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**Challenges and Readiness of Islamic Education Teachers
in Innovative Teaching and Learning**

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CHALLENGES AND READINESS OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION TEACHERS IN INNOVATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract

The importance of Islamic education in building generations and society is undeniable. The field of Islamic education is not static but is constantly evolving as time goes by. In this paper, the author explored the technological innovations in today's world of education as well as the effects of Islamic Education teachers. The paper also discussed the barriers to implement technological education in Islamic education. Because of the current advent and emerging developments of technology and the impact of globalization, the paper offered possible solutions for Islamic educational systems and educational policymakers so as not to miss and fail the momentum of development. This study contributes towards strengthening the Islamic education system to engage in any innovation and transformation that may take place.

Keywords: *Teaching and Learning; Innovation; Islamic Education Teachers; Curriculum.*



A. Introduction

Since ancient times, the central role of education in Islam has been anchored on a scripture tradition and its study (Liow, 2009). This centrality has helped to make education a central pillar of the religion in virtually all times and places in the history of Islam. Education is the first duty of a Muslim, male or female (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004).

Islam encourages Muslims to learn and also to think creatively and critically for bringing changes in their lives (Sahin, 2018). However, many people acknowledge the need for a comprehensive and holistic review of Islamic education across the board (Ilham, 2020). According to the observations of Islamic scholars, Islamic educational innovations and their implementation have not kept pace in the larger context of the global education scene, as evidenced by Muslim students' learning outcomes. Besides, the current content of Islamic education is not closely associated with students' daily lives due to the lack of religious foundations and functionalities that can support the new needs of a 21st-century society (Nor, et al., 2017). Although vast investments have been made by governments and people, in general, Islamic education has yet to be fully understood (Dahari et al., 2019).

Nowadays, with the rise of the Internet and modern communication tools, one might observe that Islamic education might have undergone a broad revolution. Yet, researchers did not witness a profound and much-needed change. Instead, the old ways of learning had fossilized (Dadamuxamedov et al., 2020). Without a doubt, as a social institution vital to the service of Muslim societies, the survival, and progress of Islamic education are necessary. Institutional evolution should not only be comprehensive, sustainable, and excellent, but it must also continuously adapt to the unpredictable challenges of fast-paced globalization. Therefore, the development of Islamic education must be systematic, consistent, and scalable. Unsurprisingly, the burden of innovation lies on educators' shoulders; teachers in Islamic education are expected to push the advancement of theoretical and practical ideas in

teaching and learning while engaging in institutional improvements to ultimately produce Muslim students who can work and thrive.

The context above laid ground to the purpose of this study, namely first, to put forth the prevalent challenges faced by educators in Islamic education in the technological integration within teaching and learning domains, and secondly, to suggest viable solutions. In the literature review, we discuss aspects of innovations adopted for Islamic education, namely types of innovations, barriers of adoption, and an outline of promising directions. In terms of the current status of innovations, we present the concept of educational innovation, integration methods, the reasons why certain integrations were ineffective, and the possible ways to scale up and boost innovation-based transformations in the Islamic education system. Finally, we recommend how Islamic educational innovations can be a growth pursuit.

B. Islamic Education

The genericity of the Islamic education term provides a broad scope of social obligations it serves. Fundamentally, Islamic education refers to the provision of education for the Muslim community, by the Muslim community. It is a knowledge heritage that is primarily built upon the Qur'an and the Sunnah scriptures (Scott-Baumann & Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2015). Throughout the centuries, Islamic education has been conducted in places of worship, academic institutions, and Islamic-based organizations (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004). Teaching can be formal or informal. Formal Islamic education can be obtained from learning centers and madrasahs where formal courses with certifications are awarded to Muslim graduates. On the other hand, there is the option for informal Islamic education uptake where students attend daily lessons, forums, speeches, and talks conducted by Muslim scholars at places of worship or the scholars' very own abodes. Attendance and registration are not compulsory (Tan, 2014).

For Muslims, Islamic education serves as a tool to shape and produce individuals with exemplary values of ethics, morality, and



spirituality. A Muslim student is not only multi-dimensional, but also one who trajects towards positivity, health, and devoutness (Hanson, 2001). The excellence and perfection of a Muslim are modeled after the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), thus the goal of Islamic education is for Muslims to emulate his being in life (Khaidir & Suud, 2020).

As a system that educates the Muslim community, it strives to leave the rich heritage of Islamic knowledge primarily via key sources. Shah (2014) stated that Islamic education contributes towards the human development of its people, that through the enrichment of Islamic knowledge, Muslims follow the righteous path and become useful members of the Ummah and the society, all while maintaining a true and sincere faith. Then, a Muslim can realize his function as an 'abid (devout person) and the caliph of Allah Almighty (Suhid, 2005).

The nature of Islamic education is borderless between living domains; religious teaching and learning permeate the boundaries of family, school, and the mosque to accommodate and readjust within modern Islamic thoughts and current materialistic context so that interaction between Muslims and the world can be increased (HT, 2013). In addition, Islamic education involves the engagement of people to find peaceful human co-existence and reasoning together (Waghid, 2014).

C. Innovation in Islamic Education

As the influence of globalization intensifies, improvements to the Islamic education system become necessary. Islamic education needs innovative ways for teachers to nurturing Muslim students' interest in studying and practicing Islamic materials (Hanafie Das et al., 2018). Innovation refers to the success of introducing a fresh idea, technique, or technology (Brewer & Tierney, 2012). Innovation has two fundamental subdomains: (1) a new idea that is specific to individuals or groups, and (2) the subsequent change resulting from idea adoption (Evans, 1970). Accordingly, innovation involves three principal steps: (1) idea development, (2) application and/or implementation, and (3) outcomes and changes. In Islamic education, innovation comes in the form of a new



pedagogic theory, a methodological approach, a teaching method, an instructional tool, or a learning process, all of which upon implementation, brings about significant changes in teaching and learning in terms of improved student outcomes. Thus, the ultimate goal of integrating innovations in Islamic education is to raise the bar of Muslim's learning productivity, efficiency, and quality (Niyozov & Memon, 2011).

Emerging innovations in education have extended from institutional systems, such as educational and accountability systems, to instructional techniques, which are applied in classrooms. According to Effendi (2011), innovation in Islamic education should be supported by effective learning strategies, practical teaching steps, new technologies, and resources, as well as methodology employed for teaching and learning engagements (Effendi, 2011). Hidayat (2017) stated that the development and adoption of e-learning in Islamic education in Muslim countries were stemmed from technological innovation. The previous studies also showed that e-learning greatly improved the effectiveness in delivering learning content in Islamic education (Hidayat, 2002). Also, Islamic-based academic institutions reported encouraging outcomes from the use of e-learning, such as reduced costs, increased satisfaction among teachers, and improved academic performance.

Year on year, e-learning has been gaining ground as a delivery staple of the modern mainstream education system. Not only it is used globally as a tool to achieve academic competencies, but also it presents itself as a worthy alternative in Islamic education delivery. Undoubtedly, its emergence created a significant impact on Islamic education, globally (Hidayat, 2017). Thus, the stakeholders of Islamic education responded accordingly to the growth of e-learning. Muslim students now enjoy state-of-the-art learning experiences, engaging interactions, and curating their study courses that are more personalized compared to traditional religion classes.

D. Effects of Technology Innovation on Islamic Education Teachers

While getting drawn into technological innovations, the role and importance of teachers may be neglected. Traditional Islamic schools had



recognized their teachers as the main pillar of student achievement. According to Morgan and Murgatroyd (1994), teachers' quality of inputs is one of four pillars of a successful education. Hussin and Tamuri (2019) showed that Islamic education teachers play an important role in producing people who can withstand the current globalization conditions and challenges without neglecting Islamic values and laws. Islamic education teachers have the role of nurturing and shaping students' thinking ability from a very early age.

According to Ahmad (1997), the appropriateness of the teaching approach is closely related to the type of students and the teaching skills of the teacher. As technological innovations continue to be applied throughout numerous aspects of modern living (Bakar & Saleh, 2010), teachers are well prepared to catalyze the teaching and learning process (Radhy, 2019). In other words, pairing teaching with innovations such as e-learning, mobile applications, and the IoT (Internet of things) can make subject concepts relatable to students (Siskandar, 2020).

According to Ajmain et al.'s (2019) study, teaching and activities in digital form enable Islamic education teachers to teach at any time and anywhere, even across any device and learning stage. It also allows Islamic education teachers to engage and communicate meaningfully in classrooms. This approach and interaction that is more personal and informal can yield opportunities for effective outreach in ensuring desired learning progress, monitoring, and assistance following learning problems. The result is greater comfort and experience enjoyed among students during e-learning (Ajmain et al. 2019). Today's educational technologies even allow students to monitor and follow the behavior of Islamic teachers as role models as in the past, because student-teacher interaction has been part of Islamic education (Dahari et al., 2019). Teachers need to realize that for innovation to yield positive learning outcomes, it must be led by pedagogy, research, and sound theories. Yet more often than not, the reverse is often observed (Christensen & Eyring, 2011, p. 16).

E. Barriers to Innovation in Islamic Education

When we discuss the need for innovation in Islamic education, we often encounter a mix of responses about technological innovations in Islamic education, and it rarely progresses beyond debate. Islamic education faces a host of challenges from current constraints and shortcomings, such as a wide-ranging curriculum, the use of different mediums of instruction across taught subjects, lack of standardization of materials and teaching methodologies, as well as limited space and time. Even when the earnest, enthusiastic adoption of innovation was to happen, the lack of a well-thought-out implementation impedes value creation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). The rollout of innovations is only worthy if it is action- and goal-oriented rather than a pure articulation of the idea. Moreover, stakeholders can only reap the significant benefits of any innovation adoption only when it is employed or integrated on an institutional scale (Anzar, 2003).

Another barrier to innovation adoption is the lack of teacher training in terms of pairing their subject knowledge with technology use in school. Razak et al.'s (2014) study highlighted the weakness of Islamic education teachers in their mastery of the knowledge while juggling new technologies in classrooms. Internet and e-learning applications further complicate and disrupt the delivery process of Islamic teachers' because current methods still depend on face-to-face mode as the teaching and learning content are traditional and analogous.

Besides, most Islamic teachers are skeptical and/or doubtful of online content, thus exposing the general trust deficit among Islamic educators on the idea of e-learning (Anzar, 2003, p. 23). This is problematic because there is no denying that Islamic education faces complex challenges that demand a response. Moreover, past observations have reported the explicit, cautionary behaviors of Islamic educators and school administrators when responding to any major innovation adoption; they perceive it as a threat to normalcy and have a low tolerance for subsequent uncertainties (Zaman, 2010). Also, the mode, process, and



routine of Islamic education have been associated as part of a sacred tradition, and therefore innovation is often reputed as a disruptor that induces a sense of discomfort among implementers.

For many years, this traditional barrier has been sustaining the lack of technology-based teaching methods (Setiawan, 2019) and the neglect of innovative applications (Zedan et al., 2015) in Islamic education. However, the technological advancement of education in schools presents a dilemma for Islamic educators and educational institutions in terms of providing alternative ways. Besides, teaching styles have been transformed because of advancements in curriculum, secular education, and technology (Siskandar, 2020).

Some Islamic academic institutions have attempted to reach a middle ground by using innovative and novel learning tools, such as social media for information inclusion, but most other institutions seem to be closed to the idea of innovation and technology in general, thus ignoring the speed of which it dictates this era (Salsabila, 2019). Among Muslims, it is still largely held that technology is a Western concept and influence. Therefore, it is perceived as an inappropriate and incompatible teaching tool to serve Islamic knowledge which has traditionally been orally imparted from one generation to another. According to Asyafah (2014), Islamic teaching methods in academic institutions still primarily involves the articulation of concepts and rote learning.

Consequently, most Islamic teachers nowadays have less urgency in mastering e-learning pedagogy over subject knowledge because they think that technology will eventually address all instructional constraints. Pappert (1990) identifies this belief as “technocentrism” which Nickols (2011) stated that this behavior is commonly discussed in e-learning. What is often forgotten is that technology and innovation serve as an extension of human abilities, not a replacement or substitute.

F. What to do? Possible solutions

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that Islamic education teachers and educational systems are facing challenges and competing



effects of the current globalization and technological change. They must always be prepared to stay afloat in the changing and innovative world of education without neglecting Islamic values and Islamic law. As mentioned, innovations emerge from new ideas. Therefore, Islamic education teachers need to equip themselves with the 21st-century knowledge and skills that encompass the latest pedagogy without neglecting the principles and characteristics of traditional Islamic education that have succeeded in producing Islamic scholars.

Besides, while innovation frequently begins as a spark in the mind of a brilliant individual, it requires a nurturing environment. Csikszentmihalyi (2013) outlines the importance of creating a stimulating ecosystem, at both macro and micro levels, which allows the convergence of social, cultural, and institutional contexts. "A successful environment provides freedom of action and stimulation of ideas, coupled with a respectful and nurturing attitude towards potential geniuses" (p. 140). This is one aspect that is within the control of educators and administrators.

Technology integration in education can be successful only when the human element is taken into consideration. This then integrates innovators, implementers, educational leadership, professional community, and, certainly, the learners. Polka and Kardash (2013) argue that the effectiveness of a computer innovation project they developed was facilitated by the school leadership because of their focus on the 'human side of change" (p. 324). Today's Islamic education teachers need to increase their knowledge and skills in using educational technologies in the teaching and learning process. In other words, full reliance on religious textbooks should be avoided, and teachers should master the skills of using the latest educational technologies to suit today's generation. Besides, nowadays the new learning space on the internet is formed and the combination of traditional education and e-learning becomes an inevitable trend. Mobile applications will also help students acquire both Islamic knowledges through online courses. In particular, new knowledge is being created at the exponential level and popularized quickly and extensively. This makes online classes, online conferences, and so on becoming increasingly popular (Vu & Le, 2019).



According to Hamzah et al. (2009), the advent of new ways of teaching by new technologies can be used to increase the efficiency of Human Resources (HR), which would, in turn, affect the quality of Islamic education. Undoubtedly, mastering these skills certainly requires the efforts and perseverance of teachers as well as moral support. Therefore, teachers need to be given appropriate training in all aspects to ensure their effectiveness. While various software exists to meet the needs of the new generation, it is not too late for Islamic education teachers to learn and apply new methods to engage students in the teaching and learning process.

As a teacher, the age factor should not be used as a reason not to understand gadgets because it is not that difficult to understand. This is because, with each generation, the application of the level of understanding of a generation is different. According to Embi et al. (2011) educators of this age need to be committed to teaching and learning in the digital form to enable learning to happen anytime and anywhere, even across devices and learning stages. In keeping with the demands of time and the era of globalization, Islamic education teachers also need to be knowledgeable and proficient in applying high-level thinking skills in the teaching and learning process whereby students can realize their knowledge and skills as a way of life-based on Islamic law demands.

Islam placed a high value on education, and, as the faith spread among diverse peoples, education became an important channel through which to create a universal and cohesive social order. Thus, coherent systemic support based on current Islamic values is essential for growing innovations in Islamic education. Besides, teaching practices are factors affecting student learning that are more readily modifiable. Moreover, additional useful practices have received attention, especially those that help transform the school into a professional learning community (Vieluf et al., 2012).

Besides, the implication of new ideas in Islamic education: needs to consider innovation implementers in terms of organizational needs, professional needs, and personal needs, all of which contribute to the innovation's success. The outreach of implementers poses a difficult task



especially when they should be posted far and wide across places of worship and academic institutions. Also, implementers are expected to demonstrate creativity and high levels of motivation. Therefore, it is crucial to allow freedom to innovate at points of implementation so that they feel empowered with a sense of security to take risks. Ultimately, they need to be trusted to do their job right. In short, there must be an “innovation-receiving system” (Evans, 1970), or a “change zone” (Polka & Kardash, 2013).

G. Conclusion

Islamic education urgently needs impactful, scalable innovations and transformations that can boost high-quality learning outcomes across all academic institutions, subjects, and among Muslim student adherents. Although varied transformations are encouraged, the emphasis should be that they must be systematic and targeted towards aspects of Islamic education that need them most. Speedy and scalable innovations are characterized as deep, multifaceted, and comprehensive in tangible and intangible forms of implementation. The change focus areas should be to meaningfully improve efficiency and quality of teaching, learning, and practice, as well as to enhance the roles of the students, teachers, parents, communities, societies, and society’s culture. Other promising approaches should seek to improve students’ ethics, attitudes, and motivation toward productively learning Islam.

Regardless of the choice of technologies that have been decided to be integrated into Islamic education, the element of humans as stakeholders, specifically the student and teacher, remains complex. The humanistic and religious developmental goals must be preserved when reaping the rewards of educational technologies in Islamic education if it is to be effective.

All technology applications must be grounded on a solid theoretical foundation based on purposeful, systemic research and sound pedagogy to achieve the desired efficiency levels and address possible spilled-over issues. When integrating novel technologies in Islamic



education, we must first consider their potential applicability, anticipated costs, and benefits, and then develop successful educational practices.

Therefore, the key to a prosperous, innovative society is a multidimensional approach to revitalizing the educational system (structures, tools, and stakeholders) so that it inculcates students' autonomy, self-efficacy, critical thinking, and creativity, as well as advances a common culture that supports innovative education. To succeed, innovative education must be developed in a collective perspective and attitude with a sense of shared responsibility. Otherwise, all efforts to build an effective educational system will fail.

In general, educational technologies in Islamic studies have been reported to be innovative and effective among Muslim students and lecturers. More importantly, from a perspective of Islamic education, using technology and novel ways of teaching (e.g., e-learning, mobile applications, IoT, 3D technologies, virtual reality) in teaching and learning is conditionally accepted as long as the tool serves as a good means to help the students get access to real knowledge and foster human intellect as all knowledge is from God and encompasses God from Islamic view.

Islamic education has, since the inception of Islam, been interested in developing the human intellect and nurturing scientific reasoning, being the key to the development of human communities. However, to use educational technologies as innovative and effective teaching tools, one must always bear in mind that it highly depends on its proper use and never forget that the main objective in the process of teaching is to foster students' ability of self-learning and innovative thinking through various means or methods of education.

The emphasis value of Islam's faith and morals should not be neglected because morals are a result of faith and *aqidah* (creed) stability and the practice of authentic worship. To ensure that this desire and pure intentions are to be a success, support and involvement of various parties holistically and collectively are of paramount concern to achieve the goal in practical and real rather depend on the theoretical basis.



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