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An innovative Teaching Method in Islamic Studies: the Use of PowerPoint in University of Malaya as Case Study

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Abstract

Teaching Islamic studies in Muslim countries in the traditional way is dominant in various institutions and technology-based teaching methods are hardly practiced if not totally neglected. However, the use of technologies, power point in particular in teaching, has been proved successful and effective in educational process of the Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya through an interview among 20 students from different grades and majors in the aforementioned institution. We argue here that using power point and educational technology in general in the process of teaching Islamic studies, plays a positive role both in the pedagogical and religious sense.

1. Introduction

For many years in the teaching process of Islamic education, the application of educational technology has been neglected. It was assumed that since Islamic knowledge is revealed or sacred message, it should not be analyzed or taught through technology, but to impart it by mere remembrance to generations to come. As Asyafah(2014) stated that '*the teaching of Islam in the institutions of higher education is still limited to conceptualization and memorization*.'

As a matter of fact, using innovative teaching methods in Islamic education has been advocated and even there

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are examples which are deeply rooted in the long history of Islamic education. However, the majority of Islamic schools even the Islamic educational departments in universities are still restricting themselves by the method of rote learning in their teaching process. In some other institutions, even discussion and comprehension through various innovative methods of teaching is not encouraged by the lecturers.

Thus, this research is conducted to investigate the interrelationship between the use of PowerPoint and its effectiveness in application to Islamic education. The motivation is to improve the teaching quality in Islamic academia as well as to facilitate the use of technology in Islamic education. We argue here, from Islamic perspective, that everything including technology products are creatures from the God directly or indirectly. This study evaluates that whether PowerPoint as a technology should be used in the process of transferring knowledge including Islamic revealed knowledge. The study was mainly done through literature review and analysis of interview results from current students in Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya.

Nomenclature

A   Educational development.
B   Islamic Perspective of Development Education.
C   Teaching Method in Islamic Studies, by PowerPoint.

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2. Motivation of using educational technology in Islamic education lectures in University of Malaya (UM)

Since its foundation, Academy of Islamic Studies (API) UM, has been emphasizing on following the latest international standards in teaching and research, as stated in the 'vision of the Academy' and the 'Objectives of the Academy', saying *'To advance Islamic studies based upon the tradition of Islamic knowledge and modern scientific methodology through quality research and education for the nation and humanity.' ; 'To expand, advance, and enrich Islamic studies for universal harmony and humanity through research activities, teaching, publication and consultation that are of international standard and quality.'*

Göl (2011), as one of the researchers in the field asserted that *'The 21st century as a digital age is characterized by the increased accessibility of information and knowledge through the medium of sophisticated technological tools.'* and also the above mentioned vision is supported when he claimed, *'The technological progress in the 21st century forces educators to develop new teaching methods within which the old categories of knowledge are addressed by the new tools of technology for educational purposes* (Göl,2011).

An Interview was conducted to survey the motivation of using PowerPoint in Islamic education from student's perspective. The results showed that the majority of students in API agree and support the idea of using PowerPoint in Islamic studies and its application is well received and accepted by students from several backgrounds. A question was asked from the students on *'Do you think it is beneficial to use PowerPoint in Islamic studies?'* Out of 20 students interviewed, one freshman claims that it is *highly beneficial* while three junior students hold that it is *absolutely beneficial*. The rest of the students answered *yes* in their interview for the question. It shows the students in API in general admit the importance of PowerPoint application in API. Also, it further provides motivation for the development from student perspective.

Since the application in school level and in the university level may differ, students were asked the second question on 'Your personal view on why PowerPoint should be emphasized in education at university level'. Table 1 shows the diverse answers received.

Table 1: Interview answers to question no. 2

Students	Freshman class 1st year	Sophomore class 2nd year	Junior class 3rd year	Senior class 4th year
1	Simple way to visualize			
2	Very easy to student			
3	Good,but do not depend on			
4			convenient	
5				Help study
6			Very helpful	
7				Give points
8	Help presentation			
9	Effective			
10			Useful	
11			Easy to use	
12				Get points
13				Get points
14				yes
15	Make student understand			
16	Easy for student			
17	Can fetch information			
18	Make course easier			
19		Yes		
20		Useful		

As it was shown in Table 1, compared to other students, university students focus more on the main points that the lecturer gave during class, so that PowerPoint can facilitate *visualization* and help students to *get main points* of the course. We may find similar results were reported in a study by Allan (2003) who said that *'PowerPoint is an excellent aid to presentations providing each presentation is considered first from a pedagogical viewpoint, bearing in mind the different ways in which students learn and largely trying to avoid the pitfalls of passive knowledge transmission.* Hence, the use of PowerPoint at university level is a convenient way to make students understand the course easier and get main points from the lectures. This outcome further enhances the motivation of the use of PowerPoint at university level.

3. The effect on students of Islamic studies by using PowerPoint and their attitude concerning using PowerPoint.

Students of Islamic studies have always attended classes with the traditional setting for a traditional course by a traditional way. Ramadan maintains that *'what is now called Islamic education is confined to the very technical memorization of Quranic verses, Prophetic traditions, and rules without a real spiritual dimension'* and the students *'are expected to remain quiet and not engaged in discussion, exchange, or debate,* he adds that Islamic education is *'in fact an ill-administered 'instruction', simply a handing on of knowledge based on principles, rules, obligations, and prohibitions, often presented in a cold, rigid, and austere manner, without soul or humanity'* . In terms of producing future Imam and scholars for the Muslim community, this really begs a question that how effective it would be if the situation remains the same.

An interview was conducted to ask further questions regarding the above issue. The first question is 'Do you think PowerPoint helps you a lot in understanding the Islamic course?' out of 20 students interviewed, only one student disagree whereas 19 other students responded positive answers. One of the interviewee told that comparing

to the traditional teaching method in his previous learning experience, he prefer the use of PowerPoint that brings more information and more lively interaction when main points of 'sacred knowledge' is being delivered in a different way. The second question is 'Are you interested in getting a copy from your lecturer's PowerPoint handout? There is also only one negative answer from a junior student, the majority answered *yes* and two of them mentioned that it can help review the course taken. The third question is 'Do you believe using PowerPoint is quite enough to understand the lecture?, and at this point several diverse answers were observed. There are 4 out of 20 asserted that the answer is *yes*, whereas 16 gave negative answers. Among them were some students who claim that if the PowerPoint is properly used, then they would expect more. This shows the proper use of PowerPoint by lecturers is very important for an effective course.

Some similar researches have been done by other researchers such as Ayla and Boyas(2011), among others. Ayla's research revealed '*Both feedback and evidence support the argument that alternative teaching methods and technology-enhanced teaching can be effective when studying the Middle East and Islam in the UK higher education context.*' And other research shows that there is need for students to get used to the educational technology before they proceed to a better appreciation toward educational technology as Boyas stated in his research, '*Students now prefer to use interactive media and learn best when presented with learning opportunities based on the technologies they are accustomed to using.* '(Boyas, 2008). He also pointed out that the creative use of technology can '*enhance student learning outcomes',* and *'can help to enhance student learning by giving students convenient access to review material and immediate, appropriately detailed feedback'* (Boyas, 2008). This result exactly corresponds to what we experienced and are experiencing in our daily teaching process and to the outcome of the interview conducted.

4. The use of PowerPoint in Islamic studies and its religious principle

From the aforementioned viewpoint, it is concluded which matters a lot in using technology such as PowerPoint to teach Islamic studies at university level. It is the issue of religious principle regarding using educational technology in Islamic studies. Let's first examine the Islamic perspective of technology, as discussed in many issues in Muslim daily life regarding technology; there have been controversial opinions for a long period. But what the majority of the contemporary Ulama holds is that as long as the media or tools from technological product can really be used as a means in promoting goodness and forbidding badness according to Islamic Shariah, then it is viewed as an acceptable means which leads to a good objective, as Iqbal(1930) stated '*The Islamic perspective views science, the study of nature, as ancillary to the principal tenets of Islam - Tawhid (the Oneness of God), as are all other branches of knowledge'.*

We have seen many Islamic educational institutions including Madrasahs and even Islamic colleges and universities that use so called 'one way traffic' traditional teaching and learning style. As the lectures in Al-Azhar University (one of the classical role model of Islamic studies institutions over centuries) '*may be taught in the form of purely lectures* ', and '*most of the learning styles may be considered as 'one way traffic' or traditional where the teacher teaches and the students listen*' （Irwan,*et al.*, 2012）. This kind of 'one way traffic' holds firmly the methods of '*teaching and learning of Islamic education at university makes Islamic education ineffective, not important, not interesting and of course a boring course to study*' (Asyafah, 2014)

In fact, using technology for the purpose of advancing knowledge and scientific thinking has always been a tradition of Islam. The Quran consistently praises those who contemplate the nature and observe it so as to reach the awareness of the greatness of Allah's creation. As Allah says in the Quran, '*behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; (here) indeed are signs for a people that are wise.*' (*Surat Al- Dukhan, 2: 164*).   Al-Sharaf says in a study '*The Qur'an, as a literary corpus, has provided the manifesto for this kind of educational value system that advocated critical and creative thinking as well as scientific reasoning…'* That's why we do believe that, '*To understand religion highly depends on the method of teaching.*'(Asyafah, 2014).

The question is that what good method of teaching means in the age of technology? Among various answers to this question, is what the old saying goes, '*teaching how to fish instead of giving a fish to a hungry man.*' In that sense, Teachers are required *'to encourage pupils in active participant observation upon learning, giving them the*

opportunity to categorize, interpret, examine the verifiability of hypotheses… Al-Sharaf(2013). And in process of learning, giving presentations is of great help in obtaining the skills mentioned above. Even in the tradition of Islamic education, *'Muslim scholars and jurists encouraged their pupils to study individually and in small groups with others by allowing them to give short presentations.'* (Al-Sharaf,2013), because the aim of education is to give students opportunities of discovery by themselves.

Among the methods of presentation and interaction in the process of learning and teaching, PowerPoint is a useful means. *'There are diverse teaching and learning contexts in which PowerPoint can be used for presentations'* (Jones, 2003) because in a short period of teaching process especially at the level of university education, *'teachers cannot teach everything, but they can teach the tenets and principles of learning how to learn.'* (Al-Sharaf, 2013). And it is no doubt that PowerPoint is the best way to deliver the course tenets and main points and thus proves the application of PowerPoint plays a significant role in the present teaching and learning process at university level.

To see the reality of the PowerPoint use in Islamic studies in API, students were interviewed by 2 questions, the first one is, 'to what extent do you think PowerPoint has to do with the Shariah study?' Table 2 summarizes the answers as follows:

Out of 20 answers collected only 1 student said that the PowerPoint is not so important in Shariah study whereas other 17 give various positive answers, mainly highlight the convenience of studying Shariah by PowerPoint.

Another question asked from interviewee was 'Is there any relationship between application of PowerPoint and transforming Shariah studies from theory to practice?' Table 3 shows the students opinion.

Table 2: answers to "To what extent do you think PowerPoint has to do with the Shariah study"?

Students	Freshman class 1st year	Sophomore class 2nd year	Junior class 3rd year	Senior class 4th year
1	visualize content in simple			
2	Helpful			
3	Just to present			
4			Not so important	
5				important
6			Give points	
7				Give points
8	Helpful			
9	Helpful in managing			
10			Not sure	
11			Not sure	
12				Important
13				Important
14				Yes
15	In presenting the notes			
16	Helpful			
17	Hope to see the process			
18	Helpful in understand			
19		Yes		
20		yes		

Table 3: answers to 'Relationship between application of PowerPoint and transforming Shariah studies from theory to practice?'

Students	Freshman class 1st year	Sophomore class 2nd year	Junior class 3rd year	Senior class 4th year
1	Yes			
2	Yes there are			
3	No			
4			Don't think so	
5				Yes
6			Yes	
7				No
8	Yes			
9	Yes			
10			No	
11			Yes	
12				More to practice
13				No connection
14				No
15	No connection			
16	Yes			
17	No			
18	No			
19		Yes		
20		No		

As you can see the answers to this question are quite different. Nearly half of the interviewee gave the negative answer. It shows that the students do not believe in the hypothesis that the use of PowerPoint can facilitate and put Shariah knowledge into practice. In their opinion, the use of PowerPoint is merely an educational tool which enables the lecturer to deliver the course more efficiently and effectively. This study suggests that the effectiveness actually depends on the quality and level of the use of PowerPoint by the lecturer, and it needs more survey and investigation.

5. The dualistic nature of PowerPoint and its future prediction.

According to theories in philosophy of education, each educational tool has positive effect on education, and also negative side in return if the tool is not properly used especially technological tool, as even science is proved to be double-edged.

Jones(2003) explained in his research, ' *It particularly includes poorly thought-out use in lectures where it becomes simply an alternative form of presenting largely text-based material that used to be delivered using 'old technology' (chalk and talk): this makes little use of the new and flexible opportunities offered by use of PowerPoint within the educational field. ' . He continued to say, that 'appropriate use of PowerPoint can enhance the teaching and learning experience for both staff and students'.

We hereby interviewed students in this respect by asking them whether they think 'Using PowerPoint has both positive and negative effect?' Almost all students answered '*yes*' and one of them gave a unique answer, '*Only positive, using PowerPoint alone is not enough*'. '*Positive answer because of making the lecture more understandable and negative answer because of less concentration on book and other material*', said anther student. It shows that the students are confident in the positive side in the use of PowerPoint use but few of them are aware of the weak point of its use. This can be seen from the author teaching experience that overemphasis on the technique of using PowerPoint would lead to a lack of deep understanding of the text and its analysis. As stated by

Brooks(2000), '*Although I would not recommend using computers or video simply because you have access to them, technology can be another appropriate instructional tool in religious education*.'

When being asked the question about 'Do you think there will be a more useful educational tool than PowerPoint in the near future?', only one of the 20 students answered *No* while others holds firmly that there will be emerging tools that will be more useful than PowerPoint in future. Some of them even know the new product called PowToon and the like. This indicates that the students' expectation for new educational tool is positive and objective.

6. Conclusion

PowerPoint and educational technology in general used in Islamic studies at University of Malaya has been proved to be innovative and effective among students and lecturers. The result of interview which was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the use of PowerPoint on student learning has been very positive. More importantly, from a perspective of Islamic education, using PowerPoint and technology is conditionally accepted as long as the tool serves as a good means to help the students get access to real knowledge and foster human intellect as all knowledge is from God and encompasses God from Islamic view. Hasanein(2003,cited in Al-Sharaf,2013) said that, '*Islamic education has, since the inception of Islam, been interested in developing the human intellect and nurturing scientific reasoning, being the key to the development of human communities*'. However, to use PowerPoint as an innovative and effective teaching method, one must always bear in mind that it highly depends on its proper use and never forget that the main objective in the process of teaching is to foster students' ability of self-learning and innovative thinking through various means or methods of education.

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