Islam and English: Islamizing Our Malaysian Youths

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ABSTRACT

Youths nowadays are always associated with degrading moral values like criminal violence (Surett 1994). They are involved in many ill-social activities like drugs, crimes or even prostitutions. Thus, as educators we must take this issue seriously because these youths are actually our future. We do not want youths who are involved in such unhealthy activities to be our leaders in the future. Therefore, this paper looks at how this issue could be looked into from the educational point of view. Though it may sound too perfect and unrealistic, it is here for us to consider and think of the various aspects to educate these youths so we can set a good example to the Muslim world.

Keywords: *Education, moral values, youths*

Introduction

It is obvious that our youths are degrading in their moral values. This is seen through various aspects of life, by which we hear a lot of cases where youths are involved in crimes and social ills especially with the borderless world which can easily expose these youngsters to various negative culture and unhealthy activities. Youth violence is increasing dramatically recently. Today, most cases reported are of juveniles. About 5 out of every 20 robbery arrests and 3 of every 20 murder, rape, and aggravated assault arrests are juvenile cases. In brief, this draws up to 3,000 murder, 6,000 forcible rape, 41,000 robbery, and 65,000 aggravated assault arrests of youths annually (Surett 1994).

The main concern here is on the future of our youths. They are our future leaders. We do not want future leaders with moral values that are degrading. Abdul Hamid A. AbuSulayman (1993) in his Book 'Crisis in the Muslim Mind' – Chapter 6 : Islam and the Future, has touched on this, and he stresses that 'it is essential that the attention and efforts of Islamic workers and leaders be directed toward three fundamental matters:

1. the future of the ummah: that is working among the Muslim youths;
2. the role of academic institutions in achieving Islamization and clarifying the Islamic perspective toward knowledge, civilization, and the preparation of new generations qualified to carry the eternal message of Islam to all mankind;
3. guiding the future course of human civilization in fulfillment of the Ummah's responsibility to correct the progress and thought of humankind.'

It is very important for each and every Muslims to play a vital role in the upbringing and the well being of these youths, especially those who are directly involved in the education system. Educationist need to produce good individuals who are not materialistic, who have comprehensive view of life and always conscious of faith as the basis of values.

Thus, a number of steps can be taken so that the upbringing and the well being of these youths are taken care of. The steps include:

1. educating these youths with the good values (adab) up to the tertiary level;
2. islamizing education through inculcating Islamic values in content subjects; and
3. introducing the subject of Islamization of Knowledge to universities in Malaysia;

Islamizing our youths here does not mean that the beliefs of the youths should be changed and be forced to convert to Islam. This is against the Malaysian Constitution in which it states the right of freedom of religion under the provision of Article 11 (1) of the Federal Constitution. Rather, it is more of Islamizing our own Muslim youths who are already Muslims but do not wholistically practise the Islamic teachings. Thus, it is more of making our Muslim youths really understand and learn to appreciate themselves being born as Muslims.

Educating Youths with Good Values (adab)

Though this is not new, youths need to be reminded from time to time. Educate these youths with good values (*adab*) that religions have taught their followers, in our case, the Islamic way of life. The concern here is not so much

of educating these youths with the basic foundation of Islam that is *Tawhid* or *Fiqh*, that they have been taught with since young, but it is more of reminding these youths of the values that a good Muslim should have. What is being proposed here is the fact that these values should be taught and reminded continuously throughout their education system up to the tertiary level. These values should be inculcated in all the subjects. For example, theses values (*adab*) should be taught in the teaching of Economics, Management, and English.

For example, the English subject can be taught in such a way whereby, students are reminded of who they really are. English is a language which carries a different cultural background. It is always associated with the western culture, and is at times against the belief of Islam. Therefore, students should be reminded that they do not belong to that culture and should not follow the western lifestyles that are against Islamic teaching. Students should be reminded that they study the language for a purpose and these students should learn that the language to help them to keep up with globalisation. English is important in order to compete but at the same time, as Muslim, we need to preserve our own culture and background. To do so, teachers/lectures must be creative and inculcate the Islamic values while teaching. In the teaching of English literature, for instance, students can be taught together with the Islamic values. In a play like Macbeth, for example, teachers can further discuss the fact that as Muslim, it is forbidden for a Muslim to take one's life. Other elements that teachers can discuss are like themes, and characters that can always be associated with the teachings of Islam.

In addition, subject content like 'Meetings' in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes could also be taught by stating that the concept of *shūara* and leadership in Islam. These are just few examples, further detailed syllabus on such idea could be looked into and thought of.

It is true that people especially youths do not like to be preached or lectured at but the need is there. It is not so much of preaching, but the methods can be done in various creative ways. Students, for example, can be exposed to the subject matter and work experience in their field of study. However, they must also be reminded of the values taught by Islam and portray these good values when they go out to work. Another case of Aman Shah, an executive at a local bank, some time ago, who was caught and sentenced to prison for transferring 1 sen a day from account holders into his own account, must be avoided. This kind of attitude is what we are trying to avoid within our youths. We do not want youths to become unethical in their lives. With good Islamic values inculcated within them since young, this sort of unethical behaviour would somehow prevent them from doing such behaviour. A family living with the guidance of the Quran will not face many problems experienced in today's societies. Children obey their parents and even avoid complaining, since Allah commands them not to express irritation (Surah al-Isra', 17:23). From early ages they learn to follow conscience, to discriminate between right and wrong, and to avoid evil. Parents strive to raise their children in accordance with religious values, giving them conscience and a sense of responsibility towards their people and country.

We would not want students to think that it is acceptable for them to go out and enjoy at night clubs and pubs just like what the westerners do. Just because they study the English language and culture, it does not justify that they can follow the western lifestyle, without even considering the fact that they are Muslims and must follow certain rules and guidelines.

It is, thus, important for us to educate these students so that they turn out to be persons with good personality who are trustworthy, disciplined and grateful with what Allah has given.

> 'It is important for the Ummah to be guided in understanding and practicing Islam as a comprehensive way of life as a means to building a civilization. A wholesome way of life will create the balance between our responsibilities in this world and the Hereafter. Islam is not merely a ritual, because ritualism is meant solely for the Hereafter. The Government has never practiced secularism that rejects the Hereafter and focuses solely on worldly matters. Islam must be lived as a system that integrates the worldly life and preparations for the Day of judgment.'
>
> (Islam Hadhari, Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia 2005)

In brief, the syllabus and course design should be looked into so that these values are inculcated while teaching the students. Educationists need to produce viable and sustainable Islamized syllabuses and teaching guidelines for school and tertiary levels of education. As teachers, we should not only transmit knowledge about also train the souls and personality of the students.

Islamizing Education through Inculcating Islamic Values in Content Subjects

Islamizing our youths through education can be carried out just like what most Islamic schools and universities are doing. That is, by inculcating the religious background to every discipline that is being taught. The idea here is not to educate everybody in becoming a learned (*Ãlim Ulama'*) or a religious teacher (*Ustaz* or *Ustazah*) per se who only studies, investigates, interpret the content of the Quran, the traditions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah upon him) but more to that: a person who is more well-rounded, who is exposed to the knowledge of the world and as well as to the knowledge of Allah.

"The present curriculum is at fault because it lacks an such moral purpose. All considerations of the curriculum should consider "how best to use subjects for the purpose of education ... rather than regarding education as the byproduct of the efficient teaching of subjects"

(Sir Philip Morris 1952, as cited in Abbott 2005)

"It is difficult to see how moral purpose can be brought into education without the continuous study of religion, philosophy, literature and history. "The years in the sixth form are crucial years in which the foundations of a sound social and moral judgement can be laid"

(The Crowther Report 1959, as cited in Abbott 2005)

So, with this background, these youths can turn to be a better person who can perhaps govern the country in a more Islamic way. Therefore, more Islamic schools with Islamic curriculum should be introduced in Muslim countries like Malaysia.

By having more Islamic schools and universities, it will not entirely solve the problems of social ills among teenagers. However, it will somehow curb the problems, especially, when these children are well trained to be good Muslims. This, in turn, can avoid them from doing all the wrong doings. These Islamic schools and universities should also be conducted in English as with English one can go far. Thus, if these Islamic schools and universities are taught in English, they can compete with other universities and schools, and at the same time allowing and encouraging others to enroll is such schools and universities and, thus, learn more about Islam and the knowledge of the world. This has actually been discussed in International conferences on Islamic Education on how to formulate objectives and strategies for the reconstruction of education (Syed Ali Ashraf 1997).

The issue here is not to educate students on the knowledge of Allah only, (the revealed knowledge) but they should also be taught on the knowledge of the world (the acquired knowledge). We need to have students who are well-rounded, exposed to various field of studies and of course proficient in English. If we were to look at the statistics of unemployment rate in Malaysia nowadays, we can see that among the contribution of the highest rate of unemployment comes from courses like Islamic Studies (8.6%) (Ibrahim Abu Shah 2004). One of the reasons that these graduates are unemployed is the fact that they have chosen courses which are not that much required by the job industries (Bernama 2005). Besides that, graduating with low grades and not mastering the English Language are also factors that contribute to the unemployment rate (Ibrahim Abu Shah 2004). It does not mean here that these students are less important, but we need to have people who are more versatile.

Having Islamic schools do not ensure that these youths will turn out to be perfect people, but the values taught can act as guidance to them, thus, portraying them as good Muslims. Islam Hadhari which has been introduced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, also encourages the mastery of knowledge as one of his main principles of Islam Hadhari. Therefore, it is believed that with the growth of Islamic schools which inculcate the knowledge of the world and the knowledge of Allah in their studies, Muslims will be more well known and, thus, Islam can once again lead the world.

Introducing Islamization of Knowledge as a Subject

Islamization of knowledge is actually a term that describes various attempts and approaches to synthesize the ethics of Islam with various fields of modern thought. "Its end product would be a new *ijma* (consensus) among Muslims on an appropriate *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and a scientific method that did not violate Islamic ethical norms (Wikipedia 2006). Islamization of Knowledge that touches on how knowledge can be Islamized and that knowledge actually belongs to everybody can be introduced as a subject. It is important as it could be a stepping stone to open up students' vision towards the importance of knowledge and Islam.

Most of us today always have in mind that knowledge belongs to the Western world. We tend to look upon the westerners as people who know all. The westerners have somehow invaded our mind by saying that the knowledge of the world is everything without realising the importance and the need of the knowledge of Allah (AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman 1999).

Most students nowadays are only exposed to the knowledge of the world. Worldly subjects like Mathematics, Physics, English and American Literature are quite a distance from the teachings of Islam as "the West has no reliable, holistic, and authentic source to know and draw the boundaries of human freedom and social life." (AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman 1999: 1) Students taking courses like TESL especially are only exposed to these worldly subjects and are definitely closer to the western culture. Thus, it is crucial for universities with courses like Bachelor's Degree in TESL (B.Ed TESL) and Master's Degree in TESL (MEd TESL) or universities which train teachers, to have Islamization of Knowledge as one of the core subjects. With this extra knowledge in Islamization, students would not feel left behind in both fields. A course such as this which educates students in becoming teachers, should be more exposed to what knowledge really is so that they do have both, knowledge of the world as well as knowledge of Allah.

Teacher training institutions especially should be one of the first to introduce Islamization of Knowledge as a

subject. This is because it is these teachers who will be the role models to the students, as they are the ones who will educate the young. They should set good examples to their students. Therefore, with subject such as this being introduced, students can always be reminded of who they should be and how they should portray themselves to their future students.
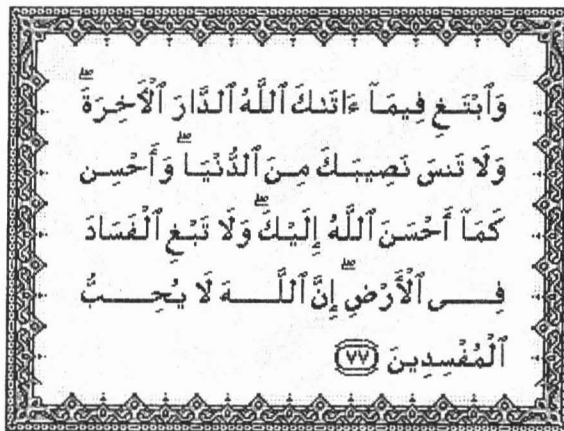
Discussion and Conclusion

Though this issue and these ideas have been brought up earlier in many instances, nothing much has been done to make it a reality. Thus, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), a university with the majority of its students are Malays and Muslims, is a good platform to embark on these ideas. This is because, it is inline with UiTM's vision and strategy to come out with graduates who are professional, global, and ethical. It also allows ample space for students to be creative and innovative, professional in knowledge and skills, and matured. It also helps to produce graduates who are ethical, harmony and holistic and have high moral values as proposed in the *Model Graduan UiTM.*

With UiTM going towards the World Class University (WCU), inculcating the ethical values within the students is very important especially to achieve the university's goal and vision. As stated by Mohd Zahid Mohd Nordin (1991) we might have come out with workers who are knowledgable in various fields but with disgraceful moral values. That is why we have a lot of knowledgeable barbarians or skilled barbarians nowadays.

Therefore, it is high time that the curriculum and syllabus of the courses offered here in UiTM should be looked into so that UiTM can come out with students who are ethical, harmony and holistic. These students are our future leaders and they are also those who will play a very important role in the society. Thus, with such values added within them, Malaysia would be a much better place to live in.

As a conclusion, it is believed that with the steps outlined and appropriate actions taken, it can somehow help our youths to be more knowledgeable and have a better quality life with strong faith and piety towards Allah and at the same time help to develop the country to be a better country in the future.

وَٱبْتَغِ فِيمَآ ءَاتَىٰكَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلدَّارَ ٱلْأَخِرَةَ ۖ وَلَا تَنسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَأَحْسِن كَمَآ أَحْسَنَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ ۖ وَلَا تَبْغِ ٱلْفَسَادَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ۝

"But seek, with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed upon you, the home of the Hereafter; and forget not your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world; and do good as Allah has been good to you, and seek not mishief in the land. Verily, Allah likes not the Mufsidun (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief makers, corrupters.)"

(Al Qasas : 77)

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