

## **ISLAMIC SCIENCE APPROACH IN HIGHER EDUCATION : THE AGENDA ON THE INTEGRATION OF NAQLI AND AQLI KNOWLEDGE IN USIM**

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**E**ducation has historically been the cornerstone of Islamic civilisation as Islam encourages its followers to pursue knowledge. One of the primary responsibilities of every Muslim towards God is to seek knowledge and is obligatory in Islam for every Muslim, man and woman. Hence, Muslims, regardless of age, race or gender are obligated to pursue knowledge. The main sources of knowledge in Islam, the Quran and the Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad's traditions), encourage Muslims to seek knowledge and be scholars, since this is the best way for people to know Allah (God), to appreciate His wondrous creations and be thankful for them. This is in line with the saying of the Prophet Mohammad (Pbuh) “Seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim man and woman”. Islam gives preference to a knowledgeable person over an ignorant one. Allah S.W.T says: ‘Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?’ (Quran 39:9).

History proves that Islamic civilisation has produced numerous Islamic scholars who have shaped and defined the knowledge that we acquire today. Names such as Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, al-Farabi and al-Ghazali were not only known for their scholarly ideas and thoughts, but also as an icon of exemplary Muslims. The wealth of new ideas generated by these great Muslim philosophers enriched civilization, particularly Western civilisation, and paved the way for the European Renaissance (Bassiouni, 2015).

Muslims have always been eager to seek knowledge, both religious and secular. Within a few years of Prophet Muhammad's mission, a great civilization sprang up and flourished. The result is shown in the spread of Islamic universities, such as Al-Zaytunah in Tunis and Al-Azhar in Cairo. They are among the oldest existing

universities in the world, going back more than 1,000 years. Indeed, they were the models for the first European universities, such as Bologna, Heidelberg and the Sorbonne. Even the familiar academic cap and gown originated at Al-Azhar University. However, since the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the lack of Islamic scholars has been increasingly felt. Therefore, it is incumbent upon today's Muslims to revive the glory of Islamic civilisation, which is based on the Qur'an and the Hadith.

This is in contrast from merely becoming an institution that churns out students or so called "human capital" that is only committed towards materialistic or self-centred goals, or what Harry Lewis, a professor of computer science at Harvard College for 32 years, described as "Excellence Without a Soul". In his book of the same title, Lewis (2006) laments the historic decay of moral education in Harvard and American education as a whole. He argues that the pursuit of excellence means the students' quest to be the best forces them into competition and isolation. The requirement by today's parents for their children to be flawless and get the desired credentials has resulted in students that are not gaining the sense of responsibility they need as young adults. In an interview, Lewis (2007) emphasised the need for universities to install values by retaining religious affiliations so that higher institutions would still hang on to their sense of moral mission in spite of the changes happening to the world.

The implication of American universities having lost the sense of their educational mission to transform graduates into responsible adults, as argued by Lewis, can be seen from several high profile financial crises in the past decades, particularly the global economic meltdown of 2008. Nicholas Ryder (2014), in his book *The Financial Crisis and White Collar Crime The Perfect Storm?*, argues that white-collar crime was a significant factor that contributed to the financial crisis, and which included several highly immoral financial activities, such as sub-prime mortgages and mortgage fraud, predatory lending, Ponzi frauds and market manipulation. This "crime" was arguably committed and supported by the presumably "university graduates" across the financial industries. In one of the US presidential debates of 2012, President Obama (2012) responded to the global economic crises by saying that:

The reason we have been in such a[n] enormous economic crisis was prompted by reckless behavior across the board. Now, it wasn't just on Wall Street. You had loan officers [were—] that were giving loans and mortgages that really shouldn't have been given, because the folks didn't qualify. You had people who were borrowing money to buy a house that they couldn't afford. You had credit agencies that were stamping these as A1 great investments when they weren't. But you also had banks making money hand over fist, churning out products that the bankers themselves didn't even understand, in order to make big profits, but knowing that it made the entire system vulnerable.

It is chilling to know that these reckless behaviors, as described by Obama, were initiated by highly educated adults who held a high and exclusive position in the industries. Rather than making a decision that would positively impact to the society, they seemed to have obviously carried out activities that fuelled a global economic crisis and caused suffering to millions of people across the world.

The reason for the lack of character and morality in the product created by higher learning institution nowadays could be blamed on the very idea that underpins the creation of higher institutions, introduced by the Western world and brought over into the third world countries, including Malaysia, namely, the idea of secularism. Secularism is represented by the modern, rational humanistic interpretation of the academic disciplines. This also means religion was seen as a thing of the past and “at best, a declining historical force, destined to give way to the twin forces of economic modernization and nation-state formation” (Hefner, 1997: 18). Many modernisation theorists were especially dismissive of the relationship between religion and modern societies, which means that Islam is seen as defenceless (Steele, 2011).

Hameed Mowlana (2003), however, has argued that, although there is a clear separation between religion and secular life in the West, with ethical conduct left to the decision of the individual, in Islam, this separation did not materialise or the process was never completed (Mowlana, 2003: 309). The Islamic revivalism of the late 20th century has prompted many Muslim scholars to argue for stronger integration between religion and modern life .

In line with the importance of knowledge in the Islamic sphere, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), through its philosophy of integration of the Naqli (revealed)

and Aqli (rational) knowledge is paving the way to bring back soul into education. As an emerging Islamic university, which is fully owned and funded by the Malaysian Government, USIM aims to spearhead knowledge and be the global reference centre for the integration of Naqli and Aqli knowledge. USIM adopts a balanced approach between the physical and spiritual or ethical aspects, not only in the academic programmes offered, but is also widely practised throughout the university, including administration and management levels. Against this backdrop, USIM embraces a holistic approach towards the delivery of knowledge, which unites revelational sciences (*Naqli* knowledge) and the rational sciences (*Aqli* knowledge). USIM thus offers a unique model to Islamic Higher Education, setting it apart from other Islamic universities worldwide. Despite the niched philosophy of USIM, the university is open to people of all faiths and none. The integration of religious sciences, together with the social and physical sciences, in all its programmes, provides a comprehensive understanding of current global problems and offers a fresh alternative in solving them.

USIM has nine faculties in Quranic and Sunnah Studies, Economics and Muamalat, Leadership and Management, Dentistry, Medicine and Health Sciences, Major Language Studies, Science and Technology, Syariah and Law and Engineering and Built Environment. These faculties offer more than 60 academic programmes, from foundation to postgraduate levels, which are delivered in English and Arabic. In addition, all professional programmes offered are certified by their respective professional bodies, both at national and international levels. The most sought-after programmes at the undergraduate level include Food Biotechnology, Industrial Chemical Technology, Actuarial Science and Risk Management, Financial Mathematics, Islamic Studies, Arabic Language Studies, Islamic Banking and Finance, Information Security Assurance, Medicine, Dentistry, Counselling, Communications, Islamic Education, Law and Syariah. Some of these programmes are also offered at Masters and Doctoral levels by research and coursework, as well as mixed or blended modes. The unique postgraduate programmes at USIM include drug and substance abuse, computer science, halal food technology, Islamic economics and *Muamalat* administration and Islamic Science.

USIM hopes to produce graduates that are not only able to function effectively as professionals in their respective disciplines, but, at the same time, are ready to contribute and make a difference to society. The basic principle is that integrating religious sciences with social and physical sciences will not only provide a more comprehensive understanding of current global challenges, but also offer a fresh alternative in solving them. USIM believes that Islamic values are universal, and history has proven that these values can be shared by people of all faiths; living together harmoniously with mutual respect and tolerance. It is also an effort towards reviving the scientific and technological feats of Muslim scholars in the past and moving it forward.

Another example that showed the importance of Integration of Naqli and Aqli is the establishment of PERMATA Insan where it is a special programme organised at the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). It aims to produce future scholars of Islam based on the Al-Quran and al-Sunnah of the early age. Permata Insan embraces the knowledge-oriented philosophy of existence, which is based on the original sources of Islam, namely the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Permata Insan is part of the PERMATA initiative originated from an idea by Datin Paduka Seri Rosmah Mansor, the wife of the Malaysian Prime Minister. It started with her concern with the problems and social ills afflicting youth today and she expressed the need for an early intervention. Permata Insan, which was officially launched on 11 December, 2010, is one of the six PERMATA purpose-driven modules with the general objective of providing a platform to unleash potential young talents in order to cultivate a leading generation of which Malaysia can be proud. Permata Insan, therefore, is seen as the formative tier in ensuring a seamless education process based on the Al-Quran and as-Sunnah. It is a school-on-campus project for gifted Muslim children in an effort to provide a seamless pathway from primary to tertiary education based on this unique approach to education. Through the delivery of USIM's original curriculum, based on Islamic science that integrates the knowledge of *Naqli* and *Aqli*, young Muslim geniuses hope to be nurtured to become tomorrow's Muslim leaders, scientists and professionals and potential Nobel Laureates.

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