An Ideal Islamic Educational Institution: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract:

There is a growing dichotomy between Islamic ideology and the application of Islamic values. If this trend continues, the notion that Islam, as a religion, is not a reliable source of knowledge or a moral guide may become the norm, with religion destined to remain separate from the real world. Thus, the impact of Islam as a way of life could be jeopardized. The ensuing consequence may result with formal worship becoming isolated from everyday application, whereby worship becomes limited to rituals. The treatment of this chasm should address the cause: a lack of educating and preparing students to live an Islamically aligned life, which serves both God and their community. A significant contribution toward a solution is to structure an Islamic Educational Institution (IEI). This paper proposes a conceptual model for an ideal Islamic Educational Institution that is Shari'ah-Compliant. This model may provide a contribution toward bridging the gap between the ideology and application of Islamic values and knowledge, thereby cultivating principled Muslims.

Keywords: Islam, Islamic educational institution, Shari'ah compliance, religion and education

1. More than a Faith - Islam: A System of Life

In Islam, man and woman are equally accountable to their creator. Therefore, each and every action is weighed against "accountability in the next life and the [reward and/or] punishment of Allah [God]" (Er, 2008: 34). The code of conduct in Islam stresses the importance of the relationship of man to his creator. In this way, an Islamic code of conduct is enforceable at all times since God is always watching the conduct of all people, with eternal knowledge and is, notably, closer to man than his jugular vein (Beekun, 1996). As a growing religion, Islam dictates the individual and collective behavior of all Muslims, who are the majority in more than 50 countries and account for more than one-fifth of the

world's population (Almoharby, 2011; Abuznaid, 2009; Sawar, 1989; Uddin, 2003). Islam, the second largest and the fastest growing religion in the world, (Armstrong, 2000; Khaliq and Ogunsola, 2011; Suter, 1997) provides individuals, and organizations, with directions to guide personal, moral, social, economic, educational, legal, and environmental directives (Ahmad, 2003).

An Islamic code of conduct serves as a framework of reference upon which individuals base their actions and also provides the moral foundations and rules for appropriate behavior (Alawneh, 1998; Ali and Gibs, 1998; Ati, 1995; Er, 2008; Kazmi, 2007; Siddiqui, 1994). Islam is more of a system of life, rather than a faith, (Branine and Pollard, 2010; Er, 2008; Lada *et al.* 2009; Maznil, 1997) that has a considerable impact on educational, social, economic, and political organizations (Metcalfe, 2007; Stone, 2002; Yousef, 2001). Despite what often seems like an expanding gap between religious ideals and day-to-day practice, many Muslim countries are experiencing a substantial revival of Islamic traditions (Hashim, 2009; Tahir and Brimble, 2011; Tayeb, 1997) and are realizing Islam's significance in several capacities of life outside the realm of formal worship, such as: banking, policy development, finance, and others (Abdullah, 2010; Martin and Ahmed, 2011; Monger and Rawashdeh, 2008). As such, Islam also offers the infrastructure for establishing a sustainable educational framework that fosters learning, personal and professional development, a deep-rooted sense of self-worth, and good citizenship.

2. Islamic Law

Islamic law (Shari'ah) is derived from the divine word of God, the Qur'an, and the Sunnah (the teachings, actions, and sayings (Hadith) of his Messenger, Mohammad, Peace be Upon Him) (Alhabashi, 1993; Branine and Pollard, 2010).

The Qur'an, which is a comprehensive, unchanging, and an eternal "absolute referencing mechanism" (Almoharbi, 2011:102) contains 500 specific legal injunctions and many other verses strictly devoted to the proper, permissible, and lawful (Halal) conduct of organizations (Lada *et al.* 2009). One of the premises upon which Shari'ah was founded is to promote the welfare of the people, protecting and enhancing their personal rights, property, wealth, etc. (Almoharby, 2011). All activities of individuals, and organizations, are grouped into two classifications: the permissible (*Halal*) and the prohibited (*Haram*). Shari'ah is grouped into three categories: Daruriyyat (Essentials), Hajiyyat (Complementary), and Tahsiniyyat (Embellishments). These three categories summarize the core objectives of Shari'ah in order of importance. Firstly, the *Essentials* refer to aspects of life that are vital to existence. A few notable examples of this category include: food, shelter, healthcare, clothes, and education. Secondly, the *Complementary* refers to aspects of life that complement the essentials and, while individuals could live without these, their absence may cause undue hardship. This category includes subjects such as communication tools and transportation. Lastly, the *Embellishment* refers to actions and activities, which lead to enhancements in life, and, while this category will not necessarily

elevate one's standard of living, it may enhance the quality of life. Hobbies and recreational activities, along with abstaining from excessive extravagance are examples of the *Embellishments*. (Abdallah, 2010; Hallaq, 2004; Kamali, 1989 & 1991)

Education falls into the *Essentials* category, though aspects of an educational institution may encompass all three. Firstly, learning is an essential process of human development from infancy. The first word of God revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (Qu'ran 96:1) was "Read". Learning is how one develops intellect, skills, and character. It is how individuals grow. Learning and development during childhood and adolescence greatly impact the way individuals perceive and interact with the world around them in adulthood. More essential, still, is the honing of one's intellectual development and moral understanding to live a principled life, contributing to the betterment of society and the larger communities around the world. If an educational institution were to focus only on the occupational, vocational, and intellectual aspects while ignoring or minimizing the importance of character development, which is essential in Islam, a student may be only partially developed and, therefore, only partially able to understand his/her place in this world. A primary role of an educational institution, especially an IEI, is to nurture the *whole* self. *Hajiyyat*, the *Complementary*, directly affect the essentials. Aspects of educational institutions such as communication and transportation can have a profound impact on a student's ability to attend the institution and learn. Communication with stakeholders is immensely important to both the success of the institution and the success of the student. Transportation, if unavailable or very difficult to secure could result with students not attending classes.

Lastly, the *Embellishments*, *Tahsiniyyat,* provide further opportunities for developing a student's moral compass and positive self-image by providing positive recreational activities for students and professional development for staff. Thus, Shari'ah plays a critical role in both the development and operation of an Islamic Educational Institution.

Shari'ah also impacts the daily activity of decision-making, be it academic or administrative. While Shari'ah should make decision-making process easier, Islamic maxims exist as regulators, or points of reference, when aspects of Shari'ah may be unclear. In order to accommodate new developments and changes in society, scholars have extracted maxims from the primary aims of Shari'ah. This process is referred to as *Usul-al-Fiqh*, which serves as the basis of Islamic legal jurisprudence. More than 70 maxims, which are typically written using short statements by Islamic scholars and jurists, reflect specific Shari'ah laws (Abdallah, 2010; Hallaq, 2004; Kamali, 1991).

The most common maxims are presented in Table 1: Islamic Maxims and Decision Making. Based on these common maxims, it is easy to see how Shari'ah impacts everyday decisions made by many individuals.

In an Ideal Islamic Educational Institution, it is imperative that all decisions are made according to Shari'ah in order to insure fairness and equity among all stakeholders within and outside the institution.

Branine and Pollard (2010: 717) summarized the three basic Islamic principles that guide all economic and social activities:

> "…(1) all wealth and resources are owned by God; (2) humans manage God's wealth and resources as trustees of God; and (3) those most loved by God are those who are most pious, helpful, and useful to other creations, including humans, animals, and the environment."

This notion is clearly supported by the Qur'an:

> *"You are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah."*
> (Qur'an 3:10)

An Islamic Educational Institution, therefore, is expected to recognize that the ultimate purpose of its existence is to nurture and guide students into principled Muslims who understand themselves, their religion, their dealings with others, and their role in the family, community, and society. By institutionalizing Islamic principles, students are immersed in an environment that practices what it preaches. When all aspects of the institution are aligned with Islamic principles, students will experience practical demonstrations of how Islam can be applied in each and every aspect of the everyday life.

3. Building Blocks of the Model

3.1 The Qur'an and the Sunnah

As an Islamic Educational Institution, the importance of the Qur'an cannot be overstated. As the Qur'an is considered the word of God, it is the prime resource for all Muslims. Therefore, by integrating the guidance of Qur'an into the framework of the model, the mission and operations of the institution, as well as the curriculum, an Ideal IEI is focusing on a holistic approach to Islamic education guided immensely by the Qur'an. The Sunnah is the second most important factor for this model. Muslims receive a great deal of pertinent information from the Sunnah. As such, it is natural for the Sunnah to be the second building block upon which this model is constructed. The Qur'an and Sunnah lead into Shari'ah (Islamic Jurisprudence). As an Ideal Islamic Educational Institution is based on Shari'ah, these two foundations (the Qur'an and Sunnah) are where all development, procedures, processes, and curriculum must begin.

3.2 Shari'ah and Islamic Maxims

Shari'ah provides the building blocks for the Ideal Islamic Educational Institution. If, and when, and issue is unclear, Islamic maxims (derived from Shari'ah) will aid in the decision making process. Shari'ah will impact the development of curricula, as well as the Code of Ethics the institution abides by and promotes. It directly influences the procedures and processes the institution follows, the decisions made within the institution, and the goals it wishes to achieve. Shari'ah, based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, impacts all aspects of the institution and leads directly to the formation of mission and vision statements.

3.3 Mission and Vision

The mission and vision statements are designed using Shari'ah as a guide. These declarations act as guides for an IEI to follow; ensuring every action pursued by the institution goes toward achieving its Shari'ah compliant mission and vision. A mission and vision of an IEI would state its purpose of existence.

3.4 Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics serves as an IEI's declaration of values. As the Code of the Ethics is formed based on the Mission and Vision, which were guided by Shari'ah, an IEI ensures Islamic principles are acknowledged as institutional values. Once these values are institutionalized, the Islamic culture will permeate not only the curriculum but also the institution itself. Furthermore, an IEI promotes accountability within the institution by establishing and enforcing a Shari'ah compliant Code of Ethics.

3.5 The Curriculum

Once an IEI explains its values in a Code of Ethics, that same code will lead to the development of the institution's curriculum. The curriculum is dependent upon the successful implementation of several aspects of the model, including: an Islamically-sound Mission and Vision, a Code of Ethics, and clear Goals and Objectives. The curriculum, in turn, has a direct influence on the education of a student. It is important to note that an IEI is compatible with any form education, not strictly an "Islamic" education. For example, an individual wishes to study engineering; at an IEI, that individual would pursue his/her education just as he/she would at any other institution offering a similar program. The notable difference, however, is that Islam impacts his/her education by establishing Islamic principles in the way the IEI is operated, and encourages the student to consider how Islam affects his/her desired specialization.

3.6 Shari'ah-Compliance Checkpoint

The *Shari'ah Compliance Checkpoint* is the heart of this model. The checkpoint serves a vital function as it maintains a Shari'ah compliant culture and ensures any action being pursued by an IEI is aligned with Islamic principles. Each time an issue goes through the Shari'ah Compliance Checkpoint, there are three possibilities: yes, no, or maybe. If the issue is Shari'ah compliant, and therefore aligned with Islamic principles, the matter may continue and be operationalized in either an academic or administrative capacity. If the issue not Shari'ah compliant, it may not proceed. No further action may be taken. If, however, the issue is in dispute, resulting with a "maybe", the matter at hand is returned to be re-examined according to Shari'ah and necessary Islamic maxims. Only at such a time the issue is deemed Shari'ah compliant may it continue to be operationalized. All issues encountered by the institution shall be required to go through this process, including the Mission and Vision, Code of Ethics, Goals and Objectives, and the Curriculum. By maintaining this Shari'ah Compliant culture, an IEI maintains Islamic principles within the entire institution. The model, as presented here, has been modified to represent an IEI.

However, it could easily be adapted to structure many other organizations, including: businesses, not-for-profits, NGOs and others.

3.7 Academic and Administrative Policies, Procedures, Functions, Activities, and Tasks
Every policy, procedure, function, activity, and/or task is a result of the Shari'ah Compliance Checkpoint. These are the result of an IEI's goals and objectives. Whether regarding an academic or administrative issue, any and all actions taken by the institution are the result of an issue being deemed Shari'ah Compliant. Once operationalized, these actions will continue to be re-evaluated by being examined by the Shari'ah Compliance Checkpoint. This continuous process ensures Shari'ah compliance is maintained.

3.8 Output: A Principled Muslim
The output of an IEI is principled Muslims. The output, however, is dependent on the successful implementation of the model. At the heart of a Muslim is one's relationship with one's Lord. Fulfilling one's responsibilities to God should be a first and foremost priority for each Muslim. A principled Muslim will possess a strong understanding of their religion and recognize how it applies in their everyday lives. They should understand Islam holistically, realizing that all their actions and activities are guided by Islam. Principled Muslims interact appropriately with all people, strive for academic excellence, and seek to serve God and their community.

4   The Model's Mechanisms

The work of an Islamic Educational Institution is continuously conscious of, and focused on, educating the entire person by engaging in activities, whether from an institutional, developmental, curricular, or recreational perspective, that always promote permissible, *halal,* endeavors (Jabnoun, 2008). An IEI encourages and maintains this Shari'ah – Compliant culture by ensuring all aspects of the institution are aligned with Islamic principles.

Vision and mission statements act as declarations explaining the purpose of existence and the future direction of the institution, which then guide the formation of goals, objectives, tasks, and activities. The vision of an Ideal IEI is founded upon righteousness as Islam commands Muslims to cooperate only on beneficial (halal) endeavors in the best way possible.

> *…Help one another unto righteousness and pious duty. Help not one another unto sin and transgression, but keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is severe in punishment.*
> (Qur'an 5:2)

When the vision, mission, and code of ethics of an IEI are founded on Shari'ah, the goals and objectives are filtered through Islamic guidelines which Muslims are required to, at all times, abide by, since their application is under the careful watch of God. As Jabnoun (2008: 70) recommends,

"Every Muslim organization needs to have a clear mission statement to use as a frame of reference in planning, implementing, and controlling its activities… all these mission statements can start by indicating the common denominator, which is 'the worship of Allah through…'".

The code of ethics then leads to the development of the curriculum and is operationalized in two areas: academic and administrative. The curriculum is dependent upon the successful implementation of several aspects of the model, including: an Islamically-sound Mission and Vision, a Code of Ethics, and clear Goals and Objectives. The curriculum, in turn, dictates the education of a student. As this is an educational model, the curriculum is a cornerstone of the institution.

The mission and vision, code of ethics, goals and objectives, and curriculum are all continuously checked for Shari'ah compliance. If all aspects are Shari'ah compliant, then policies and procedures can be developed. The policies and procedures align with fundamental building blocks, such as: truthfulness, honesty, prioritization (loving God more than your self-interest), integrity, patience, fairness, equity, humility, satisfaction, generosity, dignity, and trustworthiness. While it is safe to generalize that these are universal human virtues, in Islam these virtues are considered *commands* directly from God; commands which must be obeyed and strictly adhered to by all Muslims. For example, as Table 2 shows, truthfulness is a command, as stated in the Qur'an (5:119):

> *And he who brings truth and he who confirms (and supports it) – such are the men who do right. And Allah will say: this is a day on which the truthful will profit from their truth. Theirs are the gardens, with rivers flowing beneath their eternal home.*

The curriculum is aligned with the goals and objectives, which are further aligned with the code of ethics. This helps ensure alignment with Shari'ah.

In conclusion, an IEI is a unique place of learning, where Muslims attain academic excellence in their respective fields, along with practical application of their faith. The Shari'ah-compliant culture permeates not only the output of the Ideal Islamic Educational Institution but is also reinforced, practiced, engrained, and intertwined in the fabrics of all aspects of the institution, thus, operationalizing Islam as a system of life.

Tables and Figures:

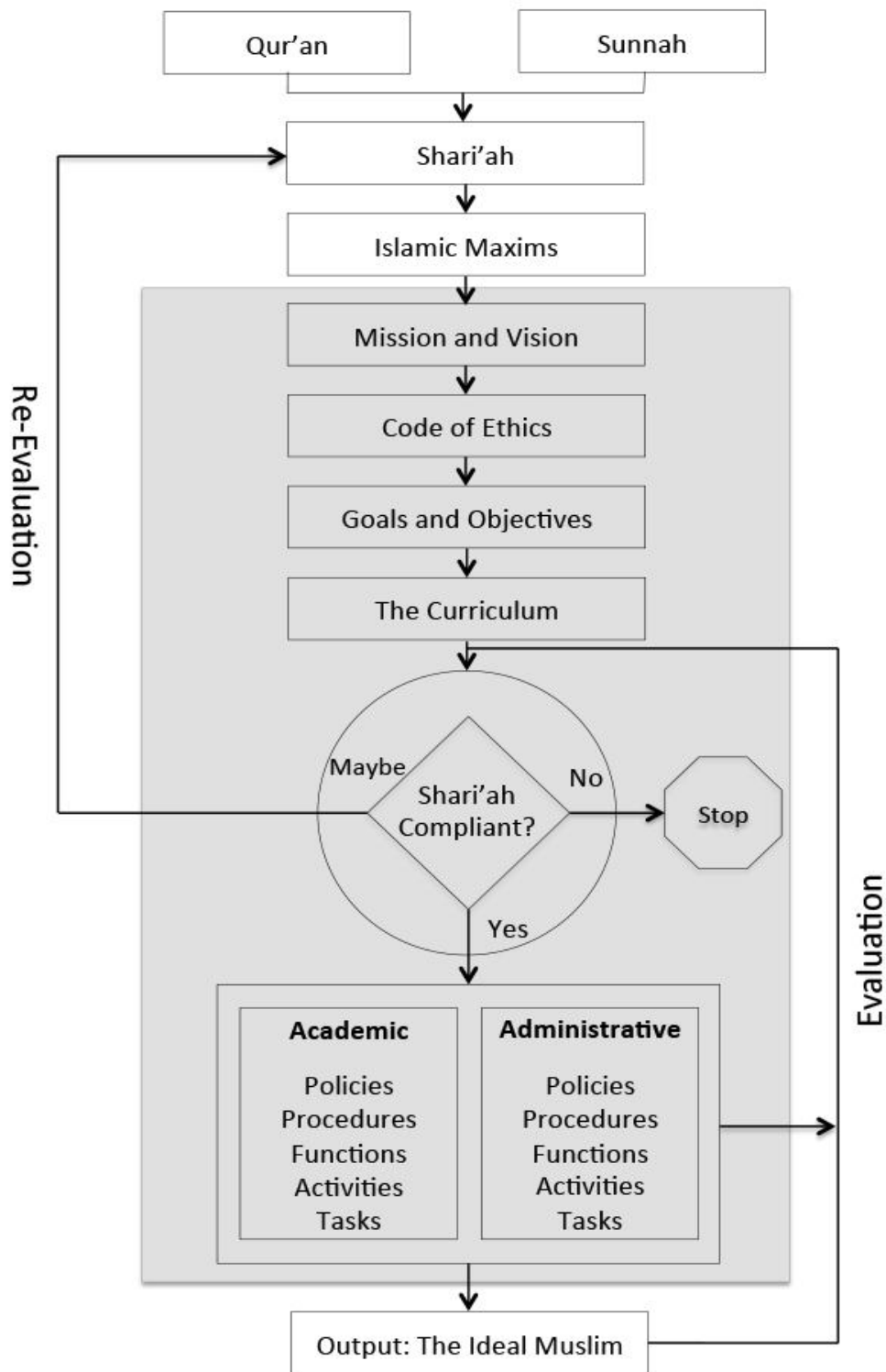## The Ideal Islamic Educational Institution

Figure 1: The Ideal Islamic Education Institution

Variable	Maxim
Harm	Harm must be eliminated
	Harm is not to be inflicted nor reciprocated
	Harm is eliminated to the extent possible
	Harm is not eliminated by another harm
	Preventing harm is given preference over gaining benefit
	Specific harm is tolerated in order to prevent a more general harm
Benefit	Public interest takes precedence over personal interest
Certainty	In case of conflict between two options, adopt the uncomplicated one for it is closer to the truth
	Certainty cannot be overruled by doubt
Validity	The norm is to regard a thing as permissible unless proven of its forbiddances
	The norm is that of non-liability unless proven otherwise
	The norm is that the status quo remains as is unless it's proven to have changed
Legality	Acts are judged by their intention behind them
	An act is illegal whether done by the person or by the agent

Table 1 Islamic Maxims and Decision Making

Universal Virtue	Shari'ah
Truthfulness	*…and speak always the truth. (Qur'an 33:70)*
Honesty	*And do not pursue (do not assume and do not say) that of which you have no knowledge (17:36)*
Integrity	Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said: "If you guarantee me six things on your part, I shall guarantee you paradise: speak the truth when you talk, keep a promise when you make, when you are entrusted with something fulfill your trust, avoid sexual immorality, lower your eyes, and restrain your hand from injustice."
Patience	*…and when the ignorant addresses them harshly, they say words of peace (25:63)*
Fairness	*And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance (55:9)*
Equity	*And We charge no soul (except that within) its capacity and with Us is a record which speaks the truth; and they will not be wronged (23:62)*

Trustworthiness	*Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people, judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing (4:58)*

Table 2: Shari'ah and Selected Universal Values

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