

Research Note

Integration of knowledge (IOK) and textbook writing for Islamic universities

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Introduction

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with aspects of knowledge such as its nature, origin, sources, scope, methods, and limits. Each society and civilization has its own epistemology that underlies and defines its education system.

Islamic epistemology reflects the Islamic world-view and is characterized by being based on *tawhidi* universalism, two complementary and inter-dependent sources that are *ilm al wahy* (knowledge from revelation) and *ilm al kaun* (empirical knowledge), comprehensiveness, and acceptance that human knowledge has limits.

Epistemology, knowledge and education

Epistemological changes lead to changes in knowledge and education and eventually lead to social change. The start of the Islamic civilization in Makkah 15 centuries ago was an epistemological and educational revolution that within a couple of centuries Islam became a civilization that expanded to cover three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe) and became a center of learning in all branches of knowledge.

The European renaissance starting in the 12th century was triggered by contact with the advanced knowledge of Muslims in the Near East during the Crusade Wars. The Muslim empirical methodology that emanated from the Qur'an triggered an epistemological revolution in Europe that started a renaissance in the sciences and arts and was followed successively by religious reformation, enlightenment, the scientific revolution, the agricultural revolution,

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and the industrial revolution. Europe became powerful and went on to colonize most of the inhabited world.

European colonial rule in East Africa starting with the ineffective Portuguese invasions of the 15th century and completed with the German and British colonial rule of the 19th century sought to replace the traditional Islamic education based on the madrasat with the new European education system based on a European secular epistemology. The replacement was however not fully complete as the process resulted in developing a dual educational system: the traditional Muslim and the imported European systems. This created a crisis of duality or dichotomy in knowledge and thought. The two systems reflect different and often conflicting world views and cause intellectual confusion to arise. This duality is associated with many social ramifications.

The crisis of duality in Muslim education was identified as a major problem at the First World Conference on Muslim Education held at Makkah in 1979. The recommendation to integrate knowledge and education was implemented by the establishment of Islamic universities in Malaysia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in the 1980s. These were followed by others in Uganda, Niger, Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria etc. The phenomenon of Islamic universities in Indonesia pre-dated the Makkah conference by several decades with more than 400 such universities operating in various parts of the Republic of Indonesia. Since 1990s many private Islamic universities were set up in Muslim countries and also in Europe and America.

Challenges facing Muslim universities

I think that Islamic universities have to answer to five challenges in order to justify their existence as distinct from a conventional university. These challenges are- student motivation, student personal development, integration of knowledge based on Islamic epistemology, and delivering a quality curriculum. These challenges require some explanation.

Students need motivation based on Islamic tenets to work hard and achieve excellence. This is even more important in situations in which the Muslim community feels marginalized and its members give up hope. Only an Islamic institution is able to deliver the necessary motivation to transform despair into hope.

The holistic all-round approach of Islam to education requires that students be brought up to have the highest morals and standards of conduct. This can be achieved by creating an Islamic ambience on campus in addition to systematic extra-curricular personal development and *tarbiyah* programs.

Integration of knowledge (IOK) involves integrating Islamic moral and epistemological values in the various disciplines of knowledge that are taught. It

is an evolutionary and not revolutionary process that does not deny existing human knowledge but builds on it and gives added value. The challenge is to produce curricula that deliver integrated knowledge while at the same time fulfilling national accreditation requirements. Our workshop today is the right step in the right direction but the path ahead is still very long and will require a lot of hard work and sacrifice.

Quality is an indispensable component of IOK. All of us must remember that *ihsan* (quality or excellence) is the third and highest of the three fundamentals of Islam the other two being Islam and Iman. Islam is by pronouncing the two testaments of faith (*shahadatain*). Iman is at a higher level than Islam; every Mu'min is a Muslim but not every Muslim is a mu'min. Ihsan is doing our best in all endeavors towards perfection and Allah loves excellence in everything (*inna al llaah yuhibbu al ihsaan fi kulli shay*). A Muslim's attitude to quality is very different from that of a non-Muslim. To a Muslim quality is a religious duty being the highest fundamental in his or her religion and is not just a job requirement.

Quality starts with doing the simple routine things well. We need to respect and manage time well. We must assure personal and environmental hygiene. We must define objectives and be focussed in our work. We must plan our activities, follow up, and follow through. We need to evaluate our selves (*muhasabat al nafs*) for continuous improvement.

Quality in an Islamic perspective is a dynamic concept. We reject quality assurance which requires us to perform to a pre-set standard. We embrace continuous quality improvement raising the standard every time to higher level. According to a hadith reported in Sunan al Daylami, he who has the same level of performance on two consecutive days is a loser (*man istawa yawmaahu fahuwa maghboon*). Today must be better than yesterday. Tomorrow must be better than today.

Writing textbooks

Classroom teaching is one area where we can start to show quality results. The teachers must prepare well putting 5-6 hours into preparing for each hour of classroom teaching. This preparation should end up being written as a chapter of a potential textbook. The chapter can be revised several times based on experiences of actual classroom delivery. Several such chapters by one author or several authors can be put together in a text book that is publishable after revisions and peer review.

Writing our own textbooks has many advantages. It is an import substitution by saving money used to import expensive textbooks from developed

countries. The textbook will be relevant to our local conditions and our students. A textbook enables us to emphasize student-centered learning because the teacher need not teach everything; students can teach themselves directly from the textbook. Perhaps the most important advantage of writing our own books will be enabling us to achieve IOK.

Integration of our values into education can be achieved in two ways: (a) an Islamic epistemological introduction to the academic material that will enable the student examine the rest of the academic material in the book from a new perspective; (b) writing an Islamic input on each aspect of the material presented. We need to emphasise that we are not starting from zero and re-inventing the wheel. The book will contain conventional material as taught in any secular university and the Islamic input will be an added value.

The process of textbook preparation should start with general epistemology and curriculum reform seminars to raise awareness of the problem of duality and to propose epistemological and curricular reform as the needed solution. These should be followed by specific seminars with discipline experts to explore IOK issues in each discipline. Specific working groups should then be set up for each discipline of knowledge. These groups should produce integrated course outlines. Available reference and resource material for each course should be collected. Then a book should be designed and structured for each course (title, units, sections, and chapters). Each chapter should be structured as: learning objectives, detailed outlines (headings and sub-headings), key words, the main text, Islamic input, glossary, index, case studies, texts from Islamic sources (Qur'an, sunnat, other books), illustrations (pictures and drawings), chapter summary, review (questions, tests, exercises), and assignments.

An editorial board should be set up for each book consisting of a chief editor and one or two co-editors in addition to chapter authors, advisors, and consultants. The board will allocate 1-2 chapters to each writer. Regular workshops have to be held for chapter writers and editors to review the written material preferably once every 1-2 months. The chapters written must be tested by being used as classroom notes for university students and getting feedback and the editors will meet regularly to monitor progress. It is difficult to find specialized references on Islamic aspects of the various disciplines. We have therefore designated two libraries one in Virginia (English references) and one in Amman (Arabic references) to help writers get the references that they need.

External discipline experts should review the manuscripts. The final versions should undergo serious editing and proof reading. A special style sheet has been prepared to guide authors, reviewers, and editors. It is expected that the book will be between 150 to 300 pages and will be published as an e-book with a few printed copies for libraries. A royalty will be paid to the authors.