PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES OF ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION: PAPER REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Islamic architecture is a complex field that accommodates diverse definitions and meanings. Because of this, the current method of teaching the canon through surveys and traditional lecture-based pedagogy are inadequate to take into account the multiple narrative and cultures of the architecture. On this premise, the research then asks what the best pedagogical strategy towards critical learning of the subject. The research applies a systematic literature review to guide data collection and analysis. The findings suggest that a course syllabus is a pedagogical tool that allows students to navigate the complexities of Islamic architecture. The paper also found that an effective course syllabus is as good as the contents. Designing the contents for the syllabus is the best pedagogical strategy which has a direct impact on how the discourse is understood and made relevant to contemporary issues. Contents of diverse context and issues facilitate critical learning, enabling students to construct an encompassing understanding of Islamic architecture.

Keywords: Architecture Education, Course Syllabus, Higher Education Institution, Islamic architecture, Pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

What was once an obscure form of art with little survey material, Islamic art and architecture have since proliferated academia with books, articles and survey texts (Blair & Bloom 2003). While Islamic architecture often takes the position of a universal aspect, the field now accommodates to multiple definitions with scholars having different views to what the architecture is, making teaching the subject a difficult undertaking (Omer 2008; Blair & Bloom 2003). Passive transmission of history knowledge has been slow to change, which could lead learners to experience cultural alienation and be detached from contemporary issues. Generating a more engaged student can be achieved by altering the traditional higher education landscape. This study looks at the strategy of teaching history of architecture with the focus on Islamic architecture with a claim that a new approach to pedagogical strategy will have a direct and immediate impact in the way the subject is understood.

ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

There are still many Islamic architecture texts that follow the formal classification method of focusing on style, building characteristics, forms, materials and technologies (Grube 1987; Creswell 1989; Hillenbrand 2003; Mitchell 1995; Petersen 1996). Creswell's detailed descriptions of Islamic Architecture is informed by travel documents, measured drawings and photographs. He connected the gaps of Islamic architecture with art from the Antiquities to reveal the influences of artisans from Greece and Egypt, in buildings such as the Great Madinah Mosque. Some books and articles classify the architecture by the meanings, philosophies, religious and value-based lenses (Blair & Bloom 2003; Utaberta & Rasdi 2013). Spahic Omer (2008) saw the importance of a

correct conceptualising of Islamic architecture. Omer himself describes the canon as a framework for the implementation of Islam, one whose religion inspires functions and forms.

However, no definition can comprehensively account for the diverse histories, regions and culture of the architecture. Nasser Rabbat (2012) found contentious issues in defining Islamic architecture, including its beginning as a post-Enlightenment European project whose subsequent classification continues to shun religion as an ontological category. Gulru Necipoglu (2012) also stated that Islamic art and architecture is still grounded on the premise of inherited Western narratives and the legacies of Orientalism. The Orientalist paradigm stresses artistic unity over diversity. This universalising claim, however, reduces the field into a distant concept with little elaboration on Islamic architecture's geo-socio cultural and political interactions between regions. Addressing the 'Islamic' in Islamic architecture is even harder especially for whom the architecture cease to be an object, but something to identify with – "a living tradition with culturally distinct roots" (Rabbat 2012). In the search for the local representation of Islamic architecture, it paved the way for a paradoxical definition of regional Islamic architecture.

Rabbat (2012) claims that Oleg Grabar's definition is considered the most comprehensive in describing Islamic architecture as something that is built by Muslims, for Muslims, in countries with majority Muslim society or countries that allows Muslims their freedom of expressions. Grabar (1980) also included both secular and religious design to highlight meanings and qualities beyond typologies. He also argued on the non-existent system of symbols in Islamic architecture. The claim is that symbolic patterns in religious artefacts detached them from contemporary realities and referencing only to specific practices and rituals (Bagli 2015). However, Abdullah Al-Jasmi and Michael Mitias (2004) would claim that the Mihrab is an ideal representation of an Islamic symbol.

Some scholars look to the Divine Law as guidance. Similar to symbolism, the concept of spirituality is a constructed framework loaded with meanings and connotations and can be used loosely in various contexts. Spirituality is a religious quest originating from the Quran and traditional scholarship of the Hadith (traditional narrative), where rites are described concerning the "inner meaning" (Arkoun 2002; Rasdi 2010). The immutability of the Islamic principles presents the architecture a sense of timeless unity that transcends diverse cultural tradition in favour of the religion as a unifying component (Nasr 1990). It is also described as a metaphysical approach that is a concept with the idea to express Islamic architecture through piety or a romanticised scheme.

The architecture discipline is no longer a static object of aesthetic and engineering but a process of production that is simultaneously informed by and informs the cultural, economic and political aspects of society. The definitions presented above supports the claim that that Islamic architecture is a complex discourse. Its many approaches covering broad chronological and geographical scope reveals the historical complexities and contradictions within the unifying "grand narratives" of the Islamic architecture (Bozdogan and Necipoglu 2007; Rabbat 2012).

Robert Hillenbrand (2003) outlined the challenges faced in studying Islamic architecture. His study saw that the mass of literature on Islamic architecture is devoted to the medieval period with gaps towards contemporary built form, underlining its state of under-development and constant flux. He added that it is possible to apply all kinds of approaches and methodologies to it.

The study of Islamic architecture has until recently been a Western monopoly and should no longer be studied similarly along the conceptual lines of Western history (Hillenbrand 2003; Rabbat 2012). Challenges and issues of Islamic architecture prove that the subject needs an effective pedagogic strategy to assist its learning for students in higher education institutions. The changing times and space continue to modify the expression and definitions of Islamic architecture, but this change is rarely reflected in spaces of education. Addressing this space through teaching strategies will have a direct and almost immediate impact on students.

Most courses for learning Islamic architecture begins with an introduction that covers the Islamic civilisation from the beginning of the religion to the twentieth century. Class formats are mainly lecture-based emphasising the use of visual aids and dramatic maps to inform students of the forms and limited actors of the architecture. Many classes utilise the chronological survey of key periods before branching out into detailed analysis of typology, elements and categories of Islamic architecture. It should be noted that an integrated case study and ground theory research was conducted before this paper to make and justify this claim. Data collected were course syllabus which covers, emphasise or pertains to the subject of Islamic architecture. The principal repository of this data was the Aga-Khan open-access websites, Archnet while others were sought out individually or through open-access search through rigorous selection. The data were then analysed using the grounded theory method of code identification, pattern development and emerging themes.

The method of learning through a timeline can be attributed to scholars that approach Islamic Architecture using historical facts (see Hoag 1977; Creswell 1989; Al-Asad 1992; Khan 1990; Golombek 1988). According to Hans Morgenthaler (1995), the chronological method of teaching history is inadequate because of its purely narrative approach, necessitating an alternative methodology for teaching history of architecture. He proposed for a nonchronological lecture sequence whose topics include design concepts, functions, morphology, the political and social meaning of buildings. Perhaps another accepted method to the chronological construct is aligning the discussion of parallel cultures within a broader timeline and space.

Mustapha Ben-Hamouche (2010) argued that the historicist method of cataloguing Islamic architecture is a way to defend and revitalise the identity of Muslim societies. His article subscribed to a process of Islamisation of knowledge, to adopt and apply contemporary thoughts of non-Islamic environment towards a new Islamic architecture. He claimed that the adoption of Western thoughts allows for the conscious, critical and constructive way of learning. However, the article's argument for Islamisation assumes that knowledge is divided into Islamic and non-Islamic. This type of understanding can present problems of marginalising the knowledge of others, especially when it is not part of the mainstream. The act of categorisation itself is a postcolonial strategy that tries to negotiate the differences between the West and architectural cultures of the "others" (Bozdogan 1999). In Bozdogan's article, "others" refer to the cultural production of societies that do not immediately fall under the legacies of a European and North American architecture.

This effort of categorising can be seen in Banister Fletcher's 'Tree of Architecture,' where it shows the evolution of the West as comparatively superior to the styles from other cultures. This was cited by Gulru Necipoglu (2012) and Gulsum Baydar (2004), among others, from their observation of Sir Banister Fletcher's 'A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for the Student,

Craftsmen and Amatuer, 9th edition. Bozdogan does not wish to replace the Western canon with the architecture of the marginalised "others", instead calls for the teaching survey to show the historical connections, exchanges, and the confrontations between them.

Another pedagogical strategy of approaching Islamic architecture is through the integration of the Islamic Sciences, which is the intellectual rational and transmitted disciplines of Islam. There are two types of knowledge to Islamic sciences; the transmitted or revelation knowledge (naqli) and the intellectual knowledge (*aqli*). While classes follow a lecture-based format, the inclusion of knowledge comprised of the science of morphology, the science of syntax, the literary sciences, the principles of jurisprudence, science pertaining to Hadith and its history and the Quranic sciences presents an additional multidisciplinary discourse to the class.

History is a form of knowledge and a form of a power structure depending on how it is presented and interpreted (Strauss & Corbin 1994). The research positions itself on the belief that there exist multiple realities of social constructions and multiple assumptions about the world (Guba & Lincoln 1989). These assumptions can be argued, shapes the worldview of Islamic architecture, motivating different understanding and interpretations of the canon. Ken Taylor (2007) states that human finds identity in landscape and place, ascribing onto them their own sets of values. The article claims that landscapes hold memories and sense of place, and is subsequently a cultural construct.

The challenge in the education realm is in trying to navigate through various discourses and complexities of the Islamic architecture field. Teaching history subject to students in higher education using passive approach gives no room analytical or critical reflection, evaluation or long-term synthesis, and students risk falling victim to texts that propagate false, Eurocentric, and mythologised views of history (Savich 2009; Foster & Padgett 1999; Loewen 1995; Goodlad 1984). Changes in pedagogical strategies are even more imperative now due to dynamic contemporary issues such as climate change, civil protests, and the mass diaspora.

The aim of the paper is then to identify the best pedagogical strategies to teach Islamic architecture without naturalising the differences in the existing definitions or undermining the multinarrative descriptions of the canon.

METHODOLOGY

The research follows a qualitative method looking at descriptive understanding as a knowledge claim. The design of the study is a systematic literature review to guide the data collection and analysis as a preparatory foundation into theory building. The paper's point of departure begins with the claim that Islamic architecture adapts to multiple definitions and approaches. Due to this premise, Islamic architecture is a complex subject to teach. This paper aims to review and find the best teaching strategy that allows for the critical learning of Islamic architecture. This method allows for a vigorous process to identify, select, and critically interpret multiple scholarships (Dewey & Drahota 2016) to answer the aim of the research.

Selected works of literature are based on data found in scientific journals, books, and academic dissertation. The inclusion and exclusion of scholarships are based on keywords. For more focused research, terms included are "pedagogy" "teaching" "Islamic architecture" "higher education"

"history theory" – while excluded from the research are scholarships that do not fit into the criteria of higher education and subjects of social theory. Each scholarship was analysed by looking at the authors' point of departure, how the article supports the research and how the article does not support the research.

DISCUSSIONS

From the discussion above, Islamic architecture discourses are of a nation-state, modernity and secularisation, political legitimacy, architectural aspirations, identity, modernist agenda and spiritual prosthetics. It is negligent then in linking art and architecture spanning fourteen centuries, several continents, with unstable political regimes and dynasties, internecine differences and cultural and ethnic boundaries as one umbrella category. Pedagogical strategies for this field must prepare students to manage the ever-more complex societal challenges towards a more critical understanding of Islamic architecture. Plato did say that intellectual education is only useful when put in the hands of someone who can distinguish between opinion and knowledge.

Chad Hanson (2014) states that higher education still measure accomplishment through short term cognitive outcomes and skills learned, rather than the development of identity. Ruzita Amin et al. (2007) examines International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)'s philosophy of education approach of integration and Islamisation of knowledge, in ensuring the achievement of IIUM's objectives, towards a well–rounded professionals imbued with Islamic values and ethics. The article's measure of values on marketability and job performance allows an extension of assessment that is beyond the classroom environment. However, by only focusing on marketability and job performance as a form of measure, risks impeding the notion of intellectual, spiritual and skills capacity of students. Both articles presented the need for an alternative measure of learning outcomes that do not undermine the values of critical cognitive and identity development.

Ashraf Salama (2007) proposes that the architectural design education should be centred on critical inquiry and knowledge acquisition and production. Mohammad Belall Maudarbux (2016) states that curriculum design; its philosophy, purpose, content, and pedagogy are dependent on global factors, which have shaped the landscape of religious education today. His article examined the needs for assessment framework to translate theoretical contributions of theoreticians into practical tools and to design relevant curricula in order to address plural societies.

The act of inquiry is a potent pedagogical instrument in higher education, to stimulate self-direction in students and encourage engagement (Justice et al., 2007). The challenge of designing the course is the extent of variables underlying the multiple goals of the subject. Greig Crysler (1995) provided insights to challenge architectural education towards a more democratic learning environment. His approach is informed by critical pedagogy as well as the idea of alternative histories to critique the institutional and curricular aspects of architectural education. Although his piece is subject to the Carleton University School of Architecture in Ottawa, Canada, there is potential to extend this observation on the teaching of Islamic architecture.

Course Syllabus as Pedagogical Strategy
The rapid pace of cultural change requires a class environment that stimulates critical learning or dialogue between architecture, culture and religion. The current cultural landscapes are now more diverse and are no longer dominated by Western concepts. Thus, the course syllabus must consider

for the cross-cultural variations of forms and spatial behaviour, encoded meanings in buildings and environments as the social and cultural production of the place (Memmott & Keys 2015). Currently, many syllabus developments are framed as power, as communication, as collaboration and as a contract between the instructor and students (Fornaciari & Dean 2013).

The syllabus focuses on the selection and grading of content allowing room for interpretation and modification to the document but should only be used as points of reference and not an absolute commitment (Candlin 1984; Widdowson 1984; Nunan 1988). The syllabus can be programmed to progress in tandem with students' understanding (Savich 2009). The syllabus is not only a document but a site where links between various academic genres and discourse can happen (Afros and Schryer 2009), supporting the paper's claim that the syllabus can encourage critical learning.

Beatriz Colomina et al. (2012) presented the pedagogical experiments of the 1960s and '70s that revolutionised the thinking in the discipline of architecture. The article asserts that the role of the syllabus to shaping architectural discourse highlights the importance of pedagogies in stimulating critical learning. It is hopeful that this method of design courses can be fully adopted within the history theory course of Islamic architecture.

Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi (2008) presents an argument to further the frameworks of Islamic architecture beyond the current discourse of 'value-centred' approach, formalistic analysis of historically selected buildings from the past, Islamic spirit works of Sufism or product of cultural, environmental forces. The article looks at values within the Hadith to draw out a framework of architectural design with a focus on the derivation of the canon across political, religious and environmental issues. This method of interpretation would highlight the difference of opinions by scholars on accounts of the Hadith, opening up the discourse of Islamic architecture. His application of this method can be seen within the course syllabus as a way to draw out critical dialogues in classrooms. However, it is essential to note that appropriating knowledge without a strong foundation could lead to theoretically imprecise assumptions, thus marginalising alternative voices.

Architectural literature is still a robust approach to support students' learning of the discipline (Montgomery 2020). Strategies for building student reading skills in architectural education increases students' literacy in architectural education. Montgomery's paper looks at the text as study tools to support student's learning. A new approach to contents within the syllabus can have a direct impact on the way the discourse is understood and made relevant to contemporary issues.

The syllabus can no longer paint a subject with a single brush, but instructors might have a difficult time to make decisions about which definitions to include or discard with the syllabus. Designing the course syllabus through selective contents can have a direct impact on the way the discourse is understood and made relevant to contemporary issues. With guidance, students can become critical thinkers, allowing them the position to control their reading and understanding of historical narratives as well as recognise forms of indoctrination.

John Allen (1984) claims that success in teaching requires a process of content selection that occurs prior to determining the objectives of the lecture. The theory is the foundation of the architectural discipline but remains a peripheral course in many undergraduate design programs (Smith 2013). Smith focuses on the development of a pedagogical alternative to traditional

architectural theory courses, using the concept of dialectics to structure the reading and writing assignments.

Linda Groat and Sherry Ahrentzen's (1996) article proposed for the architecture field to engage diversity in terms of demographic composition. The article's investigation of content and form of architectural education focuses on three aspects of "hidden curriculum": studio pedagogy; social dynamics and ideals and expectations, as a measure of inclusivity. The article's focus on women and minorities can be included in the discourse of religion, social class as well as current events. A selective content syllabus that includes the social, political, cultural, economic, and ethnic and gender history and structure can stimulate students to be actively engaged with the field whilst avoiding the prescription to one definition of Islamic architecture.

The approach that would complement Islamic architecture is to use the course syllabus with themes that align with issues found within the subject of Islamic architecture. The bottom line of an effective syllabus is one that is grounded on the philosophy of life-long learning.

Critical Dialogue

Amir Ameri (2008) proposes a shift of emphasis in architectural pedagogy towards a complex dialogue between culture and architecture to address the rapid change of cultural diversity. The article addresses culture as a distinct set of rituals and experience avoiding sweeping diversity under the same umbrella of religion or region. Selective contents within the syllabus that emphasise issues or themes raised by the different definitions of Islamic architecture can facilitate a better understanding of students.

Critical dialogue creates space for multiple perspectives to be creatively reassembled through critical lenses, paving a path for social awareness and change (Giroux 2010; Griffin, Brown and Warren 2012). Dialogues also illuminate the consequences of alternative interpretations (Siegel 2018). Curated contents are not necessarily limited to architectural production but expand into other disciplines to reinforce and advance critical thinking. The aim for dialogue and selected contents is not to take history as a cacophony of contending critical viewpoints, but to mutually come to terms with the different definitions. There is no one truth to be found at the end of a dialogue; rather, it is a more significant outcome than that which are growth and expansion of self-understanding (Wegerif 2017).

CONCLUSION

Islamic architecture is a complex subject to study due to the many definitions and meanings it accommodates. Current methods of teaching the canon through a survey are not adequate to take into account the multiple narratives, diverse regions and culture of the architecture. The paper argues that the teaching strategy of history of architecture, especially of Islamic architecture, needs to change to allow students to navigate through the complexities of the canon. The findings presented suggests that:

1. Pedagogy of architectural history must centre on critical inquiry to stimulate a democratic learning environment and avoid indoctrination.
2. Course syllabus can be used as a teaching tool that provides an explicit mapping for students to navigate the complexities of Islamic architecture.

3. An effective course syllabus is only as good as its contents. Designing the course syllabus contents is the ideal teaching strategy that can directly impact how students in higher education institutions understand discourses.

4. Selective contents for the Islamic architecture course syllabus can stimulate active engagement among students, in the form of dialogue, towards in-depth learning of the field.

A change to the pedagogical strategy in teaching Islamic architecture is necessary because a comprehensive course content allows students to evaluate the multi narratives of the canon, find the link between the past to contemporary issues and challenge inherent systems of indoctrination. New approach to archival content can have encouraging effects on how the discourse is understood and made relevant to contemporary issues. Contents of diverse context and issues facilitate critical learning, enabling students to construct an encompassing understanding of Islamic architecture.

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