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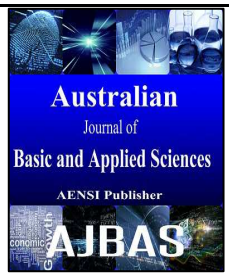

Implementation of Integrated Knowledge in Higher Learning Institution in Malaysia: A Case Study in University of Technology MARA (UiTM)

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ABSTRACT

Background: Any religious community believes that every field of knowledge has a direct connection to God. This is because God is the main source of knowledge. God has also commanded human to constantly increase their knowledge in order to do justice to themselves and their society; towards creating prosperous lives for all. Therefore, the process of teaching and learning knowledge should always be integrated with divine values and morality. These days however, higher learning institution in many countries are focusing on the utilitarian and pragmatism aspects to meet labor demands as well as to develop their economic capacity. **Objective:** This article discusses the findings on the efforts and challenges faced by UiTM lecturers in integrating divine and moral values in their teaching practices. **Results:** The findings in this research show that the challenges faced by lecturers in integrating divine values and morality are due to the absence of specific guidelines for the lecturers and also lack of knowledge and skills regarding the concept of knowledge based on religious paradigm as well as the skills to apply them during lectures. **Conclusion:** Therefore, lecturers need to enhance a comprehensive belief on the concept of integrated knowledge based on religious paradigm as well as the skills to implement it in their teaching practice in order to nurture pious, balance and competent human being among students.

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INTRODUCTION

Human needs knowledge to guide their life. In explaining the meaning and the reality of life, Imam al- Ghazali had put great emphasis in the definition and nature of knowledge (*ilm*). God is the main source of knowledge. The true knowledge is supposed to yield high morality in a human character (Hamid Fahmy 2010). Thus, many great Muslim scholars revealed that good morality and attitude of a person could be nurtured if he/she has a comprehensive belief of knowledge or epistemology based on religious paradigm. In this article, the concept of integrated knowledge means the knowledge in every field or area being integrated with divine values and morality (al- Ghazali 2000, al-Attas 1978, Hassan 1997). The integration of knowledge with divine values and morality is a basis in instilling good character in students besides applying an effective teaching method. (Hofer 2002, 2004, Habsah Ismail *et al*. 2013).

However, the education in Malaysia is increasingly becoming market-oriented that causes students to select the field of studies which in turn would generate a lucrative income. Hence, they will rather concentrate on their achievement in examination rather than the knowledge itself (Lee Yok Fee & Sarjit S. Gill 2008, Gazi *et al*. 2010). Furthermore, the benchmark of the excellence for higher learning institution is based on the rate of employability among graduates. (Ashby, 2011). This makes the process of teaching and learning merely targeting on transferring required knowledge and skills in order to meet the standards of competency in the employment. (Hussain *et al*.2008). This situation has led the teaching and learning process become too examination-oriented, whereas the performance in the examination does not necessarily reflect the high level of knowledge of the students. In addition, knowledge is not only has to be understood, memorized and explained but more importantly has to be applied and internalized in oneself until he/she become a pious man in the eye of God (Al- Ghazali 2000, Al- Attas 1978, Habibah & Zaharah 2014).

Therefore, the teaching and learning process which do not integrate the divine values and morality can lead to the increments of white collar crime in society. As for that, it is vital for the lecturers to

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implement the concept of integrated knowledge as this matter is very crucial since the main purpose of education is not solely to produce a competent employee, but most importantly a good person in the eyes of God.

Objectives:

This study aims at eliciting the views on (i) how the Malaysian higher learning institution lecturers, especially in University of Technology MARA infuse the divine and ethical values in the process of teaching and learning, and (ii) what are the challenges faced by the lecturers in implementing it in their teaching activities.

Methodology:

A qualitative research method was deemed suitable in eliciting data on how the lecturers in UiTM integrate the divine values and morality in their teaching practice. Interviews based on semi-structured open-ended questions were administered to obtain participants' view. Interviews were used in this qualitative study as they permit the participants to describe detailed information on the questions asked. The interviewer also had better control over the types of information received as she/he could ask specific questions to elicit this information (Creswell, 2005). The questions on the one-page teacher-interview schedules mainly focused on how the lecturers integrated the divine and ethical values in the process of teaching and learning and also the challenges faced by them in carrying out these tasks. The general question the research sought to answer was, how do lecturers implement the concept of integrated knowledge in their teaching practice? The following related questions guided the study: 1. How do lecturers instill the divine values in the process of teaching and learning? 2. What are the challenges faced by instructors in implementing the concept of integrated knowledge?

Based on the participants' feedback and suggestions in the pilot study conducted, the interview schedule was refined to improve its validity and reliability. The participants involved in the study were interviewed with their consent, after getting the approval from Deputy Vice Chancellor of the university. For each interview, the time taken was about 45 minutes to an hour. Confidentiality was assured to the participants when the interviews were conducted. A thematic analysis method was used to analyze data of the study and the transcribed interviews were done case by case based on qualitative approaches using Atlas.ti software. The inter-rater reliability for categorization was assessed using Cohen's Kappa (Cohen *et al*., 2000). High kappa values of 0.83, 0.85 and 0.82 were obtained from the first, second and third raters respectively indicating the reliability of the classification of the themes was adequate, thus, enhancing the credibility of the case study findings (Creswell *et al*., 2005).

The respondents of this study consisted of seven male and fifteen female lecturers with age ranging from 27 to 50 and with three to thirty years of teaching experience from various faculties which are Engineering, Mass Communication, Information Management, Islamic Studies, Sport Recreation, Accountancy, Computer Science and Mathematics.

Results:

(i) Efforts in integrating divine values and morality in teaching:

Several themes have been identified to answer the question of "what is being done to realize the concept of integrated knowledge in teaching". Table 1 lists the themes and the description of each theme:

Table 1: Themes for implementation efforts towards integrating knowledge in teaching

Theme	Description
Divinity	The implementation of integrated knowledge is done by linking the syllabus with the greatness of Allah SWT
Good values	The lecturer instills good moral values such as honesty, trust, sincerity, etc. that can be linked to the context of the lessons being taught
Tazkirah (religious talk/ sermon) / Motivation	The lecturer delivers a short and casual *tazkirah* or motivational talk to students before and during lecture
Motif / Islamic Design	The lecturer instructs students to create a product design that has Islamic motives such as a dome, *khat*, etc.
Adhering to Islamic principles	The lecturer reminds the students on the *halal* and *haram* aspects of the lessons being taught

Source: Interviews with lecturers

In these interviews, most lecturers had clarified that efforts were being made to integrate knowledge, by instilling good values in students; for example, by advising students to use their knowledge towards meaningful endeavors (P/CS/Phg 2014). Values such as honesty (P/IM/JHR 2014), trust (P/AC/Kln 2014), being responsible and sincere in any practice (P/AC/Nsb 2014) are imparted during lectures whenever it is appropriate. In addition, there were lecturers who used religious talks (sermon) or motivational talks at the beginning of class to implement Islamic elements in their teaching sessions (P/CS/Phg 2014, P/CS/Phg 2014 and P/IM/JHR 2014). For lecturers who teach courses involving product design, their efforts are in the form of making design motives that are based on Islamic principles, such as floral motifs and avoiding patterns that have three-dimensional elements (P/AD/Kln 2014).

Moreover, there were also lecturers who directly associate their lessons to the aspect of divinity, which is by explaining the power of Allah SWT based on the field of knowledge being taught to the students (P/AS/Nsb 2014). Students were also reminded to be honest through the installation of the feeling that Allah SWT was always watching over His servants (P/AC/Kln 2014). When students complained of problems in their lives, the lecturers would take this opportunity to instill the divine values to the students. One lecturer said,

"If a student confides to me, I'd ask, why are you telling me this? It would be better if you talk and pour your problem out to Allah… Go to the prayer room, sit quietly and meditate, let your heart communicate with Allah, tell Him your burden… just ask whatever it is your heart desires… believe that Allah is listening and will help you… I do this because I want the student to know that Allah is ever present." (P/MC/Mlk 2014)

In another example, one lecturer explains:

"…for example, in the robotic syllabus... we build hands… so, we try to associate Allah's greatness when He created the human fingers, complete with knuckles…" (P/EE/Tgn 2014)

Efforts towards the implementation of knowledge integration could also occur by applying the principles of Islam during lectures, for example,

"I teach event management, that we associate with the Islamic principles. We would have road safety campaigns… in the bunting, we would point out the Islamic view on reckless driving, we would instill the virtue of patience while driving… there's even no need to include Islam on the bunting... what's more important is the Islamic principles." (P/MC/Mlk 2014)

Thus, in general, the lecturers' efforts towards implementing the integration of knowledge were by implementing good values that related to the lesson or in the students' everyday lives.

(ii) Challenges in implementing the integration of knowledge:

In spite of the efforts made by the lecturers to implement elements of knowledge integration, they had also faced some challenges in realizing these initiatives. Table 2 showed the list of challenges in implementing the integrated knowledge in teaching and learning process.

Table 2: Themes for challenges in implementing knowledge integration.

Theme	Description
Absence of specific guidelines for lecturers	Lecturers were not equipped with any specific guidelines on the methods of implementing the integration of knowledge; this led to implementation efforts that rely only on the initiative of individuals
Pressure from industrial demand	Industry requirements emphasize on the marketability of graduates, which had led to lessons that were focused more on developing skills and professionalism of the field
The absence of Islamic aspects in the syllabus	No discussions had been held with regards to the Islamic perspectives in any field of knowledge or course
Lecturer's inability	The lecturer has no exposure to the concept of integrated knowledge and the methods of implementing it in teaching students
Dependency on textbooks	The lectures were dependent on textbooks and reference books that were usually imported from the West
Washing off the responsibility to Islamic Education (IE) lecturers	Some lecturers had the perception that Islamic affairs and instilling moral values are the sole responsibility of IE lecturers

Source: Interviews with lecturers

As expressed by the students, any efforts towards implementing the integration of knowledge had occurred only among a small number of lecturers. This fact was recognized by most of the lecturers interviewed. They mentioned that such efforts were more individual and depends on the initiative of the lecturer. This was due to the absence of specific guidelines in the syllabus regarding the integration of knowledge in the courses concerned, as well as the methods to implement the integration of knowledge in teaching.

"I think it depends on the lecturers… (to instill Islamic affairs in a subject). So far, there's nothing specific…because lectures are based on the content of the courses that were given." (P/CS/Phg 2014)

"…To discuss this in terms of Islamic education? hmm... it depends on the lecturer... in my case... I'd tell my students… you're not here to learn just for your exams... learn for the sake of knowledge... There's definitely none of this in the syllabus… I'd personally make the connections, such as when learning about bacteria… the syllabus will directly mention bacteria… because this is a science field. It's up to the lecturer's creativity to explain and link science to the power of Allah, etc." (P/AS/Nsb 2014)

"There are no apparent aspects of integration… it's just… we do include ethics, trust in the topic of auditing… to value honesty… that sort of things… We link trust to God… But based on the syllabus, it really depends on the lecturer to explain things…" (P/AC/Kln 2014).

In fact, some of the lecturers who were involved in the curriculum review, conducted every 3 years at

the faculty, had divulged that the implementation of Islam in the title or any course had never been seriously raised, prior to this research. When in fact, these lecturers responded that the opportunity for integrating *fardh ain* in their fields were vast.

"….for sure! (Islam can be integrated in the syllabus). Especially with paper security, or how to hack into a system. Hacking can be bad, can be good… So, I can see that this is where *fardh ai*n plays its role… but there is no tendency to include the aspects of Tawhid during curriculum reviews… it's up to us to instill these values… we have to repeatedly tell our students" (P/CS/Phg 2014)

Another example:

"I don't include it in my curriculum review… but, from what I've seen, there's no integration of Islamic values at all… haven't seen it so far" (P/SR/Phg 2014).

Then, when the lecturers were further asked about the main factors of this prevailing circumstance, the factors mentioned can be linked to the pressure to meet the requirements of the job market. A lecturer responded in the following fashion,

"In SR (Sports Science and Recreation), it's more about filling the current demand… of securing a job, the National Sports Institute trains students to work there." (P/SR/Phg 2014).

Similarly, as previously mentioned, another lecturer had also responded that,

"The syllabus doesn't include it (integration of knowledge)… It's the same with the curriculum review… hmm… these days, the curriculum… focuses more on skills… it requires our students to graduate with their marketability upon graduating… in terms of our religion… there's nothing… but students do learn about it… in ethics… but it depends on the lecturer…" (P/HM/Tgn 2014).

As described in the interviews, most of the responses had expressed that the lack of implementation in relation to knowledge integration was due to the course syllabus not covering any aspects of the integration of knowledge. In addition, one of the factors was the lecturer's own inability to relate his/her discipline with the field of *fardh ain*, thus resulting in the extreme reliance on the syllabus or textbooks.

"…I haven't thought about instilling the notion that art belongs in the field of *fardh kifayah*… I don't focus much on the aspect of *fardh kifayah*… had focused more on idea creations, commercialization of products" (P/AD/Kdh 2014).

"…for example, in record management, the element of honesty was only mentioned in ethics… but it was definitely not linked to religion… ethics and religion are seen as being different… it is taught in our religion, but we do not relate them together… maybe it's because I'm less adapted at delivering and linking the two together... I choose to be neutral… no creativity... We lack the creativity in terms of relating knowledge to religion… just accept knowledge as is from the textbooks. Even the textbooks came from the West" (P/IM/Jhr 2014)

"…I think it's because most of our textbooks…mostly came from the West. But, there's no denying… there are lecturers who integrate it into their lectures. For me… I just focus on the syllabus… we can if we want to include it in our lectures… but not to the point of deviating from the requirement of the syllabus…" (P/AM/Tgn 2014)

Another finding during the interview with one lecturer was the discloser of the hands-off attitude or the sole reliance on the Islamic Education course (CTU) for imparting Islamic knowledge to the students.

"…I teach the sports law subject. There are no elements of Islam in law… students would normally just ask about *hudud*… I do teach them a little about *hudud*… but there's no *hudud* in the syllabus… nothing at all in the program content. We just depend on CTU…" (P/SR/Pls 2014).

With regards to the same issue, one lecturer commented,

"I see it in terms of the commitment of the lecturer… because sometimes, I notice that the lecturer would completely leave it to the CTU subject… usually… because the faculty has so many syllabuses… Sometimes, among the lecturers… there are some who are not very Islamic… so, they've been unable to implement it… (P/EE/Tgn 2014).

However, there were faculties in certain branches that have taken the initiative to include elements of the integration of knowledge in their syllabus.

"Basically, this depends more on the… syllabus… and how a lecturer translates these issues in his or her lectures… it's not specifically included in the syllabus... until recently... there are… two or three subjects, added into one chapter… discussed from the perspective of Islam… subjects added were… for example... legislatives in the context of Islam, executives in Islam." (P/AM/Tgn 2014)

At the same time, there were respondents from among the lecturers who had clear understanding of how to implement the aspect of integration of knowledge.

"I have no problem at all (with integrating Islamic beliefs in the subject or program) but… this issue depends very much on the lecturer… if a lecturer wants to do it, he definitely can... the management would not interfere… for example, we did Islamization on media… this doesn't mean it was an Arabic story... although it can be done! A musical that portrays divinity songs… the singer must be male…no female singers… so… you can see that the media has Islamic characterizations… All these can be directed towards Islam… No problem at all… It depends on whether you really want to or not… to include Islamic elements in your media... for

example, in an entrepreneurial carnival… you don't have to declare it as an Islamic entrepreneurship, but the activities and events are Islamic… When adhan is heard, immediately cease all sale and purchase activities… attend prayers… ha, something like that." (P/MC/Mlk 2014).

Discussion:

Based on the interviews with the lecturers, it could be briefly summarized that the belief of the concept of Islamic knowledge, especially from the aspect of the integration of knowledge among students, would very much depended on the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and commitment of the lecturers themselves. Limited efforts towards the integration of knowledge may possibly be due to the lack of knowledge, lack of creativity and extreme reliance on textbooks from the West, as well as on the syllabus. However, simultaneous pressure to meet work force requirements in the industry had also affected the goal of studying, the teaching and learning patterns, as well as the attitude and commitment of the lecturers, towards instilling the belief in the concept of Islamic knowledge among students. Only few lecturers had the vision and capable to integrate knowledge with respective values. In addition, the content knowledge delivered in the process of teaching is solely based on the syllabus and text book imported from Western universities.

The urge to fulfill the demand of marketability among graduates in the industry influenced the lecturers' belief on the objectives of education as well as the process of teaching and learning which mainly focused on achieving good grades in examination and also preparing competent professional workers and experts in the particular area. Thus, the commitment to instill the divine and ethical values to develop pious and holistic human being was quite marginalized.

Noor Lela (2008) also reported the same phenomenon. The level of ethical values infused in teaching and learning process was low as many lecturers focused on delivering merely content knowledge. The same issues were raised which were (i) lack of skill to instill divine and ethical values in teaching and learning process, (ii) not enough time to cover all syllabus, (iii) lecturers belief that technical courses such as engineering has no direct relation with divine and ethical values. Habsah (2000) also added that the weakness of the lecturers to seriously instill integrated knowledge were caused by (i) lack of interest to relate and integrate their expertise area with other area, (ii) too obsessed in covering all syllabus within the time provided for examination and (iv) lack of knowledge and awareness on the importance of integrated knowledge in teaching and process to achieve the ultimate goal of education.

This qualitative research had shown that the aim to achieve good grades in examination and marketability of graduates were two dominant factors in determining the curriculum development as well as the teaching and learning process (Ishak *et al*. 2008, Yee & Norehan 2007). The main effect of this situation was the marginalization of divine and ethical and moral values in the concept of knowledge (Rosnani 2004, Noor Hisham 2015). This situation also led to the lack of emphasis of the integrated knowledge as an important agenda in curriculum development as well as in the process of teaching and learning. The separation of divine values and morality in education may give bad effect for human development as it also may decline the awareness of interrelatedness between knowledge and God among human. With the internalization of true knowledge human will realize their dependency on God to sustain their lives in this world. Plus, in the perspective of religious community, the ultimate objective for human being to seek knowledge was to recognize and acknowledge God as The Most Powerful and Magnificent Being so that human could willingly and consciously submit themselves to Him (Al Attas 1978, Mohd. Kamal 2010, Tajul Ariffin 2007)).

Conclusion:

As a conclusion, the aims and the ultimate goals of the education which focused on developing balanced human being whether physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually should be based on the divine values and morality so that students would not just aim to achieve good grades in examination but also to fulfill the ultimate goal of human existence in this world as servant and vicegerent of God. Likewise, the lecturers also needed to be guided and exposed in realizing the concept of knowledge based on religion and revelation paradigm so that they can instill these values effectively in their teaching practice.

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