debates on the nature of Allah. Meantime, the prophetic and apostolic aspects are related to the

nature of task characteristics and revelation of scriptures. These two aspects consist of beliefs that must be certified by all Muslims on equal bases. This explanation of Islamic bases is dwelled on by Mohd. (2006) and Muhamad (2010) stating that the matter is the entire basis for faith and beliefs in our relationship with one another. Mohd Teh (2008) notifies that the domain of debate of tawheed/faith is composed of four areas, namely uluhiyyah, nubuwwah, sam'yyat and mumkinat. Faith then is the core central and specific beliefs of all Muslims.

Abdullah et al. (2009) claim that Syariah is the knowledge of all the commands of Allah in the form of laws or regulations which are comprehensive and wide within its scope. The Syariah knowledge is also related to other famous names such as fikah or fiqh, the statutory law, nas or basis of Syariah law and masadir Syariah or resources. The debate turns over the knowledge about maqasid Syariah or Islamic Syariah. Thus maqasid Syariah are divided into three types, namely dharuriyyat, hajiyyat and tahsiniyat. Some of the purposes of the Islamic Syariah are to support justice, make human life arranged, educate individuals, form the purposes and goals of the community, which results in taking care of the felicity of human beings.

Muhamad (2010) states that moral debate usually focuses on two main issues, namely, the properties of praise (mahmudah) and reprehensible properties (mazmumah). This description is supported by Abdullah et al. (2009) stating that human acts can be generally divided into two categories: good behaviour and bad behaviour. All the teachings and practices of Islam begin with the good or bad moral character. Syariah teachings form positive minds and morals while the inhibitions distance people from negative values and morals. Therefore, knowledge of Islamic studies covers a very wide range of subject areas and is the foundation for the Muslims' lives. Thus, new knowledge arising from Al- Quran and Al-Sunni should be explored by the community in order to strengthen the faith/tawheed, daily worship and morality, leading to real perfection.

The influence of the Western world has been through the invasion of the Islamic world via modern sciences expressed through certain channels in propaganda. These modern pure sciences which exclude the spiritual norms have led to the loss of direction among Muslims who are devoted solely to Allah (Abdullah, 2004). Actually, science revolution in the West was uppermost striped by the Jews for two centuries either by individuals or organizations. This revolution has led to positive developments in the knowledge of science which is of a great benefit for mankind. In spite of that and because of the influence of secularism in this revolution, the negative effect is seen

to be greater than the positive effect which gives rise to the thinking of human mind based on religion, particularly Islam. Consequently, some Islamic scholars who are aware of these problems recognize that the best way to get over them is to look at science from the Islamic point of view in order to return man to his fitrah (primitiveness). Likely, all Muslims have to be cautious in being by the science and must ingrain confidence in their minds that the truth and the truth comes only from the verses revealed by Allah (Abdul Razak, 2005).

The reason behind the current situation of the West is the lack of engagement with Islam which is in turn due to the Judeo-Christian dominance of public discourse. The second problem is rabid secularism which frustrates the dialogue of civilizations. Actually, there is a need for a universal celebration of Islam because knowing the roots of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would allow for a greater interchange between cultures, religions and civilizations.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, all that has been said about knowledge, innovation, and integration in Islam can become a touchable reality in our universities because the experience of many of the Malaysian institutions who are always the first in applying new ideas of innovation which result in effective reforms. In fact, getting knowledge from the West is not a sin that should be warned or punished because we can analyze their knowledge and adapt it to the Islamic norms and rules embodied in the Qur'an and the Sunnah as our ancestors did. Moreover, this is the rotation of life; at the beginning Muslims benefited from Greek; Persian, Indian, and Antique through translation, then created their own sciences. After that, the West benefited from Islamic civilization and is still taking advantage from it in some important domains. The reverse will happen if Muslims redo what their predecessors did in ancient ages. All in all, the integration of Islamic knowledge in pure scientific domains is of a great importance since civilizations are made up out of the integration of two aspects; morals taken from Islamic doctrine and scientific knowledge.

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