Reforms in Islamic Education

International Perspectives

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Contents

Transformative Islamic Education through a Transformative Pedagogy in Malaysia

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Background

Reform of Islamic education has been ongoing since the period of contact with the West in the eighteenth century, when Muslims realized their physical, material and economic weaknesses in comparison with the dominant colonizers who subjugated them with their superior strategies and arms. Notable education reformers during this period include Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India and Mahmud Yunus in Indonesia. The educational reforms attempted by these scholars varied according to their national context. In Egypt, Abduh sought to reform existing institutions, specifically the curriculum of al-Azhar University; he wanted to introduce modern science, rational inquiry and the thoughts of Muslim scholars who brought new insights from inquiry into society, and did not merely rely on religious texts and revelations such Ibn Khaldun's masterpiece, *Muqaddimah*. In India, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan experimented with innovative ideas by establishing a new educational institution – the Muslim Anglo-Oriental College – that combined modern knowledge with Islamic sciences to enable the Muslim Indians to compete with the Hindu Indians who were more favoured by the British. Although his integration experiment failed, he was successful in generating graduates who subsequently led independent Pakistan. In Indonesia, Mahmud Yunus attempted to establish an integrated curriculum and was successful in introducing Islamic religious instruction within the

Dutch public schools in Sumatra. These attempts at reform continued even after independence.

After independence, many Muslim countries began to chart their own course. The 1977 First World Conference of Muslim Education in Makkah alerted the Muslim world to the basic issues of the liberalizing secularization within the inherited public education system on the one hand, and the rigid and conservative traditional religious education on the other hand. This rampant educational dualism hampered each country because of the conflicting traditional and liberal views on the approaches to develop the country held by the graduates of the two systems. Subsequent attempts were made to reconcile the curriculum of public and religious education, especially through the formulation and implementation of an integrated curriculum. This involved introducing 'modern' sciences into the religious school curriculum, establishing integrated schools and an integrated curriculum, the Islamization of contemporary knowledge and establishing Islamic schools and universities. Although the challenge of educational dualism persists, its nature has changed since the emergence of the internet; the reform of Islamic education Malaysia is a case in point.

Malaysia is a multiracial country. The total population stood at 28.3 million in 2010, of which 91.8 per cent are Malaysian citizens and 8.2 per cent are non-citizens. Malaysian citizens comprise the ethnic groups Bumiputera (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and Others (0.7%). Islam is the predominant religion, held by 61.3 per cent of the population, while other religions embraced are Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%) (Department of Statistics, 2010). Malaysia achieved her independence in 1957 and maintained the British colonial legacy of a liberal and secular national education for her multiracial, multifaith population. At the same time, Islamic religious education was also provided, through Islamic religious schools (madrasa and *pondok*[1]) established by private individuals and the community. It was only after independence that the government systematically introduced Islamic education into the national school system – from primary to secondary schools. However, the approach was still secular and compartmentalized, to the extent that in the 1980s, various Islamic schools were set up under private initiatives by certain Muslim organizations and state governments. They experimented with the 'integrated' curriculum – some extending the school hours from half a day to a full day, to ensure students will have both the *'ulum naqliyyah* or the revealed (traditional) sciences, and the *'ulum 'aqliyyah* or the acquired (modern) sciences. However,

this change is structural and not epistemological. In other words, a school might have an integrated curriculum that values and imparts both perennial and acquired knowledge, yet might not be able to achieve complete integration or an integrated character because knowledge is still compartmentalized. For example, the way that natural science is taught negates the presence of the transcendence, and vice versa. Thus, the integrated curriculum still does not provide the proper Islamic worldview especially in regards to epistemology. To combat this, efforts towards imbuing the epistemological perspective doubled; the Islamic perspective of knowledge was advanced together with the notion of the Islamic worldview.

Nonetheless, these efforts at the macrolevel will not succeed if we neglect the microlevel. At the microlevel, there was a content review of the curriculum of Islamic Studies (known as Islamic Education in Malaysia), which teaches the fundamentals of the faith. In this context, al-Attas (1991), the world renowned Muslim scholar from Malaysia, proposed the Arabic term *ta'dib* (education of mind, body and spirit) instead of *tarbiyah* (education of body and mind) to describe the ideal form of Islamic education; the former relates faith to education while the latter does not. With mounting pressures from Muslim organizations and professional education bodies to reform Islamic education, due to the increasing disciplinary and moral problems at schools, the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools was formulated in 1989 after the formulation of the National Philosophy of Education in 1987. This Integrated Curriculum replaced secular values with Eastern universal moral values. The reforms in the 1980s met with obstacles, but it did accomplish certain things – the most basic of which is the moulding of the attitude that Islam is a *din*, a way of life, and there is no separation between the public and private domains. It also fostered an understanding of the Islamic worldview. However, given that the world is constantly changing, educational reform likewise has to be a continuous process, providing new solutions to new challenges. With globalization, the Muslim world is confronted with greater challenges when interacting with others through travel, migration, the mass media, the internet, trading, foreign higher education and various publications. There is a higher chance that one's values and opinions will clash with those of another. How does one resolve differences in values and thoughts? How does one learn to respect differing views? What role can Islamic Studies in school play?

In this chapter, I would like to examine this important but often neglected aspect of the significance of Islamic Studies. Assuming that our efforts at

'integration' of the religious and secular subjects succeed and educators understand the importance of teaching acquired sciences with the Islamic perspective, how should we then proceed? How significant is Islamic Studies in helping students cope with contemporary challenges? This subject is singled out because it is greatly emphasized in most Muslim schools and therefore should have a great impact on Muslim students' lives, preparing them for life's challenges, and enabling them to solve problems and make good judgements. Unfortunately, this is not happening, not so much due to the curriculum content, but due to the teachers and the pedagogy. Observations of Islamic Studies classes reveal that the teachers employ a pedagogy that is informative rather than transformative. When we contrast their pedagogy with that of the Prophet (peace be upon him), we see that the latter's pedagogy is critical and possesses the spirit of individual transformation. It aims to transform society by means of *shura*, that is, consultation within a community of learned companions, to create a world where there is justice; human cooperation, with the rich helping the poor, the able helping the weaker ones, the more knowledgeable guiding the ignorant; and where the rights of women are preserved. He did not just feed information to his companions for the sake of transmitting mere facts; he distinguished between education for understanding 'who is a Muslim' and 'what it is to be a Muslim', where the former is informative and the latter is transformative (Kazmi & Hashim, 2010). This chapter will examine the teaching methods and curriculum of present-day Islamic Education (Islamic Studies or Islamic religious knowledge) in Malaysian schools.

Islamic Studies curriculum

What is the content of Islamic Studies and how is it taught in schools? What should its goals be? The goal of Islamic education, as deduced from the Qur'an and the tradition, is to produce good people who will achieve ultimate happiness in this world and the Hereafter. This ultimate happiness will be attained when all people become true servants (*'abd*) and vicegerents (*khalifah*) of Allah. As true servants, it is necessary to perform acts of worship (*'ibadah*) in the broadest sense, to purify their souls and to perfect their character for their own well-being. As His vicegerents, they are obliged to preserve and safeguard the universe, which has been created for their sustenance and, more importantly, to spread the message of Islam (peace)

by working towards social justice – *hablum min Allah* (relationship with Allah) and *hablum min an-nas* (relationship with men). To achieve this task, man has been endowed with an intellect (*'aql*), which distinguishes him from the other creatures. God praises the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the Perfect Person (*al-insan al-kamil*) who has a great character (*khul'q al-'adhim*). The *Hadith* literature also states that he was the living Qur'an. In one *hadith*, the Prophet (pbuh) emphasized that he came to perfect moral character. Therefore, Islamic education ought to transform individuals to have faith in God when they previously had none, or to increase their faith. One would then possess a meaningful life of usefulness, where one benefits other members of the society, other creatures, as well as themselves. These aims are clearly stated in the Islamic Studies curriculum in many schools; however, the problem lies in the achievement of these aims.

In fact, much of Islamic Studies education neglects the aforementioned aims in favour of preparing students to take public examinations and to excel in their knowledge of subjects. Teachers are less concerned with whether students internalize the values imparted or whether they will change for the better behaviourally, mentally, spiritually or morally. The Islamic sciences are often taught in a way similar to all other subjects: the cognitive domain is emphasized, and it does not matter whether the teachings convict students' hearts. Clearly, the teachers' method of teaching the subject does not facilitate students' internal transformation. If we regard the soul of Islamic Studies education as the purification of the heart – the seat of good or evil – then Islamic Studies education can be perceived as having lost its soul, having failed to connect students with God. The five daily prayers are taught mechanically as a ritual with little understanding or spiritual meaning. Similarly, recitation of the Qur'an no longer convicts the heart and transforms the person. Islamic Studies lessons have not enabled 'knowledge' to be translated into good deeds; despite obeying God's commands, people's lives and characters have not been transformed, their souls have not been purified and they lack the fear of God as described in this Qur'anic verse: 'To those whose hearts when God is mentioned, are filled with fear' (22.35). Islamic Studies appears to have been more preoccupied with the secondary goals of education, mainly the utilitarian goal of vocational efficiency and, recently, the commodification of knowledge.

Since a major goal of Islamic Studies education is to raise individuals whose lives embody the Qur'an, it goes without saying that they must know its content

and love it. Unfortunately, in most cases, students only read textbooks written in accord with the syllabus that contain certain Qur'anic excerpts. They never possess or recite the Qur'an systematically, but learn to recite it from cover to cover only after school, either at home through their parents or private tutors, or in the tutor's home. This after-school exercise only stresses its proper recitation and rarely the content because many Muslims do not know Arabic. Therefore, the Qur'an has never been the main textbook for Muslim students, even in the Islamic Studies classroom. As a result, students neither understand nor embody the Qur'anic assertion that 'This is the Book, in it is guidance sure, without doubt to those who are God fearing' (2.2). Moreover, they cannot begin to love the Qur'an because they do not know enough of it.

It is reasonable to expect that in order to understand the Qur'an, students ought to know Arabic or have access to a translated version. The absence of Arabic from the curriculum of Islamic religious science in the Muslim education of non-Arabs is too glaring. It should not be considered as another foreign language to be learned outside the curriculum, such as English or French, as Arabic is part and parcel of Islamic science. Therefore, the Muslim curriculum ought to include Arabic, just as logic is essential to philosophy, or experiments are necessary in the study of natural science.

Being exposed to the Qur'an and *Hadith* (the Prophet's traditions) texts will enable students to understand the difference between the authentic texts and scholarly interpretations. Otherwise, the problem of Muslims preferring commentaries to the original text – to the Qur'an in particular – even when resolving current problems, will remain. These shortcomings in the curriculum's content and implementation must be resolved.

It does not mean that by teaching the Qur'an and *Hadith*, it will limit students' creativity. The Qur'an does ask its readers to observe, reflect and study the human body, the universe beyond and God's creation from the smallest atom to the biggest star. It contains a wide range of subjects, such as history, psychology and natural science.

Teaching methods

The teaching methods employed in teaching Islamic Education is still subject-centred and traditional, with a tendency for moral prescription instead of moral reflection, reasoning, feeling and action. This contradicts the method of the Prophet (pbuh) who speaks less but does more. He taught more by example than

by words. If we survey the *Hadith*, most narrate his actions or his responses to situations. Very rarely does one see him giving sermons in the *Hadith*. The only notable one is the Farewell Sermon, and that too was concise and succinct. The problem with moral prescription is that it does not teach students to consider contexts, thus they fail to judge unfamiliar situations correctly. They have not been taught how to think according to religious principles, how to weigh, think critically, and judge circumstances, social and moral issues, or dilemmas.

The traditional method of teaching neither fosters an inquiring mind nor broadens it. The traditional method needs to be balanced with a student-centred method, specifically one that enables students to derive meaning from what they learn, fosters an inquiring and reflective mind, broadens their perspective and develops their interpersonal, social and communication skills. After all, freedom of inquiry was the trademark of the generation of Muslim scientists and scholars from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. In this sense, integrating scientific knowledge with evidence of the Creator found in natural phenomena to illustrate the Qur'anic verses, such as His hand in the human body, needs to be done. We now have a great deal of scientific knowledge on the workings of the human body, as illustrated in beautiful charts, diagrams and presentations in video or CD-ROM formats, that could be used in the classrooms. However, most teachers are not well versed in these sciences and thus cannot make use of such materials effectively. History and archaeology could also be used to make teaching more meaningful. For example, one could show video clips of Petra in Jordan when teaching about the effect of Allah's wrath on people who not only disobeyed Him but worship other gods. Nonetheless, these are but stimulus materials; whether they can foster an inquiring, critical and reflective mind depends on how the teachers use these materials.

Second, the teaching of Islamic Studies has not fostered empathy in students, nor motivated them to seek deeper knowledge on Islam as teachers are preoccupied with examinations. Therefore, Islamic Studies teachers need to understand their spiritual and moral role. In addition to teaching moral reasoning, they must come up with methods that will create empathy in their students, especially on ethical matters. They can distil maxims regarding moral purity from the works of great Sufis, for example, al-Ghazzali, and adapt it to students' lives. There needs to be a balance between imparting 'head knowledge' and 'heart knowledge'. It is true that many teachers are neither innovative nor creative when it comes to devising effective teaching methods. However, the need for change is greatest for Islamic Studies, which has the greatest influence on Muslim minds. There are many ways of teaching the Qur'an, *Tawhid* (Unity

of God), *Hadith*, *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) or Islamic history to make these subjects more interesting and lively.

Occasionally, the teachers' attitudes towards Islam may be problematic. For example, instead of portraying Allah as most merciful, they portray him as rigid and a harsh punisher. This is improper because the invocation *Bismi Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim* (In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful) is found and recited at the beginning of each of the 114 chapters of the Qur'an, with the exception of the ninth. It is even recited at the beginning of any daily activity. Teachers' misguided depictions of Allah will leave students with the *impression* of a vengeful God, hindering them from developing a deep love of God – the spirit of *taqwa* (God-consciousness) – from which obedience stems. Could this be one of the reasons for the rise of rigid and stone-hearted Muslim extremists? Although *taqwa* is spiritual and describes the individual's relationship to God, it is also related to our situatedness in society. It will be pointless for an individual to claim to be *taqwa* and yet tolerate social injustices. *Taqwa* should involve embracing the good and eschewing evil, with a spirit of mercy and not revenge.

Teachers' stereotypes of the West, especially among those who have never been to the West and thus have not learned to appreciate its good values, is also antithetical to Islam. These stereotypes are often false, and will breed in students a strong hatred of the West and of non-believers. This contradicts the message of chapter 109 of the Qur'an which teaches Muslims to respect each others' beliefs despite differences. Such stereotypes will also close off students' minds to other cultures. However, there is always a lot to learn and benefit from other cultures or civilizations as highlighted in the Qur'an 49.13, which encourages Muslims to get to know other people.

Transformation of the pedagogy

To substantiate the claims discussed, the observations of two Islamic Studies classrooms[2] in Malaysia conducted by myself and another researcher are discussed.

The observations of the teaching and learning processes in two classrooms were part of a study that employed the case study as a research method. Two female Islamic Education teachers of a public boarding secondary school were selected based on a voluntary basis. Teacher A had eight years of teaching experience, while Teacher B was newly appointed. The teachers were also interviewed after the observation. The first observation that involved Teacher A

was done in a classroom of Secondary 2 (aged 14 years) on 26 August 2010 in a 40-minute lesson, when the teacher was teaching a topic called 'Vision of *'ibadah* (worship) as part of the larger topic of Ethics and Moral Conduct (*Adab* and *Akhlaq Islamiyyah*). The second observation that involved Teacher B in another classroom of Secondary 1 students (aged 13 years) was also conducted on 26 August 2010 in a 40-minute lesson on the ethics of seeking knowledge, as part of the same larger topic of Ethics. The focus of the observations was on the content and quality of the teacher–student discussion and the pedagogy employed by the teachers in the classrooms. The observations and interviews were analysed according to this focus.

Observation 1: Teacher A

Topic: Vision of 'ibadah *(worship)*

The class had already begun when I (the observer) came in. I sat at the back of the classroom. The class was having a presentation from a group of four girls for the topic. I observed that while the group was presenting, the teacher would interject after they finished explaining certain points. Here, the teacher would ask questions to the whole class and select some students to answer the questions. The teacher gave further examples in the forms of *sirah* [The Prophet Muhammad's life history], *du'a* (prayer), current issues and stories.

Students' responses were not enthusiastic. They gave typical textbook answers, as the questions posed did not require them to think critically. Most questions were factual or only to confirm their understanding. The teacher's interaction with students was at a general level and there was little individual interaction. The group that presented was allowed to pose questions to other students based on their presentation, of which the answers could be obtained from the textbook. Many students did not seem to give much attention to the presentation and to the questions. None were enthusiastic enough to engage in further discussion of the topic, which could have become very interesting if dealt in a more creative way. In other words, there was no peer-to-peer interaction.

My personal view is, the lesson was rather uninteresting.

Observation 2: Teacher B

Topic: The ethics of seeking knowledge

When I (observer) came in, the class had already commenced with a group presentation on the topic. While presenting, the teacher would interject with

questions, but the answers were not given by the students but by the teacher herself. On a scale of 1 to 10, I would rate students' enthusiasm for the lesson at 4, and students' response at 3.

A good thing about this lesson is that the teacher tried to keep the students interested in the lesson by asking probing questions. Unfortunately, the students were not able to come up with concrete answers. Critical thinking was virtually absent. The teacher tried to ask for responses, but when no one volunteered, she had to select specific students to answer. Students seemed to have no drive to learn.

Before the end of the presentation, there was a discussion on 'barakah' (blessings). I could not help but interrupt the discussion by asking the presenter, 'What is the real meaning of "barakah"? How do we define it?' I observed that the classroom suddenly came alive as if awakened from a long slumber. Students started to talk among themselves, discussing the answer to that conceptual question. They started to raise more questions by the end of the lesson. Although the response from the presenter did not seem to satisfy the class, it was good that students interacted with each other during the lesson. The teacher asked the students to find out the answer to the question as homework, to be discussed at the next class.

The observer's personal observation from this lesson was that students can actually think critically if the teacher utilizes the right approach. However, the teacher might not have the proper training in encouraging critical thinking among students. With the right pedagogical skills, a dull lesson can be transformed into a lively discussion.

The observer concluded that despite using group presentations for teaching, which supposedly is more student-centred, both teachers seemed to dominate the discussion. Presenters merely shared information that could be easily found in the textbook. Further explanation and questions came from teachers, not students. There was no display of critical thought by students. The teachers did ask questions based on the presentations, but these questions required standard answers, and often, the teachers would provide the answers. Second, there was a lack of peer interaction during the presentations. While the presentations were in progress, other students in the classroom did not seem to show much interest. Some were even doing their own work, which was not related to the discussion at hand.

Third, since the study was conducted in a full boarding school where students were selected from among high achievers, the students from both classes are

intelligent; they do have the potential to perform better if the teachers manage to provide the right stimulus for active learning, as in the case of the Secondary 1 class over the concept of *barakah* that livened the class discussion. Several students came to see the observer in the staffroom to ask more questions. Such a 'simple' question of a concept that most take for granted made the students curious about its answer. Curiosity would eventually lead to an enthusiastic search for answers. Such enthusiasm to learn actively should always be inculcated in classrooms so that learning will become more meaningful for the students. However, the observer found this to be lacking in the teachers.

The observer then interviewed the teachers. For the first question, 'How do the students respond to the method that you applied?', the teachers claim that the students responded well. For the second question, 'How do you know that the method that you use is effective in the lesson?', a typical answer is: by the ability of students to give correct answers to the questions, or by obtaining high marks in examinations.

I had the opportunity to personally observe another experienced teacher of Islamic Education teaching Secondary 3 students (aged 15 years) in a different public school when I was supervising student teachers there on 5 August 2008. She was teaching a 30-minute lesson on the topic 'Preparation for the Day of *Akhirat* (the Judgement Day) under the broad topic of '*Aqidah* (Belief)'.

Observation 3: Direct observation by author

Topic: Judgement Day

The teacher began the class by writing the topic of the lesson on the board, and then pasted a large piece of paper with some ideas for the lesson written on it. As an introduction, she asked students for the meaning of the Judgement Day. Someone answered that it was the Day of Resurrection. With that response, she directed the students' attention to the main ideas she had written on the paper, which were as follows:

1. Preparation for the Judgement Day:
   - *'ilm* (knowledge),
   - *akhlak* (conduct),
   - *jihad* (utmost striving for the sake of God),
   - *sadaqah* (charity) and
   - man's relation with Allah.

2. *'Amal salih* (good deeds):
   - preparation, not a loss,
   - Allah's reward and
   - Allah's remembrance.

3. Factors for success in this world and the next:
   - This world – diligence, good moral conduct, helping one another;
   - The hereafter: fulfil duties, do the *sunnat* (encouraged actions), *amr ma'aruf* (encourage good deeds and discourage evil ones).

She then proceeded to read each point on the paper. For each point, she stated its meaning briefly (one short sentence) or asked a student to explain it in a few words. Then she would explain it herself. Students just listened and answered accordingly. As there were many points, she could not go into any detail for each. There was minimal student–teacher interaction; the teacher did most of the talking. No questions were posed by the students, if that is any indication of interest in the topic.

At the end of the class, she evaluated the students' understanding by asking the same questions, that is, What is the Day of Judgement? How do you prepare for it? Students just gave one-word answers.

Discussion

In this third class, I was the observer; I noticed that the teacher was only interested in delivering the content according to the syllabus. There was no meaningful discussion, no debates over any issue, no demands for evidence to support claims made and no reasons or justifications given for any viewpoint. The teacher was satisfied if there were one-word responses to her question; she did not see a need to probe deeper to ascertain if the students were convicted in their answers, or if they were merely giving textbook answers to please her. Nowhere did she discuss the meaning of major concepts such as *jihad* (utmost striving to achieve a good purpose) and *akhlak* (moral conduct). Furthermore, a lesson on preparing for the Day of Judgement assumes that students believe that such a day would come; this underlying assumption was not questioned. The answers students gave were model textbook answers, ideal for doing well in examinations but indicating a lack of inquiry or independent thought. The teacher did not attempt to make the lesson applicable to students' lives, neither

provided analogies to aid in their understanding, for example, likening the Day of Resurrection to the growth of a plant, as stated in the Qur'an, in which there is no life on a barren soil in the beginning but God can easily cause a plant to grow from a seed planted in it. Similarly, God can also resurrect man on the Day of Judgement after his death.

Based on these observations, one cannot help but wonder if Islamic Studies will ever achieve goals other than information transmission. Can it produce Muslims who are critical, open-minded, aware of social issues and injustices, able to deliberate intellectually, and willing to act against injustices, or will they be mere parrots, regurgitating textbook facts? Can it produce Muslims who really know how to 'read' the Qur'an, that is, understand and interpret the Qur'an, love the Qur'an and act upon it? It is futile to think about integration and Islamization if this cannot be accomplished. Even though Islamic Studies existed before the formal madrasa was established, its current form falls way short of the standards of education in the past. Before the establishment of the madrasa in the eleventh century of the Muslim caliphate, teaching and learning was more dynamic – with freedom of inquiry and thought, and active *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning), deep intellectual attempts in interpreting Islamic sources of knowledge in an effort to solve societal problems. This was evident from the existence of many schools of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), more activity in *all* sciences – *shar'iyyah* (revealed) or *aqliyyah* (rational), more institutions of learning and more patronage for learning from among the rich, wealthy and the Caliph through debates or discourses in palaces (Makdisi, 1981). However, after the institutionalization of the madrasa, teaching methods became more rigid, and different schools of thought became ossified. Memorization replaced debates or discussion, and students relied more on *sharah* [commentaries] and super *sharah* [commentaries upon commentaries] instead of engaging in independent interpretation of the Qur'an. Instead of education in a tradition, Islamic studies employed traditional education. Muslim teachers or scholars have become fearful to introduce any new methods of teaching, even disparaging these as 'illegal' innovations.

Similarly, no attempts were made to relate scientific phenomena to the faith, even in all-Muslim schools such as the residential science schools or the national religious secondary schools. However, the Qur'an repeatedly states that natural phenomena reveal the signs of God and his laws, as seen in scientific principles and laws. Thus, it is not just a problem of teaching methods but also of content. Islamic Studies and knowledge should be linked to scientific ideas, and vice versa.

Reviving the 'Hikmah' pedagogy of philosophical inquiry

It is clear from the earlier discussion that we need to reflect on the teaching methods employed in Islamic Studies lessons. We need to revive philosophical inquiry, where students are encouraged to discover meanings instead of just learning facts. They ought to be made aware of relevant issues through various stimuli, such as stories, video clips, pictures and newspaper excerpts. Students should be trained to ask relevant questions on the topics taught and attempt to answer them on their own; they would be a community of sincere and serious inquirers who deliberate over the matter, while the teacher facilitates, as a wise and thoughtful coach. This brings us to the discussion of 'hikmah' or wisdom pedagogy – a pedagogy that attempts to accomplish the above. With 'hikmah', students will critically question, discuss and debate about the central concepts till they come to a satisfactory solution or conclusion. Even if they fail to reach a consensus, they would still learn to respect differences in opinions. In addition to that, the 'hikmah' pedagogy utilizes concepts from the Qur'an; students will deliberate on the possible meaning of the texts to make the Qur'anic verse come alive, and thus draw guiding principles from it. I have used the term 'hikmah' to denote wisdom that ought to be the fruit of the pedagogy of philosophical inquiry, and to give it an Islamic connotation, especially since this philosophy is not practised in Islamic Studies lessons even if the teacher claims to utilize student-centred approaches. This pedagogy also facilitates conflict resolution, even more crucial now that we live in societies with much diversity.

In this regard, the Centre for Philosophical Inquiry in Education (CPIE) in the Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) has been spearheading and experimenting with the pedagogy that encourages students to work as a community of inquirers. In this community, members engage themselves in identifying a problem by raising questions related to the text read, the video clip viewed or other stimulus materials. This is then followed by a deep discussion among students and between students and the teacher. The Centre for Philosophical Inquiry in Education (CPIE) initially began as a school holiday programme for the children of the IIUM staff, which was later extended to the public. Teacher training was then conducted. The Centre has also produced teaching materials for primary schools, for example, *Thinking Stories for Muslim Children*, which has four titles. Book One narrates Mira's experience of a visit to the zoo, where an elephant reminded her of chapter 105 of the Qur'an (*Surah al-Fil*) and a snake reminded her

of how Prophet Moses' staff turned into a snake. This story highlights the difference between truth and magic. Book Two relates Mira's fascination with the nature of names, which symbolize knowledge, to the Qur'an 2.31, where God taught Prophet Adam the names of all things. Book Three narrates Mira's curiosity about God as evident from the questions she posed to her mother who was smart enough to use analogies appropriate to her cognitive developmental level. Finally, Book Four describes a community of inquirers helping Mira determine the 'rightness of her action of using the money her father had given her to pay the school fees to help a poor family'. Here the essence of chapter 107 of the Qur'an (*Surah al-Ma'un*) is highlighted; that is, performing the five daily prayers is futile if they are not translated into good deeds. Through these books, many concepts such as names, knowledge and discerning between right and wrong can be discussed within the parameters of the Islamic worldview.

Conclusion

I believe Muslim scholars and educationalists have reached a crossroads. They have to decide between retaining the traditional ways but remaining stagnant; or progressing by educating students *in* a tradition that retains all the perennial values while employing new teaching methods, reclaiming the freedom of inquiry and *ijtihad* they used to enjoy yet remaining true to the Qur'an and *sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh). Philosophical inquiry would then be a necessary evil. Even Hamka, a renowned Malay Indonesian scholar, asserts that Muslims have to utilize philosophy to provide an intellectual basis to students' faith; this does not contradict the spirit of the Qur'an and the Prophet himself, whom they regard as a philosopher. Muslims ought to stop labelling one another as Young Turk (*Kaum Muda*), Old Turk or apostate, unless they are absolutely certain that the person possesses deviant or heretical beliefs. The history of the Malay world describes a group (Hamka, Za'ba, Sh Tahir Jalaluddin, Sh Sayid Ahmad al-Hadi, Kyai Ahmad Dahlan, Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari and Imam Zarkasyi) with fresh new ideas that succeeded in reforming the Muslim community as radicals or *Kaum Muda* (for details, see Hashim, 2010). Syed Ahmad Khan had a similar experience (for more information, see Zobairi, 1971), and Muhammad Abduh also had to fight adversaries to reform al-Azhar (see Kaloti, 1974; Shafie, 2004). Scholars have to be courageous before change can occur, even if it means risking one's life, as seen from the Prophet Muhammad. A transformative

curriculum would provide stimulus and impetus for reform, as well as courage and conviction to implement reform.

Consequently, this begs the question of whether the current teacher training programme, that is, teachers' basic undergraduate education, is adequate. As teachers are the most important ingredient in education, a review of the curriculum of teacher education programmes for the Muslim community is in order. As for reforms to students' curriculum, the introduction of philosophy and natural science, especially the philosophy of knowledge, the scientific method and theory of ethics, would provide students with a stronger basis and conviction for their faith. Also, lessons would do well to include a scientific study of selections from the Qur'an, with a focus on Islamic values and *tadzkiyat an-nafs* [refinement of the soul].

Notes

1   *Pondoks* are traditional, religious schools; students lived in huts surrounding the mosque, which also doubled as a school. Madrasas are physically similar to a modern school and came in to existence after the First World War, much later than the *pondok*.
2   I would like to thank Ms Adilah Juperi of the Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia for these insightful observations from her Master of Education study.

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