

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN DEVELOPING FUTURE HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS: VIEWS FROM EXPERTS AND TEACHERS

(Pendidikan Agama dan Latihan dalam Pembangunan Sumber Manusia Profesional
Masa Depan: Pandangan Mufti dan Guru)

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to explore the views of Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers on the development of future human resource professionals. A qualitative design was employed to explore themes of this study among Islamic experts and excellent Islamic teachers. Participants of the study comprised 8 Islamic religious experts and 12 excellent Islamic teachers. In-depth interviews with the participants were conducted to gather the data. The findings indicated that Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers viewed, the process and practices of human resource development (HRD) would be greatly strengthened through understanding and application of the contents of the al-Quran and Hadiths. It would be able to apply and practice Islamic concepts and ethics in carrying out HRD functions. Implications that can be drawn from the findings suggest that religious concepts and ethics should be integrated or infused in the pre-service curriculum to prepare for a “balanced” HRD professional. On the other hand, in-service training programs for HRD professionals should also include religious concepts and ethics to fortify them with the foundations of integrity, professionalism and accountability.

Keywords: Religious education and training, HRD, teachers, religious experts, pre-service and in-service training

ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk meninjau pandangan pakar-pakar agama Islam dan guru-guru Islam yang cemerlang kepada pembangunan profesional sumber manusia masa depan. Reka bentuk kualitatif telah digunakan untuk meneroka tema-tema kajian ini di kalangan pakar-pakar Islam dan guru-guru Islam yang cemerlang. Peserta kajian terdiri daripada 8 orang ahli agama Islam dan 12 orang guru Islam yang cemerlang. Temu bual mendalam terhadap para peserta telah dijalankan untuk mengumpul data. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pakar-pakar agama Islam dan guru-guru Islam cemerlang melihat, proses dan amalan pembangunan sumber manusia (PSM) akan terus diperkukuhkan melalui kefahaman dan aplikasi isi kandungan al-Quran dan hadis. Dengan demikian akan membolehkan aplikasi dan amalan etika Islam dalam menjalankan fungsi PSM. Implikasi daripada kajian menunjukkan bahawa konsep dan etika agama harus disepadukan atau diselitkan dalam kurikulum pra-perkhidmatan bagi memastikan wujudnya profesional PSM yang seimbang. Selain itu, program latihan dalam perkhidmatan untuk profesional HRD juga harus merangkumi konsep agama dan etika untuk mengukuhkan mereka dengan asas-asas integriti, profesionalisme dan kebertanggungjawaban.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Agama dan Latihan, HRD, guru, mufti, latihan pra perkhidmatan dan latihan dalam perkhidmatan

INTRODUCTION

The process of human capital development is more than economics and technology; it embraces spiritual, social and political dimensions. The development dimension focuses on improving the wellbeing of individuals on the basis of their knowledge and a fair distribution of benefits resulting from their active participation in knowledge acquiring endeavors. Hence, along with being a basic human right, education is recognized as being at the core of development (Abuarqub 2009). In the Islamic perspective, human development emphasizes on organizational learning whereby learning should be the culture of an organization (Abu Daud al-Sajistani 2000). Education is the only form of action that can transform potentials into competencies for life. Within this perspective, to prepare for new generations of young professionals is to develop educational concepts and practices that can generate competencies for people to transform themselves and their realities through the full development of their potentials. The human development paradigm is based on the view that each human being is born with a potential and has the right to develop them. These potential are consistently interrelated with education, training and ethics to build future human resource professionals (Abuarqub 2009). The concept “capital” is an economic term which means expenditure or an investment into “something” with the hope of some useful returns in the future. In the context of Human Capital Development (HCD),

capital indicates investment in education and training to develop human resources in terms of knowledge and skills for the development of society and/organizations. Therefore, human capital development refers to the development of productive capacity of an individual acquired through education and training.

In the Islamic perspective of developing future human resource professionals, a conscious effort should be made to include Islamic concepts and ethics based on the contents of al-Quran and hadiths either infused or integrated in HRD curriculum and in in-service training programs. It has been shown that Islamic concepts and ethics are able to provide the foundations for justice and tolerance to the diversity of needs, problems, and challenges faced by a society and/an organization (Mohamed Aslam & Hafas, 2009). Ethics in Islam is not based on a variety of separate and scattered virtues, with each virtue such as honesty or truth, standing isolated from others. Virtue in Islam is a part of a total, comprehensive way of life which serves to guide and control all human activities. Truthfulness is an ethical value as are protecting life, conserving the environment and sustaining development within the confines of what God's Orders. Al- Quran contains the instructions for a complete way of life with political, social and economic principles side by side for the construction and preservation of the earth (Mawil, 1990). The role of Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers is critical in providing knowledge and skill to develop all-rounded professionals who are able to balance the demands and challenges of technology, economy and spirituality to pursue quality of lives especially in a developed nation.

Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers emphasize the *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim* and *ta'dib*, taken together to convey the meaning and scope of education and training in Islam, both formal and informal. In Arabic, the word *ta'dib* means "refinement or discipline" for what we call education, an educator as *muaddib* (teacher manners), the word *tarbiyah* (education) is derived from the root word *raba-yarbu* which means to grow and to increase (al-Taftazani, 1996). In Islamic moral teaching, it is to be remembered that Muslims will have to provide an account to the Almighty Allah on the Day of Judgment for all of our actions on earth (al-Baqarah 2:281). Informal Islamic education aims at the spirituality and ethics of human beings. This Islamic perspective can effectively be imparted to society in the informal setting of Islamic education through different ways and approaches and people will be able to play a vital role to build a society which is enriched with moral and spiritual values (Kamiz Uddin 2006).

The aim of this paper is to explore the views of Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers developing future human resource professionals. How can Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers develop future human resource professionals through education and training? What contributions can Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers provide to strengthen future human resource professionals?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in three states, namely, Perak, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka in Malaysia. For each state, two areas were selected, one representing a rural area and the other an urban area. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify and select the sample from the population of Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers in the rural and urban areas identified in each state. An interview guide was developed based on the focus and themes of the study such as justice, tolerant, diversity of needs, honesty, truthfulness, integrity, professionalism, accountability and roles of experts and teachers in imparting knowledge to students. The study used in-depth interviews as the main data collection method with eight (8) Islamic religious experts and 12 excellent Islamic teachers. Interviews were conducted in their offices and school meeting rooms. All respondents were asked to fill a brief form on their demographic profiles. In-depth interviews were recorded using a camcorder (IC recorder) and each discussion lasted for about two and half hours. Interviews were recorded, reported verbatim, compiled and interpreted immediately after the field study. Major themes were derived from the research questions. The next level was to find sub-themes that link the study findings to data collection, research questions, and data analysis. Organizing data means compiling them in meaningful themes and categories to understand the meaning of a phenomenon. Data interpretation reflects the perspectives or views of the researchers. Data were analyzed in order to find similarities and differences within the main themes in-depth interviews and transcribed reports obtained. Through this process, a consensus among the researchers was attained while reporting and describing the results of the study. The explicit findings from written reports were combined with literature reviews and presented by themes and sub-themes in the major findings and discussions.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents' Profile

The findings indicated that eight (8) religious experts interviewed were experts in planning and administration of religious programs and activities. All religious experts interviewed had their religious education from University Al-Azhar, Egypt, from around 1966 to the early 1980s. All of them knew each other due to frequent contacts and doing similar jobs although they are located in different states. Almost all of them were involved in religious administration and management at state levels, except one who was the Deputy Dean of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) of the Islamic International University. Most of them have their basic degree in Islamic studies focusing in *Syari'e (Law)*.

Table 1: Islamic Expert Profile

Respondent	Age	Level / Field of Study	Year of Study
Respondent A	68	(MA) Usul Fikh, University Al-Azhar	1966-1974
Respondent B	65	(MA) Syari'e (Law)	1970-1973
Respondent C	55	(MA) Usuluddin	1979-1988
Respondent D	69	BA Syari'e (Law)	1966-1973
Respondent E	61	BA Syari'e (Law)	1974-1978
Respondent F	65	BA Syari'e (Law)	1972-1974
Respondent G	57	BA Syari'e (Law)	1977-1980
Respondent H	62	BA Syari'e (Law)	1973-1977

Excellent teachers are those who excel in their professions with impeccable personal attributes and personality. They usually become role models to students and other teachers and have excellent knowledge-base and skill to improve learning outcomes. Excellent teachers have the capacity to communicate accurate information as well as to improve themselves through research and academic writing to improve the quality of education. They received promotions from DG 41 to DG 44 or DG 44 to DG 48 to DG 54. Most of the excellent teachers were in the age range of 37 to 54 years. From the 12 excellent teachers interviewed, only three were males. The majority of the excellent teachers have 10 to 20 years of teaching experience. The higher grade excellent teachers have (DG48 & DG54) 25 to 29 years of teaching experience. All excellent teachers in this study have similar educational background, that is, Islamic Studies and Arab Language and they were graduates of local universities.

Table 2: Excellent Islamic Teachers' Profile

Islamic Teacher	Age	Gander	Job Grade	Years of experience	Major Area of Study
Perak					
Excellent Teacher 1/ 2008*	39	F	DG 44	12	Arabic Language
Excellent Teacher 2/ 2009*	43	F	DG 44	13	Arabic Language
Excellent Teacher 3/ 2009*	50	M	DG 48	20	Islamic Education
Excellent Teacher 4/ 2008*	37	F	DG 44	10	Arabic Language
Melaka					
Excellent Teacher 5/ 2008*	42	F	DG 44	21	Islamic Education
Excellent Teacher 6/ 2008*	37	M	DG 44	11	Arabic Language
Excellent Teacher 7/ 2003*	49	F	DG 44	25	Islamic Education
Excellent Teacher 8/ 2010*	46	M	DG 44	20	Syari'e (Law)
Negeri Sembilan					
Excellent Teacher 9/ 2009*	47	F	DG 44	20	Islamic Education
Excellent Teacher 10/ 1996*	53	F	DG 54	29	Islamic Education
Excellent Teacher 11/ 2008*	38	F	DG 44	14	Islamic Education
Excellent Teacher 12/ 2009*	37	F	DG 44	12	Islamic Education

*Year being promoted.

The views from Islamic experts were obtained to provide information on the preparation of future HRD professionals as well the ideal attributes of these professionals, while the views from excellent Islamic teachers were obtained to harness the potentials among students in designing appropriate teaching and learning methods to build future HRD professionals. Synergy Islamic human resource concepts and practices should focus to produce professionals who are obliged and fearful not only to the employers but most importantly to Allah the Al-Mighty. In this respect, excellent Islamic teachers will be much more trustworthy, truthful, sincere, tolerant, and put their interest second to that of their employers (Ilhaamie 2009).

How can Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers contribute to the development of future human resource professionals? What can Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers provide to strengthen positive attributes of future human resource professionals? To answer these questions, Islamic experts viewed suitable orientation programs and continuous exposure during the duration of their schooling and university study programs must be planned and implemented to inculcate positive virtues as the foundation to become individuals with high integrity, professionalism and accountability. In line with this thought, a good and cordial relationship between students and teachers is a prerequisite to enhance the transfer of knowledge and skills in a conducive learning environment.

The Deputy Dean of ISTAC and *Mufti* Kedah gave their opinions on this matter as follows:

In Egypt, knowledge is stored in an open storage and whoever works hard to obtain knowledge will be able to get them. Students must not only attend classes but also follow and have cordial relationships with their professors to acquire knowledge (Respondent B).

Teachers love students to create a conducive situation to transfer knowledge in an efficient manner. Prophet Muhammad SAW loves the Caliphs and transfer of knowledge is made easier through the environment of love. Teachers love students and students love teachers. This cordial student-teacher relationship makes transfer of knowledge effective (Respondent C).

Academic achievement is not obtained only in classes, but the experts felt that students who attended universities in the Middle East had vast opportunities to acquire knowledge outside of classroom situations organized through informal groups on a regular basis. The outside classroom teaching and learning would contribute greatly to the academic performance of students.

I did not major in al-Quran studies, but I learn Talaqih from my early student days. Now I am a Mufti and can be a judge in Quran reading competition. I studied hadith, Usuluddin but I learned Talaqqi and that has enabled me

to pronounce the words of al-Quran correctly. Recites of al-Quran from Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia pronounce the works of al-Quran correctly due to Talaqqi and these are usually acquired outside of classroom situations (Respondent D).

I was made to understand that students seek the help of tuition teachers in their studies. This is alright, but I think students should strive hard and use ample time available to them to learn by themselves to acquire knowledge. Students should always be ahead of their teachers in learning a topic so that they could understand more and learn more on that particular topic (Respondent E).

This assertion is in line with the thinking of Knowles (1970; 1980; Knowles Holton III & Swanson 1998) when he said that adults are self-directed learners when they see that learning fulfill their needs and solve their problems. As students, we have to be proficient in one or two foreign languages, other than our own mother tongue to improve our academic performance. The *Mufti* of Kedah, indicated that he would use semester breaks to learn English, French and Arabic. These languages would enable him to have a broader base to acquire knowledge written in various languages.

...a law book has about 500 pages; I have to read it and even that is not enough, I have to buy extra books. If I don't understand the lectures in class, I will usually seek the help of lecturers outside class in order to understand the topics discussed. I learn English and French during holidays so that I can refer books written in these languages to better understand the subject matter I learn in my studies and perform well in my academic subjects (Respondent D).

Participating in debates organized by students' associations is a way to improve language proficiency besides gathering facts and information about a topic as part of a learning and acquiring knowledge process. Participating in debates will enhance one's communication skills, a useful social skill in one's future endeavors, especially in influencing career success. Two important factors to ensure success in acquiring knowledge that is, interest and motivation. The *Mufti* of Johor states that:

Those who studied with me were not so intelligent, but they were constantly reminded of the Islamic virtues and ethics to be successful. These virtues and ethics were the driving force behind us to become successful. Hardworking, interest, motivation to succeed, honest, average intelligence, monetary support and guidance from teachers are some virtues and ethics in Islamic education to ensure one's success (Respondent E).

Life-long learning must be inculcated among students in order to avoid the students being obsolete due to knowledge being generated on a fast track presently. Continuous learning using several media, besides the classroom learning, must be encouraged among students to acquire technology, economics, political, spiritual and

Islamic knowledge to remain relevant in this world and in the world thereafter. In this aspect, the ex-Syarie' judge of Sarawak vividly indicated that knowledge is a 'trust' to human beings and must be acquired and disseminated for the benefit of all. The ex-syarie judge said that when he was a student he acquired knowledge not only from the professors but also from fellow students who came from all over the world studying in al-Azhar University, Egypt.

I hold on to the advice of my father who encouraged me to mix around and make friends with people of different colours and cultures. Some of these people were unique and had special knowledge that we could learn and adopt in our lives. I regard searching for knowledge as a 'trust' (*amanah*) which must be carried out in order to be successful in my worldly pursuits as well as in the world thereafter (Respondent G).

According to Hafas (1996) in relation to trust (*amanah*), man is allowed to own and fully utilize and benefit from nature, not in an absolute sense as he must be responsible to preserve nature, expand and develop it for the betterment of all creatures and for the successful mission of *Khalifah* (23: 115). Ilhaamie (2009) said that the principles of *khalifah* and *al-falah* should be inculcated in training. *Khalifah* is the man's role as God's messenger on earth (al-Baqarah, 2:31). Meanwhile *al-falah* is the success in this world and Hereafter matters. To achieve success in both worlds, one has to steadfast to *tauhid* principles and be consistent in his or her belief, faith and good practices (*istiqamah*) (al-Qasas, 28:77). HRD professionals will be more responsible and trustworthy with high integrity and accountability when they understand these two concepts of *khalifah* and *al-falah* in their lives.

From the perspective of excellent Islamic teachers, constant advice and motivation to students become the principal agenda to ensure that students are socially active and emotionally stable. Through regular interactive sessions, students and teachers discuss and share interests, needs and problems facing students and find a common ground agreed by all for future undertaking. Some of what being discussed as reflected by the following excerpts is as follows:

If you want to instill some good deeds and good behavior to students, say like why one should pray five times a day or the importance of acquiring knowledge now for future endeavors; students must be made aware and understand why such deeds and behaviors are important and how these deeds and behaviors are practiced. Teachers must always give advice and motivation to students. I always take five (5) minutes before each class to give 'pep talks' to my students (GC 2, urban school).

The responsibility of excellent Islamic teachers of rural schools and that of the urban schools is different. Usually, the failure rate in rural schools is higher compared to urban schools due to differences in students and parents backgrounds, especially

the social-economic status besides differences in facilities and teachers' motivation. To improve passing rates in rural schools, teachers have to do extra work to improve student's techniques of answering questions' how to take class note for future revision, organizing motivational programs to reduce absenteeism and to encourage students to learn through innovative teaching/learning methods. In this regard, GC 3 suggested the following to improve academic performance of students:

To improve academic performance, we will group students who have failed school based examinations and provide extra coaching and "drill" on how to answer exam and how to take class notes as well as to provide motivational programs on why they should come to schools regularly and pay attention in class. These sessions are usually conducted with the collaboration of counselors and being done outside of school to provide a different learning environment for these students (GC 3 rural school).

For urban schools, excellent Islamic teachers provide extra classes to improve students' academic achievement. One teacher provided newspaper cuttings of her successful students in their careers to motivate students in her class to do likewise.

In class or in extra classes, I never fail to give motivation to my students to achieve the best in life. That can be done, first to be successful in school and later, be successful in life through their careers. I use past students success stories to motivate my present students (GC 12, urban school).

According to Ilhaamie (2009), the concept of productivity in Islam is not just based on the quantity or rate of work completed but also the *akhlaq* or personality development of the workers. If *akhlaq* (good personality with good behavior) is developed alongside with knowledge and skill to perform a task, then outcomes would achieve the highest level (quantity and quality) on a sustainable basis. To maintain this achievement, regular motivational programs with appropriate incentives must be given to the workers as part of a complementary deal between employers and workers (Muhammad 1997). Accordingly, many Islamic scholars viewed Islamic education can contribute significantly to the development of *akhlaq* among students due to its emphasis in almost all Islamic education curriculums. If *akhlaq* is the focus in the teaching and learning of Islamic subjects, then the development of future human capital follows the right path of producing excellent HRD professionals. This idea was vividly put forward by an excellent Islamic teacher as follows:

We, the Islamic teachers believe strongly that *akhlaq* is a critical component in the development of excellent HRD professionals. If students are excellent in their academic achievements only without a strong foundation of good *akhlaq*, then their future success is in jeopardy (GC 8, urban school).

A substantial number of students do not really understand the relationship between humans and God as eluded by GC 2 (Urban School). Many students in her school do not perform the daily prayers fully as required by all Muslims. When this happens, the achievement of a “complete” human being is not attained because *akhlaq* (good behavior), a critical component, is missing in the development process. This is in line with what Ilhaamie (2009) and Muhammad (1997) indicated that a good workforce requires knowledge and skill as well as good *akhlaq*. The impact of having both of these components would produce a workforce that is modest (*tawadu*) with high level of patience and discipline (*istiqamah* / good practice) (Hairunnizam & Radiah 2010).

What I see in students who do not perform the daily ibadah (e.g. praying five times a day) would have “empty soul”. This causes the missing link between human beings and God and would have serious implications in the process of building internal strength to pursue success in their careers and in the world thereafter (GC 2, urban school).

An excellent Islamic teacher (GC 4) had the opinion that the process of human capital development could be greatly enhanced if students could recite and understand the al-Quran besides being in good standing academically. She believed that students from rural schools could be at par with their peers from urban schools if appropriate guidance, advice and motivation as well as to have creative and innovative teaching/ learning methods that would excite them to be interested in learning. This idea was supported by her colleague (GC 9) when she indicated that students who were able to recite and understand the al-Quran and performed the *ibadah* as required by Muslims would become future leaders with integrity and accountability.

From an emotional and environment stand point, rural school students are expected to be able to recite the al-Quran and practice what the al-Quran seeks the followers to do. As an excellent teacher, I would do my best to change the behavior of my students through encouraging them to do the daily *ibadah* and inculcate the interest in learning so that they would perform as well academically (GC4, rural school).

To become a good leader in the future, students must be exposed to the al-Quran and inculcated with positive values from Islamic education infused or integrated with academic subjects (GC 9, rural school)

The leaderships of Prophet Muhammad SAW is exemplary to all Muslims. Allah SWT says in surah al-Anbiya’: 107 that “Allah would not send you (Muhammad) as a messenger if not to benefit the whole universe”. The prophet who has led his followers to the light of truth is the best leadership model for all human beings. The concept of leadership in Islam centers around faith, good *akhlaq* and pious so that individuals,

families and societies could contribute to the well-being of organizations and nations as well as the well-being of every individuals in the world thereafter. The findings from this study showed that Islamic religious experts and excellent Islamic teachers support the development of human capitals through religious education infused or integrated in school and university curricula as well as in-service training programs to improve competency of professionals.

CONCLUSIONS

Religious education and training as a whole focus on building the inner strengths of individuals which form a critical component to sustain high work performance with satisfaction. The inner strength embedded with technology and economic knowledge would make an individual a professional with high integrity, professionalism and accountability and able to function in a variety of situations with modest and high level of patience and discipline. From the perspective of HRD, religious education and training would play an important role in developing all-round professionals who are able to balance the demands and challenges of modern day living with spirituality and quality of life.

Religious education and training is applicable to all human capital development processes as its main goal is to equip individuals with the concept and practice of *Khalifah*, man's role as God's messenger on earth and *al-Falah*, success in this world and the world thereafter. To achieve success in both worlds, HRD professionals have to believe and practice *tauhid* principles with faith and sincerity besides acquiring technology and economic knowledge to perform effectively the tasks at hand. The integration or infusion of Islamic concept, principles and practices in HRD curriculum would ensure a 'balanced' HRD professional able to function effectively in any situation.

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