Understanding Basic Concepts of Islam Amongst Malaysian Muslim Youths

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ABSTRACT

All religions have their own concepts in regards to belief and life. This paper discusses some basic concepts of Islam as understood by Malaysian University Students in the East Coast of Malaysia. There are four important concepts that will be focused in this discussion namely Islam, Iman, Tawakkal and Zuhud. By using purposive sampling, 300 Muslim students in three higher learning institutions were selected as respondents. Respondents were asked to respond to three statements for each concept that necessitates them give the best answer according to their understandings. Data were collected through questionnaire and analyzed descriptively. Result of the study demonstrated that majority of the respondents have a good understanding of Islam, Iman, Tawakkal and Zuhud concepts. Despite various challenges facing students of this country in terms of modernization, secularization and globalization, the study showed that the respondents still have a good understanding and knowledge in regards to some basic Islamic concepts.

INTRODUCTION

Islam, like other religions of the world has its own concepts about belief and life. To be a good Muslim, one has to understand and uphold to some basic concepts in regards to Islamic belief and life since mastering these concepts enable him to be a good servant who serve his Master faithfully, paying careful attention to His wishes and command besides implementing all religious teachings. Thus, education is very essential in Muslim life specifically that related to the study about theology focusing on Islam, Iman and so on. This was in line with Islamic teaching that requires its believer to be fully committed Muslims and understand the meaning of life as manifested in the Quran and the Prophet’s hadith. The first revelation already stressed the importance of ‘iqra’ or read which imply how important seeking knowledge was in the daily life of a Muslim prior to their understanding of other worldly activities. Ibn Majah and Bayhaqi [5] narrated that the Prophet once has emphasized this in many of his hadith among which he mentions “Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim”. Ahmad Shalabi in his Tarikh al-tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah (History of Muslim Education) devotes a section to ‘Travel for study’. He quotes the Prophet’s hadith saying ‘ whoever sets out seeking knowledge will be working in the path of Allah until he return and whoever dies while travelling for learning will be regarded as a martyr’. This shows that education in Islam becomes an essential element for Muslims.

Seeking knowledge about Islam and Iman for instance is crucial and important since it would bring one close to Allah. These considered as a priority also before one’s seeking for other knowledge. Considering the current scenario of Muslims’ life and some other reasons, coupled with the existing challenges such as secularization which clearly declare religion as having no place in human affairs, it was essential to consider role of Islam since there were some Muslims effected by those challenges in terms of education, culture and the way of life as a whole. In this regard, something must be done to avoid further deterioration within Muslim community. Resulting from those challenges, there are Muslims who tend to separate Islam gradually from their daily personal affairs, thus making their feeling, thinking, culture and their way of life governed by western life style contradictory to Islamic teachings. As Sayyid Qub notes, ‘Islam does not prescribe worship as the only basis of its beliefs, but rather it reckons all the activities of life as comprehending worship in themselves [7]. A similar concern was voiced out by al Maududi [6] when he notes ‘Islam, in fact, is an attributive title. Anyone who possesses this attribute, whatever race, community, country or group he belongs to, is a Muslim’. In other word, as a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to Allah alone and not to other...
creatures. In line with the above scenario facing Muslims, this paper discusses four basic concepts of Islam as understood by Muslims. The paper, however, will focus on Muslim youth in Malaysia particularly university students studying in three universities in the East Coast of Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study uses survey design focusing on Muslim youths who studied in three public universities in the East Coast of Malaysia. By using purposive sampling, 300 Muslim students representing three higher learning institutions were selected as respondents. They came from various educational backgrounds such as arts, science and religious education. The respondents were asked to respond to three statements for each concept that necessitates them give the best answer according to their understandings. Data were collected through questionnaire and analyzed descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In line with objective of the paper, this section will be discussing four basic concepts of Islam namely Islam, iman, tiwakkal and zuhud. Before discussing these four basic concepts, the paper will first highlight the socio demographiic profiles of the respondents.

Socio-demographic profile:

Out of 300 respondents, 245 that constitute 82% of them were female, while the rest were male students. These students represent several universities located in states of Terengganu and Kelantan. In terms of the field of study, 123 of the total respondent (42.9%) came from social sciences stream, 104 (36.2%) were from pure science and 60 (20.9%) coming from Islamic studies background. There were three categories of respondents namely those undertaking diploma level, first degree and postgraduate levels. They constitute 300 respondents all together.

Meaning of Islam:

Islam means submission to Allah in all walks of life. Islam can also be understood as applying the Quranic teachings in a proper way as exemplified by the Prophet. Muslims means those who submit their life, their thought and their worldly activities in accordance to the commandment of Allah.

The coming of Islam into the Malay Peninsular (Malaysia today) could be traced back through the archaeological evidence provided by the discovery of Batu Bersurat (a stone inscribed with Arabic letter) in Terengganu (the east-coast Malaysia) in 1902. The date mentioned on the stone is 1303 AD and it is accepted as a historical record of the arrival of Islam to the Malaysia Peninsular (al-Attas, 1970). Today Islam becomes the official religion in Malaysia and Muslim of this country constitutes more than 60% of the total populations. Despite the existing challenges facing Muslims of this country in terms of western culture and way of life brought together under the name of the so called ‘globalization’ and ‘secularization’, the Muslim youth in the study area are seen to be in a good understanding of the noble principles of Islam. This is because in every time and every place as this study is concerned, the Muslim youth face the challenges and hardships with steadfastness and adherence to Islamic teachings. Such steadfastness emanates from strong faith and unshakable trust in Allah, and yields its ripe fruits in all spheres of their life. The role of Islamic centre in each university in promoting Islamic teachings and festivals also contributed to the development as out of 300 respondents participated in the survey, 282 of them were able to choose the right answer about what Islam means to their life. To them, Islam means submit and follow what has been revealed to the Prophet through the Holy Quran without any exception of its commandment and teachings. In depth interviews with respondents of the study revealed that most of them have to take Islamic course such as TITAS (Islamic civilization course) during their first year study and thus giving them the opportunity to enhance their existing basic knowledge about Islam.

Meaning of Iman:

To be a good Muslim, one must has a strong faith to Allah and His attributes. Iman means acknowledging Allah with full sincerity of heart whilst accepting all His attributes and His Glory. According to al-Farahi [4], whilst explaining the meaning of the word iman:

"The root of iman is ann. It is used in various shades of meaning. One of its derivatives is mu’min, which is amongst the noble names of Allah because He gives peace to those who seek His refuge. This word is also an ancient religious term. Hence the certitude which exists with humility, trust and all the conditions and corollaries of adherence to a view is called iman and he who professes faith in Allah, in His signs and in His directives and submits himself to Him and is pleased with all His decisions is a mu’min."

In the survey, it was found that 255 out of the 300 respondents (85%) have a clear understanding of the concept and meaning of iman. Even though the respondents coming from various academic background and
field of study such as science, social science and religious study, yet they have a similar understanding on the term iman and its meaning. It was found that various programs conducted by the university authority through its Islamic centre coupled with some Islamic courses taken by the respondents had contributed to their understanding. Moreover, the surrounding environments in states of Terengganu and Kelantan where religious education are taught in mosques of every villages had provided informal and non formal learning opportunity for the university students to take part and to learn about basic Islamic knowledge together with the villagers. [3].

Tawakkal:

The concept of tawakkal is very close to the concept of iman. Its beauty can only be felt by those who sincerely have full conviction and taqwa in Allah s.w.t. Thus, tawakkal, is a branch of faith (iman) and its importance was included in this survey besides understanding other noble concepts of Islam. However, there are those among us who consider tawakkal as resting everything in the hands of God, without putting in any effort. Tawakkal is regarded as a piece of cotton, flying in the wind – with its direction determined by the blow of the wind. In reality, the concept of tawakkal means to put in effort in the best way we can, before surrendering the outcome to Allah. One must first perform the best effort before surrendering everything to Allah. In the context of the survey conducted, majority of the respondents knew exact meaning of the word tawakkal where 296 out of the total 300 respondents (98%) provided correct meaning of the word. In addition to the clear understanding of the word, the study found that the use of the word which was common in the Malay vocabulary thus making them familiar with its usage.

Zuhud:

Zuhud is an Arabic word mean renouncing worldly pleasures in order to gain nearness to Allah. According to al-Qardhawi [9], the word zuhud sometime has been misinterpreted by Muslims to mean leaving all worldly affairs to those unbelievers and devoting one’s life to Allah by focusing merely on the basic principles of Islam. Ibn Taymiyyah said zuhud is to leave alone things which not benefit you in the next life. He also said ‘Az-Zuhd entails abandoning what does not bring about benefit in the Hereafter. Al-Wara’ (abandoning a part of the permissible for fear of falling into the impermissible) entails abandoning what you fear its consequences in the Hereafter.”

Therefore, the true concept of zuhud mean one not being over joyed with the glitters of the life of this world and not to regret things which have passed you by. It is also can be considered as having trust in Allah, and being content in times of poverty. Zuhud must also involve absolute justice (al- adl al-mutlaq), and balance in performing religious duties and worldly activities which did not in contradiction with Islamic teachings. In regard to human social interaction for instance, there must be solidarity, love, co-operation, and mutual understanding among human beings on the basis of faith in God what Islam sought to achieve through its teachings. Therefore, the individual, the group, the party, the nation are governed by one law with one goal, that the activity of the individual and the activity of the group may proceed freely and all can work together without conflict, directing their lives to God, the Creator of life. Most important, everything is performed for the sake of Allah and not for other rewards [2].

In this survey, result demonstrated that there are different views in regards to the true meaning of zuhud. Although majority of the respondents have a clear understanding of the true meaning where 250 of the respondent provided a correct answer on zuhud meaning, yet there are few students (50 respondents) who regarded zuhud to mean ignoring the worldly affairs completely and to focus on basic Islamic principles such as five daily prayers, fasting and performing hajj. This understanding seems to have a relation with some misperception amongst the students about Islam and their overwhelming concern on the term secularization which stress that ‘religion and worldly affair could not be mixed together’ and ‘religion has no place in world affairs’. Thus, proper programs should be organized to expose this category of students to the true meaning of Islam and its teachings that include observing Allah’s command in all walks of life be it in the name of worldly activities or life of the hereafter. The growing concerns on the impact of secularization upon Muslim community also necessitate Muslims to be careful towards various forms of knowledge and education widespread before them so that they may not indulge in any education which bring them to religious deviance and heresy away from true Islamic teachings. Al-Qardhawi’s concern was right when he included misconception about zuhud concept as one the dangerous challenges facing Muslims of this century [9].

Conclusion:

This paper discusses four basic concept of Islam as understood by Malaysian University Students who represent Muslim youth in the East Coast of Malaysia namely Islam, iman, tawakkal and zuhud. 300 Muslim students in three higher learning institutions were asked to response to three statements for each concept that necessitates them to give the best answer according to their common understandings. Result of the study demonstrated that majority of the students have a good understanding of Islam,iman,tawakkal and zuhud.
Despite various challenges facing students of this country in terms of modernization, and secularization, the study showed that the students still have a good knowledge about some basic Islamic concepts. The surrounding environments such as religious educations at the mosques and relevant Islamic courses offered to students contributed to their understandings. It therefore becomes the responsibility of various sectors including the university authority through its Islamic centers, government and local Islamic agencies to inculcate religious concerns on this generation in order to retain, besides strengthening and deepening the young Muslim’s knowledge, understanding and faith about Islam and its principles.

REFERENCES