Chapter 6

The Decline of Intellectualism in Higher Islamic Traditional Studies: Reforming the Curriculum

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Introduction

The number of institutions of higher Islamic education or faculties of Islamic studies has increased greatly, especially since most Muslim countries became independent. However, this cannot be said with respect to their quality. By "higher Islamic education," I refer to higher education institutions specialising in Islamic traditional sciences or Islamic studies.[1] I use "traditional sciences" to refer to those sciences based on the Prophet's Traditions and the Qur'an, and "intellectual sciences" to refer to the acquired sciences. Thus, I avoid such classifications as "secular" and "religious," as well as "revealed" and "acquired," in order to assert the Islamicity of both sciences.

The number of higher Islamic education institutions in Malaysia, with its Islamic universities and colleges, and such other parts of the Muslim world as Indonesia, with its Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN), Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN), and Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN), M. Amin (2005), has risen in response to the increasing demand for integrated education. Their curricula vary, but all offer a

specialisation in the Islamic traditional sciences or Islamic studies as their core focus. A huge number of students graduate from such institutions, in addition to those who graduate from the Middle East. As a result, one would expect to witness enlightened and dynamic societies in all spheres of human activity, such as socio-economics, politics and health.

Unfortunately, the reality does not live up to these expectations. Except for the few who reach the highest levels of learning and are absorbed by university departments and/or faculties of Islamic studies, the new graduates' potential remains severely limited. For example, their achievements tend to comprise no more than talks or sermons (in the narrowest sense of the word) about individual worship rituals dealing with what is legal (*halal*) and what is not (*haram*), bringing good and bad news about the hereafter, using Islam for political mileage, or preaching the ideals but rarely being practical or down to earth. Most of the time, these discussions focus on what the past 'ulama who rightly addressed the issues of their time said but might not be relevant today. Nowhere did these 'ulama urge their followers to just repeat their thought.

Very few graduates can articulate today's pressing issues of democracy, civil society, human rights, gender, environment, non-Muslim, pluralism, language, and globalisation to the extent that they can guide the masses. This failure is not only true for graduates of traditional madrasas, as asserted by Safi (2004), but, as indicated above, for modern Islamic higher education institutions as well. As a result, lay Muslim intellectuals and activists are "stepping into the vacuum created by the marginalisation of the traditional Islamic madrasas" due to Western colonisation and modernity and the shortcomings of learning in modern higher Islamic education institutions.

Why are these graduates only good at teaching the same old stuff, at preaching or giving sermons? Why are they not practical and efficient when managing such administrative organisations as religious departments and courts? Why are they not creative and innovative even in their core business of teaching or *da'wah* (preaching Islam to the general public and trying to win their hearts)? As school teachers, they still employ the same old style of delivery without concern for its effectiveness. As evidence of this, many Malay adults remember learning to recite the Qur'an using the *Muqaddam*, a primer that is popular in

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[1] In the context of this paper, Islamic Traditional Sciences and Islamic Studies are used interchangeably.

the Malay Archipelago for learning how to read the Arabic letters and recite Qur'anic words and sentences as recounted by Munshi Abdullah, a Malay literary figure in 1810. Imagine having to recognise and remember each of the twenty-eight Arabic letters before learning the vowels. It was definitely a poor method to teaching reading and was definitely not motivating for young children but none of the Qur'anic teacher seem to bother. No doubt, the *Muqaddam* was written by a well-intentioned Qur'anic teacher of the past but it is not immutable like the Qur'an. It was so much later at the close of the twentieth century that another Qur'anic teacher came out with the *Iqra'* or *Qira'ati* method, which was almost similar with the method I had self-created and was based on almost the same pedagogical principles. Why did the Malay community stick so religiously to the *Muqaddam* for over a century?

According to Rahman (1982), one can measure the success or failure of Islamic education by evaluating its success in nurturing the growth of a genuine, original and adequate Islamic thought. He defines Islamic education as:

... not the physical or quasi-physical paraphernalia and instruments of instruction such as the books taught or the external educational structure, but what I call "Islamic intellectualism"; for to me this is the essence of higher Islamic education. It is the growth of a genuine, original and adequate Islamic thought that must provide the real criterion for judging the success or failure of an Islamic educational system (p. 1).

If we use Rahman's criterion, then we can conclude that Islamic education institutions and their teachers have failed. Many of our graduates are not critical, creative, or original in their thinking. They lack the Islamic intellectualism, or what the West considers the goal of a liberal education. Our institutions produce religious teachers, staff members for the Shari'ah courts or Islamic religious departments who can address *fiqhi* and Shari'ah-related issues, but who cannot articulate a lot of pressing contemporary issues especially in a multi-faith society. In brief, our Islamic education system has failed to bring the Islamic traditional sciences to bear on other spheres of life.

Can Muslims continue to blame the West, since they have been managing their own affairs since colonialism ended almost fifty years ago? The university is an elite system that gives birth to the leaders in all fields, such as politics, economics, sciences, health, education and social welfare. The Muslim societies' failure can also be attributed to the failure of its universities. In this chapter, I will examine a few factors related to higher Islamic education that have contributed to this state of affairs and propose some changes that might solve these problems. But I believe that identifying the problems is more pressing than the solutions proposed, which are tentative.

The Goals of Education from the Islamic Perspective

Before I examine the factors that contribute to the weaknesses discussed above, it would be appropriate to review the goals of education according to the Islamic tradition. This will provide us with a criterion or a set of principles against which we can determine whether Muslim higher education is meeting its goals or departing from them. Islamic literature is replete with references to *ta'lim*, *ta'allum*, *adab*, *ta'dib*, *tahdhib* and *akhlaq*. But none of these terms refer to the science of education as an academic discipline (Nashabi, 1979). Consequently, Nashabi argues that there is no "Islamic philosophy of education," but rather an Islamic theosophy applied to education, theories of instruction (*ta'lim*), or an Islamic theory of knowledge combined with ethical conduct (*akhlaq*). Muslim educationists had to coin the term *tarbiyah*, which hardly occurs in classical Islamic literature, to refer to both education and instruction.[2]

This observation is significant, because it reflects the Islamic view of humanity's attitude to knowledge in general, as well as the process of knowledge transmission in Muslim society. In fact, the Qur'an defines this attitude by frequently using *'allama* (to teach, to instruct) with reference

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2 In fact al-Attas argues similarly and thus the appropriateness of the term *ta'dib*.

to God when He chose to instruct humanity about what people ought to know, and in reference to prophets when they guide their followers to what they should do or avoid. The verbal root from which *tarbīyah* (education) stems and which has a wider sense than *'allama*, is used only twice. In both instances, it refers to parents raising their children during their early formative years.

And make yourself submissively gentle to them (i.e., your parents) with compassion and say: "O my Lord. Have compassion on them, as they brought me up [when I was] little." (17:24)

(Pharaoh) said [to Moses]: "Did we not bring you up as a child among us, and you tarried among us for [many] years of your life?" (26:18)

During the early years of a person's life, one's life-long habits are formed and the basic orientation of one's mind and spirit are established. Following this early stage, one's educational activity is filled with instruction in the particular sciences (*ta'lim*) or the rules of proper conduct and ethics. Thus, imparting knowledge is not "educative"; rather, it is "instructive." People only transmit knowledge because true knowledge lies with God, who is All-Knowing and imparts His knowledge to whomever He may choose. True knowledge becomes accessible by divine grace and, directly, by intuition. Our major educational activity consists of transmitting knowledge and exploring the best and most effective techniques for doing so. In general, Muslim educationists (al-Zarnuji, 1947; Al-Ghazali, 1974; Tibawi, 1972) have devoted their attention to these techniques, and so their works have mainly taken the form of advising teachers and students in these techniques. Thus, knowledge transmission is motivated by the conviction that true knowledge necessarily leads to a deeper faith in God.

Al-Attas (1991) crystallised this conviction in his definition of education, which he defines as the progressive instilling of *adab*, namely, "the recognition and acknowledgment of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence," into the individual. For him, education endows its possessor with the knowledge (*hikmah*) of the proper places of things or objects

in the scheme of Creation and, subsequently, the ability to act in a just manner (*'adl*) with proper discipline (*adab*). Thus, education's primary goal is to lead humanity to recognise and acknowledge its Creator or to acquire a deeper faith. This acknowledgment is manifested in absolute obedience and adherence to His commands as a servant (*'abd*) and vicegerent (*khalīfah*).

In this sense, the Islamic approach to education is essentially qualitative, in the sense that acquiring knowledge is not the result of the love of knowledge as such, but rather a means to know God, Who is the Ultimate Truth. Therefore, all Muslims must seek true education. In fact, this is why Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) considered knowledge acquisition to be an obligation (*fard*) for all Muslim men and women through several ahadith: Seeking knowledge is obligatory for all Muslim men and women; seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.[3] In light of this, the study of nature should not be directed toward dominating it, but toward benefiting from it and then transcending it to reach a higher order of knowledge: knowledge of the Ultimate Reality and the realisation of our status as spiritual servants.

In another aspect, knowledge acquisition in Islam has always been associated with serving society. The prophetic tradition and Muslim thinkers have consistently enjoined the scholar (*'alim*) to pursue useful knowledge (*al-'ilm al-nafi'*) and use it to serve society (*al-'alim al-'amil*). To ensure that all intellectual activity is used to serve God and humanity, priority is given to studying the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Through this, Muslims are made aware of the covenant that binds them to God as His *khalīfah*, encouraging them to live up to His commands and contribute toward the good of society. Thus, if Muslims live and work within the bounds of a particular social polity and contribute to its overall good, they do so out of the belief that their life and work conform to this original covenant and that their actions will find favour with God and the

3   In the famous *hadith*: Seeking knowledge is obligatory for all Muslim men and women; seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.

Prophet. Therefore, there is no separation between theory and practice, or between pure knowledge and applied knowledge, in the Islamic tradition of learning. In addition, there is no duality between religious education and professionalism; both are equally essential.

To ensure that people fulfill their roles as '*abd* and *khalīfah*, all of their intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, moral, social and other potentials have to be developed. Therefore, the role of education and instruction is to initiate the germination and later flowering of each child's potential. To this effect, Islamic education is designed to produce God-conscious (*taqwa*) people who serve Him and who are aware of their individual vertical relations with Him (*hablu min Allah*) and their horizontal social relations with their fellow human beings (*hablu min al-nas*). A good person, or the '*abd* in the Islamic perspective, will also be concerned about social justice, as were the Prophet and his Companions, all of whom commanded good and forbid evil. Clearly, then, the good person is one who is active and dynamic, always concerned with justice, fully devoted to seeking God's favor, and always conscious of the need to worship Him alone.

Objectives of the Islamic Traditional Sciences Programme

Considering the nature and stages of human cognitive and moral development, the Islamic traditional sciences programme should vary according to the level of education. The early formative years focus more on shaping and instilling good behavior and attitudes until they become second nature. The primary years reinforce these habits by forming good character and promoting the acquisition of facts, both prescriptively and through explanation. Thus, these formative years are suitable for memorizing the Qur'an, inducing the beliefs and habits associated with good character, such as prayer and fasting. The secondary years are most appropriate for shaping beliefs and knowledge through reasoning and argument. At this stage, the relationship between motives, acts and consequences become more visible.

The explicit aims of an Islamic studies programme are not clearly stated in most institutions; and if they are stated, they are not holistic. Some focus on developing the disciplines and professions, but none focuses on the actual individual. While the goal of producing a good person has often been cited, no programme has clearly analysed or defined it in exact terms. The IIUM (2004: 9), for example, has clearly defined its vision as an institution: to be "an international centre of educational excellence which integrates Islamic revealed knowledge and values in all disciplines and which aspires to the restoration of the Ummah's leading role in all branches of knowledge." It also espouses its commitment to its mission:

to revive and revitalise the Islamic concepts and traditions of learning, which regard the quest for knowledge as an act of worship and the spirit of science as emanating from the Holy Qur'an. The university endeavours to introduce a unified teaching and learning process along with the inculcation of moral and spiritual values through Integration, Islamisation, Internationalisation, and Comprehensive Excellence (p. 10).

But nowhere does it state, although it can be inferred from the mission statement, that the individual or Muslim (*insan*) who it desires to produce should possess a "culture of learning," have moral and spiritual values, and be instrumental in restoring Muslim leadership in all of the sciences.

What is a good person? Numerous ambiguous statements claim to represent this equally vague concept. Unfortunately, no serious attempt has been made to elaborate upon the meaning of '*abd* and the *khalīfah*. Kazmi (1998; 2000) has defined '*abd* as the "authentic self" who has a relationship with God but needs the temporal world to realis it. Such people read the Qur'an as a phenomenon, and not as an event, and thus perceive it as being applicable in different time contexts and to various problems.

At the same time, the Qur'an becomes humanity's criterion. It portrays the '*abd* as an active and God-conscious person who fears His punishment, who observes good relations with everybody, respects the surrounding social and physical environments, and sees natural phenomena, one's physical body, and history as signs of God. These

people view the world as a traveler traveling toward their final destiny, work to encourage good and forbade evil, and attempt to make proper judgments on all such matters. In order to fulfill these aspirations, they need to develop their rational and spiritual faculties as well as to activate their mind, spiritual heart, and spirit. They will have to control their lower self, and that itself is a greater jihad.

Consequently, these people must strive for social justice in accordance with God's commands, call others to goodness, and make peace with one's self and others. In their role as a *khalifah*, they employ their *'aql* to explore the natural environment and derive from it whatever will benefit humanity in this life. But most of all, they must have the wisdom and judgment to know their limits so that they do not destroy the environment or themselves. To perform their roles as a *khalifah* effectively and properly, they seek knowledge for a good purpose. Thus, Islam understands each human being to be an active person, provided that his or her activities do not transgress His commands and are performed to gain His pleasure. All such activities are forms of worship. In other words, there should be no separation between mosque and state, the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular.

Hence, higher Islamic education, including Islamic studies programmes, should focus on the intellect or the mind, which is God's unique gift to humanity and distinguishes human beings from all other creatures. Although we should be concerned with morality (akhlaq) at all times, the nature of human cognitive development emphasises formal operation as the highest stage of development when one reaches adolescence or early adulthood. The focus on developing moral beings begins during the early stage of development through habituation. At the tertiary level, the goal of producing a good person should focus on the ability to think critically, creatively and ethically and to communicate effectively, be it in writing or in speaking. At this level, our Islamic traditional scientists or scholars should be performing *ijtihad*, at least at a personal level, and testing their findings. The good person should appreciate how one gains knowledge and understands the universe, society, and ourselves; be informed of other cultures and times; have some under-standing and experience with moral and ethical problems; have developed a spirituality that is dominated by a good heart; and

have attained depth in some field of knowledge (Hashim, 1999; Tanner & Tanner, 1980). Only then can he or she function as a judicious and wise *'abd* and *khalifah*.

Academic Freedom and Intellectualism in the Islamic Legacy

The Qur'an is fundamental to Islamic education, and the transcendent and the revealed are pervasive in Muslim thought. Islam rejects any philosophy that denies or contradicts revelation. One may ask how academic freedom and free inquiry can thrive within this seemingly rigid context. Nashabi (1979) argues that academic freedom was safeguarded in Islamic history in a manner that compares favourably with the most liberal traditions of our present day. Other scholars (Wan Daud, 1991; Rauf, 1991; Tibawi, 1927) have demonstrated this enlightening experience in their respective works.

The first four Islamic centuries, the "golden age" of Islamic intellectual activity, was characterised by the free exercise of reason and respect for learned opinions, both of which were established practices in academic circles and in society in general. According to Maqdisi (1981), there were more than 100 schools of thought (madhahib) among the *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah* tradition; today there are four. Many of these schools, all of which had differences in *usul* (jurisprudence) and *furu'* (its minor branches), at some point in time died a natural death due to the declining number of their followers who "were capable of defending the doctrines of its recognised representatives" (p. 4). He also stated that the institution of *waqf* or endowment played an important role in the live of these schools too by determining which school to be propagated by the *madrasa* that was established with the *waqf*.

A certain basic piety and humility prevented any excesses of intolerance or bigotry. Philosophy and the religious sciences were in direct confrontation, a situation that contributed to the development of an Arabo-Islamic civilisation in which Greek, Christian, Hindu and Persian thought interacted freely in the tolerant atmosphere of the Islamic cities. This interaction enriched Islamic thought and

broadened its scope and influence. In fact, Islamic civilisation had its own form of philosophy before coming into contact with the Greeks. [4] By the fifth Islamic century, Islamic thought had developed its unique characteristics. The oneness of God (tawhid) was recognised as its major pillar, and this maturing Islamic thought was a catalyst for the European Renaissance. Ibn Rushd's refutation of al-Ghazzali's rejection of philosophy was readily perceived by the Church as a challenge to its intellectual authority. In fact, aside from other factors that were internal to Christianity, Nashabi (1979) asserts that the separation of church and state owes much to Ibn Rushd's intellectual initiative. However, this idea did not have as much influence in the Muslim world probably because Islam has no organised religious institution, such as the papacy, whose authority can be challenged. This lack of institutionalised religion allowed Islamic thought to develop in an atmosphere of freedom.

Intellectual freedom was similarly perceptible in education, particularly in the educational institutions that were not associated with defending a particular school of thought. Thus as long as education was undertaken in the Qur'anic schools (kuttab) and the mosque, academic freedom thrived. Only when educational institutions were established to serve the ruling authority or a particular school of thought – for example the madrasa to defend Shafi'i orthodoxy, al-Azhar to propagate esoteric (batini) thought, and the Fatimid dynasty – did a certain rigidity in thought began to appear and the liberal, intellectual tradition of Islamic society suffer.

The educational institutions that appeared in the tenth century and later were, with rare exceptions, all supported by the state and therefore naturally espoused the state ideology. Under such circumstances, the waqf

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4 According to Leaman, "it would be a mistake to regard philosophy in Islam as starting with the translation of Greek texts." He also asserts: "Even before Greek logic was available, there were philosophical arguments going on in the field of jurisprudence, disputes concerning the nature of law, analogy and meaning ..." O. Leaman, An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6 and 7.

was the only possible means to secure the financial autonomy needed to secure an educational institution's academic freedom. The history of jami' masjid al-Azhar provides evidence that its academic freedom has always been directly related to its financial self-sufficiency and autonomy.

Nevertheless, some awqaf were restrictive in the sense that they used their financial aid to espouse a certain school of thought. In fact, due to its exclusory rule, the so-called "godless" foreign sciences were often excluded from the madrasa curriculum and so were taught privately. [5] But despite this, the role of waqf in developing the institutions of learning remained crucial, especially in the tenth century. According to Maqdisi (1981: 28): "With the waqf, institutions of learning were made perpetual, and independent, in some cases, of the donor himself, and in all cases, of the donor's life span."

The fear of rigidity and commitment to serving a ruling authority that hampered the free exercise of good judgment led Muslim thinkers to avoid forming any order of "learned people" ('ulama) or even of defining a "learned person" ('alim). This designation was left without a restrictive definition and, despite its occasional misuse, has generally served to prevent any class from monopolising wisdom or exercising patronage over knowledge. The 'ulama's autonomy from the state or the ruler is an important point that al-Ghazzali (1974) underscored when he categorised those 'ulama who associated closely with the rulers for favours as being bad 'ulama ('ulama al-su').

In conclusion, the classical Islamic tradition preserved academic freedom due to the lack of an organised religious system, the establishment of awqaf to support educational institutions; the calling upon of rulers and ruled alike to hold learned people in high esteem; calling up on them to practise asceticism and humility, resist the temptation of worldly prosperity and devote themselves to pursuing knowledge, and the

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5 In fact Maqdisi argued that the West created foundations in emulation of the Islamic awqaf and thrived whereas the same did not materialise in the Islamic tradition because of this restrictive condition of the awqaf, pp. 235-6.

deliberately vague definitions of *'alim* and *'ulama* (Nashabi, 1979). In this atmosphere, Islamic thought reconciled scientific truth and revealed Truth in such a way that there was no dualism between the revealed and the acquired sciences.

History (Sarton, 1927; Nasr, 1968; Stanton, 1990) shows that Islamic educational scholarship produced original, genuine and creative thought in the past. It also produced integrated Muslims who were both brilliant in their fields and adhered to their religion with piety. Aside from the caliphs' staunch support for learning and the existence of a culture in which learning was valued, probably one other major factor contributing to this golden age for the sciences was the prevailing academic freedom enjoyed by society. Could the absence of this freedom be the only factor, or are there other ones that hinder the growth of authentic Islamic thought today? In the context of Malaysia, when one looks at the quality of graduates several years after their graduation and compares them with the graduates of the human, social and natural sciences, the latter seem to be more confident in their knowledge and their fields, able to work more systematically and think more logically, able to communicate more clearly and identify and solve problem faster, and able to organise activities more efficiently than their counterparts. Why is this so? Might this be related to other factors present in their educational or professional training? In the next section, I will examine the curriculum of the Islamic studies programme in general and then the issue of academic freedom within contemporary Muslim academia.

The Educational Training of Islamic Studies Professionals: Pedagogy

A major factor responsible for the state of affairs of our Islamic studies graduates is their educational training. The method or pedagogy used to train them is not conducive to the development of intellectualism. Despite the changing times and modern technologies, our graduates are still treated as repositories of knowledge, like computers whose memory can be expanded to store more and more information that might not be meaningful to them. They are stuffed with what Whitehead (1957) calls

"inert knowledge." Thus they are compelled to memorize the Qur'an, the hadith, *tafsir, sharah* (commentaries) and super-sharah from the Muslim legacy, especially jurisprudence, even though such information could easily be retrieved from books, CD references as al-Bayan or al-Alim, or websites in the internet. Nowhere are they encouraged to question, discuss, debate, challenge, or argue over ideas.

This contrasts sharply with the methods employed by the early scholars, such as *jadal* (the scholastic method of dialectics), *khilaf* (divergence of opinion in the law), and *munazarah* (disputation). Consequently, these graduates do not develop the ability to debate and articulate contemporary issues involving Islamic matters in public or in popular writing. In many cases, the mass lecture overrides the smaller class. Lecturers pride themselves on being able to address hundreds of students. Sometimes they literally read from their notes without pausing to inquire if the students understand their ideas and arguments. Frequently, instructors only depend on one or two textbooks and, even worse, on their own notes for the examination as in the case of al-Azhar University. Such lecturers have been criticized for not expanding their students' horizons and knowledge and for trapping them in the mind of one scholar (Ghoneim, 1992). Rahman (1982) made this same criticism when analyzing the Jamaat Islami's failure in education. He asserts that the members' dependence on Abul 'ala Maududi's works and thoughts imprisoned the minds of thousands of Muslim youths.

Thus, armed with this model, newly trained teachers of Islamic studies perpetuate the same method. Definitely, the mode of teaching and learning method need some changes to accommodate the Internet and the other new technologies (e.g., multimedia, digital cameras and video cameras, PowerPoint presentations, blogs, emails, e-groups, Youtube) and to make communication, public speaking, or *da'wah* more motivating and attractive to everyone, regardless of religion or age. But what is more important than the technology is their ability to argue, support, and articulate their points of view convincingly and rationally.

The Islamic Studies Programmes Curriculum Structure

The second major factor that promotes this inertia is the Islamic studies programmeme's curriculum for higher education. Although it has improved, it still faces many challenges. In most institutions, the programme's undergraduate curriculum continues to be narrow and too focused on the Islamic traditional sciences. Students are only required to study the Qur'an, the hadith, the Shari'ah, *usul al-din* ('aqidah or theology), the Arabic Language and the other auxiliary sciences. Although these subjects are broad and cover every sphere of human life here and in the afterlife, they are orientated toward gathering information.

Clearly, the curriculum is unbalanced and lacks integration between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge, this life and the afterlife, the sacred and the profane, and the perennial and the acquired. Students are unable to see how these sciences can be applied to other spheres of life. The classification of knowledge into revealed and acquired, that is based upon its sources, has not helped this integration. Similarly, classifying knowledge according to priority and duty into *fard 'ayn* and *fard kifayah*, albeit with good intention, also works against the unity of knowledge. Yet the First World Conference on Muslim Education, held in Mecca in 1977, adopted these models, and al-Attas (1978) elaborated upon them in one of the works that came out of it. Perhaps it is time to consider the nature of the core knowledge for those specialising in the Islamic traditional sciences or other models of knowledge classification used by such classical Muslim scholars as al-Farabi and the Ikhwan al-Safa, who avoided dichotomy in their classifications.

The unbalanced knowledge to which our graduates are exposed has narrowed their minds rather than broadening them, as it initially aspired to do. Due to the nature of these specialised subjects, namely, that the Islamic sciences are received from the authority of the Qur'an and the Prophet, our graduates are exposed to only one form of knowledge: that which presents the nature of the Ultimate Reality with no further need to question its truth. There seems to be no debate on the great ideas concerning the various interpretations of the signs of God, even though this was once the hallmark of learning and discourse in the Abbasid

caliphs' palaces. Respect for their masters' view or authority is supreme, and its absence would be interpreted as arrogance or disrespect to their teachers and scholars. This is in sharp contrast to the Islamic tradition, whereby a student could start his own study circle upon receiving his master's authorization. The only requirement was their ability to defend their *ijtihad*, even if it differed from the master's, as was the case of Wasil ibn Ata,' founder of the Mu'tazilite school, and his Master, the great Sufi scholar Hasan al-Basri.

The First World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977 heralded a new era in Muslim higher education. It fact, it was the precursor of attempts to crystallize the idea of the Islamisation of contemporary knowledge and the birth of great institutions: the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), and the international Islamic universities in Pakistan, Uganda and Malaysia, in particular the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The idea of integrating the Muslim world's dualistic educational system and Islamising contemporary knowledge preoccupied Muslims for many years. Finally, they devised an integrated curriculum structure for higher Traditional Sciences, one that had a university core, a faculty core, a departmental concentration, and supporting and elective courses. Such a framework as below is typical of most faculties of Islamic studies in Malaysia and probably in other Muslim countries:

- Core university requirement (varies according to its emphasis. For example, Islam and Asian civilisations, language proficiency courses, and such co-curriculum courses as parenting and swimming).

- Faculty/Kulliyah core requirement (basic Islamic traditional sciences that are obligatory, regardless of concentration).

- Departmental/Concentration requirement (Traditionally *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*, the Qur'an and hadith, history and Islamic civilisation, Shari'ah, *usul al-din*, and *da'wah*).

- Supporting courses from within the faculty (more Islamic Traditional sciences).

- Electives/Minor courses from within the faculty.

At the IIUM, the Faculty of Islamic Studies or Revealed Sciences and the Faculty of the Human and Social Sciences were combined to become the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences. As a result, students majoring in the Islamic traditional sciences must minor in psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, communication, history, or another human science of their choice. In this way, the *'ilm al-naqliy* (the Islamic Traditional sciences) and the *'ilm al-'aqliy* (the human and social sciences) are integrated. This curriculum is better than its predecessor in the traditional institutions because it produces a more balanced and informed Islamic teacher or religious personnel, who could also work as psychologists, sociologists, journalists and the other relevant fields.

In the case of the University of Malaya, the concentration has widened to include a combination of the Shari'ah plus law, economics, management and *dakwah* plus human development. Here, integration is determined more by professionalism than by liberalism, as is the case with IIUM. In other words, its graduates will be more marketable and versatile. Students from the Islamic studies programme can move beyond the traditional sphere of Shari'ah courts, Islamic judges, religious councils or religious departments and teachers, and enter economics, business, social services, and other modern professions. Definitely, these are improvements in the sense that the students' knowledge is more integrated, balanced and relevant to the time in which they live.

However, the curriculum is still not satisfactory or holistic, because it neither nurtures an appreciation of the arts and literature or the affective domain nor sharpens the students' scientific or mathematical analytical and logical abilities. A liberal or an intellectual Islamic curriculum would allow students to explore literature and the arts, history, social and philosophical analysis, science and mathematics, and foreign languages and cultures, with religious sciences as the basic core. Unless our students fill in the gaps through their own initiative, they will have no aesthetic imagination and taste, no ability to undertake philosophical and scientific analysis, and no appreciation for culture. Many Muslim scholars and Sufis have articulated the relationship of art and aesthetics and the refinement of the human soul.

If Islamic arts were only accidentally related to Islam, one could not observe and feel the unmistakeable fragrance of the Islamic revelation in the mosques or handicrafts of lands as far apart as Bangladesh and Senegal (Nasr, 1987: 217).

However, the Wahhabi school of thought considers most forms of arts as innovation (*bid'ah*) and therefore does not encourage their growth. This lacks of art and aesthetics has hardened the soul. One can relate this to the radicalism in Muslim youth as well as their yearnings to be fulfilled by Western music. It is important to study foreign languages and cultures to sensitise students and help them appreciate their own Islamic civilisation (Al-Attas, 1991). A more holistic curriculum model for Islamic higher education could be something like the one displayed in Figure 6.3, which is an improvement on al-Attas' model (Figure 6.2) which lacks an emphasis on the intellectual sciences and the American liberal education model (Figure 6.1) which lacks an emphasis on the Traditional Islamic sciences as its core. In this millennium, the importance of science and technology and its philosophy and methods cannot be doubted. The Intellectual science core for this Age should comprise the following the justification of which will be apparent in the next section;

1. The philosophy of knowledge in the Islamic Tradition
2. The philosophy of science in Islam
3. History of science: Islamic, Eastern and Western Traditions
4. The philosophy of the Shari'ah
5. Elements of tasawwuf/ Philosophy of ethics
6. The Qur'an and science
7. Languages (Arabic and English)
8. Logic

Curriculum Content

Today, higher Islamic education must examine its curriculum from the vantage point of Islamic epistemology in order to provide a clear, comprehensive picture of the knowledge tree — its roots, trunks, branches and leaves. This analogy is necessary to understand the unity, hierarchy and purpose of the knowledge that guides the university in developing
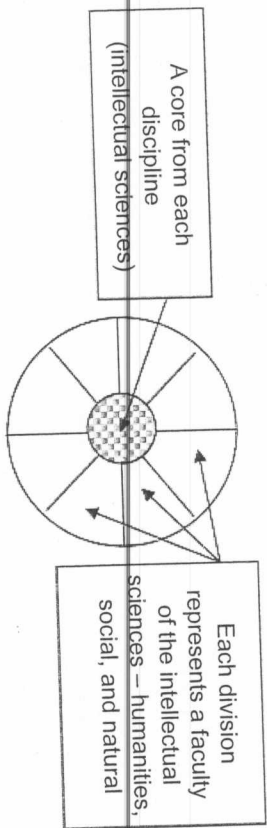
Such confusion is evident if we examine these programmes' content. We will notice that several of the courses at this level have already been offered at the secondary education level and thus are redundant. For example, IIUM students have already encountered "Study of Qur'an I and II," "Introduction to Fiqh," "Introduction to Usul al-Fiqh," "Sciences of Qur'an," "Sciences of Hadith," "Fiqh al-Sirah," "Islamic 'aqidah," "Islamic Ethics," and "A Survey of Islamic History and Civilisation." Too much repetition dulls the mind and creates boredom, instead of motivating students to engage in further exploration.

Although IIUM's curriculum is more integrated and broader, with the Islamic traditional sciences serving as the core, its content still lacks courses in science, art, and literature (Figure 6.3). Hence, such courses as "Central Issues in Science," or the philosophy of the natural sciences, religion, or even of the social sciences are absent. Specialisations follow the traditional categorisation of a liberal education. However, specialisations at the University of Malaya are broader in response to the needs of a professional education, such as combining the Shari'ah with economics, management, or contemporary law. Unfortunately, neither institution gives its students a holistic or balanced education that maximises their potential.

Which course can sharpen our students' minds, thinking, and reasoning abilities? Possibly, here is something we can learn from our Islamic heritage and the West. Lipman (1988) argues that philosophy teaches both logic, reasoning and the fallacies in thinking. If one considers that writing and reading are basic to all disciplines and that teaching English language or literature sharpens those skills, then it necessarily follows that one should teach philosophy if one thinks that thinking and reasoning are basic to all disciplines. What is so special about philosophy that enables it to achieve this? Philosophy deals with issues of concern to our life, such as metaphysics, epistemology, values and ethics, aesthetics, and, most importantly, formal logic and linguistic analysis. However, Islamic philosophy should be seen in a different light from Western philosophy in the sense that it replaces the notion of philosophy as skepticism and pure linguistic analysis to the idea of wisdom, universality and certitude. For this, we have a lot of examples from the work of classical-era Muslim philosophers.

A core from each discipline (intellectual sciences)

Each division represents a faculty of the intellectual sciences – humanities, social, and natural

Figure 6.1: The American liberal education curriculum model

Traditional or Shari'ah sciences as the core

The various faculties from the intellectual or 'aqliyyah sciences

Figure 6.2: Al-Attas curriculum model of an Islamic university

Shari'ah sciences core

Intellectual or 'aqliyyah sciences core

Intellectual or 'aqliyyah sciences specialisation
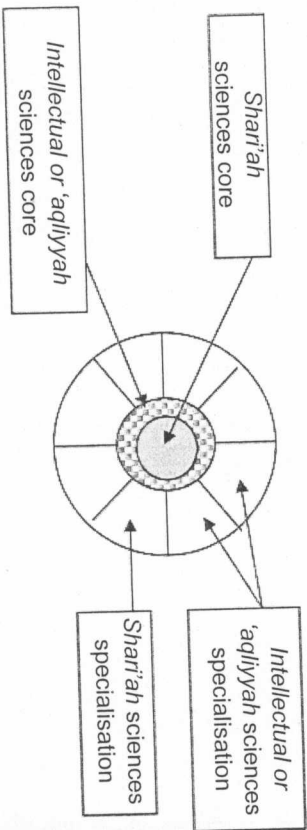
Shari'ah sciences specialisation

Figure 6.3: Rosnani's proposed curriculum model of an Islamic university

its curriculum. Right now, the curriculum of Islamic higher institutions of learning is a hodge-podge, a kind of cut-and-paste undertaking that transplants content from one tradition or culture to another. This is precisely the kind of approach that teachers greatly frown upon if they see their students using it.

The Socratic method of philosophy consists of discussion, debate, argument, and the existence of a deliberative community, each member of which respects and tolerates each other member. One learns to argue in an intelligent and respectable manner and to listen and respect other views. It is so critical that it does not leave a single stone unturned. Undoubtedly philosophy, which allows the mind or reason some degree of freedom, can create doubt or skepticism; however, certitude (*yaqin*) is only attained after one's doubt has been removed by one's teacher or self-exploration. Imam al-Ghazzali in his *Munqidh min al-Dalal* (1980) attests to this in his life and works. This is why past and present Muslim reformers and scholars (Keddie, 1983; Qadir, 1988), among them Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Nasr (1987) have called for the reintroduction of philosophy into the Islamic curriculum. According to Nasr (1987:224), it is essential to teach philosophy to defend Islam, a view shared by the Mu'tazilah:

[T]he teaching of Islamic philosophy … is the means of protecting the Truth and providing ways for repelling the attacks which are made against it from all sides. Its teaching in the correct manner is, therefore, in a sense a religious duty.

Al-Ghazali studied philosophy to defend Islam against the Muslim philosophers he believed had gone astray, and Ibn Rushd applied philosophy to refute al-Ghazzali. Thus, it is not a question of "whether one should teach philosophy to Muslim students but rather what kind or kinds of philosophy should be taught and how the subject should be approached (p. 204)." Students need a good understanding of the Islamic intellectual tradition before embarking on Descartes, Kant, Plato or Aristotle. The great debates of the Muslim philosophers, such as those between Ibn Sina and al-Biruni, al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd, should be analysed and their significance highlighted. This discussion already shows how important for Muslim graduates to reclaim their conversation with the past scholars. They need history of Islamic philosophy and also history of science so that they are aware of the contribution of every civilisation to the development of the sciences.

However, if we scrutinise al-Farabi's classification of knowledge, before we can study logic, we need to study the languages. In the context

of the present day, in addition to students' mother tongues, we need to equip our graduates with both English and Arabic, regardless of which discipline they major in. English is necessary as the language of the sciences of the day, just as the Europeans had to master Arabic to learn the sciences then in Muslim Spain. In the context of the Islamic traditional sciences' curriculum, philosophy should be introduced when dealing with epistemology. The curriculum should expose students to the nature of research methodologies in both the Islamic traditional sciences and the intellectual sciences – applying the methods of the empirical sciences, of hermeneutics for the interpretation of the texts (*ta'wil*), as well as the normative, ethical and rational methods or other philosophical approaches. They will also need to study the quantitative methods. Students need to understand the nature and ways of using these methods in their research and how to defend critiques of them. Familiarity with these methods will produce adept graduates who will know how to solve social, political, and religious problems by applying the appropriate methods and thereby yielding more accurate solutions.

In this context, the curriculum should also acquaint students with the philosophy of science, which discusses in great depth the nature of scientific or empirical knowledge and its verification. M. Amin (2005) argues that "whatever science is compiled, conceptualised, written about systematically then communicated, taught and [disseminated] orally and in writing cannot be [done] without a philosophical paradigm." He argues further that the philosophy of science is the forgotten analytical tool of Islamic studies. In his re-examination of al-Faruqi's epistemological bases of the Islamisation of Knowledge theory, Safi (1996) laid out the weaknesses of the research methods used by Muslim scholars and sought to synthesize the major methods of inquiry by putting them on a more solid base. Thus, the philosophy of science and a wider variety of research methods are vital ingredients for intellectual development.

In line with the Islamic intellectual tradition, the curriculum should also incorporate the subject of *tasawwuf* (Sufism), because its classical texts contain many pearls of wisdom from which contemporary Muslims could benefit and enrich their lives, such as Ibn Ataillah's *Al-Hikam* and al-Ghazzali's *Al-Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. After all, most of the classical

Muslim philosophers, al-Farabi included, were Sufis and strove their utmost (jihad) to harmonise reason and revelation.

The Scholar-Teachers

Another major factor that produces inert graduates of Islamic studies is the issue of scholar-teachers, whose teaching methods have not undergone any significant changes to make their pedagogy more effective. If they continue to apply the same method with which they were taught, namely, lecturing and note-taking, then their students will do the same when they become teachers. If scholar-teachers employ the discussion method or problem-based learning, this will be reflected in how their students will teach the next generation of students. Lipman (1988) has argued that in many instances, teachers in pre-service training are not taught by teacher educators in the manner that they will use to teach children or school pupils. Consequently, they will be ineffective because they have not seen the method demonstrated or modeled. Thus, it is no surprise that nothing new has developed in the teaching of Islamic studies despite the various educational methods, technologies, and guidelines available today, especially those that will stir the mind.

The high regard in which classical Muslim society held toward learned people or scholar-teachers can only be matched by their asceticism and disdain for worldly possessions. Whether a scholar or a teacher may or may not receive remuneration was even debated during the time of al-Ghazzali and al-Qabisi. These teachers were highly committed to knowledge and scholarship, regardless of remuneration. This high commitment undoubtedly brushed off on their students. Unfortunately, many of our contemporary scholars have been corrupted with worldly concerns and material possessions. There is no more the asceticism and disdain for worldly possessions. A majority of them write, research or publish because of academia's "publish or perish" mentality toward tenure or promotion, but not genuinely for creative scholarship and forging new ideas. They do not possess even a quarter of the passion of such Islamic intellectual giants as Ibn Sina, al-Khwarizmi, Ibn Khaldun and al-Biruni, all of whom took pains to travel and stay with the scholars

or societies they visited. In fact, Ibn Khaldun and al-Biruni were the earliest qualitative or ethnographic researchers. This passion is now possessed by the people of the West, who hold many Nobel Prizes and are committed to scholarship.

Muslims can recapture their former glory if they consider the example of Abdus-Salam (the Nobel Prize for Physics, 1979) and Ahmed Zewail (the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, 1999). Even so, both of them carried out their research in the West. The examples that scholar-teachers exhibit today is emulated by their students when they become scholars or teachers and perpetuate weak scholarship and a lack of intellectualism. Interestingly, the tradition of asceticism among scholars-teachers and the strong scholar-student bond is very much alive in the private traditional educational institutions such as the *pondok*. But unfortunately, it is not evident in the government-funded modern public Islamic institutions. Perhaps the Sufi approach to teaching is more effective for developing this sort of bonding.

A final point concerns the scholar-teachers' strength in the Arabic language. An accomplished scholar of Islamic studies must have a good grasp of Arabic, since it is instrumental to mastering all branches of the Islamic traditional sciences and essential to engaging in intellectualism, which requires using the original sources. Sadly, students do not even seem to have any passion for mastering Arabic. In the same way, fluency in English is another pre-requisite, as it is the language of modern knowledge and globalisation as well as the language for cultural and intellectual discourse with non-Muslims. Our scholars also need to be erudite in this language.

Academic Freedom

Earlier, I argued that academic freedom thrived in classical Islamic civilisation due to the non-existence of an organised religious institution in Islam; the establishment of *awqaf* to support educational institutions; the call upon the rulers and the ruled alike to hold learned people in high esteem; the call of these people to practice asceticism and humility and to resist the temptation of worldly prosperity by devoting themselves

to pursuing knowledge and the deliberately vague definition of '*alim* and '*ulama*. Do we still have these conducive factors within Muslim societies today?

In many parts of the Muslim world, there is a more organised and hierarchical system of religious administration having a mufti to give fatwas. In one sense, this is useful for administrative efficiency and running religious affairs with respect to Islamic law as regards to '*aqidah*, marriage, divorce, inheritance, apostasy, and *waqf* and zakat institutions. But in another sense, it tends to stifle creativity because the authority to decide is limited to this body, although various intellectuals might not agree. In Iran, for example, this system became more stringent with the establishment of *vilayat-i-faqih* after the revolution. Thus it is not completely true anymore to say that there is no organised mosque in the Muslim world.

Waqf still exists, but only in a few Middle Eastern countries and only on a minor scale. In some, as in Malaysia, it has not been able to generate enough funds to finance education. The most *waqf* can provide is a site for the school. However, in Egypt, Indonesia and elsewhere this institution still provides strong financial backing. In most cases in the context of Malaysia, Islamic higher education is totally supported by the federal or state government. Interestingly, a strong Islamic economic institution that has yet to be harnessed is zakat, which could provide an alternative when it comes to supporting private Islamic educational institutions and students.

Muslim academicians in various parts of the Islamic world do enjoy a certain degree of academic freedom, which varies from country to country. They are allowed to publish and disseminate their research findings, as well as to speak their minds at local and international conferences. Problems only arise if their findings criticise the government's policies or conduct, in which case their research might not be published or broadcast in the local media. At times, this academic freedom may be curtailed due to political events or the encroachment of religious issues. This happened in Malaysia when a group of progressive, youthful Muslim writers wrote on various dimensions of Islam, especially on issues regarding gender, the Prophet and the civil society – Muslim non-governmental organisations and the Islamic political party demanded that their writings be retracted

in such strong terms that the government finally had to intervene. Even the appointment of a university's leader is based on political affiliation instead of academic merit. Thus, with respect to the growth of intellectualism, although the factor of academic freedom requires attention, I believe it pales in significance when compared to the intellectual training required for Muslims in general and for graduates of Islamic studies in particular.

To a certain degree, learned people are still held in high esteem. But unfortunately, esteem is gradually being dissociated from learning and being attached to corporate business and political power; the learned intellectual is beginning to take a backseat. This esteem has been further eroded by globalisation and the commodification of knowledge. Driven by commerce, Islamic studies, like the social sciences, is no longer considered to have a promising future – its graduates have no market value. No private colleges whose core business is profit making would offer this specialisation. Hence, for its survival, the issues of professionalism and relevance must be considered by those institutions that do.

Finally, the definition of '*ulama* is the only factor that remains as it was in the past. This notion has to be expanded because the Qur'an has defined it as "those fearing God" and also defines "men of understanding" (the *ulul albab*) as those who often contemplate about nature (al-Qur'an 3: 190-91). The Qur'an and Science cannot be separated because (i) the Qur'an calls for reflection (*ulul albab*) on nature, and (ii) Reflection of Nature leads to higher realm. It is significant that integration and unity can produce intellectualised '*ulama* and well as *ulamatised* intellectuals.

Conclusion

I have attempted to delineate the factors that have contributed to the inertia of Islamic studies graduates. In summary, these are related to educational training, the ambiguous definition of a good person (the goal of Islamic education), the epistemological ambiguity of knowledge and curriculum in Muslim higher education, weak teaching and research

methods, the commitment of the scholar-teachers, the lack of good scholarship models, weak Arabic and English languages skills, and the lack of academic freedom. Having diagnosed the problems, I now propose some possible solutions.

First, Muslim scholars should deliberate on the operational definition of 'abd and khalifah and determine, epistemologically, the nature of the knowledge tree for Muslim higher education. Then, they can tailor a more holistic and relevant curriculum. Second, the curriculum should be reformed by making it more integrated and holistic in light of society's liberal/intellectual needs and professional services. Accordingly, the curricular content needs to include a core representing the Islamic intellectual sciences, such as human science, arts and literature, science and mathematics and the humanities.

Moreover, I have recommended the reintroduction of philosophy, in particular the history and philosophy of science and religion, for specialists in the Islamic traditional studies in order to meet the need for intellectualism as well as the reintroduction of tasawwuf to refine the hearts. Iran provides a good example of 'ulama who are grounded in philosophy and can understand and articulate intellectual issues. If their effectiveness is still in question, then we will have to examine what kind of philosophy is taught there and how is it implemented. The curriculum should be broadened to enable students of Islamic traditional studies to minor in relevant specialisations in the Islamic intellectual sciences, including the study of statistics that will prepare them to conduct research in a more integrated manner at the post-graduate level. It will also help make them more aware of how to apply their knowledge to the real world. Only after doing this can more original thoughts develop.

Third, the faculty of Islamic traditional studies should only select the best teachers who will become good models for their students with regards to thinking, conduct, character and scholarship, including research and especially publications. These teachers should be in the fore-front of the effort to produce Islamic human sciences. Fourth, teaching methods need to be re-examined. There should be a great focus on intellectualism or reasoning and thinking needs as well as the intelligent use of the relevant educational technology so that the "parrot of the past" can be replaced. There ought to be more discussions, debates, philosophical inquiry and

deliberations to foster critical, creative and ethical thinking, instead of the traditional lecturing and note-taking. Students ought to be given assignments that employ their research knowledge and skills.

Fifth, these students must master Arabic so that they can read classical and modern Islamic studies texts. They must be competent in English and if possible, other western languages, such as French and German, and have an understanding of the debates and the critiques that have gone on in the West. They should be encouraged to pursue their studies in order to become accomplished teachers. Finally, we should revive the tradition of academic freedom for scholars-teachers and encourage the growth of private and financially independent institutions. These steps, although few in number, would definitely help us develop a new curricular structure and content. This undertaking requires great determination and sacrifice on the part of educationists, faculty members, teachers, curriculum designers and even politicians. However, the results will breathe life back into the hearts and minds of teachers and students of the Islamic traditional studies, as well as other disciplines, and will bear intellectual fruit for generations to come.

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