FUTURE ISLAMIC STUDIES CURRICULUM AND ITS INSTRUCTION: A GLIMPSE AT AL AMIN INTEGRATED ISLAMIC CURRICULUM (AAIIC)

Nor Zalmiah Jahidin¹ and Hamidah Mat²
¹Pusat Pendidikan Al-Amin, Gombak, Selangor
²Center for Foundation Studies, IIUM Malaysia
¹norzalmiahjahidin@gmail.com
²usumayyah.hm@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Islamic studies curriculum and its instruction that is appropriate for this contemporary age and century. The twenty-first century is marked by diversity in terms of generation gap and its characteristics, the readily exposure to the borderless cyberspace, the availability of information technology and communication facility and the fast encroaching westernization process, which require very serious and special attention. To provide students with the appropriate Islamic studies curriculum and instruction, and hence its internalization these aspects should be taken into consideration. Prior to that, an overview of the development of Islamic studies curriculum and its instruction is also discussed.

Keywords: islamic studies, curriculum, instruction, contemporary, future, worldview, civilization
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The present condition of the Muslim state and Ummah (community of Muslims) are way behind not only in science and technology, information and communication technology (ICT), and physical development but most importantly adoption of principles such as justice, freedom, wisdom and bring goodness to people are also lacking. These are the universal and yet inclusive principles, which form the very purpose of Shari’ah (Audah, 2008). To our surprise, Ireland followed closely by Denmark and Luxembourgh are at the forefront of the Islamicity index, ahead of most Muslim countries with respect to the proximity of principles to those in the Qur’an, which they applied on economic justice, legal governance and structures, human and political rights and international relation (IslamiCommunity, 2014). To rectify the situation, education being the main vehicle of civilization should play a pivotal role in revitalizing the Ummah. Muslim intellectuals and scholars should deliberate on issues of Islamic education ranging from simply establishing an Islamic school to the complexities of designing the right curriculum and its instruction.

2.0 BRIEF DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC STUDIES CURRICULUM AND ITS INSTRUCTION

The knowledge of Islam came down to the world through our Prophet Muhammad PBUH more than 1400 years ago. The first five verses of the Qur’an from Chapter al-’Alaq (the Clot), which says

1) Proclaim! (or Read) in the name of your Lord and Cherisher, who created
2) Created man, out of a leech-like clot.
3) Proclaim! And your Lord is Most Bountiful,
4) He Who taught (the use of) the Pen,
5) Taught man that which he knew not

had successfully transformed the worldview of the Arab society with respect to their theological, metaphysical and epistemological dimensions, that is, the verses had revolutionized the thinking of the pagan Arabs (Wan Daud, 1998). With the pronouncement of the word Iqra’ followed by twenty-three years of instructional Divine had developed the worldview which formed the basis of every action of the early Muslim community. This worldview changed and shaped the beliefs, personality, thoughts, ideas, and practices which successfully formed the community on a system that benefited all. A system that prioritized maqasid al-Shari’ah (objectives or benefits of Shari’ah) ensures the Muslim community to also protect the rights and responsibilities of non-Muslim communities as enshrined in Sahifah al Madinah (Constitution of Madinah). On this understanding, a kind of consensus and cooperation was formed among all members of society of diverse ethnic and religious groups, which led to foster a prosperous civilization.

In the early days of Islam, the Islamic knowledge was transmitted through a simple preaching by the Prophet PBUH himself to the companions RA be it in public or private. The house of al Arqam RA and the seat of ahl al-Suffah in the Masjid al-Nabawi besides halaqah (circles) were known to be early seats of learning in Islam for adults and kuttab or maktab held in the mosques were for childrens’ education. As time progressed, the Islamic knowledge for children was organised accordingly from the rudiments of writing, reading and memorization of the Qur’an, studying grammar and doing calligraphy, and arithmetic to a more advance and complex combination (Nor Zalmiah, 2009).
The early Middle Period, which began in 950 A.D marked the most creative period of the intellectual history in Islam. Aside from the classical religious sciences being solidified, the translation and transmission of foreign sciences had finalized their chapters, which was an important and significant chapter made possible and flourished by the early Umayyad conquests and especially ‘Abbasid’s ascension to power (Gutas, 1998). A more than century of translation and preparation allowed the Muslims to come into full possession of all the available knowledge from the Greek, Indian, Persian, and Greco-Roman (Amin, 1946). By the end of the 10th century, ‘almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the Near East were translated into Arabic’ (Gutas, 1998). The latter was preceded by ‘reliable manuscripts were sought, even as far as Byzantine empire, texts were carefully copied and collated, editions were produced, translations were made, and commentaries were written’ (Kraemer, 1992).

Noteworthy, in the 14th century knowledge of al-Qur’an remained central in the curriculum of the day despite the variation in time allocation that is subjected to each region namely the Maghrib, the Spain, the Africa and the East (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). The East as noted by Ibn Khaldun retained the tradition of scientific instruction whereby it trains students in the ability to express oneself clearly in discussing and disputing scientific problems, which could not be acquired through much memorization (1958). However, this was conducted poorly in the Maghrib and was disappearing among the inhabitants of Spain (Ibn Khaldun,1958). The education system which existed then was unique in the sense that, the system that produced great scholars in the past was not restricted to the madrasah as a formal institution, but rather to the whole learning culture of the community, of the varied learning institutions, the scholars as institutions in themselves, the institution of subhah or fellowship, the culture of rihla and the political leadership (Hannan, 2003).

Scientific process (Acikgenc, 2008), which constitutes stages commencing with a worldview to problems, disciplines, naming, and progress had produced a multitude of multidisciplinary scholars and disciplines to the extent of some being encyclopedic. It is from this fountain of intellectual and scientific traditions that the Europeans in the renaissance period quenched their thirst and inherited the Muslim legacy, which served as the basis of their intellectual awakening (Watt, 1972). The Muslim legacy is a rich intellectual heritage that springs from various sources which are the Qur’an and al-Hadith, and also from the civilizations of Greek, Persian, Greco-Roman, and Indian.

Somehow, the post colonization period saw the curriculum and its instruction assumed in a different form. What exists today somehow depicts the extend the Muslim education particularly Islamic studies curriculum and its instruction was effected by colonisation that slowly pave the way for westernization.

2.1. The Present State of Muslim Education and Islamic Studies Curriculum in Malaysia

Malaysia with more than 50% of her population being Muslims from inception has given attention to Muslim schools and its curriculum. Its development from private to formal education and its curriculum development are succinctly elaborated in ‘Educational Dualism’ (Rosnani, 1996). To date Malaysia has private, semi private, government and international Islamic schools implementing either private, Malaysian religious bodies, national and
international curriculum such as al Azhar. The latest addition to Islamic school is MARA’s Ulul Albab Science Junior Colleges (MRSM). Under this program, in addition to academic and religious studies elective they also offer a Tahfiz program, which they hope to produce professionals and huffaz. Undoubtedly, the administration and management of some of Islamic schools are becoming more efficient and professional but the instruction of curriculum is yet to be upgraded and more contemporary in line with the development of ICT. Despite the Malaysian government effort at introducing such as high order thinking skills (HOTS), child centered education as well as collaborative, exploratory and mastery learning in teaching and learning (TnL), not much progress is seen in TnL of Islamic studies curriculum and its instruction.

Sardar (1985) states that, ‘both the classical and the modern approaches to Islamic studies concentrate on Islam as a religion and culture. Be it memorizing the Qur’an or Hadith, mastering the opinions of the classical jurists or learning Islamic history, the emphasis is on rote learning and collecting facts’, thus amounting to students being vast storehouses of facts and opinions. Contemporary literature on Islamic education also highlights the traditional approach to curriculum and instruction of Islamic studies. Among the practices are the emphasis on memorization (hifz) than understanding (fiqh), memorization of facts than internalization, fiqh originally intended to mean religious insight and discernment becomes restricted to mean jurisprudence, and becoming huffaz (those who know the Qur’an by heart) assumes as the primary objective as compared to the early generation of huffaz’s engagement towards understanding al Din. Al Qardhawi (1996) cautions that the existing Islamic education system’s preference to hifz in a way could result in producing silent witnesses devoid of deep comprehension. What is worrying, the Muslim mind does not have enough courage to analyze its intellectual legacy or what it holds as sacred resulting in not understanding what is really important, distinguishing between what is fundamental and absolute, and what is temporary and limited as emphasized by AbuSulayman (1993).

It is timely to note the point made by Rahman (1982) that Islamic intellectualism should be the essence of especially higher Islamic education for the growth of genuine, original and adequate Islamic thought is the real criterion for judging the success or failure of an Islamic education system. Thus, Sardar (1985) proposes that Islamic education system should aim at producing insan whose ‘strength lies in the ability to perceive Islam not as a mere religion but as a dynamic world-view, to synthesize the historical and the modern, and to appreciate the concerns of the traditional sectors of the Muslim population while possessing the intellectual apparatus to communicate with the modernists’. This kind of insan is further refined by al Attas (1999) as man of adab (insan adabi), that is a man with a disciplined body, mind, and spirit with respect to his obligations towards his Creator, Allah SWT.

3.0 A FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE ISLAMIC STUDIES CURRICULUM: HIGHER LEARNING

Future Islamic studies curriculum is proposed to embrace the entire field of traditional Islamic knowledge. The uniqueness of this curriculum is that it holds worldview of Islam as important. Islamic principles and concepts are intended to shape the thinking and understanding on Islam’s comprehensiveness, which is beyond religion, culture or way of life. Appropriate for this age, Islam needs to be translated as a civilization that spans the fields of religion and spirituality, worship and muamalah (interaction between people), law and justice, politics and government, economy, education and science, art and literature,
culture, nutrition and health, science and technology and the environment. Applying relevant principles from al Qur'an and al Hadith in those fields helps build a prosperous civilization.

Islamic worldview which revolves around the oneness of Allah SWT, apostleship, the purpose of creation, morality and values, knowledge, and the Hereafter will provide a firm and strong standing against all kinds of doubts, chaos, confusion and uncertainties as a result of embracing Western worldview (process of westernization). The view has succeeded in shaping an understanding and thinking of a large number of Muslim Ummah in matters of religion, science, ethics and education, science and technology, tradition, modernity and development. A westernization of thought will result in forming alien values, culture, thoughts, and even stance among generations of Muslims today. Thenceforth, the resulting reaction or solution offered to the problem today is not real solution rather it results in new problems or lead to more destruction.

In order to interpret Islam as a civilization, TnL of the traditional Islamic studies curriculum needs to be presented in the form of a worldview. Two pre-requisites for implementation are:

a) Curriculum should not be compartmentalized according to traditional division but instead it should be integrative in nature
b) TnL should be in the form of a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approach in which wisdom is highlighted, 'izzah (take pride in being Muslims) is nurtured and collection of facts and data should be minimal.

3.1. Organization of Subjects

3.1.1. Sources of Islamic Thought

Islamic thought is derived from the Revelation and reason. Revelations as contained in the Qur'an are translated by al-Sunnah and developed further by the use of guided mind. Intellectual environment at the beginning of Islamic civilization has led to the exchange of knowledge in the field of theology, philosophy, metaphysics and logic. This activity involved not only Muslims but also others of different religions, cultures and nations who contributed to the enrichment of the body of knowledge in Islam. However, the “materials” procured by the Muslims from diverse sources during the first three centuries of Islamic history, were infact integrated and absorbed into the unitary perspective of Islam (Nasr, 1976). The intellectual tradition spans various aspects in scope and depth covering ulum al-Qur'an (science of al Qur'an), ulum al-Hadith (science of al Hadith), usul al-fiqh (principles of jurisprudence), 'ilm kalam (teology), tasawwuf (metaphysics), philosophy, logic and science.

3.1.2. Worldview of Islam

Worldview of Islam revolves around the principles and basic concepts of Islam amongst which are the Divinity, apostleship, the creation of man and nature and its purpose, knowledge, moral, value and causality. They are in fact elements of philosophy in the Islamic perspective. The perfect world and full of beauties would somehow jolt the human’s conscience with regards to the existence of the Creator, Who administers the world with love, compassion and care. The belief that life in this world is temporary and the Hereafter is eternal, will lead men to be vigilant with respect to their actions. His lowly origin must make men realize their responsibility to inhabit and perform their roles and duties on the earth in such a way that Allah’s justice prevails. Knowledge and values, which are based on authentic and permanent sources, will add confidence and give exposure to real truth. In sum, this
section will focus on *iman* (faith), Islam and *ihsan* (striving for excellence) as well as related matters so as to be able to further clarify the principles and concepts discussed.

### 3.1.3. Foundations of Islamic Civilization

*Sirah* (biography) of the Prophet PBUH serves as the basis of reference for contemporary Islamic civilization. Early effort and contribution made by *Khulafa’al-Rashidun* (the Rightly Guided Caliphs) followed by Muslim rules before and after the Mongol invasion portray the nature of civilization which was supported by the systems and institutions then. Based on the basic principles of al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah and these models, a form of contemporary civilization maybe realized. Biography of the Prophets AS, history of Islam, concepts and principles as well as some of the systems and institutions of choice are to be frame of reference and shall be translated in the changing circumstances. In short, adopting a contemporary Islamic *asalah* solution becomes the agenda of reviving the *Ummah* and civilization.

### 3.1.4. Contemporary Fiqh (*Fiqh al-Mu’asirah*)

Life today requires a true understanding of the reality and change. The state of the community and *Ummah* today is shaped by various factors. Effort to identify these factors is important so that a problem can be addressed reliably. Challenges in thoughts, globalization, science and technology as well as change and development must be assessed in accordance with the framework of Islamic thought. In the effort to move forward, oftentimes the *Ummah* is held back by certain classical *fiqh*. Thus it is timely to venture into this confine and offer appropriate *fiqh* as a way forward.

### 3.1.5. The Caliph Program@Al Amin

The Caliph program provides opportunities for students to apply theory in real situations. It extends an opportunity to serve the community, nation and the world while portraying Islam as *rahmatan lil ‘alamin* (mercy to the universe). Research based activities and in-depth involvement are to be part of this program. Most importantly, under this program students are trained as leaders and will also undergo a *Tarbiyyah* (training) program with all its *wasail* (means) and objectives as means to nurture Islamic identity (Nor Zalmiah, 2011).

Students pursuing this Islamic studies curriculum will be able to:

a) Understand and appreciate the comprehensiveness of Islam.  
b) Understand and appreciate the worldview of Islam.  
c) Understand and internalize the role of ‘*ibad and khulafa’* (servants and vicegerents) towards self-improvement, community and the world in their respective fields of involvement or specialization  
d) Evaluate and analyze current problems.  
e) Solving current problems according to the worldview of Islam’s framework  
f) Prepare students to:

i. deal with the present and future challenges therefore the curriculum should be relevant, dynamic and meaningful.  
ii. invite others to goodness, justice, brotherhood, freedom, and equality in accordance with the nature of Islam as *rahmatan li’il ‘alamin*.  
iii. be equipped intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, socially, and physically.  
iv. enhance the integration between acquiring knowledge and internalization
Realizing the fact that experts in the field of religion need to be groomed to face challenges outside their own field, a curriculum that addresses current issues is needed. Further studies, research, and refinements will be able to realize a viable future Islamic studies curriculum. It is hoped that Islamic curriculum of this century has the ability to cope with the challenges of contemporary cultures and thoughts.

4.0 PPAA’S EFFORT AT AL AMIN INTEGRATED ISLAMIC CURRICULUM AND ITS INSTRUCTION

With the passing of time, policy makers, leadership and management as well of educators exert and research the most suitable curriculum and its instruction. One of the outcome of PPAAB’s retreat held at Gambang, Kuantan in early 2013 is to study the prevalent, latest and most appropriate curriculum and its instruction for children of this age but not at the expense of neglecting the knowledge, attitude and skills to be acquired by Muslim children. Around the globe, we are familiar with Montessori methods, International Baccalaureate program and of late International Primary Curriculum program and naturally they become PPAAB’s Curriculum, Research and Development Committee’s object of study in addition to Finland education and Gulen’s method.

There are elements from each of those educational programs, which fulfill and attract our attention with respect to future curriculum and its instruction. Features such as 21st century objectives (world, student, skill), thematic, big ideas, goals (personal, subject and international), learning process or structure (sound principles, rigorous, up to date, enjoyable, time saving, comprehensive), interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, unit of work, learning style (collaborative, exploratory, mastery, inquiry, research and record) and last but not least assessment for learning best fit our description of future curriculum and instruction.

By adopting those ideas, we hope to develop students into multi-perspectival, adaptable, resilient, internationally-minded, communicators, moral, thoughtful, co-operative, respectful, enquirers and FAST (fatnah, amanah, siddiq, tabligh) (wisdom, trustworthy, truthful, convey) personalities through learning activities which are meaningful or exciting, enriching or engaging, energetic or active, reflective, independent, innovative, effective and making connection.

4.1 Principles and Values to be adopted in AAIIC and Instruction

4.1.1. Children and students should be encouraged to inculcate the spirit of inquiry and explore.

4.1.2. The characteristics of active students should include among others wonder, plan, investigate, discover, reflect, share and act.

4.1.3. Spiritual and Character Education should emphasize on inculcating faith, knowing roles and responsibilities, encouraging goodness, refraining from prohibited acts, feelings, attitude and way of life and developing skills in al Qur’an.

4.1.4. Adoption of challenging and inspirational ideas.
4.1.5. Effective TnL should be meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and TnL Islamic studies should be active, interactive and interesting

4.1.6. TnL should focus on developing HOTS, indepths knowledge and related to the real world

4.1.7. Measurement and evaluation should be organized, in accordance to standard and quality, continuous and fair.

(Tawhidi, 2001-6 & PPAAB, 2002)

4.2. A Glimpse at Proposed AAIIC and Its Instruction

Having considered the proposed future Islamic studies curriculum and its instruction, AAIIC is planned to adopt the followings:

4.2.1. The curriculum content should prepare the students with the knowledge, skills and attitude, which are necessary to face contemporary challenges.

4.2.2. TnL of Islamic studies should employ styles, tools and technology that fit 21st century and generation.

4.2.3. Students should be made to understand Islam as a civilization vis a vis religion, culture or even way of life hence TnL adopts interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach

4.2.4. Students should be made aware that Islam is rahmatan li‘l ‘alamin thus language and cultural barriers should be addressed and programs or activities for that purpose should be made available for them.

4.2.5. Most importantly, students should play their roles as ‘ibad and khulafa’ equipped with worldview of Islam as framework that enables them to provide solutions to contemporary challenges and problems.

AAIIC is designed such that it is comprehensive and holistic thus constitutes elements of J-TASK namely Jasadi (physical), Tawhidi (belief in Oneness of Allah : spiritual), Aqli (intellectual), Syu‘uri (emotional) and Khuluqi (character).

AAIIC learning goals are comprised of subject, personal and universal or ummatic. Personal goal comprises Mardhatillah (seeking Allah’s pleasure) in salimul aqidah (true faith) and shahihul ibadah (valid worship); Ihsan (striving for excellence) in qawiyyul jism (physical fitness), matinul khuluq (firm character) and mujahadatun linnafs (striving for Allah’s sake); Ithar (preferring others above oneself) in muthaqqaful fikr (intellect), harithun ‘ala waqithi (time management), and naﬁ’un lighairihi (benefit others); Islah (embracing transformation) in qadirun ‘ala kasb (ability to earn) and munazzamun fi syu‘unihi (well organized).

AAIIC core subjects for secondary level include Tasawwur Islami (Sources of Islamic thought, Worldview of Islam, Foundations of Islamic Civilisation, Contemporary Fiqh, the Caliph Program), Language Arts (Arabic and Mandarin), Social Studies (Psychology, Anthropology, Humanities), Arts, Designs & Technology (Visual, Auditory, Fine, Performing, Culinary, Agriculture, Handiwork), and last but not least Science of Al-Quran and Science of Hadith, which will be in Arabic. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach as well as
ScienceOn1 (‘ilm as in tawhidic, Oneness of God perspective) approach will be adopted in TnL.

A sample of proposed theme for secondary level is ‘Others and I’ wherein we will find out Allah as the creator in Tasawwur Islami, Surah al-Ikhlas in science of al Qur’an or al-Hadith, the beginning of humanity (Adam and Eve) and relationships between races and countries in social studies (history or sirah of the Prophets AS), parts of human and Ismul ‘isyarah (noun) in language arts (Arabic and Mandarin), varying arts, designs and technologies in Arts, Design and Technology, and we will be finding out different types of music genre in music or history of civilization.

Having shared the above, despite some deliberations AAIIC needs further refinement.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Islamic education should be more concerned with what it means to be Muslims (transformation) than teaching about Islam (information). The goal of Islamic education is not to fill their mind with as much information about Islam as possible but rather to guide and assist them in becoming Muslims, inspiring them to transform themselves in the process and equipping them with the knowledge, attitudes and skills most fitting for the 21st century yet remaining as ‘ibad and khulafa’.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge members from PPAA board of governors and teachers in sharing their views on curriculum and instruction for developing Al-Amin Islamic Integrated Curriculum in a workshop that was held in August, 2014.

REFERENCES

Daud Tauhidi. 2001-6. The Tarbiyah Project : A Holistic Vision of Islamic Education


