

Inspiring Muslim Employees: Divine Speech

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Abstract: *This study is related to Islamic management. The aim is to test Nouman Ali Khan’s methodology found on www.bayyinah.tv. Khan says Muslims should start by exploring the linguistic miracles of the Qur’an before exploring the rest of the Qur’an. To test this claim, different groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students from the International Islamic University Malaysia watched videos from the bayyinah’s Divine Speech module. The qualitative and quantitative data supported Khan’s claim. The conclusion is that business leaders interested in developing a corporate culture that reflect Islamic values should consider using this methodology.*

Keywords: Qur’an, linguistic miracle, Islamic management

1. Introduction

This study concerns Islamic management. Islamic management encourages Muslim business leaders to create corporate cultures that allow Muslim employees to internalise the Qur’an (Fontaine, Ahmad, & Oziev, 2017). Their conclusions is that Muslim business leaders need a growth-mindset, they need a systems thinking approach to management, and they need to develop the spiritual intelligence of their employees (see Figure 1).

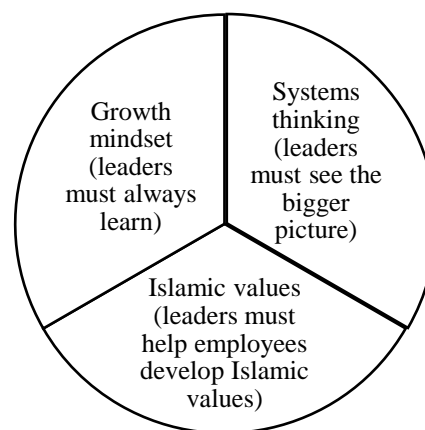


Figure 1: Three Elements of Islamic Leadership

Source: Adapted from Fontaine, Ahmad & Oziev (2017)

To date, two generic processes have been developed. These are getting participants to watch Islamic videos alone outside of work and keeping a diary of their thoughts and reflections; and getting participants to watch Islamic videos in groups at work and developing mindmaps

to record the groups' discussions. For these processes to work, leaders need to create an incentive system (Fontaine, Ahmad & Oziev, 2017). However, there is virtually no cost with this approach as most of the content is freely available on-line. Since 2010, experiments have been conducted with other 3,000 students.

From 2010 to 2014, students watched any Islamic video of their choice. The assumption was that as long as students were learning something new about Islam, they would grow spiritually. Furthermore, the fact that participants could choose what to watch allowed them to explore religious themes that were important to them. From 2014 onwards, participants focused on videos that explained the Qur'an. The responses of participants were very positive. Since 2017, the focus has been on testing the methodology of Nouman Ali Khan (www.bayyinah.tv).

Khan has focused on explaining the Qur'an systematically and posting them on his website. He works with a team of scholars that help him develop the academic integrity of the videos he posts online. Khan has developed the following modules:

- 1) Divine Speech – a study of the linguistic miracle of the Qur'an
- 2) *Surah al Fatihah* – a comprehensive explanation of this *surah*
- 3) A Thematic Overview – an introduction to the main themes found in the Qur'an.
- 4) A Concise Commentary – a brief explanation of the whole Qur'an.
- 5) A Deeper Look – a detailed commentary of the whole Qur'an.

The sequence of these modules is important. Before getting into the detailed study of the Qur'an, students ought to study the linguistic miracles of the Qur'an. To test this idea, selected contents from the Divine Speech module were shown to groups of management students over a one-year period.

2. Methodology

This study used an action research approach (Fontaine, 2016). The qualitative phase lasted about nine months. This phase showed that students benefited tremendously from watching the Divine Speech material. The paper will focus on reporting the quantitative data.

3. Literature Review

The need for the Divine Speech module (or something like it) is implied in the Qur'an itself. Allah says, "*Indeed, those who conceal what We sent down of clear proofs (bayyinah) and guidance (huda) after We made it clear for the people in the Scripture - those are cursed by Allah and cursed by those who curse*" (2:159). This *ayah* suggests that revelation is a two-step process: *bayyinah* (which convinces people of the authenticity of prophets) and *huda* (which are the detailed injunctions that one accepts after accepting prophets). Scholars are in an agreement that one of the greatest proofs of the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the linguistic miracles of the Qur'an (in Arabic, *'ijaz*).

The literature on the linguistic miracles of the Qur'an is vast but Mir (1983) summarised it as follows. Most classical scholars focus on the unparalleled eloquence of the Qur'an by focusing on the sequence of words or the beauty of individual *ayat* (Mir, 1983, p. 17). This sequence (*nazm*) makes the Qur'an miraculous. Mir (1983) compares the ideas of Khattabi, Baqillani, Jurjani and Zamakhshari. Mir (1983, p.25) says that Razi was the first to apply the

idea of *nazm* to the whole of the Qur'an. This idea was further developed by Farahi (1863-1930) and Islahi (1904-1997).

Khan has been inspired by the work of Islahi and others. *Nazm* is one of the pillars of his Divine Speech module. *Nazm* is not simply a device to make the Qur'an miraculous, it is a concept that helps Muslims better understand the meaning of the Qur'an (Mir, 1983, p. 73). Apart from *nazm*, Khan explores the theory of ring structures in the Qur'an based on the work of Farrin (2014). Khan and Randhawa (2016, pp. 232-234) present a visual representation of the ring structures embedded in the Qur'an. Khan and Randhawa (2016) suggest that there is a coherence within an *ayah*, between *ayat*, within a *surah* and between the *surah* of the entire Qur'an.

Haleem (2011) makes another point. When speculating on the origin of the Qur'an, non-Muslim scholars assume that Muhammad (peace be upon him) plagiarised the Bible. If this theory is correct, then it should be possible to identify those passages from the Bible that have been plagiarised. One theory is that *surah al-Fatihah* is the plagiarised version of the Lord's Prayer. Haleem (2011, pp 24-26) shows that they are quite different so that the accusation of plagiarism seems unfounded. Haleem (2011) further compares the stories of Adam, Eve and Joseph in the Bible and the Qur'an. The differences are so significant that the accusation of plagiarism seems disingenuous.

The Divine Speech material will be described by relying on the Divine Speech module on www.bayyinah.tv and other divine speech related videos that Khan has posted on YouTube. There is about 14 hours of content (see Table 1).

Table 1: The Divine Speech Content

<i>Section</i>	<i>Number of videos in section</i>	<i>Time in hours</i>
<i>Surah al Fatihah</i>	8	3
Figures of speech	8	1.5
The perfect choice of words	7	1.5
Three kinds of Arabic	2	0.75
Sentence structure	4	0.75
Order of words	3	0.5
Coherence in the Qur'an	2	1
Beginning and ending	3	0.75
Miscellaneous	6	4.5
Source: Bayyinah.TV		14.25

Most of the content has been published in a book that includes scholarly references (Khan & Randhawa, 2016). Khan explains how much of the material has been derived from the work of other Muslim scholars. He compiled their research and presented it in public workshops. Apart from these 14 hours of content, there are two videos called "*Divine speech prologue 1*" and "*Divine speech prologue 2*" that last about 2.5 hours (Khan, 2009a, Khan 2009b). A video called "*The Final Miracle*" lasts about 2 hours (Khan, 2013). A video called "*Rediscovering al-Fatihah*" lasts three hours (Khan, 2015a). All four videos are available on YouTube.

Khan (2013) tells the story of a young Muslim teenager who attended his Divine Speech talk in the United States. He went home and said to his mother, "*Tonight was the first time I really*

believed that the *Qur'an* was not written by a human being". Khan (2013) concludes that we cannot force children to simply believe that the *Qur'an* is the word of God. They need to be exposed to its miracles so that they become convinced. Khan (2013) adds that these talks "*do not satisfy the intellect, they satisfy the heart. Once the heart is satisfied, the intellect will follow the heart*". This point is critical. Over the two years, our research indicate that this statement is the key to understanding the effectiveness of the Divine Speech module.

The authors asked participants to watch these videos in class and let them discuss the content in small groups. This collective approach to on-line learning was developed with the assistance of a postgraduate student (Parvin, 2017). The first task was to break up the Divine Speech content into smaller sections that would allow for short sessions. A number of areas of reflections were proposed to help students focus. These were,

- 1) The Prophet (peace be upon him) didn't know how to read or write yet he revealed a 600-pages book. He was expelled from Makkah but reconquered it without spilling any blood. Did anyone else in history do anything similar? Has there been any illiterate individual that has dictated a book?
- 2) Each word is chosen perfectly. For example, the choice of the word "*al hamd*" in *surah al-Fatihah*. Khan explains the many alternative choices available in Arabic and explains why *al hamd* is the best choice (Khan, 2015a). This perfect choice of each word appears throughout the *Qur'an*.
- 3) Each *ayah* has a unique structure. An *ayah* is not a sentence. An *ayah* can be a word like "Ar Rahman" (55:01) or part of a sentence. In some cases, an *ayah* can be made up of multiple sentences. For example, *surah al-Asr* is one sentence divided into three *ayat*. However, *ayah al-Kursi* is made up of 9 sentences.
- 4) Each *surah* has a perfect structure. There are many examples, such as the structure of *surah al-Mulk* (Khan, 2016a).
- 5) There are subtle and complex relationships between *surahs*. For example, Khan (2013b) demonstrates the relationship between *surah ar-Rahman* and *surah al-waqiah*.
- 6) In the Divine Speech module, there are examples of the coherence between the *Qur'an* and the prophetic narrations.
- 7) The *Qur'an* is not simply intellectually stimulating but it has a beautiful rhythm that makes it easy to remember and inspires awe.

With these sub-modules these videos were shown in classroom to undergraduate and postgraduate students. After a couple of cycles, the authors decided to measure the spiritual intelligence of participants before and after the intervention. The questionnaire used was developed by King and DeCicco (2009). They argue that spiritual intelligence is based on four concepts: critical existential thinking (CET), personal meaning production (PMP), transcendental awareness (TA), and conscious state expansion (CSE). The instrument was found to be culturally valid in Malaysia (Anwar, 2016).

The authors had previously developed the spiritual intelligence of management students at the International Islamic University Malaysia. One of them asked his students to watch one Islamic video of their choice every week throughout the semester. The same questionnaire developed by King and DeCicco (2009) was used. Students were given the questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Results from 2013

<i>No</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>1st round</i>	<i>2nd round</i>	<i>Sign.</i>
1	I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality.	3.48	3.71	0.089
2	I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence.	3.9	3.95	n.s.
3	I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death.	3.7	3.84	n.s.
6	It is difficult for me to sense anything other than the physical and material.	2.45	2.54	n.s.
7	My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations.	3.77	4.13	0.025
8	I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness	3.59	3.72	n.s.
9	I accept the theories about such things as life, death, reality, and existence.	4.47	4.5	n.s.
13	I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life.	3.81	3.85	n.s.
14	I define myself by my deeper, non-physical self.	3.54	3.79	0.04
15	When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.	4.29	4.28	n.s.
16	I often see issues more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/awareness.	4.06	3.84	0.06
17	I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe.	3.79	3.84	n.s.
18	I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life.	3.75	4.04	0.022
19	I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life.	4.06	4.15	n.s.
21	I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is some greater power.	3.75	3.91	n.s.
22	Recognizing the nonmaterial aspects of life helps me feel centred.	3.58	3.86	0.032.

Source: Fontaine and Ahmad (2013)

4. Findings

To avoid cluttering this paper, the qualitative data will be omitted. It was however a very important part of the process because it gave us the confidence to collect quantitative data.

A group of 45 students were surveyed in February 2018. A group of 70 students from another class served as a control group. The Cronbach Alpha was 0.9. Paired T-tests identified any significant difference in the level of spiritual intelligence before and after the intervention (see Table 3)

Table 3: Results of Paired T-tests

No	Questions	Differences in Mean	T	Sig. (2 tailed)
1	I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality	-.24444	-1.598	.117
2	I recognise aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body	-.44444	-2.714	.009
3	I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence	-.46667	-2.654	.011
4	I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness	-.33333	-2.803	.008
5	I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death	-.55556	-2.619	.012
6	It is difficult for me to sense anything other than the physical and material	.06667	.425	.673
7	My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations	-.15556	-1.045	.302
8	I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness	-.17778	-1.274	.209
9	I have developed my own theories about such thing as life, death, reality and existence	-.33333	-1.701	.096
10	I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people	-.42222	-2.801	.008
11	I am able to define a purpose or reason for life	-.28889	-2.229	.031
12	I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness	-.24444	-2.044	.047
13	I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life	-.28889	-1.832	.074
14	I define myself by the deeper, non-physical self	-.15556	-1.360	.181
15	When I experience failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.	-.13333	-1.062	.294
16	I often see issues and choices more clearly while in a higher state of consciousness	-0.04444	-0.34	.736
17	I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe	-.15556	-.961	.342
18	I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life	.08889	.682	.499
19	I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life	-.44444	-3.665	.001
20	I recognise qualities in people which are more meaningful than their body, personality or emotions	-.46667	-3.405	.001
21	I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is a greater power or force (e.g. God)	0.00000	0.000	1.000
22	Recognising the nonmaterial aspects of life help me feel centred	.02222	.144	.886
23	I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences	-.17778	-1.596	.118
24	I have developed my own technique for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness	-.42222	-3.009	.004

The results indicate a significant increase in the spiritual intelligence of respondents in 10 out of the 24 questions asked. The result was not surprising in light of the qualitative data collected prior to the study. However, the result was much better than a similar study conducted in 2013 (Fontaine & Ahmad, 2013) presented in Table 2. The results for the control group is shown in Table 4. The students in the control group continued to attend the normal spiritual activities that all IIUM students attend. This includes attending weekly *usrah* events. This explains some changes in their measurable spiritual intelligence. Overall, the control group showed an increased in only 2 out of the 24 questions. This increase is significantly less than the students exposed to the linguistic miracles.

Table 4: Paired T-tests for the Control Group

No	Question	Differences in Mean	T	Sig. (2 tailed)
1	I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality	.05634	.490	.626
2	I recognise aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body	-.15493	-1.33	.187
3	I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence	.16901	1.367	.176
4	I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness	.04225	.359	.721
5	I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death	-.30986	-2.24	.028
6	It is difficult for me to sense anything other than the physical and material	0.00000	0.000	1.000
7	My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations	-.08451	-.591	.556
8	I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness	-.12676	-1.08	.282
9	I have developed my own theories about such thing as life, death, reality and existence	-.02817	-.219	.827
10	I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people	.04225	.320	.750
11	I am able to define a purpose or reason for life	-.19718	-1.72	.090
12	I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness	-.18310	-1.56	.124
13	I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life	-.09859	-.716	.477
14	I define myself by the deeper, non-physical self	.19718	1.440	.154
15	When I experience failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.	-.21127	-1.93	.058
16	I often see issues and choices more clearly while in a higher state of consciousness	-.14085	-1.02	.311
17	I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe	.02817	.252	.802
18	I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life	-.09859	-.829	.410
19	I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life	-.19718	-2.11	.038
20	I recognise qualities in people which are more meaningful than their body, personality or emotions	.04225	.340	.735
21	I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is a greater power or force (e.g. God)	-.26761	-1.55	.125
22	Recognising the nonmaterial aspects of life help me feel centred	-.01408	-.129	.898
23	I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences	-.12676	-1.12	.267
24	I have developed my own technique for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness	-.11268	-.815	.418

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to test the benefits of the Divine Speech module. The data collected shows that the increase in the measurable component of spiritual intelligence is quite significant. In fact, Fontaine and Ahmad (2013) used the same questionnaire and a similar approach although their respondents were free to watch any video that they liked. The group surveyed by Fontaine and Ahmad (2013) did not show as much change as the group of 45 students.

Since 2010, research indicates that it is possible to develop a corporate culture that reflect Islamic values (Fontaine & Ahmad, 2013, Fontaine, Ahmad & Oziev, 2017). Research shows that it is reasonably easy and it can be done at a minimum cost. This study adds to this body of research in two important ways.

First, the methodology of Nouman Ali Khan has been partially tested. In fact, subsequent (unpublished) experiments with students shows that when the students are not exposed to the Divine Speech module, they seem to benefit less from other videos about the Qur'an.

Second, the research since 2010 suggest that increasing knowledge about Islam is necessary but not sufficient to develop spiritual intelligence. A critical part of the process is reflecting on the Qur'an (*taddabur*). This was the part that students had the most difficulty with. The group discussions were invaluable to help that process. This point is similar to Khan's (2013) comment that these talks "*do not satisfy the intellect, they satisfy the heart. Once the heart is satisfied, the intellect will follow the heart*". To help the reflection process, the use of diaries throughout the semester helped a lot (Fontaine, 2015).

Third, the idea of exploring the linguistic miracles of the Qur'an has an enormous potential. For example, one of the authors has submitted articles that look at the miraculous similarities and contrasts between prophet Yusuf and Prophet Musa (peace be upon them). He is also completing an article that looks at the themes in the work of Dostoevsky and the themes expounded in the Qur'an. His conclusion is that the whole body of Dostoevsky's work – which includes "Underground Man", "Crime and Punishment", "The Idiot", "The Devils", and "The Brothers Karamazov" and runs for several thousands of pages – can be summarised by only three *ayat*. Once one starts comparing the themes of the Qur'an with current arts – books, movies, or paintings – one is able to attract the attention of non-religious Muslims and get them thinking about the most amazing fact of all – how can a man (who did not know how to read and write) reveal the Qur'an in the first place?.

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