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The Garden of Knowledge and Virtue: A Tale of Necessity and Duty

Taman Ilmu dan Budi: Suatu Keperluan dan Kewajipan

Iyad Muhammad Eid*, & Rohaiza Rokis**

Abstract

This paper addresses the perceptions and practices of doctorate candidates at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) toward its vision of devoting educational efforts for restoring the dynamic role of the Muslim *Ummah* in all fields of knowledge and intellectual discourse. It investigates to what extent they possess competent research skills and foster core values such as cooperation and trust. It utilizes the qualitative research approach, using thematic analysis of data collected by semi-structured interviews. The sample is composed of ten Ph.D candidates, coming from the Middle East and Asian countries who currently study at IIUM. They are all Muslims; four females and six males. Eight candidates are the international students and two are Malaysians. Purposive sampling was implemented to select the candidates who were still pursuing their Ph.D degree at the time of conducting the study. They all came from five different *kulliyah* (faculties), with two from each *kulliyah*. The study showed that the Ph.D candidates' practices did not reflect the vision of IIUM. They lacked of competent research knowledge and skills as well as the core values represented by cooperation and mutual trust, which were clearly manifested in the IIUM's vision. The implication of this current qualitative study may bring into the realization of the existing critical situation of the Muslim *Ummah*. The *Maqasid al-Shariah* may be seen as the practical formula for IIUM to restore the core educational system for Islamic revivalism and glory.

Keywords: Doctorate Students (Ph.D), Research Knowledge and Skills, IIUM Vision, Cooperation, Mutual Trust, *Maqasid al-Sharia*.

Abstrak

Makalah ini membahas persepsi dan amalan calon pelajar kedoktoran di Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM) terhadap visinya untuk menumpukan usaha

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pendidikan bagi mengembalikan peranan dinamis umat Islam dalam semua bidang pengetahuan dan wacana intelektual. Ia mengkaji sejauh mana mereka mempunyai kemahiran penyelidikan dan keupayaan memupuk nilai-nilai teras seperti kerjasama dan kepercayaan. Makalah ini menggunakan pendekatan penyelidikan kualitatif, melalui analisis bertema dari data temu ramah separa berstruktur. Sampel terdiri daripada sepuluh calon Ph.D, yang berasal dari Timur Tengah dan negara Asia yang belajar di UIAM. Mereka semua beragama Islam; empat perempuan dan enam lelaki. Lapan calon merupakan pelajar antarabangsa dan dua daripadanya adalah pelajar Malaysia. Persampelan bertujuan untuk memilih calon yang masih dalam pengajian dalam peringkat Ph.D, ketika kajian dijalankan. Mereka semua berasal dari lima kulliyah yang berbeza, di mana dua sampel dipilih dari kulliyah yang sama. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa amalan calon Ph.D tidak mencerminkan visi UIAM. Adalah didapati bahawa mereka kurang mempunyai pengetahuan dan kemahiran penyelidikan yang kompeten serta kurang mempunyai nilai teras seperti kerjasama dan saling mempercayai. Implikasi kajian kualitatif ini dapat mewujudkan kesedaran keadaan kritikal umat Islam masakini. Maqasid al-Sharia mungkin merupakan formula praktikal yang boleh UIAM gunapakai untuk mengembalikan sistem pendidikan teras demi kebangkitan dan kegemilangan Islam.

Kata kunci: Calon kedoktoran (Ph.D), Pengetahuan dan Kemahiran Penyelidikan, Visi UIAM, Kerjasama, Saling Mempercayai, *Maqasid al-Sharia*.

The Establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

European colonialism, which extended for many centuries, had left destructive and brutal marks of conquering, exploitation and aggression. It controlled the wealth of numerous Muslim countries, and worst of all, secularized their education. As a result, Islamic identity and practices became distorted. In other words, Muslims started to split between the outer development of the physical world and the inner development of the spirit. A large number of educated Muslims became affected and fascinated by the western educational system, blindly endorsing Western perspectives. On the other hand, there were internationally outstanding Muslim intellectuals and scholars vividly remembered for their unprecedented stand in the face of colonial hegemony and their articulation of spirited initiatives to rescue the Muslim minds and correct the manifestation of true *Ibada* (worship).

Tracing the historical aspirations to found Islamic education in Southeast Asia pointed to Zainal Abidin Bin Ahmad, the Malay reformist, intellectual and educationalist, who proposed in 1917 the establishment of a college which integrated between “all kinds of worldly and otherworldly knowledge”¹ to transform the educational outputs among the Malays and

¹Mohd. Kamal Hassan, “Malay Intelligentsia’s Quest for An Islamic University and the Future of “Islamization of Human Knowledge” in International Islamic University

Muslims of the country. The establishment of the Islamic College Malaya in 1955 was considered a preliminary and significant accomplishment and paved the way for the foundation of an Islamic university.²

The First World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977 in Makkah was one of the most unforgettable responses, represented by its recommendations, that set the stage for the gathering of hundreds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals coming from tens of countries to discuss issues related to the reforms of the educational system in the Muslim World (from the kindergarten to higher education).³

As a Muslim intellectual and decision-maker, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, had called for an urgent action to address the backwardness of Muslims represented by their common misunderstanding of the message of Quran. He travelled to the United Arab Emirates to gain support and announce a proposal for the establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia. While the response was late, he headed back to Malaysia and decided to start the university. He had the perspective that IIUM should be an international university to expose the Malaysians to the world and be part of the Muslim *Ummah*. In addition, it was intended to be distinguished from other universities which taught Islamic studies by integrating revealed and modern knowledge.⁴ The quest of knowledge integration was built on the perspective that modern sciences would never be the dominant source of knowledge. Instead, Muslims have to achieve productivity and progress in all domains of life as long as they cling to the fact that the Creator, The-All Knowing, is the ultimate source of knowledge and humans act as His servants S.W.T. Thus, all efforts were accumulated to reestablish “the primacy of Islamic values in all fields of knowledge and the propagation of knowledge in the spirit of submission to God “*tawhid*”.”⁵

Malaysia,” in *IIUM: The Premier Global Islamic University*, ed. Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rashid Moten (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2013), 23-46.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Sayed Salim Agha bin Syed Azamthulla, “The Establishment of the IIUM as Explained by Mahathir Mohamad,” in *IIUM at 25: The Path Travelled and the Way Forward*, ed. Sayed Arabi Idid (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2009), 3-8.

⁵Ibrahim Mohamed Zein and Hazizan Md. Noon, “Relevantisation and Islamization: The Experience of the Kulliyah of Islamic Reveled Knowledge and Human Sciences,” in *IIUM: The Premier Global Islamic University*, ed. Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rashid Moten (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2013), 171-180.

The Garden of Knowledge and Virtue and its Vision

The first thing to be noticed when passing by the gate of IIUM University, browsing its website or accidentally receiving one of its leaflets is the slogan ‘Garden of Knowledge and Virtue’. The phrase signifies a physical place and abstract elements. The pure nature of the garden, undoubtedly, leaves peacefulness in mind and soul. Knowledge and virtue are the fruits of the garden. Virtue opens a wide gate of a better understanding among human beings, maintaining peace and development. In a sense, the slogan connotes intellectual productivity and moral goodness, which are special qualities of humans.

IIUM combines between natural, intellectual and spiritual worlds. Featuring modern Islamic architecture, the campus is basically located in a forest where a river flows through, and trees and flowers spread around. The movements of other living creatures enhance natural beauty. Climbing monkeys, running cats, swimming fish and flying birds exist peacefully and harmoniously with the campus inhabitants, who feed them generously.

Nature scenes are carefully cultivated to empower the university inhabitants with intellectual creativity and perseverance. IIUM hosts intellectual competencies coming from all over the world and redirects them toward seeking knowledge as an *ibada* (continuous worship) and *amanah* (trust). For this, a student’s character is intended to be transformed to be beneficial to all mankind by acquiring the knowledge which integrates between reason and revelation. The refined character is supposed to lead a productive lifestyle and act in a spirit of cooperation adopting the act of cooperation to change the humiliating situation of the Muslim *Ummah*. All that would be hindered without fostering the spirituality of IIUM community. Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Mosque in the heart of the university constitutes an integral part to produce spiritual intellectuals. The five calls for prayers ensure continuous communication with the Creator and create peaceful living while carrying out the challenging mission of serving the *Ummah*.⁶

Since its establishment, IIUM leaders have emphasized that the university’s philosophy must be derived from the first five verses of Surat al-Alaq:

⁶Ismawi Zen, “From a Ramshackle Estate to a Garden of Knowledge and Virtue: A Campus for a Premier Global Islamic University,” in *IIUM: The Premier Global Islamic University*, ed. Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rashid Moten (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2013), 101-124.

Read! In the name of your lord who has created! He has created man from a germ-cell! Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, who has taught by the pen. He has taught man he did not know. (96:1-5)

The phrase “university with a soul”⁷ characterizes the philosophical frame of IIUM. It is further defined by the four dimensions of leading the way; *Khalifa, Amana, Iqra, Rahmatan Lil Alamin*.

The university has the initiative to lead the way by preparing an army of Muslim generations to occupy the front rows of the intellectual battlefields. Ensuring the materialistic future is not a priority. The fundamental objective is to meet the vision of restoring the influential role of the Muslim *Ummah* in all branches of knowledge. In the modern world, countless perspectives and orientations clash with Islamic views. Not all Muslims are competent enough to take over the mission of fulfilling justice to all creatures on earth unless they are equipped with the revealed knowledge which makes the word of Allah the highest. Thus, Muslim students must begin a journey of change starting from reforming themselves and then reforming every Muslim soul.⁸

The mission is challenging; it involves interrelated dimensions. It is all for the salvation of the Muslim mind and preservation of the Muslim *Ummah*. The question that arises here: How can IIUM balance between the development of the part (the Muslim mind) and the whole (the Muslim *Ummah*)? The scope of the mission drawn by IIUM leaders provides the answer. Integration, Islamization, Internationalization and Comprehensive Excellence summarize the quest. It relies on reliable human resources that reflect leadership and professionalism through well-practised Islamic values.

Besides integration between the modern and Islamic sciences, IIUM is a platform for creating and disseminating Islamized knowledge. It is a special quest which aims to reconstruct educational pillars by presenting holistic Islamic worldviews. Contemporary human knowledge will feature more moral virtues when integrated with revealed knowledge to be under the umbrella of *Tawhidic* worldview. Thus, all the efforts and activities are

⁷Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rashid Moten, “International Islamic University Malaysia: The University with a Soul,” in *IIUM: The Premier Global Islamic University*, ed. Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rashid Moten (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2013), 3-22.

⁸AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, “The Revitalization of Higher Education: The IIUM as a Model,” in *IIUM at 25: The Path Travelled and the Way Forward*, ed. Sayed Arabi Idid (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2009), 35-60.

performed to seek the satisfaction of Allah S.W.T.⁹ The mission of transmitting the knowledge that is based on combining between reason and revelation has never been compromised, and the emphasis on creating productive human life is based on the supreme divine principles enshrined in the Quran and the Sunnah.¹⁰

IIUM pursues international horizons; therefore, Internationalization has been always a remarkable dimension in its strategic plan and history.¹¹ “Considerable order and systemization” paved the way for substantial achievements in terms of teaching and research that are equivalent to global standards. Taking into consideration the challenges of globalization, the university rectors have redirected activities, policies and procedures towards “international context of excellence”.¹² Muslim and non-Muslim IIUM students are also partners in the successful pursuits towards internationalization. They are situated in an environment that exposes them to international experiences in terms of learning programmes, events and activities.¹³

IIUM further takes the lead in creating a culture of comprehensive excellence and it is expected to reach every single individual belonging to IIUM community. Besides achieving goals and physical success, the university leadership significantly urges the manifestation of true human values. The four dimensions mentioned above are in line with the National Education Philosophy and sustainable development goals. They can be best summarized by the following remarks made by Professor Dato Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, the IIUM Rector.¹⁴

Looking at IIUM as a garden allows us to see the trees, the flowers which represent the books, the lecture halls, the publications etc., but the most important is what we don't see above the ground which represents the roots. There are no

⁹ Mohd Kamal Hassan, “The Integration of Human Sciences and Revealed Knowledge in the KIRKHS”, in *IIUM at 25: The Path Travelled and the Way Forward*, ed. Sayed Arabi Idid (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2009), 111-124.

¹⁰ Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rashid Moten, “International Islamic University Malaysia: The University with a Soul,” in *IIUM: The Premier Global Islamic University*, ed. Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rashid Moten (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2013), 3-22.

¹¹ Abdul Rashid Moten, “The IIUM: Internationalizing Higher Education,” in *IIUM at 25: The Path Travelled and the Way Forward*, ed. Sayed Arabi Idid (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2009), 61-76.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ An exclusive interview with Professor Dato Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, the IIUM Rector, at his office on 3 January, 2019.

nice trees without healthy roots. While the trees show our knowledge, the roots represent our virtue which includes all our intangible Islamic values, but we can feel them as part from our emotion and aspiration which direct our internal motivation to do more than we can. Accordingly, if our roots are healthy and strong, it does not matter what comes to us in terms of globalization, westernization, colonization because we are able to push them back.

Research Sample and Design

The present research is based on qualitative research approach. It implemented case study research method. For answering the research questions, semi-structure interviews were conducted. Purposive sampling was utilized that included two main aspects: samples who were originated from the countries which historically were colonized by the Western imperialism, and samples who were still undergoing their Ph.D program. Both aspects were extremely crucial for research sampling. Frantz Omar Fanon (1959) and Paulo Freire (1970) in their debates construed that colonialism had seriously impacted the life of the oppressed people. Fanon's study of psychology and sociology concluded that imperialism and colonialism indoctrinated the oppressed people to further propagate their condition by trying hard to mimic the ideas and culture of their oppressors (1959). Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, agreed with Fanon about the way of the oppressed to be similar to the oppressors at any cost. This research is thus interested to know how far this colonialism adoring mentality is influenced till today, particularly among IIUM students who are currently undergoing their Ph.D program.

The sample was composed of ten selected IIUM Ph.D candidates, coming from the Middle East (Yemen, Algeria, Sudan, Egypt and Libya) and Asian countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan and Malaysia) who currently study at IIUM. They are all Muslims; four females and six males. Eight candidates were the international students and two were Malaysians.

Purposive sampling was implemented to select the candidates who were still pursuing their Ph.D degree at the time of conducting the study. They all came from five different *kulliyah* (faculties), with two from each *kulliyah*. The *kulliyah* were the Kulliyah of Islamic Reveled Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), Kulliyah of Education (KOED), Kulliyah of Engineering (KOE), Kulliyah of Economics (KENMS) and Kulliyah of Law (AIKOL). Purposive sampling technique was implemented. Two participants were chosen from each *kulliyah*. Their

identity was kept anonymous. In consideration of research ethics and in response to the participants' request, pseudonyms were used to protect their anonymity.

The researcher interviewed the participants individually at different times and venues. Interviewing technique provided the researcher with an opportunity to listen how the participants expressed their understanding of IIUM vision and their perceptions toward the impact of cooperation in enhancing learning processes. Through probing, the informants discussed the barriers to cooperation among Ph.D candidates. Each interview was administered for 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed in the same order they were recorded. The researcher classified the collected data and highlighted similarities and differences between the informants' responses. The data analysis also included the participants' comments, positive and negative, regarding the contradiction between the Islamic atmospheres of IIUM and the real learning-related practices. All the participants in this paper have been treated anonymously to maintain congeniality and trust. Besides interviewing doctorate candidates, an interview was conducted with Professor Dato Dzul kifli Abdul Razak, the IIUM Rector.

Limitation of the Study

Although the qualitative research represented in a case study is considered one of the most important empirical studies to understand a specific phenomenon, the limited number of participants in this study is considered a weakness. Therefore, future studies are required to include more participants to ensure the validity of the results.

Research Findings and Analysis

The previous section presented that IIUM University is established on a unique philosophy, including a vision and clearly stated mission. The philosophical foundation of the university is expected to attract knowledge seekers who have unparalleled determination to redirect their knowledge-based career toward uplifting the dignity of the Muslim *Ummah*. In other words, all members of the IIUM are supposed to be involved in building an international intellectual community benefiting the *Ummah* by restoring its historical progress in all fields of knowledge and intellectual discourse.

The following discussion presents the results of an empirical research conducted to highlight the perceived understanding of Ph.D candidates of the university's vision, and it shows to what extent they pursue to fulfil this vision. In addition, it reveals the quality of research

knowledge and skills necessary to conduct the academic research to obtain the degree. The discussion also considered the concept of cooperation in learning, and this aspect revealed the quality of interpersonal relations among the Ph.D students. Finally, the investigation tackled mutual trust as significant qualities among students to share knowledge and experiences. The discussion aims to guide the university leaders to detect the obstacles in achieving IIUM vision. Table 1 below shows the themes discussed in the study. The themes highlighted were conceptualized by reviewing the literature and analyzing the interview narratives to discover similarities and differences.

Table 1: Research themes

No.	Themes
1	Familiarity with necessary research knowledge, skills, methodologies, online database and computer-based software
2	Understanding the vision of IIUM
3	Teamwork and cooperation among the Ph.D candidates
4	Mutual trust among the Ph.D candidates

Familiarity with Research Knowledge and Skills

IIUM leadership values and prioritizes research; therefore, postgraduates were expected to have competent research knowledge and skills, which include online database and computer softwares. However, this study found out that six Ph.D candidates neither have good research knowledge nor skills. In this regard, Sami, from Pakistan, commented the following,

I have studied at IIUM for more than one year, but I still do not have any idea about research skills and methodologies.

Likewise, Aisha, from Yemen, helplessly said,

I am not familiar with any of the computer-based software which facilitate academic research. My study is related to Sharia and Law. I use an Islamic online library called Maktabah Shamilah to cover the topics related to sharia, and I depend on theses and dissertations to cover the topics related to law. Regarding qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, I think they are only useful for

students studying Sociology, Psychology, Education and Science.

When asked about the reasons behind the weakness of many graduates in terms of applying research methodologies, obtaining research skills and using technical software, one of the participants, Hassan, from Yemen, had the following to say,

I have observed that most of the Ph.D students are weak in conducting their research. They do not have the basic skills for that. I can hardly find a Ph.D candidate working like an expert researcher. There are many reasons behind such weaknesses. Mainly, IIUM attracts Muslim students, but most of them obtained their master's degree from low rank universities without having to conduct empirical research. When they come to IIUM, they struggle with English language; therefore, they find it difficult to attend workshops to learn about research. Further, they do not cooperate with other students to share knowledge and experiences. The worst of all, some students pay money for some people to do their Ph.D dissertation.

Understanding the Vision of IIUM

Knowing the motives and career goals which encouraged the participants to choose to study at the IIUM might reveal to what extent they absorb the university's philosophy, vision and mission. Although the university considers Ph.D candidates as knowledge ambassadors to transform the challenging situations in the Muslim world, all the participants expressed that certain personal motives stimulated them to join IIUM. For example, Ali, from Bangladesh, considered that obtaining a doctorate degree would be a great chance to improve his professional and economic status. In this regard, he said:

I worked at university back in my country. I was offered a full scholarship to get a Ph.D degree. I accepted the offer which I considered as important for my future in terms of job position and income increase.

Similarly, Ahmad, from Yemen, was motivated by some friends who were studying in Malaysia and encouraged him to join IIUM. He remarked the following,

I was always in contact with some friends studying in Malaysia. They convinced me that it was fruitless to remain in my country after the outbreak of war. I decided to embark on my Ph.D especially after they informed me that it was possible to receive a scholarship. I considered that decision much better than wasting time in my country.

Fatima. We have to include her quotations/findings too prior to include her points in the Discussion.

Teamwork and Cooperation

This topic discusses the importance of teamwork among postgraduates as a valuable soft skill for a future career.¹⁵ It involves numerous benefits, including building up self-confidence, improving communication skills and interaction with others, enhancing creative and critical thinking and improving the quality of workmanship.¹⁶ Besides, when students work in teams, they develop more mature communication, show accountable interdependence and obtain psychological safety because they have a common purpose and a clear understanding of their role.¹⁷ Another benefit of teamwork is building trust.¹⁸ According to research, teams increased students' self-esteem, and when they were involved in cooperative learning they developed more positive feelings about themselves than students who worked individually.¹⁹ Besides offering positive experiences, groups work provides the students with new skills such as problem-solving.²⁰ According to Colbeck, learning valuable professional skills as a result of working cooperatively between students and their peers eases

¹⁵Laura Wilson, Susie Ho and Rowan H. Brookes, "Student Perceptions of Teamwork within Assessment Tasks in Undergraduate Science Degrees," *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 43, no. 5(2018): 786-799.

¹⁶Mashitah Sulaiman, Zawiah Binti Hj Mat, Faridah Binti Che Husain, Adibah Sulaiman Mohamad, Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah and Latifah Abdul Latiff. 2016. "The Impact of Teamwork skills on Students in Malaysian Public Universities," Paper presented at International Conference on Humanities and Technology, Melaka, Malaysia, August 17-18.

¹⁷Bianey C. Ruiz Ulloa and Stephanie G. Adams, "Attitude toward Teamwork and Effective Teaming," *Team Performance Management* 10, no. 7-8 (2004): 145-151.

¹⁸Dele Olufemi Akindele, "Enhancing Teamwork and Communication Skills Among First Year Students at the University of Botswana," *TESOL Journal* 6 (2012): 2-15.

¹⁹Robert E Slavin, *Cooperative Learning: Student Teams. What Research Says to the Teacher* (Washington D. C.: National Education Association Professional Library, 1982). Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED222489.pdf>

²⁰Eva Hammar Chiriac, "Group Work as an Incentive for Learning – Students' Experiences of Group Work," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5 (2014): 1-10.

academic challenges and enhances interpersonal communication and the ability to gain access to new technical knowledge.²¹

Accordingly, IIUM students are expected to show a high level of cooperation in exchanging valuable knowledge and experiences, hence, they direct their efforts toward achieving the university's vision of serving the *Ummah*. This theme revealed to what extent the participants were aware of the value of cooperation, and how it boosted research knowledge and skills. However, it was clear that the Ph.D candidates were motivated by competition rather than cooperation. They all emphasized on facing rejection from their peers to cooperate and help when they encountered difficulties or challenges during conducting research. Khaled, from Sudan, for example, pointed out the following,

I resorted to many students studying at the same department to help me understand some issues related to research, but I found that they were not willing to share knowledge. I was really shocked. I really do not know how to describe such attitude. I faced difficulties during the stage of data analysis. I asked my peers about the software they used for data analysis in their research, but they did not benefit me by giving any information. Then I was forced to send emails to some professionals I knew about on the Internet. They charged a lot of money.

Likewise, Ashraf, from Algeria, shared his negative experience by saying,

I asked many Ph.D students who had experience in research, but they rejected to help. They justified that they had spent a lot of time to absorb and understand the information related to academic research and it was illogical to give me such information easily. They had the opinion that the students who were new to research must spend their time in understanding everything by themselves without any help.

Thus, individualistic attitude was a common behavior among Ph.D. candidates causing resentment and disappointment among them. However, the participants expressed that cooperation among postgraduates is assumed to be obligatory rather than optional, especially because they considered it

²¹Carol L. Colbeck, Susan E. Campbell and Stefani A. Bjorklund, "Grouping in the Dark: What College Students Learn from Group Projects," *Journal of Higher Education* 71, no. 3 (2000): 60-83.

as vital for effective learning. Fatimah, from Malaysia, for instance, affirmed that mutual help could make difference in student's progress in terms of research. She pointed out,

Working as a team is the only way to improve our understanding of research and develop our skills. Individual work will not produce high quality research and the research becomes closer to replication. In contrast, collective efforts will produce distinguished work especially when they involve students from different fields of study. They create motivation and inspiration, boost brainstorming, explore innovative ideas, enhance students' learning outcomes and guide them to reach the level of significant scientific contribution.

Mua'th, from Libya, also provided the following comment,

Individualism should not be a common behavior among IIUM postgraduates. It is not normal at all. I have observed that the undergraduates practice the value of cooperation more commonly than the postgraduates. I had long time educational experience in Europe. I used to work as a team member and that allowed me to be developed intellectually and gain numerous skills. For example, I used to work as a group member to do big projects. My team used to set together, discuss and exchange ideas and finally everyone focused on finishing a specified part in the project. In the end, all of us enjoyed the achievement together. I believe that with noncooperation we will not propagate knowledge in IIUM.

Mutual Trust

At this point, it is very important to evaluate the level of mutual trust among IIUM Ph.D candidates. By spending many years studying at IIUM and had been familiar to its vision, they were expected to trust each other, communicate openly and share knowledge and experiences together. However, all of the participants believed that there was no trust among the Ph.D candidates. This finding was in sharp contrast with the Islamic culture and practices. Salem's account, from Egypt, for example, highlighted the factors which prevented them from creating more collaborative academic relations among themselves. In this regard he said,

I can say that there is no mutual trust among the postgraduates. The students prefer to keep research

knowledge and skills for themselves to show that they are superior and possess unique academic skills. Also, there is a strong feeling of jealousy among them. They compete in submitting their theses before others. Even though they literally perform the five pillars of Islam, they tend to be egocentric when it comes to academic competence. They do not reflect their Islamic identity thorough showing certain values such as cooperation.

Discussion

The previous sections presented the reviewed literature and analysis of research findings. The study found a kind of gap between the noble vision sought by IIUM leaders and the tendencies and practices of the PhD candidates, who represented the sample of the current study. Data demonstrated that the candidates appeared to have a clear limitation in reflecting and fulfilling the vision of serving the *Ummah*. They lacked the necessary research knowledge and skills. Besides, the absence of cooperation in sharing knowledge and experiences as well as mutual trust were commonly found. The following discussion elaborates the findings to highlight that the educational journey at IIUM requires the students to realize the “necessity” and “duty” of its vision so that they devote their personal endeavors in the interest of the progress of *Ummah*.

Normally Ph.D candidates face challenges when they embark on academic research due to a lack of basic understanding of research and experience. A study showed that the graduates at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) had moderate research knowledge and competencies; therefore, IIUM was recommended to offer research training in research methodology and analysis to make the students very knowledgeable and skillful in their field of specialization.²² The difficulties in doing research do not occur because of the course requirements but because many students do not have the essential skills for applying quantitative or qualitative research methodologies.²³ Negative orientations regarding the learning of a specific research methodology also affect the development of research knowledge and skills. As a result, students choose one research approach rather than the

²² T. Subahan Mohd Meerah, Kamisah Osman, Effendi Zakaria, Zanaton Haji Ikhsan, Pramela Krish, Denish Koh Choo Lian, and Diyana Mahmud, “Measuring Graduate Students Research Skills,” *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 60 (2012): 626-629.

²³ Mari Murtonen and Erno Lehtinen, “Difficulties Experienced by Education and Sociology Students in Quantitative Methods Courses,” *Studies In Higher Education* 28, no. 2 (2003): 171-185.

other, and this attitude hinders the development of comprehensive research knowledge.²⁴ A study showed that graduate students made remarkable progress in most research skills, including language, finding information and research methodologies over an academic year as a result of being involved in research roles.²⁵

Accordingly, it is normal to find the candidates in the present study possessing incompetent research knowledge and skills, yet it would be critical if they remain inattentive to the need of upgrading their understanding of academic research by attending training programs and workshops. The majority of the IIUM international students came from Muslim countries with educational systems that did not emphasize the application of scientific research. In addition, their English language proficiency hindered them from attending courses or programs about conducting research once they started their Ph.D studies. Further, some candidates viewed that their field of study did not require them to allocate time and efforts to learn about conducting research. For example, the students majoring in *Sharia* (Islamic law) rely on theoretical knowledge; therefore, they are not familiar with quantitative or qualitative research methodologies. Based on the fact fieldwork provides the students with the opportunity to study the real world, the current study emphasizes that the students' conviction about research must be changed so that their educational efforts meet the IIUM's vision. They are all required to learn about research methodologies and familiarize themselves with computer-based software which facilitate research work.

More critical than the incompetent research knowledge and skills, the current research found the fulfilling of IIUM's vision was interrupted by the lack of cooperation and mutual trust among the candidates. This behavior was in sharp contrast with the dominant Islamic atmosphere of IIUM where the students, regardless of their specialization, were expected to embrace, foster and practice these Islamic values. This was considered a major defect for IIUM, an Islamic university calling for serving the *Ummah*.

²⁴Mari Murtonen, "University Students' Research Orientations: Do Negative Attitudes Exist toward Quantitative Methods?" *Scandinavian Journal of educational research* 49, no. 3 (2005): 263-280.

²⁵Joanna Gilmore and David Feldon, "Measuring Graduate Students' Teaching and Research Skills through Self-Report: Descriptive Findings and Validity Evidence," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Denver, CO, Apr 30-May 4, 2010). Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509407.pdf>

The lack of cooperation and mutual trust among the candidates in the current study is not a recent behavior in IIUM. Rather, it dates back to the time when Muslim nations began to suffer from poverty and deprivation at the hands of colonialism which further imposed an educational system that was alien to their culture and legacy and radically altered their value system. Several Muslim scholars described the attitude of Muslim students toward education. For example, Al-Faruqi, the well-known Muslim scholar, made a significant reference to western colonialism as the fundamental factor in the deterioration of the Muslim's character and spirituality. Besides stealing the wealth of the Muslim nations and inflicting widespread poverty, it distorted their educational systems. Consequently, it deliberately robbed the Muslim intellectual from his heritage, thought and culture. Eventually, Muslim educated elites had lost the original educational vision, thought and methodology and had become unable to overcome crises and bring about development as perceived by *sharia*.²⁶ Commonly, when Muslims start their educational journey, they are more likely to be driven emotionally and controlled by materialistic egoistic intentions to secure a brighter future without considering the interest of the *Ummah*.²⁷

Similarly Al-Attas, emphasized that the Western materialistic thought affected the values and beliefs of the Muslim intellectual, stripping him of spiritual values.²⁸ In the western world, reason and science replaced religion, emancipating the western mind from God on the basis that "God is dead".²⁹ Muslims were forced to receive the Western ideologies from their contemporary intellectuals who were fascinated and influenced by western scientific and technological breakthroughs.³⁰ For Bennabi, intellectual development in the Muslim world is based on how Muslims received the western philosophy which affected their spirituality. During their educational journey, the Muslims tend to build their goals according to their interests rather than society's benefit. This is why educated Muslims are trapped in the wrong attitude, and this is considered a serious disease, causing serious damage to society as a whole.³¹

²⁶Ismail Al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1987), 1-33.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 2-37.

²⁹ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁰ Ibid., 15-18.

³¹ Malik Bennabi, *The Conditions of the Renaissance: Problems of Civilization* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1986), 83-84.

All the candidates expressed their resentment from not finding cooperation and trust from their peers. By analyzing their accounts, the study deduced that the candidates were controlled by competitive attitudes to secure better living circumstances. They had personal materialistic motives behind pursuing their Ph.D degree which would guarantee higher professional positions and secure their future. It was clear that they did not relate their education to the noble vision of the university. By examining the forces which made the candidates pay considerable attention to such materialistic needs, it was found similar to what the Muslim scholars discussed above.

The participants in the study came from those countries which suffered from the destructive consequences of the direct and indirect hegemony of colonialism controlled by Britain, France or the United States. Historically, Yemen, Algeria, Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Malaysia experienced the hegemony of colonialism. Interestingly, following their independence, most of them are still struggling with wars, economic dependency, political mismanagement, poverty, corruption, and educational systems that lacked effective vision and mission.

All these factors forced the candidates to compete with others and focus on securing personal future to enable them to survive, ignoring noble values. However, by looking at the model of Malaysia, as an example, the account of Fatimah about teamwork and cooperation, the Malaysian participant, emphasized on the value of teamwork and cooperation. Following its independence, the Malaysian leadership created an effective system which freed them from the hegemony of colonialism, build up economic system and provided them with peaceful social environment. This system is based on core values such as cooperation. Groupwork is very remarkable among the Malaysian students at IIUM. This is clear from Fatimah's account when she commented on the fruitful results of teamwork based on her background educational experience in Malaysia. This opinion is further supported by the observation of international academics that the Malaysian students were taught how to distribute themselves in groups for learning purposes which has positive impact on the educational system and the improvements of Malaysian living conditions as a whole.

In this regard, Professor Dato Dzul kifli Abdul Razak, the IIUM Rector, remarked that the ultimate purpose of seeking knowledge is moral rather than personal. The benefits of obtaining a degree should include the surrounding community. He said,

The culture of Iqra is not only reading and memorizing the Quran without understanding it nor reading, writing or publishing in Scopus journal to become a professor. It is uplifting the knowledge to the level that we can use it to make the sustainable change the way Islam wants us to do, based on the Amanah and leadership rather than making a change for ourselves and families while our communities are still backward.

Thus, we can understand the causes of the contradictory tendencies among the candidates. They looked very religious while they were talking about Islamic values and practices yet those were superficial only. They asserted on the values of cooperation and mutual trust while they themselves lacked them. They called for fostering and practising core values to become ideal Muslims, but they were driven by a sense of competition.

Realizing the critical situation of the Muslim *Ummah*, IIUM formulated its vision that Muslims must revive their Islamic educational style based on their values, principles and culture and in accordance to *Maqasid al-Sharia* to find solutions to their crises and develop their countries. Such design is supposed to be opposite to the western materialistic ideology because it relies on the principle of *Tawhid* that introduces man as a *khilafa*, responsible for bringing positive changes for humanity in the worldly life as well the *lifeafter*. Allah S.W. T. says, "I will create a vicegerent on earth." (1:30)

Maqasid al-Sharia is an approach adopted by the intellectuals who have deep insights regarding the deterioration of the Muslim *Ummah* and earnest endeavors to address its political, social, economic and psychological weaknesses. It is the soul of the Islamic religion as it creates flexibility in understanding contemporary life-related issues. Moreover, it is a sophisticated science that needs adequate understanding on how it provides the human society with comprehensive protection and continuation within five interrelated necessities namely- protection of self (or life), protection of faith, protection of wealth, protection of intellect and protection of progeny.

Educated Muslims need to understand that their competitive behavior did not only come from the backwardness and humiliation inflicted by the power which exploited them but also from their psychological submission to such humiliation. Therefore, they need to free themselves from any internal acceptance and restore their dignity by challenging and changing themselves by practising core values with themselves first and

with others. In this way, they will change their social surroundings.³² Allah the High says,

“Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves.” (13: 11)

This task needs rational thinking which is one of the necessities of *Maqasid al-Shariah* (protection of intellect) to create balance by controlling irrational attitudes to establish a system in the society.³³ This is how Quran deals with the human intellect, requesting man to look, think, learn and read.³⁴ Science works like the shield in protecting people from making mistakes and guide their steps to improve their life, especially when they have adequate professional skills.³⁵

“Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?” (39: 9)

Conclusion

The International Islamic University (IIUM) has allocated the necessary physical and human resources to carry out the vision of becoming a leading educational center to re-establish the glory of the Muslim *Ummah* which historically pioneered in the generation and dissemination of knowledge. This study investigated the perceptions and practices of Ph.D candidates toward the vision of IIUM. It showed that they did not reflect an adequate understanding of the vision. They lacked competent research knowledge and skills as well as core values represented by cooperation and mutual trust. Accordingly, the necessity to found IIUM is a kind of hindered by the candidate’s duty they should perform. IIUM leadership is recommended to take massive measure to create various channels to improve the delivery of IIUM vision among students and create life-long duty toward the Muslim *Ummah*. The idea of establishing an Islamic educational institution developed during the same century the last Islamic Caliphate collapsed. The West established institutions and universities around the globe to dominate the power of knowledge and occupies human minds. Accordingly, intellectuals, decision makers and all of those who believe in IIUM’s vision and mission are required to answer some critical questions. Can IIUM candidates be empowered as ambassadors to revive the

³² Ibid., 31- 32.

³³ Muhammad al-Tahir bin Ashur. *Usul Alnizam Alejtimae*. (Algeria: The National Library for Book, 1985), 41-43.

³⁴ Ibid., 41-45

³⁵ Ibid., 91, 92,

Ummah? Does IIUM alone have the potential to revive the glory of the *Ummah*? Is not it the time to duplicate itself in various Muslim countries, starting from where the the last Islamic Caliphate collapsed? Fanon (1959) wrote, “Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well.”

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