

Lifelong Learning among Islamic Education Teachers

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Abstract

The fourth industrial revolution (IR4.0) is expected to accelerate occupational change, with new professions emerging while others are left behind. Therefore, it is certain that this development will lead to a change in social status and demand a big change both in education and learning. However, the results of previous studies found that teachers still lack knowledge and skills in teaching. Therefore, Islamic Education teachers are seen as frontliners who are exposed to progress and should take the initiative to improve their knowledge, skills, and professionalism, as organized by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Lifelong learning, also known as continuous learning, is also related to the aim of shaping and developing people to become knowledgeable, faithful, and righteous Muslims. This concept paper aims to examine the lifelong learning practices of Islamic education teachers (GPI). This concept paper can be used as a reference for GPIs in an effort to improve their learning practices.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Continuous Learning, Teacher Knowledge, Teacher Professionalism, Teacher Development.

Introduction

Education is a very important sector in determining the quality of Malaysian society (Abu Hassan & Musa, 2020). In order to keep Malaysian education in line with the world of education in foreign countries, it is certain that teachers, who are the main pillars, need to work hard to prepare themselves and be open-minded to the technological explosion in today's education system. Teachers cannot avoid being proactive in pursuing technology to benefit their students. According to (Halili, 2020), 21st century students are also known as the digital generation, and teachers need to play a vital role in changing and improving their teaching and learning delivery methods. In line with that, the mastery of knowledge is very important for teachers, and it is not an exception for Islamic education teachers, either. They should be skilled in religious knowledge and also in other fields such as current technology in

order to be able to convey knowledge effectively to students in line with technological developments and changes in modern education (Kasmin et al., 2019; Sukor & Azman, 2021).

We need to realize that the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysian schools has led to major changes in the implementation of education. Therefore, teachers need to adapt and improve their skills to keep up with new technology (Lubis et al., 2021). This is because in-depth knowledge mastery is a requirement for teachers (Hussin, 2022). Starting from that, the change of a phenomenon will require teachers to make a shift to develop knowledge and skills in order to be able to adapt to the current situation. There is no doubt that there are various methods to improve teachers' skills in teaching and learning practices. Some of these methods have already been outlined in the Malaysian Teacher Standard (2009), which states that teachers must have a value-based teaching approach, a professional understanding of their subjects, and knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning concepts.

Aripin & Hamzah (2017) concluded that teaching has more impact if effective and careful planning is always practiced in schools. Likewise, with the views expressed by Vanneman et al. (2009) and the Georgia Department of Education (2010), only teacher development programs can help improve student performance. In addition, according to Wood (2023), quality teacher training and continuous learning are very important in providing a high-quality education that is sufficient to produce student success. Therefore, training and human resource development are seen as very important functions in making the changes that occur in the environment a success (Aripin & Hamzah, 2017).

However, according to Choi & Liu (2020) study, the results of the analysis from previous studies showed that teachers pedagogical skills and the practice of sharing are still at a low level, and they still tend to work alone (Ismail et al. (2015). This is reinforced by the fact that teachers' knowledge of the use of interactive materials is still moderately high (Hilmi & Halim, 2022), and it is also found that GPIs are still weak in the use of information technology in teaching. Meanwhile, the findings also showed a significant relationship at a low level between pedagogy and students' academic achievement (Goliong et al., 2016). Next, the study by (Sulaiman & Wak, 2018) found that 90% of teachers in schools do not have good knowledge about differentiated teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, in another study, it was found that GPIs lacked preparation and skills related to technology in education despite the relevant courses; previously, it was only used as a complement to the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Kasim et al., 2022). Likewise, from the aspect of innovation in the classroom, the lack of knowledge becomes an obstacle for teachers to innovate when carrying out their teaching practices (Muhamad, 2015).

On the other hand, (Abdullah, 2011) found that GPIs still lacks training related to the latest pedagogy, causing the level of student-centered teaching to be at a level that still needs to be improved. There is no denying that there are still GPIs who are not very good at mastering content knowledge, especially those related to naqli and aqli knowledge (Ramlie, 2017). Therefore, GPIs should master naqli and aqli knowledge as best as possible because they are transferring the knowledge to their students and the community. According to (Ghavifekr et al., 2016; Hammack, 2018; Holmqvist, 2019; Ismail, Mohd Nopiah & Mohd Sattar, 2018) teachers are lacking skills in teaching due to incompatible training with teaching options, lack

of motivation, lack of skills, inability to meet students' needs, difficulty in writing articles, and a lack of preparatory training and in-service trainings. Based on this problem, the researcher wants to investigate more broadly the need for lifelong learning for GPIs so that it can help them improve their skills and then be able to convey their knowledge in the best way possible to their students.

Lifelong Learning Concept

In the 2013 UNESCO report, UNESCO's goal and policy are to strengthen policies to create a lifelong learning system. Teachers who hold the title of educator need to be aware that lifelong learning is an active process in which teachers develop knowledge, skills, and understanding to achieve their professional needs. Lifelong learning is one of the elements that can contribute to the development of teacher professionalism for future education goals. Changes and innovations in the world require individuals to constantly evolve, which causes the need for lifelong learning throughout society (Bohari et al., 2020).

Yacizi et al. (2021) defines lifelong learning as encompassing the changes and transformations that occur in cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning along with biological development in the process from birth to death. In addition, lifelong learning is a learning process that teachers need to master in order to maintain the quality of their profession (Mohd Bohari et al., 2020). In this sense, lifelong learning helps individuals acquire more complex skills throughout their lives, which makes them one of the most important skills and competencies (Nguyen et al., 2020; Salite, 2015; Salite et al., 2020) and have a positive impact on teachers' careers (Bohari et al., 2020).

According to (Padillo et al., 2021), learning to teach reflectively is a lifelong process that is reinforced through active involvement in various professional development activities inside or outside of school. Lifelong learning is not only practiced in Malaysia; even developing countries take the approach of implementing lifelong learning in their communities, such as in North America, Europe, Japan, and Korea, promoting lifelong learning programs as described in the UNESCO report. In addition, Islamic countries such as the UAE do not miss the opportunity to apply the concept of Islamic lifelong learning in professional development programs to meet the high international demands for highly skilled Islamic education teachers (Alhashmi & Moussa-Inaty, 2021).

From the concept highlighted above, it is clear that as educators, especially GPIs, it is necessary to focus on lifelong learning because it is in line with Islamic demands that every human being should seek knowledge not only for his own benefit but also for the ummah.

The Relationship of the Concept of Lifelong Learning with Demands for Knowledge

The context of lifelong learning in Islam is very clear because Islam encourages the believers to seek knowledge in various fields for the benefit of mankind. This means that the knowledge acquired by mankind will never be enough. So, mankind is encouraged to learn something they do not know in order to become a person who knows more. Imam Ash-Shafi'i rahimahullah, stated in his book, Al-Umm:

“Whoever wants the world, he should have knowledge. Whoever wants the afterlife should have knowledge. And whoever wants both, he should have knowledge.”

Islam greatly glorifies knowledge and encourages the believers to become knowledgeable. In this regard, seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim, whether old or young. Learning

throughout life is highly encouraged to raise the height of civilization in the future. Hence, the intended learning process is not only at school and university but also through reading, lectures, workshops, and any other means that can help improve knowledge. The age granted by Allah S.W.T will be filled with knowledge that is beneficial to oneself and society.

Indeed, Islam is a religion that is very concerned about knowledge. Seeking knowledge is a duty for every Muslim from the beginning of life to the end. This shows that throughout life, Muslims always carry the trust of knowledge for the needs of life in this world and the hereafter. The demand to seek knowledge is clear from the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W in Surah Al-Alaq, which contains the command to seek knowledge for every human being. The words of Allah S.W.T in Surah al-Alaq, verses 1–5:

Recite! In the name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exist), Has created man from a clot of congealed blood. Recite! And your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught (the writing) by the pen. Has taught man that which he knew not.

[Surah Al-Alaq 96:1-5]

Knowledge is the main requirement for an educator. If an educator does not have enough knowledge, he will not be able to guide his students. Teachers should always seek opportunities to improve their knowledge of their subject matter, either by learning about a subject in more detail or by learning new techniques. Therefore, teachers need to master knowledge, especially in their field of specialization. Superficial mastery of knowledge will prevent them from imparting sufficient knowledge to their students.

As the internet allows students to access all information and knowledge quickly, it makes the teacher's job more challenging and requires them to master knowledge and information (Rahim, 2017). In line with the latest developments, teachers need to be given continuous training so that their knowledge can be improved after they graduate from university. In addition, educators, especially GPIs, also need to master the latest knowledge of Islamic studies. The importance of certified teachers in the field of knowledge cannot be disputed. This is because many teachers have a background in various specialized fields, which gives them a lot of knowledge and understanding about different subjects.

In addition, GPIs need to have expertise in a pedagogical approach, as emphasized by Ibnu Khaldun, to form students with an intelligent mind, skill, good character, a noble soul, and noble character. This shows that a teacher must be knowledgeable and proficient in the subjects taught, know their approach, be able to use teaching resources effectively, use various teaching strategies, and have good communication and interpersonal skills because it is an important aspect of teaching. According to (Padillo et al., 2021) The teacher's knowledge will help increase students' interest and improve their academic achievement. This is in continuation of the points emphasized by (Okogbaa, 2017) that teachers cannot give what they do not have.

Meanwhile, as mentioned by Pa (1994) teachers should master, understand, and appreciate the contents of their subject matter. They also need to master naqliyyah and aqliyyah knowledge (up-to-date), master the knowledge of pedagogy and psychology, the skills of managing people, complex subjects, and atmospheres, and be sensitive to various methods of teaching and learning nowadays. It cannot be denied that mastery of knowledge is very important in GPI's dictionary of life. They need to master not only religious knowledge but also other additional knowledge, such as current technology, to keep up with changes in modern education. Besides that, they also need to prepare themselves to master current

knowledge such as information and communication technology, pedagogical approaches, knowledge related to humanitarian approaches such as counselling and psychology, as well as various other sciences that can strengthen GPI's position as an authoritative educator (Lubis, Sulaiman & Kamis, 2017).

Therefore, the context of lifelong learning in Islam is very clear because Islam encourages its people to seek knowledge in various fields for the benefit of mankind. This is because the knowledge possessed by humans is never enough; we are encouraged to learn something we do not know in order to become a person who knows more. Therefore, GPIs need to cultivate lifelong learning as a bridge to face the reality of the needs of today's education scenario.

Lifelong Learning Needs for Islamic Education Teachers

Lifelong Learning for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning

Knowledge is the main requirement for an educator. If an educator does not have enough knowledge, he will not be able to guide his students. An Arab proverb says: "People who do not have something will not be able to give something to others" (Abdul Rahim, 2016). Islam encourages its people to accept technological progress that plays a role in improving the quality of life.

Yusof (2013) specified that educators need to find new opportunities and methods in an effort to educate their students to do good deeds and prevent them from doing bad things. Educators need to be committed to constantly seeking various knowledge as well as practicing and respecting the knowledge that has been learned. In addition, educators should always be open to learning and deepening new knowledge that is contemporary, not only for themselves but also for the benefit of the community. Educators should always check for their own shortcomings and weaknesses and keep updating their knowledge.

Al-Abrasyi (1969) emphasized the need for teachers to always strive to improve their knowledge, whether in their own field or in the way of imparting it. A teacher must have a wide range of skills, including in-depth knowledge of the subject being taught. In fact, according to (Al-Nahlawi, 1987), an educator should always improve his knowledge, deepen his knowledge about the subjects he teaches, and master other knowledge such as religious knowledge, history, geography, mathematics, language, and so on.

A study by Hargreaves (2011), who stated that learning and teacher development are critical and the most potential aspects of improving knowledge and skills, which in turn will lead to increased individual and team commitment to the school's goals.

Therefore, Islamic education teachers should acquire as much knowledge as possible, including information technology, from any source that can help smooth the education process. GPIs need to be smart in the use of technology by using it in an integrated and balanced way between religion and material things. As educators, they need to take advantage of the application of technology and its network in an effort to meet the demands of students and universal humanity (Yusof, 2013).

Lifelong Learning as an Agent to Increase Knowledge and Update Skills

Lifelong learning helps teachers make changes and develop their environment. This is because the main role of GPIs is very important because the teaching content is not just related to technical matters limited to a certain field and time period but is a comprehensive way of life covering aspects of beliefs, practices, and morals and aims to appreciate the aspects of a person's life. The teacher's role as a mu'allim (conveyor of knowledge) is to improve

knowledge, especially in their field and expertise, by looking for additional information that has a relationship with their field of expertise.

This is because the explosion of information can have a great impact on students who are exposed to various authentic or otherwise relevant information. As professionals, teachers need to be concerned with the development of the latest knowledge and skills so that we can provide a meaningful learning experience for students and use that knowledge to uphold truth and justice and provide quality and meaningful contributions to students, society, and the country (A. Rashid et al., 2010)

How Lifelong Learning Can Be Implemented

In an effort to ensure that the teacher's roles remain relevant and can educate the younger generation today more effectively, the following points need to be taken seriously:

Personal Learning Plan

Only teachers who continue to learn can offer innovation in their classroom. In fact, not only can reforms in classroom teaching practices be offered, but teachers who continue to improve their self-efficacy are teachers who can realize education for sustainable development (Sumaryanta et al., 2019). Furthermore, lifelong learning for adult learners is considered a necessity in the 21st century (Glastra, Hake & Schedler, 2004). The study shows that teachers take the initiative and study on their own to acquire knowledge and competence by pursuing their studies in advanced degree programs (Ronnerman & Olin, 2021; Sepulveda-Escobar, 2022) and degree programs (Halinger, Tran & Troung, 2021; Nolan & Molla, 2019). According to (Hallinger et al., 2021) although teachers are motivated to learn on their own, learning at this level is time-consuming and expensive, causing many senior teachers and some others to lose interest and forced to forget their desire. In the meantime, this personal learning also opens up the opportunity to choose a new career in the future. Next, the study by (Estevez, Souto-Seijo & Rey, 2021) shows that progressive teachers choose personal learning that is less institutionalized and non-formal to meet their needs and interests. Proven, with this learning program teachers experience strength in collaborating and engaging in dialogue with their peers, which opens their eyes to benefit and makes them critical friends to each other and to others as well (Ronnerman & Olin, 2021).

Long Term/ Short Term Courses

In-service trainings (LDP) is one of the important activities that need to be done in the school organization. Therefore, the effective implementation of LDP needs to follow the needs of teachers, taking into account their teaching experience and the frequency of attending trainings (Mohd Hamzah & Sirat, 2018). The findings of this study also show that effective training has a positive relationship with employee performance (Lubis et al., 2021). High-quality professional development programs could foster job satisfaction and change their attitudes and beliefs. Modifications in teachers' attitudes and beliefs are also important in implementing the school curriculum and improving student learning outcomes (Al-Mutawah et al., 2019). Professional development through LDP or LADAP at the school level needs to be intensified and expanded. This responsibility rests with all parties, especially the school administrators and the entire school community itself (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Hallinger et al. (2021) found that there are various short-term courses offered by the school or department related to curriculum areas for teachers to add credit points to their continuing training certificates. Participation is voluntary, or on the recommendation of school administrators, or compulsory courses directed by the ministry, education department, or district division. Teachers' new knowledge gained through continuing education courses

combined with action research projects can immediately be implemented in their practice, and the impact on student learning achievement is directly observed (Kellner & Attorps, 2020).

Action Research

Action research is seen as either research oriented towards teachers' work and teaching practices in the classroom or the development of new educational strategies that are oriented towards the shortcomings or personal interests of teachers and students (Eilks, 2018; Eilks et al., 2012). (Al-Abrasyi, 1974) emphasises that teachers should constantly improve their knowledge in the field being taught by doing more research or by improving the way they teach the subject. Furthermore, it is necessary for teachers to have in-depth knowledge of the subjects they teach. According to James, if teachers only learn based on work experience, then it is too little or insufficient. Unless they learn something new at work (Avis et al., 2010). The study shows that action research is implemented to improve educational practices based on solving complex problems and teaching practices. Action research is acceptable because it encourages teachers to take their own initiative. This allows them to explore and test teaching strategies and improve their knowledge. Action research cannot be separated from teaching, and it gives it a higher level of quality (Zajic et al., 2021) and effective (Kalman et al., 2022). Through action research, teachers can develop alternative perspectives about their own practice (Ronnerman & Olin, 2021). Writing one's own practice is not only focused on specific content or subjects but also involves the inquiry process itself.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

The main purpose of PLC is to share the skills and knowledge of teachers, build quality relationships, plan focused programs, mobilize existing resources in the environment, and share leadership in an effort to realize the National Education Policy to produce quality human capital in the future (Teacher Education Department, 2019).

Teachers participating in the PLC projects have indeed gained a lot of competence, have built relationships of trust and learning, and have experienced a higher level of autonomy through collaborative learning (Zaalouk et al., 2021). Working collaboratively through the PLC approach will develop teachers' professionalism and further improve the quality of their teaching (Iksan, 2017). The knowledge and skills acquired through PLC can improve the quality of GPIs' teaching in terms of teaching strategies and methods, effective questioning techniques, innovative teaching aids, solving student behaviour problems, and changing GPIs' attitudes to be more positive (Dzul, 2022).

Teachers express a desire for collaborative learning; however, they prefer formal channels (such as the same institution where they teach or the Department of Education) rather than through self-learning mechanisms or non-formal and informal trainings (Morer et al., 2021). Teachers take turns organising lesson observations, and all teachers, including the host, participate fully in coding, analysis, and discussion. The collaboration of colleagues and participation in this intellectual process attracts their interest in uniting hearts and minds in carrying out teaching practices (Gore & Rickards, 2021).

Reading Culture

The study, it was found that teachers read about their subject area (Kalman et al., 2022) and read books and articles (Estevez et al., 2021) to improve their skills and knowledge. In addition, the study by (Sawatzki et al., 2022) tends to confirm that the majority of teachers state that reading is a worthwhile professional activity.

A successful country is one that encourages reading and learning. Islamic teaching itself emphasizes the importance of reading and learning through Surah Al-Alaq, verses 1–5. The words of Allah S.W.T in Surah Al-Alaq clearly show that reading is an important part of learning and that it helps us simplify our lives. Today, there are too many reading materials available electronically, let alone traditional printed materials. So, as educators, especially GPIs, it is important for them to practice reading and learning new information. One of the ways to increase knowledge is to increase the practice of reading. The teachers' reading materials also determine the way they think. Teachers should choose their reading materials wisely so that the increase in knowledge can benefit both teachers and students (Kasmin et al., 2019).

Digital Literacy

It refers to the ability to apply a teaching approach using information and communication technology, through a variety of uses and abilities, to benefit the students during the class. The dropout in the use of ICT among GPIs also has a burden effect on their teaching (Aziz Mahyuddin, 2017). Teachers need to master ICT skills. This is because the digital generation is the generation that grew up in an ICT environment; indeed, they are very proficient in ICT skills. Educators should not be 'allergic' to ICT (Abdul Rahim, 2017).

GPIs need to have the confidence to explore the borderless world of ICT in order to keep pace with the rapid development. Teachers should make full use of ICT facilities to carry out learning and teaching activities in a more interesting and effective manner. Communicating virtually has become a trend in today's world. Teachers need to wisely take the opportunity to build relationships outside the classroom with students through this social media network. With this approach, the teacher will be closer to the student, and the teacher will be able to understand the hearts and tendencies of his students. The need for ICT training, training in practical methodology, cultural training, and training in educational psychology is essential. The study by Kalman et al. (2022) shows that teachers develop skills and knowledge about online teaching, recognize different technologies, and integrate them into their learning process. In addition, teachers also use technology to build a blended learning environment. The studies by (Al-Mutawah et al., 2019) and (Schultz & Love, 2022) show that teachers use various platforms and technology tools for teaching. Furthermore, the findings by (Gorozidis et al., 2020) showed that the online Communities of Practice (CoP) program is a very promising perspective to effectively increase teachers' learning and practical knowledge. However, the digital dimension of teachers' professional development practices is still in its infancy (Morer et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This concept paper provides some basics about the concept of lifelong learning. It also discusses ways to improve the ability of teachers to develop lifelong learning policies, in addition to providing some ideas about the roles of teachers. This is because the findings of the study show that teachers use various sources and platforms to acquire new knowledge. On top of that, teachers work hard to improve their potential to meet the needs of their profession. In addition to the courses provided by KPM, some teachers allocate their own time and expenses to increase their expertise in the field they are interested in. Following on from that, it is hoped that the KPM can provide awareness, encouragement, and various interesting initiatives to schools and teachers to foster learning in schools as a lifelong learning culture so that it can bring change and benefit the future of the nation.

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