

ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND THE CYBERSPACE: RATIONALE FOR ISLAMIC TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

(Pendidikan Islam dan Siber: Rasional Pendidikan Teknologi Islam)

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to pinpoint the areas that are of concern to Islamic education experts with respect to globalisation agenda, and chronicle some of the Muslims' efforts in tackling the vices of the cyberspace. The paper argues that the cyberspace is gradually taking the role of the sources of Islamic education, and now have more influence on youngsters than their parents and teachers. Hence, there is a need for strengthening the Islamic education in the cyberspace and create a safe and value-laden cyberspace. In this respect, the paper suggests creation of Islamic technology education with the primary aim of producing ICT tools that are in line with Islamic values and Muslims' peculiar socio-economic needs. The paper also draws attention to the importance of creating Islamic digital studies as a sub-field of Islamic technology education.

Key Words: Cyberspace, Globalisation, Islamic Education, Islamic technology, Islamic digital studies.

Abstrak

Kertas ini bertujuan untuk mengemukakan tentang isu yang menjadi kebimbangan kepada ahli Pendidikan Islam terhadap agenda kesan globalisasi, dan usaha muslim di dalam mendepani ancaman siber. Kajian ini mengutarakan peningkatan peranan penggunaan alam siber sebagai satu sumber rujukan pendidikan Islam terutama kepada remaja melebihi peranan ibubapa dan guru. Maka, satu usaha memperkasakan pendidikan Islam melalui medium alam siber, dan mencipta satu persekitaran yang selamat dan sarat dengan nilai harus diwujudkan. Oleh itu, kertas ini mencadangkan pembinaan teknologi pendidikan Islam dengan tujuan utamanya bagi melahirkan peralatan ICT yang selari dengan nilai Islam dan keperluan sosio-ekonomi muslim. Kertas ini juga ingin turut menarik perhatian dalam membincangkan kepentingan mencipta program digital Islam sebagai sub subjek Teknologi Pendidikan Islam.

Kata kunci: alam siber, globalisasi, Pendidikan Islam, Kajian Teknologi Pendidikan Islam

1.0 GENERAL BACKGROUND

Cyberspace can be described as a virtual and artificial environment that has turned all countries in the world into a single borderless global village. Cyberspace has created new opportunities for netizens: to interact remotely with others, learn endlessly and do business without borders. This new environment has become an inevitable space with its effect on all aspects of human life. It has taken over the role of many physical spaces and become the most significant factor of production. There is a plethora of research that emphasises the usefulness and inevitability of

cyberspace tools, and that they should be integrated into the Islamic education pedagogy (Eraku, et al., 2022; Mansir, 2022; Solahudin, & Fakhruroji, 2019; Whyte, 2022). However, cyberspace is not without disadvantages, it poses an unprecedented threat to human life, culture and religious beliefs (Baldassarre, 2023; Mbanaso, & Dandaura, 2015; Patel & Chudasama, 2021; Whyte, 2022). The empirical studies that suggest that there is intellectual and moral decadence associated with excessive and illicit use of ICT tools are too numerous to be ignored (e.g., Chu, 2014; Juncoa&Cottenb, 2012; Lepp, et. al. 2013; Rosen et al.,2011; Sanchez-Martinez & Otero, 2009; Valenzuela, et al., 2014; Wood, et al., 2012).

The aim of this paper is to dig deep into the main agenda behind the creation of cyberspace which is called globalization agenda. The paper discusses the kind relationship between globalization and Islam and exposes areas that are of concern to Islamic education. It also chronicles some of the Muslims' efforts in tackling the vices brought by cybersapce. The paper concludes with suggestions which include creation of Islamic Technology education as well as digital Islamic studies.

2.0 ISLAM AND GLOBALISATION

Mittelman (1997) offers a comprehensive, logical, and convincing definition for globalisation which is relevant to the topic of discussion here. He defined globalization as "coalescence of varied transnational processes and domestic structures, allowing the economy, politics, culture and ideology of the one country to penetrate another"(Mittelman 1997, p. 3). This definition of points to some key facts about globalization: it is a mechanism that creates an inevitable common space for the global citizenry, which eases the flow of a chosen ideology, culture, economy, and politics to the entire human race on the globe in an enacompassing manner. Thus, globalisation breaks the barriers to other cultures and ideologies, social and economic policies and incapacitates netizens and impacts them with both its positives and negatives.

Since the rise of its nomenclature, globalization has been perceived by many thinkers around the world, regardless of their religious or political affiliations, as a rebranding of colonisation, and an extension of Western hegemony. It presents, they claim, serious detriments to moral and ethical values, the sovereignty of the individual country and cultural identity (For further reading see: Andreev, Ilyin & Zinkina, 2015; Rodrik, 1997; Sheetz, 2006; For a review of thinkers' quotable quotes on globalization see: <http://www.betterworld.net/quotes/globalization-quotes.htm>) .

Islam is founded on the sovereignty of Allah the only one that deserves human servitude, submission, and control. This principle has been carved and is being reiterated by every Muslim several times a day as Allahu Akbar; meaning Allah is the only one that is Great". This principle not only implies that Muslim should only bow and receive dictates from Allah the Creator, but also negates submission to the whims of the creatures at the expense of God-given commands. This places Islam as a major obstacle to the advancement of neo-colonization agenda and consequently position the Islamic world and societies at the centre of a raging world struggle; targeted from all sides and exposed to dangers from all frontiers and proponents of globalization agenda. Islam distinguishes itself from other major world religions, as it presents a sweeping, internally cohesive set of legal and moral rules for the organization of collective and individual life. It is a total way of life that addresses both spiritual and material concerns, in the theological and political spheres. Islam is not merely a set of functional beliefs, but a permeating layer of reality that shapes the duties of the Muslim in relation to God and fellow Muslims (Yom, 2017).

The Islamic world has been threatened and challenged by globalization on several grounds: Globalisation has popularised consumerism and materialism where people in the society are more concerned with the worldly material, they could acquire rather than the essential aspects of humanity. In other words, globalization reinvigorates the idea of "survival of the fittest" where a privileged human being exploits a fellow human being for self-benefits and material gains. This has given birth to a valueless society. In the words of an American thinker and poet, Wendell Berry he says: "For complex reasons, our culture allows "economy" to mean only "money economy." It equates success and even goodness with monetary profit because it lacks any other standard of measurement. I am no economist, but I venture to suggest that one of the laws of such an economy is that a farmer is worth more dead than alive. A second law is that anything diseased is more profitable than anything that is healthy. What is wrong with us contributes more to the "gross national product" than what is right with us" (Berry, 1981, p. xiii)

In the education sector, globalization has created a new mindset towards the content of education and teaching methods. Influenced by materialism, the formal education system is now emphasising more on science, technical, financial and managerial skills in response to market demands, and attaching less importance to traditional academic subjects and moral education; such as Islamic education. This means that education is nothing more than acquiring specific skills and techniques to create more job seekers for capitalists' industries to exploit more and more.

The main tool of globalization that paves way for easy penetration of others' barriers is the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools. The ICT boom has given rise to an expansion, dissemination and access of information with ease. These features of IT tools have been maximally utilised and, unarguably, gained ground in the education industry. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools are gradually taking the role of teachers and parents when information is needed or a personal problem to be solved (Fallows, 2008; Purcell, 2011; Zakaria, et al., 2014). With this, the role of teachers and parents as sources of moral teachings and role models is diminishing, while youngsters are exposed to a junk of information which are anathema to Islamic teachings. In addition, cyberspace is providing a safe heaven for poorly informed and gullible young Muslims to challenge the religious status quo and erode religious authority (Solahudin, &Fakhruroji, 2019; Whyte, 2022).

There are studies that suggest ICT has tremendous influence on religious beliefs. Campbell (2012) called this area of research the digital religion studies. According to Campbell (2012), "digital religion as a concept acknowledges both how digital technology and culture shape religious practice and beliefs, but also how religion seeks to culture new media contexts with established ways of being and convictions about the nature of reality and the larger world" (Campbell 2012, p. xx). This buttresses the fact that religious experts must rise to the impending challenges that are posed by the advent of ICT tools.

3.0 THE MUSLIM DEFENSIVE RESPONSE TO GLOBALIZATION AGENDA

To save their societies from the waves of neo-colonization and the vices of globalization, the Muslim around the world has taken several steps. Here researchers shall be concerned with two major defensive steps taken: the first was reformation and re-engineering of Islamic education, and the second are policies that were made as preventive measures against the vices of globalization tools. These are discussed in the following sections :

3.1 Reformation of Islamic Education System

In the late seventies, there was an intellectual awakening among Muslim thinkers and there were persistent trials by Muslims to protect their societies and communities from the waves of neo-colonialism. To this effect, Muslims held the first world conference on Islamic education in 1977. In the conference, it was stressed that there is a need for Muslim thinkers and educationist to draw up plans and programs with a view to inspiring Muslim children with a noble ideal of Islam. This plan has been a proactive step; so that the upcoming Muslim children may know not only that they should resist the influences that make the individual the slave of external forces, but also that they should strive for the establishment and maintenance of God-given values and re-direct technology, science and other concomitant forces for the benefit of humanity. This conference which took place in Jeddah and in Makah (1977) and the subsequent conferences that took place in Pakistan (1980), Dakar (1981) and Jakarta (1982) gave rise to a paradigm called Islamization of knowledge (Tajudeen, 2019). The main thrust of this paradigm is to develop a comprehensive approach for reforming Muslim education system by integrating godliness with modernity. In other words, the reform is to make an amalgam of Islamic education with modern education by purging the subjects of study of the poison of excessive materialism, and of the denial of the higher moral and spiritual values, and to inject into them, the spirit of piety and godliness and solicitude for the Hereafter (Tajudeen, 2019). It was further stressed that without such a merger Islamic education would be swept by the tides of globalization and would no longer pass the litmus test of time. Earlier before the advent of Islamization nomenclature 'Ali Nadwy (1969) observed inter alia:

"A country which seeks to ignore the challenge of modern civilisation by withdrawing into its shell and shutting its mind to the mighty changes that are taking place around it has no future in the present context of things... It cannot hold back from it the tide of western civilisation to the country which will at first seep into it through the services and then sweeps over it once the breach has been made" (Nadwy1969, p. 13) .

Since this time, there has not been a consensus among Muslim thinkers on the ideal way to carry out such merger (Tajudeen, 2019). However, what is evident is that the Islamization paradigm, not minding the criticism levied against its nomenclature, is well received, and celebrated by many Muslims including some nominal Muslims. Muslim schools proliferate in many Islamic countries as well as Muslim communities in the Western and non-Islamic countries. Attempts were made to establish Islamic model schools whereby the operating system follows the dictates of Islam, while some Madrasahs (traditional Islamic schools) also introduced some western subjects into their school curricular .

What is obvious to whomever that may be following the development of Islamic education in the world scene is that there is a lack of synergy among Islamic countries on the reformation of the education system to reflect Islamic epistemology, pedagogy and values. Since the weakening of OIC as a leading organization in this respect and the subsequent conversion of Islamic education center in Makkah to a national University (a center which was earlier established to serve as a major think-tank for Islamic education), most of the efforts made so far have been individual-based which may not be applicable to other Islamic countries and societies. Although the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) is making tremendous efforts in this regard, there has not been a unified and sophisticated Islamized curricular and tangible school textbooks and materials designed for all the secular subjects.

It should be noted that teaching of Arabic and Islamic subjects along the secular subjects in their unrefined forms, as it is being popularised today as a form of Islamization of knowledge, does not make a school Islamic, it is rather a caricature of Islamization of knowledge. For Islamization agenda to be a reality, all subjects must be analysed with the lense of Islamic theology and epistemology. Courses and Subjects of study must be re-engineered in their totality in terms of their objectives, content and method of teaching and evaluation. In addition, Muslim teacher training colleges must adopt a unique but comprehensive model that is capable of preparing teachers for both religious and worldly needs of their respective societies. The following summation presses home this fact :

"Islamic education is the total educational system which has its philosophy, goals, objectives and content selected using the divine wisdom both as the source of information and as the nucleus of the entire programme." (Bidmos 2003, p. 177)

It can be arguably said that Islamization agenda is still in its infancy in many Muslim countries. For instance, the system of education in many Muslim countries is still a pro-western system of education in theory and practice. The number of years in primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions is fashioned according to western paradigms not in accordance with Muslim educationists thought, such as Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Sina. Neither difference nor uniqueness could be seen in the pedagogical principles in Muslim countries: students are being promoted massively and placed mostly based on pen-and-paper exams rather than based on their capabilities in the realities of life as stressed by Islamic principle. Girl's education has not been accorded the special attention it deserves from an Islamic perspective. There are no international exams for Muslim countries based on the promoted principles of Islamization of knowledge. On the contrary, the number of Muslim countries participating in the secular international exams such as Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) continues to rise. The implication is that such international exams would definitely influence, albeit indirectly, the education policy in Muslim countries. It will also distract them from their unique Islamic objectives and pedagogy as well as their peculiar local educational problems and needs.

3.2 Preventive Measures Against the Vices of Globalization

The major think tank for Muslim countries in education is the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). Professor Laila KJIRI documents the efforts made so far by ISESCO and some Arab countries in protecting Muslim societies from the vices of globalization tools as discussed in the following sections:

Within the framework of the implementation of its "Strategy for the Development of Communication and Information Technologies in the Islamic World", adopted by the 5th Islamic conference of the Ministers of Culture, ISESCO has implemented several programs to activate four spheres of activities, namely: capacity building of the human resources operating in the field of ICT in Member States, reinforcement of the role of these technologies in national development, production of better digital contents reflecting the cultural diversity of Member States and the promotion of the ethical and cultural aspects of ICT. In addition to this, ISESCO and UNESCO held an advisory meeting of experts to study the methodology project for the benefit of teacher-trainees as to the use of ICT for educational purposes. In February 2010, ISESCO took part in an international symposium in Tunis on "Youth in cyberspace: legal protection and ethical limits". The participants examined the legal and cultural problems relating to the use of the Internet in general and cybercrime in particular. It was stressed that there were no enough legislations governing

cybercrime. Consequently, "Tunis Call for action 2010 for the protection of youngsters in cyberspace" was launched, hinging on several principles which include: intensification of campaigns by all stakeholders against illicit use of cyberspace; Establishing mechanisms of technology watch likely to ensure the follow-up of all forms of ethical transgressions; and the fight against cybercrime, cyberterrorism, radical movements via the Internet and all forms of moral and sexual abuse affecting youngsters of the world . (Altwaijri, 2008)

In September 2011, ISESCO also held a national conference in Marrakech on "The protection of young Moroccans against cybercrime." The conference examined the major criminal and legal risks to which youngsters can be exposed during the daily and illegal use of the Internet. The recommendations of this meeting particularly insisted on the importance of the introduction of a world operational system in the area of cybercrime in order to attenuate such risks, within a framework of international cooperation. This conference also recommended the implementation of lawful measures sanctioning the various acts contained in the international convention on electronic communication (Budapest Convention 2001).

In October 2011, in Amman, upon the invitation of the School of Law at the University of Jordan and the Observatory for Cyberspace Security, ISESCO took part in the Second Regional Arab Congress on the security and protection of cybernetic space. This meeting particularly examined the challenges of cyber-security and protection of cyberspace; and the adoption of an Arab platform reporting the ethical criteria on the use of the Internet. This conference was attended by experts and research professors in the field of computing, representatives of national and regional organisations and representatives of private companies specialised in NICT in the Arab world. ISESCO representatives presented a contribution relative to their efforts as to the implementation of the strategy for the development of ICT in the Muslim world. In November 2011, in Nouakchott, ISESCO, in co-operation with UNESCO Rabat-Office, held a meeting of experts on "Ethical and cultural dimensions of the information society between the freedom of expression and the respect of human rights". The participants stressed the importance of the ethical and cultural dimension and the need for respecting the legal limits of freedom of expression in close relationship with human rights and the ethics of the information profession, recognised in international charters and declarations (Altwaijri, 2008).

Further, ISESCO also developed the "Strategy for the Development of Information and Communication Technologies in the Islamic World", adopted by the 5th Islamic Conference of the Ministers of Culture in 2007. On this basis, within the framework of its Action Plan 2010-2012, the Organization granted priority interest to the programs and activities aiming at highlighting the ethical and cultural dimensions of ICT in the Islamic world, particularly through sensitizing the officers in charge, content providers, professionals and users, on an effective and efficient control in the area of cybercrime. ISESCO supported the efforts made by the Member States in order to control the ethical and cultural dimensions of ICT contents and to sensitise parents, educators and decision makers to the repressive measures and criminal sanctions resulting from their illegal uses. Given the increasingly growing number of children using the Internet in the Member States, there is an increasing fear that this social category would be a victim of cybercrime as well as various forms of moral and behavioral deviation. Likewise, children can be victims of pernicious ideas and campaigns of indoctrination conducted by extremist bodies, which aim at destabilising societies and hinder their development .

All the aforementioned efforts are some of the efforts made so far by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). Nearly all Muslim countries have responded to the wake-up call from ISESCO in one way or the other especially in terms of censorship of ICT tools.

Despite all these efforts, cyberspace remains a major source of anti-Islamic vices which are always intermingled with various beneficial services and uses of ICT tools. There is need for more efforts to make cyberspace a morally safe place for Muslims.

4.0 THE NEED FOR ISLAMIC TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

Digital infrastructure is increasingly becoming the major backbone of prosperous economies, vigorous research, and strong militaries. Hence, investment in the digital infrastructure is inevitable.

However, buying of ready-made technologies or mere censorship of the existing ICT tools cannot solve the peculiar needs of Muslim countries. Advancement is always a product of research and innovation not by mere purchase or procurement. For an accelerated advancement in technology in the Islamic world, it must follow the knowledge triangle integration which comprises of education, research and innovation as its three adjoining sides (For literature review on knowledge triangle see: Meissner & Shmatko, 2017; Meissner et. al., 2021; Smol & Kulczycka, 2019; Unger & Polt 2017; Unger, et. al., 2020). Simply put, knowledge triangle integration is the design of education system to be research-laden which then drives to innovations and new discoveries. Without research there can be no new knowledge. New knowledge can be a theoretical basic knowledge or practical applied knowledge. This is why the current era is described as knowledge-based economy.

Many of major digital infrastructures are produced and controlled by non-Muslims built purposely for profit making and to project materialism. The major social media platforms (facebook, instagram, twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, WeChat, TikTok etc.) contain some contents which are detrimental to the Islamic belief. Search engines are also littered with obscene photos and videos which are incidentally projected to Muslim users. Cyberspace is also being used for propaganda against Islam and to spread Islamophobia.

Indeed, the estimated two billion populations of Muslims in the world deserve an alternative search engine and social media platforms that are not only morally safe for all, but also Islamically educative and informative. There is need to reengineer values into science and technology (Ferdous, & Uddin, 2012). Islam as a total way of life should have its own alternative ICT tools which would promote its values and strengthen them in the cyberspace. This would not only provide a solace for Muslim youngsters but also serves as a huge source of economic gain for the Islamic world. Such reformation of ICT tools can be regarded as Islamization of technology project (Ferdous, & Uddin, 2012; Setia, 2016).

Islamic technology is a deliberate devotion of academic activities to the study of technology from Islamic perspectives and production of modern ICT tools for the benefits of Muslims and the entire human race. Islamic technology is not a mere label customization of the existing ICT tools, but rather a total reengineering of ICT tools for the purpose of providing an ethically guided alternative for the entire mankind.

One of the major areas that Islamic technology would also pay attention to, apart from producing ethical ICT tools, is digital Islamic studies. Digital religion studies is "a dynamic area of research covering a diverse range of topics, from ethical questions raised by artificial intelligence and techno-influenced worldviews such as transhumanism to ethnographic exploration of religious groups' use of social media and apps" (Tsuria, & Campbell, 2021). This branch of Islamic technology would provide a synergy for all scholars that are concerned with the ethical and positive use of technology, and its role in shaping beliefs and politics.

Islamic digital studies go beyond simple consideration of how digital media force religious groups and practitioners to adapt altering notions of religious tradition, but also how Islamic believes are constituted in new ways through digital media and cultures.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Globalization is the main agenda behind creation of cyberspace which has both advantages and threats. In the discussions so far, emphasis is made on the need to strategise for more effective ways to avoid the ICT vices which are detrimental to Islamic education. One of such ways is the creation of Islamic technology education in the higher institutions of learning with the aim of both production of Islamic friendly ICT tools and a study of Islamic digital studies. In a small scale, module and courses that educate on good use of ICT can also ameliorate the situation. Creation of academic courses to tackle the vices of technological tools has an anticidenece. For example, when global warming phenomenon appeared several topics and subjects, initiatives and educational programs were designed to educate students on the phenomenon and how to reduce the effects. The Same thing may be done in Islamic education by designing special modules and subjects to enlighten the youths on the correct way to use cyber space and ICT tools which have been inevitable in the 21st-century life. This has been the conclusion of some authors who wrote research articles in this regard (e.g. Abu Sadat, 2008; Harun, & Hasan, 2008; Razak, 2011; Zakaria, et al, 2014).

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