

## **AbdulHamid AbuSulayman: The Pioneer of Intellectual and Educational Reform of Contemporary Islamic Education**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the intellectual legacy and educational reform efforts of Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman (AHAS), a prominent contemporary Muslim thinker and reformer, with particular attention to his role in advancing the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) and reforming Muslim education. Situating his work within the broader historical context of educational reform in the Muslim world, the article traces the evolution of reformist thought from pre-independence movements to post-colonial challenges that necessitated a rethinking of educational philosophy, curriculum, and institutional structures. Drawing primarily on qualitative analysis of AHAS's major writings, complemented by interpretive insights based on the author's personal observation, interaction, and professional experience, the study explores AHAS's diagnosis of the crisis of the *ummah*, his theoretical framework for educational reform, and his emphasis on Islamic *aşālah* grounded in the higher objectives of the *Sharī'ah*. The article further analyses how AHAS translated theory into practice during his tenure as Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) from 1988 to 1998, highlighting key reforms in curriculum restructuring, integration of Islamic revealed knowledge and human sciences, academic governance, and the establishment of initiatives spanning higher education, teacher education, basic schooling, early childhood education, and even parenting. The findings demonstrate that AHAS's reform agenda was holistic, praxis-oriented, and rooted in a Qur'anic worldview, aiming to address the intellectual, moral, and civilizational challenges facing the Muslim world. The article concludes that AHAS represents a rare example of an educational reformer who successfully bridged theory and practice, leaving a lasting institutional and intellectual legacy in contemporary Islamic education.

*Keywords: Crisis of the Muslim ummah, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, educational reform in the Muslim world, Tawhidic epistemology, integration of knowledge*

## INTRODUCTION

Schooling and society are two very intricate but closely connected concepts. To some educational philosophers, a school is a reflection of its society and similarly, a society is a reflection of its schools. This means that when schools are well organized, learning to know and learning to do take place; people learn proper values, manners, and how to live together, and consequently, the society in which they live will also be well organized. Thus, whenever a problem arises in society and a solution is identified, schools are tasked with teaching and educating students about it. Consequently, efforts to change or reform society often look to education as the primary means. Educational reform is a continuous process due to changing times and societal needs. However, major educational reforms typically occur when societal problems become particularly severe. In the context of modern Islamic civilization, reformist ideas were widespread just before the First World War (1914–1918), when many Muslim countries were gradually colonized by Western powers. Foremost among the reformers were Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt. The former called for political reform (*islah*) through Pan-Islamism, emphasizing the unity of the Muslim community as a means of liberation, while the latter advocated reform through education, with the reform of al-Azhar University as a central focus.

Abduh was successful in disseminating ideas of educational reform that promoted a broader Muslim education in *madrasah*, incorporating modern knowledge—especially science, mathematics, and the English language—across the wider Muslim world, including South and Southeast Asia. Al-Afghani, on the other hand, succeeded in raising awareness among Muslim leaders about the need to struggle for liberation from colonialism. Sayyid Ahmad Khan also pursued reforms in Muslim education in India through peaceful means, fully aware that Muslims were not favored by the British administration. He established the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAOC), emphasizing science and English so that Muslims could compete with others and revive the glory of Islamic sciences. In the Malay world, reformers emerged who absorbed the ideas of Abduh, including Mahmud Yunus, Imam Zarkasyi, and Hamka in Indonesia, as well as Shaykh Ahmad al-Hadi, Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin, and Za'ba in Malaysia (Rosnani, 2010; 2021)

These reform efforts took place before Muslim countries attained independence. The struggle for reform continued after independence in the 1940s, during which each country gained the opportunity to chart its own future. During this period, many countries began to establish their own public school systems, starting with primary and secondary education and later expanding to universities. However, in most cases, these systems were mere imitations of those introduced by the colonial powers. In this sense, the traditional Islamic educational system was relegated to the periphery and replaced by Western education, which was expected to usher in the modern age but also implicitly contributed to the emergence of secular Muslims with little or no attachment to their religion.

This situation continued until the 1970s, and the crisis was felt by many Muslim scholars, who subsequently converged at the First World Conference on Muslim Education (FWCME) held in Jeddah in 1977. Many resolutions were tabled, among which were the necessity of establishing holistic Islamic universities that would differ from existing traditional Islamic universities that offered only revealed or traditional Islamic sciences; the integration or Islamization of contemporary knowledge—especially the social sciences and humanities—based on Tawhidic principles; the development of an integrated curriculum that combines revealed and acquired knowledge at all levels of education; the establishment of institutes of

Islamic thought and international Islamic journals and publications; and the recognition of the importance of women's education.

As a result of this landmark conference, many scholars began to re-examine their respective fields of study in order to imbue them with the Tawhidic principles of the unity of Allah, the unity of creation, the unity of knowledge, the unity of truth and reality, the unity of life, and the unity of humanity. Among these scholars and their areas of focus were S. M. Naquib al-Attas on the aims and objectives of Islamic education; Ismail Raji al-Faruqi on the process of Islamization of the social sciences; AbdulHamid AbuSulayman on the civilizational crisis of the *ummah*; S. H. Nasr on teaching philosophy in Muslim universities and the crisis of modern science; Hussain and Ashraf on the crisis in Muslim education; Nejatullah Siddiqui on Islamic economics; Iqbal Bayunus on sociology and Islamic society; Malik Badri on psychology, and Hasan Langgulong on Islamic educational psychology. Most of these works and ideas were conceptual and theoretical in nature, as these scholars were pioneers working without an established empirical base to test their ideas.

The platform to translate and implement these ideas into practice came about with the establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 1983. This undertaking required an educational reformer who possessed the vision, insight, and foresight to understand the socio-political conditions of the *ummah*, which appeared to be in decline, and to pursue reform through education. This role was fulfilled by AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman (AHAS), who served as Rector of IIUM beginning in 1988. In this context, AHAS can be regarded as a modern educational reformer. Although he served as Rector for a period of only about ten years (1988–1998), he left a lasting legacy through his reform efforts at IIUM. During this period, he was not only deeply involved in reforming higher education but was also instrumental in raising awareness of the importance of reforming Islamic schools and early childhood education, as well as translating these ideas into practice.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The objectives of this paper are to examine the intellectual and educational legacy of AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman (AHAS) as a contemporary Muslim reformer; to analyse his diagnosis of the civilizational and educational crisis of the Muslim *ummah* and the theoretical principles underpinning his reform agenda, particularly the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK); and to document how his ideas were translated into concrete educational reforms during his tenure as Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Specifically, the paper aims to highlight AHAS's contributions to curriculum restructuring, integration of revealed and human sciences, academic governance, and the establishment of educational initiatives spanning higher education, teacher education, basic schooling, early childhood education, and parenting, thereby demonstrating his role in bridging educational theory and practice.

### METHODOLOGY

The article adopts several methodologies. It employs an analytical method in the analysis of AHAS's major works in the form of books, such as *Crisis of the Muslim Mind*, as well as articles and documents by other scholars, such as Ibrahim Zein and Hazizan Md. Noon, relating to their views on his life and achievements. In addition to theoretical analysis, the practical aspects and the translation of AHAS's theories were also examined through personal historical narratives from the period of encounter between 1987 and 1999, based on direct encounters,

interactions, and experiences as an academic and administrator working in the same institution. Finally, a qualitative interpretive perspective is applied based on the writer's experiences, drawing on analyses of both texts and actions. The narratives derived from personal observation and experience provide strong and authentic evidence, and although the writer has bracketed off her personal inclinations in an effort to remain objective, others may still perceive the account as biased. This is a limitation of this approach, as experiences differ among individuals. Experiences are privileges that only those who have lived through them can fully appreciate, particularly when they capture the spiritual values and blessings that reflect the stature and credibility of the subject under study. The writer previously served as an academic staff member (1987–2020), Assistant Head, and later Head of the Department of Education, Dean of the Kulliyah (Faculty) of Education, and a member of the University Senate.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

For the analysis and discussion, the paper begins by examining the biographical background of Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman and then moves on to his theories and principles of educational reform, followed by his thoughts on educational reforms in Islamic higher education and the changes he effected in the university curriculum programme structure for IOK.

### **Biographical Background of AHAS**

Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman was born in Makkah in 1936, during the period after the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate and before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1942. He was intellectually active and possessed a broad educational background, with a specialization in politics, a field that greatly interested him. He studied at the University of Cairo in Egypt, where he obtained his Bachelor's degree in Commerce in 1959 and his Master's degree in Political Science in 1963. He later travelled to the University of Pennsylvania to further his studies in International Relations and earned his PhD in 1973. Upon graduation, he returned to his home country to teach, and subsequently became Chairman of the Department of Political Science at King Saud University in Riyadh in 1982.

While in the United States of America, he was actively involved in Muslim student and youth organizations, as evidenced by his election as Secretary General of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) in 1973. He was also committed to organizing Muslim academics and was a founding member of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) in the same year. The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in the United States—an influential Islamic institution known for supporting Muslims in the areas of education and development—was established in 1981, and AHAS was among its founding members, together with Ismail al-Faruqi, Taha Jabir Alwani, Jamal Barzinji, Hisham al-Talib, and Ahmad Totonji. He later rose to serve as its President, Trustee, and Chairman of the Board.

His life reflects a deep dedication to ideals of service through organized effort and effective leadership. His philosophy was not merely theoretical but also practical, as evidenced by the many significant institutions he helped to establish, which remain in operation today. His final mission in educational leadership—both in theory and practice—began when he was appointed Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 1988. He was persuaded to accept the position by Anwar Ibrahim, then Minister of Education, who encouraged him by presenting it as an opportunity to translate his educational reform theories into practice. He accepted this challenge and served for a period of ten years, a crucial phase in the formative years of the University. He left IIUM at a time when the young institution had

begun to make a meaningful impact on the Muslim world. Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman passed away on 18 August 2021 at the age of 85.

Thus, it can be observed from his life journey that AHAS was well acquainted with diverse civilizations, cultures, and faiths—having received his education in both the Middle East and the United States, led an international youth organization, and later headed an international institute as well as an international Islamic university in Asia. He was a witness to the stark contrast between Islamic and Western civilizations in the twentieth century. He possessed a clear vision and reflected deeply on ways to alleviate the challenges faced by Muslims through the reform of the mind.

### **AHAS's Theories and Principles of Educational Reform**

AHAS's theory and principles of education and reform can be gauged from his magnum opus, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (AbuSulayman, 1993). He first presented this idea in the IIIT Second Conference on "Islamization of Knowledge" held in Islamabad in 1982, which was published in the Conference Proceeding in 1988. In the preface to its Arabic edition published in 1991, AHAS wrote: "*The book in your hands is very special. It is not a compendium or a composition, but a study, a contemplation, and an analysis that has occupied me throughout my life*" (translation) (AbuSulayman, 1997, p. xi). He stated that he never stopped questioning the reasons for the ummah's decline and fall and that he had made the ummah's problems his own. He asserted that the heart of the ummah's crisis lies in "the backwardness of its culture, its political degradation, and its human suffering, despite its human and material resources and in spite of its values and principles" (AbuSulayman, 1997, p. 1)

He sought a starting point for addressing these problems and focused on three alternatives or categories, namely: (1) imitative foreign solutions—borrowing from the secular and materialist contemporary West; (2) imitative historical solutions—drawing on Islamic historical experiences without due consideration of time and place; and (3) the Islamic *aṣālah* (authentic) solution—applying relevant solutions derived from authentic Islamic sources (AbuSulayman, 1997, pp. 3–4). His analysis identified myriad problems in the first two alternatives, thereby underscoring the necessity of adopting the third approach of Islamic *aṣālah*. This, in turn, implies that "there must be a complete understanding of and concentration on the higher purposes of the *Shari'ah* and its general values, principles, and fundamental teachings" (AbuSulayman, 1997, p. 19).

Islamic society, he argued, is distinguished by justice, *shūrā* (mutual consultation), solidarity, brotherhood, and other values held dear in Islam (AbuSulayman, 1997, p. 19). He further contended that the methodology of research in Islamic studies must be restructured to proceed from experience in practical situations. This restructuring entails the reunification of the two branches of education at all levels: the spiritual, with its emphasis on values, and the technical, with its emphasis on application. Moreover, he emphasized that sustained attention must be given to Islamic approaches and philosophy across all branches of knowledge, particularly in the humanities and social sciences.

AHAS believed that "contemporary Islamic *aṣālah* will lead to a reordering of priorities and a restructuring of methodology and thought so that the means for sound Islamic education will be provided" (AbuSulayman, 1997, p. 20). However, for it to be effective in the leadership and reform of human civilization, the *aṣālah* must include two factors, namely, the impetus of positive religious outlook and preeminence in effective thought. He pointed out the deficiency of social sciences within Muslim scholarship, such that no Islamic economic, political,

educational, communications and administrative sciences were ever developed. Consequently, he emphasized that religious reform pursued in isolation from sound methodology would not benefit the contemporary Islamic movement. AHAS further asserted that the crisis of the Muslim mind is fundamentally linked to the failure to realize Islam's higher objectives and to embody its core values. As he stated, "It is therefore a crisis of thought in its essence and its approach, and a crisis of methodology, which the *ummah* lacks in the social sciences". This critique refers to the absence of a rigorous methodological field of study grounded in Islamic epistemology and not dependent on any specific Western, Leftist, Eastern, or other external theoretical schools (AbuSulayman, 1997, p. 34)

In a nutshell, he concluded that "the problems of the Ummah are clearly connected to confused thinking, obscured social vision, improper and inadequate education and the decline of its institutions in general" (AbuSulayman, 1997, p. 158). It lacks a methodology of sound thinking. He envisioned that the most important issues on the Ummah's agenda in the next coming decades should be Islamization in general and Islamization of knowledge in particular. He envisioned that efforts undertaken in various fields should be coordinated to complement and support one another, and argued that any political initiatives must be accompanied by corresponding academic and intellectual efforts. Finally, AHAS advocated a few essential steps to end this crisis, namely: (1) working with and among Muslim youth to develop their mind and character, especially through the education of parents, teachers, and community organizations; (2) working with academic institutions in achieving Islamization and clarifying the Islamic perspective toward knowledge, civilization and the preparation of new generations qualified to bring the eternal message of Islam to all mankind; and (3) guiding the future course of human civilization in fulfillment of the Ummah's responsibility to correct the progress and thought of mankind.

### **AHAS's Thoughts on Educational Reforms in Islamic Higher Education**

Major educational reform in higher education focused on the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK), which has been one of the most important agendas of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), USA. The notion of IOK was first mooted by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas at the historic *First World Conference on Muslim Education* held in Jeddah in 1977, where he presented a paper titled *Preliminary Thoughts on the Aims and Objectives of Education*. He later authored *Islam and Secularism*, published in 1978 by the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), which articulated the theme of the de-Westernization (also understood as Islamization) of secular knowledge.

In this work, al-Attas elaborated on the roots of the crisis facing the Muslim *ummah*, attributing it to the loss of *adab*, or the confusion between true knowledge and false knowledge, as well as the emergence of false leaders who further propagated such distortions. He explained the concept of Islamization and IOK in detail, arguing that Islamization entails liberation from beliefs rooted in myths and superstitions and a return to the recognition of true sacred authority, namely the transcendent God. The process of Islamization of Knowledge, he contended, involves the removal of secular elements from contemporary knowledge and their reintegration with Islamic values and epistemological concepts grounded in the Islamic worldview. He also emphasized the centrality of the Islamic worldview in addressing and resolving these intellectual and civilizational challenges.

Al-Faruqi wrote his version of IOK in a book called *Islamization of Knowledge*, published by IIIT in 1982, in which he identified secular education and the dualistic educational

system prevalent in Muslim societies as the root causes of the Muslim crisis. He further delineated twelve possible steps needed to resolve the problem through analysis and synthesis of the Western and Islamic conceptions of knowledge. The intended outcome of this process was a synthesized conception of knowledge, manifested in textbooks embedded with the principles of IOK. AHAS concurred with al-Faruqi on the foundational ideas of IOK but later refined and expanded the framework by incorporating IIIT's broader agenda and clarifying key concepts related to general Islamization, IOK, and the prioritization of reform within the *ummatic* scheme. Al-Faruqi's twelve-step work plan was subsequently streamlined into two major stages: *Mastery of the Legacy* and *Mastery of Contemporary Knowledge with Islamic Creativity and Initiative*, with the production of textbooks across various disciplines as the ultimate outcome. Throughout this period in the 1970s to the 1980s IIIT organized numerous local and international seminars and conferences in the Muslim world to espouse the crisis of the Muslim ummah, emphasize the necessity of IOK, and advocate reforms in Muslim higher education institutions based on its worldview and epistemological framework.

AHAS continued his writing even after he was no longer with IIUM. He repeated his call that reform and revitalization in higher education are essential elements for the *ummah's* awakening and for the realization of its civilizational aspirations and the success of its global mission. He continued to advocate educational reform, particularly through the Islamization of Knowledge, so that both divine and human sources of knowledge are integrated into a coherent whole, with revealed knowledge providing comprehensive spiritual and moral guidance for human action, and universal laws, scientific knowledge, and technological expertise serving as tools for the effective implementation of that guidance and action (AbuSulayman, 2007). AHAS also published a separate work, *The Quranic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform* which outlines its importance and role in the IOK (AbuSulayman, 2011). He asserted that the rebirth of Islamic identity grounded in the Qur'anic worldview is a central requirement of our time and a prerequisite for any healthy and sustainable future development of Muslim societies. So, in a sense, this reaffirms the idea of Al-Attas on the importance of the Islamic worldview in the IOK framework.

The International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) was established during the premiership of Mahathir Mohamad in 1983 and was a culmination of the call for an Islamic university in the country from the time of Za'ba in the 1920s. The demand for an Islamic university gained momentum after the establishment of the Islamic College Klang in 1955. In 1966, the Congress of Islam was organized by the National Union of Muslim Students' Organization (PKPIM), and in 1967 another seminar was organized by the Muslim College Students' Association. Both gatherings called for the establishment of an Islamic university. Professor Ungku Omar, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Muslim College, presented a paper on the concept of an Islamic university in Malaysia. However, the response to these calls was the establishment of a national university, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), which proved to be a great disappointment to Za'ba, who had envisioned a university that combined the best of al-Azhar and Cambridge (Hassan, 2013).

The 1970s were a period of Islamic resurgence. Between 1972 and 1988, the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) organized five series of seminars on Islamic Education. The first seminar, held in 1972, introduced the idea of integrating Islamic education and proposed the establishment of an Islamic university, with the Faculty of Islamic Studies at UKM serving as its foundation. These seminar series were instrumental in the establishment of integrated National Religious Secondary Schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama*, SMKA) and the Islamic Teacher Training College in 1977. The resolution

to establish the Council for the Coordination of Islamic Education (LEPAI) was subsequently realized in 1983 (Rosnani, 2003, pp. 83–85).

Another significant event that contributed to the formation of an Islamic university was the National Seminar on the Concept of Development in Islam, organized by SERU, a unit within the Prime Minister's Department, and held at UKM. Two notable papers—*Science and Technology for Development* and *The Integrated Development of Man and Its Implications for National Education*—were presented by Tg Azzman Sharifaddeen and Mohd Kamal Hassan, respectively. Among the resolutions adopted was a call for the amendment of the formal education system, from schools to universities, to be founded on the Islamic concept of the integrated development of the human being, with the resolutions of the 1977 First World Conference on Muslim Education (FWCME) serving as the core reference (Hassan, 2013, p. 25).

The University, which has its local historical roots, was also, in a way, a response to one of the resolutions of the First World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977, which was also attended by Mahathir Mohamad, on the need to establish a new model of an Islamic university that would lead to change in the epistemological dimension in contrast to existing traditional models. In discussing the origin of the idea of the University, Kamal Hassan (2013, p. 23) stated that Mahathir was disappointed with the FWCME 1977, which he attended, because the educationalists were conservative and it did not focus on the type of education that could contribute to the elevation of the Muslim mindset. However, it was also true that Mahathir met with Ismail al-Faruqi, a proponent of IOK who called for reform in the traditional methodology of Muslim higher education, when he visited Malaysia around 1981, and he must have, in a way, influenced the former (p. 29). It was after this visit, too, that the Islamic civilization course began to be offered in Malaysian public universities.

Upon its establishment, Prof. M. A. Rauf, former principal of the Muslim College, was appointed as its first Rector in 1983. AHAS was then given the honour of being appointed as its second Rector in 1988. He was reminded by Anwar Ibrahim, the then Minister of Education of Malaysia, that this was an opportunity to put the theory that he and the IIIT had been deliberating into test and practice. Reluctantly, he accepted the position and the challenges that came with it. From the beginning, Integration and Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) became explicitly two of the most important missions of the University. AHAS then took concrete steps to actualize these upon his appointment, as will be discussed in the subsequent sections. It was Prof. M. Kamal Hassan, the original architect who drafted the philosophy and curriculum of the University at its inception, who neatly coined the acronym for the University's mission as IIICE to include Internationalization and Comprehensive Excellence when he became the next Rector after AHAS.

### **Changes in the University Curriculum Programme Structure for IOK**

In the effort toward the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK), AHAS focused on the nature of two major disciplines: Islamic revealed knowledge, which is traditional, and the human and social sciences, which are contemporary but have been neglected in Islamic education, as well as their organization within the University's curriculum structure. Prior to his joining IIUM, the University had a curriculum structure comprising the existing Kulliyyah of Economics, the Kulliyyah of Laws, and the Centre for Fundamental Knowledge (CFK). The CFK formed the core of the curriculum and was proposed in the original curriculum structure developed by Prof. Mohd Kamal Hassan and Prof. Ariffin Suhaimi. Its purpose was to provide Islamic foundations

for all students, regardless of their area of study, particularly in relation to the Islamic worldview, ethics, creed, and spirituality (see Figure 1). At the beginning, students were required to take about seven courses (21 credit hours) of *'ulūm al-naqliyy* (revealed knowledge), consisting of *aqidah* (faith), the Qur'an, Traditions (*sunnah*), ethics, Islamic worldview, *shari'ah* (*fiqh*, *ibadah*, and *akhlaq*), *sirah*, and Arabic. In addition to the curriculum, the CFK also conducted co-curricular activities, namely regular *halaqah* or study circles and *ibadah* camps, which were obligatory for all students. (Note: *Halaqah* is a study circle covering certain topics held weekly with the leader appointed by rotation, while an *ibadah* camp is a two-day, one-night event filled with practical prayers, invocations, talks, or community service.) Prof. Kamal Hassan preferred that there be no single Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (IRKH) department, as in the traditional university, but rather that IRKH serve as the core that permeates all the Kulliyahs (faculties). AHAS agreed that IIUM should not be a copy of a traditional Islamic Studies faculty; however, he differed in that he sought the integration of IRKH with the human and social sciences as well.

For that purpose, AHAS expanded the curriculum structure by establishing a new Kulliyah (Faculty) in 1990, which came to be known as the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), offering both Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (IRKH) and the Human Sciences (HS). Students majoring in IRKH are required to also minor in one of the Human Science disciplines (i.e., History and Civilization, Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology, Political Science, and Communication), and vice versa; that is, those majoring in the Human Sciences are required to minor in the IRKH disciplines (see Figure 2).

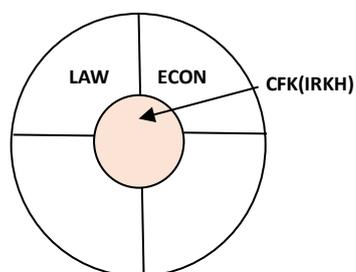


Figure 1 Relationship between CFK and the Economic and Law Disciplines

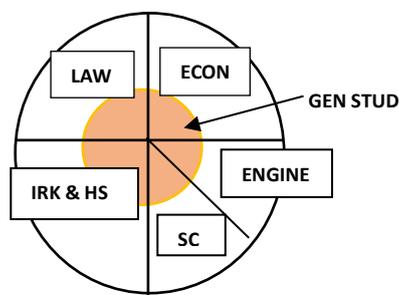


Figure 2 Relationship between IRKH and HS and other disciplines (General Studies is shaded)

With this strategy, he killed two birds with one stone. First, he translated the IIIT notion of Islamization of Knowledge, whereby students and researchers are prepared to undertake both the analysis and, subsequently, the synthesis of the Human Sciences and IRKH. Secondly, he provided important preparation in sound methodology for IRKH students through the establishment of Human Science departments. At the same time, he was able to develop the Human and Social Science disciplines, which could also be imbued with the Islamic worldview framework. When the Kulliyah was established, students were required to complete 33 credit hours of shared courses (Sciences of the Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic Da'wah, Fiqh, Aqidah, and Ilm al-Kalam) before selecting five courses in their areas of concentration. To ensure the

success of this project, an academic leader who understood the concept of Islamization of Knowledge, Prof. Mohd Kamal Hassan—formerly the Shaykh of the CFK—was appointed as the first Dean of the newly formed Kulliyah.

As a result of this restructuring, the Centre for Fundamental Knowledge (CFK) had to be reorganized to offer a lesser number of IRK courses, that is, from 27 to 12 credit hours, to students from the non-IRK Kulliyah. By then, the Kulliyah of Science, Engineering, Architecture, and Medicine had also been established. The CFK was placed under KIRKHS and was renamed the Department of General Studies, a department that serviced all Kulliyahs by offering university-required core courses such as Ethics and Fiqh. Meanwhile, the Department of IRKH retained the CFK courses but developed specializations in Qur'an and Sunnah, Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, and Islamic Thought and Da'wah.

In 1996, these specializations developed into their own departments, with the addition of the Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, as the degree programme in Islamic Religious Sciences became necessary for its relevantization to gradually develop a body of new knowledge—namely, the integration of human sciences with IRKH and values. New courses were introduced, such as Foundations of Communication in the Qur'an and Sunnah, Foundations of History in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and similar courses for other human sciences, as well as courses on contemporary Islamic movements and Islamic thinkers. Issues such as Islamization of Knowledge (IOK), human rights, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and social justice were addressed in more than one course (Zein & Md. Noon, 2013).

Thus, KIRKHS represents a unique experience in integrating three bodies of knowledge—Islamic Studies, Social Sciences, and Humanities—which had not previously been attempted in conventional universities. However, in 2012, major changes were introduced to comply with the requirements of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, whereby IRKH students were no longer required to minor in another discipline but instead to take 12 credit hours, or four elective courses, from introductory offerings in Psychology, Communication, Sociology and Anthropology, Political Science, and History and Civilization. Thus, the relevantization of IRKH disciplines constitutes the foundation of the Islamization of Human Knowledge (IOHK). As noted, “the long-term project of IOHK is based on the reform and renewal of Islamic religious sciences, which are inextricably connected to contemporary socio-political and socio-economic contexts” (Zein & Md. Noon, 2013, p. 175).

There are pros and cons to the two curriculum structures, and their effects can be observed among different generations of IIUM graduates who experienced these structures. The first structure, with the CFK under Prof. Kamal Hassan, had the effect of producing graduates from all Kulliyahs of the University who possessed a deeper understanding of Islam and its articulation, despite not originating from IRKH specializations, as compared to the second structure introduced by AHAS. However, IRKH specialists under the second structure were more contemporaneous, as they were exposed to the Human Sciences (HS) and had additional strength in the use of English. Hence, this represented AHAS's method of IOHK in a practical sense. Nevertheless, the IOK component of the other Kulliyahs was diminished due to the reduced number of credit hours offered under the Department of General Studies (which has recently been renamed the Department of Fundamental Interdisciplinary Studies, or FIDS).

### **IOK in Academic Management**

As the leader of the University, AHAS also displayed a strong academic and mentoring role in relation to the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK). This was evident in the philosophical and stringent process of academic staff selection interviews conducted by the Academic and Staff Selection Board, which he chaired. He scrutinized candidates' backgrounds in Islamic knowledge, their expertise and competence, as well as their conduct and commitment to Islam during the interviews. The author personally experienced this when she was about to be confirmed in her service. AHAS asked many probing questions and occasionally provoked discussion, but the author later realized that he was assessing candidates from multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, the author found the interview enjoyable, as it took the form of an intellectual discussion.

Another approach of his, which can be regarded as mentoring, was evident in the process of approving new university programmes and courses during Senate meetings. He was most active in discussions on the offering of new courses. His examination of programme content and course outlines was meticulous. He paid close attention to course references—whether they consisted only of older sources or included more recent works, whether the authors were distinguished scholars, and finally, whether the references incorporated Islamic perspectives and Islamization, which was natural given the niche of the University. This approach contrasted with that of his successors, whose discussions tended to focus on whether the references adhered to APA or Chicago citation styles, which, in a sense, marginalized the Islamic perspective and the Islamization of modern and contemporary knowledge. At times, Kulliyahs or Departments were required to resubmit their proposals after making the suggested amendments. His fastidiousness in this regard led Kulliyahs to scrutinize their proposals thoroughly before submission to the Senate to avoid embarrassment. He thus served as both a mentor and a gatekeeper in the integration and Islamization of Knowledge through course planning and content development.

AHAS was also known for initiating programmes to financially assist poor students by drawing funds from local and international donors. Through this channel, the University was able to attract academically strong international students from disadvantaged backgrounds to complete their studies at IUM. Since 1995, AHAS paid particular attention to identifying outstanding Muslim youth in the post-Soviet region and providing funding for their studies at IUM. Later, through the IIIT office in Baku, Azerbaijan, he extended networking and collaboration with regional experts on the Islamization of Knowledge (Akhmetova, 2023). To continue his legacy, I on several occasions, assisted needy international students in paying their tuition fees by recommending them to IIIT. I personally witnessed how deeply grateful these students were to IIIT and to AHAS, who had a remarkably generous heart in this regard.

### **Disseminating the Concepts and Practices of IOK**

AHAS, as a reformer, did not stop short at IUM in his effort to bring change to the ummah within the region. The University often organised seminars and conferences on Integration and IOK in various disciplines at the local and national levels in order to disseminate the ideas and practices. He then began to spread IOK to other universities in Southeast Asia in collaboration with IIIT. It was in 1996 that AHAS entrusted some IUM academic staff to be part of the mission of spreading IOK externally. I was one of those whom he selected and trusted to undertake this, probably because it was the core of my doctoral thesis. I remember travelling

with him and the selected team to several universities located in Padang, Jogjakarta, Jakarta, and Gontor in Indonesia, and Mindanao in the Philippines, to share the concept and practice with their academics. The concepts were well received by these universities we visited, as gauged from the questions and discussions we had, although there were a few criticisms as well. In this respect, AHAS had thus fulfilled his theory of the future of Integration, Islamization, and IOK by paying attention to the education and aspirations of Muslim youth. There was a decline in these activities and also in students' assistance after he left the University, such that in Indonesia, it was recently reported in the press and media that Indonesians were requesting Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim to resume financial aid for its students to study at IIUM.

### **The Establishment of the Department of Education**

AHAS placed great expectations and hopes on education, which, from his perspective, can transform people and the ummah. Most societal reformers share this attitude. The importance that AHAS attached to education is manifested in his actions as the Rector of IIUM. One of the first things he did at the beginning of his stint as Rector was to strengthen the Centre of Education, which had just been established in 1987. The year of its establishment coincided with the year of the formulation of the Malaysian National Philosophy of Education (FPK), which was to be translated through the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School (KBSM). As such, its founding was essential in the effort to produce teachers to translate and implement the newly formulated philosophy, whose main goal was to produce physically, intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally balanced, holistic individuals with a firm belief in and devotion to God. It also desires to produce individuals who are competent, knowledgeable, and morally excellent. Consequently, the FPK called for a change in curriculum to one that is integrated—both theoretically and physically, materially and spiritually, emotionally and rationally. Thus, it was fitting that a new breed of teachers be trained for the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School (KBSM) and the primary school (KBSR), with the tagline of values across the curriculum and education that is not secular but faith-based.

Hence, the Centre of Education was instrumental in the reform of education in Malaysia, and it had the full support of the University under the leadership of Prof Kamal Hassan, the Deputy Rector. Its major programme was the Postgraduate Diploma in Education, admitting students with good Bachelor of Education degrees relevant to specific school subjects—Malay, English, and Arabic language, Islamic education, and Mathematics education. Although it was recorded in the minutes of an earlier Senate meeting that the President of IIUM had approved the establishment of the Kulliyyah of Education even before the arrival of AHAS, the University instead established the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science (KIRKHS) and placed the Centre under KIRKHS, where it was renamed as a Department. It was learned that AHAS did not set up the Kulliyyah of Education because he was not able to find qualified academics in terms of integrated knowledge and academic qualifications to head and manage it. The newly recruited academic staff only embarked on their PhD programmes beginning in 1990 and returned from 1994 onwards. It had to depend on retired Ministry of Education officers as contract lecturers, although it later secured a few retired professors.

Here again, we see the concern for excellence by AHAS. Prof Hasan Langgulung, an Islamic psychologist and educational philosopher from UKM known for his work *The Foundation of Islamic Education* (in Malay), and Prof Mahmoud Rashdan and Prof Ishak Farhan from the USA were recruited as pilots to steer the Department in the Islamization of

Education. The Department under KIRKHS began to offer its Master of Education programme in 1991 in a few specific areas: Educational Psychology, Educational Administration, Social Foundations of Islamic Education, Guidance and Counselling, and Curriculum and Instruction (Islamic Education, TESL, TAsL, Instructional Technology, and Curriculum Development). Later, in 1996, a four-year Bachelor of Education Programme in Moral Education was introduced and was extended to new subject areas in Malay, English, Arabic language, and Islamic Education.

### **Reforming Basic Primary and Secondary Education**

AHAS did not only focus on higher education but also on early and basic education. He believed that proper human development should begin early because it lays the foundation for holistic education and a holistic community. He had already outlined in his theories the importance of teachers, parents, and the community in the education of their children. In 1994, as Assistant Head of the Department of Education, I had the privilege of sitting together with him, as the Rector, to discuss the setting up of the International Islamic School Malaysia (IISM), to be managed by the Gombak Educational Development Committee (GEDC) headed by Mr. Yasin Baboo. AHAS was concerned with the education of the children of expatriates who came to serve IIUM. He did not want them to worry about their children's education and future as they served IIUM. He wanted the Department to spearhead this project and to work with GEDC to provide the software, structure and workforce to ensure the success of this school.

The Department was entrusted to come up with a plan for the school management committee, its manpower needs, and most importantly, its curriculum suitable for an Islamized and integrated education. Dr. Feryal al-Khaldi and Dr. Freda Shamma were brought in for consultation from the USA, and they worked with a few IIUM professors from various disciplines relevant to the proposed school subjects. Although not a pure educationist, AHAS knew the importance of the school curriculum, and he wanted it to be the best. Thus, the syllabi for all school subjects were designed by the professors and teachers. I remember having to produce the syllabus for primary mathematics. It is really at the primary level that the school was most free to experiment with subject content. At the secondary level, the IGCSE syllabus was adopted, but we were still able to plan how to integrate the content with Islamic concepts and values, especially in subjects such as science and geography.

Islamic education subjects were blended between theory and the practice of Fiqh (jurisprudence), tilawat al-Qur'an, Hadith, Sirah, and Akhlak, and the memorization of some surahs was given space in the school's daily activities. The study of God's names was related to the world, and science was related to the signs of God. Recruiting teachers was the most difficult part, and we were fortunate that we managed to obtain both local and international candidates. In all these processes, AHAS paid serious attention and assisted in whatever way he could. Dr. Feryal stayed on to become the school curriculum coordinator.

The school was officially opened in Batu 11 Gombak after the Department of Education (DOE) vacated its premises to move to the IIUM Gombak campus in 1996, occupying the space allocated within the Kulliyah of Engineering. Later, through AHAS's dedication to the project and financial support from IIUM in the form of payment of tuition fees, the school moved to its present modern campus in Sungai Pusu. As Chair of the IIUM Lower Education Sendirian Berhad (ILES B) Board of Directors between 2010 and 2014, I began to realize how much the University had to subsidize the school's operating expenses. However, with proper strategy, the ILES B School Management Team managed to implement a better fee collection system,

which consequently improved and stabilized its financial standing. The school management team was able to add a new Primary IISM building wing without any debt, which was a significant achievement. The school has been important to the DOE as a future laboratory school, although this was not fully utilized until much later. Today, AHAS can stand tall for having established IISM, which now caters not only to IIUM staff but also to other expatriates in the country, as well as locals who desire an affordable, integrated, and Islamic education in the English medium for their children.

### **Reform in Early Childhood Education and Parenting**

After the establishment of IISM, AHAS next focused on the education of preschoolers and toddlers. Not many Rectors or Vice-Chancellors would do this. His interest and belief in education as a transformative and reform agent are again manifested in his thought and deed. He asked the DOE to shoulder the responsibility. Firstly, we had to find a good model and develop a wholesome preschool and early childhood curriculum. Secondly, we had to plan how to obtain the manpower; thirdly, we had to look for the physical site and the instructional materials; and finally, the budget. The DOE set up a working committee on this project and then established the Child Development and Learning Centre (CDLC) in 1997 under the charge of Dr. Zaleha Izhah. CDLC was later renamed EDUCARE, which served not only the children of academic and non-academic staff but also IIUM students at a subsidized cost. AHAS cared about early childhood education because he knew its impact on children's future lives. According to Bloom, the child's brain is developed almost 90 percent by the time he or she is 4 years old. Although he was not a specialist in education, he was a great believer in the role of education to transform. EDUCARE, too, stands as a witness to AHAS's educational vision. EDUCARE provides children with life skills appropriate to their ages, basic knowledge, physical education and practice of worship, some basic numeracy and literacy, including memorization of short verses of the Qur'an, in preparation for school, and inculcates good adab (manners, etiquette) and habits. Activities were conducted in a thematic manner with different corners for various activities, and the Montessori approach was also adopted after some adaptation.

Yet, AHAS was not satisfied with attention to the development of preschoolers and toddlers. You would think that this is the lowest level at which to begin in education. However, this was not so for him. He felt that for the whole enterprise of human development to be successful, it should begin even earlier, that is, at the formation of the embryo and the upbringing of children. Hence, he began to focus on good parents and their parenting skills in order to groom the child. This brought him back to the University, in particular the students. For IIUM students to nurture and educate their progeny, he desired that they should become good parents with proper knowledge of bringing up their children physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally, which is the whole gamut of child development in psychology. Consequently, he proposed to the DOE to introduce a compulsory university core course on Parenting for all undergraduates, regardless of specialization. He wanted to make it compulsory for all students in the future, but initially, taking into consideration the lack of instructors, it was to be offered as an elective core course. The DOE again formed a committee to develop suitable course objectives and content. It was decided to create a course that blends Abdullah Nasih's *Tarbiyatul Aulad* (Education of Children), which is based on the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic legacy (e.g., Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun), with child development theories from Western psychologists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Vygotsky, and Skinner. The final course was approved and placed under the General Studies Department. In fact, a lecturer was recruited to teach it, in addition to other lecturers from KOED. Today, instead of being taught by education

specialists, the course has been handed to the Co-curricular Unit and is taught by volunteer staff from various kulliyahs. I used to teach this course in its initial year, and both the students and lecturers seemed to enjoy it for its practicality. However, I am not sure if there has been any evaluation of its alumni regarding its usefulness for parenting among those students who have since become parents.

As much as I can recall, few educational leaders possess the critical thinking, commitment, conviction, creativity, and innovativeness exemplified by AHAS. Even after leaving the University due to unforeseen circumstances, he never ceased reflecting on education and its transformative role. In 2013, I was pleasantly surprised to receive a copy of a novel in the form of an educational dialogue on the proper social upbringing of youth and adults entitled *Kanūz Jazīrah al-Binaīn* (Builders of Island Treasures). Shortly thereafter, he presented me with another book, *Parent-Child Relations: A Guide to Raising Children* (Washington: IIIT, 2013), which he co-authored with Dr. Hisham Altalib, the current President of IIIT, and Omar Altalib. He truly stands as an exemplary Muslim scholar, continually concerned with the ummah and how education may uplift it throughout his life. These works remain valuable treasures for reflection.

### **Emphasis on Quality and Excellence**

My first encounter with AHAS was in October 1988, when I was interviewed by the IIUM Academic Staff Recruitment Committee, which he chaired, for the confirmation of my post as an academic staff member. That was about the same time he was newly appointed as Rector. One of his characteristics that stood out then was his Socratic method of questioning, by which I mean he would probe into the responses I gave. This indicated that he had a philosophical mind and a love for discussion. However, someone who is reserved might not like his approach. He also possessed good interpersonal and psychological skills, by which I mean he was friendly, very approachable, and always smiling. This is very important in his relationship with those working with him. He always welcomed and was open to suggestions and comments. As a new academic staff member, I learned of his major concern for academic excellence among staff as well as students.

He was very serious in ensuring that IIUM would have the best and most excellent academic staff. To ensure the success of his plan, he recruited those excellent staff whom he felt could perform the tasks. As such, we saw many international staff of great calibre working at the University then, such as Prof. Omar Kasule for Medicine, Prof. Jamal Barzanji for KIRKHS, and Prof. Ghulam Nabi Saqeb for Education, and there was an entrenched culture of learning, as they regularly engaged in intellectual discourse. He also ensured that young academic staff either already had PhDs or acquired them as soon as possible upon recruitment as tutors. He literally pushed staff, regardless of whether they had family obligations, to study abroad, specifically in the USA, because its PhD programmes include coursework.

His concern for excellence was also reflected in the quality and aesthetics of the university buildings constructed during his tenure. He was often seen inspecting the buildings with groups of architects and engineers, even paying close attention to details such as bidets and taps in the toilets and restrooms. This reflects his concern for aesthetics, perfection, and minute details. Today, many graduates and alumni are proud of the University's architecture and structure, and all this is due to him.

Finally, AHAS was serious and dedicated in his mission, which I interpret as producing excellent and integrated Muslims with an ummatic agenda across all fields of knowledge in order to elevate the ummah. He was also deeply committed to the mission of the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK), not only in Malaysia but throughout the Southeast Asian region.

### **Personality**

Personally, I consider myself blessed and fortunate to have worked under and with AHAS during his relatively short stint in Malaysia. I knew him as a very hardworking brother, often staying late in his office attending to important matters. He was very patient, direct in his words, and soft-spoken. Never did he show any anger or lose his temper. He was always smiling and very pleasant, despite his back pain. He had an open mind and welcomed suggestions. Every semester, he held a university assembly where academic staff could have a dialogue with him. He treated women much more honourably and gently than he treated men. I sometimes felt that he was like a father when addressing his staff, and at other times, like an older brother when offering his support. He was caring, critical, and creative.

Back in the 1990s, there were few female Heads of Department and no female Deans, yet he treated them kindly, like younger sisters, much to the envy of male leaders. I will always remember an incident that illustrates his openness and willingness to listen to a sister's view. It occurred shortly after I was appointed Head of the Department of Education (DOE). During a Senate meeting I attended with my former Head, I sensed that AHAS looked down upon the DOE, based on a mocking remark he made. It was embarrassing to me. Soon after learning of my appointment, I met him and gathered the courage to make a request. I asked him not to ridicule or demean the DOE in future Senate meetings, as other Kulliyahs might adopt the same attitude. I thought he would be irritated or angry with me. However, he only gave his usual gentle smile. Although he made no promise, I noticed that he never looked down upon us after that.

He was meticulous and a perfectionist, as evident in the planning and construction of the Gombak campus—from paper to concrete. Even the layout and materials for the restrooms were not spared from his discerning taste. He was generous, often giving his salary to support poor students and going to great lengths to raise financial support from the Arab world to help international students. His favourite expression, which I always remember whenever we were discussing a problem, was *"May Allah help you, sister,"* said with a warm grin on his face.

### **CONCLUSION**

AHAS was a true reformer who remained faithful to his principles. Reflecting on what he accomplished during his ten years at IIUM, it is evident that he worked diligently to translate his theoretical ideas into practical realities. As he often expressed, he regarded the problems of the ummah as his own and devoted his life and energy to addressing them. The achievements of the University's graduates today stand as clear evidence of the impact of a sincere and committed reformer. His reform efforts were not confined only to the structure and organization of higher education, but also extended to its content, as observed in curricular changes aimed at developing the integration of the human and social sciences with the revealed sciences, as well as the Islamization of the natural sciences with Islamic revealed knowledge. Through this integration, every student was encouraged to understand the significance of the unity of knowledge, which leads to belief in the unity of God and the duty to worship Him. His understanding of the power of education in transforming individuals and society led him to engage deeply in the establishment of educational institutions at all stages of human

development—from parenting and preschool to primary and secondary education, spanning childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

With his great knowledge, magnanimity, personality, and sense of mission, AHAS touched the hearts and minds of many IIUM academic and non-academic staff. This is evident from a festschrift published in his honour (Shukran & Rohaiza, 2024). Many felt a profound sense of loss when AHAS left the University in 1999 due to unforeseen political circumstances. His contributions to education, the Islamization of Knowledge, IIUM, and the broader ummah were substantial, particularly in ensuring access to quality education for future generations, which has since contributed to the emergence of new leadership within Malaysia and the Muslim world. He remained closely connected to the University even after his departure to Saudi Arabia. Until his passing, he maintained personal correspondence, including annual Eid greetings to several academic staff and administrators. He influenced many deeply in the mission of Integration and Islamization of Knowledge, Internationalization, and Comprehensive Excellence (IIICE). He will always be remembered with the highest respect and gratitude—as a Muslim brother and an exemplary figure.

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