

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Islamic Studies in Malaysia in Confronting Liberal Islam

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ABSTRACT

Liberal Islam is a stream of thought that requires openness in the interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah that transcends religious barriers of them. This article aims to discuss the approaches of the Islamic Studies in Malaysia, especially at higher learning institutes in dealing with the threats of Liberal Islam. This study uses the approach that involves both, library research and document analysis which is divided into five parts. First, an introduction to the study. Second, a description of Liberal Islam that comprises the developmental history and traits of the thoughts. Third, a discussion of the chronology and development of Islamic studies of Malaysia. Fourth, the Islamic Studies approach and fifth, a discussion based on how the Islamic Studies face the threats of Liberal Islam. The early findings of this article summarizes that the Islamic studies of Malaysia, through the subjects offered, seem to have the potential to become a competitive education system, fulfilling present requirements in facing the challenges of globalization such as the challenges of the Liberal Islam thoughts that exist today.

Key words: Liberal Islam, Malaysia, Islamic Studies, challenges, Islam and modern thought.

Introduction

There are many challenging matters that create harmony de-stability of Islam including the followers themselves. Various organizations or streams that protect themselves under the name of Islam, appear by bringing along different ideology and thoughts. The Liberal Islam group, which is one of those far misled groups of the teachings of Islam, is currently active in spreading their false missionary teachings to the Malaysian Islamic community.

The urges of this group is nothing but to look at the interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah including the understandings of Islam in a progressive and an open manner with the aim to progress the thoughts of the Islamic community. Nevertheless, they have the tendency to go beyond the boundaries of Islam when they claim a pluralist interpretation of Islam, including a controversial look at *Allah's* laws based on Muslim theology with rational views and dismissing the enforcement of religious moral laws. The Liberal Islam movement in Malaysia is inclined towards copying what had existed earlier in the Middle East and Indonesia. For example, the controversial issues pertaining to the women's rights of today as forwarded by the Sisters in Islam (SIS) organization. Hence, the researcher feels that the concept put forward by Liberal Islam has a big impact upon the thoughts and beliefs of the nation's Islamic community since this frequently discussed issues seem to confuse their understandings.

In realizing the threats of the Liberal Islam thoughts in this nation, the researcher feels the need for a follow up research to identify the approaches used by centres of Islamic studies in Malaysia in facing such threats. It is felt that the importance of this research needs to be highlighted in view of the role played by the Islamic studies

centres of higher learning institutes to furnish students with adequate knowledge to cope with problems that could endanger the beliefs of the followers of Islam. Besides fulfilling this current need, the Islamic studies approach is also an alternative to the question of the development of the Islamic community in Malaysia.

Materials and Methods

Chronology of Liberal Islam:

Liberal thinking merged into the Islamic world during the 18th century due to the influence of religious liberation during the Renaissance of the 16th and 17th century in the west. The liberal group was initiated by figures like John Locke, Rousseau, Adam Smith and J.S Mill who stood for individual liberty but denied moral values and transcendental aspects.

Besides, the development of liberal thoughts in Islam was also claimed to have a continuity with the modernization of Islamic practice which was conducted by some Islamic intellectuals like Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh during the 20th century with the aim to bring the Islamic community forward in the fields of science and technology based on western philosophy (Shahrom 2002:34). In addition, some were of the opinion that the development, too had continuity with secularism, orientalism and the philosophy of relativism, rationalism and nihilism.

Since the 18th century, a fraction of Muslims have been progressing liberal thinking in the world including Malaysia. Although the idea of liberalism was accepted by some Muslim intellectuals, yet the term 'liberal Islam' does not exist. According to Uthman El Muhammady (2008) this term was initially introduced in 1988 and was promoted by Leonard Binder through his writings entitled 'Islamic liberalism: A critique of development ideologies' and followed by Charles Kurzman's book, 'Liberal Islam: A source-book' which was published in 1998. Both these books have been the main source of references for the supporters of this ideology in the world. Nevertheless, the liberal thought among Muslims have developed earlier than Kurzman or Binder writings.

Muslim thinkers like Ahmad Khan, Fazlur Rahman, Ali Sharyati, Abdullah Ahmad Naim, Hasan Hanafi, Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri, Muhammad Arkoun, Abdul Karim Soroush, Fatima Mernesi, Aminah Wadud, Nawal Sa'dawi, Rifa'at Hasan, Ali Abd al-Raziq (Ahmad Zaki 2005), Farid Esack (NurFarhana 2010), Nurcholis Madjid, Harun Nasution, Ahmad Wahib, Lutfi al-Syaikani, Ulil Abshar, Djohan Efendi (Muslim 2005) and many more have been usually related to the development of Liberal Islam.

Moreover, the influence of Liberal Islam was claimed to have developed in Malaysia as well. Scholars like Kassim Ahmad (Azizan 2006), Farish Noor, Syed Akbar Ali (Anis Shakila 2006), Zainah Anwar (Ramnaizzudin 2005), Reza Shah Kazemi (Ariffin 2009) Astora Jabat and Zainuddin Idrus (Hafiz Firdaus 2007) and organizations like Musawah (Wan Salim 2009), Jemaah al-Qur'an Malaysia (Zamihan 2008) Sister in Islam (SIS), Inter Faith Commission (IFC) (Ariffin 2009), Women's Aid Organization (WAO), all Women's Action Society (Awam) (New Straight Time 8 March 2008) and The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) (Utusan 6 October 2009) were said to have tried to develop the thought in Malaysia.

Thought Traits of Liberal Islam Understanding:

The Liberal Islam group is also said to have a diversity of understandings and thoughts that has been the basis of their fight, first amongst which is the Liberal Islam group supports the idea of religious pluralism. According to Jaffary Awang and Kamarudin Salleh (2007), religious pluralism refers to varieties of religion that exist among man which is true as heading towards the oneness in God. In other words, it can be deduced that religious pluralism refers to the belief that Islam is not the only true religion. This concept of pluralism in religion was said to have been introduced in the west by W.C. Smith as the "universal theology of religion" which was later spread by John Hick and Hans Kung before being introduced into the Islamic world.

According to Khalif Muammar (2006), supporters of Liberal Islam also dismiss religious authority and individuals are free to interpret the Quran and Sunnah as regards any form of religious problems. The methodology of Relativism is used where truth is relative and cannot be contested by any party. The dismissal of religious authority by the followers of Liberal Islam is important because as such they have the freedom to execute the interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah. Based on these, Liberal Islam has many a times referred to the writings of the Orientalist. Western Orientalist like Leonard Binder and Charles Kurzman have been responsible for influencing the thoughts of the Liberal Islam followers especially by strongly supporting ideas such as the interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah without any restriction, religious pluralism and the dismissal of the religious laws.

Hence, the Liberal Islam group has been pestering the notion of the re-interpretation of the Quran without being tied to earlier translations which were considered for being not with the times. In addition, the Liberal Islam group is of the opinion that the process that involves the interpretation of the Quran need not take into

account disciplines like *Asbab Nuzul*, *Nasikh wa al-Mansukh*, the Prophet's (SAW) interpretation, his companions and so on. As for the Prophet's (SAW) Sunnah, without wavering they feel that it was only relevant to the Arab society of His (SAW) times and was outdated to be practiced, today. (Hafiz Firdaus Abdullah, 2007)

Third, thinkers of the Liberal Islam group, too dismiss exercising the Islamic religious laws as they would bring about negative effects since they were against human basic rights and again, unsuitable to be practiced, nowadays. As such, the group, do not hesitate in making amendments to the laws pertaining to the Quran and Sunnah such as the hereditary property system, the *aurat* of the muslim women, the polygamy rights, the laws of *hudud* and the dead penalties of muslim disbelievers, guidance of muslim women in performing the *solat*, the absolute rights of the husband in divorce matters, matrimonial restrictions between muslims and non muslims including the religious moral laws that go against the basic human rights and freedom. (Riduan Mohamad Nor and Ahmad Adan Fadhil 2009).

Fourth, according to Muhamad Razak Idris (2006), the understanding of Liberal Islam is associated with the modernism movement and idea which is to free a society from being hindered by customs and traditions that seem to obstruct the culture of progress and freedom. This group is also responsible for playing the role of disseminating the teachings and ideas of the modernism movement. They feel that society should free themselves from traditional restrictions in order to achieve success in life.

Fifth, the Liberal Islam group supports the emancipation movement or the freedomship of women and feminism. Liberal Islam thoughts have also been influenced by the aim of the Feminism movement of the West which is to create gender equality. Thus, the Liberal Islam feminist body usually claims for such equality as regards to the differences in the Islamic religious laws which are seen as unjust. They also assume that whatever are the rights of man should also be their rights since in Islam, man and woman are created by *Allah* (SWT). Hence, whatever differences in rights or privileges between man and woman should be abolished since they discriminate and oppress women.

Results and Discussion

Scenario and Development of Islamic Studies:

Today, the Islamic Studies of Malaysia are undergoing a drastic and positive development with an increase in the number of Islamic Studies institutes under both, government and private sectors. The reality of the Islamic Studies in Malaysia, whether formal or informal have long been based in this nation since Islam was spread and received by the peoples of the Malay Peninsula. (Farid and Ibrahim, 2008). In the early days of Islam, the Islamic Studies in Malaysia was conducted at the mosque, house including the palace, too. Later, the presence of local religious scholars changed the religious education scene to a more formal institution known as- traditional studies which also regularly referred as hut studies (*pengajian pondok*).

This formal institution was said to be famous among the Malays during the 19th century with the presence of Malay religious scholars like Tok Pulau Manis (Terengganu), Tok Shabudin (Pahang) and Tok Wan Ali Kuntan (Kelantan) (Farid and Ibrahim, 2008). These scholars were students of a number of Malay teachers who were staying in Mecca among which were Syeikh Hamzah Fansuri, Syeikh Daud al-Fatani, Syeikh Arshad al-Banjari and others. Later, during the 20th century, those formal institutions became even more popular and developed into Malay educational institutes mainly in the north and the east coast states of the Malay Peninsula.

Nevertheless, during the early 20th century Syeikh Muhammad Abduh and Syeikh Muhammad Rashid Rida of Egypt brought about renewal to the Islamic world. It is believed that this renewal had an impact on the spirits of the Malays, then and thence established the Islamic Studies institution in the form of schools. The establishment of these schools encouraged the Malays to go against the British education system which was seen as a threat to the Islamic Studies system including the effort to spread the influence of Christianity among the Malays.

Later, during the mid 20s, there were many religious schools in the Malay Peninsula including Singapore. Soon, there was an urge for the existence of higher education centres for Islam, since the Malays at that time could not afford to further their studies in the Middle East after completing their schoolings. The idea of establishing these centres was prompted by Maulana Abdul Alim Siddique, an Islamic missionary from the Indian continent.

His idea was well accepted by the Islamic community through the efforts and campaigns of Dato' Ibrahim Omar al-Saqoff, the Chairman of the Islamic Advisory Authority (*Lembaga Penasihat Islam*), Singapore. This also caught the attention of a number of the Malay Islamic religious scholars and became a reality. Soon, the Islamic College of Malaya (*Kolej Islam Malaya*) was officially opened by His Grace, the late Sultan of Selangor Tuanku Hishamuddin Jwa, Klang. The college developed further after the nation got its independence.

In 1968, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia agreed to raise the status of the college to a university college. The efforts to form the Islamic University College Malaysia did not last long because of the formation of the National University of Malaysia in 1970, following claims to establish a university apart from the Islamic

university. Although, in the beginning the Minister of Education, the late The Honourable Khir Johari was opposed to the idea for reasons of sentiments and the Malay fanatical spirits, but in the end he gave in to the establishment of the national university.

Later, the first Islamic Studies Faculty was established at the National University of Malaysia. Malaysia, as a progressing nation, has been giving priority to higher levels of Islamic Studies until today. This has been realized by the establishment of universities such as the University of Malaya, the International Islamic University of Malaysia, the Islamic Science University of Malaysia, the Darul Iman University of Malaysia, the Kelantan University of Malaysia, the Sultan Idris Education University and others that offer Islamic Studies degrees and programs.

Hence, it can be concluded that all these religious institutions have played a vital role in the development of the Islamic Studies in Malaysia. They have produced many students and graduates in this field of studies. The support of the authorities concerned in the development of Islam and the institutions in Malaysia helps greatly in the continuance of the Islamic knowledge and the institutions.

Approaches of Islamic Studies:

The teaching of Islamic Studies at the institutes of higher learning is an on-going effort in order to achieve the objective of integrating the principles of Islamic Studies with the world development of technological science and modern living. Hence, the aim of this writing is to discuss the approaches of Islamic Studies in realizing the said objective in general and specifically in facing the threats of Liberal Islam thoughts.

The Quran Interpretation Study:

The Quran interpretation study in the Islamic Studies introduces a number of basic subjects which includes a combination between the classical and the modern interpretation subjects. Generally, the interpretation study that is offered at the institutions is based on the importance of the department or faculty. For example, at the Islamic religious law (*syariah*) section, the focus is more on the interpretation study of the sentences pertaining to the system of law. Likewise, at the section of the Knowledge of the Tenets of Islam (*Usuluddin*) and the Quran and Sunnah, the focus is more on discussing the writing methodology, interpretation flow, issues and problems of the interpretation study like the *israiliyyat*, the orientalist interpretation and the interpretation studies of today.

The University of Malaya, for instance, offers subjects like *Manahij al-Mufasssirin*, Interpretation of Text Study, Contemporary Issues in Interpretation Study (Mustaffa, 2007) and so on with the aim to improve student's ability in getting the right information from the interpretation study by referring to the original source. As for the National University of Malaysia, a number of courses that are associated with the Quran interpretation study are introduced. These include Deviations in the Interpretation (*Penyelewengan Dalam Tafsir*), Comparative Interpretation (*Tafsir Bandingan*), Interpretation Methodology of members (*Metodologi Ahli Tafsir*) and so on (National University of Malaysia, 2003). Students are expected to have a thorough grasp of the interpretation knowledge discipline, methods used by religious interpretation authorities (*ulama tafsir*) including Arabic through those courses offered.

As regards the above courses, a number of current issues like the interpretation methodology upholds Liberal Islam towards the Quran (*metodologi penafsiran pendukung Islam Liberal terhadap al-Quran*) has been debated. The Liberal Islam interpretation sources including the issues highlighted by the Liberal Islam movement pertaining to women such as polygamy, *aurat*, leadership, inherited property are among others that are highlighted in the subject. The Liberal Islam movement rejects the interpretations of the earlier Islamic religious authorities (*ulama*) based on these issues and accept the opinions of people like Fatima Mernissi and Rifaat Hassan who fight for women's rights. Collectively, the Liberal Islam movement has deviated from the truth in their interpretation of the Quran by putting aside the method and condition that was laid down by the earlier Islamic religious authorities (*ulama*). In fact, this movement is more inclined towards using their own reasoning in the Quran interpretation method.

In order to face this problem, students are later exposed to the right methodology of interpreting the Quran as is required by Islam. This includes discussing the conditions of an interpreter, the knowledge required by a *mufasssirin* and so on.

The approach will definitely be looked upon as a constructive step in the Islamic Studies field by highlighting contemporary issues pertaining to the Studies of the Quran and interpretation. This shows that the Islamic Studies especially in higher learning levels are sensitive to the current issues associated with the Studies of the Quran and interpretation where it is not only restricted to the study of the methods of the earlier Islamic religious authorities. Indirectly, this sheds new knowledge to the students concerning the field of interpretation.

Studies on Traditions of the Prophet (SAW) (Pengajian Hadith):

Studies on the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) is the core study to the Islamic Studies besides the study of the Quran. Although the development of the studies on the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) is not as fast as studies like the interpretation (*tafsir*), *feqh*, Islamic beliefs (*akidah*), Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*) and Arabic. Yet, it is a branch of knowledge of the Islamic Studies that helps in facing the current challenges like the Liberal Islam thought which questions the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) as the second source of reference after the Quran. They claim that it was only relevant during the Prophet's (SAW) time and was considered as outdated to be practiced today.

Although it can be said that at the higher learning levels, the study of the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) deals less with current issues, yet the subjects highlighted in this study are seen as being still relevant in helping one to face the threats of the enemies of Islam. For example, *takhrij hadith*, present study on the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) (*kajian hadith masa kini*), attitude of the orientalist towards the Quran and Sunnah are subjects offered at the National University of Malaysia and the Islamic Science University of Malaysia for Bachelor Degree students while the study of *Musykil al-Hadith* and the *Nasakh*, Methodology of Interpretation Study and Current Traditions of the Prophet (SAW) (*Hadith Semasa*) and Traditions of the Prophet (SAW) and Human Development (National University of Malaysia 2003) are offered at the Masters level at the National University of Malaysia.

These subjects debate matters that encompass a number of aspects like methodology and the orientalist view as regards the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) and the rejection, current issues of the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) including the Muslim rebels' view of the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) and the rejection. Through these subjects, the students will be able to evaluate the validity of the traditions of the Prophet (SAW), *mentakhrij hadith*, evaluate the views of various Islamic religious scholars and apply the issues pertaining to the Quran and Sunnah and the relation to current issues. Besides, the graduates would also be able to analyse issues concerning the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) including understanding the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) as has been recommended by the earlier Islamic religious scholars.

Islamic Faith Studies (Pengajian Akidah):

Islamic faith studies is among the fields of study which is important to maintain the self-esteem of Muslim people especially today whereby the Islamic world is facing threats with the presence of secularism, liberalism, hedonism and terrorism thoughts. These studies have been introduced to a number of institutes in the higher learning levels such as the University of Malaya, the National University of Malaysia, the Islamic Science University of Malaysia and the International Islamic University.

Among the subjects offered by these studies include the *al-Tawhid* and the *al-Nubuwwah wa al-Risalah* (Mohd Fauzi, 2007) which have been offered at the University of Malaya with the aim to expose the students to the actual concept of the Islamic faith based on the Quran and Sunnah including equipping them with the prophetic and apostolic faith. Both these courses discuss the Islamic faith irregularities occurring in the community and how to deal with such issues. They also expose the students to scientific arguments which allow them to reject wild allegations especially from the enemies of Islam such as the Liberal Islam group.

In addition, the University of Malaya also offers the subject, Islamic faith and Human Development which highlights the role of faith in human development. This subject is expected to help in handling external challenges like globalization, orientalism, the spread of the ideology of liberalism with an understanding of the principles of the Islamic faith. The Islamic faith studies at the other universities like the National University of Malaysia and the Islamic Science University of Malaysia offer Islamic Faith as a subject, while the International Islamic University of Malaysia offers Islamic Faith The Quran and Sunnah as Source of Knowledge. Although the courses offered are quite different, however it is seen as appropriate in the teaching objectives of the Islamic faith which aim to eternalize the Islamic faith in the hearts of the students and reject the confusion surrounding them (Mohd Fauzi, 2007).

The study of faith in the Islamic Studies in Malaysia together with the syllabus, methodology including the connection with several disciplines like the law based on Muslim theology (*feqah*) and Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*) is seen as capable of helping one to face the threats of Liberal Islam thoughts.

Islamic Thought Studies:

The Islamic Studies in Malaysia also offers the Islamic thought studies which play a vital role in building a proper understanding of Islam especially among the Muslims. The studies also functions as a bulwark for Muslims in facing the globalization challenges of today. In Malaysia, these studies are offered at various institutes of higher learning such as at the National University of Malaysia, the University of Malaya and the International Islamic University of Malaysia.

The Current Islamic Thought subject is offered at the National University of Malaysia as a core subject for the Bachelor of Islamic Studies program which discusses current political and economic issues, socio-cultural race, globalization and the connection with the Islamic laws (*syariah*) and faith (*akidah*) (National University of Malaysia, 2003). While, the International Islamic University of Malaysia offers Current Islamic Thought Issues as a departmental major subject and as an elective for the Bachelor of Revelation Knowledge program. Next, at the University of Malaya, two specific subjects of Islamic thought entitled Current Issues of The Islamic Faith and Thought along with The Work of Islamic Thought and Philosophy are offered at the Department of Islamic Faith and Thought (Mohamad Kamil and Wan Adli, 2007).

According to Mohamad Kamil and Wan Adli (2007), the scope of the Islamic thought covers word knowledge (*ilmu kalam*), philosophy and Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*), man, natural life, death and others. In facing the modern thoughts of the West such as reformist, humanist, orientalist, secularist, pluralist and liberalist, the Islamic thought course is seen as an important study in exposing to the students the Western social and attack strategies of thought on Islam besides introducing figures of Islamic thought and the West, methodology and current Islamic thought issues that cover several aspects such as politics, economy, civilization and others.

In addition, discussions about current issues of the Liberal Islam movement such as figures of Liberal Islam, pluralism religious beliefs and the debate about the basic needs of man that form the basis of the thoughts of the Liberal Islam movement are also highlighted in this course. Besides, the course also exposes students to the solutions to the above mentioned issues based on the views of the human life submitted by the word knowledge (*ilmu kalam*), philosophy and Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*) and others.

Islamic Studies in Confronting Liberal Islam:

After discussing the various approaches used by the Islamic Studies at the institutes of higher learning in facing the Liberal Islam thoughts, accordingly the following are an explanation on the application of the approaches so that the efforts in confronting the discourse of Islamic thought can be made more effective.

The Focus of the Study:

Through the observation of the researcher, the Islamic Studies at the institutes of higher learning have taken steps to produce more research that focuses or debates matters that are associated with Liberal Islam whether in the form library research or field studies to consolidate the students' knowledge particularly about Liberal Islam. This method not only focuses on students but it is also applied by them. The findings of the research is later used as reference in the process of teaching and learning so that the input or latest information concerning Liberal Islam in particular can be used together.

Among the researches concerning Liberal Islam that have been produced at the National University of Malaysia are Malaysia's Islamic community response to the trend of Liberal Islam, The use of the concept of faith in the idea of religious pluralism in the trend of Liberal Islam by Nur Farhana (2010). While at the International Islamic University of Malaysia, researches such as Liberal Islam Thought: The Indonesian Experience, Liberal Islam Manifestation in Malaysia: Political dimension and laws (Abdul Karim and Mohd Roslan, 2009) focusses on the Liberal Islam ideology. At the University of Malaya the researches concentrate on the Liberal Islam idea. For example, Liberal Islam Network (LIN): A study of the sources of epistemology by Ahmad Yumni (2009), Liberal Islam thought in Malaysia: A study of the issue raised by Farish Noor and Syed Akbar Ali by Anis Shakila (2006) which is a dissertation and an academic writing at the Department of Islamic Faith and Thought (<http://www.pendeta.um.edu.my/>). Then, the researches of the lecturers of the University of Malaya such as Islamic Studies and liberalism in Egypt: An experience of meeting with liberal Muslim leaders and thinkers, Agenda of the secularization of thought behind the anti-*hadith* and liberal Islam- an epistemological critique, Modernism and liberalism: Highlights the historical birth and evaluation of the methodology (Abdul Karim and Mohd Roslan, 2009).

Training of Students:

Based on the observation of the researcher, in order to meet current demands, the Islamic Studies at the institutes of higher learning have applied two pedagogical methods that is the Problem Based Learning (PBL) and the thinking and communication skills (Arabic and English) that can generate students' critical success and ability in solving current problems. This PBL method coincides with the demands of the education agenda for the current global world which requires both, the lecturer and the student to interact in a more open and critical context. This method forms a critical way of thinking whereby the process itself will shape the mentality and methods of dynamic thinking for the lecturer as well as the student.

For example, students are given problems or issues that have been highlighted by the Liberal Islam ideology. Then, the lecturer trains the students with the postulates or the specific methods to answer the problems or questions. Such training is done either during the learning process of the lecture or the tutorial so as to produce graduates who are capable thinkers and able to rectify facts and the concept of knowledge which is contrary to the epistemology of Islam, blending views of Muslim scholars on current knowledge, coordinate disciplines of knowledge with the core knowledge of Islam and eventually form the knowledge-based paradigm of the Islamic faith.

Encouragement to Participate in Seminars, Public Talks and Others:

Through the researches conducted, it can be seen that the Islamic Studies institutes in Malaysia play an effective role in organizing programs that discuss current issues among which is the Liberal Islam idea. Then, these institutes are responsible in fostering and in giving encouragement and interest to students to involve themselves directly in the programs among which are seminars, public talks or workshops as participants, presenters or secretariat members. This, in turn, would give them the opportunity to explore the subjects associated with the Liberal Islam idea. In addition, such activities are carried out in the form of in house training where experts in the relevant public and private sectors are invited to provide information about Liberal Islam. For example, the National University of Malaysia in collaboration with the Department of Islamic Religion, Selangor (JAIS) have organized the National Seminar on the Liberal Islam issues that analyze the issues by inviting Islamic institutions to clarify their activities or experiences in curbing the Liberal Islam ideology such as the Department of Islamic Understanding, Malaysia (JAKIM), the Department of Islamic Religion, Selangor (JAIS), the Islamic Youth Force, Malaysia (ABIM), the Department of Islamic Religion, Malacca (JIM) and so on.

Students would be exposed indirectly to the latest inputs concerning the current issues and challenges in the world of Islamic Studies especially the threats of Liberal Islam. At the same time, such activities would provide students space and opportunity to share ideas together and improve their level of credibility and confidence. In this way, the students would be more ready with all possibilities and efforts that threatens the Islamic religious harmony. The inter-religious dialogue organized by the National University of Malaysia, Seminar on Islam and the relationship between religions in Malaysia organized by the University of Malaya (Mohamad Kamil and Wan Adli 2007), the Nabawi Heritage Seminar organized by the Islamic Science University of Malaysia were among the other related seminars that were organized.

Conclusion:

The Islamic Studies in Malaysia develops in tandem with the development of the other studies at the institutes of higher learning in this nation. This can be formulated based on research concerning several fields of study that are offered by the Islamic Studies such as the interpretation study, study on the traditions of the Prophet (SAW), Islamic thought study and the Islamic faith study which becomes the focus of discussing this study. It is not even an exaggeration to say that the courses offered in each study mentioned takes into account the changes and needs of the community in this era of globalization today. It is hoped that through these subjects, too the students will be able to associate the teachings with a variety of challenges of life which is being confronted by the Muslims, for example the threats of the Liberal Islam ideology.

Through this study, some recommendations can be submitted in order to ensure that the Islamic Studies in Malaysia will be a platform in addressing the threats of Liberal Islam especially at the institutes of higher learning. Thus, the steps that need to be taken are as follows:

- 1) Diversify the teaching and learning methods such as e-learning, community and industry.
- 2) Increase the number of regional or international seminars and workshops regularly for the purposes of a wider exposure concerning the threats of the Liberal Islam ideology at the institutes of higher learning.
- 3) Increase the number of joint research activities with other institutes of higher learning, non-governmental organizations (NGO) or Islamic institutions of Malaysia in order to ensure that the effort to curb the influence of Liberal Islam is undertaken more effectively.
- 4) Coordination in terms of course offerings, syllabus and the use of basic reading materials to create a unity of thought among regional Islamic scholars.

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