

INTERNALISING THE PRINCIPLE OF FAITH IN TEACHING-LEARNING

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Accepted date: 25-11-2018

Published date: 14-04-2019

To cite this document: Nasir, W. M., Jaafar, A., Rahman, N. Z. A., & Yacob, N. (2019). Internalising The Principle of Faith In Teaching-Learning. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 4(29), 53-61.

Abstract: *Islam does not make any distinction between religiousity and secular matters. Muslims as servants and vicegerents of Allah are responsible for continually reaffirming their faith in all their activities. This includes teaching-learning as a principal role of a teacher and it encompasses classroom, laboratory, clinic and community engagement activities. The objective of this paper is to explore the application of the principles of faith in teaching-learning activities in a curriculum that integrates naqli and aqli knowledge. It adopts the qualitative research method involving a review of literature that is related to teaching methodology as well as studying the verses of the Quran and the parables of the hadith on faith. In general, teaching-learning sessions consist of three parts, namely the opening, the engagement with students and the closure. In internalising the principle of faith, teachers must start an activity by professing that Allah is the Most Beneficent and the Most Merciful followed by greeting the students. Subsequently, they need to perform supplication in seeking guidance from Allah so that they can perform their tasks with excellence. When engaging with students, praises such as Alhamdulillah, Subhanallah and Maa sya Allah, as well as Astaghfirullah are reinforcements that can enhance repetition of a behaviour. The closure of a teaching-learning session must reinforce the belief in the superiority of Allah that only He knows best. This approach exemplifies the testimony of faith that Allah is one and continually strengthened in all our endeavours including teaching-learning. The concepts derived from this principle will be disseminated to all lecturers in this Faculty for implementation.*

Keywords: Faith, Teaching-Learning, Reinforcement, Integration Naqli-Aqli

Introduction

The curriculum at the Faculty of Dentistry, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia was developed by incorporating ten essential values for a dental practitioner to practice independently and in a safe manner (Nasir, 2015). These values include scientifically knowledgeable; technically competent; biologically oriented; respect for human dignity; socially sensitive; ethically responsible; professionally accountable; effective team member; life-long learner; and always uphold principles of the Oneness of Allah. From these ten values, the most important value that forms the basis of faith (akidah) is the belief in the Oneness of Allah. It means that we accept without reservation that “there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”. This statement of faith is the beginning of our journey on the right path of Islam that is considered as a way of life. The five verses of Surah Al-Ikhlās (chapter 112) are entirely dedicated to the description on oneness of Allah. We exist as a servant of Allah and are responsible to worship Him as stated in the Quran that “And I have not created the Jinn and men but that they may worship Me” (Adz-Dzariyat: 56). We are also vicegerent of Allah to serve humanity (Al-Baqarah: 30). Therefore, teachers as a servant and vicegerent of Allah must internalise the principle of faith in all activities of the curriculum including teaching-learning in the classroom or laboratory or clinic or in the community.

Problem Statement

In the Malaysian context, there are several education systems that coexist. The dominant systems are the secular education system and the Islamic education system. The focus of Islamic education is on religious system of belief and divinity of Islam whilst the secular education is mainly directed to modern knowledge (Peter, 2011). Nevertheless, there are several institutions in Malaysia, notably International Islamic University (IIU) and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) that strived to merge these two systems. The approach by UIA is through Islamisation of knowledge (Ahmad, 2011) and USIM through integration of *naqli* (revealed) and *aqli* (acquired) knowledge (Nasir, 2013). However, the teachers are influenced by the pedagogic approach they are familiar with, that is either the secular education system or the Islamic education system and face difficulties in integrating Islamic and secular knowledge (Ahmad, 2011). USIM, for instance, are continually looking into operationalising the integration of *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge (Puteh-Behak and Saad, 2017). Some of the efforts are developing the curriculum based on the *mustawa* model of ayatisation, comparison, adaptation and integration (Nasir, 2013), application of *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge in research (Nasir, 2017), *muhasabah* in clinical assessment of students (Yacob et al., 2018), development of balanced professional (Yacob and Nasir, 2019), and other relevant activities. Therefore, other activities that integrate *naqli* and *aqli* knowledge in the curriculum need to be developed and disseminated to the teachers for implementation. One of the activities is to internalise the principle of faith in performing their core function as a teacher. This is consistent with the goal of education in Islam that is to produce a good person who understands the rules of behaviour in Islam as well as knowledgeable on and committed to the faith (Halstead, 2004).

Objective

The objective of this paper is to explore the role of teachers in internalising and reinforcing the principles of faith in Allah in their teaching-learning activities. The first part of this paper will deliberate on articles of faith on the responsibility of individuals in their relationship with Allah as in *fardu ain* and their responsibility with fellow man (*fardu kifayah*). This will be followed by the incorporation of greetings and relevant supplications before starting a teaching-learning activity to cultivate the principle of faith. Several statements of faith are also suggested when

engaging with students. Finally, the concept of humans as mere mortals in scope and depth of knowledge as opposed to Allah as the know-all are examined.

Literature Review

This study adopts the qualitative research method involving a review of literature that are related to teaching methodology as well as studying the verses of the quran and the parables of the hadith on faith. In general, teaching-learning sessions consist of three parts, namely the opening, the engagement with students and the closure. The findings with regard to these three components of teaching-learning will form the guide in implementing the principles of faith in teaching-learning.

The Opening

As a muslim, we are required to begin an activity with a statement recognising that Allah is the Most Beneficent and the Most Merciful - *bismillah ir-rahman ir-rahim*. It may not necessarily be uttered audibly but reciting the first sentence of the quran is a good practice in Islam. It is advocated for all muslims to begin their activities with this sentence. It is an act of remembering Allah and recognising that He is the creator. It serves to remind the teachers that whatever knowledge and skills they acquired is granted by Allah. It is also to indicate that the tasks to be performed in the quest to share the advancement in knowledge with their students is with utmost sincerity. It was reported that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said that “Any action of importance not beginning with *bismillah* is devoid of blessing and therefore incomplete” (Sahih Ibnu Hibban #1-2).

The next step a teacher needs to do after reciting the *bismillah* is to greet their students “*As-salamu ‘alaikum*” – May peace be upon you. It is a standard salutation of Muslims not only socially but also in worship. In chapter Al-An’am of the quran, verse 54, Allah said that “When those who believe in Our Ayat come to you, say, “*As-salam ‘alaikum*”, your Lord has prescribed Mercy for Himself, so that if any of you does evil in ignorance, and thereafter repents, and does righteous good deeds (by obeying Allah), then surely He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful”. It is further emphasised in another verse of the quran that “But when you enter the houses, greet one another with a greeting for God, *As-salamu ‘alaikum*” (Surah An-Nur: 61). When interpreted in the context of teaching-learning, a teacher should greet the students as he enters the class room or lecture theatre, as a place of congregation for the students or participants. It can be observed that the greeting differs between muslims. Essentially there are three variations to this greeting as follows:

- *As-Salaamu ‘alaikum - May peace be upon you;*
- *As-Salaamu ‘alaikum wa Rahmatullaah – May peace and mercy of Allah be upon you;*
- *As-Salaamu ‘alaikum wa Rahmatullaahi wa Barakaatuh – May peace, mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you.*

In a civil society, it is a polite gesture to return greetings directed to you. The greeting of *As-Salaamu Alaikum* in whatever variations is not only polite to reply but also an obligation thrust upon Muslim. It was reported that (Sahih Ibnu Hibban #241) “*The Muslim has five rights over his fellow-Muslim:*

- *he should return his salaams;*
- *visit him when he is sick;*
- *attend his funeral;*
- *accept his invitation; and*

- *pray for mercy for him by saying yarhamuk Allah, when he sneezes.*”

After giving the salam, it is a good practice to emphasise the sovereignty of Allah and pray for his blessing to our prophet, his family, companions and followers as outlined below.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى أَشْرَفِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ
وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ أَمَّا بَعْدُ

The above verses are recited as gratitude and appreciation to Allah for His favours and are translated as “Every praise be to Him, to Whom all praise is due! And blessings and peace be upon the compassionate Prophet, and upon his Family and his Companions and upon all his true Followers after them!”.

Finally, in the opening lecture or presentation, we should not take for granted that since we have prepared for the presentation and so will be able to perform our tasks with ease. Before any endeavour, we need to seek help from Allah so that we can put forward our presentation with confidence and clarity. The Al-Fatihah verse 5 that we read at least 17 times a day reminds us that “Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.” It would be for this reason that we need to seek the help of Allah so that we can perform our task with ease.

An appropriate supplication would be Surah Taha, verse 25 to 28. Rabbish rahli sadri, wa yasir li amri, wahloul uqdatam mil-lisaani yafqahu qawli. It is translated as “My Lord, put my heart at peace for me, ease my tasks for me, and loosen the knot from my tongue so that they may understand what I say”. This is the prayer to instill confidence in delivering messages of Allah. It is the prayer that Prophet Moses recited to gain the courage for him to fulfill the obligations of a Messenger in the face of a staunch opposition by the pharaoh. It was to give him the confidence to perform his obligation in delivering the messages. Therefore, we need to make this prayer with sincerity and understand its significance before we start talking with and to our audience. It is a prayer to seek Allah’s help. He has reminded us to “Call on me. I will answer your (prayers). But those who are arrogant to serve me will surely enter Hell in humiliation”. (Surah Al-Ghafir :60).

Engaging with The Learners

Behaviourist as a school of thought, believes that the behaviour of the individual that can be observed is the result of learning. Therefore, a function of a teacher is to facilitate learning through a number of teaching-learning activities. This includes motivating students to sustain the interest in learning through the change in behaviour. One of the approaches to motivate student learning is to adopt the principle of reinforcement during the process of engagement with the students in the classroom.

Reinforcement is a process of strengthening or increasing a behaviour, that is, the behaviour that tends to be repeated. A behaviour which is not reinforced tends to gradually diminish (weakened). This phenomenon is based on the Law of Effect that was formulated by Thorndike through his experiments in the laboratory. He advanced the principle that behaviour that is followed by pleasant consequences is likely to be repeated, and behaviour followed by unpleasant consequences is less likely to be repeated. Skinner further expanded this Law of Effect by introducing the term Reinforcement (Wei and Yazdanifard, 2014).

This theory of reinforcement is often applied in education. Teachers or carers praise or use other verbal reinforcements as an approach in the classroom to get their students to repeat the behaviour. This is often termed as positive reinforcement. Praises such as “I appreciate your hard work”; “terrific progress”, “congratulations on your achievement” are positive connotations. It is meant to provide positive feedback for doing something that is good or desirable (Kelsey, 2010). It was found to work in the short term. Therefore, it was suggested that praise should be used appropriately (Hodgman, 2015), sparingly and as acknowledgement (Wei and Yazdanifard, 2014). This is one of the reasons that praise is not frequently used in the classroom (Kern, 2007). Other reasons include contradiction with educational aims; the teacher's recognition that change is not needed; and the limitations of frequent use of this approach (Hodgman, 2015).

The concept of reinforcement, either positive or negative reinforcement as in reward and punishment that was developed from the laboratory experiments by the western psychologist was introduced in Islam more than 1400 years ago (Nazri, 2011). In Islam, the concept of reward and punishment (*Al-Thawab Wa Al-Ilqab*) rests on his behaviour as a servant of Allah and the relationship with Him and as vicegerent of Allah in his relationship with fellow man. A person will be rewarded for the good that he does and punished for his negative actions in performing these two roles. The Quran tries to shape human behaviour through its frequent promises about rewards and punishments in Hereafter.

Praise and rewards are both positive reinforcements and are generally considered as an encouragement to indicate that something good is done by the person (Wei and Yazdanifard, 2014). Nevertheless, praise and rewards are two different entities. Praise is a positive verbal feedback on a specific behaviour that provides the indication that the said behaviour is appropriate and desirable. Rewards are something of value given in return of an act. Prophet Mohamad (pbuh) detests praises directed to an individual (Sahih al-Bukhari, #1239). It is believed that excessive praises can lead to the person being praised becomes deceived and arrogant. He also advised “Do not praise me excessively like what the Christians worship (Isa) Ibn Maryam, as I was only his slave. Therefore, you should say: “I am only His slave and His messenger” (Sahih al-Bukhari, #3445). It is emphasised that all the praises and thanks are to Allah, the Lord of the heavens and the Lord of the earth, and the Lord of the 'Aalamin including mankind, jinns and all that exists (Surah Al-Jathiya: 36).

It is for this reason that in order to uphold the faith to Allah when engaging with the students, teachers should refrain excessive praises to this charge. Instead, praise Allah who has willed that such good behaviour or achievement is realised. Repeated use of following expressions strengthened the faith of the teacher as well as the students:

- *Maa shaa Allah* (Allah has willed) to express joy, praise or thankfulness for a positive occurrence in an educational setting. It is also to show amazement in the positive actions of our students. This is an expression of admiration or glorifying Allah when we are pleased with the actions of our students. The focus is not in praising the student but indicating the role of Allah in that occurrence. This expression can replace the usual expressions of “great”, “wow”, “well done”, “your assignment is very good”, and other similar expressions.
- *Alhamdulillah* means praise be to Allah. It is not merely any level of praise. It is a high praise to Allah as recited at the early part of the chapter (surah) of Al-Fatihah that focuses on praising Allah. It can be used in any situation in the classroom setting when a teacher is satisfied with the performance or action of the students. If a student

answers the question very well, we can say “Yes, *Alhamdulillah*”. When we announce the results of an assessment that five students obtained distinction, we follow it up with the expression *Alhamdulillah* and *maa shaa Allah*. If they submit the assignment on time, we can also say “*Alhamdulillah*, you are on time”. *Alhamdulillah* indicates a gratitude to Allah for bestowing these students with His continual blessings. Additionally, by expressing *Alhamdulillah* we give credit to Allah instead of taking the praise all to ourselves. It is also an expression of humility, a virtue of a good Muslim. It is therefore important that the supervisors to clinical students remind their charge to always express *Alhamdulillah* when they have successfully performed their treatment on patients as Allah is the Healer.

- *Subhanallah* which means that Allah is free from any imperfections. It is also to express glory or exaltation to Allah. This expression is used when the teacher marvelled at the creation of Allah. Usually, it is to express admiration of natural occurrence. For example, when a patient has a very good set of teeth, we say *subhanallah*. It is not used to show appreciation to the student who gets good grades.
- *In shaa Allah* or if Allah wills. It is an expression that refers to an event that will take place in the future. It is used to denote that it is beyond the means of man to determine with certainty that an event will happen in the future. When students ask us when will they get the result of the assessment, we as teachers should say “Next week (or any specific time), *in shaa Allah*”. However, we should not say *in shaa Allah* merely to please our students when our intention is contrary to what we say. We are reminded in the Quran (Surah Al-Kahfi: 23-24) that we should not make promises that involve the future. If we were to forget, we need to remember Allah and mention the dependency of all future actions on Allah’s will.

We are not free from making mistakes when we are teaching. We need to openly admit our mistakes and seek forgiveness from Allah. The expression *astagfirullah*, which means forgive me Allah or I seek forgiveness from Allah is to indicate that we are mere mortals who are not perfect but always striving for betterment in the right path. On the other hand, when the action of the student is not within the usual norms, the use of this expression indicates disapproval of such actions.

Post-Closure

A lesson or teaching-learning activity starts with a set induction should not end abruptly but must be made through a closure (Ganske, 2017). A closure is critically important, in order to wrap up the lesson. It helps the students to synthesize and summarize what they have learned as well as help them to put in place the data and information in a meaningful context so that they can apply accordingly.

In the context of strengthening our faith, the next step after closure but before we leave is to remind us and the students that it is Allah that knows best. The expression, *Wallahu a’lam bissawab* (Allah knows best) attest our deficiencies in acquiring knowledge. Our acquisition of knowledge is akin to a drop of water in the vast expanse of the ocean. Similarly, important before we leave the class is to express our gratitude to Allah (*Alhamdulillah*) for the work that we have done and wish them peace, mercy and blessings of Allah.

The Operational Model

The above review indicated the actions and behaviours of a teacher during a teaching-learning session. It includes three sections, namely the opening, engaging with students and post-closure. These three sections indicate the actions and behaviours of the teacher in internalising the principle of faith. The setting for these sessions is not confined to lectures but include

laboratory and clinical teaching as well as supervising students during community engagement activities. The operational model as shown in Figure 1 provides a guide for teachers to perform their role in teaching-learning whilst acting as a servant and vicegerent of Allah.

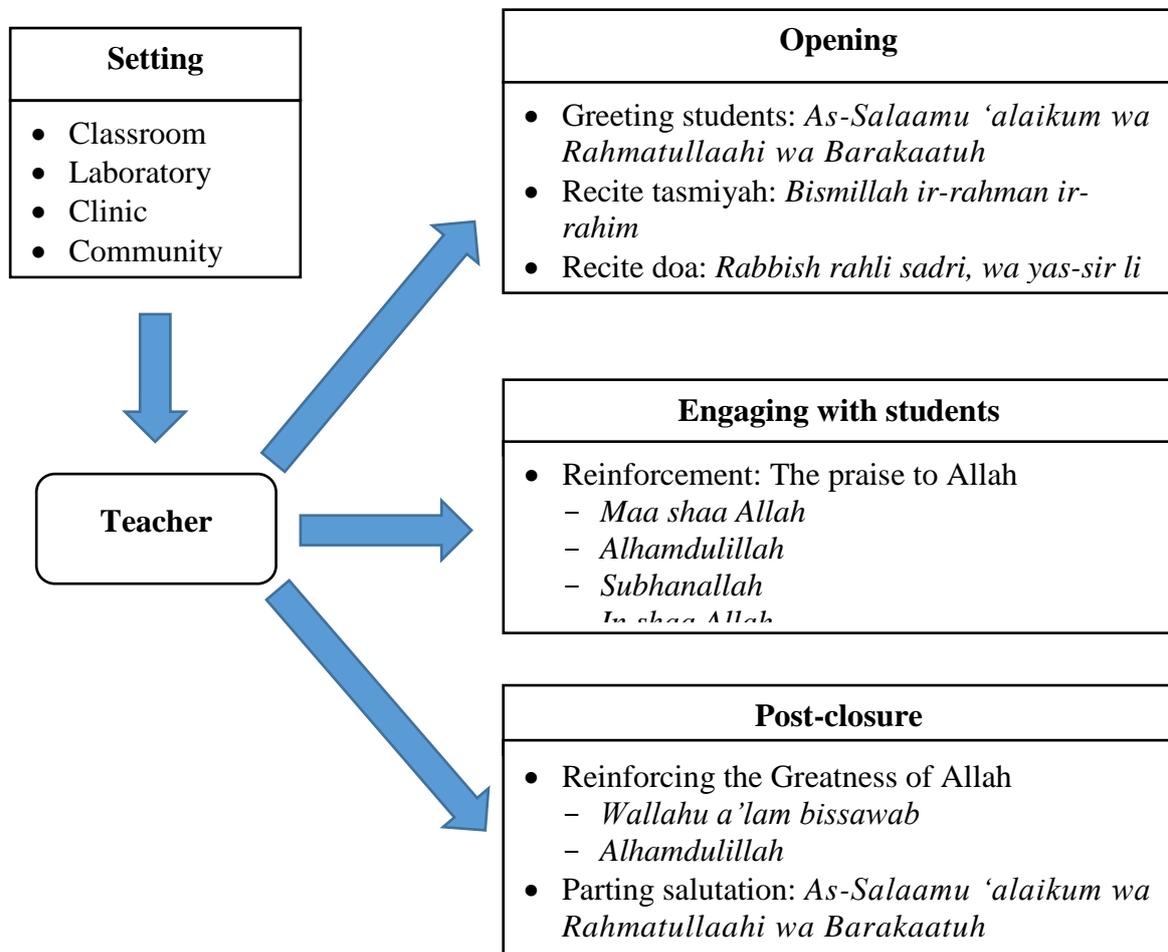


Figure 1: Operational Model for Internalising Faith in Teaching-Learning

Conclusion

Taking into cognisance that Islam is a way of life, it is essential that we reinforce our beliefs in Allah and adopt the Islamic values in all our activities. As a teacher, expressions in the belief in Allah and adopting the Islamic values need to be incorporated in teaching-learning activity. Every endeavour must begin with *bismillah ir-rahman ir-rahim*, initial contact with our students as clients must be accompanied with greetings and we should always seek Allah's help through doa. During the engagement with students, expressions of blessings of Allah must be uttered to recognise that any good things that happen is through his sanction. After wrapping up the session with students, it is essential to remind ourselves that Allah knows best. These greetings, doa and expressions by the teacher during teaching-learning sessions heightened our testimony of faith even in performing our tasks as a vicegerent of Allah. These expressions must be made with sincerity. *Wallahu a'lam bissawab*.

Conflict of Interest

The authors confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest to declare that may arise from being named as author of this manuscript.

Submission Declaration

The authors declare that this manuscript is original and has not been published before. It is currently not considered for publication elsewhere.

Acknowledgement

We are most grateful to the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) and Faculty of Dentistry USIM for the support and approval to conduct this study at the institution.

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