Strengthening Muslim Family Institution: A Management Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Today, the Muslim society is embroiled with many problems and there are reasons for this. It is the view of many Muslim scholars that presently the Muslim family institution is not as strong as it is supposed to be. The objective of the present research was to apply Quality Function Deployment (QFD) and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to strengthen Muslim family institution. According to the QFD framework, two types of information are required, namely the 'what' and 'how'. The 'what' includes the requirements for having a strong Muslim family institution, while the 'how' involves the ways to fulfil those requirements. Data are collected from 40 Muslim scholars on a personal contact basis. AHP has been applied to prioritize the requirements ('what'). The QFD exercise provides the prioritized 'technical' requirements ('how'). The findings are expected to provide guidelines for having a strong family institution that can contribute towards developing a healthy society.

Keywords: Analytic hierarchy process, Muslim family management, quality function deployment, priorities

INTRODUCTION

In the recent time, the Muslim societies all over the world are experiencing problems which have emanated internally as well as externally. In a survey conducted in 1996, under the auspices of United Nation Development Program (UNDP), the Muslim society was depicted as backward (Farooqi, 2007). There are manifold of causes for this backwardness, which include low literacy rate, corruption, lack of motivation to work hard, poverty, unemployment, indifference toward modern knowledge and poor leadership, to mention a few.

In general, education is regarded as the key to solve many of the problems that a society faces. It is for this reason that an utmost emphasis has been placed in Islam to educate its people and the search for knowledge. In fact, the very first verse revealed by Allah (*swt*) to the holy Prophet (*pbuh*) starts with "Read". However, when the literacy rates in many Muslim countries are analyzed, only disappointments surround us. For example, the literacy rates in some Muslim countries are as follows: Afghanistan (36%), Bangladesh (43%), Pakistan (45.7%), Iraq (40.4%), and Yemen (50.2%) (Khan, 2004). According to Spengler (2007), one in five Arabs lives on less than $2 per day, fifteen percent of the Arab workforce is unemployed (this number could be double by

2010), only 1% of the population has a personal computer and half of the Arab women cannot read.

Why is the Muslim society facing all the problems mentioned above? The Muslim society is not supposed to have all these. The views of the authors are drawn from the reports of various mass media, that a large number of Muslims are not practicing Islam. In order to verify this, Muslims need to go back to the family institution, where a child can learn the basic principles of Islam and know the importance of leading a good religious life. If a child is brought up in a proper Islamic atmosphere, the chance of not practicing Islam in his or her later life is minimal and it is hoped that in this way, a healthy society can be created. It is to be noted that no specific problem is addressed in the present study, but a strong family institution is viewed as vital to contain the manifold of problems in the society. Meanwhile, the physical exercise does not address any specific disease as it can prevent many ailments in a human body. The same can be ascribed about the Muslim family institution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Muslim Family Institution

The authors' search for referred journal articles on Muslim family institution did not yield sufficient number of hits. Therefore, they had to rely mainly on the Internet resources.

In order to strengthen a Muslim family, one of the most important matters is the Islamic orientation when a child is in his/her early age. At this time, the parents, especially the mother remains very close to the child (Hussain, 2007). Parents should have a "kangaroo hold" where they can watch their children closely.

Mababaya (2007) mentioned that all Muslim families should practice the rules and regulations of Islam. He further recommended a number of ways to strengthen the Islamic family institution: 1) attending Islamic lectures, forums and seminars, 2) reading books and other materials on Islam, 3) listening to the radio and watching television programmes on Islam, 4)

buying books, booklets, magazines and other reading materials on Islam, 5) learning from the other media (e.g. CDs, videos and cassette tapes) on Islam and family, and 6) using all the opportunities to acquire knowledge about Islam.

According to Hamdan (2007), building self-esteem is one of the important elements in the Islamic family. Children with high self-esteem are capable of making good decisions; they are proud of their accomplishments, willing to take responsibility and ready to cope with frustrations. Thus, parents and the family environment obviously play a crucial role in the development of children's high self-esteem. Her suggestions to improve self-esteem include communicating positively with the children as well as fostering the culture of responsibility and accountability.

According to Aways (2007), *tarbiyah* plays a great role in a Muslim family. He suggested the following steps in bringing up the family: seeking righteous children, setting a good example, placing importance upon *deen*, showing love and kindness towards one's children, teaching good manners, and exercising justice all the time.

Goddard (1999) states that a child development specialist discusses six ways to improve a family institution: 1) caring and appreciation, 2) commitment, 3) communication, 4) community and family ties, 5) working together, as well as 6) flexibility and openness to change.

Lea (1999) emphasizes on "discipline" to strengthen family institution. The author has also mentioned the benefits of discipline, which include successful family, protection of family from being undercut by short-sighted demands, systematic and orderly management, and holding family members to the standards of excellence, etc.

Datuk Syed Othman Alhabshi (1997) reported a survey conducted on 250 youths, out of which, the majority came from lower and middle income families. Some of them revealed that they had sex quite freely, did not perform their prayers and preferred to loaf around than doing anything productive! Ironically, these

youths put the blame on their parents for all these activities and misbehaviours. They complained that they did not experience parental love as much as they would like, they did not see their parents perform prayers and also did not find anything that would attract them to stay in their own homes. Alhabshi (1997, p. 1) further stated that:

> *It would not be fair to leave the problem to the government alone. After all, these youths do not come from the government. They are our own products. We are the first to raise and influence them. We provide the first ever education for them. They have been moulded by us to be what they are. ... To be practical, I feel that we can all attempt to look after our own families to make sure that our own children will not indulge in any of the undesirable activities. One of the ways of doing this is to create a home out of our house.*

He also points out that people are very careful about location, design, façade, colour, style and size of the house. He reminded that one should not just be so obsessed with the physical aspects of the house and forget about the individuals who reside in it.

A strong Muslim family institution can significantly contribute in developing a healthy society. A society can be considered as healthy when its people possess good moral and manners, respect for each other, help and cooperate among themselves, as well as maintain unity and harmony in the entire society. A society devoid of these is vulnerable to fragmentation, and fraught with all kinds of evil. A strong Muslim family may not be a panacea for all the diseases of a society may have, but it can be considered as a multi-vitamin for the body of a society.

The present research focused on how to strengthen a Muslim family institution so that it helps to become good Muslims and develop a healthy society where everybody can live in peace and prosperity. In more specific, the objectives of the present study were:

- To identify the requirements for having a strong Muslim family institution
- To apply Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to prioritize those requirements
- To identify and prioritize technical requirements[1] by applying Quality Function Deployment

Quality Function Deployment (QFD)

Quality Function Deployment (Akao, 1990; Bossert, 1991) is a quality management tool that helps design a product/service in response to customer needs and expectations. It is important to note that the QFD requires three kinds of inputs, namely the (1) customer requirements, (2) the technical requirements that address the customer requirements, and (3) the relationships between the customer and technical requirements.

The QFD has been applied in numerous settings. Among other, Pitman *et al*. (1996) showed how the QFD could be used to measure customer satisfaction. They reviewed the MBA programme at Grand Valley State University by utilizing the QFD principles. In general, as a process, the QFD is highly successful in satisfying customer requirements. Evidence has shown that a complex process can be managed using the QFD method and it is a very useful tool in ascertaining customer needs, prioritizing them, and directing organizational resources toward fulfilling those needs.

Zhao and Lam (1998) proposed and tested a methodology for identifying different teaching techniques and their effectiveness in achieving educational objectives from students' perspective. Their paper demonstrates how the QFD and Analytic Hierarchy Process (a multi-criteria decision making tool that is briefly described later) are used in identifying the teaching methods and in evaluating their effectiveness in achieving educational objectives. The study also showed the applications of the AHP and QFD in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching in achieving educational objectives

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[1] Technical requirements are the ways to fulfil the needs of a strong family institution.

at the Department of Applied Statistics and Operational Research of the City University of Hong Kong. With the help of the AHP software Expert Choice, a hierarchy was constructed for the purpose of selecting alternative teaching techniques to achieve teaching excellence. Using pairwise comparisons of subjective judgments from teaching staff, the software package calculated the effectiveness ratings for each of the seven teaching techniques.

Shaffer and Pfeiffer (1995) described the application of QFD in the design of nurse training module. A design team used the QFD approach to identify customer needs and develop teaching module to satisfy customer needs. The module they designed was tested in four large healthcare facilities in the USA, and the design proved very successful.

Though satisfaction of customer needs is the primary objective of applying QFD, the method has been applied in a wide variety of areas due to its generic nature. Apart from the foregoing, some more applications are found in the areas of manufacturing strategic planning (Crowe and Chao, 1996), curriculum and course design (Denton et al., 2005), concurrent engineering (Kao et al., 2002), and strategic capital budgeting (Partovi, 1999). It is crucial to note that in the present work, the researchers were interested to collect information on the requirements of having a strong family institution (considering family members as customers, and the requirements of strong family institution can be treated as customer requirements) and how these requirements could be fulfilled. This makes the QFD a suitable choice to pursue the objectives of the present study.

Analytic Hierarchy Process

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) (Saaty, 1977), a popular multi-criteria decision making tool, was developed by Prof. Thomas L. Saaty at the Wharton School of Business in 1977. This was designed to aid in the solution of complex, multiple criteria decision making problems in a number of application domains. The method enables the people to work with both tangible and intangible factors which employ a 1 to 9 weighting scheme for paired comparisons (Saaty, 2000). According to the originator, a hierarchy can be constructed by creative thinking, imagination and using people's understandings. This method has been found to be effective and practical in making many kinds of complex and unstructured decisions (Vargas, 1990; Vaidya and Kumar, 2006). The method has also been widely used for ranking of a set of factors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research was conducted based on the interviews of 40 Muslims, of whom some are well-known Islamic scholars. The main criteria for choosing the respondents were high level of education (at least master's degree holders), sound knowledge on Islam, and thoughtfulness on the Islamic civilization. The majority of the respondents comprised four levels of academicians working in various departments of International Islamic University Malaysia, namely professors, associate professors, assistant professors and lecturers. They were asked about the requirements for having strong Muslim family institution and the possible ways to fulfil those stated requirements. A recorder was used to tape record their statements, and the researchers also wrote down their articulated salient points at the same time.

In the first phase of data collection, 25 interviews were conducted to find out Muslim family institution requirements ('what') and the possible ways to fulfil those stated requirements ('how'). In the second phase, the objective was to prioritize the Muslim family requirements. For this purpose, once again, 15 respondents were contacted. They were shown a compiled list of "what" and were asked to prioritize them using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP). Since the AHP is a technical method, its working procedure was briefly described to each of the 15 respondents. They were also requested to fill in the QFD matrix that related the customer requirements with the technical requirements. They were designated as the respondents because

they responded to the researchers' queries, although no formal questionnaire was prepared for them.

After the collection of data in both Phases 1 and 2, the Quality Function Deployment (QFD) was used to finally rank the technical requirements. The QFD uses a specially constructed matrix comprising customer and technical requirements. All the inputs were aggregated and then fed into a sketch that is known as the house of quality (see *Fig. 1*).

The customer requirements or the "what" were listed in the left-hand side of the matrix and the technical requirements were arranged on the top of the house. A proper implementation of the technical requirements was expected to satisfy the customer requirements. After determining the weights of the customer requirements, using some suitable techniques (in this paper the AHP was employed), the next step was to find out the relationship between the customer and technical requirements. It is important to note that one single customer requirement may be related to more than one technical requirement and vice versa. Usually, four symbols are used to represent the relationships (*see* Table 1).

TABLE 1
Various symbols used in the QFD matrix

Symbol	Meaning	Weight
◉	Very strong relationship	9
●	Strong relationship	6
○	Medium relationship	3
°	Weak relationship	1

If there is any technical requirement that is not related, the corresponding cell in the grid matrix is left blank. When all the possible relationships between every pair of customer and technical requirements have been identified, one can determine the weights of all these technical requirements. This is done using the following formula:

$$t_j = \sum_{i=1}^{m} c_i r_{ij}, j=1,2,...,n \qquad (1)$$

where

t_j = weight of the jth technical requirement
c_i = weight of the ith family requirement (in the present study this is determined by AHP)
r_{ij} = weight of the relationship between i^{th} customer requirement and j^{th} technical requirement (r_{ij} = 0 or 1or 3 or 6 or 9)
m = number of customer requirements
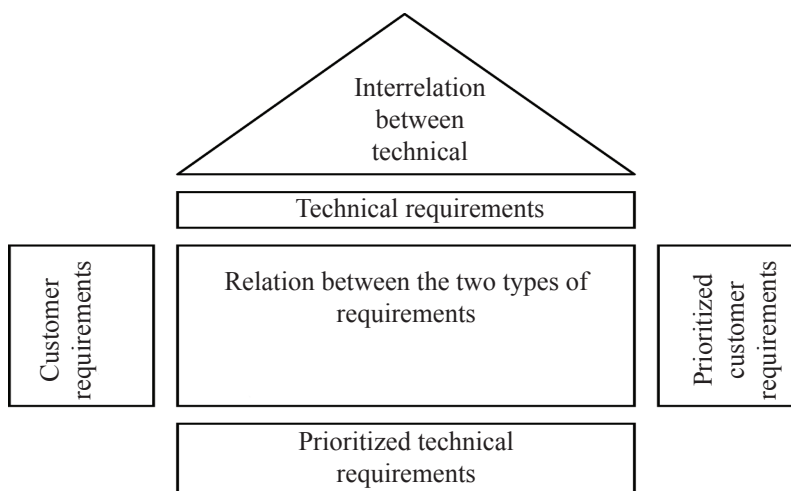n = number of technical requirements

Fig. 1: House of quality framework

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

As mentioned previously, altogether there were 40 respondents contacted for the data collection on the proposed topic and all of them belonged to various departments and divisions of the International Islamic University Malaysia (*see* Table 2).

TABLE 2
Affiliations of the respondents

No.	Department	No. of respondents
1	Islamic Revelled Knowledge (IRK)	9
2	History	2
3	Economics	9
4	Qur'an and Sunnah	5
5	Fiqh and Usul al-deen	5
6	General Studies	2
7	Political Science	2
8	Sociology	1
9	Laws	1
10	Others*	4
Total		40

The category "others" comprises of four administrative officers working in various divisions of the university.

A list pertaining to the requirements for having a strong family was generated when they answered the open-ended question, "what are the requirements for having strong Muslim family institution?" The words were tape-recorded as well as written down as articulated by the interviewees. From these detailed accounts, a synthesized list was obtained by considering the common and seemingly more important requirements. This synthesized list is shown in Table 3. It is also crucial to noted that there is a bit of overlapping between the requirements; however, no pair of requirements is exactly the same.

TABLE 3
Synthesized list of family requirements

Code	Requirements
C1	Islamic education and manner
C2	Trust among family members
C3	Moral character
C4	Knowledge on basic principles of Islam
C5	Respect each other
C6	Social awareness
C7	Fairness and justice
C8	Transparency
C9	Love and affection
C10	Mutual understanding & cooperation
C11	Patience
C12	Discipline in the family
C13	Good and positive values
C14	Self-esteem and spiritual enhancement

In the next phase, 15 respondents were contacted to prioritize the above synthesized list of requirements. Since the AHP was used for the prioritization process and this is a technical method, each respondent was briefed about the working process of the AHP. After collecting and combining all the individual pairwise comparison matrices, a synthesized pairwise comparison matrix (PCM) was formed using geometric mean rule of Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) (Aczél and Saaty, 1983; Condon *et al*., 2003). *Fig. 2* shows the synthesized pairwise comparison matrix.

Expert Choice (EC) is a one of the Windows-based software that has implemented Analytic Hierarchy Process to make decisions involving multiple criteria. The software is also used to rank a set of factors according to their level of importance. For the present problem, EC 2000 was used to derive the priorities of the requirements, as shown in *Fig. 3* and Table 4.
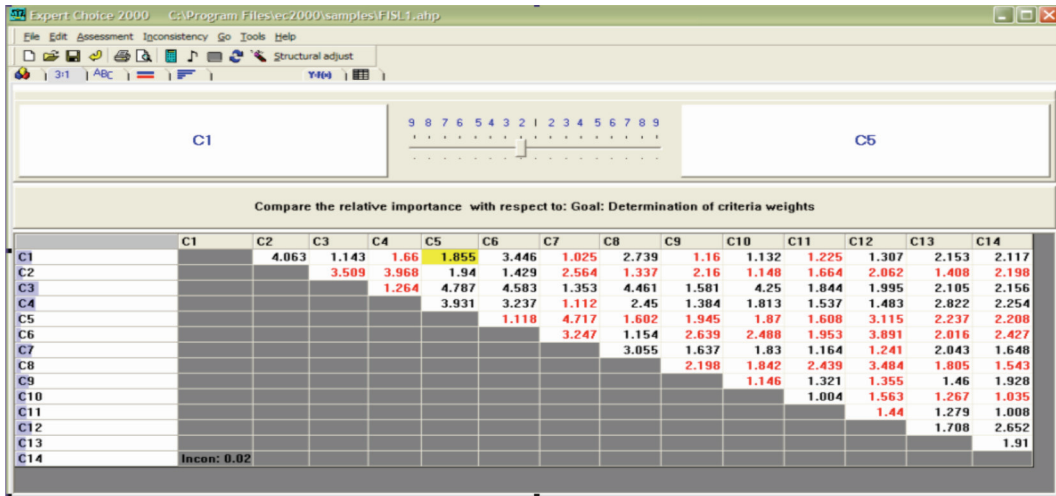
Fig. 2: Synthesized pairwise comparison matrix for family requirements using geometric mean rule of AHP

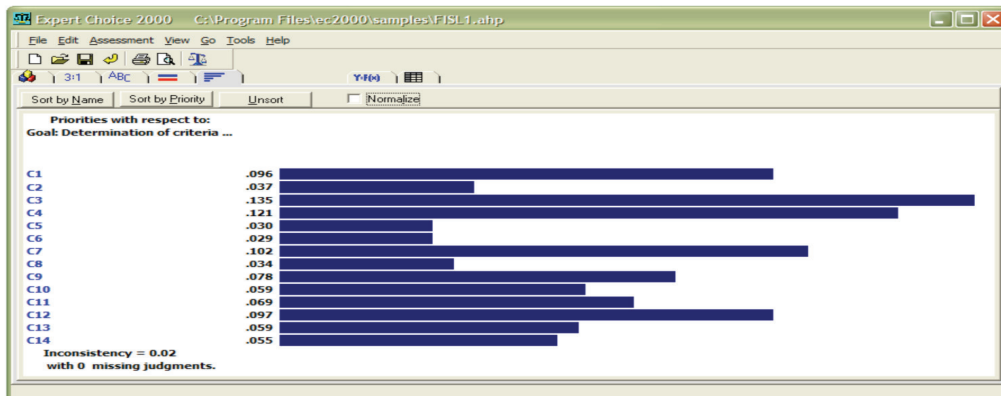|	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13	C14
C1		4.063	1.143	1.66	1.855	3.446	1.025	2.739	1.16	1.132	1.225	1.307	2.153	2.117
C2			3.509	3.968	1.94	1.429	2.564	1.337	2.16	1.148	1.664	2.062	1.408	2.198
C3				1.264	4.787	4.583	1.353	4.461	1.581	4.25	1.844	1.995	2.105	2.156
C4					3.931	3.237	1.112	2.45	1.384	1.813	1.537	1.483	2.822	2.254
C5						1.118	4.717	1.602	1.945	1.87	1.608	3.115	2.237	2.208
C6							3.247	1.154	2.639	2.488	1.953	3.891	2.016	2.427
C7								3.055	1.637	1.83	1.164	1.241	2.043	1.648
C8									2.198	1.842	2.439	3.484	1.805	1.543
C9										1.146	1.321	1.355	1.46	1.928
C10											1.004	1.563	1.267	1.035
C11												1.44	1.279	1.008
C12													1.708	2.652
C13														1.91
C14	Incon: 0.02													

Fig. 3: Individual weights of family requirements determined by Expert Choice 2000 software

The five most important requirements were observed as:

• Moral character

• Knowledge on basic principles of Islam

• Fairness and justice

• Discipline in the family

• Islamic education and manner

After collecting the family requirements, the same respondents were asked another open-ended question, "what are the possible ways to fulfil those requirements?" As expected, the respondents articulated their responses in a much unstructured manner. The responses were unstructured not because of the unstructured question was asked, but it was rather due to the very nature of the question itself. On the basis of their responses, a list of technical requirements was generated and synthesized, as shown in Table 5.

TABLE 4
Prioritized family requirements

Code	Requirements	Weight	Rank
C1	Islamic education and manner	0.096	5
C2	Trust among family members	0.037	11
C3	Moral character	0.135	1
C4	Knowledge on basic principles of Islam	0.121	2
C5	Respect each other	0.030	13
C6	Social awareness	0.029	14
C7	Fairness and justice	0.102	3
C8	Transparency	0.034	12
C9	Love and affection	0.078	6
C10	Mutual understanding and cooperation	0.059	8
C11	Patience	0.069	7
C12	Discipline in the family	0.097	4
C13	Good and positive values	0.059	9
C14	Self-esteem and spiritual enhancement	0.055	10

TABLE 5
Synthesized technical requirements

No.	Technical requirements
1	Role of parents
2	Ta'lim and tarbiyah based on divine knowledge
3	Spouse selection
4	Gain knowledge about society
5	Effective communication
6	Role of government
7	Family library
8	Awareness of negative elements of media
9	Practice Islamic culture
10	Role of neighbours and relatives
11	Empowerment
12	Family meeting
13	Role of teacher as guardian
14	Effective leadership
15	Role of media (national & global)
16	Role of religious leadership
17	Role of NGO (Non governmental organization)

After obtaining the technical requirements, the construction of the House of Quality (HOQ) was started and the relationships between the family requirements and the technical requirements were also established. By using four different categories of relationships, as stated previously, the main matrix of House of Quality diagram was filled up (see *Fig. 4*). Afterwards, the weights of all the technical requirements were calculated using formula (1) which was provided in Research Methodology section.

For example, the weight for the "role of parents" is $(9 \times 0.135) + (9 \times 0.121) + (9 \times 0.102) + (9 \times 0.097) + (9 \times 0.096) + (9 \times 0.078) + (9 \times 0.069) + (9 \times 0.059) + (9 \times 0.059) + (6 \times 0.055) + (9 \times 0.037) + (3 \times 0.034) + (9 \times 0.030 + (9 \times 0.029) = 8.64$.

The weights of all the technical requirements are shown in the 3rd row from the bottom in *Fig. 4*. From the weights of the technical requirements, one can determine their ranks. In Table 6, the technical requirements are arranged according to their ranks. If these technical requirements are properly implemented, it is hoped that the

Standard 9-6-3-1	
Very strong	◉ 9
Strong	● 6
Moderate	○ 3
Weak	° 1

		Role of parents (1)	Ta'lim and tarbiyah based on divine knowledge (2)	Spouse selection (3)	Gain knowledge about society (4)	Effective communication (5)	Role of government (6)	Family library (7)	Awareness of negative elements of media (8)	Practice Islamic culture (9)	Role of neighbours and relatives (10)	Empowerment (11)	Family meeting (12)	Role of teacher as guardian (13)	Effective leadership (14)	Role of media (15)	Role of religious leadership (16)	Role of NGO's (17)	Weight	Rank
C1	Moral character	◉	◉	◉	○	●	●	●	●	◉	◉	°	●	◉	◉	●	●	°	.135	1
C2	Knowledge on the basic principles of Islam	◉	◉	◉	○	○	◉	○	○	◉	●	°	◉	◉	●	●	◉	°	.121	2
C3	Fairness and justice	◉	◉	○	○	●	●	°	°	◉	●	○	●	●	◉	○	●	○	.102	3
C4	Discipline in the family	◉	●	●	○	●	°	○	○	◉	●	○	◉	●	●	○	●	○	.097	4
C5	Islamic education and manner	◉	◉	◉	○	◉	●	◉	○	◉	○	°	●	◉	●	●	◉	○	.096	5
C6	Love and affection	◉	●	○	°	●	°	°	°	◉	○	○	●	○	●	°	○	○	.078	6
C7	Patience	◉	●	○	○	●	°	°	°	●	○	○	○	○	●	°	○	°	.069	7
C8	Mutual understanding & cooperation	◉	●	●	○	◉	°	°	°	●	●	○	◉	○	●	°	●	°	.059	8
C9	Good and positive values	◉	◉	●	●	◉	●	○	○	◉	●	°	●	◉	◉	°	●	●	.059	9
C10	Self-esteem and spiritual enhancement	●	◉	○	○	●	°	°	○	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	°	.055	10
C11	Trust among family members	◉	●	◉	○	●	°	°	○	●	○	○	●	°	●	○	○	°	.037	11
C12	Transparency	○	●	○	●	●	○	°	●	○	○	○	●	○	●	●	●	○	.034	12
C13	Respect each other	◉	◉	○	◉	●	◉	○	●	○	○	°	●	◉	●	◉	◉	◉	.030	13
C14	Social awareness	◉	●	○	○	●	°	°	°	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	.029	14
	Weight	8.64	7.80	6.34	3.31	6.29	4.24	3.10	2.80	7.88	5.34	2.17	6.47	6.63	6.89	4.11	5.85	2.53		
	Column Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
	Ranking of the technical requirements	1	3	7	13	8	11	14	15	2	10	17	6	5	4	12	9	16		

Fig. 4: House of quality for strengthening Muslim family institution

Muslim family institution will be strengthened, and consequently a society that is with moral, peaceful, and progressive, will be developed.

TABLE 6
The ten most important technical requirements

No.	Technical requirements	Rank	Weights
1	Role of parents	1	8.64
2	Practice Islamic culture	2	7.88
3	Ta'lim and tarbiyah based on divine knowledge	3	7.80
4	Effective leadership	4	6.89
5	Role of teacher as guardian	5	6.63
6	Family meeting	6	6.47
7	Spouse selection	7	6.34
8	Effective communication	8	6.29
9	Role of religious leader	9	5.85
10	Role of neighbours and relatives	10	5.34

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

In the following, the ten most important factors identified for strengthening Muslim family institution are further elaborated in this study.

Role of parents: If Muslim parents hope to succeed in their pursuit to raise children Islamically, they must develop a better understanding of how children grow and learn; they need to understand the processes of moral development and the methods of effective teaching and learning. Children will not become moral individuals simply because we want or tell them to do so. They will become moral individuals *by cultivating their minds and hearts*, and by having opportunities to actually see and apply Islamic values in practice (Tauhidi, 2007). To a large extent, the future will depend on how well we educate our children today and to what extent we are successful in transferring the sacred vision of life to them. Attention on the following matters is also drawn:

Teaching moral behaviour: The most important part of parents' role in the family is teaching moral behaviour to their children. It is the sublime responsibility of the parents to be morally upright all the time and teach children to be so all the time.

Cognitive development: Parents can influence their children's cognitive development in a number of ways. This influence may be in terms of the amount of stimulation and attention a child receives. Parents should identify the specific ways of cognitive development for their children.

Personality: Children may learn some aspects of their personality through selective reinforcement and imitation of their parents' behaviour. In order to build the children's personality in the family, parents are the best example.

Practicing the Islamic culture: As a part of the Islamic culture, there are some issues which Muslims are required to adhere to. These are pertaining to the names, religious practices, holidays and festivals, marriage, public ceremonies, Islamic clothing, etc.

Names: When a baby is born in a Muslim family, it is considered Allah's great blessing for the family. Children bring happiness and joy, and also great responsibilities on the parts of the parents. One of the very first duties parents have toward new born, besides physical care and love, is to give a meaningful Islamic name that carries honour and dignity. It is reported that the Prophet (*pbuh*) said: "*On the Day of Resurrection, you will be called by your names and by your fathers' names, so give yourselves good names*" (*Abu Dawud*).

Religious practices: Muslim culture generally includes the essential practices prescribed in Islam. The five formal acts of worship which help strengthen a Muslim's faith and obedience are often called the "Five Pillars of Islam", namely the declaration of faith, daily prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage.

Muslim's daily life: Muslims are expected to be the best in morals and manners. Islam forbids any action which infringes the rights of others or harms oneself. Furthermore, Muslims need to make a balance in dealing with life and remaining mindful of their duties to Allah (swt) and to others.

Holidays and festivals: Muslims celebrate many festivals including *Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Adha, Muharram, Milad-un-Nabi, etc*. In some Muslims countries, people do not perform these festivals keeping the proper decorum, especially *Muharram*. It is important to observe the festivals in a proper manner.

Marriage: Marriage is an important element in family institution. The final Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (*pbuh*) stated that 'marriage is half of religion' (Al-Bayhaqi); there are numerous *hadiths* which underscore the importance of marriage and family. In Islam, marriage is a legal bond and social contract between a man and a woman as prompted by the *Shari'ah*. Unfortunately, in many Muslim families, many un-Islamic practices, e.g. dowry, relating to marriage are observed. In order to have a strong Islamic family, it is extremely important to strictly follow the Islamic guidelines of marriage.

Clothing: The Islamic dress code is mentioned in the *Qur'ān* and amplified through Prophet Muhammad's (*pbuh*) teachings and practices. A Muslim woman is required to cover all her body with the exception of the front part of the face and hands. Islam has also prescribed a dress code for Muslim males. Allah (swt) says:

> *"Say to the believing man that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them, and God is well acquainted with all they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof" (Al-Noor 24:30-31).*

Ta'lim and tarbiyah: *Ta'lim* (education) and *tarbiyah* (training) for children should begin very early. The purpose of this is to transform a child's life into a sound Islamic personality, with a good character and moral, strong Islamic principles, sound Islamic knowledge, proper Islamic behaviour, and the wisdom to handle the demands of life in a responsible and matured fashion. Such training should not consist merely of a set of directives, but far more importantly, the parents' unfailing submission to God through a sincere and conscientious practice of the Islamic teachings. An essential part of this training, beginning very early in life, is obedience, respect and consideration for the parents themselves. A well-known Muslim proverb is, "the pleasure of God is the pleasure of the parents."

The Islamic training aims, first, at giving the Muslim child a correct understanding of and the relationship to reality. He is taught very early that it does not consist merely of the material world which we observe and experience but of an unseen dimension as well, at the centre of which is God, the Most High. God's absolute power and sovereignty, man's total dependence on Him and his place in the scheme of things, the existence of Angels and also of Satan and his forces, are all essential parts of this reality. A child is able to understand all these, and a clear understanding of the purpose of his life, the certainty of death and of returning to God when he or others die, and the future Life in the Garden or the Fire forms a vital part of his consciousness and comprehension of reality as he grows up. At the same time, he is taught to love God, the Source of the innumerable blessings, which fill his life, above everything, and that love and thankfulness to Him are best expressed in obedience to His commands.

Effective leadership: Basically, leadership is the ability to inspire others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members (Mcshane and Vongallnow, 2005). The lessons of leadership apply not only to our organizations and community associations, but also to a family unit. Each family has its own ways of deciding

who has the power and authority within the family environment, and which rights, privileges, obligations and roles are assigned to each family member. In most Muslim families, parents are expected to be the leaders or executives of the family, and children are expected to follow the leadership of their parents. As children grow older, they will ask for, and should be allowed, more autonomy, while their opinions should be considered when decisions are made; however, parents are the final authorities. According to the findings, effective leadership is one of the most important factors for having strong family institution. It will be easier for the family members to carry out any job if effective leadership is in place in the family.

It is observed that the families of all kinds tend to do better when they are spurred by some purpose greater than themselves, without sacrificing their own essential growth needs. A family can run very well when their relationships are exemplified by some common purposes, set of values or shared enterprise and those families fare better when the children are raised with some set of values which transcend mere self-interest. More often, these "wider missions" can emerge organically from the relationship of the partners and children. Value statements like a good mission statement for a family should be relevant enough to add meaning and context in specific situations, while broad enough to remain applicable through changing times and circumstances. In the following, few important leadership roles in the context of a family are discussed.

Communication: It is very important for the parents as leaders to be a good communicator within the family in order to have a strong family institution. The benefit of communication is a sound relationship between parents and their children. If parents communicate openly and effectively, children will benefit from in their entire lives. Thus, in order to strengthen Muslim family institution, good communication skills should be taken care of by the parents.

Organization: Leaders who have to direct and motivate others are generally expected to possess good organization skills. By building

structure and order, a leader will be able to assign a clear vision or goal to those he leads. In a family, this skill can be demonstrated in a number of ways. One way is to have the child get into the habit of using a simple checklist. This can be done by the use of a notebook in which the child can write a list of chores or homework assignments. The child can then cross out the items from the list upon completing the tasks, thereby gaining both a sense of accomplishment and organization.

Problem solving: Helping a child to develop good problem solving skills can also go a long way towards helping them grow as leaders. There are various ways to help the child develop this particular skill. One easy way to do it is to role-play with the child. In this role-play, present the child with a difficult situation he may encounter when playing with another child or sibling. Challenge the child to come up with solutions which will solve the situation. Encourage and help him come up with as many solutions as possible. Then, discuss the pros and cons of each solution. This will help structure how a child thinks about solving problems which he may encounter.

Healthy self-esteem: Even a child with good leadership potential can be derailed by a bout with low self-esteem. Therefore, it is essential for the child to be able to develop a healthy view of him. There are many different ways in which a child can be helped to achieve good self-esteem. Medical research has shown that one basic factor that contributes to the development of good self-esteem in a child is the presence of an adult who helps the child to feel appreciated and special. In order to help accomplish this, one should set aside some 'special time' for the child. During the time that is set aside, it is best to focus on things which the child enjoys doing, or on areas which he displays strengths in. By doing this, parents will give the child the needed positive reinforcement to develop a healthy self-esteem.

Role of teacher as a guardian: Obviously, teachers can play a very significant role to nurture and develop a child's personality. Even though there are beautiful teachings of the

Holy *Qur'ān* and Prophet's (pbuh) *Sunnah*, and existence of many Islamic schools and organizations, many Muslims today do not live in accordance with the principles and values of their faith. This is where, teachers and educators can play significant roles. The teachers, through the Islamic educational system, have crucial roles to play in imparting the Islamic teachings to the students.

In order to strengthen the Islamic family, Muslim educators must restructure the Islamic studies curriculum, i.e. *what* is taught and *how* it is taught. In other words, if our children are to develop the 'spiritual skills' needed to survive as Muslims in the twenty-first century, an academic curriculum based on the Islamic concepts of education is strongly recommended. An Islamic educational system, that is capable of producing Muslim youths with a level of understanding, commitment and social responsibility which will both motivate and enable them to effectively serve Islam and humanity, is needed. Islamic education must be able to produce Muslim youths who are able to identify, understand and work cooperatively to solve the problems which they face in their community and the world in which they are living in (Tauhidi, 2007).

Effective Islamic teaching and learning must be *meaningful* and *integrated*. It must encompass and engage the whole child spiritually, emotionally, socially, intellectually, and physically. Most important of all, effective Islamic teaching and learning must be *value-based.* By focusing on values and by considering the ethical dimensions of topics, Islamic education becomes a powerful vehicle for character and moral development, and thus achieving its real purpose. Educators must realize that every aspect of the teaching-learning experience conveys values to students and provides opportunities for them to learn about values. Teachers must therefore develop a better awareness of their own values and how those values influence their behaviour as role-models and what students ultimately learn from these experiences about themselves, about others, and about Islam.

Regular family meeting: Building a successful family is like building a home. Both need a plan. A successful family based on unity and love takes careful planning. One of the best ways to organize a family is to hold weekly family meetings. By doing this, families enjoy special closeness and stability. Memories gathered together during the meeting will bond and sustain the family through the years. The family meeting should be an important part of every family's activity. In relation to family meetings, a few items are discussed below:

Schedule activities: Coordinating schedules and planning family activities need to be done weekly. When everyone is present, discuss activities in each day of the week. Try to plan a daily schedule that allows the family to eat at least one meal together each day, even if meal time is a little later or earlier than most convenient time for every person. Sometimes, individual schedules need to be adjusted for the good of the family.

Talk about upcoming events: Decide when family members can support one another by attending their activities. Then, plan for one family activity. Remember to talk about all the details of the activity. This will include the date, time, meeting place, food, special clothes to be worn, etc.

Talk about family matters: Discuss household tasks, family problems, and anything family members want to talk about. This is a valuable opportunity each week to gather around and share feelings about the family. Anything that needs to be discussed can be shared at this time. It is important that family members speak only positively, and allow the person talking to share his or her feelings in an atmosphere of empathy and caring. This is a time to voice concerns and suggestions for the good of the family.

Plan next week's family meeting: In order to make sure that the next family meeting will be a success and each family member is involved, decide about the topics for discussion, especially who will give the lessons from the religious literature.

Have fun: Families need to have fun together. The activity should be something that everyone enjoys. It could be as simple as a family walk in the neighbourhood, or playing a board game. The activity could be watching a movie as a family, going to a sporting event, or doing a service for a friend or neighbour. The most important thing is the involvement of all family members in the activities.

It is viewed that the weekly family meeting is an excellent opportunity to learn lessons. As mentioned above, there can be a discussion on correct behaviour, good manners, or one of the important moral values which helps shape children's character. This is because the opportunity to meet together regularly as a family to learn 'life lessons' is priceless.

Spouse selection: In Islam, marriage is not a sacrament but rather a legal, binding contract between a man and a woman which establishes the licitness, permanence and responsibleness of their relationship, an acceptance of one another as spouse with a mutual commitment to live together according to the teachings of Islam. Both are to be mindful of their duties to God and their responsibilities to one another in all aspects of their interaction. In selecting spouse, a man should find a bride to be a life partner who will be a companion and helpmate of husband, who is, together with him, responsible for the affairs of the household, the physical and emotional well-being of its members, and the training of the children.

While the mother is generally the primary means of training the children, Islam neither expects nor wants her to carry out this extremely important task alone. It is the joint responsibility of the husband and the wife to bring up their children properly. Although the greater part of the daily work with the children generally falls to the wife, the husband is the principal authority in the home and is responsible not only for the welfare but also for the behaviour of all members of the family. Together, husband and wife must provide an Islamic ambience in their home and a consistent approach to training in which they reinforce and support one another. There are some important qualities which a man should

seek in the woman whom he wants to be his life-partner and the mother of his children.

*Righteousness***:** The first and foremost quality for a wife is righteousness. The Prophet *(pbuh)* urged a man to seek a woman of faith and piety, and indicated that a man attains happiness by marrying her. One of the *hadiths* narrated by Abu Hurayrah *(ra)* reported that the Messenger *(pbuh)* said: "A woman is sought in marriage for four reasons: wealth, social status, beauty, and *deen*. So seek the one with *deen* – may you then be successful" (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim).

*Good moral character***:** One should seek a wife who is known to possess good moral character or who has been raised in a good moral atmosphere. According to a *hadith* that is similar to the one given above, a woman of low morals should be avoided, even though she has other qualities, such as wealth and beauty.

*Loving attitude***:** One should seek to marry a woman who is expected to have a loving and caring attitude toward her husband. This is normally possible to sense from the environment in which she lives and her family's background. This quality is indicated in a *hadith* narrated by Ibn 'Abbas *(ra)* that Allah's Messenger *(pbuh)* said: "Your women who will be of the people of *Jannah* are those who are loving to their husbands, bearer of many children, and concerned about their husbands" (Ibn Asakir).

*Naivety***:** Naivety, simplicity, and innocence of heart are commendable qualities to be sought in a wife.

Compatibility: A man should seek a wife who is compatible with him, and a woman should seek a husband compatible with her. Aishah *(ra)* reported that Allah's Messenger *(pbuh)* said, "Make a choice for your sperm (i.e. offspring), marry those who are compatible" (Ibn Majah).

Beauty: This is another quality in the selection of the spouse.

Effective Communication: The relationships between parents and their children are greatly improved when there is effective communication in the family. Children begin to form their ideas and beliefs about themselves

and show their respect based on how their parents communicate with them. At the same time, they begin to feel that they are heard and understood by their parents, which boost their self-esteem. On the other hand, ineffective or negative communication between parents and children can lead children to believe that they are unimportant, unheard, or misunderstood. Below are some of the ways to communicate positively with the children and other family members (Jusoh and Jusoh, 2007).

Communicating effectively while children are young: Parents should start the stage of open, effective communication when the children are very young. Parents can do this by making themselves available to their children when they just want to talk. Children who feel loved and understood by their parents are more likely to open up and share their thoughts, feelings, and concerns with their parents.

Communicate as per children's level: It is very important for the parents to know the levels of their children when they communicate with their children. Parents should try to ask open-ended questions in their conversations with their children. Questions should be matched with children's ability and they need to be creative to answer those.

Be a good listener: Listening is a skill that must be learned and practiced, because it is an important part of effective communication. When parents listen to their children, they send the message that they are interested and they care about what their children are saying. When children express a desire to talk, parents should give them their undivided attention. They should put aside whatever they are doing at that time, face their children and give them their complete attention.

Express your own feelings and ideas during communication: For communication to be effective, it must be a 2-way phenomenon. Not only must parents be available to and listen to their children for effective communication to take place, they must also be willing to share their own thoughts and feelings with their children. Parents can teach their children moral

and values by expressing their thoughts and feelings.

Unfortunately, many parents are not aware of just how often they use negative forms of communication with their children. As a result, these parents may be planting the seeds of mistrust and low self-esteem in their children's mind. This is why it is important for parents to be aware of and correct any negative forms of communication they may be using with their children.

Role of neighbours and relatives: Neighbours and the relatives also play important roles in terms of strengthening Muslim family institution. They can play role in spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical and social preservation, and development of the individual person in a family, with the view of establishing a sound Islamic family as well as a righteous society (Ansari, 2001).

The Holy *Qur'ān* proclaims "Exhortation to Truth" as one of the essential conditions of human success (Al-'Asr 103: 4). Hence, it is the duty of the neighbours and relatives as the vicegerents of God, successor to the Holy Prophet (*pbuh*), and representative of the people, to uphold, propagate and ensure the functioning of truth, and consequently, the spiritual values, which form the basic content of truth in the lives of Muslims. Neighbours and relatives can take all positive steps, including the enactment and enforcement of laws so as to ensure a proper practice of Islamic morals with a view to preserve and promote moral values. In addition, they can also organize and institute the moral education of the people in the society.

One component of duties and responsibilities of neighbours and relatives in order to strengthen the family institution is social welfare for establishment of happiness, peace and order for ensuring healthy existence and development of the individuals. They can also ensure justice without discrimination and without any extraneous consideration, for the preservation of life, honour and property of the individuals, defence of Islam and Muslims against internal disruption and external aggression.

Role of a religious leader: A religious leader is an exemplary and respectable person in any society. A Muslim religious leader teaches the society about the role of Muslims, and how one can follow the rules and regulations of Islam, which activities are allowed and which is prohibited. With their vast knowledge about Islam, they can play a crucial role in shaping the society. A significant role they can play through their *Jumma Khutba* to promote and practice Islam in family environment may help strengthen the Muslim family institution.

CONCLUSIONS

A strong family institution is vital in developing a healthy society. It is in the family children learn the basic of moral and manners. Strong Islamic values infuse family to help shape the character of children and this, in turn, transform those becoming good Muslims in their later life. The paper identifies the ways through which the Muslim family institution can be revitalized. The research findings were based on the interviews with Muslim scholars. Though many articles have been written on the topic, this study is analytical and based upon empirical data. Thus, it is hoped that if the findings are implemented by Muslim families, a society can then be developed wherein everybody can live amidst peace and prosperity.

The sample size considered for the present research was rather small vis-à-vis the topic researched. Furthermore, all the respondents were chosen from the International Islamic University Malaysia. Therefore, for the sake of generalizability of the findings, not only the sample size should be increased, the respondents should also have varied backgrounds. Sufficient literature on the application of management tools in managing Islamic families is also not found. In a nutshell, future research should be directed towards this and with increased sample size involving respondents with wider and diverse backgrounds.

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