

## **Creativity and Innovation in Islam: It's Necessity in Islamic Education**

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**Abstract:** This is a preliminary study on the Islamic concept of creative thinking through the life of Muhammad (SAW). It is aim to revisit, the concept of creativity and innovation in Islam, from the examples shown by the Prophet (SAW). This study also highlights the significance and the needs to apply the Prophetic model of Islamic creativity and innovation to the present educational system. It employed qualitative approach by theoretical and conceptual analysis of relevant historical cases to establish, the concept the Islamic creative and innovative thinking from the life of Muhammad (SAW). It is hope that it may provide a distinctive perspective on the concept of creativity and innovation and its necessity in contemporary Islamic educational system which should be treated as a crucial tool for modern era. Further actions are discussed.

**Key words:** Islamic, creativity, innovation, Prophet Muhammad (SAW), educational system

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Creativity is linked to ideas. One individual can produce an idea which could be an outstanding or a mediocre idea while another can generate an assortment of ideas, some of them original and brilliant. The difference between the first person and second has to do with creativity. Before the mid 1950's, creativity received little scholarly attention (Sternberg *et al.*, 2002) in spite of the fact that scores of creative people in all fields of knowledge lived in the years, decades and centuries before the middle of the 20th century. On the other hand, the significance of creativity was acknowledged by Islam and this is evident from the examples shown by Muhammad (SAW) a Prophet of Islam. This study is a preliminary study is on the concept of creative thinking through the life of Muhammad (SAW). Obviously, this study focuses only on a few aspects of his life; particularly his creativity in politics, economics, social and religious aspect. It is hope, it will provide a distinctive perspective on the concept of creativity and innovation and its necessity in contemporary Islamic educational system which should be considered, as an important characteristic for both modern Islamic and Western worlds. Future reseaches may focus on modeling the creativity and innovation framework for revisiting an Islamic education.

### **CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION: THE PRACTICE OF MUHAMMAD**

**Political aspect:** Politics can be defined as the art of ruling human societies or as the science of government and the art of relationships of government that describe the group of affairs which concern the state or the manner followed by rulers, on power and authority. The most important quality of a political leader, especially when the leader assumes the highest position in the state or in establishing a state is authority. Political leadership requires clemency, forbearance and wisdom. Having qualities for both kinds of leadership can rarely be found in a person. Muhammad (SAW) differed from other political leaders in the sense that he neither inherited a throne nor seized power. Rather, he established a state from nothing. As such, it is important to understand his political skills. Muhammad (SAW) emerged from a religious leader to a political leader and then to the leader of humankind. Watt (1961) regarded him as a farsighted strategist. Hodgson (1974), Esposito (1984) and Hart (1992) believed that Muhammad (SAW) has the qualities to be a great leader; not only religious but also political.

It must be noted that the decision of Muhammad (SAW) in directing the Muslims to migrate to Ethiopia, twice (in AC 615 and 616) was merely not due to

psychological attachment to his breastfed mother, Ummu Ayman. The migration to Ethiopia is an example of his political skill in seeking alliances with others. When the persecution increased in Mekkah and some of his followers found it difficult to live in that environment, he allowed them to migrate to Ethiopia and seek the help of the Ethiopian Christian King. In Ethiopia, Muslims found peace and they reciprocated the King's hospitality with prayers and support for the King and his party. Muslims' relations were so good with the monarch that he grew to love Islam and before his death he became a Muslim. This is a great example of two different people and religion able to live in peace and harmony, thus refuting the clash of civilizations theory.

While on the case of Madinah Treaty which was established as the first written constitution in the world (AC 622) in a multiracial society, the treaty of Madinah consists of 23 points of relationship between Muslims (the Mekkans and Medinans) and 24 points of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims (i.e., the Jews in Madinah). The number of points is quite significant, as Muhammad (SAW) was well aware of the important internal threat. Even Clausewitz shares the same points in his work; on war. The treaty also became the cornerstone of the establishment of a country based on religion, not because of skin color, language or other physical appearance. This is very significant as the Prophet (SAW) envisioned that Islam would spread to other continents, beginning with the treaty of Hudaibiyah that led to the conquest of Mekkah. In the treaty of Hudaibiyah, Muhammad (SAW) has portrayed his highest quality of diplomacy and firm action once the Quraysh violated the treaty. Often his wisdom and wise judgment could not be comprehended by his companions. However with his excellent human and psychological skills, they finally understood it.

It is worth to noted, Muhammad (SAW) was actively involved in conflict resolutions long before he became the Prophet (SAW) at the age of 40 as in the case of the Alliance of Fudul (Ali, 1972; Haykal, 2008; Lings, 2006; Sarwar, 1964). Again, he displayed his political character in conflict resolution in the case of the Black Stone in Mekkah. He resolved this dispute with great wisdom in an amicable way. He spread his own cloak on the ground and placed the stone upon it. He then asked the representatives of each tribe to lift the cloak together. When the Black Stone reached the required height from the ground he went forward and set it in its place, thus sharing equally in the glory and privilege of replacing it.

Thus in the political dimension, Muhammad (SAW) should serve as a model for the modern Muslim political

leader who is not only just and fair but also creative and innovative in introducing and implementing policies for a peaceful, balanced and just nation (Nizah *et al.*, 2012). The two important traits shown by Muhammad (SAW) on top of his strong faith and belief in Allah, throughout his life as discussed previously, should be studied and practiced, so as to produce Muslim leaders of today and tomorrow capable of expressing political creativity for the benefits of their followers (Nizah *et al.*, 2013).

**Economic aspect:** The fundamental principles of Islamic economics have been comprehensively laid in the Qur'an, as well as in the sayings and practices of Muhammad (SAW). In the wake of the arrival of Islam and the migration of Muslims from Makkah to Madinah, a major change in the economic life occurred. The phenomenon was but part of the total change that was sweeping across the land of Arabia. It appears as though such a phenomenon was pretty spontaneous after such concepts of Islam as work as a form of worship, honest and just wealth acquisition and distribution, equality and equity, financial prudence, humility, charity and others had been institutionalized and imbibed by the people.

One of the 1st things that Muhammad (SAW) had emphasized upon his arrival in Madinah was the idea of research as a form of worship, as well as an avenue to realizing some of the important goals of the new and fragile community of the faithful. The people were fervently encouraged to seek research opportunities and labor vigorously, so that everyone in line with his/her ability may be turned quickly into a community asset rather than to stay as its liability. The people were to satisfy their innate needs for food, shelter and comfort and to realize balance and harmony in their relations with men and nature. The earth was to be thus transformed into a producing orchard, a fertile farm and a beautiful garden (Al-Faruqi, 1992). In doing so, however the spiritual was never to be bartered for the trivial delights of the world.

Due to the fact that production and trade are two of the city's key elements, on the one hand and due to the transformations that the city state of Madinah was subjected to, on the other the existing markets of Madinah, as both concepts and spatial phenomena have been affected too following the migration. At first, the Muslims used to avail themselves of the existing economics, most of which were controlled by the Jews. Because in these economics number of errant practices were perpetrated, the Muslims gradually developed a strong aversion to doing business there. And so a new market controlled by the Muslim community was shortly set up. On selecting the market site Muhammad (SAW) is reported to have said:

This is your market, it is not to be narrowed (by acquiring and building for instance) and no tax is to be collected from it

The system of occupying the market space followed the pattern of occupying the Mosque space: He who came first to a space occupied it and it remained his until he wanted to leave (Uthman, 1988).

Since, Madinah was yet to become purely Islamic in terms of its citizenry, it was inappropriate to position the market too distant from the Mosque because the latter had been established to radiate by means of its form and function the rays of the Islamic struggle, thus serving as an inexhaustible and effective means of Islamic mission. Since it offered access to everybody, including the Jews and nonbelievers, the market was bound to be affected somehow by the general ambiance generated by the Mosque and its wide-ranging activities. Muhammad (SAW) explicitly prohibited conducting trade within his Mosque but did not prohibit doing the same outside the Mosque. Several instances of trading activities on a very limited scale outside the Mosque during Muhammad's (SAW) era have been reported. On account of this, certain markets and even industries abutting mosques specifically such as were with tolerable visual, auditory and aromatic effects for every day city's life were before long introduced to the morphology of the Islamic city, i.e., they constituted part of the cities' midpoints. Other markets and industries, some of which were bound to cause a kind of serious disruption or nuisance to either individuals or institutions, remained customarily situated on the cities' peripheries. The extent of their remoteness from the cities' principal Mosques and their residential areas varied depending on a number of issues, such as the geography of an area, the compactness of residential areas and the availability of space, the vitality and function of the mosque complex, the dynamism and richness of markets' activities, the overall socio-political and economic condition of an area, etc.

Given that production and trade are two of the city's key elements, the idea of market as both a concept and spatial phenomenon was given its due consideration too. However, due to the deep-seated transformations that the city state of Madinah was subjected to the existing markets proved inadequate to meet the demands of the new Islamic perceptions of research of commerce of production of distribution of consumption, etc. A new market was thus established. In it research was looked upon as a form of worship. Material wealth was looked upon as a means, an instrument and a carrier of the spiritual side. Islamic message disapproves of material wealth to be transformed into a goal of one's existence. To do so is to renounce one's spiritual aspect.

**Social aspect:** Many social changes took place under Islam between 610 and 661 AC, including the period of Muhammad's (SAW) mission and the rule of his 4 immediate successors who established the Rashidun Caliphate. It is because for Muhammad (SAW), religion was not a private and individual matter but the total response of his personality as the messenger of Allah. His acts were responding to the religious and intellectual aspects of life which in present day situation covered economic, social and political changes. The most important social change that had been brought about by Muhammad (SAW) included 2 political traditions in Islam one that transformed Medina as an Islamic state where Muhammad (SAW) was himself a statesman. While in Mekkah, the Prophet (SAW) had brought a revolution that greatly changed the societies into which Islam was brought. Historians generally agree that changes in areas such as social security, family structure, slavery and the rights of women improved not only in Arab society but also the world over (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002). For example, Islam rejected hierarchy and adopted a formula of the career open to the talents. All these would not have happened if it was not due to the creative and innovative approach that had been taken by Muhammad (SAW).

There were two records which showed how Muhammad (SAW) encouraged creativity. In those records two persons took the initiative to create something new. They created the wordings of prayers by themselves which Muhammad (SAW) had never taught them. When he heard those prayers, he commended both of them. From this, some basic principles practiced to inculcate creativity by Muhammad (SAW) can be outlined as follows:

- When his companions do something they were not asked to do, he gave them commendation
- When and what Muhammad (SAW) commended were for the results of the work, not the person
- If that action was done openly then Muhammad (SAW) will commend it openly too
- Commendation and praise were given immediately and not later

Another popular case of Muhammad (SAW) creative solution to problems can be seen from his answer to his wives' question as which one of them is most loved by him. He gave a ring to each one of his wives and reminded them not to tell the others. The 1 day, he told his wives to gather because he wanted to give the answers to the question and said, the most beloved one is the one who I gave her a ring and his wives smiled, thinking she was the only one to receive a ring.

**Religious aspect:** From the religious aspect, there are a number of cases where Muhammad (SAW) has expressed the elements of creativity and innovation throughout his life. This has not only made his messages clearer for his followers to implement but also served, as an effective tool in teaching them the rulings and methods of the religion. In this regard, one of the most important and fundamental principles of creativity of Muhammad (SAW) can be seen from his practice of the concept of *ijtihad*. It refers to the intellectual struggle critically and legally in search of answers to new problems. It is inherently creative and dynamic and is considered as an indispensable religious duty (Abd-Allah, 2006). In the process of *ijtihad*, a person must expend the best of his cognitive and moral efforts to achieve the desired goal. He must utilize the existing resources and methods and consider the possibilities and implications of his decision.

In other words, the person must not only attempt to express novel ideas for solving problems or satisfying needs but the solution proposed must also be appropriate and suitable to be implemented. Thus towards a certain extent, the concept of *ijtihad* coincides with that of creativity in terms of definition (Stenberg, 1999). Similarly both require expertise whether technical, procedural and intellectual knowledge, flexible thinking skills and high level of motivation to be successfully implemented (Harvard Business School, 2003). Yet, *ijtihad* implies on the ethical and legal dimensions of Islam as a means of deriving at a specific religious ruling. It also requires a certain set of skills and sound knowledge of the religious methods and its sources.

In his capacity as a Prophet (SAW) and religious leader of the Muslims, Muhammad (SAW) also practiced *ijtihad* in many instances throughout his life. For example at the dawn of Islam in Mekkah, he has carefully strategized his method of propagating Islam to his people. Instead of proclaiming the message of Islam openly and invite confrontation with the nonbelievers that could endanger the lives of his followers, he began his mission in secrecy. He has also chosen the house of Abu Abdillah al-Arqam bin Abi al-Arqam as the meeting place with his followers. Thus, he was able to attract a considerable number of followers amongst his family members, relatives and close friends for 3 years before, he propagated openly to the Mekkah people (Al-Buti, 1990).

In doing so, he has demonstrated the excellent qualities of a religious leader who was not only focused towards spreading the message of Islam but also considerate enough to ensure the safety of his followers apart from assessing the political and social conditions of Mekkah at that time and planning for the future. The

creative move of Muhammad (SAW) in implementing the Islamic mission has also guided various Islamic movements in managing their affairs effectively and strategically. In addition, Muhammad (SAW) has also inculcated the concept of *ijtihad* amongst his companions. He has actively encouraged the creative process of *ijtihad* by promising rewards to whoever practiced it regardless of the outcome. Yet, to exercise *ijtihad* in the religious domain requires fulfillment of a number of conditions. It is only open to anyone who fulfilled the strict criteria stipulated and the outcome is acknowledged by the religion as valid (Badi and Tajdin, 2005). Thus, Muhammad (SAW) often used creative measures in attempting to reflect the understanding of his companions on this important religious precept.

### CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION

**Teaching and learning:** Creativity and innovation is deemed important today as it can bring progress and can also make life better. In education, the implementation of new, interesting, unique, extraordinary and helpful teaching and learning environment could then instill in the students the importance of knowledge acquisition. Now-a-days, the process of acquiring knowledge is executed in several ways such as face-to-face classes, online lecture, virtual lessons, audio-visual course and instructional software. It is a fact that listening to lesson when attending classes has become a tradition of more than a 100 years and represents authoritative exponents of Islamic orthodoxy. This can be seen from what was practiced in the traditional religious school (*pondok*) and religious education of Malaya in the pre-modern period. In reference to the *pondok* system, an obedient student is he who does not argue with the religious instruction of the teacher. As such, students sit in circle around the teacher to listen to his religious instruction. Wan Mohd Shaghir contended that the system of education in *pondok* concentrates on learning by heart similar method is still being practiced in many *pondoks* until today with few adjustments. Such a traditional teaching and learning methods prompted the thinkers of the early 20th centuries in Malaya to introduce a new style of religious education. The establishment of several newly styled Arabic religious schools such as Madrasah al-Iqbal in Singapore, 1908, Madrasah Alhady in Malacca, 1915 and Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiyyah in Penang, 1916 was a clear departure from the existing Arabic religious schools at that time and marks the process of integration of education. At these new religious schools, for instance chairs and tables were used in

classroom to provide a comfortable environment of study. Unlike the new style Arabic religious schools, the traditional ones employed the conventional method of teaching and learning that was very much similar to the pondok education (Adibah, 2011).

As far as contemporary Islamic education is concerned, two-way communication is regarded as one of the effective techniques to deliver lessons to the students. In a two-way communication, the student receives the message that is sent by the teacher and then responds to it. In other words, a two-way type of communication provides the opportunity of feedback for the teacher and student. Thus, this technique may transform the environment of a classroom into student centered learning. The technique is almost different from the practice of the traditional method which is teacher centered and which most of the time is a one-way communication. In a one-way communication, the teacher sends out message or instruction which may whether receive a response or not. Teacher may find that the one-way communication is quite ideal to use at certain times, for instance when addressing a group of students or giving them instructions on assigned task.

Shalih maintained that a two-way communication method in teaching and learning was exhibited by Muhammad (SAW) when he propagated Islam to his people during his time. He used catchy words or phrases that can attract the listeners and hence, giving full attention to his speech or teaching. Catchy words that are coupled with correct body language that includes facial expression, gestures and postural language in a two-way communication would enhance the process of teaching and learning. With the use of audio visual aids, the study of Islamic education would not be seen as dry and dull. Several other ways such as e-learning, collaborative and problem-based learning would also be useful to teach and learn the Islamic studies. Student centered learning in higher education, especially in Islamic studies is regarded as necessary in order to create a new means of teaching and learning. This would be in line with the needs of modern generation who are tech savvy and prefer to learn via new learning styles.

**Materials:** In the 21st century with all the rapid advancement that has been achieved specifically in the field of communications and information technology, Islamic educators need to take a hard look at their methods of teaching vis-a-vis the materials used to enhance the teaching and learning experience for the sake of both the teacher and student. Without instructional materials, classes tend more often than not to end up being one-way exercises in communication with teacher and students resigned to being at either end of a gaping

hole, the gap between the world of the teacher and that of the student. It is no longer conducive to the process of teaching and learning when the only material in the classroom, beside the teacher himself and his knowledge as well as expertise is the blackboard (Brown and Race, 2002).

In the past several years, a number of monumental changes have occurred in the classroom with regard to instructional materials or tools. Brown and Race (2002) have surveyed the materials at the disposal of teachers that can be utilized in the classroom. The advantage of using a roller blackboard is that one can use it without having to erase previously written material from the same lecture. Most instructional aides or materials that can be found in relatively well-equipped classrooms include overhead projectors, either suspended from the ceiling or beaming through a projection box at the back of the classroom, linked to either a classroom computer or the teacher's laptop computer (Newble and Cannon, 2000). Through these, teachers can show students illustrated PowerPoint lecture notes, scanned documents, relevant pictures, video clips, Arabic calligraphy and even pages from Islamic heritage books, all of which make learning so much more interesting than if these instructional tools were not available. In addition, teachers can also show students something on the internet instantly if the classroom computer is equipped with a fast modem. A well-equipped classroom ideally might have a touch-sensitive screen or switch that can be used to dim the lights in the room, close the window blinds and start the projector (Brown and Race, 2002). That switch perhaps can also be used to silence the noisy air-conditioner or ventilation system for a few minutes while students concentrate on watching and hearing a conversation between two or more people which is deemed relevant to what they are studying, such as watching a role play dialogue in an Arabic listening and speaking class. Instructional material does not just refer to electronic gadgets and equipment but also includes things like maps, charts, posters, illustrations and diagrams. When teaching Islamic history, for example a map of the Arabian peninsula would be of great help in making students understand the location of various places referred to by the teacher, places where conflicts were won or lost or where Muhammad (SAW) travelled or trade routes used by Muslim traders in the past. It is one thing to tell students orally where a conquest took place and how it was fought and another to show them the exact place where the conquest happened and to screen illustrated pictures of the conquest. This helps students to visualize events which in turn means, they will probably remember them better. After all, a picture is worth a 1000 words.

When teaching children three-dimensional objects could be of great benefit in making children understand something. These also are considered as instructional materials and they may include educational toys, miniature objects representing real ones and costumes. Children would be encouraged to handle these materials to enhance their sense of touch and to understand better the function of the object being handled. The teaching of the various Islamic disciplines such as the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, life story of Muhammad (SAW), the fundamentals of the religion, including the method of praying in Islam, the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of Islamic faith, along with Islamic doctrines, rituals, jurisprudence and history will be made more attractive to students when they learn in an environment which is rich with instructional materials and aids. In today's exceedingly fast-paced era, attention spans of students are very short. Unless teachers make use of instructional materials to supplement their conventional methods of teaching, it is going to be very difficult indeed to attract students and make them become interested in what a teacher has to say.

### CONCLUSION

This preliminary study has attempted to provide a distinctive perspective on the concept of creativity and innovation in Islam as exemplified by Muhammad (SAW) and the necessity of its implementation in contemporary Islamic educational system. In fact, the topics of creativity and innovation should be considered, as crucial skills that need to be mastered by the youngsters of the present age to survive in the era of knowledge and innovation based science and technology. A further study is indeed necessary and is in progress to model a more comprehensive concept of creativity and innovation in Islam based on the examples of Muhammad (SAW).

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