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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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Email: intdiscourse@iium.edu.my; intdiscourse@yahoo.com

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## Transliteration Table: Consonants

| Arabic | Roman | | Arabic | Roman |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ب | b | | ط | ṭ |
| ت | t | | ظ | ẓ |
| ث | th | | ع | ‘ |
| ج | j | | غ | gh |
| ح | ḥ | | ف | f |
| خ | kh | | ق | q |
| د | d | | ك | k |
| ذ | dh | | ل | l |
| ر | r | | م | m |
| ز | z | | ن | n |
| س | s | | ه | h |
| ش | sh | | و | w |
| ص | ṣ | | ء | ’ |
| ض | ḍ | | ي | y |

## Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

| Arabic | Roman | | Arabic | Roman |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ◌َ | a | | ◌ًا، ◌ًى | an |
| ◌ُ | u | | ◌ٌو | un |
| ◌ِ | i | | ◌ٍي | in |
| ◌َا، ◌ٰ، ◌َى، | ā | | ◌َوْ | aw |
| ◌ُو | ū | | ◌َيْ | ay |
| ◌ِي | ī | | ◌ُوّ | uww, ū<br>(in final position) |
| | | | ◌ِيّ | iyy, ī<br>(in final position) |

*Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: http://rotas.iium.edu.my*

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# Note from the Editor

*Intellectual Discourse,* Vol. 32, No. 2 (2024), presents seven research articles that cover the disciplines of communication and media studies, Islamic studies economics, Islamic finance, and education. It also includes a research note and a book review.

In the first article (Media Framing in a Changing Political Landscape: Astro Awani's Political News Coverage of Post-HAWANA 2022), Juliana Abdul Wahab, Azmel Tayib and Syaza Furhat analyse how *Astro Awani*—Malaysia's most trusted news source—framed its political news following Prime Minister Ismail Sabri's assurance at the National Journalists Day (Hari Wartawan Nasional) 2022 that the government would respect the independence of the media. By examining 56 news samples in June and July 2022, the authors find that Astro Awani news provided balanced reporting that incorporate positive and negative aspects of the government's performance. In the expansion of democratic space in Malaysia, Astro Awani helps shape meaningful public discourse and opinion regarding politics in the country.

The second article (Learning Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: Between Islamic and Boko Harām Perspectives) written by Hassan Suleiman, Alwi Alatas, Abdul Bari bin Awang and Mohd. Afandi bin Awang Hamat addresses the misunderstanding about the benefits of non-religious—worldly—knowledge. In fact, such knowledge is important and seeking it is also a religious obligation. In their study, the authors suggested that the misinterpretation of Islam, as manifested in the misconception of the importance of worldly knowledge, is one of the main reasons for violent extremism, as the case study of Boko Haram in Nigeria exemplifies. Contrary to Boko Haram's rejection, the pursuit of beneficial worldly knowledge is not only encouraged, but it is also a *farḍ kifāyah*, which is a collective obligation of the Muslim community.

Ahmad Farouk Musa discusses the reform ideas of Muhammad Asad (1900-1992) in the third article (Remembering Muhammad Asad: The Modernist Reformer of the 20th Century). He explores the life and works of Muhammad Asad, especially his translation and exegesis of the Qur'an—*The Message of the Qur'an.* The article highlights the influence of Ibn Hazm and Muhammad Abduh, as well as acquaintances with Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi, Omar al-Mukhtar and Muhammad Iqbal, in shaping Asad's thoughts and ideas. Such thoughts and ideas address issues that are relevant to Muslims in the contemporary age. The article also shows that Asad's reform ideas, clearly reflected in *The Message of the Qur'an* and his other writings, are based on the primacy of both reason and revelation and a rejection of *taqlid.*

The fourth article (Between Awareness and Visibility: A Google Trends (GT) Analysis of Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP), East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and Kuantan Port (2013-2024)) by Goh Hong Lip, Lee Pei May and Loo Wai Hong investigates Malaysian public interests in Malaysia-China relations, specifically the cooperative projects of Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP), East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and Kuan Port between 2013 and 2024. Using Google Trends Analysis, the authors find that on the Internet, public interests in the projects—as indicated in online search interest—coincided with political shifts in Malaysia and the strength of news coverage. Public interests in the projects differ in terms of job and investment opportunities, tourism, and project progress.

In the fifth article (Enhancing Career Performance: Key Factors in Career Adaptability Among *Aṣnāf Faqīr*), Ahmad Rosli Mohd Nor, Mohd Faizal P Rameli, Abdul Azim Akbar, Nor Aziera Mohamad Rohana and Mohd Khudri investigate various factors that influence career adaptability that contribute to career development of the poor, a category of individuals who is considered as *Aṣnāf Faqīr*. Using in-depth interviews, this study finds various factors that impact career adaptability of the *Aṣnāf* that include personal traits such as self-efficacy and resilience, social context such as family support and mentor access, and career-related experiences such as education and job training. The article also suggests that efforts at addressing structural inequalities and barriers that hinder access to education, social support, and other resources are vital in promoting career adaptability among people living in poverty.

The sixth article (Islamic Wealth Management: A Bibliometric Analysis of Major Dimensions and Future Research Plan)—by Saheed Abdullahi Busari, Kazeem Akeem Olayinka, Akhtarzaite Binti Abdul Aziz and Habeebullah Zakariyah—uses bibliometric and content analyses to synthesise fundamental dimensions and themes within the study of Islamic Wealth Management. The article finds that in the evolving study of the discipline, there is still limited exploration by financial planners and policymakers into various dimensions such as wealth creation, protection, purification, and distribution, which are crucial for sustainable Islamic Wealth Management. This study suggests that scholars in the field should also explore contemporary technologies such as blockchain and artificial intelligence to enhance transparency and efficiency in *Waqf, Zakāt*, and Islamic finance.

In the seventh article (Development and Validation of a Tahfiz School Performance Index), Azam Othman, Nik Md. Saiful Azizi Nik Abdullah, Nurbaiduri Ruslan, Mohamad Sahari Nordin and Shahrul Fhaizal Shabu develop a *Tahfiz* School Performance Index as a tool to measure the performance of *Tahfiz* schools in terms of *Tahfiz* education and sustainable growth development. Focusing on academic *Tahfiz* school that teaches academic, Islamic studies and Qur'an memorisation, through surveys conducted on students, alumni and teachers, the study estimates—using the Rasch Rating Scale Model—a composite score of *Tahfiz* Schools' Performance Index at 6.2 on a scale of 0-10. The index proposed by the authors aims at offering *Tahfiz* schools a comprehensive measure of performance that addresses the holistic aspects of academic, administrative, well-being and school facilities.

The last two articles are a research note by Tahsina Nasir (Reframing the Narrative: Challenging Eurocentrism in Modern World Economic Historiography) and a book review by Hamza Dudgeon (Sherman A. Jackson (2024). *The Islamic Secular*. Oxford: Oxford University Press). Tahsina Nasir compares key scholarly contributions on modern world economic historiography that offer a multi-perspective understanding of global economic developments beyond simplistic Eurocentric interpretations. In the process, she highlights the significant economic innovations from across the globe that debunk the myth of European exceptionalism. Hamza Dudgeon considers *The Islamic Secular* by Sherman A. Jackson as a major contribution to Islamic, secular, and religious studies that challenges the Western conceptions of secularism, arguing that in Islam, "the secular does not signify a complete separation from religion but rather a differentiation from *Sharī'ah* (i.e. non-*Sharʿī*), maintaining a symbiotic relationship with religion (*al-Dīn*)."

The publication of this issue will not be possible without the contributions of the authors and reviewers of the manuscripts. The editorial team records our utmost gratitude to each and every one of them in making the publication of this issue a reality. We hope that the articles in this edition can further stimulate academic discourse on wide-ranging topics and issues of interest to the Muslim World.

**Tunku Mohar Mokhtar**
**Editor**

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# Media Framing in a Changing Political Landscape: Astro Awani's Political News Coverage of Post-HAWANA 2022

**Juliana Abdul Wahab**[*]
**Azmil Tayeb**[**]
**Syaza Fuhat**[***]

**Abstract:** The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and influencing political discourse. However, the relationship between the media and political issues is complex and often shaped by government control, regulations, and ownership structures. During the 2022 *Hari Wartawan Nasional* (HAWANA) celebration, the then Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri, assured the government would not interfere with media organisations' ability to fulfil their responsibilities. This study examines how Astro Awani, Malaysia's most trusted news source, framed political news following this announcement. Using qualitative methodology, the analysis employs an inductive approach to examine 56 news samples from 1 June 2022 until 1 August 2022. The sample and time frame for the study were chosen to capture the media's response following the 2022 HAWANA celebration and the then-Prime Minister's assurance of non-interference, providing an ideal period to assess how Astro Awani framed political news under this renewed commitment to media freedom. The findings indicate that Astro Awani strives to provide balanced reporting, incorporating positive and negative aspects of the government's performance. Overall, the study offers insights into the organisation's operations, highlighting its role

[*]Associate Professor at the School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Penang, Malaysia. Email: julia@usm.my. *Corresponding author*.
[**] Associate Professor at the School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Penang, Malaysia. Email: azmil@usm.my
[***] PhD candidate at the School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Penang, Malaysia. Email: shazafuhat@student.usm.my

in shaping public discourse within the local context amid a fluid and evolving media landscape.

**Keywords:** Television News, Framing, Politics, Malaysia, Astro Awani

**Abstrak:** Media memainkan peranan penting dalam membentuk pendapat umum dan mempengaruhi wacana politik. Walau bagaimanapun, hubungan antara media dan isu politik adalah kompleks dan sering dibentuk oleh kawalan kerajaan, peraturan dan struktur pemilikan. Semasa sambutan *Hari Wartawan Nasional* (HAWANA) 2022, Perdana Menteri ketika itu, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri, memberi jaminan kerajaan tidak akan mengganggu keupayaan organisasi media untuk menunaikan tanggungjawab mereka. Kajian ini mengkaji bagaimana Astro Awani, sumber berita paling dipercayai di Malaysia, merangka berita politik berikutan pengumuman ini. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif, analisis menggunakan pendekatan induktif untuk meneliti 56 sampel berita dari 1 Jun 2022 hingga 1 Ogos 2022. Sampel dan tempoh kajian dipilih untuk meneliti reaksi media selepas sambutan Hari Wartawan Nasional (HAWANA) 2022 dan jaminan Perdana Menteri ketika itu mengenai kebebasan media tanpa campur tangan kerajaan, sekali gus menberikan tempoh yang ideal untuk menilai bagaimana Astro Awani membingkai laporan berita politik di bawah komitmen baharu terhadap kebebasan media. Dapatan menunjukkan Astro Awani berusaha untuk menyediakan pelaporan seimbang dengan menggabungkan aspek positif dan negatif mengenai prestasi kerajaan. Secara keseluruhannya, kajian ini memberikan pandangan mendalam tentang operasi organisasi tersebut, sambil menekankan peranannya dalam membentuk wacana awam dalam konteks tempatan di tengah-tengah landskap media yang semakin dinamik dan berkembang.

**Kata kunci:** Berita Televisyen, Pembingkaian, Politik, Malaysia, Astro Awani

## Introduction

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing political discourse. However, the relationship between the media and political issues is often complex and shaped by government control, regulations, and ownership structures. During the 2022 *Hari Wartawan Nasional* (HAWANA) celebration, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri assured the government would respect the media's independence and refrain from interfering with their duties (Povera, 2022). This study explores how Astro Awani, widely regarded as Malaysia's most trusted news source (Borneo Post Online, 29 June 2018), framed political news for public consumption.

Media freedom in Malaysia has long been contested, often shaped by the political climate and government regulations. Historically, the media landscape was dominated by laws such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984 and the Sedition Act, which placed significant restrictions on media independence and allowed the government to exert considerable control over news content (Sani, 2005). Despite periodic promises of reform, these restrictive laws remained in place. Even during the Pakatan Harapan government in 2018, while specific reforms were initiated, many of these laws were not fully repealed, leading to ongoing self-censorship among media practitioners (Lim, 2020).

During the 2022 HAWANA celebration, with the theme "People's Voice, National Aspiration" (Bernama, 2022), then Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri assured that the government would not interfere with the media organisations' duty to fulfil their responsibilities and report the news. Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri also advocated establishing the Malaysian Centre for the Study of Journalism, suggesting that it could collect data for various research purposes and enhance the country's journalistic standards. With the announcement, it seems that the media in Malaysia would be free to perform their duties without interference from the state. They are free to report on matters and issues related to the current government without fear of facing actions as long as their reports comply with the law. The authorities have not only recognised the role of local media but also encouraged them to promote good governance actively. Hence, this paper aims to achieve two main objectives: firstly, to analyse the prevailing news slant conveyed through political news on Astro Awani, and secondly, to identify the sources used in constructing political news on Astro Awani.

## Understanding Media Framing

This study looks at framing as a basis to understand how news is selected, framed, and constructed on television. In general, framing theory focuses on how the media draws the public's attention to specific societal issues and topics. In this context, framing shapes our thoughts about news items and the presented content. According to Weaver (2007), the basis of framing theory is that the media focuses on specific events or issues and places them within certain contexts to articulate meaning-making.

Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980) assert that framing allows us to understand news as both a social construct and a tool that shapes social reality. As explained by Entman (1993), framing involves selecting and emphasising specific elements in a communication text, making certain aspects of perceived reality more salient. This process helps define problems, offer causal interpretations, make moral judgments, and suggest solutions. Entman also highlights that the information media choose to include or exclude, as well as what they emphasise or downplay, significantly influences the audience's perception and opinion on societal issues. Similarly, Tankard et al. (1991) define a media frame as the central organising principle behind news content, providing context and shaping how an issue is perceived through selecting, emphasising, omitting, and elaborating details. Similarly, Price et al. (1997) describe an issue frame as a theme or storyline that suggests a particular interpretation of events. Additionally, Griffin (2003) supports this view by noting that framing draws attention to certain aspects of reality while obscuring others, thus guiding how audiences interpret the news.

In the Malaysian context, Wong (2007) examines how the Chinese-language press in Malaysia framed political events during the 1999 and 2004 general elections. The research found that the framing strategies used by these newspapers evolved, adapting to the changing political climate. In 1999, the newspapers tended to present news more neutral and balanced. However, by 2004, a more critical and confrontational approach was evident. This suggests that framing strategies can change in response to political dynamics, reflecting the newspaper's adaptation to the evolving political landscape in Malaysia.

Yang (2012) examined how mainstream newspapers and an online news portal in Malaysia framed the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) movement. The three mainstream newspapers shared a similar perspective, negatively portraying Hindraf using the conflict frame. In contrast, Malaysiakini, the online news portal, offered diverse coverage, reflecting varied political beliefs, cultural assumptions, and institutional practices, highlighting different ideological positions.

Another study by Wen, Chubundu & Chua (2020) on how alternative and mainstream newspapers in Malaysia cover the issue of Chinese primary education found that both types of newspapers use a responsibility frame in their news coverage. However, alternative newspapers focus more on conflict, highlighting conflict between ruling and opposition politicians and intra-Barisan Nasional (BN) disputes. In contrast, mainstream newspapers use a human-interest frame to capture readers' attention.

On the other hand, Ting, Murudi & Chuah (2020) suggest that framing in media directs readers' focus toward specific aspects of an issue, often aligned with the interests of the media source. Their study found that The Star published fewer articles on the 1MDB issue, sometimes omitting certain discussions. In contrast, Malaysiakini extensively reported on the opposition's viewpoints, critiquing the government's accountability. This illustrates how different media outlets present the issue in varied ways and highlight selected aspects for public attention. Overall, the study highlighted the influential role of media framing in shaping public understanding and interpretation. It highlighted how the choice of language, news slant and framing strategies can significantly influence the news narrative in Malaysia.

**Malaysian Media**

Over the last four decades, Malaysia's television industry has undergone tremendous changes primarily due to various responses to local politics and economic and cultural situations. The latest development of streaming television provides further impetus to the growth of the local broadcast industry.

As a vital medium for public communication, television continues to play a key role in distributing information to society. Television news, in particular, holds a distinctive place within the industry, as audiences generally perceive it to be more credible than other genres of television content (Fiske,1987;2010; Gunter, 2015). In this context, television is seen as a mechanism that can promote the concept of the public sphere (Habermas,1969). It can be regarded as a site of the struggle' where different issues and meanings are articulated and negotiated to provide critical discourse in society (Dahlgren,1996; Fiske, 2010; Gunter, 2015). From its inception, the ownership and management of television in Malaysia have been in the hands of the Barisan Nasional (BN) government. The BN government has exercised direct control over television stations, ensuring that all programs align with state policies and suppressing alternative perspectives or voices (Zaharom, 1996; Wang, 1998; Beng & Ahmad, 2015). These policies have resulted in the proliferation of commercially driven "safe media products" that do not challenge the status quo of the previous government (Mustafa, 2005).

Studies by Wang (1998) and Zaharom (2000) revealed that television news often favoured government policies and ideologies, portraying the government positively while either excluding or framing the opposition parties in a negative light. Similarly, Lee (2014) found that English news on TV2 and NTV7 followed a "top-down flow of information," reinforcing the ideology of those in power. Lee further argued that these news broadcasts reinforced the position of the Barisan Nasional (BN) by using rhetoric around "national unity" and "national development" to gain public validation.

Past studies have also shown that Malaysian television, newspapers, and online news portals often framed news to favour the BN government, highlighting its positive aspects while emphasising negative reporting on the opposition (Mustafa,1990; Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 2000, Abbott, 2004; Mustafa, 2005, Nicole, 2009; Lee & Safar, 2009; Lai & Md Sidin, 2012; Norazleen et al.,2013; Beng & Ahmad, 2015). To this end, it is evident that both mainstream and alternative outlets exhibited political bias, resulting in a lack of balanced and fair reporting under the Barisan Nasional's administration.

Astro Awani was selected for this study because it is considered Malaysia's most trusted news source, according to a 2018 report by the Reuters Institute of Digital News (Newman, 2018). Therefore, it is interesting to examine how Astro fulfils its duty to disseminate news in Malaysia.

The concept of ideology and hegemony, as described by Antonio Gramsci, illustrates the state's relationship with media and its ownership by the ruling class. Gramsci argued that power operates at the intersections of culture, economy, and politics within a hegemonic discourse. Hegemony, in this regard, involves a "hegemonic class" leading a "subordinate class" by gaining their moral and intellectual consent. As an ideological tool, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and maintaining social control by promoting the dominant class's norms (Gramsci, 1971). Over the past century, media has influenced public opinion, promoted the status quo, and simplified complex issues (Yilmaz, 2014; Sjovaag, 2013).

In the Malaysian context, the BN government exerted significant control and influence in the media by introducing various laws, acts, and regulations that curbed the freedom of the media to maintain state ideology. For instance, the BN government maintains its hegemony by using the powerful Internal Security Act of 1960 (ISA) to enforce actions such as arbitrary arrests without warrants and detentions without charges (George, 2007). In 2012, the Internal Security Act (ISA) was abolished and replaced by the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA). In addition, other oppressive laws like the Sedition Act, Presses and Publication Act, and Communications and Multimedia Act are implemented to curtail media independence, effectively preserving their existing power structure.

## Media Ownership

Past studies have highlighted how the Malaysian government controlled the media through legislation and ownership. Pro-BN conglomerate Media Prima controls over half of Malaysian media, with mainstream newspapers and major free-to-air TV stations owned or dominated by corporations linked to the BN government (Gomez, 1990; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998; Mustafa, 2005; Mohd Safar, 2006; Loh, 2009; Zaharom, 2013; Lumsden, 2013; Beng & Ahmad, 2015). Major media organisations like The New Straits Times Press (NSTP), Utusan Group, and The Star Publications dominate newspaper publishing. Government-owned RTM1 and RTM2, along with commercial stations like TV3, ntv7, 8tv, TV9, and Astro, also maintain strong government ties (Zaharom, 2000; Wang, 2001, Beng & Ahmad, 2015, Rahman, 2017).

## Legislative Control Over Malaysian Media

In Malaysia, media freedom is limited by several regulations, such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act (1984) for print media and the Communications and Multimedia Act (1998) for broadcast and internet media. Scholars argue that these restrictive laws hinder access to reliable information (Sani, 2005). The Internal Security Act (ISA) was replaced by the Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill (SOSMA) in 2012, which many view as merely a continuation of the ISA's repressive measures (George, 2007). Meanwhile, the Anti-Fake News Act, enacted in April 2018, penalised the spread of "fake news" and was widely seen as an attempt to suppress reports on the 1MDB scandal (Lim, 2020). Although the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition, which won the 2018 election, pledged to abolish restrictive media laws, these promises were not fulfilled. After PH's 22-month rule, Muhyiddin Yassin formed the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government in March 2020. The PN government used laws like the Sedition Act, Official Secrets Act, Communications and Multimedia Act, and Anti-Fake News Act to control media. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Emergency Ordinances further empowered the government, tightening its grip on media freedom (Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

### Media Environment During Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional Government

When Mahathir Mohamad's PH government took power in May 2018, it pledged to repeal laws restricting media freedom, such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act and the Sedition Act (2020). Reporters Without Borders noted a significant improvement in journalism, with Malaysia rising 22 places to 101st in the Press Freedom Index (Lim, 2020).

However, since the PN government took power in March 2020, Malaysia has experienced unprecedented political turmoil and media operations in Malaysia are more controlled and restricted (Azmil, 2021). The employment of the draconian legislative arsenal was seen to have posed a threat to the idea of information flow and freedom of expression, encouraging a return to self-censorship (Reporters Without Borders, 2021), which has resulted in a detrimental impact towards the country's democracy index. As a result, Malaysia dropped from 18th in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index to 119th out of 180 countries, the most significant drop of any country in the index (Surin, 2021). In addition, Muhyiddin's government had also taken steps to revive the Special Affairs Department (JASA), which disseminates political propaganda and is given funding of 85 million ringgits (17.4 million euros) in the 2021 budget (Justin, 2020).

## Operational Definitions of Key Terms

*News Tone*

Eisenman (2012) defined news tone as the propensity to evaluate news as positive, neutral, balanced, or negative. The researcher has established the tone for the political news based on observing the news coverage. The definitions are outlined below:

| Key terms | Definition |
|---|---|
| Positive Tone | 'Positive' refers to the coverage that supports the government, |
| Negative Tone | 'Negative' refers to the coverage that opposes the government |
| Neutral Tone | Neutral' refers to news that doesn't lean either in favour of or against the government. |

*News Source*

A news source is someone directly credited with a statement, fact, or comment in a news report. Awani's news sources include lawyers, government officials, academicians, activists, citizens, courts, royals, the speaker of the Dewan Rakyat, public and private sector agencies, and international news sources. Politicians are categorised as either pro-government or opposition. This addition results from the researcher's observation of news videos throughout the respective period. The definitions are outlined below:

| Key terms | Definition |
|---|---|
| Government Officials | Any elected official, officer, or employee who taxpayers pay, the government, or businesses owned, managed, or supported by the state, and any person employed in a particular position or sector designated or governed as a public servant by local law. |

| Key terms | Definition |
|---|---|
| Politician (PRO) | Politicians/parties in favour of the government. |
| Politician (OPPOSITION) | Politicians/parties opposed to the government. |
| Royals | A member of the Royal Institutions/ family. |
| Speaker of Dewan Rakyat | The Speaker of the House, who is in charge of upholding order in the House, may be either a member of the House or a non-member eligible to run for election. |
| Court | An institution that the government establishes to resolve conflicts using the legal system. |
| Legal Practitioner | An individual who practices law |
| Academician | A member of a university or college who teaches or does research. |
| Activist | An individual who runs campaigns to affect political and social change. |
| Media | Journalists, correspondents, media analysts, and people identified as working for the media. |
| Citizen | An individual who is given full rights and obligations as a member of a nation or political community under their place of birth, the nationality of one or both of their parents or their naturalisation. |
| Ministry | A government department headed by a minister. |

| Key terms | Definition |
|---|---|
| Public Sector/Agency | The sector of the economy that is under the supervision of the federal, state, local, or local governments and offers a variety of governmental services. |
| Private Sector/Agency | The sector of a nation's economic system that is managed by private citizens and businesses rather than by the government. |
| NGO | A non-profit group that is not under the control of any government and whose primary goal is to solve social or political issues. |
| International News | Reports covered by global media organisations. |

## Method

The study utilised content analysis of news broadcasts from Astro Awani, which was chosen for its reputation as Malaysia's most trusted news source (Borneo Post Online, 29 June 2018). A sample was selected from Awani's YouTube channel from 1 June 2022 to 1 August 2022, coinciding with the HAWANA celebration. The data collection period was selected after Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri assured that the government would not interfere with media organisations from executing their duties and publishing news reports in his speech at the HAWANA celebration (Povera, 2022).

Throughout the period, 56 news broadcasts from Awani 7:45 were analysed quantitatively for frequency, news sources, and tone. A qualitative approach was also used to differentiate between tones when reporting political news. An inductive approach was employed to identify the tone of the news. The inductive approach systematically analyses qualitative data, allowing key themes or patterns to emerge naturally from the raw data (Thomas, 2003). In this study, this method enables researchers to explore how television news frames narratives for public consumption.

## Findings and Analysis

This section presents the study's findings, focusing on the news slant and sources used in Astro Awani's political news, categorised by themes, sources, and the tone of political news coverage.

### *News Theme*

Throughout the two months, 826 issues were reported (Table 1). Awani reported political issues the most frequently, with a percentage value of 38% of all issues. Social issues are the second most prevalent category, with 20% of the total, followed by Economic and Criminal issues, with 16% each. There were additional reports of concerns with the legislation (3%) and (6%) Environmental issues.

Table 1: News Theme

| Theme/issues | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Politics | 318 | 38 |
| Social | 164 | 20 |
| Crime | 135 | 16 |
| Economy | 135 | 16 |
| Environment | 49 | 6 |
| Law | 25 | 3 |
| Total | **826** | **100** |

In the social issues category, Awani reported on religion, culture, welfare, infrastructure, and events. Meanwhile, in the economy category, Awani reported the rise and control of staple goods, the appointment of company board members, and developments in the nation's economy and business sector. Awani also reported crime-related topics such as criminal issues and crime victims. On top of that, Awani has also reported on the nation's environmental problems under the environment category. Under the law category, Awani has reported on several laws that have been enacted or are in the process of enactment. To this end, regarding coverage, Awani tends to emphasise political news compared to other types of news. The way the news items were presented, in general, highlighted the key issues that the government sees as essential and that should be made known to the public.

*News Sources*

Based on Table 2, Government officials accounted for 51% of Awani's most frequently mentioned sources. The opposition party's politicians received 9% of citations, compared to pro-government politicians, who received 7%. The court received 7% of citations, while the citizen received 5%. Academicians comprised 3%, and the Media and the Ministry comprised 3%. 3% of the sources were from the public sector, 3% were from NGOs, and 2% were from legal practitioners. There were 1% from the royals, 1% from the private sector, 1% from activists, and 1% each of the Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat and International sources.

Table 2: News Sources

| **Sources** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| Government Officials | 421 | 51 |
| Politician (PRO) | 61 | 7 |
| Politician (OPPOSITION) | 71 | 9 |
| Royals | 11 | 1 |
| Speaker of Dewan Rakyat | 6 | 1 |
| Court | 59 | 7 |
| Legal Practitioner | 13 | 2 |
| Academician | 28 | 3 |
| Activist | 7 | 1 |
| Media | 24 | 3 |
| Citizen | 45 | 5 |
| Ministry | 24 | 3 |
| Public Sector/Agency | 23 | 3 |
| Private Sector/Agency | 10 | 1 |
| NGO | 17 | 3 |
| International News | 6 | 1 |
| Total | **826** | **100%** |

*Political News Sources*

Astro Awani's coverage focused primarily on political news, accounting for 37% of its reporting, more than any other category. Most of Awani's sources for political news came from the "Government official" category. Awani also included voices from both pro-government and opposition politicians. As indicated in Table 3, Awani featured additional perspectives from other sources, including royals, legal professionals, academics, activists, the media, citizens, public and private sector agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), allowing them to express their views on policies and issues affecting the nation.

Table 3: Political News Sources

| **Sources** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| Government Officials | 130 | 43 |
| Politician (PRO) | 49 | 16 |
| Politician (OPPOSITION) | 46 | 15 |
| Royals | 5 | 2 |
| Speaker of Dewan Rakyat | 5 | 2 |
| Court | 19 | 6 |
| Legal Practitioner | 10 | 3 |
| Academician | 11 | 4 |
| Activist | 2 | 1 |
| Media | 5 | 2 |
| Citizen | 6 | 2 |
| Ministry | 3 | 1 |
| Public Sector/Agency | 0 | 0 |
| Private Sector/Agency | 2 | 1 |
| NGO | 5 | 2 |
| International | 1 | 0 |
| Total | **299** | **100** |

Of the political sources cited by Astro Awani, 130, or 43%, were government officials, making them the most frequently cited group. Pro-government politicians received 49 citations (16%), slightly more than opposition politicians, who garnered 46 citations (15%). Academics were cited 11 times (4%), while the judiciary was mentioned in 19 instances (6%). Legal practitioners accounted for 10 citations (3%), with royals, the Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat, the media, and non-governmental organisations cited 5 times (2%). Citizens contributed 6 citations (2%), followed by representatives from ministries with 3 citations (1%), and activists and the private sector with 2 citations each (1%). Notably, there were no citations from public sector agencies. In line with political reporting, government officials remained the dominant source in constructing politically slanted news. Interestingly, the data also suggests that Awani balanced their coverage by including perspectives from politicians across both the pro-government and opposition parties, indicating a degree of impartiality in their reporting.

*News Tone*

For over two months, Awani has consistently highlighted several key themes, including politics, social issues, economics, crimes, environment, and law. Among these themes, political news receives the highest coverage ranking, with a frequency of 318 news (Table 4). The tone of political news coverage can be categorised as 'Negative' when it opposes the government, 'Positive' when it supports the government, and 'Neutral' when it does not lean in favour of or against the government. The analysis found that a positive tone predominates with a percentage of 41%, followed by a negative tone (36%), while a neutral tone is 23%.

Table 4: Political News Tone

| **Tone** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| Positive | 131 | 41 |
| Negative | 113 | 36 |
| Neutral | 74 | 23 |
| Total | **318** | **100** |

*Positive Tone*

In presenting the coverage of a positive tone in political news, Awani has provided the government with a platform to communicate its slogan of 'Keluarga Malaysia' and policies to the public. Awani also addresses the issues brought up by the opposition parties by providing coverage of political news with a favourable tone. Awani has shown support from leaders of political parties and alliances, including PAS and Perikatan, towards the Prime Minister's leadership. 131 political issues were identified as positive. 'Keluarga Malaysia', Inflation & Subsidy, Prime Minister leadership, & RUU Anti-Hopping Law are the most frequently highlighted issues within two months. To help the reader understand the tone of the news, a sample of news coverage that illustrates a favourable news direction toward the government is presented below:

> Keluarga Malaysia:
> "Taking into account the 'Keluarga Malaysia' approach, this concept can be perfected by Islamic scholars and scientists by giving a unified approach to the Islamic-based family concept".
>
> (Awani 7:45, 11 June 2022)
>
> "This is the first time the unemployment rate has decreased by 4 per cent since the Covid-19 pandemic. This year, the government targets job opportunities of up to 600 thousand with allocations through the "Keluarga Malaysia" job guarantee initiative".
>
> (Awani 7:45, 25 June 2022)
>
> Prime Minister leadership:
> "The PM has proven to steer the national administration well successfully. In one year, what mistakes did the PM make, what mistakes? Nothing. Why are all kinds of accusations made?
>
> (Awani 7:45, 25 June 2022)

*Negative Tone*

Awani's political news coverage has featured criticism from opposition parties, citizens, academics, NGOs, and activists against government policies. One hundred thirteen issues were identified as negative, including subsidies, living costs, political turmoil, the Sulu conflict, and floods in Baling, Kedah. To help the reader understand the tone of the news, a sample of news coverage that illustrates a favourable news direction toward the government is listed below. Awani has reported criticism from the leader of the opposition party at that time, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from Pakatan Harapan, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad of Pejuang, and Chairman of Pakatan Harapan Kedah, Mahfuz Omar, who voiced criticism of the government's approach to providing subsidies to the people. Examples of news coverage are as follows:

> Anwar Ibrahim:
> "The government is seen to be slow in finding a solution to the people's problems, especially regarding the cost of living. Decisions made, if any, are focused on mega projects".
> (Awani 7:45, 30 July 2022)

> Mahfuz Omar:
> "What happened in GE14? Political parties use the money to bribe people and call it a subsidy. That's not a subsidy. That's a crime. You need to distinguish between subsidies for the neediest cases. But, if you want to be popular and give money to people, that's corruption and a crime".
> (Awani 7:45, 28 June 2022)

Awani has also displayed the royal institution's criticism of the government. For instance, Sultan Ibrahim Ismail of Johor who questions the government's ability to fulfil the promises made towards the facility of Johor, Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah of Selangor criticises the political turmoil and division among leaders of Malay political party and Malays, and Sultan Nazrin Shah of Perak, who urges the government to take significant preventative steps regarding the issue of food shortage in the nation. The examples of the news coverage are as follows:

> Sultan Ibrahim Ismail of Johor:
> "…See for yourself the condition of the damaged and potholed federal roads, for example, Johor Bahru and Mersing, that could potentially harm the road users. I feel as though the state of Johor is being ignored, even though Johor is one of the main contributors to the national economy. Don't let the people of Johor insist on getting out of Malaysia. Maybe Johor will be more advanced if it stands independently".
> (Awani 7:45, 15 June 2022)

> Sultan Nazrin Shah of Perak:
> "Just because someone has money doesn't mean they automatically have food in their possession. We need to comprehend the philosophy underlying the concept of rice farmers in Malay society because if an individual doesn't want to sell, we will starve since the era of inexpensive food is ending. A food emergency is soon to follow".

(Awani 7:45, 30 July 2022)

Awani also has reported criticism from the opposition party in Sabah towards the Parliament's inability to approve and present a significant motion to the country's sovereignty. The examples of the news coverage are as follows:

> Opposition:
> "We want the issue to be addressed and debated in the parliament because, in the Philippines, their parliament publicly claimed Sabah as part of their territory, as if they don't even respect our nation's sovereignty".
> (Awani 7:45, 28 June 2022)

> Opposition:
> "Despite the government's assertion that it does not recognise Sulu, the issue still exists, and payments have been made through 2013 as if we had rented Sabah from them (Sulu). What action has the government taken since it stopped making payments?".
> (Awani 7:45, 30 July 2022)

Awani has also displayed criticism from academicians, activists, and citizens regarding the policy, general election, and measures taken by the government to curb the environmental issues that resulted in a flood in Baling, Kedah. The examples of the news coverage are as follows:

> Activists:
> "In 2018, we did try to protest the project on that hill. After almost years, there was no response from the protest, and this is the result: the flood took lives".
> (Awani 7:45, 28 June 2022)

> Citizens:
> "Complaints after complaints are reported by the residents but are not taken seriously; where are all the parties involved? As usual, every party is irresponsible".
> (Awani 7:45, 28 June 2022)

Moreover, Awani has showcased critique directed at both the pro-government and opposition parties. The examples of the news coverage are as follows:

> Faizal Azumu:
> "He (Anwar Ibrahim) doesn't care, and not only does he want to fight with me alone, but he also wants to fight with

> everyone because he thinks he is the greatest person in the world".
>
> (Awani 7:45, 4 June 2022)
>
> Syed Saddiq:
> "The attitude of Kelantan PAS, which permits the holding of celebrations throughout the state, is hypocritical,"
>
> (Awani 7:45, 9 June 2022)

## Discussion

Framing provides insights into how news content and narratives should be interpreted. Over two months, Awani consistently highlighted key themes like politics, social issues, economics, crimes, environment, and law, with political news receiving the most coverage. Nearly half of the analysed news items focused on Malaysian politics, emphasising issues the government deems essential.

Astro Awani uses framing techniques to present political news as a central organising idea, shaping audience understanding through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and content elaboration. This approach directs attention to specific political debates, influencing audience perceptions and opinions on societal issues.

Awani has effectively conveyed a positive tone in its political news coverage, providing a platform for the government to communicate its 'Keluarga Malaysia' slogan and policies to the public. Additionally, Awani has addressed concerns raised by opposition parties by presenting political news favourably. The channel has also highlighted support from political party leaders, including PAS and Perikatan, for the leadership of the Prime Minister.

To this end, the positive coverage primarily aimed to depict the inspiring and optimistic aspects of the PN government under the leadership of Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri. It was meant to highlight the government's achievements, policies, and initiatives perceived as beneficial to the public. On the other hand, Awani's coverage of political news with a negative tone includes criticism from various sources, such as the opposition party, citizens, academics, non-governmental organisations, and activists, who expressed their concerns and dissatisfaction with the government's policies. The news is constructed in a way that highlights the problems and shortcomings of the government, which could raise concern and dissatisfaction among the public.

The source plays a crucial role in the construction of news, as it indicates the origin and credibility of the information. In the context of Astro Awani, the analysis demonstrates that government officials, especially those in high-ranking positions, are consistently chosen as the primary source for news coverage. These officials are relied upon to provide insights and information for constructing news items. Astro Awani seems to place high credibility on government officials, considering them reliable and authoritative sources on the various issues they have covered.

Interestingly, the data indicates that sources from politicians from the opposition party outnumbered those from the ruling party. While news coverage often focuses on political developments, such as elections, party activities, policy debates, and government decision-making, government officials remain the primary source utilised in constructing news items with a political bias. However, it is noteworthy that Astro Awani has tried to achieve source balance by including politicians from both parties. This demonstrates Awani's attempt to ensure fairness by incorporating multiple perspectives in their reporting.

## Conclusion

The study indicates that Astro Awani, within this specific context, effectively served as a platform for communicating government policies, initiatives, and actions to the public. This highlights the crucial role played by Astro Awani in keeping the public well-informed about the government's decisions and their potential impact on various aspects of society. The media's presentation of news items consistently emphasised key issues prioritised by the government for public awareness. Importantly, Astro Awani tried to provide balanced reporting by incorporating positive and negative aspects of the government's performance. While government officials played a central role as the primary source in shaping the news narrative, the inclusion of diverse viewpoints demonstrated a commitment to presenting multiple perspectives in achieving a more comprehensive portrayal of political issues in the Malaysian context. Although previous findings may have acknowledged Awani's relative neutrality, this research delves into how the station has framed political issues during a specific time frame and explores whether this neutrality has persisted under different political climates. This study found that Astro Awani continues to strive for balanced coverage, incorporating both positive and negative narratives regarding the government's performance. These findings align with earlier perceptions of Awani's neutrality yet also highlight the station's nuanced approach to political reporting in a more fluid and evolving media landscape.

This study highlights Astro Awani's significant role in shaping public discourse and opinion in the Malaysian context. Drawing on Gramsci's idea of ideology and hegemony, it underscores how the media reinforces dominant ideologies while also offering alternative perspectives. Through strategic framing, Astro Awani influences how political and social issues are perceived, guiding public consent, and shaping societal narratives. By emphasising certain aspects while downplaying others, the media controls the lens through which issues are viewed, thereby impacting public understanding. Ultimately, this study emphasises the media's powerful impact on shaping narratives and facilitating the flow of information. By framing issues in specific ways, the media plays a crucial role in guiding public understanding and shaping the broader discourse within society.

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# Learning Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: Between Islamic and Boko Harām Perspectives

**Hassan Suleimān**[*]
**Alwi Alatas**[**]
**Abdul Bāri Bin Awang**[***]
**Mohd. Afandi Bin Awang Hamat**[****]

**Abstract:** Islamic civilisation once led the world to develop worldly knowledge, producing significant advancements in medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. Scholars viewed these knowledge domains as complementary to religious knowledge, with the latter holding superior status. However, in recent times, some Muslim communities have distanced themselves from temporal knowledge, wrongly perceiving it as alien to Islam. Insurgent groups like Boko Harām in Northern Nigeria and neighbouring countries, including Niger, Chad, northern Cameroon, and Mali have weaponised this misconception. Boko Harām's ideology rejects worldly education, equating it with an anti-Islamic agenda, leading to violent campaigns against educational

[*] Assistant Professor, Department of Fiqh and Usul al- Fiqh, AbdulHamīd AbūSulaymān Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: abuxzubair@iium.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*
[**] Assistant Professor, Department of History and Civilisations, AbdulHamīd AbūSulaymān Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: alwialatas@iium.edu.my
[***] Associate Professor, Department of Fiqh and Usul al- Fiqh, AbdulHamīd AbūSulaymān Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: abdbari@iium.edu.my
[****] Assistant Professor, Department of Fiqh and Usul al- Fiqh, AbdulHamīd AbūSulaymān Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: mohdafandi@iium.edu.my

institutions. This article addresses the misunderstanding that beneficial worldly knowledge contradicts Islamic teachings, highlighting its importance as an Islamic obligation. It explores how this misconception has contributed to violence and stagnation, such as in Boko Harām's attacks, and analyses Islamic primary sources, the Qur'ān, the ḥadīth, and scholarly commentaries, to clarify the stance on acquiring such knowledge. The analysis includes an examination of key prophetic traditions that highlight the importance of pursuing worldly knowledge that contributes to societal welfare. The findings reveal that Islām not only permits but encourages the pursuit of beneficial worldly knowledge, which is considered *farḍ kifāyah*—a collective obligation upon the Muslim community. The article emphasises that education aligned with Islamic values is key to societal progress. It criticises extremist group like Boko Harām for misinterpreting Islam and calls for a return to valuing both religious and beneficial worldly knowledge to advance Muslim communities.

**Keywords**: Beneficial worldly knowledge, Islamic perspective, religious knowledge, Boko Harām movement, Muslim scholars

**Abstrak:** Tamadun Islam pernah memimpin dunia dalam mengembangkan ilmu duniawi dan menghasilkan kemajuan yang signifikan dalam bidang perubatan, matematik, dan astronomi. Bidang-bidang ilmu ini dianggap sebagai pelengkap kepada ilmu agama, dengan ilmu agama menduduki status yang lebih tinggi. Walau bagaimanapun, pada masa kini, terdapat beberapa Masyarakat Islam yang telah menjauhkan diri daripada ilmu duniawi, dengan salah anggap bahawa ia asing kepada Islam. Kumpulan pemberontak seperti Boko Harām di Nigeria Utara dan negara-negara jiran, termasuk Niger, Chad, utara Cameroon, dan Mali telah memperalatkan salah tanggapan ini. Ideologi Boko Harām menolak pendidikan duniawi, menyamakannya dengan agenda anti-Islam, yang membawa kepada kempen keganasan terhadap institusi pendidikan. Masalah utama adalah salah faham bahawa ilmu duniawi yang bermanfaat bertentangan dengan ajaran Islam. Artikel ini membincangkan bagaimana kepercayaan ini menyumbang kepada keganasan dan kemunduran, seperti serangan Boko Haram, dengan merujuk kepada al-Quran, ḥadīth, dan ulasan ulama untuk menjelaskan pendirian Islam tentang ilmu duniawi. Analisis ini merangkumi pemeriksaan tradisi-prophetik utama yang menekankan kepentingan mengejar ilmu duniawi yang menyumbang kepada kesejahteraan masyarakat. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa Islam bukan sahaja membenarkan tetapi juga menggalakkan usaha untuk memperoleh ilmu duniawi yang bermanfaat, yang dianggap sebagai farḍ kifāyah — kewajipan kolektif kepada Masyarakat Iskam. Artikel ini menegaskan bahawa pendidikan duniawi yang selaras dengan nilai Islam adalah penting untuk kemajuan masyarakat. Ia mengkritik kumpulan ekstremis seperti Boko Harām kerana salah tafsir ajaran Islam dan menyeru pemulihan tradisi Islam yang menghargai ilmu agama dan duniawi untuk kemajuan masyarakat Islam.

**Kata kunci:** Ilmu duniawi yang bermanfaat, perspektif Islam, ilmu agama, gerakan Boko Harām, ulama Muslim.

## Introduction

The religion of Islam comprehends people's interests both in this world and in the hereafter. Therefore, the knowledge deemed necessary to be studied in Islam is not only religious knowledge but also worldly knowledge. It is so because worldly knowledge, such as medicine, Mathematics, and Economics, among others, is also needed and offers significant benefits to humanity. From an Islamic perspective, the position of worldly knowledge is similar to that of the religious sciences.

In the past, the Muslim community showed significant achievements in worldly and religious knowledge. Many important personalities in science emerged from within Islamic civilisation and became central authorities in many fields of knowledge for centuries. At the same time, other parts of the world were left behind in science. During that time, religious and non-religious scholars had no controversies or disputes. If there was, then it was minimal and related to certain theological controversies, not because of common hostility between these two categories of knowledge. Likewise, there is no dualism in both kinds of knowledge. Both knowledge is seen by Muslims as integrated (Huda et al., 2016: p. 5) and not dichotomised into religious and non-religious poles since religious sciences are also useful for this worldly life, while natural and social phenomena become the objects of worldly knowledge with a metaphysical dimension. In the past, it was not uncommon to find religious scholars, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, showing interest in general knowledge, thus becoming an expert in geometry and medicine (Riswanto & Wan Abdullah, 2021) and writing commentaries on Ibn Sīnā's medical Book *al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb* (Griffel, 2007). The commentaries of al-Rāzī were criticised by ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī, a contemporary scholar who mastered medicine and several other branches of sciences (Stern, 1962). Al-Baghdādī, though better known as a medical scientist, has written books in the fields of ḥadīth and fiqh (Bonadeo, 2019). Many scientists then usually understood basic religious knowledge since studying Islamic religion in early education was the norm in Muslim society.

Conversely, several early religious scholars wrote about medicine based on the traditions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), popularly known as *Ṭibb al-Nabawī*, to show that there is a prophetic endorsement of this branch of knowledge. Even though they had no medical background, their awareness of and borrowing from Graeco-Arabic medicine was, to some extent, reflected in their work on the Prophet's medicine, especially in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Yusoff & Ab Razak, 2020). The exchange of knowledge in these two great fields was typical in the past. However, the influence of the modern Western worldview of science and knowledge, in addition to the factor of internal decline within Muslim society, has triggered uncertainty about the status of worldly knowledge in the minds of some Muslims today.

This article aims to examine Islamic views regarding worldly knowledge by discussing its primary sources (Qur'ān, ḥadīth, and scholars' views) and relate them with  the attitude of the Boko Harām movement in Nigeria and its neighbouring countries towards worldly knowledge.

## Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: Concept and Components

Islamic educationists and scholars often approach the concepts of knowledge with distinct perspectives rooted in Islamic epistemology, which emphasises a holistic integration of spiritual and worldly knowledge. From an Islamic perspective, all knowledge originates from Allāh, and distinctions like "worldly knowledge," "general knowledge," and "temporal knowledge" are understood based on the centrality of divine revelation (al-Attas, 1980). Islamic scholars argue that there is no inherent separation between religious and worldly knowledge but rather an integrated framework that guides the believer toward divine understanding.

## Worldly Knowledge

In Islamic thought, worldly knowledge (*ʿilm al-dunyā*) refers to material and practical knowledge that helps individuals navigate daily life. Unlike the dichotomy between worldly and religious knowledge seen in Western thought, Islamic scholars, such as Al-Ghazāli (1058–1111), in *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm ad-Dīn*, do not view worldly knowledge as separate from spiritual concerns. Instead, worldly pursuits should be balanced with religious obligations (Ghazali, 1997). Additionally, worldly knowledge is deemed valuable when aligned with Islamic ethics and used for the benefit of humanity and in the service of Allāh (Nasr, 2010). The Qur'ān and ḥadīth advocate for the pursuit of both practical and spiritual knowledge while cautioning against its misuse if it detracts from spiritual truth or Allāh's commands (Iqbal, 2013).

## Temporal Knowledge

Temporal knowledge, often used interchangeably with worldly knowledge, pertains specifically to time-bound, material affairs, in contrast to eternal, spiritual matters (Al-Attas, 1980). This form of knowledge relates to disciplines like engineering, medicine, and agriculture, focusing on empirical, observable phenomena. While temporal knowledge is adaptable and can evolve with new evidence or societal needs, it remains essential for societal well-being and human advancement (Popper, 2005; Sardar, 1985).

Islam does not oppose temporal knowledge. Islamic teachings encourage pursuing such knowledge if it aligns with religious and ethical values. Islamic scholars, including Al-Ghazāli, emphasise the importance of harmonising temporal knowledge with spiritual principles, ensuring that material progress does not lead to moral or ethical decline (Iqbal, 2013).

This article addresses these concepts and highlights that Islamic epistemology promotes a holistic approach to knowledge. The Islamic understanding of *ʿIlm* does not uphold a rigid division between sacred and worldly knowledge. Instead, all knowledge—religious or worldly—contributes to understanding and fulfilling Allāh's will (Nasr, 2010). While modern terms such as "temporal" and "worldly" may imply a distinction in Western discourse, Islamic thought integrates both material and spiritual knowledge within a unified framework (Sardar, 1985).

Throughout this article, the terms "worldly knowledge," "temporal knowledge," and "general knowledge" are used to refer to beneficial non-religious knowledge. It is emphasised that Islam encourages pursuing such knowledge if it promotes human well-being and aligns with the ethical principles derived from Islamic teachings.

## Islamic Perspective on Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: The Permissibility and Importance of Acquiring Beneficial Worldly Knowledge

Undoubtedly, the study of worldly knowledge is Islamically essential and encouraged, and the divine texts that point to the encouragement of Shari'ah to learn worldly knowledge that is beneficial for ummah are countless. Allāh, for example, says in the Qur'ān: "Make ready for them all thou can of (armed) force and steeds of war, that thereby you may dismay the enemy of Allāh and your enemy" (al-Anfāl: 60). This verse denotes an instruction to Muslims to prepare all mental and physical strength to the greatest extent possible, including all types of arms and weapons to help fight enemies. Thus, it comprises all kinds of industries in which various weapons and machines are produced, including cannons, machine guns, rifles, aeroplanes, land and sea boats, forts, castles, trenches, and defence equipment. According to another opinion, it also refers to policies or actions adopted by Muslims in defending themselves and confronting the evil of their enemies, as well as to learning archery and courage and organising governance (Ibn al-Sa'dī, 2000).

Additionally, the Prophet p.b.u.h. once said in his tradition narrated by Muslims: "Prepare to meet them with as much strength as you can afford. Beware, strength consists in archery. Beware, strength consists in archery. Beware, strength consists in archery" (Muslim, 2007, p. 251; Vol. 5, ḥadīth no. 4946). It can be understood that the strength that needs to be prepared includes various things useful for defence mechanisms, such as armoured fighting vehicles. The previous verse of the Qur'ān, in which Allāh mentions "the steeds of war, that thereby you may dismay the enemy of Allāh and your enemy," highlighted such. In Islamic law, legal provisions cannot be separated from its *ʿillah* (legal cause), the existence and non-existence, and the *ʿillah* mentioned here are present in the military equipment of that century to combat or intimidate the enemies. Therefore, if there is something more effective in confronting the enemies, such as modern artillery, warships, and aircraft, then it is essential to strive to own them. Even if they are not available to be purchased and used except through manufacturing them with our industry, then it becomes obligatory, as the legal maxim says, «*mā lā yatim al-Wājib illa bihī fa huwa Wājib*" (should an obligation not be fulfilled except by a matter, then the matter becomes an obligation) (Ibn al-Sa ʻdī, 2000).

Accordingly, al-Shanqīṭī (1426H) explains that Western civilisation has undeniably achieved developments that have never been reached by other civilisations before, generating beneficial and detrimental products. The condition of the Islamic world today, which is lagging and defeated by Western civilisation, points to their weak state, a situation that can be considered a rebellion against the law of Allāh. The reason is that Allāh has commanded the Muslims to be strong in various fields and become leaders in this worldly life (al- Anfāl: 60). In contrast, weakness, dependence, and the absence of equipment and strength denotes weak adherence to the command of Allāh as He said, "So beware of those who go against His command" (Sūrah al-Nūr: 63). The above messages of the Qur'ān show that there are two main commands given by Allāh, namely: to prepare with strength and to thrive forward, together with adhering to spiritual ethics (al-Shanqītī, 1426H).

## The Importance of Worldly Knowledge

It is permissible, and there is no harm for a Muslim to preoccupy himself with worldly knowledge that benefits the community, even when he learns or acquires it to benefit himself in this worldly life. Beneficial knowledge, directly related to religion or not, is generally noble. The sources or channel of knowledge (*asbāb al-ʿilm*) as understood by the Muslim scholars is not only the revelation (the Qur'ān and ḥadīth) that came through the Prophet p.b.u.h., which can be categorised under accurate report (*khabar ṣādiq*). Other than revelation, accurate report also acknowledges widely accepted reports (*mutawātir*), or "report that is established upon the tongues of people of whom reason cannot conceive that they would purpose together on a lie" (al-Attas, 1988, p. 66). In addition to accurate reports, there are two other channels of knowledge, namely the senses (*al-ḥiss*: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) and reason (*al-ʿaql*) (Ramli, 2020). Therefore, the doors of knowledge are limited to purely religious matters and other matters related to nature and human beings.

Importantly, religious knowledge is far more critical. Therefore, one should acquire it alongside other beneficial worldly knowledge as much as possible. By so doing, one will be among those the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said: "Whoever Allāh wants good for him, Allāh will make him understand about the religion" (Al-Bukhārī, 1997, p. 98; Vol. 1, ḥadīth no. 71; Muslim, 2007, p. 254-255; Vol. 5, ḥadīth no. 4956).

Suppose a person learns his religion diligently and simultaneously acquires knowledge such as medicine or manufacturing; this will benefit him and humanity. In this regard, scholars asserted that learning beneficial worldly knowledge, which brings advantages for the benefit of the ummah, is considered among the communal obligations (*farḍ al-kifāyah*) that the Muslim community must discharge. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah (1428H) said:

> Among those, the people needed a group that specialised in agriculture, the weaving industry, and manufacturing. With that, the leader has the right to obligate them to do so with the appropriate wages, as the public interest is only fulfilled by doing so. That is why a group of the companions of Imam Aḥmad and al-Shāfiʿī said that learning these industries is an obligation at the community level to meet the sufficiency of the people's needs; these include the obligation of washing and shrouding the deceased body, as well as the various types of public and private services in which the interest of ummah is not held upright except with fulfilment of such communal obligations. (p. 337)

He further continues:

> Even the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) sometimes performed specific duties by himself, and sometimes, he delegated some of them far and unreachable to others. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) portrayed so when he appointed ʿAttāb ibn Asīd to care for affairs in Makkah. For Ṭāif, he sent ʿUthmān ibn Abī al-ʿĀṣi al-Thaqafī, while for the people of ʿUraynah it was Khālid ibn Saʿīd al-ʿĀṣi. He delegated ʿAlī and Muʿādz ibn Jabal and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī to Yaman. Hence, as he sent others to lead some wars, which he did not join, he also sent several officers for amwāl al-zakāt, collecting them from those who met the necessary wealth criteria and distributing them to those who deserved it. They went back to Madīnah, only the whip with them. They did not come with any money except they knew where the right place to put it. (p. 337)

Despite the various opinions of scholars regarding the communal obligation to acquire worldly knowledge that benefits the ummah, Muslims need to discern between beneficial and harmful knowledge.

They should also distinguish between Western civilisation's positive and negative aspects, and the benefits and potential harms of its materialistic and organisational strength to safeguard themselves from its detrimental effects. All these contradicting outcomes result from its moral degeneration and rebellion against the law of Allah, which is the main reason underlying the detrimental side of Western civilisation. Once humankind disconnects itself from the Creator, who grants them the sights, guides them from darkness to enlightenment, and protects them from the oddities of their acts that dazzle their minds, nothing will be left beneficial for them in this world.

The study of worldly knowledge is important as it can offer numerous insights. Nature and its elements, including human beings, serve as signs pointing to the existence and oneness of Allah. Nature can be likened to a "Great Book" that, when "read," can bring one closer to the Creator (Zarkasyi, 2018). Understanding nature is intended to lead to the recognition of the proper place of its various elements, ultimately facilitating the recognition of the place of Allah in the order of existence, thereby aligning with the Islamic definition of knowledge (al-Attas, 2018, pp. 13-19).

## Boko Haram's Perspective on Beneficial Worldly Knowledge

### *The Boko Harām Movement and Their Ideology: A Brief Background*

The Boko Harām insurgency started in Borno State, northeast of Nigeria, in 2009. In the Hausa language, "Boko Harām" refers to the rejection of Western education. So, the word "Boko Harām" translates literally to "Western education is prohibited." The name follows the movement's perception of the pervasive economic disparities between those in power and the general citizens, which led to utter destitution amid abundance. The movement concluded that the government's imposition of Western education was to blame for their hopelessness and that it should be replaced with something more appropriate. They believed that because Sharia law would be just and transparent, it would be a superior alternative to democracy (Pham, 2012). The movement's specific, overt emphasis on education is noteworthy. It exists "to an unusual degree among peer movements," despite some analysts' claims that "Boko" in the Hausa language refers to more than just Western education for Boko Harām. Instead, they claim that it more broadly refers to "people who operate within Western-style frameworks and institutions" or "Westernised people" (Thurston, 2018).

However, it is essential to note that the “Boko Harām movement” officially names itself “Jamā’ah Ahlu al-Sunnah li al-Da‘wah wa al-Jihād,” which means “Association of the People of Sunnah for Da‘wah and Jihād,” (Arabic: جماعة أهل السنة للدعوة والجهاد). Therefore, it does not think that its movement is “Boko Harām” (Western education is forbidden). However, since its fundamental doctrine is the prohibition of worldly education, the Nigerian government has given it the term “Boko Harām” movement.

Establishing who founded the Boko Harām movement is difficult because different researchers have provided conflicting accounts. However, one likely acceptable assertion is that Muḥammad Yūsuf became the leader in 1997 after Lawan Abūbakr left for further studies in Saudi Arabia (Omale, 2017). However, Boko Haram’s ideology was unknown to the community in 1997; their concept emerged only in 2009.

Undoubtedly, Muḥammad Yūsuf’s indoctrination of his followers with his ideology or philosophy is the main reason for popularising the «Boko Harām» movement. According to Omale (2017) and Aworawo (2017), Muḥammad Yūsuf was detained in 1998 and 2005 due to allegations that he radicalised his adherents through his sermons and disrupted peace and order. In Borno State in 2009, the group went on rampage and set fire to police stations and government buildings in revenge for police crackdown on some of its members for disobeying the order to wear helmets. The police slew Muḥammad Yūsuf after being taken into custody in July 2009 (Cook, 2018). Since then, the “Boko Harām” movement’s evil deeds have made Northeastern Nigeria a grisly scene.

*Violent Phase of Boko Harām in Nigeria*

Boko Harām launched its terrorist assaults through kidnapping, the senseless murder of unarmed civilians, and the bombing of mosques, churches, and schools, which exposed their claim to be a group of the People of Sunnah for Da’wah and Jihād. In 2014, Boko Harām kidnapped 276 Chibok government secondary schoolgirls. As a result, abduction methods have continued unabatedly, primarily targeting young men, women, and girls. Young boys were radicalised and recruited into combat forces, while young girls were indirectly forced into marriage with Boko Harām militants. According to a report, Boko Harām has killed over 20,000 civilians since 2009, including an unknown number of women and children (United Nations, 2015).

According to the education authorities in Nigeria, 338 schools in the States of Borno, Adamāwa, and Yobe were destroyed or damaged between 2012 and 2014. In 2015, Michael Olukoya, national president of the Nigerian Union of Teachers, claimed that 600 teachers had perished at the hands of Boko Harām militants (Nneka, 2015).

It is imperative to note that attacks on school facilities scared away many parents from sending their children to school and thereby exacerbated the problem of out-of-school children existing in the northeast of Nigeria. Continued Boko Harām attacks led to varying degrees of physical and mental health problems. Some of those who survived the explosion of the bombs may spend the rest of their lives with physical disabilities. In contrast, others will have to deal with the psychological anguish brought by seeing the atrocities committed by the Boko Harām rebels (Nneka, 2015).

**Boko Harām's Perspective and Justification for Rejecting Worldly Knowledge**

Muḥammad Yūsuf, the leader of the Boko Harām movement, is said to have drawn inspiration from the divisive Islamic preacher Muḥammad Marwa, better known as Maitatsine, who forbade reading any books but the Qur'ān. In a 2009 interview, Muḥammad bin Yūsuf expressed his opposition to not only Western education but also to the theory of evolution, the idea that the Earth is spherical rather than flat, and the notion that rain is produced by "evaporation caused by the sun" rather than being directly created and sent down by Allāh, as stated in some Qur'ānic verses (Nneka, 2015).

From this vantage point, we can infer that some Western theories and several other concerns that are superficially or substantially in conflict with the glorious Qur'ān and the teachings of the Prophet p.b.u.h. are the fundamental causes of Boko Harām›s total rejection of worldly knowledge.

One might, however, concur with it that any theory or body of knowledge clearly in conflict with the Qur›ān or the authentic Prophetic Sunnah is to be discarded in Islam. Allāh explicitly stated in the Qur›ān: «Follow, (O Muslims), what has been revealed to you from your Lord, and do not follow other than Him any allies.» [al-A›rāf 7:3] And Allāh added [al-Nisā 4:65], «Swear by your Lord that they will not be true believers until they seek your arbitration in all matters on which they disagree among themselves, and then find not the least vexation in their hearts over what you have decided and accept it in willing submission.» However, this does not justify Boko Harām prohibiting the beneficial parts of worldly knowledge that are acceptable and permissible to be acquired in Islam. Prophet Muḥammad p.b.u.h. provided several examples during his life, demonstrating how important it is for Muslims to acquire and use beneficial worldly knowledge and skills to meet their diverse requirements.

Boko Harām is highly skilled at employing technologies in all its operations. Modern knowledge undoubtedly brought about these technologies that it rejects entirely or assert as prohibited in Islam. Its ideology is obviously in conflict with this practice. Therefore, the Boko Harām insurgents have embraced this erroneous ideology to the extent of taking arms against society to acquire worldly knowledge and attend Western education. In the following discussion, this study clarifies how Islam propagates beneficial worldly knowledge from an Islamic point of view by highlighting some practical examples mentioned in the Qur›ān and the Prophet›s Ḥadīth.

## Comparison and Clarification

It is pertinent for Muslims to uphold their spiritual tradition and divine etiquette in obedience to Allāh while benefiting from these worldly treasures and strengths. Thus, Islam emphasised maintaining its divine teachings and spiritual etiquette without abandoning worldly development in all fields. Even if that progress is the product of the human mind, produced by the unbelieving and libertine minds, as was the leader of humanity, our Prophet p.b.u.h. has shown us the way through his actions and doings.

Historically, when combined forces besieged the Muslim army in the Battle of Khandaq, the military siege laid a tremendous historical record in Qur'ānic verse:

> "[Remember] when they came at you from above you and from below you, and when eyes shifted [in fear], and hearts reached the throats, and you assumed about Allāh [various]

> assumptions. There, the believers were tested and shaken with a severe shaking." [al-Aḥzāb: 10-11]

Noteworthily, when this military siege happened, Salmān al-Fārisī said to the Prophet p.b.u.h., "In Persia, whenever we were surrounded, we would dig a trench to protect ourselves" (al-Tabari, 1997, p. 8). Military trenches are among the strategies of war, and the mind that first came up with this idea was from Persian people who were Zoroastrians or "fire worshippers." Interestingly, the Prophet p.b.u.h. at the time did not consider that military plan which originated from the infidels as nasty and filthy. Instead, he took the idea and used it in his worldly affairs.

Similarly, when the enemy wanted to kill him, he was forced to leave his homeland and migrate to Madīnah, where all the people were at war against him; he and his companion were coerced to stay in a cave to run from the polytheists (*mushrikīn*), as portrayed by Allāh: "When they were in the cave, he told his companion, "Do not grieve; indeed, Allāh is with us." (al-Tawbah: 40).

Henceforth, the Prophet p.b.u.h. met an infidel named ʿAbdullah ibn al-Arqaṭ al-Du'alī, who knew about all the roads and paths between Makkah and Madīnah. He took the Prophet p.b.u.h. to the side of the sea and brought him through an unusual path until they safely reached Madinah (Ibn Hishām, 1990; al-Tabari, 1988). The Prophet p.b.u.h. provided a clear example for us for not regarding his infidelity as a barrier to benefiting from his knowledge and expertise. The Prophet p.b.u.h. is the most pleasured servant of Allāh, and he held steadfast to the divine manner and spiritual discipline in the light of the religious teaching.

Likewise, the Prophet p.b.u.h. had once been concerned with prohibiting intercourse for a breastfeeding mother (*ghīlah*). The Arabs believed that having sexual intercourse with a wife who is breastfeeding would bring harm to the mother and the child as well. However, he changed his mind after hearing from the Persians and the Romans that they used to do it without any harm to their children, and he took their experience into account (Muslim, 2007, pp. 87-88; Vol. 4, ḥadīth no. 3564).

Islam is a religion of knowledge in every field of life and a religion of strength, not stagnation or rigidity, but rather striving, strength, jihad, and advancement. Islam leads human life and enlightens them through its teaching and illumination to bring goodness in both aspects of life, in this world and the hereafter. Allāh the Almighty has enjoined the relationships of people in this world and the hereafter; He explained to them what would bring happiness in this worldly life and how to have an eternal happy life after death. Thus, every Muslim should know that the religion of Islam is a religion that urges people to strive and progress in life while maintaining obedience and worship (*ʿubudiyyah*) to Him. Because this universe has a creator who created it, and He is the King of justice, He does not leave people in vain. He commands and forbids them, and there is no means except to obey His orders and follow His paths, and verily His rules and laws for humanity are nothing except the best of this world and the hereafter. Allāh says: "And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and justice" (al-Anʿām: 115). This verse verifies the truthfulness of His revelation, by which all His rules are of justice, and everything that He legislates for humanity is the best-governing human conduct (al-Shanqīṭī, 1426H).

Likewise, al-Bukhārī (1997, p. 88; Vol. 3, ḥadīth no. 1913) and Muslim (2007, p. 144; Vol. 3, ḥadīth no. 2511) narrated from Ibn ʿUmar that the Prophet p.b.u.h. has said: "We are an illiterate nation; we neither write nor know calculation. The month is like this and this, i.e. sometimes of 29 days and sometimes of 30 days." The ḥadīth implies that the ummah of the Prophet p.b.u.h. does not need to resort to writing or astronomical calculations to know the times of their worship, as with other nations. According to Ibn al-Battal, the ḥadīth implies that Muslims are not required to master sciences such as Mathematics or Astronomy to decide times for their religious activities such as fasting (al-Aynī, 1427H). Simple and clear natural indications are sufficient for that religious purpose and are not less valid than elaborate calculations produced by experts in Arithmetic and Astronomy. He then quoted Ibn Taymiyyah, who argues that what the Prophet means in the above narration is that Islam does not enjoin its followers to write or calculate as in the case of *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book) because their specific times and periods for fasting are only known through calculation and writing, and because their religion is closely related to their holy book in a way that without that book and the ability to utilise it they would not have known their religion.

It is important to address that the Prophet's saying does not indicate the prohibition of learning sciences and calculations. According to Ibn Taymiyah, "illiteracy" in the ḥadīth does not imply ignorance. It is not blameworthy – as some people think – that Sharīʿah does not prohibit learning the sciences and arithmetic or other beneficial worldly knowledge. The above Prophet's saying, "We are an illiterate nation," cannot be seen as a command (*ṭalab*) from the Prophet because the Arabs were already illiterate before the emergence of Islam as indicated in the Qur'ānic verses Al-Jumuah: 2; and Āli 'Imrān: 20. The Prophet›s saying also does not imply that they must remain in that condition (illiterate), even though they may continue practising specific rulings in Sharīʿah based on that ḥadīth. There is no indication in the ḥadīth that writing and calculation are forbidden, and the ḥadīth may be understood as mere information (*ikhbār*). Illiteracy is a shortcoming and not a quality of perfection. Therefore, the ḥadīth will be better understood as an excuse for the illiteracy of the Arabs and as an indication that their condition is forgivable rather than furnishing that state with praise (Ibn Taimiyyah, 2005).

The Prophet's saying above does not mean that the Arabs cannot read and count. Some of the companions of the Prophet, such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Zayd, and Mu'awiyyah, can read and write, and the Prophet assigned them the task of writing. They also knew how to calculate the dates and calendar, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, "so that you may know the number of years and account [of time]" (Sūrah Yūnus verse 5 and Sūrah al-Isrā' verse 12). However, most of the Arabs at that time could not read and write, nor did they have advanced mathematical knowledge, which is usually found in developed societies. Therefore, some of those who could read and do arithmetic are generally considered part of the illiterate Arab society.

The word ummī (unlettered or illiterate) comes from the same root as ummah (nation). It refers to someone not distinguished from others by knowing how to read or write. It is like the word āmmi, which describes a regular person (one of the āmmah or masses) who is not distinguished from them by having knowledge they do not have. It is also said that the word ummī is connected to the word umm (mother) because one has learned no more than what his mother taught him. The distinction which takes a person out of the regular situation in society into a group of people with specialised knowledge may be a virtue – like the case of those who read the Qur'ān and understand its meaning – if he uses that knowledge for good causes that deserve praise. The one who neglects or uses it for evil purposes is condemned.

The word ummī has two meanings. The first meaning is illiterate, as mentioned earlier, and the second meaning is not having a scripture like the one possessed by Ahl al-Kitab, namely the Jews and the Christians (al-Faruqi, 2005). Both meanings are plausible for the term ummī for the Arabs. The Prophet p.b.u.h. was sent to the Arabs, through whom his message was conveyed to all the other nations because it was sent in their tongue. They were mostly illiterate and had no specialty of knowledge or scripture, although, naturally, they were more ready to learn than other nations. They were like a plowed field ready to be sown, but no one was to do the task. They had no scripture revealed from Allāh for them to read, as the People of the Book had, or any inductive-analytical sciences like the Sabians (one of a group mentioned in the Qur'ān as entitled to Muslim religious toleration along with Jews and Christians and usually identified with the Mandaeans or the Elkesaites) and others had. Writing existed among them but to a minimal extent. They had some knowledge of the type that is acquired by instinct but which does not make an individual distinct from any other unlettered person; for example, knowing of the Creator, and they held good, noble characteristics and ethics, and they had some knowledge of astronomy, genealogy, and poetry. So, they deserved to be called unlettered in all senses of the word, as Allāh Almighty said concerning them: "He is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muḥammad) from among themselves" [al-Jumu'ah 62: 2] and "And say to those who were given the Scripture (Jews and Christians) and to those who are illiterates (Arab pagans): Do you (also) submit yourselves (to Allāh in Islam)?" [Āli 'Imrān 3: 20].

The unlettered or illiterate were described as opposite to the People of the Book, for the kitābi (one of the People of the Book) is something other than the ummī (unlettered). When the Prophet was sent among them, it became obligatory for them to follow the book he brought, ponder its meanings, understand it, and act upon it. Allāh has made this book as an explanation for all things, and their Prophets taught them everything, even the etiquette of defecation. After that, they became people of books and people of knowledge. Indeed, they became the most knowledgeable of people and the best of them in beneficial knowledge.

Thus, the feature of shortcomings and inadequacy due to illiteracy, which is the lack of knowledge and writing, ceased from them as they gained knowledge of the book and wisdom. They inherited the book, as Allāh said in *Sūrat al-Jumu'ah* 62:2 about them.

They were an unlettered nation in every sense of the word, but when He taught them the book and al-Hikmah, Allāh said concerning them:

> Then We gave the book (the Qur'ān) as an inheritance to such of Our slaves whom We chose (the followers of Muḥammad). Then of them are some who wrong their ownselves, and of them are some who follow a middle course, and of them are some who are, by Allāh's Leave, foremost in good deeds (Fātir 35:32).

> And this is a blessed Book (the Qur'ān) which We have sent down, so follow it and fear Allāh (i.e. do not disobey His Orders), that you may receive mercy (i.e. saved from the torment of Hell). Lest you (pagan Arabs) should say: "The Book was sent down only to two sects before us (the Jews and the Christians), and for our part, we were unaware of what they studied." Or lest you (pagan Arabs) should say: "If only the Book had been sent down to us, we would surely, have been better guided than they (Jews and Christians)" (al-An'ām 6:155-157).

Moreover, Allāh answered the prayer of *al-Khalīl* (Ibrāhīm) for them when He Almighty said:

> Our Lord! Send amongst them a Messenger of their own (and indeed Allāh answered their invocation by sending Muḥammad), who shall recite unto them Your Verses and instruct them in the book (this Qur'ān) and al-Hikmah (full knowledge of the Islamic laws and jurisprudence or wisdom or Prophethood) ([al-Baqarah 2:129).

> Certainly, did Allāh confer [great] favour upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error (Āli 'Imrān 3:164).

So, there are different kinds of illiteracy, which are ḥarām, *makrūh*, and kinds which are shortcomings and avoiding them is better. A person who does not know how to read al-Fātiḥah or any part of the Qur'ān is called by the jurists in their discussion on daily prayer as ummī (unlettered), the opposite of whom is a qāri' (one who reads or recites). They say that it is improper for an ummī to lead a qāri' in prayer. However, it is permissible for an ummī to lead another ummī in prayer. They discuss other issues of the same nature (Ibn Taimiyyah, 2005, Vol. 25). What they mean by ummī here is that he cannot read what is necessary (for worshipping), regardless of whether he can write and calculate.

This illiteracy also includes neglecting what is obligatory, for which a man will be punished if he can learn but does not. There is also the kind of illiteracy that is blameworthy, such as that which Allāh described in the case of the People of the Book when He said, "And there are among them (Jews) unlettered people, who know not the Book, but they trust upon false desires and they but guess" (al-Baqarah 2:78). The verse describes one who does not understand the word of Allāh or act upon it; all he does is recite it. Al-Hasan al-Basri said: "The Qur'ān was revealed to be acted upon, so recitation implies acting upon it" (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1985, p. 137).

The ummī, in this sense, may read the letters of the Qur'ān, but he does not understand it. When he speaks about knowledge, he speaks superficially, based on conjecture. This type of ummī also deserves to be blamed, just as Allāh condemned him for his lack of knowledge in obligatory matters, whether it is *farḍ 'ayn* (obligatory on everyone) or *farḍ kifāyah* (obligatory on the community but not on everyone). There is also the kind of 'illiteracy' which is better, such as the one who only reads a part of the Qur'ān and only understands some parts of it. He does not understand except for matters related to him and does not know about Sharīʿah except for what is made obligatory for him. Such a person is also called ummī (illiterate), and others who are bestowed with knowledge about Qur'ān and practising it are better than him.

These matters which distinguish a person are virtues. If a person fails to attain them, he misses out on something that is obligatory either on him as an individual (*farḍ 'ayn*) or obligatory on the community (*farḍ kifāyah*) or *mustaḥabb* (recommended). These attributes of perfection and virtue may be attributed to Allāh and His Prophets in general terms. Allāh is All-Knowing and All-Wise, and He combines knowledge and beneficial speech in all He wants, tells, and wills. A similar thing is true of His Prophets and our Prophet, the leader of the knowledgeable and wise people.

Several conditions for the distinctive features are meant to attain virtues. Sometimes, one can do without them and use alternative means, such as writing and calculation, and not attaining them is not blameworthy. If a person does not have these abilities, knowing that virtue cannot be achieved without them, then not having them is a sign of imperfection. If a person acquires them and uses them to perfect himself – like the one who learns how to read and then uses that to read the Qur'ān and read helpful books or write other things that will benefit people – then this is a virtue in his case. However, if he uses it for purposes that will harm himself or other people – like the one who reads misguided books or writes things that will harm people, like forging the writing of rulers, judges, and witnesses – then this will be bad for him and will be a sin and imperfection. As a result, it is preferable to avoid learning or acquiring knowledge in such a way that one harms himself or his community. We need to attain perfect knowledge with reasonable means. Allāh said about His Prophet p.b.u.h., "Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write (i.e., Muḥammad) whom they find written with them in the Tawrat (Torah) and the Injil (Gospel)…" (al-A'rāf 7:157).

The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) being unlettered does not mean he lacked knowledge or the ability to recite by heart, for he is the leader of all imāms. Instead, what it meant was that he was not able to write or read anything that was written, as Allāh said of him, "Neither did you (O Muḥammad) read any book before it (this Qur'ān) nor did you write any book (whatsoever) with your right hand…" (al- 'Ankabūt 29:48).

Not knowing how to write yet managing to attain its utmost objectives (from writing) is his greatest virtue and greatest miracle (*muʿjizah*) since Allāh has taught the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) without any intermediating book is a *muʿjizah* for him. It was only when the element of falsification and alteration started to happen that the Prophet taught his ummah about al-Kitāb and al-Ḥikmah without the need to write them (the revelations) down for himself. Meanwhile, most of his great companions, the four caliphs and others write them out of need since they were not given any revelation as the Prophet did. So, their literacy became a means of perfection for themselves. In contrast, for others who do not write, it is considered lacking or imperfect, as virtue from the revelations could not be accomplished without writing. Back to the discussion about the Prophet's saying about illiteracy, Ibn Taymiyah (2005, Vol. 25) says:

> Thus it becomes crystal clear that the "illiteracy" mentioned here is a characteristic which is praiseworthy in several senses: firstly in terms of dispensing with writing and calculations in favour of something clearer and more apparent, namely, (sighting) the new moon, and secondly, in the sense that writing and astronomical calculation here may involve error or mistake, and thirdly, for resorting to them (writing and astronomical calculation) require many efforts and thus distancing from other beneficial thighs, since they are meant for other purpose and not intended for the writing and calculation itself (p. 166-174).

## Conclusion

To conclude, we notify here that the scholars have classified the obligation of learning beneficial knowledge for ummah as a communal obligation, which is commanded upon the community and made sufficient if a group of people performs that. The Qur'ān commands the Muslims to prepare themselves as best they can to become strong and not be overrun by other nations. It must be done in every required field and not only related to purely religious matters. Likewise, the Prophet p.b.u.h. showed several examples of beneficial worldly knowledge and skills necessary for Muslims to learn and use to fulfil their various needs.

As a result, it is apparent that Allah SWT is the source of all beneficial knowledge. His Revelation is the ultimate source of knowledge for humans, providing insight into both transcendent truths and tangible realities. Thus, Islamic scholars have classified knowledge into four types: theoretical and practical, personal and acquired, Religious and intellectual, and individual and communal obligations. Any worldly knowledge that the ummah needs and on which its survival depends—such as medicine, agriculture, manufacturing, etc.—is considered a *farḍ kifāyah*. If the seeker's goal and intentions are to serve and benefit the Muslim ummah and humanity in general, support it, elevate its status, and make it self-sufficient from disbelieved nations.

Finally, neutralising the young generation's beliefs (*aqīdah*) is essential. Ideology continues to be the primary source of support for Boko Harām's supporters because it is a significant factor in the recruitment process. In many ways, ideological conflicts are more crucial than physical ones, and when an ideology is overthrown, an insurgency withers and dies.

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# Remembering Muhammad Asad: The Modernist Reformer of the 20th Century

**Ahmad Farouk Musa**[*]

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on one of the most famous modern Muslim scholars: Muhammad Asad. He was born as a Jew by the name of Leopold Weiss in the year 1900. In his life's works, Asad drew his methodology from the medieval Spanish scholar Ibn Hazm whom he called *Imāmul A'zam* (the greatest Imam). His translation and exegesis of the Qur'an in English—*The Message of the Qur'an*—drew its inspiration from Muhammad Abduh's tafsir *Al-Manar*, where he attempted to fuse *'aql* (reason) and *naql* (texts). Muhammad Asad struggled for the renaissance of Islam and the rejuvenation of Islamic spirit. Through his extensive journey throughout the Muslim world, he made acquaintances with renowned Muslim scholars including Shaykh Mustafa al-Marāghi, who would later become the Mufti of al-Azhar, Omar al-Mukhtar, the symbol of resistance in the Muslim world, and Muhammad Iqbal, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. This paper will briefly look into his Qur'ānic exegesis *The Message of the Qur'ān.* His thoughts and ideas might have evolved later in his life since he lived a full 92 years, but his ideas as seen in *The Message* was ahead of his time and showed how he appreciated the ideas of Islamic reform that was promoted by Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin al-Afghāni before him. Indeed, the first and most important idea of Muhammad Asad's vision was his conviction that Islam is based on *reason* and, consequently, argumentation is necessary to becoming and being a Muslim.

**Keywords:** Muhammad Asad, *ijtihād*, reform, renaissance, The Message of the Qur'ān

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[*] Senior Lecturer, Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine & Health Sciences, Monash University Malaysia. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2303-7813. Email: farouk@monash.edu

**Abstrak:** Makalah ini menumpukan kepada salah seorang cendekiawan Muslim moden yang paling terkenal, iaitu Muhammad Asad. Beliau dilahirkan sebagai seorang Yahudi dengan nama Leopold Weiss pada tahun 1900. Dalam kesarjanaannya sepanjang hayat, Asad membangunkan metodologinya daripada cendekiawan Sepanyol abad pertengahan, Ibn Hazm, yang beliau gelar sebagai *Imāmul A'zam* (Imam yang Agung). Terjemahan dan tafsiran beliau terhadap al-Qur'an dalam bahasa Inggeris—*The Message of the Qur'an*—adalah mengambil inspirasi daripada tafsir Al-Manar karya Muhammad Abduh, di mana beliau berusaha menggabungkan *'aql* (nalar) dan *naql* (teks). Muhammad Asad berjuang demi kebangkitan semula dan pembaharuan semangat Islam. Melalui perjalanan luasnya ke seluruh dunia Muslim, beliau berkenalan dengan cendekiawan Muslim terkenal termasuklah Shaykh Mustafa al-Marāghi, yang kemudiannya menjadi Mufti al-Azhar, Omar al-Mukhtar, simbol penentangan di dunia Muslim, dan Muhammad Iqbal, pengasas Republik Islam Pakistan. Makalah ini akan melihat tafsiran al-Qur'an beliau secara ringkas, *The Message of the Qur'an*. Pemikiran dan idea dalam hidup Muhammad Asad kemudiannya mungkin telah berevolusi pada akhir hayatnya kerana beliau hidup selama 92 tahun, namun idea-idea beliau yang terdapat dalam *The Message* adalah jauh mendahului zamannya dan menunjukkan bagaimana beliau menghargai idea-idea pengislahan Islam yang dipromosikan oleh Muhammad Abduh dan Jamaluddin al-Afghāni yang hidup sebelum daripada beliau. Bahkan, idea pertama dan paling penting dalam visi Muhammad Asad adalah keyakinannya bahawa Islam adalah berasaskan nalar, justeru perbahasan adalah perlu untuk bertukar menjadi dan terus menjadi seorang Muslim.

**Kata kunci:** Muhammad Asad, nalar, islah, kebangkitan, *The Message of the Qur'an*

## Introduction

Muhammad Asad (1900-1992) is arguably one of the greatest Muslim intellectuals who ever lived, but remains almost unknown in the West and relatively unknown to the average Muslim (Hoffman, 2000, pp.233-237). However, those who have followed his work through his books and writings know that no one has contributed more in our times to the understanding of Islam and the awakening of Muslims, or perhaps worked harder to build a bridge between the East and the West, than Muhammad Asad (Asad T., 2011, pp.155-165).

Muhammad Asad was born Leopold Weiss on 2 July, 1900 in Lviv, Galicia, then part of the greater Austrian empire, but now in Ukraine.

At the age of 26, he converted to Islam and became Muhammad Asad. Before his conversion, his spiritual journey was basically in search of a home, where he was unable to quell his restless spirit until he embraces Islam. How he transformed into this new spiritual life is best described in his own words:

> After all, it was a matter of love, and love is composed of many things; of our desires and our loneliness of our high aims and our shortcomings, of our strengths and our weaknesses. So it was in my case. Islam came over like a thief at night; but unlike a thief, it entered to remain for good (Nawwab, 2002).

**Asad's journey into Islam**

It was in an underground Berlin train that Weiss experienced his first epiphany. In September 1926, he was travelling with his wife Elsa, when he saw that people around him in the train had no smiles on their faces, as if they are in agony, despite their opulent dress. Back to his flat after that incident, he noticed a *surah* of the Qur'ān he was reading earlier on: *Al-Takāthur* (the Abundance of Wealth):

1. YOU ARE OBSESSED by greed for more and more
2. until you go down to your graves.
3. Nay, in time you will come to understand!
4. And once again: Nay, in time you will come to understand!
5. Nay, if you could but understand [it] with an understanding [born] of certainty,
6. you would indeed, most surely, behold the blazing fire [of hell]!
7. In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty:
8. and on that Day you will most surely be called to account for [what you did with] the boon of life! (Asad, 2013, p. 1161)

Weiss said that the Qur'ān literally shook in his hands, and he was speechless. He documented the experience: "It was an answer: an answer so decisive that all doubt was suddenly at an end. I knew now, beyond any doubt, that it was a God-inspired book I was holding in my hand" (Wilmot, 2024, pp. xxi-xxxix). Asad then made his way to an Indian Muslim friend living in Berlin and proclaimed the *shahādah* immediately. A few weeks later, his wife Elsa followed suit. Upon conversion, he took the names Muhammad in honour of the Prophet, and Asad (meaning "lion") as a reminder of his given name, Leopold.

In 1922, before embracing Islam, Asad was a foreign correspondent in the Near and Far East for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of the most outstanding newspapers in Europe at that time. His career in journalism took him to many parts of the Islamic world including Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, and made him understand the socio-political issues at that time including those related to Jews and Arabs especially (Iqbal, 2016). He became very critical of the Zionist agenda then, and remained steadfast to be an anti-Zionist throughout his entire life (Maarif, 2024, pp. xxi-xxvii). He subsequently crossed the Mediterranean with his first stop at Cairo, where he learnt Arabic and spent some time with Shaykh Mustafa al-Marāghi, a student of the great Egyptian reformer Imam Muhammad Abduh. This was the same Mustafa Marāghi, a critical thinker himself, who subsequently became the Sheikh of al-Azhar (Musa & Koya, 2009).[1]

## Asad's Strong Rebuke against *Taqlid* (Blind Imitation)

It was through his friendship with al-Marāghi that he realised that al-Azhar had lapsed into sterility, a condition that afflicted the whole Muslim world as well, with no new ideas and innovations. Those former Islamic thinkers would never have dreamt that their ideas would remain fossilised for a few centuries, and repeated over and over again, as if they were sacred and infallible truths (Asad, 1996, pp. 188-193; 2019, pp. 199-204).

Muhammad Asad realised at that time that just as some saints and scholars would be surprised to see their graves made into shrines, many will also be shocked to see how their words were immortalised. This was the essence of the concept of *taqlīd*, or blind imitation—a concept that made Muslims backward and unproductive, whereby men clung blindly to the beliefs of their forefathers; a concept that Muhammad Abduh and other reformers waged war against.

[1] Musa, Ahmad Farouk & Koya, Abdul Rahman. Remembering Muhammad Asad, the West's gift to Islam. *In* the blurb for the movie screening "A Road to Mecca" on 13th December 2009, Securities Commission, Mont Kiara, Kuala Lumpur

"And [so,] whenever they commit a shameful deed, they are wont to say, "We found our forefathers doing it," and, "God has enjoined it upon us." Say: "Behold, never does God enjoin deeds of abomination. Would you attribute unto God something of which you have no knowledge?" [*Sūrah al-A'raf*; 7:28] (Asad, 2013, p. 247).

The blind acceptance of scholars' opinions, upholding books as al-Bukhāri, Muslim, at-Tirmizi and others as if they were complete truths, has created an interpretation of Islam that does not allow progress and reform. The blind following of scholars such as Imam Shāfi'ī and others of the past, who were only Muslim intellectuals of the first few centuries, has created a version of Islam that does not liberate and develop humanity. The scholars of those times lived under monarchical rules, and were invariably influenced by the rampant culture of collusion between the rulers and the ulama' or scholars. The passiveness and downfall of the Muslims as cited from the work of many academics comes from the blind imitation or *taqlīd* and false assumptions we have on the early Islamic scholars and their works (Kuru, 2024, pp. 78-81, 136-148). It was quoted that a renowned scholar among the Sunnis, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazāli, who lived in the 11th century, consistently defended the idea of the religion-state collusion. He even wrote in his book *al- Iqtiṣād fi al- Iʿtiqād* (Moderation in Belief): "[I]t has been said that religion and sultan are twins, and also that religion is a foundation and the sultan is a guard: that which has no foundation collapses and that which has no guard is lost" (Kuru, 2024, p. 148).

Asad believes that the alien-layer that has covered Islam must be removed before the scholars can wake up from their endless repetition, and before the Muslim world wakes up from its dormancy. All the *ahādith* (sing. *hadīth*) and traditions were collected by historians, who left us history they thought were reliable, or through the supervision of the elite culture, were concocted or allowed to be incorporated into the Muslim mind. This does not mean that Asad was against *hadīth* and *sunnah*. In fact, the second book he wrote after *Road to Mecca* was a translation and commentary of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri* into English titled *The Early Years of Islam*, published in Lahore in 1938.[2]

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[2] Arafat publication, later reprinted in Gibraltar: Dār al-Andalus in 1981. The Islamic Book Trust of Kuala Lumpur reprinted the book *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhāri: The Early Years of Islam in 2013.

So, according to Muhammad Asad, we must approach these books anew as man-recorded history, and thus accept that history and interpretation by scholars to contain forgeries and wrong assumptions. There was a possibility that alien sources and beliefs had entered the minds of the scholars, and tried to infect Islam by making people believe our Prophet said or did certain things. All of the Prophet's deeds and behaviour were a result of the Qur'ān. Not of any revelation next to it. Therefore, to follow the Prophet, we must follow the Qur'ān and start with the Qur'ān. A similar view was uttered by the martyr Sayyid Qutb in his *Ma'ālim fi-at Tarīq* or *Milestones* – which is considered a textbook by the Islamic activists - in the first chapter *Al-Jīl al-Qur'ān al-Farīd* or *The Unique Qur'ānic Generation* (Qutb, 2006, pp. 29-36). To use history as guidance is dangerous and misleading in many cases. It is time to be honest, time to admit many mistakes and lies have entered into the idea of what Islam is and tells us. The Qur'ān is Islam; everything else is human interpretation, explication, and recording of history.

## Asad's Formulation of an Islamic Government

Asad believes that history can only give advice, show the underlying factors when a society was successful, but is not to be replicated to decide the ruling of today's states and societies. His book *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* initially published in 1961,[3] a small book of only 107 pages, has become an essential foundation for further efforts to rejuvenate Islamic jurisprudence and to develop a much-needed Islamic political theory of statehood. Admittedly, the initial research for this book was prompted by the need to develop an Islamic constitution for the new Islamic Republic of Pakistan. It was meant to base the society not on the basis of race or nationality but solely on the "ideology" of the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* of the Prophet. But then Asad was also aware that Islamic history could not provide models that could be copied directly. The Constitution of Medina was set up under very peculiar circumstances; it was also unique insofar as it was being ruled by a Messenger of Allāh. In the words of the current Islamic scholar Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim, the experience of combining religious and political authority is unique to the Prophet and cannot be replicated (An-

[3] University of California Press 1961; reprinted in Gibraltar: Dār al-Andalus 1980. The Islamic Book Trust of Kuala Lumpur reprinted in 2007.

Naim, 2008, p. 53). Islamic history has ever since been characterised by despotism. The ideas al-Mawardi (d. 450/1058) in his oft-quoted book by the Islamic ideologues in this country, *al-Ahkām as-Sultāniyya*, could not serve as the blueprint of an Islamic community in our industrial age (Hoffman, 2000, p. 240).

Asad therefore had to partake in *ijtihād* in order to make a clear distinction between the relatively small set of divine norms found in the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* in governing state and government which falls under the jurisdiction of *as-siyāsi*—that is, the political, profane, and relative—where it was essentially man-made notwithstanding the fact that its ultimate sources are rooted in revelation. This was similar to the idea of *faraghāt* or spaces as articulated by Rachid Ghannouchi, the political leader of *an-Nahda* of Tunisia (Tamimi, 2001, pp. 182-199; 2018, pp. 301-330.). Ghannouchi, similar like Asad earlier on, contends that if Islam is the final divine revelation to humanity, it is only appropriate that no fixed prescriptions are given for matters that are of changing nature. Thanks to the existence of *faraghāt*, Muslims can exercise their *ijtihād* to devise suitable solutions for emerging problems, which makes it fit for all times and places. He strongly asserted that it would be rather naïve to think that all is required for *khilāfah* to be reinstated would be for Muslim leaders especially just to execute a set of *ahkām* (rules) in the name of God's law. Where is the role for *ijtihād*, or for *'aql* (reason) if Islam is conceived of as encompassing, or catering for, all requirements? This view was expressed at the time when Muhammad Asad has left the world despite articulating this idea much earlier in his *Message* and his book.

Hence, we need new interpretation that requires new *ijtihād*. Every generation faces different circumstances, and thus many laws and ways for society cannot be fixed for all time. Laws of Islam in ethics, rights and restrictions, are universal in their application. It is a constitution containing the basis for mankind's dealing with life. Everything else is time bound and must be reinterpreted by every generation to fit it to their circumstances. This is the true understanding of the *sunnah*, custom of the Prophet, a constant improvement and development of society. A clear understanding of Ghannouchi's *faraghāt* theory begins with the assumption that the Prophet did not leave his *companions* with a set of rules as to how to choose his successor. *Ijtihād* is mandatory upon them in order to find their own ways and means. Ghannouchi considers this not as a weakness, but instead one of the miracles of Islam (Tamimi, 2001, p. 188; 2018, p. 301). He argues that if Islam is the final divine revelation to humanity, then there should not fixed laws due to the changing nature of human conditions. From this *murūnah* (flexibility), and the existence of spaces or *faraghāt,* Muslims are free to exercise their *ijtihād* to search for suitable solutions for new emerging problems. Only then can Islam be suitable for all times and places (Tamimi, 2001, p. 192; 2018. p. 318). As Muhammad Asad translated the first verse from *Sūrah al-Furqān*:

> "HALLOWED is He who from on high, step by step, has bestowed upon His servant the standard by which to discern the true from the false, so that to all the world it might be a warning."
> [*Sūrah al-Furqān*; 25:1] (Asad, 2013, p. 655).

**Asad's Odyssey across the Muslim World**

In early summer of 1924, Muhammad Asad was on the move again. He travelled to Amman, to Damascus, Tripoli and Aleppo, to Baghdad and to the Kurdish mountains, then to Iran, and to the wild mountains and steppes of Afghanistan (Abdulfattah, 2024). Travelling extensively throughout the Muslim world, his interest in Islam deepened. As Asad has made Muslim renaissance his main agenda, he took a task in immersing himself in understanding the main source of Islam, the Qur'ān itself. Considering Arabic is a semitic tongue, he embarked on an intensive study of classical Arabic which has remained intact for fourteen centuries, from living with the bedouins of Arabia whose speech and linguistic associations had essentially remained unchanged since the time of Prophet Muhammad. In order to grasp the spirit of the language, he decided that he must be able to feel and to hear the language as the Arabs felt and heard it at the time when the Qur'ān was being revealed. It gave him insight into the semantics of the Qur'ānic language unknown to any Westerner, and enabled him later to translate the Qur'ān into English as *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Asad, 2013, p. xix). Along with his commentary, *The Message* is without parallel in conveying the holy book's meaning and spirit to non-Arab readers in Shakespearean English. It was the best, apart from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's and Marmaduke Pickthall's translations which are the most remarkable among the contemporary efforts to convey the message of the Qur'ān in English (Hoffman, 2000, p. 242).

In his study of the Qur'ān, Asad found that the decline of the Muslims was not due to any shortcomings in Islam but rather to their own fatalistic attitude towards life (Rahim, 1995, pp. 45-46). This was most probably from the theological views of some Imams of later years which evolved predominantly as the Ash'ariyyah school of thought. It was not Muslims per se that had made Islam great: it was Islam that had made the Muslims great (Asad, 2011, p. 193; 2019, p. 204). Modern Muslim thinkers and adherents alike should find in the principles of Islam a flexibility which allows them to explain and interpret with the greatest freedom while still keeping the faith intact. But when their faith became such a routine habit and ceased to be a program of life to keep innovating and improving, it led to the ossification of faith and understanding, which in turn resulted in the decline of their civilisation that ultimately leads to a vacuous sterility.

We know now that Muslims' renaissance was Asad's goal in life. He travelled far and wide, conferred with kings, leaders as well as the common man "between the Libyan Desert and the Pamirs, between the Bosporus and the Arabian Sea," and began putting his ideas on paper (Faruqui, 2024). *Islam at the Crossroads*[4], the book that was first published in 1934, still keeps the contemporary reader in awe with its analysis of Muslim regression and its prescription for instilling self-confidence to an Islamic world who were facing the onslaught of Western culture (Hoffman, 2000, p. 238).

Asad continued his travel and managed to get across from the northern confines of Arabia towards the south until in 1932 when the monsoons of India replaced the dry desert sand. Asad befriended Muhammad Iqbal, the spiritual father of the idea of a separate Pakistan, while in India. He was in the Indian continent when Iqbal persuaded him to abandon plans to travel to the East including Indonesia in order "to help establish the intellectual premise of a future Islamic state." He started his ambitious project of translating *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri* into English including writing the commentary once he was in India (Musa, 2024, pp. ix-xx).

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4 Asad, Muhammad. First published in Delhi and Lahore in 1934. Later reprinted by Dār al-Andalus in 1982. Reprinted by The Other Press, Kuala Lumpur in 2022. Translated into Malay as *Islam di Persimpangan Jalan* by the Islamic Renaissance Front, Kuala Lumpur in 2016.

At the end of the war, Asad was interned in India by the British since he was considered a citizen of an enemy state after Germany took over Austria in World War II (Hasan, n.d.). His project to translate *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri*[5] was stalled and the manuscripts destroyed during the chaos from the partition of Pakistan from India after the war. (Asad, 2013, pp. v-viii). When Pakistan was born in 1947, Asad became the first citizen of Pakistan (Shabbir & Laskowska, n.d.). and was then appointed as its undersecretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs and became its permanent representative to the United Nations in 1952. This was where he met his wife, Pola Hamida, a Polish-American and a Muslim convert whom he married the same year (Kepa, n.d.). It was also here that he began writing his remarkable and celebrated autobiography *The Road to Mecca,*[6] covering the first half of his life and his travel in the Middle East, including his spiritual journey and later ended with the year 1932 where he left the Middle East for British India (Rubin, 2016, pp. 1-28).

After two years in New York, and after his marriage to Pola Hamida created a ruckus with his wife in Pakistan, the couple travelled extensively after his resignation from his position at the Pakistan Foreign Service (Musa, 2024, pp. xvii-xviii). They initially travelled to Morocco, then to Tangiers, then to Portugal, and finally they resided in Spain. In his book that was initially inspired from the formation of the Islamic state of Pakistan, *Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Asad, 1980),[7] Asad did not lay down the blueprint for an Islamic state but the religious fundamentals such as the concept of *shura* or mutual consultation in establishing an Islamic government. Within this framework, Asad showed that an Islamic state had the flexibility to contain features of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law as long as *shura* is observed, not excluding the likes of American institutions of presidency and the Supreme Court (Asad, 1980, pp. 30-50).

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[5] Asad, Muhammad. Preface to *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri*: The Early Years of Islam. First published in 1938 by Arafat publication, Lahore. Reprinted in 1981 by Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar. Reprinted by the Islamic Book Trust in 2013.

[6] Asad, Muhammad. Originally published by Max Reinhardt 1954. Republished by the Islamic Book Trust, Kuala Lumpur in 1996. The Malay translation *Jalan ke Mekah* was published by the Islamic Renaissance Front in 2019.

[7] Asad, Muhammad. *Principles of State and Government in Islam* was originally published in 1961 by University of California Press, and a revised edition in 1980 by the Islamic Book Trust.

## The Message of the Qur'ān

"And be conscious of the Day on which you shall be brought back unto God, whereupon every human being shall be repaid in full for what he has earned, and none shall be wronged."
[*Sūrah al-Baqarah*; 2:281] (Asad, 2013, p. 75).

It was probably his last project, after years of labour in translating *Ṣaḥīḥ* Bukhāri, that he embarked on translating his magnum opus *The Message of the Qur'ān. The Message* in a complete form of thirty *juzu'* was published in 1980 but he published the first edition in 1964 by the Islamic Centre of Geneva based in Switzerland (Mykhaylo, n.d.). Coincidently, the Islamic Center of Geneva was established by Sa'id Ramadan, the son-in-law of the *Ikhwānul Muslimun's* (Muslim Brotherhood) founder Imam Hassan al-Banna. It is true that Muhammad Asad meant to devote only two years to completing the translation and the commentary but ended up spending seventeen years instead. However, it has been acclaimed as one of the best, if not the best, translations of the Qur'ān into English (Eaton, 2003, pp. i-v). Hasan Charles Le Gai Eaton, the British Muslim intellectual, said that no other translator has come close enough to conveying the meaning of the Qur'ān to those who are not familiar with the Arabic language than Muhammad Asad (Eaton, 2003, p. i).

As we have said earlier on, Muhammad Asad dedicated The *Message* to "people who think." Indeed, Asad had clearly pointed out in his explanation of verses 31-33 of *surah al-Baqara* that by virtue of man's ability to think conceptually, man is superior in this aspect even to angels.

"And He (God) taught Adam all the names"
[*Sūrah al-Baqarah*; 2:31] (Asad, 2013, p. 30).

The subsequent verses show that owing to his God-given knowledge of those "names", man is, in certain respect, superior even to the angels. The "names" are a symbolic expression for the power of defining terms, the power to articulate thinking which is peculiar to the human being and which enables him, in the words of the Qur'ān, to be God's vicegerent on earth. Hence, there is no virtue in *taqlīd* or blind imitation; and the Qur'ān categorically denounces it in a clear rebuke:

"And never concern thyself with anything of which thou hast no knowledge, verily [thy] hearing and sight and heart -all of them – will be called to account on it [on Judgement Day]"
[*Sūrah al-Isrā'*; 17:36] (Asad, 2013, p. 507).

Instead, each believer is acquired to "use *reason*" and their own judgement, pursue knowledge in its widest sense, and gain the ability for discernment on moral and religious issues. As this passage in the Qur'an makes clear, the accountability on the Day of Judgment is individual: we will be asked what we have done, *not* who we followed blindly. Thus, Muslims should not be following their Shaykh and religious leaders blindly without knowing the *dalil* or religious reasonings but should instead use their own critical mental faculties.

Muslims were obligated to understand their faith based on the Qur'ān as best as they could. They should use their own faculty or reasoning, understanding the message of the Qur'ān by themselves, before seeking help to empower their understanding. To Muhammad Asad, every Muslim ought to be able to say "The Qur'ān has been revealed for me" (Asad, 2013, pp. xv-xxiii). In translating his *Message*, Muhammad Asad had made copious references especially in his footnotes to Muhammad Abduh whom he considered a person where every single strand of the modern Islamic movement converges (Asad, 2013, p. xx). This is an important fact to be realised since we will not get a clear understanding of his thought without understanding the influence of Muhammad Abduh on him.

Finally, in 1987, Asad published *This Law of Ours and Other Essays,*[8] which was basically a collection of articles he had written over the years on Muslim religious and political thought but had not published. He remained intellectually active for the next few years until the last days of his life. He spent the final days of his life in Mijas in the Andalusian province of Spain after spending a record 19 years in Tangier, Morocco. Leopold Weiss was born on 2 July 1900. Muhammad Asad died on 20 February 1992. He was buried in the Muslim cemetery in Granada, Andalusia (Musa, 2024, p. xx).

8 Asad, Muhammad. *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*. First published by Dār al-Andalus, Gibraltar in 1987. Republished by The Islamic Book Trust in 1987.

It has been Asad's dream to see the living body of Islam flourish in the modern world. Although distressed by the sad state of the Muslim world and its inconclusive agenda of Islamic reformation, he remained optimistic that, post-Islamic revolution of Iran, a new generation of Muslims would rise eventually to make his dream a reality. He would, in particular, have invested high hopes on Muslim youth for their idealism and their ability and prowess to think and reason. He wanted to revise his *Message* but his age and health took a toll upon him. To me, Muhammad Asad was the conscience of thinking Muslims, the kind of reformer we need most when entering the new millennium.

**Asad's Qur'ānic Hermeneutics**

"The Most Gracious has imparted this Qur'an [unto man]. He has created man: He has imparted unto him articulate thought and speech" [*Sūrah al-Rahmān*; 55:1-4] (Asad, 2013, p. 986)

If we were to understand about the entire hermeneutical approach of Muhammad Asad, it lies in the assertion that every Qur'ānic statement is directed to man's reason and must, therefore, be comprehensible either in its literal sense or allegorically. This was clearly explained in the Foreword to *The Message* (Asad, 2013, pp. xv-xxiii). The Qur'ān can only be understood if it is read thoughtfully, as one integral whole, and not as a mere collection of moral maxims, stories or disjointed laws. It is God who reveals the Qur'ān and it is Him who bestows upon man the ability to understand it. Asad insisted that the Qur'ān is read, as "it ought to be read" and it becomes, "its own best commentary."

"Thus, when We recite it, follow thou its wording [with all thy mind] and then, behold, it will be for Us to make its meaning clear" [*Sūrah al-Qiyāmah*; 75:18-19] (Asad, 2013, p. 1093).

In interpreting the Qur'ān, Asad asserted that apart from linguistic considerations, there were two fundamental rules of interpretation he tried to observe consistently. His basic approach is grounded in the belief that all the Qur'ānic injunctions and exhortations (the ethical message) are all interrelated and should be viewed together as an exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences. This is the concept of *at-Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bil Qur'ān* (the exegesis of the Qur'ān *with* the Qur'ān) where the verses, all of them, clarify and amplify one another. Consequently, its real meaning can be grasped only if we correlate every one of its statements with what has been stated elsewhere, and try to explain its ideas by means of frequent cross-references (Asad, 2013, p. xxii). That is why reading of *The Message* must be done when we have the entire Qur'an in hand i.e. *The Message*, due to its heavy cross-referencing. Whenever this rule is faithfully followed, we realise that the Qur'ān is, in the words of Muhammad Abduh, "its own best commentary" (Asad, 2013, p. xx).

Secondly, no part of the Qur'ān should be viewed from a purely "historical" point of view. The Qur'ān provides general principles that are presented for sermonic and didactic purposes. This means, for instance, that its references to historical circumstances and events should not be taken literally as constituting a factual record, but as being illustrations of the human condition (Asad, 2013, p. xxii). I think at this juncture, it would be good if we can view one simple example. In *Sūrah al-Burūj*; *Sūrah* 85:1-21 (The Great Constellations), Asad denies the story has any correlation with Abraham's experience with his idolatrous contemporaries, or the Biblical legend of Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to burn pious Israelites, or the persecution of the Christians of Najran by the Yemeni King or the apocryphal of a Zoroastrian King who burnt his defiant subjects (Asad, 2013, pp. 1126-1128). To him, as a matter of fact, the anonymity of the evildoers shows us we have a parable and not an allusion to a historical event. The pit of fire is a metaphor for the persecution of the believers by the unbelievers, a phenomenon not restricted to any time, or any particular people, but recurring in many forms and many degrees of intensity throughout human history (Asad, 2013, pp. 1126-1127 fn).

Moreover, as he points out, the underlying purpose of a verse and its relevance to the ultimate message of the Qur'ān should not be clouded by the preoccupation of classical commentators with the historical occasion when a particular verse was revealed. The classical *mufassir* (interpreter or commentator) sometimes lost sight of the purport of the verse in their unwarranted details to embellish the Qur'ānic narrative. To him, one needs to be clear about the Qur'ānic perspective and its message.

Asad is of the view that in the interpretations, and especially of such narratives as the science of creation, one should be able to understand from the modern scientific disciplines. This would not make people to look at the scriptures as anti-intellectual or anti-science. The main reason is for making such narratives comprehensible to people of the modern era. Let us look at *Sūrah al-Ṭāriq*; 86: 5-7 to make this point clearer. In these verses, Muhammad Asad translated as:

5. LET MAN, then, observe out of what he has been created:
6. he has been created out of a seminal fluid
7. issuing from between the loins [of man], and the pelvic arch [of woman]
(Asad, 2013, pp. 1129-1130)

In his commentary in the footnotes, Asad uses pelvic arch for the translation *tarā-ib* (Asad, 2013, pp. 1129-1130). This is more consistent with the scientific fact that the ovaries are located in between the pelvic bones rather than the ribs, which are also *flat bones*, similar to the pelvic bones. This is something which is often neglected by many *mufassir* despite living in the scientific age.

Muhammad Asad's emphasis on the rationality of Islam went hand in hand with his intellectual approach to religion. This is in tandem with the approach of Muhammad Abduh who developed a belief system based on reason. In the words of Abduh: "religion must be accounted as a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence, summoning him to respect the established truths and to depend on them in his moral life and conduct" (Salleh, 2003, pp.133-142).[9]

One final point to emphasise, although it might not be relevant to our discourse, is that the Qur'ān tells us clearly that many of its passages and expressions must be understood in an allegorical sense, and not simply literal, for the simple reason that, being intended for human understanding, they could not have been conveyed to us in any other way. That is, if we disregard the possibility of some of the verses of the Qur'ān were supposed to be understood allegorically, and if we only take every Qur'ānic verse in its literal sense, we would be offending against the very spirit of the divine writ (Asad, 2013, pp. 1179-1181).

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[9] See also Musa, Ahmad Farouk. Speech on *The Message of the Qur'an* by Muhammad Asad 2009. Securities Commission, Mont Kiara. Available at: https://irfront.org/post/speech-delivered-by-dr-ahmad-farouk-musa-on-muhammad-asad-146 (Accessed on 27 July 2024).

Given that the metaphysical ideas of religion relate to *al-ghayb* (a realm which is beyond the reach of human perception), the only way they could be successfully conveyed to us is through loan–images derived from our actual—physical or mental—experiences (Asad, 2013, pp. 1179); or using the words of az-Zamakhshari – which was heavily quoted by Muhammad Asad in his commentary – on verse 35 from *Sūrah ar-Ra'd* (Asad, 2013, pp. 439-440), "…through a parabolic illustration, by means of something which we know from our experience, of something that is beyond the reach of our perception" [*tamthilan li-mā ghāba 'annā bi-mā nushahid*]" (Asad, 2013, pp. 439-440 fn). And this is the innermost purport of the term and concept of *al-mutasyābihāt* (the ambiguous) *as* used in the Qur'ān.

## Conclusion

Muhammad Asad had a colourful life. His brilliance is evident in his translation and explanation of the compilation of *ahādith* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri* (although most of his works were destroyed during the commotion from the India-Pakistan partition) and his magnificent translation of the Qur'ān which conformed the modernists' agenda. He is a person who has committed his entire life to the rejuvenation of Islam and to the renaissance of the Muslim *umma* and civilisation. His other books basically touched on issues relevant to the Muslims in the contemporary age. Although some of his ideas changed as we observed in the later edition of *Islam at the Crossroads* for example, it only shows that Asad is a pragmatic scholar who is not rigid in his thought and ready to evolve when the situation changes. That is why we believe that his stand in his book *Principles of State and Government in Islam* would also change when looking at the current discourse of political Islam in the Islamic world. Whether we are ready to accept his call and the call of the other Muslim reformers to abandon *taqlid* and to instead use both '*aql* (reason) and *naql* (revelation) in understanding our religion is yet to be seen. But one thing is certain: Asad has left a very profound mark on our thinking with his work. May he get the best reward from Allah in the hereafter.

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# Between Awareness and Visibility: A Google Trends (GT) Analysis of Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP), East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and Kuantan Port (2013-2024)

**Goh Hong Lip***
**Lee Pei May****
**Loo Wai Hong*****

**Abstract:** Malaysia and China established the Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP) in 2013. More cooperation follows, including significant projects such as the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and Kuantan Port. These projects help to strengthen the economic and strategic partnership between both countries. Despite their strategic importance for the continuous growth of West Malaysia's East Coast Region, they struggle to establish a significant online presence, which is crucial for gauging public interest and social acceptance. In this article, the researchers use Google Trends Analysis to investigate the public's interests in the projects. Findings indicate that MCKIP has consistently experienced low search volumes, with interest concentrated in Pahang, which is likely tied to job opportunities and investments. Kuantan Port searches were more related to tourism, while ECRL queries focused on project progress. MCKIP and Kuantan Port's online presence is overshadowed by the ECRL's broader scope and media coverage; notably, a spike in search interest during 2018-2019 coincided with political shifts in Malaysia and news

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* Assistant Professor, Faculty of Accountancy and Management, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia (UTAR). Email: gohhl@utar.edu.my
** Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Email: peimay@iium.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*
*** Research Assistant, Faculty of Accountancy and Management, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia (UTAR). Email: hongwai0224@gmail.com

coverage. The results highlight the need for enhanced strategic communication to improve public engagement, inform public decisions, and increase public trust in the government and project visibility, fostering positive economic and social outcomes for local communities. Better public relations can counter negative narratives, such as China's "debt-trap diplomacy" critique, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of its economic statecraft.

**Keywords:** MCKIP, ECRL, Kuantan Port, Google Trends Analysis, visibility, economic statecraft

**Abstrak:** Pada tahun 2013, Malaysia dan China telah menubuhkan Taman Perindustrian Kuantan Malaysia-China (MCKIP). Lebih banyak kerjasama menyusul termasuk projek utama seperti Laluan Rel Pantai Timur (ECRL) dan Pelabuhan Kuantan. Projek-projek ini membantu mengukuhkan perkongsian ekonomi dan strategik antara kedua-dua negara. Walaupun mempunyai kepentingan strategik untuk pertumbuhan berterusan di Wilayah Pantai Timur Semenanjung Malaysia, projek-projek ini menghadapi kesukaran untuk mewujudkan kehadiran dalam talian yang siknifikan. Kehadiran dalam talian adalah penting untuk menilai minat umum dan penerimaan masyarakat terhadap projek-projek tersebut. Oleh itu, Analisis Google Trends digunakan untuk menyelidik minat awam terhadap projek-projek tersebut. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa MCKIP secara konsisten mencatatkan jumlah carian yang rendah, dengan minat tertumpu di Pahang, mungkin disebabkan oleh peluang pekerjaan dan pelaburan. Carian mengenai Pelabuhan Kuantan tertumpu kepada pelancongan, manakala pertanyaan mengenai ECRL lebih memfokuskan kepada perkembangan projek. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa kehadiran dalam talian MCKIP dan Pelabuhan Kuantan lebih rendah berbanding projek pembangunan berhampiran seperti ECRL. Secara khusus, lonjakan ketampakan pada tahun 2018-19 dikaitkan dengan siri kejadian berita dan perubahan kerajaan di Malaysia, yang menonjolkan pengaruh peristiwa luar terhadap minat awam. Hasil kajian ini menekankan keperluan untuk komunikasi strategik yang lebih berkesan bagi meningkatkan penglibatan masyarakat serta meningkatkan kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap kerajaan, supaya projek-projek mega tersebut dapat menghasilkan impak ekonomi dan sosial yang positif untuk komuniti tempatan. Selain itu, hubungan awam yang lebih positif juga dapat menangkis naratif negatif seperti kritikan terhadap "diplomasi perangkap hutang" China, sekali gus meningkatkan keberkesanan strategi ekonomi negara China.

**Kata Kunci:** MCKIP, ECRL, Pelabuhan Kuantan, Analisis Google Trends, ketampakan, strategi ekonomi negara

## Introduction

China announced one of the most significant global initiatives, the One Belt One Road Initiative (renamed as Belt Road Initiative, BRI) in 2013, which aims to connect countries across different continents, providing new impetus for global growth. Ten years after its inception, more than 150 countries have embraced and become participants of BRI (Feingold, 2023). BRI is viewed as one of the crucial economic statecraft employed by China to achieve its broader foreign policy goals (Norris, 2021). While China employs other economic statecraft, such as activist institution building, BRI is arguably much more critical. This is because BRI is deemed the hallmark of Xi's foreign policy. Moreover, Beeson (2018) believes that if BRI is successful, it will help China cement its geoeconomic influence for many years. As an emerging great power, China wants and needs to expand its power beyond the region, but using economic statecraft does not guarantee that China can consistently achieve its national goals. Norris (2021) noted instances of backlash against specific BRI projects. As the West tries to frame the BRI as a form of debt-trap diplomacy, the visibility and reputation of BRI become even more critical for China (Himmer & Rod, 2022).

Therefore, this study seeks to understand the online presence of three crucial BRI projects in Malaysia: Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP), East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and Kuantan Port. Google Trend Analysis is critical to two aspects. First, the method sheds light on the public interest and knowledge of the three projects over time and by region. Based on the time series and regional comparative data, this study proposes sound suggestions for improving the visibility and reputation of the projects. Lastly, the search interest reflects Malaysians' genuine interest and actual behaviour. Unlike questionnaires, which might suffer from potential biases, Google Trend Analysis could generate real-time insights into public interest in the projects.

## Major BRI Projects in Malaysia

The commencement of the Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP) in 2013, and subsequently, the development of Kuantan Port and the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), represents a strategic advancement in line with Malaysia's broader economic aspirations as articulated in the East Coast Economic Region (ECER) development zones (ECERDC, 2019a; ECERDC, 2020). The ECER was designed to reduce the economic disparity between the less-developed East Coast and the more prosperous West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, and these projects are integral to achieving the aspiring goals. The initiations of the projects also align with the objectives of various Malaysian development plans, notably the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (ECERDC, 2019b), which emphasises regional development, infrastructure enhancements, and balanced development across the peninsula. Malaysian firms and Chinese firms jointly undertake these projects.

The ECRL is designed to enhance connectivity and stimulate economic growth across the peninsular, offering cutting-edge freight and passenger transport links that are expected to integrate with existing transport infrastructure, reducing travelling costs and improving accessibility. The MCKIP and Kuantan Port complement the ECER aspiration by providing a robust industrial base to facilitate trade activities, attract international investments, boost the local economy, and enhance regional employment opportunities. The availability of quality jobs in the East Coast region would enable people to remain in their home state, effectively lowering the stress of urban migration to the West Coast area (ECERDC, 2018), especially the Klang Valley region.

Previous studies have discussed the prospect of the projects (Abdul Rahman & Zakaria, 2015; Cheng et al., 2022; Lim, Li, & Syailendra, 2021). Most of the discussions were on the business and governmental structure of the projects and the local communities' perception of the projects. Gathering people's perceptions of the projects is essential as it allows the government to fine-tune its policies to better address the needs of the people. Using questionnaires to understand local perception may not be as encompassing as Google Trends analysis, which can reflect public interest across different times and locations, thus providing richer data.

Despite their strategic importance and potential to catalyse growth in West Malaysia's East Coast Region, these projects struggle to establish a robust online presence, which is crucial for gauging public interest and social acceptance. This gap in digital visibility could hinder the projects' ability to attract further investments and fulfil the goal of uplifting the regional economy. Due to the projects' low visibility, the government has been unable to capitalise on these projects to build public trust. Aminudin et al. (2023) observed that the government suffers from declining public confidence because of problems such as inefficiency and corruption scandals. Therefore, the government must promote large-scale projects such as MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port so that the public understands that these are good government initiatives to advance public interest. Ultimately, it could increase public confidence and trust in the government.

Therefore, this research aims to delve into the dynamics of public awareness and the regional impact of these projects over time, as reflected through Google Trends data, providing insights that could provide more effective communication strategies and stakeholder engagement. It aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the search interest of MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port on Google from 2013 to 2024?
2. How do MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port search interest trends reflect the dynamics of public awareness and regional impact over time?

The aims of this study are to:

1. Analyse the Google Trends for MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port from 2013 to 2024.
2. Understand the variations in public engagement and regional impacts of MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port through Google Trends analysis.

**Significance of Study**

The study can enhance our understanding of public engagement with significant infrastructure projects like MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port in Malaysia. The search trends analysis can provide a crucial understanding of the fluctuations of public interest over time and across different regions. This information is vital for policymakers, project managers, investors, marketers and even the locals as it helps gauge public attitudes, tailor communication strategies, and optimise the projects to benefit the people, ultimately ensuring the implementation of policies and strategies to better align with community needs and expectations. As the debt-trap narrative gained traction, the Chinese government needs to understand how the people in the host country view these projects, especially if there is negative news associated with it. This understanding will enable it to partner with the host country to develop measures to play down the negative news. As BRI is an essential source of China's soft power, ensuring a good reputation for BRI through such efforts is critical. When BRI projects are widely accepted in the host countries, other countries with limited or no participation in BRI might perceive BRI in a different light. This would have made them reconsider participating or increased their participation in the Chinese-led initiative. As BRI is a good source of China's soft power, increasing the number of BRI partners could help China expand and solidify its influence.

**Methods**

Several searches were conducted on Google Trends to analyse search interest. Popular search terms relating to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are explored in this study. The terms "MCKIP", "ECRL", and "Kuantan Port" are selected for the study due to their association with BRI and their geographical proximity to each other. Separate Google Trends searches are conducted for MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port, followed by a combined search for the three terms to compare their search trends and associated search terms. The Google Trends data for MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port from 2013-2024 are examined due to their relevance with each other. Relevant data gathered from Google Trends includes the search terms' interest over time, breakdown by subregion (states), and the related queries associated with each search term.

Although Google Trends does not show the number of searches over time, it presents data adjusted by population to reflect a specific search timeframe's popularity. The search volume in Google Trends is aggregated and normalised within a range of 1-100, relating to the peak search volume for the keyword during the period of inquiry (Choi & Varian, 2012). This is crucial for showing subregional interest in specific search terms and not getting lost in a sea of searches that certain areas might dominate. Consequently, the areas with large populations and high volumes of searches may not exhibit the highest search interest, but relatively more minor populations with substantial searches may exhibit higher search interest.

While Google Trends can recognise the association of search terms with other key terms and provide general insight into public interests, it is essential to note the limitations of these searches. The searches were conducted in English, and local dialects or languages may skew the results. However, the skewing of the results due to local dialects or languages might be limited as the projects were often referred to by their acronyms. Using English terms on platforms like Google Trend Analysis could provide more comprehensive data than search terms in local dialects or languages. Given the scope of this study, there are additional areas that can be explored. Specifically, future research could run an analysis based on standard terms in local dialects and subsequently cross-verify with the findings of this paper. Since the search terms are acronyms, terms such as MCKIP and ECRL may have different meanings unrelated to the study's interest. Nevertheless, Google Trends' weighted data can provide a solid platform for further analysis. Content analysis (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2016) was used to analyse the rankings and associated search terms. Figure 1 shows the summary of the method used in the study.

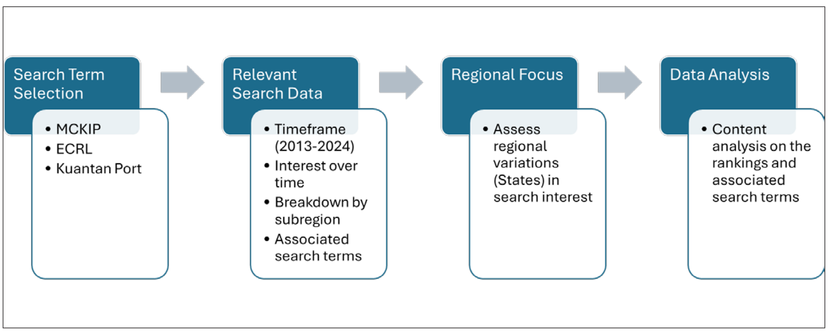


Figure 1: Summary of the Methods Used in the Study

Source: Developed for the study by the authors

## Results

*Search Term (MCKIP)*

The Google trends analysis on the search interest of Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP) from January 2013 to April 2024 by Malaysians are as follows:

The search interests showed an initial spike in 2013, gained momentum starting in 2016 and reached peak interest in 2018. From 2019 onwards, there was a declining trend with occasional spikes, though it never reached the height of 2018 as observed. The decline in search trends might suggest a normalisation of the public's online interest in the projects or could be due to the broader economic developments affecting the region. The occasional interest spikes could be attributed to overshadowing by other nearby, higher-profile projects. Figure 2 shows the search interest over time for the search term "MCKIP".

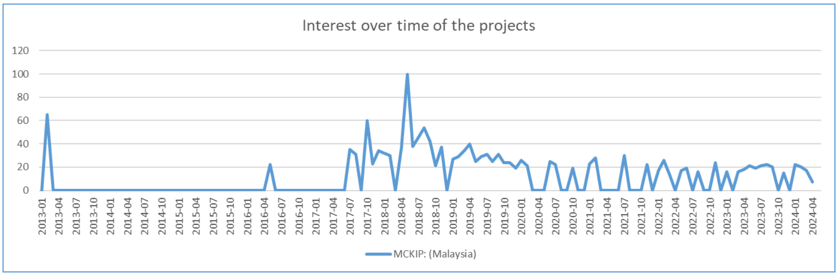


Figure 2: The Search Interest Over Time for MCKIP

Source: Developed for the study by the authors

If the search trends are compared to nearby projects such as the ECRL and the Kuantan Port, the search interest of the projects is as follows:

The search interest in MCKIP has been relatively low compared to other more prominent projects, which have garnered more media coverage and interest. This suggests public awareness of the MCKIP was lower than other nearby projects. There were sporadic spikes in the early days of the development, and a peak of search interest during mid-2018, but the search interest was relatively low and stable post-peak in 2018.

The initial search interests were high in early 2013, possibly due to the initial announcement and promotional activities related to MCKIP and the ambition to develop the MCKIP as a significant industrial hub in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the spike can also partially be attributed to the announcement of investment attraction and the potential job creation for MCKIP (The Edge, 2013). The period from 2014 to 2016 also saw sporadic news reports on the development of MCKIP, where the focus was on investment attractions associated with the development of Kuantan Port and the project's complement to the national ECER policy to improve the Peninsular East Coast's economy (ECERDC, 2016; Chen, 2016). Despite the continuance of investment attractions and the success stories (Chew, 2016) from local investors, especially in the property industry, the search interest on MCKIP remained low. However, the search interest on MCKIP lagged from 2014 to 2016, with a gradual increase in interest starting in 2017.

The search interest in MCKIP has risen since 2017, but not positively, as there were reports concerning the denied access and "sovereign loss" of MCKIP in Malaysia (Bernama, 2017). The search interest for MCKIP peaked in May 2018, partly due to concern about revisionism by the new government on various Chinese-related investments and the historical regime change in Malaysia (Lee et al., 2018). Several high-profile news regarding the MCKIP during that time also contributed to the interest in the MCKIP search term on the internet, resulting in the peak interest in search. The concern about MCKIP escalated further when the "Great Wall" incident (Sean, 2018) and the alleged water usage problem (Latib, 2018) put MCKIP in the spotlight. Despite these incidents being identified as miscommunication between various parties (Kamsani, 2018), MCKIP during this period (2017-2019) was portrayed negatively, despite the relevant parties' statements ensuring continuous commitment toward the development of MCKIP (Alagesh, 2019; Mahanum Abdul Aziz, 2019). MCKIP experienced a high interest in internet searches during this period.

The search interest in MCKIP was lower starting in 2020, with fluctuating results. The news related to MCKIP is also very much focused on the number of investments and job creation (Tan et al., 2023). A recent boost of search interest also might be attributed to the 10th year of establishment (Ariffin, 2023) and the Malaysian government's commitment to catalyse the peninsular east coast's development through avenues like MCKIP (Alagesh, 2023). The notable negative news during this time was the mass food poisoning incident in early 2022 (Yusof, 2022).

*Search Term (ECRL)*

The search interest for the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) began to increase starting in mid-2016, escalated further around 2017, and peaked in 2019, indicating a very high level of public interest. The surge was likely due to significant project milestones or relevant news spotlighting the project.

The ECRL saw a relatively low search volume from 2014-2016. However, the search interest gained momentum in late 2016 as discussions focused on the project's actual cost (Gho, 2016) and potential implications (Abas et al., 2016) in bridging the economic divide between the east and west coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

Search Activity for the ECRL spiked between 2017 and 2019 due to dramatic events and the intense scrutiny of its progress. The project's suspension, confusion, realignment to the south, and resumption (NST, 2019; Malaysiakini, 2019; Othman & Abas, 2019) in a short period (April-May 2019) all contributed to the public interest regarding the high-profile project.

In 2020, search interest for the ECRL declined due to the ongoing pandemic and the overall national political climate. The realignment of the ECRL route back to its original state in 2021 (Choong, 2021) received a mixed reception and was not as sensational as in 2019. Despite not being under the same limelight as in 2019 and a decline in interest since then, the ECRL once again picks up the interest of the public starting in 2022, with increasing momentum. The discussions on ECRL focused on costs (Adilla & Jalil, 2023) and potential regional implications (Global Times, 2023). With more than half of the project completed and constant updates on progress, public optimism about the long-term prospects of the ECRL remains high (The Star, 2023), with expected operation by 2027. The trending discussion of Thailand's alleged "Chumphon-Ranong Land Bridge project" also contributed to the renewed public interest in the ECRL.

*Search Term (Kuantan Port)*

The search interest for Kuantan Port was relatively stable over the years, with a peak occurring in 2015 following a high-profile ship hijacking incident involving MT Orkim Harmony, which was reported to have arrived safely at Kuantan Port after a week's disappearance (Hakim Rahman, 2015). Reports of pollution and poisonous shellfish near the port also contributed to Kuantan Port's relatively high search interest (Alagesh, 2014).

Unlike its ECRL and MCKIP counterparts, the Kuantan Port search interest did not experience a spike in interest in 2016-2019. The port only recorded occasional search interests during this period despite the disastrous 2016 Kuantan bauxite pollution controversy in 2016 (Malaysiakini, 2016; Reduan, 2017).

The search interest fluctuated with relative lows during April 2020 and July 2021. The news report during this period primarily focused on the technical achievements of the port (Kuantan Port, 2020) and the capacity to manage sophisticated and complex cargo. However, the search interest in Kuantan Port experienced a hike again in early 2022 and remained steady ever since. The announcement of progress and increased cargo handling capacity (Hani, 2022) might have contributed to the surge in search interest.

Figure 3 shows the search interest over time for the search term “ERCL” (scale to the left axis) as compared to other relevant nearby projects such as “MCKIP” and “Kuantan Port” (scale to the right axis).

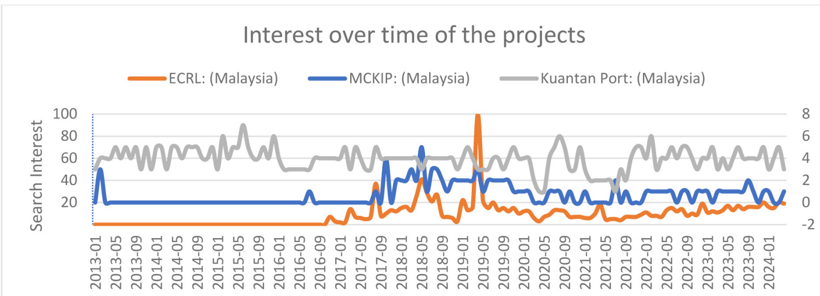


Figure 3: Search Interest Over Time for MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port

Source: Developed for the study by the authors

*Regional Search Interest*

The search results demonstrate varied search interest levels across different regions for all key terms (MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port). This potentially reflects each project’s geographical relevance and economic impact on those regions. In terms of subregional or locational search interest, the results are as follows:

**MCKIP**

The highest search interest was Pahang (16%), which was intuitively given that MCKIP is in this state. Lower levels of interest are also shown in other states, such as Terengganu (8%), Sabah (8%), and Kuala Lumpur (6%). Sabah, who emerged as one of the top searchers for MCKIP, was surprising as the State of Sabah was on Borneo Island, a place 1400km away from Kuantan. However, there was virtually no or minimal search interest from East Malaysia counterparts such as Sarawak and Labuan on MCKIP.

**ECRL**

The search interest by region for ECRL also showed some surprising results, with Perlis topping the search interest (100%) and Perak (82%) ranking third. Perlis and Perak, located in the northeast and central regions of West Malaysia bordering Thailand, are not directly linked by the ECRL. This suggests that the states are likely interested in the broader economic impact of the project.

Kelantan (93%, 2nd place) also showed a very high interest due to the direct impact of the rail link within the state. The search interest level is also moderately high across most states, excluding Labuan, reflecting the nationwide significance of the project and the constant attention to such large-scale projects.

**Kuantan Port**

Unsurprisingly, the highest search interest was in Pahang, where Kuantan Port is located (46%). Significant search interests were also evident in Johor (30%) and Putrajaya (29%), suggesting the geographical proximity (Johor borders Pahang geographically), economic ties, and the logistic connectivity of related development. Perlis and Labuan did not show enough interest in searching for Kuantan Port. Table 1 shows the search interest by subregion for MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port.

Table 1: Search Interest by Subregion (States) for MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port

| MCKIP | | ECRL | | Kuantan Port | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Region** | **MCKIP** | **Region** | **ECRL** | **Region** | **Kuantan Port** |
| Pahang | 16% | Perlis | 100% | Pahang | 46% |
| Terengganu | 8% | Kelantan | 93% | Johor | 30% |
| Sabah | 8% | Perak | 82% | Putrajaya | 29% |

| MCKIP | | ECRL | | Kuantan Port | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Region** | **MCKIP** | **Region** | **ECRL** | **Region** | **Kuantan Port** |
| Kuala Lumpur | 6% | Sarawak | 80% | Malacca | 27% |
| Malacca | 5% | Kedah | 79% | Negeri Sembilan | 26% |
| Johor | 5% | Terengganu | 78% | Kuala Lumpur | 25% |
| Kedah | 4% | Sabah | 78% | Penang | 21% |
| Selangor | 4% | Selangor | 76% | Selangor | 20% |
| Penang | 3% | Penang | 76% | Sarawak | 20% |
| Negeri Sembilan | 3% | Negeri Sembilan | 71% | Kedah | 17% |
| Perak | 2% | Putrajaya | 71% | Perak | 16% |
| Kelantan | 1% | Kuala Lumpur | 69% | Terengganu | 14% |
| Sarawak | 0% | Malacca | 68% | Sabah | 14% |
| Putrajaya | 0% | Johor | 65% | Kelantan | 6% |
| Perlis | 0% | Pahang | 38% | Perlis | 0% |
| Labuan | 0% | Labuan | 0% | Labuan | 0% |

Source: Developed for the study by the authors

*Overall Regional Search Interest*

However, comparing the breakdown of the three search terms, some exciting findings can also be found. Labuan showed no substantial differences or interest in searching for MCKIP, ECRL, or Kuantan Port on Google. Perhaps other projects are more appealing to the region or due to its isolation from mainland West Malaysia and the East Malaysia region of Borneo Island, resulting in a lack of search interest in these projects, at least in online search. While most areas in Malaysia exhibit similar search trends where the search interest on ECRL was higher than Kuantan Port, followed by MCKIP (ECRL > Kuantan Port > MCKIP), the search queries exhibited by the state of Pahang were quite different. For the past 10 years, the Google search on Kuantan Port was higher than ECRL compared to other regions, and the search interest on MCKIP was significantly higher, doubling (16%) the nearest area of

Terengganu (8%). Perhaps the geolocational factor might influence the search influence on specific projects.

**Related Search for MCKIP**

There are related queries when people search for MCKIP, attributed to key terms searched for while googling for MCKIP. The top queries associated with MCKIP were "MCKIP Kuantan" (100%), "Gebeng" (31%), "Alliance Steel" (31%), "Alliance Steel MCKIP" (31%), and vacancy (5%). If we consider the breakout of rising queries, keywords such as "Gebeng", MCKIP Gebeng", "alliance Steel", and "alliance Steel MCKIP" were the rising search when people were searching for MCKIP as well. If we consolidate the Top and Rising searches, the associated search terms on MCKIP can be summarised as "Kuantan", "Gebeng", "Alliance steel", and to a lesser extent "vacancy". Showing the search interest ranging from the location-associated projects with a small interest in the potential job opportunities. Table 2 shows the related search on MCKIP.

Table 2: Related Search on MCKIP

**##MCKIP (n=10)**

| **#TOP (n=6)** | | **#RISING (n=4)** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Queries | Count | Queries | Column1 |
| mckip kuantan | 100 | gebeng | Breakout |
| gebeng | 31 | mckip gebeng | Breakout |
| mckip gebeng | 31 | alliance steel | Breakout |
| alliance steel | 30 | alliance steel mckip | Breakout |
| alliance steel mckip | 28 | | |
| vacancy | 5 | | |

Source: Developed for the study by the authors

**Related Search for ECRL and Kuantan Port**

The top related search terms for ECRL are closely associated with the project itself, with prominent search terms being "Malaysia ecrl", "project ecrl", and "ecrl route". The Bahasa Malaysia's term "projek" is "project", while "laluan" means "route" in English. The search interest for ECRL was primarily concentrated on the progress of the project and the project's route, especially since there have been several proposed revisions to the design of ECRL's route since 2018. Notable key search terms include geolocational interests such as "ecrl terengganu" and "ecrl kelantan", as the project also involved these states. Similar to the search related to MCKIP, though to a lesser extent, the search queries on ECRL also involved job vacancies, indicating an interest in finding job opportunities related to the high-profile project. The same can be said with the breakout or rising queries, where searches focused on the project's route and a smaller but significant number of searches on potential job vacancies.

However, the search interest on Kuantan Port was vastly different from the search for MCKIP and ECRL. The top related search on Kuantan Port was "port Dickson", a famous tourism hotspot on the west coast of peninsular Malaysia. Port Dickson is closer to Kuala Lumpur than the city of Kuantan, with a distance of about 220km to Kuantan and approximately 70km to Kuala Lumpur. The top searches focused more on tourism-related queries, with other prominent search terms including "hotel Kuantan" and "Port Dickson hotel." Additional notable search terms were "Melaka," "Port Klang," "Penang port," and "ECRL". Similar trends were observed when looking at the rising search terms, where the increasing search interest was focused on Port Dickson, and there was a surge of queries related to ECRL.

Table 3: Related Search on ECRL

**## ECRL (n=47)**

| **#TOP (n=25)** | | **#Rising (n=22)** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Queries** | **Count** | **Queries** | **Column1** |
| malaysia ecrl | 100 | malaysia ecrl | Breakout |
| project ecrl | 67 | ecrl route | Breakout |
| ecrl route | 47 | laluan ecrl | Breakout |
| projek ecrl | 40 | ecrl kelantan | Breakout |
| laluan ecrl | 38 | cccc | Breakout |
| ecrl terengganu | 26 | ecrl station | Breakout |
| ecrl kelantan | 23 | ecrl map | Breakout |
| china | 22 | ecrl pantai timur | Breakout |
| cccc | 22 | ecrl kuantan | Breakout |
| ecrl station | 20 | ecrl news | Breakout |
| ecrl map | 16 | stesen ecrl | Breakout |

## ECRL (n=47)

#TOP (n=25) | #Rising (n=22)

| Queries | Count | Queries | Column1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| ecrl pantai timur | 16 | ecrl train | Breakout |
| ecrl kuantan | 16 | ecrl project malaysia | Breakout |
| ecrl news | 16 | ecrl terkini | Breakout |
| stesen ecrl | 15 | hsr | Breakout |
| ecrl train | 14 | mrl | Breakout |
| ecrl project malaysia | 14 | mrt | Breakout |
| ecrl terkini | 13 | jajaran ecrl | Breakout |
| hsr | 13 | ecrl vacancy | Breakout |
| mrl ecrl | 11 | ecrl job | Breakout |
| mrl | 11 | ecrl cost | Breakout |
| mrt | 10 | ecrl puncak alam | Breakout |
| jajaran ecrl | 10 | | |
| ecrl vacancy | 10 | | |
| ecrl job | 10 | | |

Source: Developed for the study by the authors

Table 4: Related Search on Kuantan Port

##Kuantan Port (n=26)

# TOP (n=22) | #RISING (n=4)

| Queries | Count | Queries | Column2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| port dickson | 100 | lexis hibiscus port dickson | Breakout |
| hotel kuantan | 51 | ecrl | Breakout |
| port dickson hotel | 45 | lexis port dickson | 120% |
| kuantan malaysia | 40 | port klang | 80% |
| kuantan resort | 35 | | |
| resort port dickson | 33 | | |
| kuantan beach | 26 | | |
| port dickson beach | 24 | | |
| kuantan pahang | 21 | | |
| kuantan beach resort | 19 | | |

**##Kuantan Port (n=26)**

**# TOP (n=22)** **#RISING (n=4)**

| Queries | Count | Queries | Column2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| port dickson malaysia | 18 | | |
| lexis port dickson | 17 | | |
| melaka | 16 | | |
| kuantan port consortium sdn bhd | 15 | | |
| port klang | 15 | | |
| hyatt kuantan | 12 | | |
| penang port | 12 | | |
| penang | 11 | | |
| avillion port dickson | 11 | | |
| avillion | 11 | | |
| lexis hibiscus port dickson | 6 | | |
| ecrl | 2 | | |

Source: Developed for the study by authors

## Discussion

*Search Interest Over Time*

The comparative search trends among MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port suggest that the public interest in the ECRL was way higher than the Kuantan Port and MCKIP in general. From 2013 to 2016, the initial search interest for MCKIP and Kuantan Port was low, indicating a lack of development or awareness during the early years of the projects. The ECRL also showed relatively low search interest initially but experienced a surge starting in 2016, possibly aligning with the ground-breaking ceremonies or the initiation of the mega project, which likely boosted public and media attention. The media coverage, the project's scale, and the potential implication of the ECRL project may have caused the public interest in the ECRL to overshadow other projects such as the MCKIP and Kuantan Port. The news coverage on ECRL primarily concentrated on the development of the project itself, discussing the cost, controversies, and implications (Abas et al., 2016; NST, 2019; Malaysiakini, 2019; Othman & Abas, 2019;) with constant updates of its progress (The Star, 2023). Perhaps the expansive scope of the project, which involves multiple states in West Malaysia, is why the ECRL generates constant search interest on the web.

The trending search on MCKIP was mainly associated with periods when the news portrayal was slightly negative (Kamsani, 2018; Latib, 2018). However, the search interest in Kuantan Port was mixed, correlating to the news. While the high-profile ship hijacking incident generated some search interest, the port development news and several nearby socio-environmental issues (Malaysiakini, 2016; Reduan, 2017) did not drive as much attention as the ECRL.

Although sensationalism by politicians is inevitable, the emergence of numerous negative news surrounding the ECRL and MCKIP from 2018-2019 suggests a need for public communications to reduce the potential misunderstandings between the investors and locals. This also supports the opposing dominance theory (Covello, 2009), which asserts that negative news attracts more internet traffic than positive news, suggesting that an adverse incident is perceived with higher weightage than positive reports.

*Search Interest by Region*

The MCKIP search interest was dominant in the state of Pahang. Given that MCKIP is situated in Pahang, it's intuitive that the locals show more search interests. The high concentration of search interest also indicates the direct local impacts and relevance of MCKIP to the residents. Hence, the locals will likely be the most affected or interested in the project development. Additionally, the search interest was relatively high in nearby regions, such as the state of Terengganu, suggesting local anticipation of the spillover effects of MCKIP. However, Sabah's unexpectedly high search volume provided an exciting foundation for further probing. In 2023, government officials from Sabah (Daily Express, 2023) suggested the potential to create a point-to-point industrial park similar to MCKIP, which could benefit both regions. This could indicate the broader economic interest or potential indirect benefits perceived by the Sabahans, or it might reflect the broader media coverage of relevant topics within the Sabah region. The same cannot be said with Sarawak and Labuan, as there is insufficient data to suggest significant search interest in MCKIP from these regions. Perhaps these regions focused more on other projects.

The ECRL represents nationwide significance and substantial interest across nearly all states, including Kelantan, directly involved with the rail link. From the distribution of the search interests, the ECRL can be seen as a project of national importance, where the public perceives the project as a transformative infrastructure development that further stimulates development and potentially catalyses the nation's economy. Intriguingly, Perlis and Perak, regions not directly linked by the ECRL, show strong search interest in related topics. This could reflect a keen interest in the broader economic implications of the project, such as the indirect financial benefits or evaluating the strategic importance of the rail link. A discussion in 2019 suggested that a rail link that could facilitate Perlis, Kedah, and southern Thailand might be more feasible and have a more significant economic impact than ECRL (Augustin, 2019). However, no news directly links the state of Perak with ECRL in this period.

The Kuantan Port also has a similar search interest distribution to MCKIP, where most of the search interest is generated by the state of Pahang due to the location of Kuantan Port, suggesting the direct economic impact on the local economy and job creation. The high interest of Johor and the peninsular west coast regions such as Selangor and Putrajaya suggests the economic tie and logistical connectivity, implying these regions view Kuantan Port as vital for the continuous economic development and supply chain integration.

The variation in search interest patterns among the projects suggests that various regions exhibit varying regional priorities and different levels of perceptions about the value and impact of these projects. Naturally, Pahang showed concentrated search interest in MCKIP and Kuantan Port compared to the ECRL, highlighting a more localised economic dependency. However, the ECRL gathered more nationwide attention than other projects. Unlike MCKIP and Kuantan Port projects, which are limited to a specific locality, the ECRL project is of a larger scale, is more expansive, and passes through several states. This could be why ECRL is garnering more attention and searches than the other two projects.

There is also a trend where the peripheral regions, such as Labuan, show lowered interest in the said projects, indicating a perceived lack of direct benefits or relevance, suggesting the geographical and economic disconnect with this area.

*Related Search for MCKIP*

The related search for MCKIP is interesting as the top queries were locational related, such as “Kuantan” and “Gebeng”, indicating the industrial and economic focus of the public while searching for the term MCKIP online. The Gebeng area, considered part of the larger industrial ecosystem surrounding the Kuantan region, highlights the increased presence due to the industrial development and economic activities generated by MCKIP in the local area.

The lower but present interest also includes “Alliance Steel” and “vacancy”, which suggest that the MCKIP generated significant public interest in the major corporations involved with MCKIP and the potential job opportunities within the region. The phenomenon also indicates that the activities and development of such companies are closely monitored due to their impact on local employment and economic conditions, underscoring the project’s role in job creation that might benefit the local economy (Lim et al., 2021; Lim & Li, 2022).

*Related Search for ECRL*

Compared to MCKIP and Kuantan Port, the ECRL received much attention and scrutiny due to its scale and association as a BRI project (Lim et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2021). The top related search was project-specific and focused on the progress, with the most search interest regarding the route and its progress. This is likely driven by the project’s impact on connectivity and its significant nationwide economic implications.

Besides the project-based queries, many related searches on ECRL were quite locational, such as “ECRL Terengganu” and “ECRL Kelantan”. The search queries show regional interest due to the direct involvement of the related states with the project. This also points to the local communities’ engagement with the project’s development as they assess the direct benefits and the development of the rail link (MKN, 2024).

Similar to MCKIP, there’s a lower but notable interest in employment opportunities where “ECRL vacancy” and “ECRL job” were shown on the top and rising queries, reflecting the public's interest in the economic implications, especially on the job creations for the locals as reported by the government (MKN, 2024).

*Related Search for Kuantan Port*

The related search for Kuantan Port was significantly different from MCKIP and ECRL. While the MCKIP and ECRL-related search were focused on locational factors coupled with the development of the projects, the search interest on Kuantan Port was tourism over the industry. The highest related searches, such as "Port Dickson" (100%), "hotel Kuantan", and "Kuantan resort", suggest that the public interest in Kuantan Port is significantly tied to tourism rather than purely industrial or economic activities. Perhaps the term Kuantan was perceived as a destination rather than an industrial hub, as Kuantan was traditionally viewed as a tourist destination due to its long beach and various attractions (Shamsuddin, 1997).

The searches linking Kuantan with other ports and tourist destinations such as "Melaka", "port klang", and "Penang Port" demonstrate the port's perceived role within a network of travel or trade routes, as well as its relative importance in Malaysia's maritime and tourism sectors.

## Implications of Study

*MCKIP*

The public's focus remains firmly on the industrial aspects of MCKIP, with significant attention paid to specific large corporations and potential employment opportunities. The search trends and related queries like "Alliance Steel" indicate a strong focus on its economic activities and industrial development, particularly in Pahang. This implies that local stakeholders should continue emphasising MCKIP's role in regional economic enhancement and industrial growth.

Furthermore, the peak of MCKIP's search interest often aligns with negative news. This also calls for more proactive public relations strategies to manage and mitigate hostile public receptions and enhance the project's overall image through transparent and progressive updates regarding its benefits and achievements. Given that the projects were perceived as part of the BRI aspiration, the inability to address the negativities impacts bilateral trade and investments. Perhaps more engagements with the locals might enhance the park's public image and foster trust in the government's abilities to develop the economy and create employment opportunities for the people.

*ECRL*

The consistently high interest in ECRL, especially during active development or local political events, reflects the project's importance within the region. The major infrastructure project also garnered significant public and economic expectations. Policymakers and other stakeholders should consider these perceptions in their strategic planning and public communications to enhance local community engagements, as the constant spotlight of ECRL highlights the anticipated spillover effects and broader economic implications. To leverage the impact of ECRL, the Malaysian Investment and Authority (MIDA) collaborated with China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) to introduce additional development projects named The East Coast Rail Link – Economic Accelerator Projects (ECRL-EAPs) in 2019. Implementing these development projects could help boost the East Coast area's tourism, construction, trade and industrial development. However, the success of these projects depends primarily on whether they can attract additional investors. Increasing connectivity could transform lives and livelihoods, especially in achieving the ECER aspirations. The economic benefits are proven by the completed BRI rail projects, such as the China-Laos Railway, which harbour similar avenues. The financial benefits reaped by the Laotian, such as cheaper transportation costs, could benefit Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) the most (Lee, 2022), improving the local economy. The ECRL can also be seen as a catalyst to court additional investment, leveraging improved connectivity.

*Kuantan Port*

Unlike the MCKIP and ECRL, the Kuantan Port's search interest is strongly tied to tourism (e.g., "Port Dickson", "hotel Kuantan"). This suggests a dual perception of the port as an industrial asset and a tourism-related location. Strategic marketing could leverage this dual perception to boost tourism and industrial investment in the region. The search interest from neighbouring areas such as Johor indicates the perceived importance of the port in regional trade and economic connectivity. This implies opportunities for promoting regional development strategies that integrate Kuantan Port's capabilities with broader economic development goals. Since the project is perceived as part of BRI, increased visibility will also create a favourable image of Chinese firms and investments. A positive image of Chinese-related investment is instrumental in improving the local acceptance of projects of such scale and is essential for broader geopolitical stability (Lee & Zulkefli, 2021).

*Overall Implications*

The study reveals significant public interest and awareness fluctuations over time, indicating the need for enhanced public communication. For MCKIP, despite the initial interest due to the commencement of the project and potential economic impact, the interest waned, possibly due to the normalisation of the project's presence. The report of investment figures and possible job opportunities might not be enough to sustain a positive online presence (Chong et al., 2022; Goh et al., 2022). The spikes of search interests related to adverse events or news highlight the need for robust and strategic communication strategies to effectively manage public perception and address potential misinformation. This is crucial in maintaining a stable and positive outlook, which is essential for smooth development and the public acceptance of large-scale infrastructure projects in the future. Increasing project visibility through enhanced communication would also help people better understand the government's intentions to bring jobs and opportunities to the locals. Strategic engagement will increase the public's awareness of the benefits of such infrastructure projects. The public could enjoy immediate benefits of such projects as job employment and long-term benefits such as narrowing the developmental gap between the West and the East Coast region. The public would recognise the government's efforts to improve their livelihoods, leading to greater acknowledgement of its actions and policies, thereby fostering public trust.

Moreover, as the geopolitical competition between the US and China deepens, China must counter the debt-trap narrative associated with BRI projects so that the public would not resist existing Chinese investments and projects as well as would welcome future ones. As BRI projects in Malaysia have been associated with debt-trap diplomacy (Himmer & Rod, 2022), mitigating negative news, especially news that reinforces the debt-trap narrative, is essential. Mitigating negative news about BRI projects would enhance the overall success of Chinese economic statecraft, enabling China to solidify its influence. A good reputation of BRI will minimise pushback against the initiative. Less negative news means that it will be much easier for China to seek new BRI partners or expand on other areas of cooperation with existing BRI partners. Such positive developments would challenge the claims of debt-trap diplomacy.

Search trends indicate that the economic implications of these projects generate considerable interest in the local communities, especially in the areas directly affected or involved by the projects. This may result in the local communities' heightened awareness and interest in the economic benefits, such as job opportunities and regional economic welfare development.

The unexpected high search interest in non-directly affected areas, such as Perlis, Perak and Sabah, suggest that these projects' broader economic or indirect benefits also hold a significant public interest. Perhaps project communications and stakeholder engagement strategies should also address these broader audiences, explaining potential spillover benefits and indirect impacts.

## Conclusion

This study analysed the search interest trends for MCKIP, ECRL, and Kuantan Port between 2013 and 2024, offering insights into public awareness and the regional impact of these significant infrastructure projects in Malaysia. The study suggests that while the search interest of ECRL consistently garnered high national interest due to its broad economic implications and media coverage, the search interest for MCKIP and Kuantan Port was more localised and influenced by specific events. External events also influenced all the projects' search interests, with adverse events generating more search interests than positive ones.

Critical peaks in search interest were often driven by news about potential job creation, investment opportunities, and controversies, indicating that public attention is highly responsive to news of significant economic or social impact. At the same time, interest spikes were closely tied to project milestones and governmental negotiations, highlighting the projects' high profile and substantial public stakes.

The study relies solely on Google Trends data, which is valuable in gauging general interest. However, the general search interest does not provide deeper insights into the reasons behind search behaviours or the actual attitudes of the searchers. The study also provided insights into the regional variations in search interest. The lack of engagement from certain areas (e.g. East Malaysia regions like Sarawak and Labuan) might be underrepresented due to lower internet penetration or different search engine preferences. Future studies could employ broader integrated search data with social media analysis, public surveys, and economic reports to provide a more comprehensive view of public perception and the actual economic impacts of these projects. Future research could run an analysis using standard terms in local dialects to cross-verify the findings of this paper. For the peripheral regions, a case-to-case study might be needed to understand the temporal heightened search interest, such as the Sabah, Perlis, and Perak regions.

Further research could focus on areas with low search interest to understand the causes—whether due to lack of awareness, disinterest, or satisfaction with the projects. This could help in tailoring communication strategies to different regional needs and concerns. Despite the study's limitations, the paper can provide an adequate analysis of the information needed to explain the search trends concerning the projects.

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# Enhancing Career Performance: Key Factors in Career Adaptability Among *Aṣnāf Faqīr*

**Ahmad Rosli Mohd Nor**[*]
**Mohd Faizal P. Rameli**[**]
**Abdul Azim Akbar**[***]
**Nor Aziera Mohamad Rohana**[****]
**Muhd Khudri Johari**[*****]

**Abstract:** This qualitative study explores the factors influencing career adaptability that contribute to the career development of *Aṣnāf Faqīr* (poor) individuals. Using thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, the research involved 12 participants. The findings highlight various elements impacting the career adaptability of those from low-income backgrounds, including personal traits like self-efficacy and resilience, social context factors such as family support and mentor access, and career-related experiences like education and job training. Furthermore, the study shows a positive link between career adaptability and improved employability, confidence, and career mobility among the poor. The research underscores the importance of investing in career development programmes tailored to address the specific needs and challenges of individuals with limited financial resources. Therefore, *Aṣnāf Faqīr* development programmes should provide the necessary skills and resources to effectively navigate the job market and achieve greater economic stability.

[*] Senior Lecturer at Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), UiTM, Melaka Branch 78000, Malaysia. Email: ahmadrosli@uitm.edu.my
[**] Associate Professor at Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), UiTM, Melaka Branch 78000, Malaysia. Email: faizal061@uitm.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*
[***] Lecturer at Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), UiTM, Melaka Branch, 78000, Malaysia. Email: azimakbar@uitm.edu.my
[****] Senior Lecturer at Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), UiTM, Melaka Branch 78000, Malaysia. Email: aziera7863@uitm.edu.my
[*****] Lecturer at Deanship of General Studies, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar. Email: m.johari@qu.edu.qa

**Keywords:** Career performance, career adaptability, *Aṣnāf Faqīr*, employability, career mobility

**Abstrak:** Kajian kualitatif ini meneroka faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kebolehsuaian kerjaya yang menyumbang kepada pembangunan kerjaya individu *Aṣnāf Faqīr*. Kajian ini menggunakan analisis tematik temu bual mendalam, terhadap 12 orang informan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat pelbagai elemen yang akan memberi kesan kepada kebolehsuaian kerjaya *Aṣnāf Faqīr* berpendapatan rendah yang terdiri daripada latar belakang termasuk ciri-ciri peribadi seperti keberkesanan diri dan daya tahan, faktor konteks sosial seperti sokongan keluarga dan akses mentor, dan pengalaman berkaitan kerjaya seperti pendidikan dan latihan pekerjaan. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan hubungan positif antara kebolehsuaian kerjaya dan peningkatan kebolehkerjaan, keyakinan dan mobiliti kerjaya di kalangan golongan *Faqīr*. Kajian ini menekankan kepentingan memberi tumpuan kepada program pembangunan kerjaya yang disesuaikan secara khusus untuk menangani keperluan individu yang mempunyai sumber kewangan yang terhad. Oleh itu, program pembangunan *Aṣnāf Faqīr* harus melibatkan penyediaan kemahiran dan penggembelengan sumber yang diperlukan untuk meneroka pasaran kerja dengan lebih berkesan dan mencapai kestabilan ekonomi yang lebih besar.

**Kata kunci:** Prestasi kerjaya, kebolehsuaian kerjaya, *Aṣnāf Faqīr*, kebolehpasaran, mobiliti kerjaya

## Introduction

Career adaptability refers to an individual's ability to navigate the changing demands of the job market and adapt to new career opportunities and challenges (Savickas, 1997). For individuals living in poverty, developing career adaptability skills is crucial for enhancing employability and increasing earning potential, thereby leading to greater financial stability. Poor individuals often encounter numerous barriers to career advancement, such as limited education or training, lack of experience, and discrimination. However, by developing career adaptability, they can learn to overcome these obstacles and build resilience in the face of adversity. This includes cultivating skills such as problem-solving, continuous learning, and flexibility – which are essential for thriving in a dynamic job market and securing better employment opportunities despite existing socio-economic challenges.

Career adaptability plays a significant role in empowering individuals living in poverty by fostering confidence and self-efficacy in their abilities to navigate the job market and pursue their respective career goals. This empowerment leads to increased motivation, higher persistence in job searches, and a greater sense of control over their economic situations. By adapting to changes in the labour market and proactively pursuing their career aspirations, individuals can improve their employability and financial stability.

However, poor individuals often face substantial barriers that impede their career adaptability. These barriers include limited access to education and training, restricted job opportunities, and financial insecurity. Consequently, they may struggle to adapt to changing job market demands – resulting in prolonged unemployment, underemployment, and continued poverty. Addressing these barriers through targeted support and resources is essential to not only enhance career adaptability, but also enable individuals to overcome obstacles, secure stable employment, and break the cycle of poverty. To address these challenges, it is vital to understand the factors that affect career adaptability among poor individuals and develop interventions to help them overcome these barriers and improve their employability (Hirschi, 2019). Poor individuals may find themselves constrained by their current job or career paths, which often offer limited opportunities for advancement or higher wages. These limitations are typically intertwined with a web of economic, social, and systemic factors, creating a complex scenario that necessitates comprehensive solutions for meaningful change (Van Niekerk, 2020).

By developing career adaptability, individuals living in poverty can explore new career options and consider alternative paths to achieve their financial goals. This adaptability allows them to leverage their existing skills and acquire new ones, opening opportunities for better job prospects and higher wages. Investing in career development not only promotes employability but also cultivates resilience, confidence, and career mobility. Such investments empower individuals to break free from the cycle of poverty, providing them with the tools to overcome challenges and secure a more stable and prosperous future.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors influencing career adaptability among poor individuals – specifically focusing on the unique needs and challenges faced by *faqīr* (poor) individuals. By investigating these factors, effective interventions and programmes can be identified to facilitate the career development of this population. The overarching objective is to equip impoverished individuals with essential skills, resources, and robust support systems, fostering success in their careers (Sengeh & Winthrop, 2022). By doing so, the aim is to shatter the cyclical nature of poverty that would in turn enable these individuals to achieve heightened economic stability. Empowerment encompasses education, vocational training, mentorship, and addressing systemic barriers. This step ensures that they not only secure better opportunities but also gain the confidence to navigate the complexities of the job market. This holistic approach includes:

a. Education and Vocational Training: Providing access to quality education and practical training programmes tailored to market demands to enhance employability.
b. Mentorship: Establishing mentorship programmes to guide individuals through career development and offer personalized support and advice.
c. Systemic Barrier Addressal: Identifying and addressing systemic barriers such as discrimination and lack of access to resources to ensure equitable opportunities.

Ultimately, this comprehensive approach strives to create a sustainable pathway for socio-economic upliftment, breaking the chains of poverty and fostering a long-term prosperity.

## Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is a multidimensional construct that refers to an individual's ability to navigate and manage their career in the face of various career-related challenges, transitions, and uncertainties. First introduced by Savickas (1997) and subsequently developed by other scholars, career adaptability encompasses an individual's capacity to effectively adjust to changing circumstances and opportunities in their career.

This skill is increasingly crucial in today's rapidly evolving job market, where new technologies and industries emerge regularly, and the demand for specific skills shifts rapidly. Career adaptability involves several core dimensions, which 'includes:

a. Career concern: the degree to which individuals are proactive and forward-thinking about their career development, and actively seek out new opportunities for growth;
b. Career control: the extent to which individuals feel they have control over their career choices and abilities to make decisions that align with their personal values and goals;
c. Career curiosity: the level of interest and openness individuals have towards learning and exploring new career options and opportunities; and
d. Career confidence: the level of self-belief and resilience individuals possess, which enables them to overcome obstacles and challenges in their career.

These dimensions have been measured using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Porfeli & Savickas, 2016), which has been validated across numerous cultures and contexts. Research has shown that career adaptability is a valuable construct positively associated with various career-related outcomes, including career success, job satisfaction, and well-being (Hirschi, 2012; Johnston & Stewart, 2010; Lent & Brown, 2013). However, it does not mediate the relationship between social support and innovative behavior (Rençber & Paşaoğlu Baş, 2023).

Interventions designed to enhance career adaptability have proven effective in promoting career development and resilience (Hirschi, 2019; Porfeli & Savickas, 2016). Individuals with high levels of career adaptability are more likely to navigate career transitions successfully and achieve their career goals, even in uncertain or rapidly changing circumstances. They tend to have more fulfilling and satisfying careers because they can explore new opportunities and adapt to changing conditions. Several strategies can help individuals develop career adaptability, such as seeking new learning opportunities, building a diverse network of professional contacts, and actively reflecting on their career goals and values. Employers can also cultivate career adaptability among their employees by offering training and development opportunities, supporting career exploration, and fostering a culture of adaptability and innovation.

***Aṣnāf Faqīr***

*Aṣnāf Faqīr*, one of the eight categories eligible to receive *zakāt* in Islam, holds significant importance within the framework of charitable giving.[1] The term "Faqīr" originates from the Arabic word "faqr", which signifies poverty or need. In Islamic teachings, the *Aṣnāf* categories serve as precise guidelines to determine who qualifies for *zakāt* , ensuring that the wealth accumulated by individuals is shared with those in society who are less fortunate. *Aṣnāf Faqīr* specifically encompasses individuals who are deemed extremely impoverished and lacking any form of sustainable income or external support. These individuals are among the most vulnerable members of society who are constantly struggling to fulfil their fundamental needs such as adequate food, clothing, and shelter. According to Ainul Afiffah (2019), this category underscores the humanitarian principle of *zakāt* , where the wealthier members of the community are obligated to assist those who are unable to meet their basic necessities due to their impoverished circumstances.

In practice, *zakāt* contributions directed towards *Aṣnāf Faqīr* aim to alleviate the hardships faced by these individuals, providing them with essential resources for survival and dignity. This charitable act not only fulfils a religious obligation, but also fosters social cohesion and empathy within the community – reinforcing the principle of mutual care and responsibility advocated in Islamic teachings. Therefore, *Aṣnāf Faqīr* exemplifies the compassionate ethos of *zakāt* in Islam – ensuring that the economic disparity within society is mitigated through the equitable distribution of wealth, thereby uplifting the lives of those who are in need the most. Islamic teachings highlight the paramount duty of assisting those in need, particularly through the giving of *zakāt* to *Aṣnāf Faqīr*. This act is deeply rooted in fulfilling the religious obligation of providing for the less fortunate and advancing principles

[1] Zakāt literally means growth, improvement, and purification. The technical meaning of zakat is the amount of money or type of money taken from a certain type of wealth when it reaches a certain amount (called nisab) at a certain time (Saad & Al Foori, 2020). It must be spent on a specific category in a certain way. After that, zakat is used as a process of spiritual cleansing of wealth maintained by Allah SWT (Solahuddin & Mohd Liki, 2020). Zakat is a mandatory annual payment made under Islamic law from an individual's property, including wealth and income (Alshater et al., 2021). It is used for religious and charitable purposes. Under Islamic principles, zakat is considered as the purification of one's property from possible impurities associated with the form from which it is obtained. It is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is the second pillar after prayer (Saad & Al Foori, 2020).

of social justice within society. However, it is crucial to recognise that not every impoverished individual qualifies as *Aṣnāf Faqīr*. The criteria for *zakāt* eligibility can vary depending on local conditions and specific circumstances, as noted by Mohamad et al. (2018).

*Aṣnāf Faqīr* specifically refers to individuals who face extreme destitution and are devoid of any sustainable means of support. These individuals are considered among the most vulnerable in society as they are lacking the most basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. By directing *zakāt* to *Aṣnāf Faqīr*, Muslims not only fulfil their religious duty but also contribute to the broader goal of alleviating poverty and ensuring dignity for those in dire need. Moreover, the concept of *Aṣnāf Faqīr* underscores the Islamic principle of redistributing wealth equitably to foster communal well-being and solidarity. This practice aims to mitigate economic disparities and strengthen social cohesion by empowering those who are marginalised and economically disadvantaged. In summary, giving *zakāt* to *Aṣnāf Faqīr* embodies the compassionate spirit of Islam, emphasising the ethical imperative of caring for the vulnerable while promoting a just and inclusive society. It serves as a tangible expression of faith through action, where individual wealth is leveraged to uplift and support those facing acute hardship.

## Research Methodology

### *Data Collection*

This study uses in-depth interviews and thematic analysis – each representing distinct research methodologies that, when combined, would obtain a thorough understanding of the subject matter, reinforced by rich, qualitative data that exposes the nuances and subtleties of human experiences and views. In-depth interviews are a qualitative method wherein researchers conduct open-ended interviews to delve deeply into participants' experiences, opinions, and perspectives. This method is valued for its ability to yield rich, nuanced data that offer profound insights into any phenomenon or issue.

Conversely, thematic analysis is a structured method that involves identifying and analysing patterns or themes within a set of textual data. It includes open coding, inductive coding, and deductive coding. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach that begins with familiarisation, where researchers immerse themselves in the data to gain a comprehensive understanding. Next, initial codes are generated to identify significant features of the data. These codes are then organised into broader themes during the searching phase. Themes are reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the data. Subsequently, themes are clearly defined and named, providing precise and meaningful interpretations. Finally, the results are presented and discussed, illustrating themes with data extracts and exploring their implications within the research context. This structured process allows for a thorough and nuanced analysis of qualitative data.

Combining these methodologies enhances the research process by capitalising on their complementary strengths. The in-depth interviews facilitate a comprehensive exploration of individual viewpoints and contextual understanding; they subsequently capture the intricacies and nuances of participants' perspectives. Meanwhile, thematic analysis systematically identifies and interprets patterns within qualitative data, providing nuanced insights into research findings. Together, the combination not only leverages qualitative depth and richness but also integrates structured expert consensus building, thereby creating a powerful research tool. This hybrid approach enables researchers to explore complex phenomena from multiple angles, ensuring a thorough exploration that is both insightful and rigorously validated by expert consensus. A total of 12 experts were selected in this study as research participants based on these purposive criteria; (1) has a job or own a business, (2) individual income of more than RM3,000 per month, (3) former *zakāt* recipient, and (4) currently being a *zakāt* payer. Experts with similar backgrounds or domain expertise have a thorough understanding of the subject matter (Rowe & Wright, 1999). This selection guarantees that their feedback is appropriate, founded in domain-specific knowledge, and reflecting practical realities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, each lasting between 40-120 minutes. The interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis. These interviews were conducted face-to-face at the respective participants' places.

*Data Analysis*

The initial round commenced with in-depth interviews – a qualitative method aimed at exploring participants' in-depth experiences and perspectives. Following the transcription stage, the data underwent a rigorous analysis using thematic analysis techniques. This process involved identifying key themes and insights derived from the interviews. To manage and analyse the data effectively, NVivo 15.0 software was used. The researchers employed open coding to generate a comprehensive set of initial codes. This phase aimed to capture a wide range of concepts and ideas present in the data. In total, 156 codes were identified through the open coding process, reflecting the richness and diversity of the interview data.

Subsequently, the researchers proceeded with selective coding – a focused analytical approach where codes relevant to each identified theme(s) and sub-theme(s) were systematically selected. This selective coding phase aimed to refine and consolidate the initial codes into meaningful categories that would correspond closely with the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Codes that aligned with established theoretical concepts were directly integrated under the respective themes and sub-themes in the NVivo software. The selective coding process was crucial as it facilitated the construction of coherent and theoretically grounded career development profiles based on the identified themes and sub-themes. By aligning the empirical findings with existing theoretical constructs, the researchers ensured that the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data were robust and supported by established theoretical perspectives. Overall, thematic analysis of in-depth interviews in conjunction with NVivo software usage underscored a methodologically rigorous approach to exploring and synthesising the experts' opinions on individual career development profiles. This methodological synergy not only enhanced the depth of understanding but also contributed to the validity and reliability of the research findings.

In this study, after the initial rounds of analysis to identify key themes and insights from the experts, efforts were made to streamline the process of consensus-building among participants. The researchers employed thematic analysis – an innovative approach that involves identifying and analysing patterns or themes within a set of textual data. It includes open coding, inductive coding, and deductive coding. Originally introduced by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke in 2006, which is often regarded as the foundational work for this approach in qualitative research, thematic analysis was chosen for its capability to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns or themes within qualitative data, offering deep insights into complex phenomena while allowing for comparison and contextual understanding. thematic analysis is used to explore underlying meanings, compare group perspectives, and understand the nuanced context of participants' experiences or behaviours in relation to specific research questions. The innovative application of thematic analysis in this study was particularly suited for addressing the research questions, where conventional quantitative methods might fall short in capturing the depth of participants' experiences and perspectives. By using thematic analysis, the researchers were able to uncover underlying patterns and themes through a careful examination of the qualitative data gathered from the interviews. This approach ensured that the derived themes and conclusions would be reflective of the participants' lived experiences and the contextual realities they face.

Overall, the integration of thematic analysis in the study's analytical framework represents a methodological advancement aimed at enhancing the depth and richness of the findings. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the identified themes and contributed to the study's overall rigour and reliability in addressing complex research inquiries. In the context of this study, thematic analysis plays a critical role in identifying key patterns or themes based on the participants' responses gathered during the interview stages. Thematic analysis involves coding the interview data, organising it into themes, and interpreting these themes to derive meaningful insights. This process allows for a systematic approach to analysing qualitative data based on the participants' responses, ensuring that the findings are grounded in the data collected. Two distinct stages were applied in this procedure to identify the key themes. Firstly, an initial coding process was conducted, where the researchers read through the interview transcripts and identified recurring patterns or concepts in the data. Secondly, these codes were grouped into broader themes that reflect the participants' experiences and perspectives. By integrating these methods into the study's analytical framework, the researchers aimed to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the findings.

In summary, thematic analysis was instrumental in transforming qualitative data into actionable insights, enabling the researchers to derive meaningful conclusions based on the participants' experiences. This methodological rigour contributed to the study's ability to generate insightful findings and draw robust conclusions relevant to its research objectives.

Table 1: Steps in Thematic Analysis

| Steps | Explanation |
|---|---|
| 1 | Determine Participants for the Study<br>Total respondents in study:<br>i. The study involved conducting interviews with 12 participants.<br>ii. The participants were selected based on their relevance to (1) has a job or own a business, (2) individual income of more than RM3000 per month, (3) former *zakāt* recipient, and (4) currently being a *zakāt* payer |
| 2 | Data Collection via Interviews:<br>i. Interviews were conducted to explore key factors such as career adaptability among poor individuals.<br>ii. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility to explore different areas based on participants' responses. |
| 3 | Coding and Thematic Analysis:<br>i. Interview transcripts were coded for recurring themes and concepts.<br>ii. These codes were then grouped into key themes that emerged from the data. |
| 4 | Thematic Interpretation:<br>i. The identified themes were analysed to provide insights into the factors contributing to career adaptability, focusing on themes such as career confidence, career control, career concern, and curiosity. |
| 5 | Discussion of Findings:<br>i. The themes were discussed in relation to the factors influencing career adaptability that contribute to the career development of *Aṣnāf Faqīr* (poor) individuals, with evidence from the interviews provided to support the findings. |

The analysis of the interview data revealed four main constructs of career adaptability among poor individuals, which were further divided into sub-constructs. The order of priority (ranking) is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Constructs and sub-constructs of learning experience

| No. | Construct | Sub-construct | Consensus | Value (d) | Ranking |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Confidence | Self-confidence | 100% | 0.147 | 1 |
| | | Consistent | 100% | 0.187 | 2 |
| | | Brave | 93% | 0.157 | 3 |
| | | Experience | 82% | 0.139 | 4 |
| 2 | Control | Self-control | 100% | 0.163 | 1 |
| | | Game changer | 91% | 0.135 | 2 |
| | | Own Decision | 87% | 0.171 | 3 |
| | | Focus | 80% | 0.157 | 4 |
| 3 | Concern | Family | 100% | 0.190 | 1 |
| 4 | Curiosity | Self | 100% | 0.178 | 2 |
| | | Religion | 86% | 0.153 | 3 |
| | | Self-Test | 95% | 0.178 | 1 |
| | | Initiative | 87% | 0.32 | 2 |

## Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the factors of career adaptability needed by poor individuals, or "Faqīr", to succeed in their careers. Thematic analysis using NVivo revealed several key factors that contribute to career adaptability among poor individuals. Individuals showcased a unique profile in their career development, highlighting the individuality and patent characteristics that set them apart from other graduates and support their career advancement.

One critical factor identified is career confidence, which refers to an individual's level of self-belief and resilience in overcoming career obstacles and challenges. Poor individuals, who face economic disadvantages, particularly benefit from developing career confidence. Highly adaptable individuals exhibit proactive behaviour in seeking new opportunities, quick learning of new skills, and resilience in the face of setbacks and challenges. It is crucial for poor individuals to have confidence in their abilities and maintain a growth mindset, as this mindset encourages risk-taking and experimentation and would ultimately enhance career adaptability (Blustein, 2019). For example, individuals who are highly adaptable tend to be proactive in seeking out new opportunities because they are able to learn new skills quickly and they are resilient in the face of setbacks and challenges; this is especially evident for those who have a lot of experiences in their career like a participant said: "If the business involves selling food as well, I can do it because I already have a lot of experience selling food before…" (Participant 3)

Another significant factor is career control, which relates to the extent to which individuals feel they have total control over their career choices and can make decisions aligning with their values and goals. Poor individuals often encounter limited access to resources such as mentorship and networking opportunities, which hinder their career control. However, developing a sense of career control is essential for empowering individuals in their career journeys and enabling them to take proactive steps towards achieving their goals (Savickas, 2013). The participants emphasised the need to take initiative and be proactive in creating their own job opportunities, highlighting the importance of self-ability and decision-making in their career planning process. A participant stressed that they could not wait for the right opportunity to come; they needed to go out and find it: "We shouldn't just wait for a job offer; we need our own initiative; if we can't get a job, we are the ones who create the job." (Participant 6)

Hence, they need full confidence in their ability to be brave, consistent with their effort and use all their experiences to adapt to all the challenges in their career paths. Individuals who strongly believe in their own abilities and have a growth mindset are more likely to take risks and try new things, which can help them to be more adaptable in their careers (Lent and Brown, 2013).

Career concern is another factor that emerged, referring to individuals' proactivity and forward-thinking approach to their career development. Poor individuals face additional stressors such as limited access to education or training, restricted job availability, and financial instability. However, those with high levels of career concern are better equipped to navigate through these challenges and seek opportunities for career growth (Porfeli & Savickas, 2016). The participants expressed concerns about how their performance would impact their family, future, and overall career advancement. While career concerns can motivate individuals to work harder, excessive concerns may lead to short-term thinking and unethical behaviour – which could compromise long-term career prospects (Holmstrom, 1999). It is crucial to address these concerns and provide appropriate incentives and rewards for poor individuals, ensuring their efforts are recognised and valued. Most of the participants are really concerned about their families and occasionally worry about their future if they fail to succeed in their career: “I really have to be enthusiastic, because I have five children who are still in school.” (Participant 10)

Overall, career concerns are an important aspect of employee behaviour and can have significant impacts on career outcomes. Poor people must be aware of these concerns and take steps to ensure that they are appropriately incentivised and rewarded for their efforts. Career curiosity emerged as another important factor, denoting an individual’s openness to new experiences and willingness to explore different career options. Poor individuals often face challenges in accessing information about various career paths and opportunities. However, cultivating career curiosity enables individuals to identify new and unexpected career options that they may not have considered otherwise previously. Career curiosity involves asking questions, seeking new information, and being open to diverse experiences – all of which contribute to adaptability in today’s rapidly changing job market (Dobrow & Higgins, 2017). Participants emphasised the importance of self-initiative and actively seeking out learning opportunities in order to succeed in their careers. The most important thing is they need to create their own initiatives to succeed in their career: “For me, if we want to do this business, the initiative from ourselves is very important.” (Participant 2)

Cultivating a mindset of career curiosity can help individuals to stay motivated, engaged, and fulfilled in their careers. By actively seeking out new learning opportunities and exploring new avenues for growth, individuals can position themselves for long-term success and fulfilment. By cultivating career curiosity, individuals can gain a better understanding of their own strengths and interests, as well as the opportunities available to them. They can also build a diverse set of skills and experiences that can help them adapt to new challenges and advance in their careers. Overall, career curiosity is a valuable trait for anyone who not only wants to stay engaged and fulfilled in their work, but also for those who want to continue growing and learning throughout their career (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

This study identified crucial factors of career adaptability essential for individuals living in poverty. These factors—career confidence, career control, career concern, and career curiosity—are pivotal for shaping effective interventions and programmes tailored to enhance the career development of impoverished individuals. By addressing these elements, interventions can be more precisely targeted to meet the unique needs and circumstances of this demographic.

Investing in career development initiatives for individuals in poverty holds significant potential. Such investments would not only equip them with essential skills and competencies, but also empower them to navigate and overcome the multifaceted challenges posed by economic disadvantage. By fostering career adaptability, these programmes pave the way for improved economic prospects, greater financial stability, and enhanced personal fulfilment. Furthermore, beyond immediate economic benefits, enhancing career adaptability among the poor contributes to broader societal goals. It promotes social mobility, reduces inequality, and fosters community resilience. Individuals equipped with career adaptability are better positioned to contribute positively to their families and communities, thereby creating a ripple effect of empowerment and opportunity.

Effective implementation of these interventions requires a holistic approach that considers not only skill development but also access to education, mentorship, and supportive networks. By creating environments conducive to learning and growth, societies can foster sustainable pathways out of poverty and towards long-term prosperity. In conclusion, investing in the career adaptability of impoverished individuals is a critical step towards building inclusive economies and resilient communities. It represents a proactive strategy to break the cycles of poverty, empower individuals, and promote equitable opportunities for all. By prioritising these efforts, societies can unlock the full potential of their most marginalised populations, driving positive social change and sustainable development.

## Conclusion

Addressing structural inequalities and barriers that hinder access to education, social support, and other resources is crucial for promoting career adaptability among individuals living in poverty. These barriers often restrict their ability to develop essential skills and competencies needed for career advancement. Moreover, promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment as viable alternatives to traditional employment can empower poor individuals who face challenges in accessing formal job markets. Fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and providing support for small business initiatives can expand opportunities for economic independence and resilience. In impoverished conditions, addressing barriers to education, social support, and resources is crucial for enhancing career adaptability. These barriers limit skill development and career progression. Entrepreneurship and self-employment offer alternatives to traditional jobs, empowering those facing formal market challenges. Career adaptability, which encompasses concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, enables navigating obstacles towards financial stability. Systemic barriers must be tackled, and entrepreneurial opportunities must be promoted to empower low-income individuals fostering sustainable futures.

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# Islamic Wealth Management: A Bibliometric Analysis of Major Dimensions and Future Research Plan

**Saheed Abdullahi Busari***
**Kazeem Akeem Olayinka****
**Akhtarzaite Binti Abdul Aziz*****
**Habeebullah Zakariyah******

**Abstract:** Islamic Wealth Management (IWM) plays a crucial role in sustainable wealth, yet comprehensive research on its current state is lacking. While some studies explore aspects like wealth distribution via *Waqf* and *Takaful*, a holistic view of IWM is often missing. Existing reviews focus on specific Islamic financial instruments for wealth creation, which consequently indicates gaps in comprehensive bibliometric analyses across IWM dimensions. To address these gaps, researchers undertook a meticulous mixed-method review, examining manuscripts, journal articles, and book chapters. This approach aimed to uncover nuanced insights and develop a framework to enhance understanding of key IWM dimensions. The study used bibliometric and content analyses to synthesise fundamental dimensions and themes within IWM. Analysing 667 pieces of literature from Scopus (2007–2023), the

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* Associate Professor, Department of Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University, Malaysia. Email: saheed@iium.edu.my. *Corresponding author.*

** Postgraduate Student, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, International Islamic University, Malaysia. Email: olayinkaakeem38@yahoo.com

*** Assistant Professor, Department of Fiqh an Usul Al-Fiqh, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University, Malaysia. Email: akhtarzaite@iium.edu.my

**** Associate Professor, Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance, International Islamic University, Malaysia. Email: habzak@iium.edu.my

research employed VOSviewer and Microsoft Excel to visualise publication trends, influential papers, and research collaborations. Findings underscored limited exploration by financial planners and policymakers into dimensions crucial for sustainable IWM: Wealth Creation, Protection, Purification, and Distribution. Despite the expansive Islamic finance industry, there remains a notable gap in research comprehensively addressing these dimensions. The study's graphical representations provided deep insights into terminologies, themes, and collaborative networks within IWM, revealing opportunities for further scholarly exploration and practical application in global financial settings. In conclusion, while IWM holds the potential for driving economic growth, its comprehensive study is still evolving. This research advocates for broader exploration and application of Islamic principles in wealth management practices to foster sustainable development and equitable wealth distribution globally.

**Keywords:** Islamic Wealth creation, Islamic Wealth Protection, Islamic Wealth Purification, Islamic Wealth Distribution

**Abstrak:** Pengurusan Kekayaan Islam (IWM) memainkan peranan penting dalam kekayaan yang mampan, namun kajian menyeluruh mengenai keadaan semasanya masih kurang. Walaupun beberapa kajian meneroka aspek seperti pengagihan kekayaan melalui Wakaf dan takaful, pandangan holistik IWM masih berkurangan. Semakan sedia ada memfokuskan pada instrumen kewangan Islam khusus untuk penciptaan kekayaan, menonjolkan jurang dalam analisis bibliometrik yang komprehensif merentas dimensi IWM. Untuk menangani jurang ini, penyelidik menjalankan kajian kaedah campuran yang teliti, meneliti manuskrip, artikel jurnal dan bab buku. Pendekatan ini bertujuan untuk mendedahkan cerapan bernuansa dan membangunkan rangka kerja yang meningkatkan pemahaman tentang dimensi IWM utama. Kajian ini menggunakan analisis bibliometrik dan kandungan untuk mensintesis dimensi dan tema asas dalam IWM. Menganalisis 667 kandungan literatur daripada Scopus (2007–2023), kajian ini menggunakan VOSviewer dan Microsoft Excel untuk menerangkan secara visual mengenai aliran penerbitan, kertas kerja dan penyelidikan bersama. Kajian ini mendapati penerokaan terhad oleh perancang kewangan dan penggubal dasar mengenai dimensi penting untuk IWM yang mampan: Penciptaan, Perlindungan, Pemurnian dan Pengagihan Kekayaan. Walaupun industri kewangan Islam semakin berkembang, masih terdapat jurang yang ketara dalam penyelidikan secara komprehensif menangani dimensi ini. Perwakilan grafik kajian memberikan pandangan mendalam tentang istilah, tema dan rangkaian kerjasama dalam IWM, mendedahkan peluang untuk penerokaan ilmiah dan aplikasi praktikal selanjutnya dalam tetapan kewangan global. Kesimpulannya, walaupun IWM mempunyai potensi untuk memacu pertumbuhan ekonomi, kajian komprehensifnya masih berkembang. Kajian ini menyokong penerokaan yang lebih luas dan penerapan prinsip Islam dalam amalan pengurusan kekayaan untuk memupuk pembangunan mampan dan pengagihan kekayaan yang saksama di seluruh dunia.

**Kata kunci:** Penciptaan Kekayaan Islam, Perlindungan Kekayaan Islam, Pemurnian Kekayaan Islam, Pengagihan Kekayaan Islam

## Introduction

Wealth is a crucial socio-economic factor, reflecting financial growth or decline. It helps define societal development, determines individuals' socio-economic status, and acts as both a means of survival and a symbol of prosperity (Kholis et al., 2022). As a result, wealth attract everyone's attention since individuals, firms and governments tirelessly make efforts to acquire and accumulate it (i.e., wealth), thereby making the attempt to understand its nature and management for efficient use imperative (Amanda et al., 2018; Ismail & Antonio, 2012).

However, there is no consensus on what constitutes wealth and how it can be generated, managed, and used (Ariff & Mohamad, 2017). Wealth is often viewed from various perspectives, with the secular view dominating. This perspective lacks spiritual and moral guidelines on handling wealth, reflecting little of the "ideal concept of wealth" as seen by many thinkers and religious figures (Ariff & Mohamad, 2017).

For instance, wealth is understood as quantitative valuable material possessions which may consist of money, financial assets, or landed properties (Ahmed, 2012). Modern wealth management focuses on materialism, overlooking spiritual and moral aspects, which contrasts with Islamic principles that integrate wealth's nature, sources, and management within a spiritual and moral framework (Mohamad Ramadili Mohd et al., 2017).

Islamic wealth management (IWM) studies offer a comprehensive approach to wealth issues, rearticulating Islamic principles across all aspects of wealth management as guided by Islam's holistic framework for human endeavours (Q6:38; 16:89). Financial and wealth issues are therefore addressed in the primary sources of Islam. More than 80 different Qur'ānic verses discuss economic, financial, and wealth-related issues (Kholis et al., 2022), and the available references in

Sunnah (prophetic traditions) are numerous. The Qur'ān and Ḥadīth therefore collectively serve as guides and principles, which need to be continuously reinterpreted to address issues based on the time-space factors (Qutb, 1992).

Muslim scholars use creative re-interpretations (ijtihād) of the Qur'ān and Aḥādith to provide financial frameworks, demonstrating their timeless relevance in addressing emerging wealth-related issues (Hunt-Ahmed, 2013). This has led to the evolution of Islamic finance, encompassing Islamic economics and the emerging subfield of Islamic Wealth Management within financial institutions and models (Farooq, 2014).

Though an offshoot of Islamic Finance, IWM is fast becoming a new research niche area attracting global acceptance in the financial world. (Bhana, 2021). This is because its potential and real instrumental roles in the wealth sustainability of individuals and institutions have continued to gain the attention of researchers, financial institutions, and policymakers (Baba Uba Ibrahim, 2017; Nandi, 2023).

Despite its current and foreseeable future relevance in economic and financial growth and development of the world, the reviewed studies as elaborately discussed next show a dearth of details not only on the dimensions of IWM but also the research trends (Ariff & Mohamad, 2017). Using a mixed method with a bibliometric analysis approach, this paper therefore seeks to explore in-depth the dimensions of the IWM to map the trends and intellectual/conceptual structure of the field to highlight thematic areas for further studies.

## Literature Review

Islamic wealth management (IWM) is a relatively recent development (Jaffer, 2009; Çizakça, 2015). However, a considerable number of studies have explored its scope, dimensions, prospects, and challenges, (Ariff & Mohamad, 2017), and even the research status of its studies and practices (Uula & Devi, 2021). This notwithstanding, this part of the paper shows, through reviewed studies below, that despite the availability of a sizable number of resourceful studies on IWM, there is (a) a dearth of studies on a deeper analysis of its dimensions; particularly, there appears to be a few scholarly attentions on how these dimensions interconnectedly reflect the holistic nature of Islamic socio-economic principles embedded in IWM and how these dimensions comprehensively capture Islamic essential values on wealth-related issues concerning all spheres of human's financial life (Ariff & Mohamad, 2017) and (b) there is need for an up-to-date bibliographical study on IWM research to establish its current status, which is very significant in knowing the emerging trend/ issues and chart a future direction of IWM studies and practices (see Uula & Devi, 2021 who conducted a very limited bibliometric research on IWM)

Discussing the history of Islamic wealth management, Çizakça, (2015) provides an insightful overview of how financial activities are variously institutionalised; he examines wealth accumulation and redistribution of wealth with a focus on *waqf*. Although the author's findings and suggestions are useful for understanding some background issues in IWM, he is specifically interested in how *waqf* could be effectively redesigned for present realities and therefore did not explore IMW's dimensions.

Providing another angle to the global evolution and perspective of IWM, particularly, in Southeast Asia, Labuan (2013) examines its growth and awareness in the Malaysian context, although without an attempt to specifically explore its dimensions and research trends. On his part, Jaffer (2009) highlights the global importance of Islamic wealth management (IWM) and its role in financial growth. He notes diversification beyond equities and real estate, with providers offering structured products like *takaful* and alternative investments, though his focus remains broad, emphasising trends without deeply exploring IWM dimensions or research.

In their studies, Kamri & Daud (2011) discuss Islamic wealth management values like accountability and fairness, focusing on halal sources and spending. However, they do not explore IWM dimensions or how these values fit within them.

In contrast to the foregoing, several studies identify and insightfully discuss dimensions of IMW, although this is attempted by selectively focusing only on one or two particular dimensions without exploring them together to reflect its holistic nature. For instance, Mohsin & Razak (2017) focus on *waqf* as a potential method for wealth creation without any major attempt to show that it (i.e., *waqf*) is also, if not, primarily for wealth distribution. On his part, Razak (2020) discusses *zakāt* as an instrument of wealth creation to alleviate poverty without considering its purification purposes. Arafah & Fathiy (2013) examine asset distribution as a potential method for Islamic financial planning with little attempt to situate it within the broader dimensions of wealth distribution to discuss other distribution plans, such as estate planning, etc. Focusing on estate planning, Azhar & Arshad (2012) consider how *takaful* is a veritable risk management instrument in IWM, and the authors do relate this other aspect of IWM.

On wealth purification, while other studies implicitly reference it, Lahsasna, (2017) is one of the few to deeply focus on wealth purification in IWM, highlighting its inherent role in both the outlook and essence of Islamic wealth management, despite not exploring other aspects.

Furthermore, and importantly, a few of the reviewed studies conduct bibliometric reviews and/or offer frameworks for future research in IWM. This is not to deny the resourceful studies respectively carried out by Uula & Devi (2012) and Özdemir & Selçuk (2021). They insightfully provide a broader overview of current issues on IWM. Of particular interest is Uula & Devi's (2021) «Research Map on Islamic Wealth Management Studies» which provides useful insights but is limited by a small dataset of only 90 papers, requiring a more comprehensive study to explore broader thematic areas. While the reviewed studies address various IWM issues, many overlook the interconnectedness of its dimensions and their socio-economic impacts. This paper aims to fill these gaps by building on prior IWM research. This was also pointed out by Ariff and Mohamad (2017) and Uula and Devi (2021). Also, the bulk of the studies, except for a few ones, only focused on selected aspects of IWM, and therefore much seemed to be left out. And most importantly, the foregoing literature survey suggests a gap in the comprehensive bibliometric analysis of IWM studies.

This study examines four IWM dimensions, illustrating their alignment with Islamic principles using examples from emerging financial instruments, and analyses IWM›s intellectual structure via bibliometric analysis to identify trends, gaps, and future directions. The table below summarises research gaps and implications.

Table 1: Literature Review Matrix for Islamic Wealth Management (IWM)

| Area | Summary of Research | Gaps Identified | Contribution of Current Study |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Wealth Creation and Distribution** | Focuses on tools like waqf, zakāt, and takaful for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation (Mohsin & Razak, 2017; Razak, 2020). | Limited exploration of interconnected roles of these tools; waqf often studied for creation, not distribution. | Examines how tools interconnect to reflect holistic IWM principles. |
| **Wealth Purification** | Emphasises ethical practices and purification through zakāt and sadaqah (Lahsasna, 2017). | Lack of integration with other dimensions like wealth distribution and financial planning. | Provides a detailed analysis of how purification integrates with other dimensions. |
| **Financial Planning and Risk Management** | Involves estate planning and instruments like takaful for risk mitigation (Azhar & Arshad, 2012; Arafah & Fathiy, 2013). | Limited focus on the broader implications of these tools within the IWM framework. | Analyses the role of financial planning and risk management as part of a holistic IWM approach. |
| **Historical Context and Institutionalisation** | Çizakça (2015) examines wealth accumulation and redistribution through waqf as an institution. | Does not explore broader dimensions of IWM and their socio-economic impacts. | Builds on institutional insights to integrate waqf with other IWM dimensions. |

| Area | Summary of Research | Gaps Identified | Contribution of Current Study |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Global and Regional Perspectives** | Jaffer (2009) and Labuan (2013) discuss global evolution and growth, particularly in Southeast Asia and the MENA region. | Limited thematic depth, focusing on regional growth without holistic analysis of IWM principles. | Explores global perspectives with thematic depth on IWM dimensions. |
| **Value-Based Approaches** | Kamri & Daud (2011) highlight ethical dimensions like accountability, fairness, and diligent spending. | Does not link values systematically to specific dimensions of IWM. | Links ethical values to all dimensions of IWM for a comprehensive framework. |
| **Specific Dimensions** | Studies focus on specific aspects: waqf for wealth creation (Mohsin & Razak, 2017), zakāt for poverty alleviation (Razak, 2020), takaful for estate planning (Azhar & Arshad, 2012), and purification practices (Lahsasna, 2017). | Limited studies on the interconnectedness and holistic implications of these dimensions. | Analyses how dimensions interconnect to reflect the holistic nature of IWM. |

| Area | Summary of Research | Gaps Identified | Contribution of Current Study |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Research Trends and Bibliometric Studies** | Uula & Devi (2021) and Özdemir & Selçuk (2021) provide bibliometric analyses of IWM, identifying thematic areas and publication trends. | Limited datasets and narrow thematic scope restrict insights into IWM's intellectual structure and research collaborations. | Conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis using a larger dataset (2007–2023) to map trends, collaborations, and conceptual structures. |

The remaining parts of this paper comprise six sections: conceptual clarification of Islamic wealth management, research methodology, data presentation, and statistical analysis, findings discussion, and concluding remarks with recommendations for future IWM research.

**Islamic Wealth Management: A Conceptual Classification**

Islamic wealth management, rooted in *Fiqh Muʿāmalāt*, addresses wealth issues based on Sharīʿah principles. Unlike conventional management, it includes financial planning, investment, and portfolio management while integrating social welfare and environmental considerations (Basah & Rozita Tahir, 2019). In other words, IWM is an ethical approach to wealth based on Islamic principles; it involves inclusive financial processes that are guided by the total provision of Islam on wealth possessions and distributions (Gadhoum, 2017; Abdullah, 2022 Sandwick, n.d.). IWM involves an Islamic holistic perspective on wealth acquisition, generation, protection, and distribution as related to consumption, production, savings, and investment. (Fadillah Mansor et al., 2022).

*Dimensions of Islamic Wealth Management: A General Overview*

Given its comprehensiveness, a sizable number of authors have identified the following aspects of IWM: wealth creation, wealth generation, wealth accumulation, wealth expenditure, wealth purification, wealth protection, wealth preservation, wealth circulation, and wealth distribution (Basah & Tahir, 2019; Uula & Devi, 2021; Kamri & Daud, 2011). However, these could be subsumed into four dimensions since some of the variously identified aspects of indifferent studies appear to overlap.

In light of this, present study adopts the following four dimensions a) wealth creation, b) wealth protection, c) wealth distribution, and d) wealth purification. A few previous studies– have discussed these four dimensions (see, Abdullah (2022), Ariff and Mohamad (2017), Basah and Tahir (2019), Qaseem (2016), and Wouters (2013)) but with little details on the implications of their interconnectedness. Varying attentions and focus are rather given to these dimensions.

*Wealth Creation*

This entails a range of financial and economic activities involving earning income, acquiring assets, accumulating capital, etc., through investment, provision of services, self-employment, inheritance, and gifts. According to Ibn Sina, earning from inheritance and work constitutes a major means of wealth creation (Ismail & Antonio, 2012). From an Islamic viewpoint, wealth creation is a vital component of IWM because Islam exhorts earning and accumulation of wealth since it serves as a means to cater to personal welfare and benefit humanity (Q62:10; Adab-al-Mufrad, Ḥadīth 1, Book 299; Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari 6441). Islamic rulings and ethics must however be the guiding framework, such as operating within the confines of halal businesses, savings, salaries, trading, and investment. The higher objectives of Sharīʿah must inform the process of wealth creation as far as IWM is concerned (Iqbal & Wilson, 2012).

In the recent past, various advanced means of creating wealth based on Sharīʿah-compliance have started to emerge. We now have Islamic equities, venture capital, Sukuk (Islamic bond), and other Islamic fund portfolios (Al-Aidaros et al., 2020b; Swadjaja et al., 2019b). These continue to be revised as scholars are now re-visiting the principles and implications of *Zakāt* and *Waqf* and how they could be used to create more wealth as shown in a few recent studies (Fahm, 2022; Mohsin & Razak, 2017). Beyond wealth creation, Islam provides guidance on wealth protection to ensure that the wealth created is safeguarded. Some of the Islamic perspectives and approaches to this are considered next as another dimension of IWM.

*Wealth Protection*

Wealth protection in IWM safeguards against risks, aiming to sustain wealth and its value. It applies Islamic principles, ethics, and practical measures to ensure preservation (Ali Nasr, 2015; Fadillah Mansor et al., 2022;). The notion of wealth protection is based on the general framework of *Maqāṣid Sharīʿah* that places significant importance on the protection of wealth. For example, Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said "He who died in protecting his property is a martyr." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 141a). Allah strongly disapproves of carelessness about wealth, for example, He says, "Do not entrust your properties – which Allah has made a means of support for you–to the weak of understanding, but maintain and clothe them out of it, and say to them a kind word of admonition" [*An-Nisāʾ*:5]. In this verse, a rightful owner of wealth (inheritor) who is a minor or suffering from insanity is not allowed to manage his/her property or inheritance to ensure the safety of the wealth.

Islam advises protection against mismanagement, gambling, and accidents that may cause wealth loss. Modern Islamic banking and financial instruments are effective measures for safeguarding and preserving wealth (Abdullah, 2015). *Takaful*, an Islamic wealth protection model, is widely adopted in wealth management to mitigate risks and is gaining global recognition, attracting both Muslim and non-Muslim participants despite its religious foundation (Azhar & Arshad, 2012) such as avoidance *ribā* (interest), *al-maysir* (gambling), and *al-gharar* (uncertainty). It uses pooled funds to safeguard wealth cooperatively and responsibly, guided by *Sharīʿah* principles of mutual assistance and shared responsibility (Basah & Tahir, 2019). It is intended to effectively reduce, if not remove, worry and fear as it indemnifies loss and damage, and "provide protection on the five fundamental elements in human's life and to achieve success or *al-Falāḥ* in this world and the Hereafter" (Azhar & Che Arshad, 2020; Mohamad Ramadili Mohd et al., 2017; Rosly, 2005).

Wealth protection in IWM involves not only financial instruments but also personal moral integrity in how individuals and society handle wealth. Avoidance of israf (extravagance) (Q17:26) is a very good example. This does not imply we should take to stinginess or hoarding of wealth. Islamic principles of wealth rather require, entail responsible discharge of socioeconomic duties in a way that reflects our financial status, social equity welfare, and financial inclusion ( Amilahaq et al., 2022; Aryandhana Mulyana Haris et al., 2021).

*Wealth Distribution*

Islamic wealth distribution emphasises sustainable consumption for future generations. Mismanagement, often due to poor financial planning and literacy, remains a significant challenge in the Muslim World (Dwi Rahmanita & Aprilliani Utami, n.d.). This partly explains some of the reasons Muslims recurrently run into financial problems. Another major problem is the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few elites and well-positioned individuals in the society (Ariff & Mohamad, 2017), negatively impacting the livelihood and well-being of masses and commoners. This also applies to uninvested funds that are sometimes hoarded or ordinarily saved without being projected for expenditure or investment.

Islam has rules that guide accumulation of wealth; it does not give room for unproductive and redundant saving. Allah says, "And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah - give them tidings of a painful punishment." (Q9:34).

Implementing Islamic wealth distribution principles via IWM has the potential to mitigate against wealth challenges facing mankind. Ibn Sina correctly posited that the central concept of wealth distribution in Islam can be derived from the Qur'ānic verse "… They ask thee how much they are to spend: Say: what is beyond your needs…." (Ismail & Antonio, 2012). In Islam, the concept of "ownership of wealth," when viewed through an Islamic lens, belongs to Allah, humans are only the custodians (Ashfaq et al., 2022). Our wealth distribution plan, including consumption, investment, etc., must therefore be guided by Allah's stipulations on *zakāt* and *ṣadaqah* demonstrate. In Ibn Sina's view, efficient distribution of wealth can be achieved in three steps: 1) consumptive spending, 2) religious spending, and 3) saving (Ismail & Antonio, 2012). Ibn Sina's categorisation spans households, corporate entities, and governments, excluding religious spending. His inclusion of "saving" aligns with wealth preservation, better viewed as part of a protection plan for future use.

Overall, Islamic wealth distribution aims for equitable use of resources, preventing unnecessary concentration and fostering financial inclusion to promote social harmony across varying financial statuses (Arafah & Fathiy, 2013; Lubis et al., 2011; Sheriff, 2015). Highlighting the importance of consulting Islamic sources for wealth distribution does not negate individuals' substantial rights and personal choices in managing their wealth. (Global Attitudes to Islamic Wealth Management, n.d.). Individuals exercise control over wealth through *zakāt* and pre-death gifting, with Islam governing wealth distribution post-death, emphasising custodianship (Hasbulah & Daud, 2015). Recently, Islamic wealth management has developed principles and ethical guidelines, leading to effective financial models like estate planning, inheritance, *waqf*, *waṣiyyah*, and *hibah* (Muhammad et al., 2013; Arafah & Fathiy, 2013; M. R. Muhammad et al., 2014; Bakar et al., 2020)

*Wealth Purification*

This dimension is unique to Islam, and it serves as a core basis "to achieve balanced happiness in this world and the Hereafter" (Ismail & Antonio, 2012). For instance, Allah says "Take from their wealth ˹O Prophet˺ charity to purify and bless them, and pray for them—surely your prayer is a source of comfort for them. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. " (Q9:103). This verse implies several instructive points, and a few important ones will be here discussed. It generally underscores the spiritual implications of managing our wealth according to Allah's injunctions; this dimension is never considered in conventional wealth management. According to Al-Baghawī (1989) commentary on the verse (At-Tawbah: 103), "Take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them from their sins and sanctify them," This verse means that Zakāt elevates individuals from hypocrisy to sincerity, increasing their wealth and bringing inner peace, contentment, and satisfaction. It inspires ongoing contributions, fostering joy and a commitment to improving the world. (Ahmad, 1998)

Implementing various rules of Sharīʿah concerning charity and almsgiving as encapsulated in *zakāt* and *ṣadaqah* entails the purification of wealth (Lahsasna, 2017). Wealth purification has three dimensions: (a) **Object**, involving cleansing excessive or unlawful earnings beyond permissible thresholds; (b) **Process**, through *zakāt* (mandatory) and *ṣadaqah* (voluntary) charity; and (c) **Essence**, fostering spiritual growth, curbing greed, and promoting social equity through wealth redistribution.

Arising from the ethical considerations embedded in IWM, wealth purification as the term is fast becoming a commonly used concept, especially by Muslim financial planners, although wealth creation, protection, and distribution still enjoy dominant usage (Lahsasna, 2017).

Wealth purification in Islam ensures lawful earning and possession, addressing spiritual implications. It involves cleansing wealth and its custodians through *zakāt*, charity, *waqf*, and other Sharīʿah-compliant means of distribution (Basah & Tahir, 2019). While *zakāt* serves as a vital means for wealth purification for its owners, it appears that it cannot be paid from wealth acquired from haram sources. This is because such *zakāt* would not fulfill its purifying purpose for both owner and wealth (Lahsasna, 2017).

## Methodology

The study uses mixed methods, combining bibliometric and thematic analyses, to examine IWM's intellectual structure, publication trends, key papers, and collaborations, aiming to develop an advanced research framework (Peterson, 2017). The study conducts a systematic literature review using various sources, including journals, books, and grey literature. It applies clear selection criteria, and search strategies, and defines inclusion/exclusion to achieve specific research goals within set timeframes (MacKenzie et al., 2012).

The study used a Data Reduction System (DRS) to simplify large datasets, presenting key features in tables, charts, and graphs to visualise relationships, trends, and tendencies for easier analysis and accessibility (Kaur P et al., 2018). Furthermore, it uses VOSviewer 1.6.19, Excel 2021, and Scopus for sourcing, gathering, analysing, and reporting findings.

### *Data Sources and Search Strategy*

The study gathered IWM publications from Mendeley, Google Scholar, and Scopus; using Scopus for network mapping in VOSviewer. The SPIDER framework guided the systematic review by defining key selection elements from the databases (Cooke et al., 2012). As an acronym, it stands for the following: Sample, P of I - Phenomenon of

Interest, D- Design, E- Evaluation, and R- Research type. The SPIDER framework (with its adaptation of the PICO components) therefore appears to offer a strategy tool that is more suitable to be applied for qualitative and mixed methods research (Cooke et al., 2012). In this study, "S" (Sample) refers to selected relevant IWM studies, while "P" (Phenomenon of Interest) provides an overview of the intellectual structure of wealth-related research and practices.

This study examines research design (D) through thematic, descriptive, interpretive, and document analyses, and interviews. Evaluation (E) captures IWM's current and future trajectory. Research methods (R) focus on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches, with expert input on SPIDER's effective use (Cooke et al., 2012), it is tacitly used by earlier studies that employed bibliometric analysis in their respective papers (see, Alshater et al., 2021; Uula & Devi, 2021).

*Inclusion and exclusion criteria:*

Besides using the search keywords that are predetermined, suggestions from previous studies on future research areas on IWM are also used. , The following search terms therefore used (in Scopus) with the following query format: ALL ( "islamic wealth management" OR "islamic wealth creation" OR "islamic wealth distribution" OR "islamic wealth protection" OR "islamic wealth purification" OR "islamic wealth planning" OR "islamic asset management" OR "Islamic estate management" OR "zakāt management" OR "waqf management" OR "sukuk for wealth creation" OR "Islamic bank for wealth creation" OR "Takaful for wealth protection" OR "*Zakāt* for wealth purification" OR " *Ṣadaqah* for wealth purification" OR "*Waqf* for wealth purification" )

As earlier noted, the search yielded 708 sources which include journal articles, books, book chapters, conference proceedings, editorials, etc. related to various issues, ideas, projections, and suggestions on IWM during the last 15 years (2007–2023) from the Scopus databases. However, with a review of the abstracts of the generated results, 56 sources were not very relevant to the focus of the study. Consequently, only a sample of 667 is used in the study.

*Data Tools and Analysis*

The study uses Scopus for bibliometric data and VOSviewer for analysis, creating network maps to visualise IWM trends, including authorship, keyword co-occurrence, and country collaboration, highlighting relationships and frequencies through labeled, coloured circles (Azmi et al., 2021; Benomar et al., 2022; Firmansyah & Faisal, 2020).

The circles' colours distinguish clusters while connecting lines indicate relationships' strength (thickness) and proximity reflects association strength (shorter distances for stronger connections). Circle colours denote clusters of similar items (Benomar et al., 2022). The study used VOSviewer to map citations, identify key publications and authors, analyse countries, and conduct co-citation and co-authorship analyses, revealing academic relationships and mapping keywords to identify thematic clusters (Uula & Devi, 2021). The study uses keyword analysis to illustrate the research trajectory, employing the "standard weight attribute" for link frequency and the "total link strength attribute" to measure the overall strength of links between items. (Uula & Devi, 2021). On this basis, new research directions evolved.

**Data Presentation and Statistical Analysis**

Based on the Scopus meta-data tool, figure 1 below shows the publication trends yearly.

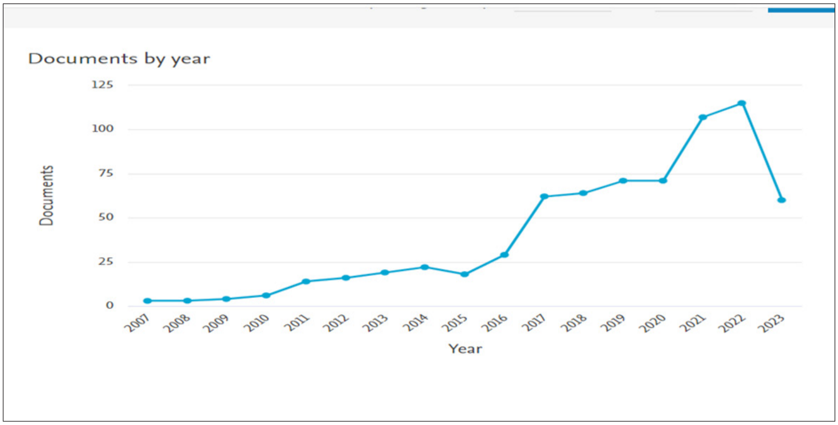


Figure 1: Identification of Publication Trend for IWM

From 2007 to 2023, IWM publications started slow, with only 3 papers in 2007 and 2008, and a gradual increase from 2011-2014, reaching 22 in 2014. After a dip in 2015, the number of publications surged, reaching 29 in 2016, 64 in 2018, and peaking at 107 in 2021 and 115 in 2022. However, there is a very sharp drop in the number of publications in 2023 which has only 60 publications, a little below a 50% decrease. The foregoing is an overview of the landscape regarding publication, next are a few details on certain specifics on some of the publications and authors.

*Identification of the Main Sources of Publication and the Main Contributing Authors in IWM*

VOSviewer uses unique citation keys to map networks and identify publications and main authors within bibliographic databases. These keys are automatically generated strings of characters, crucial for tracking citations between publications, and cannot be manually edited.

**Main Contributing Publication / Authors**

The study used VOSviewer's "citation key with sub-document key" feature to identify main publications and contributing authors in IWM. This focused on understanding historical context, and current trends, and informing future research by analysing prominent publications and authors in the field.

Setting the minimum number of citations to three (3), 247 publications out of 653 identified documents meet the threshold. This is shown below in Figure 2. The following are a few of the selected main documents:

*Prominent Publication Sources*

To capture main sources like journals, books, etc that contain papers on IWM, the study uses the "citation key and source" in VOSviewer to create a visualisation network map which is shown in Fig 3. The study created the map by setting the minimum number of documents from a source to five (5), and out of the 294 sources, only a total number of 26 meet the threshold.

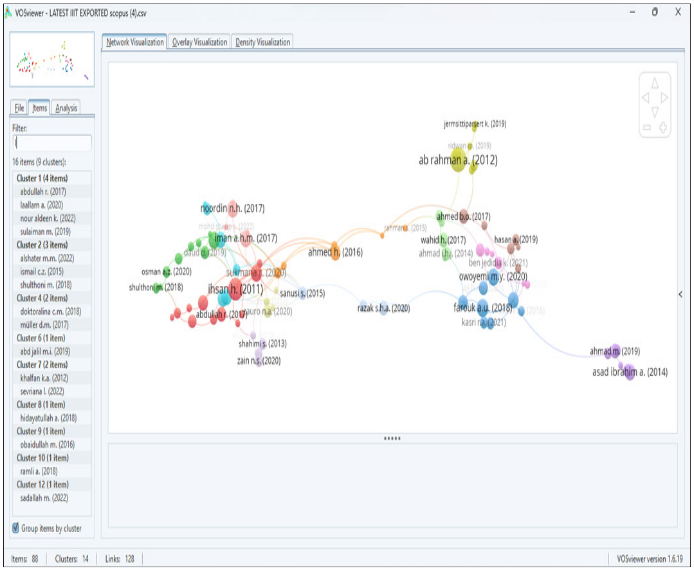


Figure 2. Main Contributing Authors/Publication

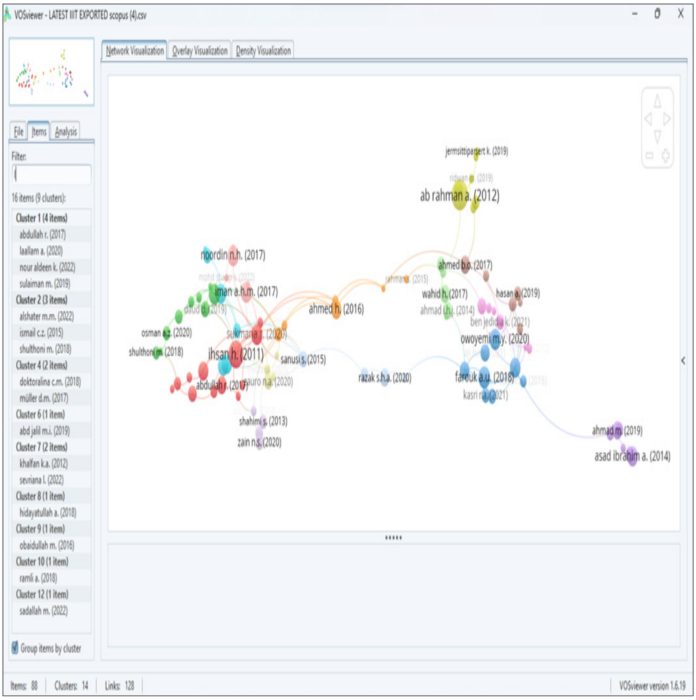


Figure 3 Prominent Publication Sources (A)

To corroborate the VOSviewer visualisation above (fig 3.), the study provides a graph (Figure 4) taken from Scopus to indicate the trend of publication on IWM from seven topmost main sources per year. A few of these sources are *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research; International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management; Lecture Notes in Network and System; Isra International Journal of Islamic Finance and Journal of Islamic Marketing*. The graph shows that research on IWM cut across several different fields of study, and the attention IWM gains only started to increase appreciatively in recent times (from 2019). Currently, diverse issues are now investigated concerning IWM from various perspectives.

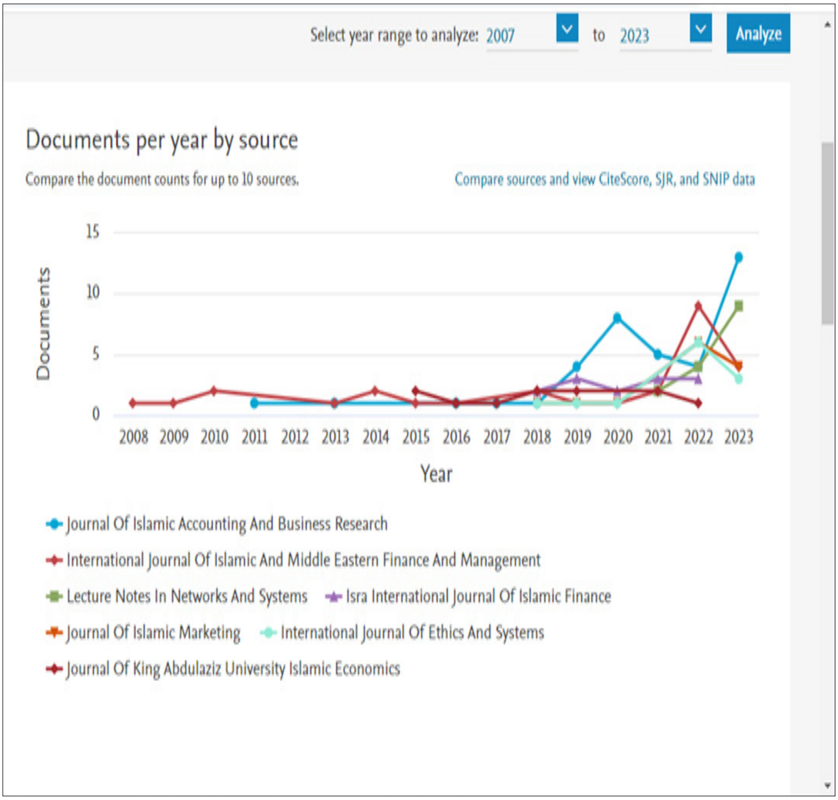


Figure 4: Prominent Publication Sources (B)

*Prominent Authors in IWM*

Using the "citation key and author key" in VOSviewer, the study can capture (Figure 5) the most cited and contributing authors. This is attempted by setting the limit of the document to two (2) with a minimum of five (5) citations. As a result, 127 authors out of 1447 met the threshold and were selected based on the strength of their links with others. This is visually captured in Figure 5; the size of the circles shows the number of publications, the bigger the size, the greater the number of publications of an author designated with the respective circle (Figure 5).

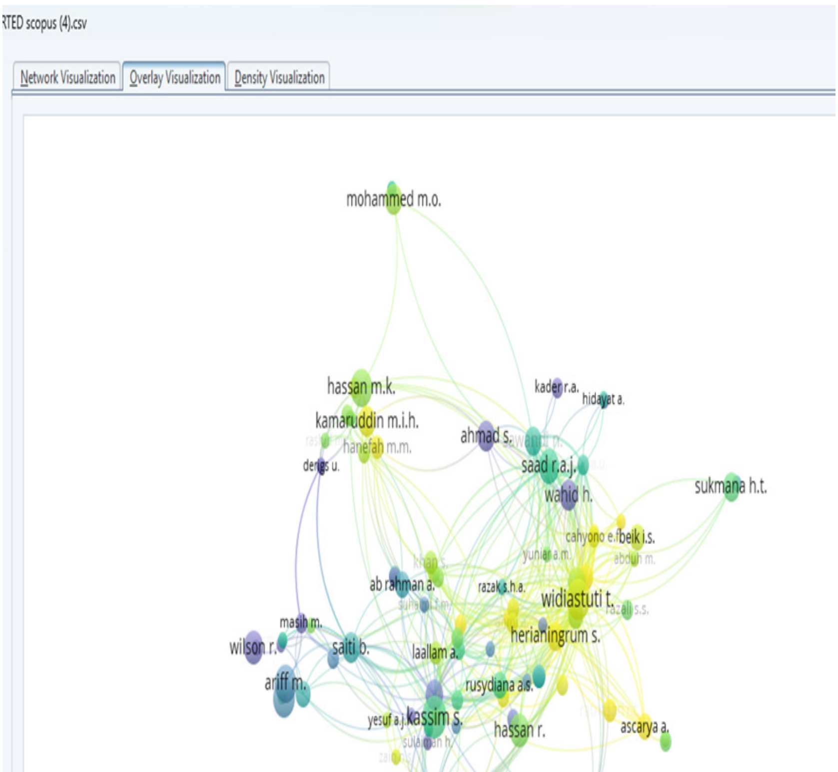


Figure 5: Prominent Authors in IWM

For instance, Kassim, S (13 publications with 68 citations); Widiastuti, T. (12 publications with 32 citations); Mohamad S (10 pubs with 18 cites); Arrif M (10 pubs with 10 cites); Hassan M. K. (10 pubs with 66 cites). In contrast to these authors, the following are a few of the most cited authors, though with fewer publications. Derigs has only two (2) publications – (2008) and (2009) – but cited up to 238 times. Saiti (2014) cited 136 with only 7 publications; Saad R.A. J. has been cited 70 times with 9 publications. Masih M, with three (3) publications has been cited 163 times. Abdul Rahman (2010) and (2012) – with more than 70 citations; Salamon H. B. cited 71 times with 2 publications and Kettel (2012) cited 42 times with only 2 publications.

Figure 5 reveals diverse IWM topics, including economic sustainability, poverty, fintech, *zakāt*, and cash *waqf*. It highlights key researchers and tracks the field's growth and development, discussed later in the study.

*Identification of the Main Countries and Collaborations of Authors in IWM*

The study uses the co-authorship and country keys in VOSviewer to identify leading countries and collaborations in IWM research. Co-authorship measures co-authored papers, while country key counts total publications. Table 2 shows that out of 65 countries, only 16 meet the threshold with a minimum of five documents.

Table 2: Main Countries of Collaborative Authors

**Verify selected countries**

| Selected | Country | Documents | Citations | Total link strength |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ | malaysia | 344 | 1865 | 118 |
| ✓ | indonesia | 196 | 512 | 47 |
| ✓ | united kingdom | 38 | 458 | 24 |
| ✓ | united states | 23 | 310 | 23 |
| ✓ | saudi arabia | 25 | 105 | 21 |
| ✓ | turkey | 19 | 29 | 14 |
| ✓ | brunei darussalam | 12 | 131 | 13 |
| ✓ | pakistan | 18 | 101 | 13 |
| ✓ | nigeria | 9 | 117 | 12 |
| ✓ | bahrain | 10 | 101 | 11 |
| ✓ | united arab emirates | 11 | 32 | 9 |
| ✓ | bangladesh | 13 | 11 | 8 |
| ✓ | australia | 9 | 173 | 6 |
| ✓ | india | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| ✓ | tunisia | 7 | 49 | 1 |
| ✓ | germany | 5 | 249 | 0 |

The table not only shows the number of documents by each of these countries but also citations of those documents and links they have with others through citation and/or collaboration. Figure 6 provides a visualised presentation of these links.

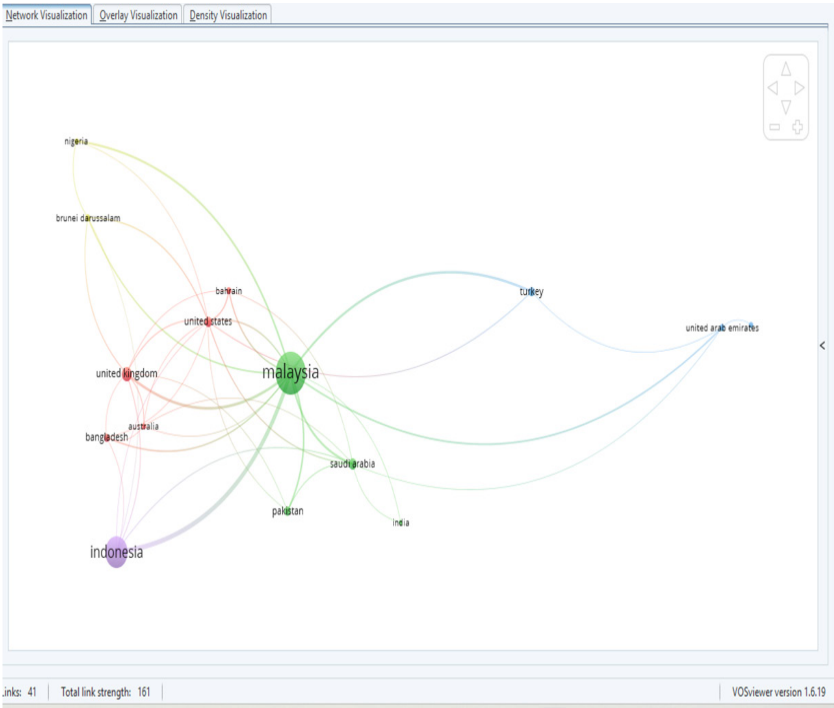


Figure 6: Main Countries of Collaborative Authors

Identifying key countries and author collaborations helps target potential collaborators, pinpoint active research areas, and track field development over time, revealing new trends and emerging research areas in IWM.

*Main Institution/Organisation Partaking in IWM Publications*

Apart from mapping publications on IWM based on the countries, the study also identifies major institutions that are active in this regard. It uses the VOSviewer's featured key of bibliographic coupling not only to capture the institution but also the links or connections that might occur among them. This could entail citing each other or citing from the same sources/documents (see Table 3 and Figure 7). The study set the minimum of documents and citations to be five (5) and three (3) respectively; out of 1144 organisations only eight meet the threshold.

Table 3: Main Institutions in IWM Publications and Links

| Organisation | Documents | Citations | Total Link Strength |
|---|---|---|---|
| "Department of economics and finance, university of new orleans, new orleans, la, united states" | 6 | 20 | 28 |
| "Faculty of economics and management, universiti kebangsaan malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia" | 6 | 26 | 232 |
| "Faculty of economics and muamalat, universiti sains islam Malaysia, Nilai, Malaysia" | 7 | 38 | 212 |
| "iium Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia" | 5 | 31 | 16 |
| "INCEIF, Malaysia" | 8 | 7 | 44 |
| "Institute of Islamic banking and finance, international islamic university Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia" | 6 | 28 | 12 |
| "School of graduate studies, an international centre for education in Islamic finance, Malaysia" | 7 | 6 | 103 |
| "Sunway University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia" | 6 | 3 | 65 |

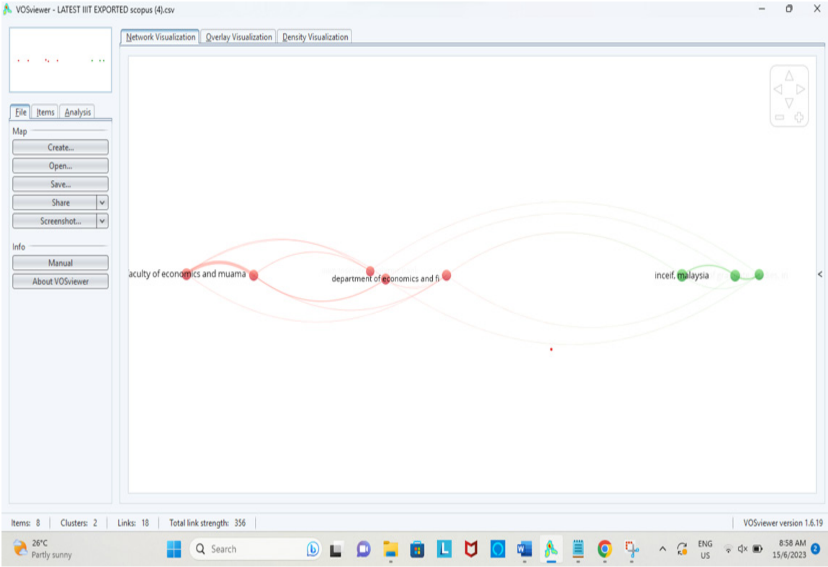


Figure 7: Main Institutions in IWM Publications with Their Connections

*Identification of the Key Areas (Issues, Topics and Themes) in the IWM*

*Keywords and Their Co-Occurrence*

Keywords and co-occurrence are key concepts in bibliometric analysis used to identify research trends. Keywords describe a document's content and can be assigned or extracted. Co-occurrence measures the frequency with which keywords appear together in documents, helping to identify research topics and patterns (Nees Jan 2023).

Keyword and co-occurrence analysis identify research trends, patterns, and emerging areas of interest. They help understand a field's evolution, find related research, and discover new opportunities for collaboration, projects, and funding by analysing evolving topics and research connections.

VOSviewer as a visualisation software tool that can be used to visualise keyword and co-occurrence data is used in this study to create maps of keywords as shown in figure 1. This is helpful to gain insights into the structure of the research field related to IWM and to identify new research opportunities.

*The Occurrence and Link Strength of Keywords in IWM*

The occurrence means the frequency of a particular word to be regarded as a keyword while the link strength implies the number of publications in which two keywords occur together. In this study, 2024 keywords are captured by the VOSviewer from the reviewed sources. With the setting of the minimum number of times a word must occur to five (5) to be regarded as a keyword, only 70 words meet the threshold. This is done by using the buttons of "co-occurrence" and "all keywords". Figure 8 below visually captures all these keywords and their links.

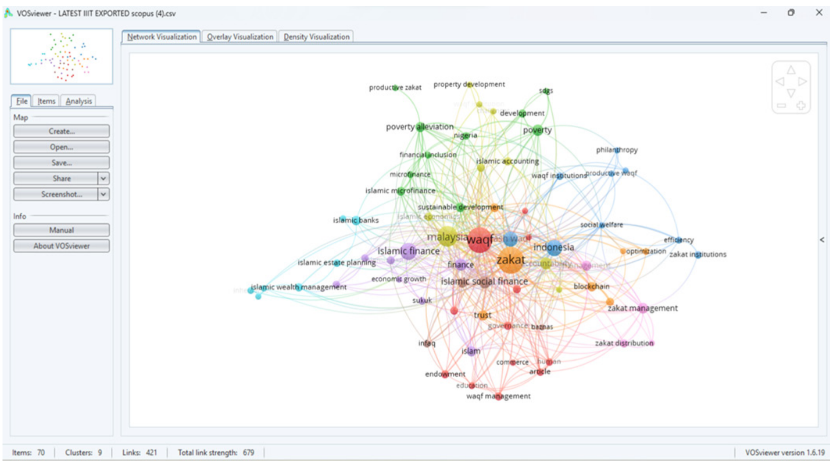


Figure 8: The Keywords: Their Occurrence and Link

*Tabular Presentation of the Keywords and Their Link Strength*

VOSviewer calculates the co-occurrence link strength for keywords to identify key concepts in IWM research. Keywords with high link strength highlight active research areas, while weaker links suggest less-explored topics. This analysis helps build knowledge maps and reveal relationships between concepts and themes in the field.

Table 4. The Keywords: Occurrence and Link Strength

| Keywords | Occurrences | Total Link Strength |
|---|---|---|
| Accountability | 17 | 36 |
| Blockchain | 11 | 30 |
| cash waqf | 28 | 33 |

| Keywords | Occurrences | Total Link Strength |
|---|---|---|
| corporate social responsibility | 5 | 2 |
| covid-19 | 13 | 32 |
| Development | 8 | 8 |
| economic development | 8 | 16 |
| economic growth | 5 | 8 |
| Education | 6 | 14 |
| Endowment | 8 | 11 |
| Finance | 18 | 48 |
| financial inclusion | 6 | 16 |
| financial management | 5 | 16 |
| Fintech | 10 | 28 |
| Governance | 9 | 18 |
| Hibah | 5 | 3 |
| Human | 7 | 24 |
| *Infaq* | 7 | 15 |
| information management | 9 | 21 |
| Inheritance | 6 | 5 |
| Innovation | 5 | 10 |
| Investment | 7 | 10 |
| Islam | 12 | 20 |
| Islamic accounting | 9 | 12 |
| Islamic banking | 9 | 10 |
| Islamic banks | 11 | 9 |
| Islamic economics | 9 | 16 |
| Islamic estate planning | 7 | 5 |
| Islamic finance | 34 | 31 |
| Islamic financial institutions | 5 | 9 |
| Islamic microfinance | 10 | 21 |
| Islamic social finance | 20 | 35 |
| Islamic wealth management | 8 | 9 |
| Malaysia | 53 | 79 |
| Microfinance | 6 | 17 |
| Nigeria | 7 | 21 |

| Keywords | Occurrences | Total Link Strength |
|---|---|---|
| Philanthropy | 5 | 6 |
| Poverty | 15 | 23 |
| poverty alleviation | 13 | 27 |
| productive waqf | 5 | 7 |
| productive zakāt | 5 | 2 |
| Sdgs | 5 | 7 |
| social welfare | 5 | 16 |
| Sukuk | 7 | 7 |
| Sustainability | 5 | 8 |
| sustainable development | 11 | 32 |
| Technology | 5 | 8 |
| Transparency | 8 | 21 |
| Trust | 12 | 21 |
| Waqf | 80 | 112 |
| waqf institutions | 7 | 9 |
| waqf management | 8 | 11 |
| Zakāt | 87 | 121 |
| zakāt collection | 5 | 6 |
| zakāt distribution | 8 | 12 |
| zakāt institution | 9 | 9 |
| zakāt institutions | 7 | 3 |
| zakāt management | 14 | 25 |

This paper explores interconnected themes in IWM, extending beyond prior research. The keyword "Waqf" appears 80 times with a link strength of 112, "Zakāt" occurs 87 times with a link strength of 121, and "Malaysia" appears 53 times with a link strength of 79. "Islamic finance" appears 34 times with a link strength of 31, highlighting key themes and relationships in the study.

*Future Research Directions*

Key research gaps include a lack of holistic analysis of the dimensions of IWM and their interconnectedness with Islamic socio-economic principles. Existing studies do not fully capture the current research status and future direction. Potential areas for exploration include using blockchain and AI to enhance transparency and efficiency in waqf, zakāt, and Islamic finance. Practical applications involve integrating fintech solutions into IWM, ensuring alignment with Sharia principles to improve efficiency and scalability.

## Conclusion

In essence, Islamic wealth management underscores the responsible use of assets while also acknowledging the importance of securing provisions for future generations. While a sizable number of earlier studies have attempted to discuss IWM, major attentions seem to be given to the individual dimensions of IWM with little focus on their interconnectedness. Consequently, this paper highlights the current research imperative to delve into IWM.

The research identifies a significant gap in understanding Islamic wealth management (IWM) dimensions like Wealth Creation, Protection, Purification, and Distribution. Current studies often focus on specific aspects, lacking a comprehensive analysis. The findings emphasise the need for a more inclusive framework for IWM, pointing to limited efforts by financial planners and policymakers in exploring essential dimensions. The study calls for a more comprehensive approach to ensure sustainable global Islamic wealth management. The paper extensively explores interconnected themes in Islamic wealth management, emphasising keywords like “Waqf,” “Zakāt,” “Malaysia,” and “Islamic finance,” revealing their frequency, strong associations, and significant presence in the dataset, providing valuable insights for researchers to discern key themes and connections beyond conventional academic and professional boundaries.

In further reflection, this research not only addresses the existing gaps in understanding Islamic wealth management’s main dimensions of wealth creation, wealth protection, wealth preservation, and wealth distribution but also synthesises and explicates the extent of work in each dimension and projects what needs to be done to sustain Islamic wealth.

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# Development and Validation of a Tahfiz School Performance Index

**Azam Othman***
**Nik Md. Saiful Azizi Nik Abdullah****
**Norbaiduri Ruslan*****
**Mohamad Sahari Nordin******
**Shahrul Fhaizal Shabu*******

**Abstract:** The *Tahfiz* (Qur'an memorisation) School Performance Index was developed as a tool to measure the performance of *Tahfiz* Schools in several key areas of *Tahfiz* education and sustainable growth development. The constructs assessed in the index were developed from analyses of focus group discussions with a few groups of stakeholders. The self-developed constructs were presented to several subject matter experts in the area of Islamic education to ascertain their face and content validity. For construct validity, the index was tested on a sample of 1,384 respondents, comprising *Tahfiz* school administrators, teachers, and alumni, and analysed using the Rasch Rating Scale Model. The results generated some evidence of construct validity, although some items related to *Tahfiz* education showed some misfitting. The index could potentially be used

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* Associate Professor, Department of Social Foundations and Educational Leadership, Kulliyyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: azam_othman@iium.edu.my. *Corresponding author*.
** Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Kulliyyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: nikazizi@iium.edu.my
*** Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: norbaiduri@iium.edu.my
**** Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Kulliyyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: msahari@iium.edu.my
***** Independent researcher. Email:shahrulfhaizal@gmail.com

to measure and improve the quality of the *Tahfiz* education sector. The index combines aspects of *Tahfiz* education with elements of Sustainable Growth Development to offer a holistic overview of the progress and well-being of the community within a *Tahfiz* School. This study however only focused on one type of *Tahfiz* School, which is Academic *Tahfiz* Schools, a type of *Tahfiz* school that teaches academic school subjects, Islamic education subjects, and Qur'an memorisation, and excluded other types of *Tahfiz* schools such as fully traditional *Tahfiz* schools.

**Keywords:** *Tahfiz* Schools, *Tahfiz* education, Qur'an memorisation, *Tahfiz* School Performance Index, schools benchmarking.

**Abstrak:** Indeks Prestasi Sekolah Tahfiz telah dibangunkan sebagai alat untuk mengukur prestasi Sekolah Tahfiz dalam beberapa bidang utama pendidikan Tahfiz dan pembangunan pertumbuhan mampan. Konstruk yang dinilai dalam indeks dibangunkan daripada analisis perbincangan kumpulan fokus dengan beberapa kumpulan pihak berkepentingan. Konstruk-konstruk yang dibangunkan sendiri telah dibentangkan kepada beberapa pakar subjek dalam bidang pendidikan Islam untuk memastikan kesahihan wajah dan kandungannya. Untuk kesahihan konstruk, indeks telah diuji ke atas sampel 1,384 responden, yang terdiri daripada pentadbir sekolah, guru, dan alumni Tahfiz, dan dianalisis menggunakan Model Skala Penarafan Rasch. Keputusan menghasilkan beberapa bukti kesahihan konstruk, walaupun beberapa item yang berkaitan dengan pendidikan Tahfiz menunjukkan beberapa ketidaksesuaian. Indeks ini berpotensi digunakan untuk mengukur dan meningkatkan kualiti sektor pendidikan Tahfiz. Indeks ini menggabungkan aspek pendidikan Tahfiz dengan unsur-unsur Pembangunan Pertumbuhan Mampan untuk menawarkan gambaran keseluruhan holistik tentang kemajuan dan kesejahteraan komuniti dalam Sekolah Tahfiz. Kajian ini hanya memberi tumpuan kepada satu jenis Sekolah Tahfiz iaitu Sekolah Tahfiz Akademik, sejenis sekolah Tahfiz yang mengajar mata pelajaran sekolah akademik, mata pelajaran pendidikan Islam dan hafalan Al-Quran, serta tidak melibatkan jenis sekolah Tahfiz lain seperti sekolah Tahfiz tradisional sepenuhnya.

**Kata kunci:** Sekolah Tahfiz, Pendidikan Tahfiz, Hafalan Al-Quran, Indeks Prestasi Sekolah Tahfiz, penanda aras sekolah.

## Introduction

*Tahfiz* schools are steadily becoming the preferred learning institution for many Muslim parents in Malaysia (Nik Abdullah et al., 2021). In recent decades, the demand for *Tahfiz* education (i.e., Qur'an memorisation) in Malaysia has increased significantly and is expected to continue growing, especially with the establishment of academic *Tahfiz* schools (Nik Abdullah et al., 2021). These schools teach Qur'an memorisation alongside academic subjects like language and mathematics, enabling their graduates to later specialise in professional fields or Islamic disciplines such as Islamic Jurisprudence and Islamic Finance.

*Tahfiz* schools are a growing segment of a comprehensive Islamic education system. Thus, they require a valid and reliable empirical measurement to ensure that they fulfil the objectives of their establishment and achieve the standard of educational quality that uniquely conforms to the spirit of Islamic education. Given the unique identity of *Tahfiz* schools, a robust tool must be developed to assess their service delivery to cover critical aspects like institutional management and Islamic value inculcation. The study's concern was that most past research has focused on Islamic schools, *madrasahs*, and Indonesian *pesantrens*, using constructs not specifically developed for the *Tahfiz* school environment. For instance, Emawati (2019) explored the development of an integrated Islamic school as an emergent entity in an urban Indonesian community and the community's expectations of the school, while a study by Sa'dullah Assa'idi (2021) examined the influence of *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) on the social statuses of *santris* in Indonesia. Abdullah (2019), in a similar study, looked at the school culture of several *madrasahs* in Kediri, Indonesia, and discovered the prevalence of commonly shared qualities as suggested by this paper. However, the present study differed from Abdullah (2019) as the sample did not consist specifically of *Tahfiz* schools. Although Islamic schools, *madrasahs*, and Indonesian *pesantrens* share the same aspirations as *Tahfiz* schools, there are aspects of *Tahfiz* schools that require specific attention, such as the environment for teaching Qur'an memorisation. Hence, studying the performance of *Tahfiz* schools, which are highly regulated by the Ministry of Education and other government agencies, would illuminate the significance, sustainability, and relevance of the schools in fulfilling Malaysia's national educational agenda and Islamic well-being. More importantly, examining various types of *Tahfiz* schools is crucial as it can provide insights into how their performance may vary by situational context. Therefore, this study aims to empirically assess the performance of different types of *Tahfiz* schools, addressing the existing gap in evaluating their management, operations, and overall effectiveness. Other studies have attempted to examine the performance of Islamic schools by focusing on specific groups, such as principals (Khasanah, 2023), teachers (Istanti et al., 2020; Ahmad Saifuddin, 2020), and both (Alwi & Mumtahana, 2023), and the effectiveness of the school.

This paper discusses on the development and validation of an index that directly addresses the aspects and features specific to the *Tahfiz* school. Subsequently named the *Tahfiz* School Performance Index, it aims to empower *Tahfiz* schools to self-assess their performance as an Islamic learning institution. It can also be potentially used to benchmark different *Tahfiz* schools, allowing the institutions to learn and develop from one another, thus elevating the quality of *Tahfiz* education. The index comprises eight constructs which were developed after a series of engagements with selected groups of stakeholders, i.e., parents, school administrators, alumni, and teachers. The initial set of items aimed to gather a comprehensive view of a *Tahfiz* school, ranging from its students' needs and administrative standards to the provision of facilities and school environment. Some aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2023), introduced by the United Nations in 2015, were also incorporated into the index's development to measure students' well-being and elements of equality. Those measures aimed to address issues on the treatment and experience of specific groups, such as underprivileged students, many of whom were selected to study at *Tahfiz* schools under scholarships or sponsorship. In essence, the index was developed based on stakeholder perspectives, whose validity as a performance measure is reported in this paper.

## Objectives

The study has two primary objectives: firstly, to evaluate the validity and reliability of the *Tahfiz* School Performance Scale, and secondly, to estimate the Index Score of *Tahfiz S*chool Performance. The index aims to enable *Tahfiz* schools to measure their performance in several key areas, i.e., vision, administration, facilities, and sustainable development goals. These key areas were self-developed from interviews with stakeholders and later validated by experts in Islamic education and *Tahfiz* education. Initially, 59 items encompassing the key areas of *Tahfiz* school performance were developed. Rasch modelling was used to further validate the index's psychometric properties using a sample of 1,384 respondents.

## Methods

The sample consisted of 1,384 *Tahfiz* school alumni, teachers, and administrators who were selected for the study based on their experience working and studying in the *Tahfiz* school system. The study recruited 52 registered *Tahfiz* schools from different parts of Peninsular Malaysia, to which prior negotiation of access and consent was secured.

*Research Instrument*

Table 1 shows the constructs and items measuring the performance of *Tahfiz* schools examined in this study:

Table 1: Constructs Measured in the *Tahfiz* School Performance Index

| **Construct** | **Definition** |
|---|---|
| School Vision | The impact and importance of the *Tahfiz* school, the targets set, and its graduates' potential anticipated in the long term |
| Education System Quality | Features that define the *Tahfiz* school as a quality educational institution in and of itself and its level of academic excellence |
| Administration and Support System | Aspects of the administration and support systems that are based on piety (*taqwa*), competency, and excellence |
| Student Facilities | Facilities that serve the needs of students of the *Tahfiz* school` |
| Sustainable Development Growth Elements | Three elements of Sustainable Development Growth were incorporated into the index to assess students' well-being and the school environment.<br>Health and Safety are related to the 3rd Sustainable Development Goal, which is to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages."<br>Peaceful Society is related to the 16th Sustainable Development Goal, which is to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."<br>Quality Education, that is inclusive and equitable, relates to the 4th goal, which is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." |

A link to a Google Form questionnaire was shared with the selected schools and later distributed to the respondents via a few social platforms, primarily WhatsApp. All data were then collected from the Google Form backend and organised for further analysis and data cleaning using SPSS. After removing outlier responses, the final sample was prepared for further analysis using the Rasch Rating Scale Model.

## Data Analysis

The Rasch analysis offers evidence of the validity and reliability of an instrument and data. The model is deemed robust in establishing the psychometric properties of the instrument which, in this case, aims to scale the performance of *Tahfiz* schools. Rasch analysis enables the mapping of the estimates of item difficulties and respondents' locations, i.e., the levels of item difficulty and respondents' ability to endorse the items along a common continuum. It was observed that the continuum scales gradually changed in the degree of difficulty and endorsability, without unexpected discontinuities. In other words, the scores of the performance quality were predicated on both person and item characteristics, which were measured on the same scale.

Rasch analysis is argued to be the only measurement analytics which is invariant when the observed data fit the requirements of the model (Bond & Fox, 2007). Unlike the Classical Test Theory, the Rasch analysis acknowledges that measurement error varies across individuals; thus, the results do not depend on a particular sample of respondents. The analytics generate linear interval scores (logit scores), characterised by additive attributes. Thus, the model enables the use of summary statistics to estimate the index score. This in turn permits the tracking and comparing of results across space and time. Such flexibility and versatility make the measurement and analysis comparable to data from different studies.

In the initial analysis, the study examined the extent to which the data satisfied the requirements of the Rasch model. Subsequently, results pertaining to the measures of item and person fit, item and person reliability, response category functioning, unidimensionality, and construct validity were examined.

## Analysis Procedure

To ascertain the reliability of the measures and valid inferences to be drawn from the data, the study applied the following steps:

*Goodness of Fit of Measured Item:* Rasch analysis provides fit statistics to assess the psychometric properties of the questionnaire. The analysis offers two statistics to evaluate the efficacy of the data, which are the fundamental requirements of the Rasch measurement model, namely (i) infit statistics, and (ii) outfit statistics. These two fit measures, based on the conventional chi-square statistic (chi-square statistic divided by its degrees of freedom), are sensitive to unexpected observations by persons and items; hence they are indicators of the good fit of the data.

Infit statistics, which is inlier-pattern-sensitive, is sensitive to unexpected patterns of responses by persons on items. The outfit statistic, on the other hand, is an outlier-sensitive fit, and it is sensitive to unexpected observations by persons on items which are relatively very easy or very hard (Wright, 1991). High infit mean-squares indicate a mismatch between respondent ability and item difficulty (a threat to validity). In contrast, high outfit mean-squares are likely due to unexpected responses by low-ability respondents.

A fit statistic of 1.50 for an item denotes 50% more variation (or "noise") than expected by the Rasch model. This means to say that the item signals an underfitting of the model. On the contrary, low mean squares suggest overfitting or redundancy. An item with a fit statistic of 0.50 suggests 50% less variation (or "overlap") than predicted; the item overfitted the model.

In general, mean-square values around 1.0 represent negligible distortion of the measurement. Infit and outfit values > 1.5 suggest a large spread in responses, while those < 0.5 represent poor variability and high redundancy. This study used the widely used rule-of-thumb to determine an acceptable mean-square value; 0.5>MnSq>1.5. Therefore, Infit and Outfit statistics smaller than 0.5 or larger than 1.5 are considered misfits. Misfitting items manifest construct-irrelevant variance and gaps along the unidimensional continuum (Baghaei, 2008). These are problematic items that may call for deletion.

*Reliability and Separation Indices:* Rasch model analysis produces two types of reliability Indices: Person reliability and item reliability. Person reliability is comparable to the traditional internal consistency reliability, using Cronbach's alpha. It is based on the locations of the respondents along the measurement scale. Item reliability, on the other hand, refers to the adequacy of the number of items which are included in the analysis; the cut score of the reliability index is .75 (McCreary et al., 2013).

On the other hand, Person separation refers to the replicability of the ordering of a person's ability when they answer another set of items measuring a similar construct. Hence, the index gauges the reproducibility of the relative person's location. Item separation indicates the extent to which the hierarchical sequencing of item difficulty is reproducible if the same set of items were answered by another sample of respondents.

Low item separation (< 3) normally means that the sample is not large enough to confirm the item difficulty hierarchy of the instrument. Low person separation (< 2) implies that the instrument may not be sensitive enough to differentiate between respondents of high and low endorsement abilities, in which case additional items will be required to address the issue.

*Response Category Functioning:* All items in the performance questionnaire (TSP) use ordinal categories of responses. Thus, it is necessary to examine how the response options were used by the samples, the results of which would indicate whether the five-point Likert scale being used was suitable. To evaluate the functioning of the 5-point response category of the TSP questionnaire, the following were observed: (a) frequency of observation in each category (i.e., ≥ 10 that shows regularity of the response distributions), (b) progression of average logit score in a linear manner, (c) mean square residual of outfit statistics (< 2.0), and (d) thresholds between every response category and its subsequent category, which should be ordered in increasing values.

*Dimensionality of the Scale:* The Rasch model rests on the assumption that there is only one underlying construct measured by the set of items in the questionnaire. Simply said the questionnaire measures only one factor. This one single latent or unobserved variable would substantially account for the variability of responses across items. This means that all items in the questionnaire are expected to share one common factor, which is the performance of *Tahfiz* schools. To evaluate the tenability of the unidimensionality assumption, the study examined the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of the residuals, which could identify if substantial subdimensions existed among the items. To decide if dimensionality holds, the variance explained by the PCA residuals needs to be at least 40% (Linacre, 2017). Additionally, the variance explained by the first principal component of the residuals should be no more than 15%. Also, the results of the PCA need to be evaluated jointly with the results of the fit statistics to identify the nature of the multidimensionality, when the data are not unidimensional (Brentari & Golia, 2007).

Another related assumption is the local independence of the items. It is one of the requirements of a quality questionnaire. The local item independence (LID) assumption requires that a respondent's response to an item does not influence his or her response to any other item. If such influence occurs, the Rasch analysis would produce indicators of the violation of this requirement.

*Construct Validity and TSP Index:* Rasch analysis assesses the degree to which the response pattern matches its theoretical pattern. The analysis generates a hierarchy of item difficulties, i.e., from the most difficult to the most endorseable (easy) items. Such an ordering of item difficulties, which are positioned on an equal-interval continuum, serves as a measurement ruler for the construct. This capability increases the trustworthiness of the meaning (and its interpretation) of the Rasch estimated scores. The trustworthiness of the item difficulty hierarchy constitutes the evidence of the measure's construct validity (Baghaei, 2008; Messick, 1996).

The composite score or index score summarises the prevalence and intensity of a phenomenon, which in this case is the performance quality of a *Tahfiz* school. Under the condition that it is empirically valid, the index facilitates a comparison of school performance across groups and changes across time, hence enabling the profiling of TSP values. The literature suggests that a valid and reliable index also qualifies its broad application across time and space. It should also be simple to use, easily linked to other related surveys, stable over time, and sensitive enough to detect changes. To capitalise on its potential, the development of the TSP index score was subjected to the following 4-step procedure: (1) ensuring that items were content-valid; (2) including items that contributed to TSP's construct validity; (3) calculating a baseline TSP index score; and (4) conducting TSP index score comparisons across stakeholder groups.

## Results

An initial Rasch analysis was conducted on the whole data set of 59 items from 1,384 respondents. The results revealed that 33 of the items satisfied the levels of fit deemed critical in the Rasch measurement modelling. The other 26 items did not meet the standards. Some of these poor items contained elements of social desirability, for example, the item suggesting that the "graduates of a *Tahfiz* academic system have the potential to contribute to the *ummah* and nation."

Furthermore, the results showed that a substantial proportion of the sample did not fit the measurement model. The results found that almost one-third of the sample failed to fit the Rasch requirement. The respondents had unexpectedly responded to the questionnaire items inconsistently. This means that items which were expected to be "difficult-to-agree-with" had been positively endorsed by low-ability respondents. Still, misfit occurred when some "easy-to-agree-with" items unexpectedly failed to be endorsed by high-ability respondents.

## Model-Data Fit

Considering the results of the preliminary analysis, a second Rasch analysis was performed on the data with 33 good-fit items, involving a sample of 877 respondents. The final set of 33 items measuring the construct of *Tahfiz* School Performance (TSP) with the 5-point agreement scale that met the requirements of Rasch measurement is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Item Fit

| ENTRY SCORE | MEASURE | MODEL S.E. | INFIT | | OUTFIT | | PTMEASR-AL | | EXACT MATCH | | ITEM CODE | ITEM DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | MNSQ | ZSTD | MNSQ | ZSTD | CORR. | EXP. | OBS% | EXP% | | |
| 3823 | 1.55 | .07 | 1.45 | 7.02 | 1.49 | 6.95 | .69 | .75 | 50.8 | 61.7 | KK3KK | Facilities for students with disabilities |
| 3867 | 1.35 | .07 | .89 | -2.35 | .89 | -1.68 | .75 | .74 | 66.5 | 62.5 | TADBIR3T | Audit and accreditation systems (internal and external) |
| 3904 | 1.17 | .07 | .77 | -4.05 | .77 | -3.70 | .76 | .72 | 70.2 | 63.2 | TADBIR4T | Performance indicator system (individual to school level) |
| 3915 | 1.11 | .07 | .95 | -.45 | .95 | -.76 | .72 | .72 | 65.7 | 63.3 | TADBIR6T | Human resource management (hiring, promotion) |
| 3931 | 1.03 | .07 | .88 | -2.17 | .88 | -1.83 | .73 | .71 | 66.8 | 63.9 | TADBIR7T | Financial management (accounting, payment) |
| 3941 | .98 | .07 | .86 | -1.73 | .86 | -2.04 | .72 | .70 | 67.8 | 64.1 | TADBIR8T | School assets and facilities management |
| 3954 | .91 | .07 | 1.13 | 2.24 | 1.30 | 3.82 | .66 | .70 | 60.7 | 64.3 | K4K | Co-curricular activities (uniform bodies, clubs) |
| 3956 | .90 | .07 | .99 | -.18 | 1.03 | .36 | .69 | .70 | 64.8 | 64.3 | K7K | Study skills development (e.g. revision planning) |
| 4002 | .65 | .07 | .92 | -1.37 | .90 | -1.31 | .69 | .68 | 68.4 | 66.2 | TADBIR2T | Supervisory committee for tahfiz curriculum |
| 4006 | .63 | .08 | 1.06 | 1.04 | 1.08 | 1.04 | .67 | .67 | 64.6 | 66.3 | KK1KK | School grounds security (e.g. CCTV) |
| 4038 | .44 | .08 | 1.21 | 3.26 | 1.57 | 5.58 | .59 | .66 | 59.5 | 67.9 | K2K | Conducive environment for memorising (comfortable and clean) |
| 4041 | .43 | .08 | .91 | -1.45 | .90 | -1.14 | .67 | .65 | 68.2 | 68.0 | K8K | Leadership qualities development (e.g. trainings, camps) |
| 4104 | .03 | .08 | .95 | -.76 | .93 | -.62 | .63 | .62 | 75.4 | 72.0 | EKUITI4E | Students receive their needed attention (on an individual basis) |
| 4109 | -.01 | .08 | 1.03 | .49 | .86 | -1.34 | .63 | .61 | 76.2 | 72.3 | F15F | Sickbay/treatment room |
| 4115 | -.05 | .08 | .93 | -1.08 | .92 | -.68 | .63 | .61 | 75.7 | 72.6 | KK4KK | Monitoring of negative behaviours (e.g. bullying, theft) |
| 4115 | -.05 | .08 | 1.06 | .93 | .95 | -.40 | .60 | .61 | 73.1 | 72.6 | AMAN5AMA | Involvement in public services |
| 4122 | -.10 | .08 | 1.01 | .14 | 1.06 | .54 | .60 | .60 | 75.2 | 73.2 | EKUITI3E | Students are given equal opportunities |
| 4141 | -.24 | .09 | .84 | -2.53 | .65 | -3.34 | .63 | .59 | 80.4 | 74.6 | KK5KK | Concern for students' problems (personal, financial, etc.) |

| ENTRY SCORE | MEASURE | MODEL S.E. | INFIT | | OUTFIT | | PTMEASR-AL | | EXACT MATCH | | ITEM CODE | ITEM DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | MNSQ | ZSTD | MNSQ | ZSTD | CORR | EXP | OBS | EXP | | |
| 4146 | -.27 | .09 | 1.05 | .75 | .94 | -.46 | .57 | .59 | 70.9 | 75.0 | K9K | Enhancing acts of worship (e.g. nafl solat and fasting) |
| 4150 | -.31 | .09 | 1.20 | 2.80 | 1.16 | 1.28 | .55 | .58 | 74.8 | 75.3 | F3F | Transportation facility (car, van, bus, etc.) |
| 4160 | -.38 | .09 | 1.03 | .46 | .83 | -1.40 | .59 | .57 | 79.6 | 76.1 | F14F | Counselling room |
| 4162 | -.40 | .09 | 1.09 | 1.35 | .88 | -.96 | .57 | .57 | 76.9 | 76.2 | F9F | Adequate clean toilets |
| 4169 | -.46 | .09 | .89 | -1.68 | .76 | -1.88 | .60 | .57 | 81.8 | 76.8 | EKUITI5E | Underperforming students are given additional guidance |
| 4182 | -.56 | .09 | 1.36 | 4.55 | 1.11 | .82 | .50 | .56 | 71.7 | 77.8 | W5W | Academic tahfiz could produce students who are strong believers |
| 4195 | -.68 | .09 | .94 | -.85 | .71 | -2.13 | .57 | .54 | 82.2 | 78.9 | F10F | Comfort hostel accommodation (if provided) |
| 4198 | -.70 | .09 | .80 | -2.88 | .62 | -2.88 | .59 | .54 | 83.0 | 79.1 | KK6KK | Clean school environment |
| 4200 | -.72 | .10 | 1.06 | .82 | .72 | -2.03 | .56 | .54 | 82.4 | 79.3 | F5F | Shop or cooperative that caters to students' needs |
| 4202 | -.74 | .10 | 1.07 | .95 | .82 | -1.21 | .54 | .54 | 81.9 | 79.5 | F4F | Library or resource centre |
| 4212 | -.83 | .10 | 1.21 | 2.58 | .87 | -.81 | .52 | .53 | 82.6 | 80.3 | F6F | School hall |
| 4238 | -1.10 | .10 | .88 | -1.48 | .57 | -2.74 | .54 | .50 | 86.0 | 82.5 | F8F | Mess hall or canteen |
| 4239 | -1.11 | .10 | 1.23 | 2.68 | .99 | -.02 | .45 | .50 | 77.3 | 82.5 | W3W | Academic tahfiz graduates are able to contribute to development |
| 4240 | -1.12 | .10 | 1.18 | 2.15 | .91 | -.41 | .47 | .50 | 77.4 | 82.6 | W4W | Tahfiz education could produce successful individuals |
| 4260 | -1.35 | .11 | 1.02 | .30 | .68 | -1.65 | .49 | .47 | 85.4 | 84.4 | F1F | Masjid or musolla |
| 4092.0 | .00 | .09 | 1.03 | .3 | .93 | -.5 | | | 73.4 | 72.7 | | |
| 121.2 | .0 | .01 | .15 | 2.3 | .22 | 2.2 | | | | 6.8.29 | | |

Table 2 displays the distributions of infit MnSq and outfit MnSq which are the indicators of fitting or misfitting items. Except for the item, *"conducive learning environment for memorisation"* (K2K), all items did not fall within the misfitting infit MnSq and outfit MnSq values. A closer look at the misfitting item found that the content of the item is essential to the measurement of *Tahfiz* School performance. Also, it did not replicate any other items and was therefore not discarded from the analysis. The values of infit MnSq of other items ranged from 0.78 (TADBIR4T) to 1.45 (item KK3KK); the estimated outfit MnSq values were between 0.57 (F8F) and 1.57 (K2K). The results suggested that the TSP items were reasonably productive.

Additionally, all items had positive correlations as measured by the point measure correlation (PTMEA CORR). The PTMEA CORR ranged between .45 (item W3W) and .76 (item TADBIR4T). The 33 questionnaire items were aligned in the same direction on the performance construct. Thus, the results supported the goodness of fit and hence, the validity of the instrument.

*Reliability and Separation*: To further diagnose the model-data fit, the study evaluated the reliability and separation of persons and items. The results of Rasch analysis showed that the person reliability index, which represents the reproducibility of person order, was at .79. This means that a similar ordering of the respondent ability is reproducible if they are answering another questionnaire which measures a similar construct. However, the person separation index was merely 1.96, which is just slightly lower than the acceptable cut score of 2.0. Thus, it was concluded that the TSP measure was considerably limited in its ability to locate respondents into different levels of ability to endorse.

The item reliability index, which represents the replicability of the hierarchy of item location, was .99. It would represent an almost perfect reproduction of item difficulty that could be observed if the TSP questionnaire were to be taken by another group of people. The item separation index was reasonably large, at 8.88. Hence, it was judged that the TSP measure had the property to discriminate difficulty levels among items.

*Category functioning*: The TSP questionnaire used five-response options, ranging from Category "1" (*Strongly Disagree*) to Category "5" (*Strongly Agree*), that the sample would select to indicate their response to each statement in the questionnaire. To examine the practicality of using the 5-point Likert data, the study examined the functioning of the response category. Table 3 summarises the results of the response category functioning.

**Table 3:** Summary Statistics of Category Functioning

| CATEGORY LABEL | SCORE | OBSERVED COUNT | % | OBSVD AVRGE | SAMPLE EXPECT | INFIT MNSQ | OUTFIT MNSQ | ANDRICH THRESHOLD | CATEGORY MEASURE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 12 | 0 | -.49 | -.91 | 1.28 | 1.35 | NONE | ( -4.20) |
| 2 | 2 | 166 | 1 | .45 | .22 | 1.16 | 1.18 | -2.98 | -2.15 |
| 3 | 3 | 1399 | 5 | 1.76 | 1.61 | 1.15 | 1.13 | -1.23 | -.15 |
| 4 | 4 | 6324 | 22 | 3.09 | 3.19 | .97 | .83 | .87 | 2.14 |
| 5 | 5 | 21040 | 73 | 5.08 | 5.05 | .97 | .97 | 3.34 | ( 4.50) |

The results showed that the number of observations for Category 1 is 12, and it increased to more than 21040 observations in Category 5. The average measures increased with the category scale, indicating an appropriately behaving rating scale. The outfit MnSq of the five categories ranged from 0.83 to 1.35, suggesting that the thresholds between the categories were properly ordered. The Rasch-Andrich thresholds matched the ordering of the response categories as they increased monotonically from -2.98 (Category 1) to 3.34 (Category 5).

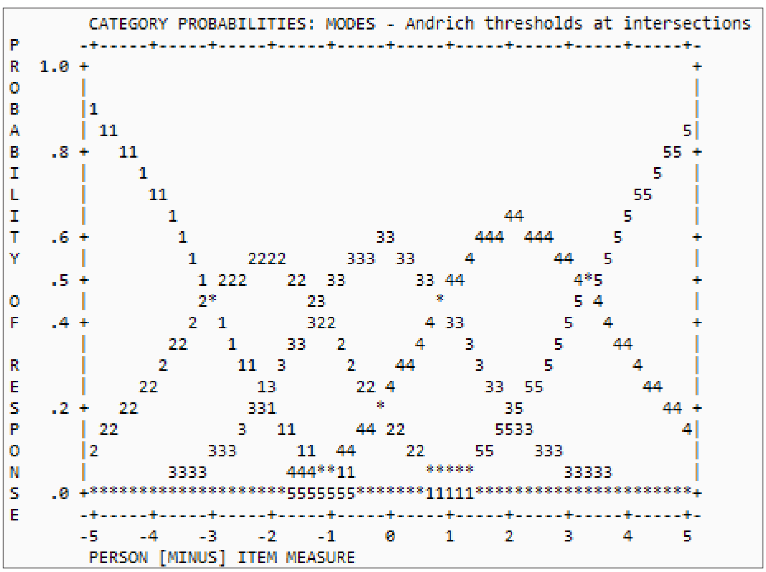

Figure 1: Rasch Model Category Probability Curves

Figure 1 displays the Rasch Category Probability Curves which supported the usefulness of the 5-point rating scale. The category widths, as shown by the differences between two successive thresholds (*), were around 2.0. Hence, the response categories were used evenly by the sample. There were no serious issues indicating that the rating scale contained overlapping categories or categories that were too far apart from each other. The 5-point TSP rating scale allowed enough information for the respondents to discriminate among response categories.

The response categories also captured a sufficient range of the TSP construct. The distance between the first category threshold, as indicated by their standard deviation (SD), ranged between -3.0 and +3.0 on a rating scale. Thus, the spread of the response categories generated a reasonably greater coverage in the measuring of the construct.

**Dimensionality**

To evaluate the likelihood of the variability of responses to TSP items being explained by a single underlying construct, the study examined the results of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of the residuals. The PCA residuals showed that the Rasch dimension explained 53.5% of the variance in the data, which exceeded the 40% benchmark (Linacre, 2017). The largest secondary dimension, "the first contrast in the residuals" with an eigenvalue of 4.6 explained only 7.5% of the variance. Checked against the widely used benchmarks, the PCA of the residuals supported the unidimensionality assumption of the instrument.

However, the variance explained by the items (17.2%) was less than twice the variance explained by the first contrast. Seemingly the second dimension systematically accounted for non-random variation, which would constitute an extra dimension. The eigenvalue of the first contrast is 4.6, with a strength of about five items. Figure 2 displays the results of the unrotated principal component analysis of the standardised residuals. Letters "A, B, C,..." and "a, b, c,..." identify items with the most opposed factor loadings.

```
       STANDARDIZED RESIDUAL CONTRAST 1 PLOT

      -2    -1     0     1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8
      -+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+- COUNT  CLUSTER
      |            |      A                                         | 1      1
   .5 +            |       B                                        + 1      1
C     |            |     C                                          | 1      1
O  .4 +     GI  D  |  JHF E                                         + 7      1
N     |          L |     K                                          | 2      1
T  .3 +            |                                                +
R     |            |    M                                           | 1      1
A  .2 +            |  N                                             + 1      1
S     |            |                                                |
T  .1 +            |                                                +
      |            |                                                |
1  .0 +------------|------------------------------------------------+
      |            |                                                |
L -.1 +            |                                                +
O     |    P      OQ                                                | 3      2
A -.2 +          p o                                                + 2      2
D     |         n  |                                                | 1      2
I -.3 +            |                                                +
N     |       m    |   l                                            | 2      3
G -.4 +       kghfji        e                                       + 7      3
      |            d                                                | 1      3
  -.5 +     b  c a |                                                + 3      3
      |            |                                                |
      -+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-
      -2    -1     0     1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8
                              ITEM MEASURE
```

Figure 2: Plot of the Standardised Residual Contrast 1

Nevertheless, a closer inspection of the results (see Figure 2) revealed that the secondary component contained three quality performance items related to facilities. The three items (A, B, and C) loaded on an essential aspect of school performance, i.e. quality assurance. On the other hand, the three opposing items (a, b, and c) were related to school facilities, namely "adequate number of clean toilets" (a; F9f), "canteen/dining hall" (b; F8f), and "hostel, if relevant" (c; F10f). These items were also part of the "quality school performance" construct, albeit conceptually different.

In addition, the values of the infit MnSq and outfit MnSq statistics of these items were 1.09 and 0.88, respectively, for item F9f; 0.88 and 0.57, respectively, for item F8f; 0.94 and .71, respectively, for item F10f. The statistics were within the range of fitting unidimensional items (Bond & Fox, 2013). The study decided not to discard the secondary dimension as it was reasonable to consider this component as an aspect or a strand of *Tahfiz* school performance.

The assessment of item dependency found no serious violations of the LID (local item dependency) assumption. The highest positive residual correlation was .54, indicating the absence of local item dependency (LID) between pairs of items. The 33 items shared less than one-half of their "random" variance, suggesting that all the items were important for the unidimensional measure.

**Construct Validity of the Tahfiz School Performance Measure**

The validity of a measure has been classified into four types, which are predictive, concurrent, content and construct validity. The first two types are also called criterion-related validity. Of these, construct validity is the most important (Baghaei, 2008; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Messick, 1996). Evidence of a measure's construct validity is supported if the analysis addresses the concern, "Does the item difficulty hierarchy make sense?"

```
MEASURE     PERSON - MAP - ITEM
                <more>|<rare>
    8  .#############  +
                       |
                      T|
                       |
    7            ###   +
                       |
                       |
                  .#   |
    6             .#   +
                      S|
                  .#   |
                  .#   |
    5           .###   +
                  .#   |
                 .##   |
                 .## M|
    4            .##   +
                  .#   |
                  .#   |
                  .#   |
    3             .#   +
                  .#   |
                   .  S|
                   .   |
    2              .   +
                  .#   |
                   .   |T KK3KK
                   .   |  TADBIR3T  TADBIR4T
    1              .  T+  K4K       K7K        TADBIR6T   TADBIR7T   TADBIR8T
                   .   |S KK1KK     TADBIR2T
                   .   |  K2K       K8K
                   .   |
    0              .   +M AMAN5AMA  EKUITI3E   EKUITI4E   F15F       KK4KK
                   .   |  F3F       K9K        KK5KK
                       |  EKUITI5E  F14F       F9F        W5W
                   .   |S F10F      F4F        F5F        F6F        KK6KK
   -1                  +  F8F       W3W        W4W
                       |  F1F
                       |T
                       |
   -2                  +
                <less>|<freq>
 EACH "#" IS 19: EACH "." IS 1 TO 18
```

Figure 3: Person-Item Map

As demonstrated earlier, the construct validity of the TSP is supported by several benchmarks of the Rasch model, which are summarised as follows:

1. All point measure correlations were positive with a minimum value of .49
2. The estimated item reliability was .99
3. The item separation index was 8.88 and the item reliability was .99
4. Reasonableness of the assumption of unidimensionality
5. Tenability of the assumption for the absence of local item dependency (LID)

The Wright map (see Figure 3) allows for a visual comparison of the Rasch analysis' predicted ordering of item difficulty against the actual order of item difficulty in a data set. It tests the Rasch model-data alignment to substantiate the measure's construct validity (Boone & Staver, 2014). The map facilitates an efficient assessment of the validity.

Figure 3 depicts the hypothetical unidimensional *Tahfiz* school performance construct that the study aimed to measure using the 33-item questionnaire. The item at the top of the line (i.e., the existence of facilities for students with disabilities--item KK3KK) was least agreeable to the sample. As expected, it was a difficult item to endorse, given the context of the study. The persons (symbol, #) located at the top of the line were more able to agree. At the bottom of the line, the items became easier (the easiest being praying space; F1F), and the persons became less able to endorse.

The inspection of the Wright map suggested the hierarchy of the estimated item difficulty matched its theoretical ordering. Moreover, the map showed the absence of huge gaps between the items, indicating that the construct was not underrepresented. The results, therefore, offered evidence of construct validity for the TSP measure.

However, the Wright map indicates that there is no item that targets the respondents at the higher end of the continuum. In other words, the targeting between the items and sample (i.e., whether the item difficulty range matches the sample ability range) was weak. The map shows that a big majority of the respondents were able to easily endorse the 33-item instrument. Therefore, the current instrument developed may not necessarily address all possible items that measure the constructs of performance of Tahfiz schools. Future studies should address this concern, namely by looking into including items that are difficult to endorse

## Estimates of Index Scores

The Rasch analysis estimated the respondents' logit scores, which exhibited additive properties. The sample of 877 respondents' scores ranged from -0.82 to 8.34, with a mean score of 5.33 and a standard deviation of 2.30. The scores were then extrapolated to be positively distributed to ease interpretations. The eyeball inspection found that the person data was normally distributed; skewness and kurtosis statistics were estimated at 1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Figure 4 illustrates the performance index score of the schools. The distributional analysis of the students' scores showed that, on a scale of 0-10, the composite score of *Tahfiz* schools' performance was 6.32, with a standard deviation of 2.29. The analysis also revealed that the teachers were slightly more inclined to positively endorse the quality of *Tahfiz* schools (Index Score = 6.50, SD = 2.25). The two administrative personnel and alumni respectively scored 6.33 (SD = 2.14) and 6.08 (SD = 2.36).

The findings as shown in Figure 4 indicate that the *Tahfiz* School Performance Index is highest among the teachers. In other words, among the sample, teachers tend to give the highest index of TSP. The next highest index was given by administrators, followed by the alumni.

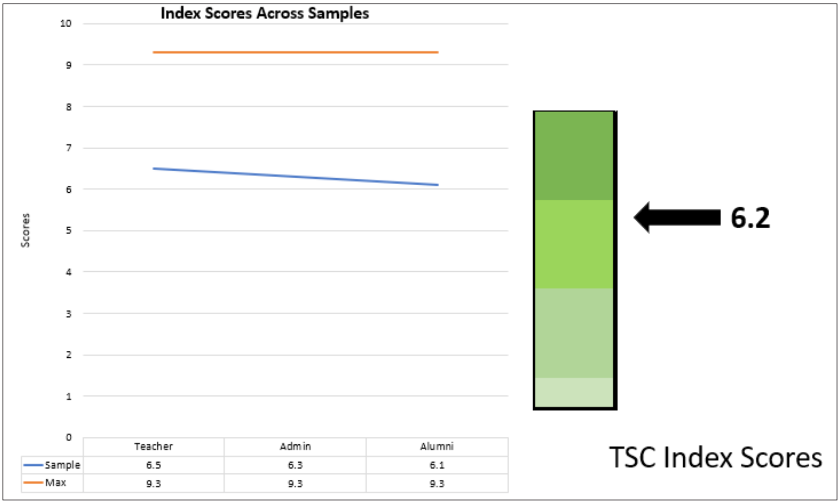


**Figure 4.** The *Tahfiz* School Performance Index

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The *Tahfiz* School Performance Index is an attempt to improve the quality of education at *Tahfiz* schools by having a standardised measurement that includes the key areas that are important to their performance. Using the Rasch Rating Scale Model, this paper has demonstrated the validity and reliability of the index, with specific evidence of construct validity. At the same time, further work is needed to address some issues related to the index, such as the ease of endorsement of the index's items, as indicated in the Wright map. In the present analysis, certain items related to *Tahfiz* education were misfitting and had to be excluded. Further examination is needed to determine the validity of these items, which would improve the index as an indicator of *Tahfiz* School performance.

The index can be used by three stakeholders i.e., teachers, students, and administrators. Teachers and students can use this index to inform the administration of their school's strengths and weaknesses, while administrators can use the index to self-assess their performance and benchmark it against that of others over time. They may conduct the benchmarking as an annual exercise. This index offers *Tahfiz* schools a comprehensive measure of performance that not only addresses the academic aspect but also the administrative, well-being, and facilities aspects.

As the demand for *Tahfiz* education increases, performance measures are important to ensure that *Tahfiz* schools can offer quality education. For governmental bodies like the Ministry of Education, this index can be used to monitor the progress and performance of the *Tahfiz* education sector. Empirical knowledge of the status of *Tahfiz* schools, as well as their conditions, strengths, and weaknesses, would enable educational authorities to develop strategies that would continuously enhance the quality of *Tahfiz* education for the public.

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## *Research Note*

# Reframing the Narrative: Challenging Eurocentrism in Modern World Economic Historiography

**Tahsina Nasir***

**Abstract:** This historiographic analysis challenges the Eurocentric narrative that has traditionally dominated the historiography of the modern world economy, which typically emphasises Europe's central role while marginalising the contributions of other regions. Drawing on the seminal works of scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Janet L. Abu-Lughod, the analysis explores the complex, interconnected dynamics of the global economic system. It argues for a broader, more inclusive approach to economic history that acknowledges the diverse influences and interactions that have shaped the modern world. By conducting a detailed comparative analysis of key scholarly contributions, this paper promotes a multi-perspective understanding of global economic developments, moving beyond simplistic, Eurocentric interpretations. The core argument positions the modern economic world as an interwoven fabric of regional interactions and contributions, debunking the myth of European exceptionalism and highlighting the significant yet often overlooked economic innovations from across the globe. This approach not only reevaluates the narrative of economic history but also enriches our understanding of the multifaceted processes that drive the global economy.

**Keywords:** Historiography, Global Economic History, Eurocentrism, Interconnectedness, Multifaceted Economic Processes

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* Ph.D. Student, Department of History, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. Email: tnasir2@student.gsu.edu

**Abstrak:** Analisis historiografi ini mencabar naratif Eurocentrik yang mendominasi historiografi ekonomi dunia moden, di mana Eropah sering dianggap sebagai mempunyai peranan utama, manakala sumbangan wilayah lain sering diabaikan. Berdasarkan karya-karya penting seperti *World-Systems Analysis* oleh Immanuel Wallerstein dan *Before European Hegemony* oleh Janet L. Abu-Lughod, kajian ini merungkai dinamika saling berkait dalam sistem ekonomi global. Ia menekankan pentingnya pendekatan yang lebih inklusif terhadap sejarah ekonomi, dengan mengiktiraf pengaruh dan interaksi dari pelbagai wilayah yang membentuk dunia moden. Melalui analisis perbandingan, kajian ini menggalakkan pemahaman pelbagai perspektif yang lebih holistik, mengatasi tafsiran Eurosentrik yang sempit. Hujah utama makalah ini adalah bahawa dunia ekonomi moden mempunyai rangkaian interaksi yang saling bergantung, menentang mitos keistimewaan Eropah, sambil menyerlahkan inovasi ekonomi yang sering diabaikan dari pelbagai rantau dunia. Pendekatan ini memperkaya pemahaman kita mengenai proses-proses multifaset yang mendorong ekonomi global.

**Kata Kunci:** Historiografi, Sejarah Ekonomi Global, Eurosentrisme, Saling Berkait, Proses Ekonomi Multifaset

## Introduction

The historiography of the modern world economy has traditionally emphasised Europe's pivotal role, often overshadowing the contributions of other regions. However, a growing body of scholarship challenges this Eurocentric narrative, advocating for a more interconnected global economic history. This historiographic essay examines seminal contributions from scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein, Janet L. Abu-Lughod, and others, who highlight the complexities of the global economic system and contest European exceptionalism. Through a detailed comparison of their works, this essay seeks to promote a nuanced, multi-perspective approach to understanding global economic developments. The core argument of this paper advocates for a historiographical approach that transcends simplistic, Eurocentric interpretations, emphasising the complex dynamics of the modern world economic system. This emerging perspective recognises the modern economic world as a complex, interwoven arrays of interactions, where multiple regions and people have played crucial roles in its evolution. Such a viewpoint not only challenges the myopic focus on Europe's purportedly unique path to economic dominance but also brings to light the often-overlooked economic contributions and innovations from across the world.

The Eurocentric narrative has long been reinforced by scholarship, with Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis offering a groundbreaking framework for understanding the historical and contemporary complexities of the global economy. Wallerstein's model, which divides the world into core, semi-periphery, and periphery zones, challenges traditional nation-centred histories by emphasising the global nature of economic development and regional interdependencies. However, his theory has been critiqued for its Eurocentric focus. In contrast, Janet L. Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* highlights a complex, interconnected economic system predating European dominance, underscoring the sophistication of pre-modern economies and the economic agency of non-European regions.

Prasannan Parthasarathi's examination of the "Great Divergence" debate further challenges Eurocentric narratives by attributing Britain's industrial ascendance to active government intervention rather than laissez-faire market dynamics. Parthasarathi emphasises the role of state policies, ecological constraints, and global trade dynamics in shaping economic development. Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* expands on this by showing how the global cotton industry was integral to the development of global capitalism, driven by European exploitation of non-European labour and resources. The analysis of Latin American commodity chains in *Silver to Cocaine* broadens the scope, highlighting the agency and adaptability of Latin American producers within global trade networks. This perspective challenges dependency theory and underscores the complexity of global trade dynamics. Giorgio Riello's study of the global cotton trade in *Cotton* reveals the ancient and sophisticated nature of the industry in regions like India, emphasising the importance of non-European knowledge and practices in shaping the global economy and critiquing the overemphasis on European technological innovations.

**Wallerstein's Core-Periphery Model**

Central to Wallerstein's theory is the division of the world into core, semi-periphery, and periphery zones, each playing distinct roles within a capitalist world-economy (Wallerstein, 2004). This model challenges traditional nation-centred histories by emphasising the global nature of economic development and the interdependence among nations and regions. At the heart of Wallerstein's analysis is the core-periphery model, which posits that the world economy is characterised by structural inequality between industrialised, technologically advanced 'core' countries and less developed 'peripheral' countries. Core countries benefit from high levels of capital and control over sophisticated production processes, while peripheral countries are relegated to providing raw materials and cheap labour. This structure perpetuates a pattern of economic dependency and exploitation.

The semi-periphery acts as a buffer zone that mitigates the binary opposition between the core and periphery. Countries in the semi-periphery exhibit characteristics of both core and periphery and serve to stabilise the world-system by preventing polarisation. Wallerstein's inclusion of the semi-periphery highlights the fluidity and dynamism within the global economy, allowing for upward or downward mobility within the system. Thus, Wallerstein traces the origins of the modern world-system to the long 16th century, a period marked by the expansion of European exploration, trade, and colonisation (Wallerstein, 2004). He argues that the capitalist world-economy emerged from this era, fundamentally reshaping global economic and social relations. This perspective underscores the historical contingency of economic development and maintains narratives that naturalise European dominance.

## Abu-Lughod's Interconnected World System

While Wallerstein's theory has been revolutionary in highlighting the structural dynamics of the global economy, it has not been without its detractors, especially due to its Eurocentric focus. Transitioning from this critique, it is important to consider the work of Janet L. Abu-Lughod, whose seminal book *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* provides a compelling counterpoint. Abu-Lughod's critical reassessment of global economic history challenges the Eurocentric narrative that frames European dominance as inevitable and natural. Through her examination of the thriving global economy of the 13th and 14th centuries, Abu-Lughod reveals a complex, interconnected economic system that existed well before the ascent of European hegemony, thereby offering a broader perspective on global economic system (Abu-Lughod, 1989).

Abu-Lughod identifies a vibrant 13th-century "world system" characterised by extensive trade networks linking Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. This system facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, and technologies, with key urban centres like Cairo, Quanzhou, and Venice acting as crucial nodes. Her analysis highlights the sophistication of pre-modern economies and counters the notion of a static and insular pre-European world, emphasising the interconnectedness of global history (Abu-Lughod, 1989). Further, Abu-Lughod underscores the economic agency and prowess of non-European regions such as China and the Islamic World. These regions demonstrated high levels of urbanisation, technological advancement, and commercial sophistication, often matching or exceeding Europe. This challenges the conventional view of non-Western societies as peripheral, significantly enhancing our understanding of their roles in global economic history.

Within the broader narrative, Abu-Lughod also delves into the cataclysmic impact of the Black Death on the 13th-century world system. She argues that the pandemic, along with other geopolitical factors, contributed to significant shifts in the balance of economic power (Abu-Lughod, 1989). While Abu-Lughod's work has been celebrated for its revisionist perspective against Wallerstein's, it also invites critical engagement, particularly regarding the applicability of the "world-system" concept to the pre-modern era and how European dominance remained unquestioned throughout the book. Many scholars have contributed to the argument of the non-European contribution to the world economy. Within this context, scholars like Prasannan Parthasarathi stand out for their rigorous challenge to traditional narratives.

**Rethinking the Great Divergence**

Prasannan Parthasarathi presents a compelling re-evaluation of the "Great Divergence" debate in his book *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600-1850*, the term historians use to describe how Western Europe, particularly Britain, economically outpaced Asia from the 18th century onwards (Parthasarathi, 2011). Central to Parthasarathi's argument is the assertion that active government intervention, rather than *laissez-faire* market dynamics, played a pivotal role in fostering Britain's industrial ascendance. Parthasarathi also emphasises the critical role of state policies in

Britain's industrial growth, particularly in the textile industry. He cites the *Calico* Acts as a pivotal example, showcasing how protectionist measures barred Indian textiles, thereby sheltering and nurturing the nascent British textile industry (Parthasarathi, 2011).

Further challenging Eurocentric narratives, Parthasarathi points to ecological constraints, such as deforestation, which forced Britain to innovate in areas like coal usage, thereby propelling technological advancements essential for industrialisation. Conversely, India's ecological conditions did not necessitate such shifts, illustrating how geographical and environmental factors influenced technological development paths. The argument further delves into the impact of global trade dynamics, highlighting how British colonial policies systematically dismantled India's vibrant textile industry by imposing tariffs and restrictions. Parthasarathi's inquiry into the Great Divergence fundamentally destabilises the accepted narrative of European economic ascendancy by highlighting the influence of external factors such as state policies, environmental conditions, and global economic dynamics (Parthasarathi, 2011). This approach not only redefines our understanding of the Great Divergence but also highlights the complex interdependencies and mutual influences between Europe and Asia prior to the industrial era. In this vein, the significance of global commodities, and specifically cotton, emerges as a crucial element in understanding the development and expansion of global capitalism. This is where Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* intricately connects with and expands upon Parthasarathi's arguments.

## War Capitalism and Global Industrialisation

Beckert's seminal work disrupts traditional narratives of European industrial supremacy by casting the global cotton industry as a pivotal element in the development of global capitalism, a system fuelled by "War Capitalism" and defined by aggressive exploitation and control. He meticulously illustrates how cotton linked continents, driving industrialisation in Europe while expanding slavery in the Americas, and forging supply chains that stretched from the cotton fields of the United States and India to the textile mills of Britain (Beckert, 2014). This complex network underscores the global nature of the cotton industry, challenging the idea that European ingenuity alone spurred industrial growth.

Beckert highlights how European powers, particularly Britain, used state power and colonial policies to control global cotton markets, illustrating the imperialist roots of global capitalism. He challenges the notion of autonomous European industrialisation by showing how it relied on exploiting non-European labour and resources (Beckert, 2014). Further, his analysis shifts rural areas outside Europe from peripheral to central roles in modern capitalism's development, contesting traditional views of European uniqueness and advocating for a re-evaluation of global history that acknowledges the interconnectedness and exploitation at its core.

**Agency in Global Trade: Latin America's Role**

Analysis of the cotton industry's role in global capitalism opens a critical dialogue on the underpinnings of European imperial dominance, urging a deeper investigation into the genesis of global trade networks. It is precisely this call for a nuanced understanding of early imperial economic strategies that leads us seamlessly into the exploration provided by the authors of *Silver to Cocaine* (Topik & Zephyr, 2006). This work delves into the multifaceted dynamics of Latin American commodity chains, effectively broadening the scope of inquiry beyond the cotton fields and textile mills of Europe and its colonies. By shifting the focus to Latin America's pivotal contributions to global trade, it highlights the diverse economic practices and strategies that preceded and coexisted with the rise of European industrial capitalism, thereby challenging the monolithic narrative of European economic ascendancy (Topik & Zephyr, 2006). Central to the book's thesis is the argument that Latin American producers were not merely passive victims of a global economy dominated by European imperial powers. Instead, they are depicted as dynamic agents, capable of significantly influencing the commodity chains within which they operate. Such a portrayal shifts the focus from a narrative of dependency and exploitation to one recognising the ingenuity, agency, and adaptability of Latin American producers (Topik & Zephyr, 2006).

A significant aspect of the book's analysis is its critique of the dependency theory of Wallerstein framework, suggesting that Latin American countries had considerable agency in negotiating their positions within global commodity chains. The authors argue that profits and power within these chains were not exclusively concentrated at the top, nor were they solely in the hands of North American and European entities (Topik & Zephyr, 2006). This perspective not only questions the narratives that underscore European dominance but also highlights the complexity of global trade dynamics, where Latin American actors played pivotal roles in shaping supply, demand, and distribution patterns. By extending the focus beyond the well-known commodities like silver, this narrative also offers a comprehensive exploration of Latin America's contribution to global economic history through its involvement in the trade of indigo, cochineal, and henequen, among others.

**Cotton as a Living Thread: Shaping the Industrial Revolution**

In the discourse on commodity chains and the global economic history, cotton emerges as a pivotal element, not merely for its role in the textiles and fashion sectors, but as a cornerstone that engineered the path to the Industrial Revolution. Giorgio Riello's exhaustive study in his book *Cotton* unravels the intricate web of this commodity's journey, laying bare the profound impact cotton has had on shaping economic paradigms and societal transformations across the globe (Riello, 2013). By delving into the multifaceted layers of cotton's global journey, the book highlights how this commodity served as a bridge, connecting diverse cultures, economies, and technologies long before the advent of European industrial dominance.

Riello's research underscores the ancient and global nature of the cotton trade, challenging the traditional narrative of Western dominance with insights into the "first cotton revolution" that centred in South Asia well before European intervention (Riello, 2013). This approach emphasises the sophistication and scale of the cotton industry in regions like India, showcasing the advanced state of non-Western economies and their integral roles in the global economy. Rather than pioneering the cotton trade, European traders integrated into this pre-existing network during the "second cotton revolution," shifting the focus toward Europe by leveraging Asian expertise and networks. This narrative reveals how Europe's rise in the cotton industry depended heavily on non-Western knowledge and practices, thereby challenging Eurocentric views and highlighting the interconnectedness of global economic developments.

Riello's analysis further counters the Eurocentric narrative through his critique of the overemphasis on European technological innovations in spinning and weaving (Riello, 2013). He argues for equal recognition of the importance of raw materials, textile finishing, and printing, areas where knowledge and techniques were heavily derived from non-European sources. Additionally, Riello's analysis reveals the grim legacy of the global cotton trade, shaped by colonialism and slavery, challenging the traditional glorification of the Industrial Revolution as a Western triumph. His work underscores the global interconnectedness and diverse contributions that have shaped the modern world economy (Riello, 2013).

**Merchants and Commercial Capitalism: A Reassessment of Economic Contributions**

When discussing the Eurocentric view of economic history, the role of merchants and their contributions to the system often remain overshadowed, with undue focus placed solely on European innovation and intellect. This narrative, however, has been dismantled by numerous scholars, including Jairus Banaji in his seminal work, *A Brief History of Commercial Capitalism*. While Banaji's focus is rooted in Marxist history and the often-overlooked role of merchants in shaping economic systems, his work also delves into the history of the Global South (Banaji, 2020). He highlights the detailed and interconnected networks of merchants and the complex, sophisticated economic systems they led, systems that were pivotal in shaping the rise of capitalism. Banaji's monograph challenges the prevailing notion that the emergence of modern capitalism was purely a European achievement. Instead, his exploration reveals how the contributions of interconnected civilisations and their vibrant economic practices laid the groundwork for this transformation (Banaji, 2020).

Banaji's work specifically sheds light on the intricate networks of commercial activity that spanned the world long before the advent of colonial system or industrial capitalism. In particular, he examines the competition among major trading powers from the $12^{th}$ to $18^{th}$ centuries, Venice, Genoa, Portugal, and the Dutch Republic, alongside significant contributions from the Byzantine Empire, India, and China. These regions were not passive backdrops to European expansion but active participants in a sophisticated web of commerce. For instance, the Byzantine economy served as a crucial bridge between East and West, with Constantinople as a hub of cultural and economic exchange

(Banaji, 2020). Similarly, Indian and Chinese merchants commanded trade routes and innovations that made them indispensable players in the global economy. This interconnected system of trade, spanning continents and centuries, complicates the narrative of Western dominance by showing how diverse regions laid the foundations for what we now recognise as global capitalism.

Banaji's analysis of the putting-out system also underscores how merchant capital did not merely facilitate trade but actively shaped production itself (Banaji, 2020). This system, evident in the Florentine wool industry, Lyon's silk production, and Oriental carpet manufacturing, demonstrates the direct control merchants exercised over decentralised networks of producers. By managing raw materials, advancing credit, and orchestrating production, merchants acted as proto-industrial capitalists, subordinating small-scale artisans to their economic strategies. The putting-out system also highlights the global nature of premodern capitalism, as the practices observed in Florence and Lyon paralleled similar systems in Persia and South Asia. This points to an economic order already integrated across regions, driven by the ingenuity of local economies long before the rise of Western industrial power (Banaji, 2020). Banaji's framing of merchant manufacturing reveals the sophistication and adaptability of these systems, laying bare the false dichotomy between premodern and modern economic practices. British mercantile capitalism of the 19$^{th}$ century, as detailed in the monograph, serves as a continuation of this interconnected history, demonstrating how managing agencies such as Andrew Yule and Jardine Matheson capitalised on global networks to dominate industries like tea, jute, and opium. These agencies embodied innovative financial techniques characteristic of modern capitalism, leveraging limited capital to control vast resources (Banaji, 2020). However, the narrative of British dominance obscures the critical roles played by non-European economies that sustained and competed within these global systems. For example, the opium trade depended on Indian agricultural labour and Chinese markets, while global commodity chains included rubber from Malaya and textiles from India.

This symbiotic relationship challenges the notion of unilateral European superiority, reframing British capitalism as a system deeply dependent on and shaped by transregional exchanges. By analysing these dynamics, Banaji compels us to recognise that the modern economy did not emerge in isolation but was a product of centuries of collaboration and competition across the Global South and beyond (Banaji, 2020). These insights dismantle the simplistic narrative of Europe as the inevitable centre of global capitalism. Instead, they offer a fresh and necessary reimagining of economic history as a shared enterprise shaped by the diverse contributions of civilisations across the globe. The putting-out system and merchant manufacturing highlight the ingenuity of early economic systems in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, while the competitive struggles among trading powers demonstrate that global interconnectedness existed long before Western dominance emerged. This perspective not only disrupts the notion of European exceptionalism but also elevates the agency of regions like Byzantium, India, and China in shaping the trajectory of global capitalism.

**Changing Pedagogy: The Practical Implications of Reframing Economic History**

Reframing this world history narrative and challenging the Eurocentric one is also very crucial on a practical level. On a practical setup, reframing economic historiography in the classroom offers a unique opportunity to reshape students' understanding of world history. Traditionally, history curricula have emphasised Eurocentric narratives, focusing predominantly on European and American contributions to global economic development. This approach often leaves students with a skewed perception, overlooking the significant roles played by other regions. By integrating the latest scholarship that challenges these Eurocentric perspectives, educators can provide a more inclusive and interconnected view of global economic history. This shift not only enriches students' knowledge but also fosters a deeper appreciation for the diverse and complex interactions that have shaped our world.

In the classroom, this reframing can illuminate the economic contributions of regions like Latin America, South Asia, and the Middle East, which have historically been overshadowed by narratives of European dominance. For example, Janet L. Abu-Lughod's work on pre-modern global trade networks reveals the sophistication of non-European economies long before European hegemony (Abu-Lughod, 1989). Similarly, Prasannan Parthasarathi's analysis of the "Great Divergence" highlights the role of state policies and global trade dynamics in Britain's industrial rise, challenging the myth of European exceptionalism (Parthasarathi, 2011). By discussing these perspectives, teachers can help students understand the agency and resilience of these regions, emphasising their vital contributions to the modern world economy.

Highlighting these diverse contributions also addresses significant gaps in the current curriculum, which often emphasises political and military histories at the expense of economic and cultural achievements. One of the key contributions of this revised curriculum is its inclusion of works such as Silver to Cocaine, which examines the economic agency of Latin American producers, and Giorgio Riello's study of India's sophisticated cotton industry. These narratives emphasise the central role that regions outside Europe played in the formation and evolution of global trade systems. Far from being mere appendages to European colonial ambitions, Latin American economies, particularly in the context of silver production, actively participated in the shaping of global capitalism. The silver trade was not solely a product of European demand, but rather a dynamic force that impacted on the economic trajectories of both Europe and the Americas (Topik & Zephyr, 2006). It fuelled not only European industrial growth but also played a critical role in the development of global markets and finance, particularly through its connection to the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. Similarly, the revised narrative highlights India's significant role in the global textile industry. The sophisticated cotton industry in India, as explored by Riello, underscores the country's pivotal contribution to the global economy. Indian cotton was a key raw material for the European textile boom, positioning India as a central player in the transnational economy (Riello, 2013). Through an academic alternative narrative and the inclusion of this perspective, it will also help educators change their pedagogy. This revision not only fills significant gaps in the current educational framework by addressing the overlooked economic and cultural achievements of non-European regions, but also provides students with a more inclusive and balanced historical narrative, highlighting history as a shared human experience shaped by diverse actors, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of world history. This approach fosters a more balanced and inclusive understanding of history, acknowledging the multifaceted contributions that have driven global economic development.

## Conclusion

Revising the historiographical approach to include diverse perspectives promotes a more comprehensive and equitable view of world history, which is more necessary than ever given current incidents in different parts of the world and these incidents' significant historical roots. Consequently, it encourages students to appreciate the interconnectedness of historical developments and challenges the notion of European economic superiority. The historiographic journey through modern world history reveals a narrative far more interconnected and complex than traditional Eurocentric accounts suggest. Scholars have challenged the notion of European exceptionalism by highlighting the diverse contributions of multiple regions and cultures to the global economic system. This inclusive perspective illustrates the mutual interdependence of world economies, debunking the simplistic view of a Europe-centred modern economy. By integrating these insights into the curriculum, educators can ensure that students gain a richer, more accurate understanding of the past, one that celebrates the diverse legacies and contributions of all regions to the modern world economy. It also fosters a historical understanding that acknowledges the multifaceted contributions of various regions, demonstrating that the development of the global economy was not a linear or one-sided process, but rather a complex interplay of political, economic, and cultural forces. Ultimately, revising Eurocentric narratives in world history is crucial for fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and accurate understanding of global history, enriching our comprehension of the past and shaping our approach to contemporary global challenges.

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# *Book Review*

**Sherman A. Jackson (2024).** ***The Islamic Secular*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 527 pp. Hardback. ISBN: 9780197661789. £32.99.**

*Reviewer:* Hamza Dudgeon, Ph.D. Student, Emory University, Atlanta, GA. Email: hamza.dudgeon@emory.edu

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> "Verily, deeds are [judged] only by intentions…"
> (al-Nawawi, n.d., p. 11)
> – a Prophetic Ḥadīth narrated by al-Nawawī (d. 1277)

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While Sherman Jackson is well-known for his research and theorisation on Islamic law and African American Islam (Jackson, 2005; 2009; 1996), this monograph proves that Jackson can tackle a wide range of intellectual questions with prowess; this monograph also shows how Africana studies and Islamic studies can intersect in important ways, bringing Blackamerican theorists in conversation with Islamic studies, such as James Baldwin (1). "It should be clear by now that there is a confessional dimension to my thesis and its application. This should neither alarm nor surprise. As Talal Asad observes, 'The question of secularism has emerged as an object of academic argument *and of practical dispute*'" (11). The concept of "secularism" is oft conceptualised as an intergenerational trauma from one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in European history, the Thirty Years War. This sectarian, ostensibly religious war was known as the "Great Schism." This "age of religious wars" ushered in the concept of the secular public square and nation-state, where religion and secularism "implies a necessary dichotomous relationship" with each other, which Jackson calls "civilisational failure or civilisational schizophrenia" (3, 11). Jackson defines secularism as "excluding religion from the public sphere, while somehow maintaining its own status as neutral" (27). Engaging with both orientalist scholarship, traditional Islamic studies, and classical sources, Jackson makes the case that classical Islamic civilisation not only had a concept of secularism, but that this concept challenges the Occident's claim that their secular is the universal Secular all must kowtow to. We need not bend the knee or prostrate to such a provincial concept; the modern Western secular is not "the only secular" (28). "It is precisely this binary relationship between the secular and the religious that the Islamic Secular calls into question" (27).

This *tour de force* of a monograph objects to the Western understanding of secularism by claiming that in Islam, the concept of the "secular" does not entail some fast-food emancipatory flight from religion, but rather differentiation from *Sharī'ah* (i.e. *dunyawī*). Unlike the modern Western secular, where secularisation aims to separate various pursuits from religion, the Islamic Secular maintains a symbiotic relationship with religion, complementing it rather than displacing it (28-29). Jackson stresses that while Islamic jurisdiction is extensive, *Sharī'ah*'s scope is limited, allowing for aspects of state policy, the economy, and science to exist outside its purview without being deemed non-Islamic. This notion of the Islamic Secular, devoid of concepts like secularisation and secularism, significantly influences Islam's interaction with the modern state, including the Islamic State, as Jackson elucidates through an examination of Islam's pre-modern juristic tradition. His overarching argument is in congruence with much of modern Islamic thought. For example, if one looks at *Definitions of the [Islamic] Sciences* by Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1973), one will see many so-called 'secular' sciences listed as Islamic sciences: linguistics, engineering, mathematics, natural sciences, studying foreign languages, literature, history, logic, philosophy, accounting, music, astronomy, geography, etc. (Ashur, n.d.). I, myself, have also heard, in person, such things from Muslim scholars at al-Azhar University, which includes departments on such aforementioned disciplines, as well as the Islamic University of Madinah. "Medicine, grammar, farming, weapons systems, educational institutions, and countless other practical disciplines have all been recognised as integral to the health and perpetuation of Islam, in which capacity of they all constitute (or can constitute) Islamic pursuits and without which Islam as a lived reality cannot be sustained" (373). This is in congruence with both Marshall Hodgson's *The Venture of Islam* and Shahab Ahmed's *What is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* in which—as the quoted Ḥadīth above states—anything is *in potentia* "Islamic[ate]" (54-73, 376).

Chapters one through three represent part one of Jackson's book, where he establishes, vindicates, and explains "the theoretical foundations of the Islamic Secular" (15). Part two includes chapters four through six, in which he focuses "on the relationship between Islam-cum-*Sharīʿah* and the modern state" (ibid.). This style of inquiry and theorisation is pertinent because:

> The choice of the modern state as interlocutor is neither gratuitous nor self-serving. The chief function of the secular in the modern world has been to regulate the public space and the proper role and authority of religion within it. In this capacity, the secular has been invoked as the Great Mediator in the relationship between religion, society and the state, the state constituting the 'immanent frame' or 'über-context' within which all modern life takes shape. In this context, to speak about Islam in the modern world is of necessity to speak about its relationship not only to the secular but also to the modern state (15-16, emphasis is the author's).

Regarding so-called 'secular' activities, Jackson wrote, "to refer to such energies and efforts as 'non-religious' because they or their manner of deployment are not concretely grounded in or dictated by scripture is to view them through the prism of a very specific, overly narrow, and historically contingent understanding of 'religion'" (372-3). Throughout, the idea that has so permeated orientalist thought, that is, the *Sharī'ah*'s totalising jurisdiction is forthwith refuted by Jackson as not only factually, historically false, but also it reinforces the Occidental Secular over the Islamic Secular. Whether one accepts the claim that there was a premodern Islamic Secular or not, as shown above, modern Muslims do not accept the Occidental Secular, which would beseech academicians to decolonise and/or provincialise their conceptualisations of secularism (30-34). This is ultimately *The Islamic Secular*'s main contribution to the academe in a monograph of 527 pages.

What this book does quite well in part two is engage with other theorists on "Islam-cum-*Sharīʿah*" vis-à-vis the modern nation-state, such as Wael Hallaq's (2012) *The Impossible State*, Abdullahi An-Na'im's (2010) *Islam and the Secular State*, and Andrew March's

(2009) *Islam and Liberal Citizenship*. "The Impossible State proves less impossible than Hallaq assumes; the Secular State proves less necessary than An-Naʿim assumes; and the mere fact that Islam-cum- *Sharīʿah* can accommodate liberal citizenship on the level of 'doctrine' proves less meaningful than March assumes. In each case, my main point was not to refute these scholars' theses but to cross-examine them in light of the Islamic Secular" (375). This follows a general trend in the field where, elsewhere, I made a similar critique of Hallaq's argument that an Islamic state is an oxymoron, showing that the modern Ottoman *Mecelle* was based on indigenous Ḥanafī jurisprudence (Dudgeon, 2022). Was the late Ottoman state not an "Islamic" state? However, all of this is with the caveat "that Muslims are not necessarily bound to the modern state as some sort of would-be normative Islamic imperative" (197).

An ostensible weakness of the monograph lies in its lexical inaccessibility to laypeople. While I, personally, do not consider this a weakness as the subject matter is inherently deeply theoretical in nature, besides its philological component. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, so-called linguistic "clarity" is a mere illusion of mutual intelligibility (Dudgeon, 2024). Naturally, philosophically dense texts such as this may be inaccessible to initiates of the discipline. While this monograph would be of great importance to graduate students, it may be slightly too verbose and theoretically layered for some undergraduate students. However, I would argue that this text was never intended solely for undergraduate students, but rather it is a manifesto to the academe at large. The age of modern secularism is being pushed to the wayside to make room for postmodern and metamodern conceptualisations of societal organisation. Therefore, I would have liked to see a broader engagement of theorists of the secular beyond Islamicists, such as Khayati Joshi's (2020) *White Christian Privilege*, or Paul Kivel's (2013) *Living in the Shadow of the Cross*, where they both demonstrate that vestiges of Christian theology still persist within Western Secularism's epistemologies, further provincialising the Western Secular. This is an opportunity Jackson unfortunately misses but remains for future scholarship to blast wide open.

Overall, this monograph marks a major contribution to Islamic studies, secular studies, religious studies, and both the social sciences and humanities more broadly. Sherman Jackson's monograph challenges Western conceptions of secularism, arguing that in Islam, the secular does not signify a complete separation from religion but rather a differentiation from *Sharīʾah* (i.e. non-*Sharʿī*), maintaining a symbiotic relationship with religion (*al-Dīn*). Unlike the Western Secular, which aims to separate various pursuits from religion, the Islamic Secular allows aspects like state policy, the economy, and science to exist outside *Sharīʾah*'s jurisdiction without being deemed non-Islamic. Jackson's argument, supported by engagement with recent occidental scholarship and classical Islamic sources, contests the universality of Western secularism and emphasises the importance of decolonising and provincialising conceptualisations of the secular. Divided into theoretical foundations of the Islamic Secular and discussions on Islamic civilisation's relationship with the modern state, Jackson's work offers a significant contribution to the field—although its dense theoretical nature may limit accessibility to laypeople—following the trends of postmodern and metamodern conceptualisations of societal organisation. What Jackson does well is give us an entirely new framework to not only understand what is "secular," but also what is "Islamic."

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**Book**
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Al-Faruqi & al-Faruqi (1986)

Reference:
Al-Faruqi, I. R., & al-Faruqi, L. L. (1986). *The cultural atlas of Islam*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

**Chapter in a Book**
In-text:
Alias (2009)

Reference:
Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

**Journal Article**
In-text:
Chapra (2002)

Reference:
Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies, 10*, 214-232.

**The Qur'ān**
In-text:
(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36
(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:
*The glorious Qur'ān*. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

**Ḥadīth**
In-text:
(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)
(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:
(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

**The Bible**
In-text:
Matthew 12:31-32

Reference:
*The new Oxford annonated Bible*. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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