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Learning Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: Between Islamic and Boko Harām Perspectives

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Abstract

Islamic civilisation once led the world to develop worldly knowledge, producing significant advancements in medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. Scholars viewed these knowledge domains as complementary to religious knowledge, with the latter holding superior status. However, in recent times, some Muslim communities have distanced themselves from temporal knowledge, wrongly perceiving it as alien to Islam. Insurgent groups like Boko Harām in Northern Nigeria and neighbouring countries, including Niger, Chad, northern Cameroon, and Mali have weaponised this misconception. Boko Harām's ideology rejects worldly education, equating it with an anti-Islamic agenda, leading to violent campaigns against educational institutions. This article addresses the misunderstanding that beneficial worldly knowledge contradicts Islamic teachings, highlighting its importance as an Islamic obligation. It explores how this misconception has contributed to violence and stagnation, such as in Boko Harām's attacks, and analyses Islamic primary sources, the Qur'ān, the ḥadīth, and scholarly commentaries, to clarify the stance on acquiring such knowledge. The analysis includes an examination of key prophetic traditions that highlight the importance of pursuing worldly knowledge that contributes to societal welfare. The findings reveal that Islām not only permits but encourages the pursuit of beneficial worldly knowledge, which is considered farḍ kifāyah-a collective obligation upon the Muslim community. The article emphasises that education aligned with Islamic values is key to societal progress. It criticises extremist group like Boko Harām for misinterpreting Islam and calls for a return to valuing both religious and beneficial worldly knowledge to advance Muslim communities. Copyright © IIUM Press.

Author Keywords

Beneficial worldly knowledge; Boko Harām movement; Islamic perspective; Muslim scholars; religious knowledge

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