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# AL-SHAJARAH

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# THE PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF THE INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AMONGST THE ACADEMICS OF INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA (IIUM)<sup>1</sup>

Suhailah Hussien Arifin Mamat Ssekamanye Siraje Abdallah

#### Abstract

International Islamic University of Malaysia's (IIUM) vision and mission is its commitment to the integration of values in the modern fields of knowledge. Today, Islamization and integration have emerged as niche areas of the IIUM. There are various phases and orientations of the implementation of Islamization of knowledge (IOK) at the IIUM. The study is important as it helps IIUM to identify and monitor the areas of specialization that need to be improved with regards to the Islamic values integration. Thus, the aim of the paper is to investigate the perceptions and practices of IIUM academics in their efforts to do IOK. The study is exploratory in nature and involves focus group discussion (FGD) with six kullivvahs namely Kullivvah of Engineering, ICT, Laws (AIKOL), Economics (ENM), IRKHS, and Science. Each FGD lasted between one to two hours, and involved about five to six lecturers from each Kulliyyah. Three broad themes were generated from the data, which are perceptions, practices and challenges of IOK. The general findings of the study reveal that IIUM academics perceive and practice IOK differently according to their background and various specializations. IIUM academics generally perceive IOK as an important endeavor though challenging, yet differ in their views of its success. Meanwhile, the practices of IOK involve content, teaching and learning, materials, research and publication, assessment, and students. IIUM academics face many challenges in implementing

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Article received: August 2018; Article submitted: November 2018; Article accepted: December 2018

IOK such as lack of resources, lack of academic involvement in IOK activities, and lack of Islamic knowledge to integrate technical, scientific and conventional knowledge. The study suggests that with proper and continuous support from the University, IOK could be implemented more effectively.

Keywords: Islamization, Integration, Curriculum

#### Introduction

The Western colonization of many Muslim countries has resulted in the secularization of the Islamic education system in these Muslim countries. To date, these Muslim countries have inherited a system of education that is alien to their belief, principles, values, culture and tradition. The educational institutions in these countries have become dualistic in nature, where the traditional Islamic education is divorced from secular sciences, and the modern secular education is equally divorced from the Islamic principles and values. As a result, the most fundamental problem facing the *Ummah* today is the problem of "confusion and error of knowledge". Being estranged from the intellectual and cultural legacy of Islam, today's Muslims lack the capability to create and innovate solutions to contemporary human problems in a way that is compatible with the Islamic worldview. Muslims have ended up as passive consumers, rather than critical appraisers of ideas coming from the dominant Western civilization and becoming innovative creators and producers of Islamic knowledge. Nonetheless, Muslims have realized that Western knowledge is not neutral as it is infused with secular ideas of "religious and cultural presuppositions, reflecting the consciousness and experience of Western individuals". This realization has led to the idea of Islamization, activated in the Muslim conference in Makkah.

The First World Conference on Muslim Education held in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization. (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Makkah in 1977 was a significant event as it gathered more than three hundred Muslim scholars from all over the world to discuss issues concerning the Muslim *Umma*h. It was in this event that the issue of secularization of the Islamic education system was highlighted and discussed. Prominent Muslim scholars like al-Faruqi and al-Attas participated in the discussion and conceptualized the idea of Islamization, a term coined by al-Faruqi, or also known as de-westernization, which was propounded by al-Attas. Despite of the different terms used, the aims and objectives of these concepts are similar, particularly, as a solution to resolve the onslaught of secularization on Muslim institutions in general, and the Islamic education system in particular. The idea of Islamization of knowledge (IOK) has grown and become a project of several Muslim institutions of education.

The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is one of the institutions that is committed to the idea of IOK to the extent that it has been made one of IIUM's important vision and mission. According to Ssekamanya, Suhailah, and Nik, IIUM is now the 'world leader in Islamization and integration of knowledge since IOK is the niche of IIUM that distinguishes it from other universities', whether locally or internationally. They further assert that IIUM has been successful in IOK in a number of areas, such as the 'vision and of IIUM, producing highly qualified individual mission academicians', developing 'Islamized curriculum' in different programmes and specializations, alumni who remain committed to the agenda of IOK, and research and publications in areas like 'Islamic economics, finance, banking, and insurance, Another success of IIUM is its 'scholars who have been recognized worldwide and are sought as experts and consultants in areas where they have made breakthrough innovations such as in the legal field, especially in the areas of Shari'ah, family, criminal and commercial laws'. Nevertheless, in spite of these successes there were several weaknesses in the implementation of IOK in IIUM. These are related

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ssekamanya Siraje Abdallah, Suhailah Hussien and Nik Ahmad Hisham, "The Experience of Islamization of Knowledge at the International Islamic University Malaysia: Successes and Challenges." In *New Intellectual Horizon in Education*. Ed. Yedullah Kazmi. (IIUM Press: Selangor, 2011).

to 'the preparedness, understanding, and commitment of the general IIUM academic staff towards IOK, students who 'lack Islamic character and knowledge', and 'lack of IOK textbooks' in different disciplines of study.<sup>5</sup>

Considering the successes and weaknesses of IIUM in fulfilling its mission in IOK, a research study was conducted to investigate the perceptions and practices of IIUM academics (in different kulliyahs) in their efforts to implement IOK and to explore the challenges that they face in their practices to do so.

#### Literature Review

#### Islamization of Knowledge:

The idea of the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) was disseminated and formalized in the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah, 1977. In consequence of this conference, the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) was established. The purpose of IIIT is to revive and reform Islamic thought and its methodology of *ijtihad* so that Muslims would be able to deal with present challenges, and contribute to the development of Islamic scholarship in contemporary social sciences. This is the primary aim of the 'Islamization of Knowledge' project.

The IIIT was responsible for a series of international conferences on IOK that discussed strategies to resolve the crisis and provided a work plan for Islamizing knowledge. The IIIT also proposes that the educational system for Muslims needs to be revamped and reformed by uniting and integrating the Islamic and secular education systems. In order to achieve this, the IIIT draws a plan of its aims for the IOK as follows:

- i. To create awareness in the *Ummah* of the crisis of ideas. This involves enlightening the *Ummah* about the place and methodology of the crisis of Islamic thought in the perspective of its cultural and civilizational existence.
- ii. To deepen understanding of the nature of the crisis of ideas in contemporary Islamic thought, its causes, and its solutions.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- iii. To define the critical relationship between the failure of Islamic thought and its methodology; the current absence of the *Ummah* as a civilization; and its failure to succeed as a free, progressive, and prosperous nation.
- iv. To work toward reviving the ideologies of the *Ummah*, reinvigorating and gradually redeveloping its methodology, and elucidating its viewpoints and its intimate relationship with original Islamic goals.
- v. To work for adopting and incorporating comprehensive Islamic methodology in fields of social sciences and the humanities, as well as to foster and fund scientific studies in actual individual and social life conditions.
- vi. To implement the requisite steps to allow the developing contemporary Islamic culture and methodology to avail themselves of the fountains of Islamic principles and legacy, as well as modern sciences and knowledge, by making them accessible and digestible to Muslim students.
- vii. To provide help in researching, studying, and working on the methodology and its presentation, with a view toward elucidating Islamic concepts and intellectual outlook and toward laying the foundation for the evolution of Islamic social sciences and humanities.
- viii. To prepare the requisite intellectual cadres to broaden the field of Islamization of knowledge through providing stipends for studies, providing academic supervision, and establishing academic programs of Islamic studies in all fields of contemporary social sciences and humanities.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the plan drawn by the IIIT, IOK is viewed as holding an important role in assisting Muslim to identify and recognize the crisis of ideas (place) in the Muslim minds and education, and the ways or causes (methodology) of the crisis, and in developing an Islamic methodology that can help to resolve the crisis. It is important to note that the 'methodology' mentioned by IIIT is a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> International Institute of Islamic Thought, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan.* (Second Edition, Revised and Expanded) Herndon, (VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1989).

conceptual idea of methodology that may be operationalized by Muslim according to their understanding and endeavor in IOK. A good case in point is IIUM and its IOK mission.

IIUM as one of the pioneer universities that declare its commitment to the process of Islamization of knowledge (IOK) holds it as a central element in its philosophy. In line with this philosophy, IIUM's vision is stated as follows:

- i. Revitalizes the intellectual dynamism of Islam and the Muslim Ummah;
- ii. Integrates Islamic revealed knowledge and values in all academic disciplines and educational activities;
- Seeks to restore a leading and progressive role of the Muslim Ummah in all branches of knowledge for the benefit of all mankind; thereby,
- iv. Contributing to the improvement and upgrading of the qualities of human life and civilization

# Islamization of Curriculum

The work of Islamization of knowledge in an educational institution should begin with the Islamization of the curriculum because the curriculum is the most important aspect in education and the educational system. The curriculum guides an educational system toward achieving its educational goal. Taba<sup>7</sup> defines curriculum as "a plan for learning". It consists of four components, which are, aims, subject matter (content), methods, and evaluation. In principle, when designing and developing a curriculum, one needs to consider the social, economic, political, cultural, spiritual, and moral context of the society. So in Islamizing the curriculum, Islam should be the point of reference. Islam is not a mere religion, but a way or system of life. Thus, Muslim countries must redesign and restructure their education system, particularly the curriculum, by integrating the worldly needs with the Hereafter. Saqeb<sup>8</sup> stresses that to achieve this aim, the curriculum has to be designed in an integrated manner, and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Hilda Taba, *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1962).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> G. N. Saqeb, "Islamic Concerns in Comparative Education. UK, Cambridge," *Muslim Education Quarterly*. Vol. 11. No. 4, 1994, 40-54.

to consider this balance in the development of the holistic Muslim personality. Muslim scholars have agreed that an Islamic curriculum does not only teach Islamic subjects, but allows Muslim learners to internalize the Islamic knowledge, skills and values

In general, there are three approaches of Islamizing the curriculum: through comparison, integration and inculcation of values. The comparative approach identifies courses in the same programme that focuses on Western and Islamic knowledge. The integrative approach teaches the Islamic and Western perspectives in the same course. Meanwhile the approach of inculcation of values or ethics deals with technical or professional courses that do not have 'philosophical presuppositions' like mathematics. In such courses, the focus would be on the development of students' ethical and moral character, 9 the use of the technical knowledge and skills for the betterment of humankind, and ultimately draw Muslim closer to the Creator

# Methodology of Study and Participants

The study is exploratory in nature and involve focus-group discussions from different kulliyyahs (faculties). The interviews seek to understand the academics perceptions of IOK and how they integrate Islamic values in the curriculum. The focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in six (6) kulliyyahs; namely, Kulliyyah of Engineering (KOE), Kulliyyah of Information and Communication Technology (KICT), Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyyah of Laws (AIKOL), Kulliyah of Economics and Management (KENM), Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS) and Kulliyyah of Science (KOS). Each FGD lasted between an hour to an hour and a half, and involved about five to six lecturers.

# Development of Interview Protocol.

The interview questions in the protocol centered around participants' perceptions of IOK, and the components of the curriculum, such as, AGO (aims, goals, objective), content & learning experiences,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ssekamanya Siraje Abdallah, "The experience of Islamization...

teaching and learning strategies, materials and activities, evaluation techniques and the dimensions of curriculum design (scope, sequence, continuity, integration and balance) that are involved in IOK. The FGDs were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis guided by the objectives of the study.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Based on the analysis, three broad themes were generated, which are, perceptions, practices and challenges of IOK. The first theme that is perceptions of academics toward IOK, reveals that they agreed that IOK is important, especially to the students, but they also felt that it is a long, gradual, and continuous process. Their views on the success of IOK differed in terms of what the kulliyyahs have achieved and need to achieve, such as the graduates that have been produced or the types of graduates that need to be produced.

The second theme, practices of IOK, is further divided into six subthemes, content, materials, assessment, research, publication, and students. IIUM academics shared their practices, which have contributed to the success of IOK as they perceived it. The final theme comes in the form of the challenges that academics faced when doing IOK.

# Perceptions of IOK.

The general view held by all participants is that IOK is a very important mission of IIUM. IOK is viewed as important (DU542), particularly for the benefit of the students, when the knowledge that is being taught involves western perspectives. For instance, a lecturer teaching psychology explained that IOK is important and her Department integrated IOK in all courses as this is visible in the course outlines (DU490). She explained that, 'students enjoyed and are interested in learning about the Islamic perspective of psychology. It becomes an added knowledge that they will get only from IIUM, and not from other local universities' (DU547). A lecturer from the Department of General Studies asserted that IOK is important for the students. She said, students are 'in need of it' (DU543) and for every 'theoretical concept that students learn, they need to relate it to themselves as Muslims' (DU556).

The academics' perceptions toward the success of IOK vary. Some academics viewed that IOK has been successful to some extent. For example, a lecturer from ICT opined that 'the Kulliyyah has been successful in carrying out its plan of IOK' (DU250), which includes organizing conferences to disseminate the idea of IOK in ICT, and organizing workshops as a platform to guide the new lecturers in integrating the Islamic values to very technical courses. In agreement to these points, a lecturer from the Kulliyyah of Engineering explained,

'I think what I can say concerning the success of Islamization is that, in a place such as Engineering, there is no Islamic courses but Islamic information is spread through the courses that they have in the program. This is the Islamization result, this is the way I will say that they are successful.' (DU 415)

Many academics felt that IOK is a gradual and long process if IIUM wants to achieve its aim in producing individuals who are well versed in the western and Islamic legacies. A few lecturers from KIRKHS think that it will take about ten to fifteen years for IIUM to achieve its IOK mission (DU757, DU772, DU780). An Engineering lecturer likens IOK to 'the Prophet SAW da'wah in Makkah, which took him more than ten years to change his people' (DU409). A lecturer from the Kulliyyah of Science also mentioned that,

"this mission might take hundreds of years. I am not worried about that 27 or 37 or even 50 years. This might take time...Let us make our objective for the coming 20 years. In 20 years, IIUM has to produce a lecturer who is good in sciences and at the same time good in Islamic Studies." (DU310)

However, few lecturers claimed that such individuals have been produced at IIUM. For instance, a lecturer from the Department of General Studies felt that IIUM has done well in producing individuals who understand and are committed to the idea of IOK.

She mentioned herself as an illustration to support her view, 'Ok, I am a product of this University. Of course, the University has done a good job....' (DU751). To further explicate her view, the explanation of how she does IOK will be presented in the discussion on practices of IOK.

On this matter too, a lecturer opined that in order for IIUM to achieve its mission, there is a need for kulliyyah other than KIRKHS to strategize on how to produce students who would be good in secular and Islamic sciences. He said,

"I think IRK relatively succeeded to produce students who are good in Human Sciences and Islamic Studies. So it is time for other kulliyyah, the science based kulliyyah, to produce ....students who are good in sciences and Islamic studies...Let us strategize in UIA..It is time to plan now, from now on to produce someone who is good in science and Islamic studies as well"

Some lecturers from certain kulliyyah explained that they use a different term than Islamization or integration because of the nature of their area. A case in point is a lecturer from Kulliyyah of Laws (AIKOL) who said, '...in the university level they use Islamization....harmonization is only confined to our kulliyyah..' (DU72). While another AIKOL lecturer added, 'It is actually developing a methodology on how to make law and harmonize between civil law and shari'ah...' (DU73). They explained that it is impossible to Islamize civil law, but they can make the effort to 'harmonize' between civil law and shari'ah law, hence their choice of the term 'harmonization'.

Some lecturers also explained that in reality, they faced difficulty to do IOK because of the nature of the course, which is technical, and due to lack of knowledge in Islamic legacy. For instance, a lecturer teaching a technical course explained that he emphasized on the value ethics in Islam as his strategy to do IOK (DU586).

# Practices of IOK.

Interviewed IIUM academics shared their practices on IOK and the analysis shows that there are six types of practices (sub themes), namely content, materials, assessment, research, publication, and students. All six types of practices are Islamization of the content based on the programmes offered by the University. For programmes that are non technical, integration of Islamic and western perspectives is done throughout the courses. Specifically, for non technical programmes and courses, Islamization is done by providing 'Islamic values or ethical perspective' (DU586), highlighting the 'Islamic and Muslim scholars contribution to the course' (DU157), or 'examples from Islamic perspective' (DU154). For technical programmes, specific courses on Islamic perspective of the technical programmes are also offered as an effort to Islamize the curriculum.

Lecturers identify and select materials that can help them to do Islamization in each course (DU633). Some kulliyyahs have good practices that may be emulated such as housing a collection on Islamization in the resource centre. A lecturer explained,

"...some lecturers have the book and search for the article in the resource centre, while some inherit from previous lecturer that had worked on it earlier...we don't have difficulty in getting books on Islamic topic but most of the articles, lecturers are able to search from the web, at the library. Then the coordinator of research centre has a collection list on Islamization...any lecturer that found any article on Islamization...he or she must submit to the resource centre...that means anybody can go there and search for books." (DU288)

For lecturers who have difficulty in getting references for the course, they identify WHAT? and ask for assistance from the reference person that could help them with the IOK (DU137, DU138, DU629).

For student assessment, many lecturers admitted that they integrate Islamic perspective in the assessment, whether examination or course work, such as assignment, presentation, and project. For instance, a lecturer explained, '...so we look at the exam questions,

sometimes on the other hand, something might not come out in the examination, but it will be handled with assignment, either both will be right' (DU18).

There have been efforts to do research work in the area of Islamization. For instance, a research cluster was set up based on Islamic creed with the hope of propelling research in IOK (DU187). Lecturers are also publicizing their IOK work through their publications (DU388, DU421). Another way of doing IOK is through the students. As one of the lecturers mentioned,

'I think because the student they don't really understand, 'why we need to Islamize', they don't really understand the concept of secularism. I said 'go back to Islamic worldview'. They haven't got it yet. After facing problem with their own life, then he realized 'oh, I need to understand this!' (DU571)

In this sense, Islamization in the courses helps students to have a better understanding of Islam, and a better understanding of western and Islamic perspectives of knowledge. A good illustration to show how Islamization has helped students was highlighted by a lecturer. He said, 'I remembered one of the students comes to me and told me, 'Ustaz, before I attend your classes, I was not very much convinced with the tudung, hijab. After finishing your class, now I have very much confidence that hijab is part of mine' (DU359). Indeed, Islamization work in the courses and classes would eventually benefit students. When this happens, a lecturer could say that IOK has been successful.

# Challenges of IOK

In understanding the academics perceptions and practices of IOK, the third theme, that is, the challenges that academics faced in IOK emerged. The challenge that some lecturers felt was that IOK is difficult to be done in technical courses, and even when they do it, they view it as superficial and not in depth. One lecturer admitted, 'technical topic is difficult to do IOK' (DU580). Another said, '...because I think the material is very hard for me to

understand....With respect to how much I have done, very superficial. I thought it's very minimal...' (DU747).

The difficulty to do IOK amongst the academics could also be due to academics' lack of knowledge in Islamic studies or Arabic. A lecturer explained,

"this is quite challenging, much have we tried through the effort suggested by Islamization and integration process still a lot of things still has to be done because most of us are western in our educational background and some of us have little or no knowledge of Islam and Arabic. With all these challenges we are trying to contribute to material input. However, more challenges we have in developing people and developing materials because there is no time, few are actually educated in Islamic science, but majority of us are educated in western aspect." (DU43)

Academics with the lack of knowledge in Islamic studies or science would also lead to the lack of materials for Islamizing the courses since not many academics are able to publish their IOK work. DU43 also mentioned about academics' lack of time, which may be due to many reasons, such as holding an administrative post, academic workload, supervision workload, and being involved in research, publication and consultancy. All these are challenges that academics have to face in their efforts of doing IOK. As a result, academics involvement in IOK activities is minimal, for example organizing workshop on IOK. This could be resolved if IIUM management acknowledges IOK work and considers it as a requirement for promotion.

#### Conclusion

It is clear that IIUM remains committed to IOK and there has been continuous efforts of IOK amongst its academics. However, limited studies have been done to evaluate the work of IOK at IIUM. Hence, the study is timely as it tries to understand how IIUM academics view and do IOK. Findings of the study discussed the different

perceptions that academics hold towards IOK and their practices. The academics' perceptions vary around the extent of IOK success. Meanwhile, the practices primarily concern the components of curriculum, in particular the content, materials, assessment, research, publication, and students. Several challenges have also been identified, rising from the academics' perceptions and practices of IOK. The challenges are inter-related and seem to be spiraling from the unsuccessful practices of IOK. However, these challenges can be resolved with the support from IIUM management in creating a conducive environment and establishing efficient networking between its academics and with other institutions of education. Most importantly, IIUM should also spearhead the promotion of IOK globally, such as setting up a platform for Islamic works to be shared and published online. Such efforts would encourage IIUM academics to engage in IOK fervently and it would also reflect IIUM's commitment to its vision and mission too.

# AL-SHAJARAH

# Special Issue

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