

Exploring the Level of Understanding the Content of Quran among Diverse Groups of People

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Abstract: The Quran, the holy scripture of Islam, is the most comprehensive source of reference for humankind to understand the teachings of Islam. Undeniably, understanding the Quran is a principal and an important aspect in the life of an individual Muslim regardless of their differences. In reality, understanding the teaching of the Quran and applying it in life can make a servant of Allah s.w.t succeed in all aspects of his life. In order to ensure accurate and correct application of the teachings of the Quran among Muslims, it is important that their level of understanding is investigated first. This will ensure guidance can be provided accordingly and appropriately. This conceptual paper compiles four levels of understanding the Quran among diverse groups of people, which are Naïve, Novice, Intermediate, and Expert.

Keywords: Religion, Quran, People Understanding, Social Stratification, Holy Books

Abstrak: Al-Quran, kitab suci Islam, merupakan kitab yang komprehensif sebagai rujukan umat manusia dalam memahami Islam. Sesungguhnya, memahami Al-Quran merupakan keutamaan dan perkara terpenting dalam aspek kehidupan individu Muslim. Dalam memastikan ketepatan dan kesahan aplikasi pengajaran Al-Quran, adalah sangat penting tahap kefahaman individu diselidiki. Ini akan memastikan bimbingan yang tepat dapat diberikan kepada umat Islam. Kertas konsep ini membicarakan empat tahap kefahaman al-Quran dalam kalangan kumpulan manusia, iaitu naif, novis, sederhana dan pakar.

Kata kunci: Agama, Quran, Kefahaman Manusia, Stratifikasi Sosial, Kitab Suci

Introduction

In 2015, it was reported that there were 1.7 billion of Muslims (Todd, Gina, Albert, & Peter, 2015). This includes over 17 million in Malaysia (Brian & Mehtab, 2010). It is compulsory for this large population of

Muslims in the world to obey all the teachings and prohibitions that have been outlined in Islam regardless of who they are. They should bear in mind that they need to give high priority to understand the Quran in order to lead them to be a better Muslims and to make them realise their purpose of life. The Quran is the book that guides and leads humankind to the light of Iman and knowledge,

away from darkness and ignorance as mentioned in the Quran:

﴿الرَّكَابُ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ﴾

(Al-Quran, Ibrahim 14:1)

(Alif, Lam, Ra. This is a Book which We have revealed to you, (O Muhammad), that you might bring mankind out of darknesses into the light by permission of their Lord to the path of the Exalted in Might, the Praiseworthy).

Although the Quran is written in the Arabic language, there is no excuse for Muslims to consider the language as the main obstacle in understanding its teachings. Instead, Muslims should strive to understand the messages found in the Quran. Understanding of Quran will enable servants of Allah s.w.t to be clear on his duties of life. Uthman bin 'Affan (*May Allah be pleased with him*) reported: the Prophet PBUH said, "The best among you is the one who learns the Qur'an and teaches it" (Nawawi, 2012). According to this hadith, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said that the best Muslims are those who learn and teach the Quran. This hadith tells us the importance of the Quran and more importantly, understanding its contents and teachings. Regardless of the different backgrounds, it is important for Muslims to understand the guidance of the Quran and practice it.

Challenge in Understanding Quran

The Quran contains the words of Allah s.w.t and works as the guidance that separates between right and wrong to help humankind in all their needs (Bhanji, 2014). Clearly, the Quran need to be understood as the guidance for humankind in all time. Thus, it is compulsory that as Muslims we understand what Allah says and reflect as much as we can. Without understanding the contents of the Quran, it is very difficult for Muslim to received its teachings and implement it in their lives (Zakaria, Fuad, & Rasdi, 2014). Even more worrying is social problems among Muslim youths caused by their lack of faith and spiritual fulfillments (Wan Kamarudin, 2015) which is very much related to their lack of understanding of the Quran.

Despite living and reflecting the Quran's teachings, Malaysian Muslims do not understand the Qur'an (Mat Saad, 2015). They are more focused on memorising the Quran to the point that they miss the importance of actually understanding its teachings as mentioned by the Former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Majlis Pelancaran Kempen 'Let's Read the Quran' (Hasli, 2016). Even the majority of Huffaz (those who memorise the entire Quran) do not understand its meaning (Ikhwanuddin & Che Noraini, 2014). Muslims

should be aware that understanding the Quran is fundamental to understand Islam.

The Quran is not just to be memorised or recited but to be understood and used guidance in every aspect of a Muslim's life. Therefore, it is vital that Muslims understand the Quran as this not only will benefit them but will develop the Ummah despite their differences in backgrounds, opinions and political beliefs.

Levels in Understanding the Quran

The Quran is perfect. It covers every aspect of life and provides valuable lessons for all mankind in all-time. Thus, understanding the main primary source of Islam is compulsory for every Muslim. The Quran itself can be defined as a book of guidance for every individual in this world and there is no doubt about it, as mentioned in the second chapter of Al Quran in Surah Al-Baqarah: 2

﴿ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

(This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah)

Differences in the levels of understanding of the Quran reflect the different levels of understanding this vital source of Islam. Ibnu Qayyim (1996) highlighted that for some groups of people, they do not need any additional references such as *Tafseer*, *Hadith* and others to capture the meaning of the Quran. Meanwhile, for others, these references are needed.

Ksar (2008) explained that there are many levels of understanding of the Quran; from literal understanding to the maximum, in-depth level of understanding. In addition, Zaid (2016) in his article 'Understanding the Holy Quran and its level', mentioned that the Quran had descended in Arabic language and this fact will never change. Therefore, in order to understand the messages of the Quran, Muslims should learn the Arabic language in order to understand the messages given by Allah s.w.t.

Omar (2016) provides five levels of understanding of the Quran.

First: *Tafseer An-Nusus bin Nusus* (interpretation according to other verses) as mention in Surah Ar-Rahman 55: 3-4:

﴿خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ ﴿٣﴾ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ ﴿٤﴾﴾

(Al-Quran, Surah Ar-Rahman 55: 3-4)

(He has created man (3) He has taught him speech (and intelligence) (4))

At this level, the interpretation is simple within the single tiered understanding of the verses of the Quran. The description of interpretation is made by referring to other related verses in the Quran.

Second: *Ta'wilul An-Nushush* (interpretation of the allegorical statement) which is based on:

﴿وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ﴾

(Al-Quran, Surah Yusuf 12: 6)

(...and teach you the interpretation of narratives..)

This level of interpretation interprets the verses from the Quran based on the understanding multi-tiered understanding on any verse that indicates ambiguity of meaning, such as verses of *Mutasyabihaat* (verses that have the possibility to be interpreted in many ways). The description of interpretation of this level is done until it shows the soul of its meaning. Reference to other related verses from the Quran is made.

Third: *Iqtithaful barakat* (quoting the blessings) which mentioned in:

﴿كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ﴾

(Al-Quran, Surah Sad 38: 29)

(This is a blessed Book which We have revealed to you)

This level is where the interpretation is made with the purpose to get a blessing. For instance, the blessing when reading *Kursi* verses which can cure illnesses.

Fourth: *Litadabburil Ayah* (reflecting verses) based on:

﴿لِيَذَّبَرُوا آيَاتِهِ﴾

(Al-Quran, Surah Sad 38: 29)

(that they might reflect upon its verses)

The interpretation of the passage from the Quran is made at the level of interpreter (Tafseer). First, the interpretation is simple and focuses on single-tiered understanding. Then, it is explained into multi-tiered understanding until it shows the definition soul of meaning referring to other related verses from the Quran.

Fifth: *Litazakkuri Ulil Albab* (reminder for open-minded people and intellectuals). The interpretation is based on the depth of understanding of the spiritual meaning required:

﴿كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَذَّبَرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ﴾

(Al-Quran, Surah Sad 38: 29)

(This is a blessed Book, which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded)

At this stage, verses from the Quran are interpreted at the level of scholars who are open-minded.

Diverse Groups of People

Diversity can be defined as a subjective phenomenon, which categorises groups of people based on their personal identity, experiences and backgrounds. From the Islamic perspectives, Islam encourages Muslims to respect different beliefs, cultures of life, communities, and ideologies. Allah s.w.t creates a human being with various facet so that Muslims can get to know each other and as a test to establish the good relationship with each other. Each requires one another to help to build a harmonious life for the sake of humankind.

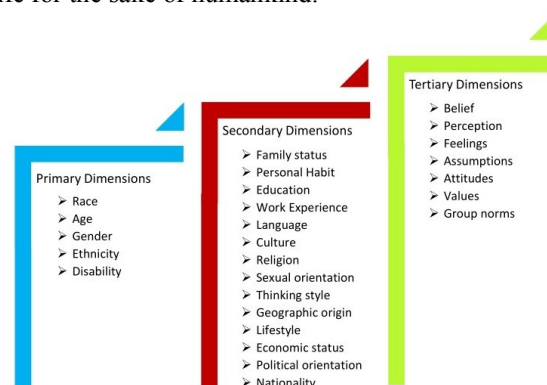


Fig. 1: Dimensions of Diversity

Figure 1 shows the three Dimensions of Diversity by Rijamampianina & Carmichael (2005). The primary dimension of diversity influences our identities in term of race, age, gender, ethnicity, and disability. It shapes our basic self-image as well as our fundamental worldviews. Additionally, it has the most impact on groups in the society.

The secondary dimension of diversity is less visible, exerts a more variable influence on personal identity, and adds a more subtle richness to the primary dimension of diversity. It includes family status, personal habit, education, work experience etc. The secondary dimension influences our self-esteem and self-definition. There is a definite trend towards definitions of a multiplicity of diversity dimensions. Arredondo (2004) then adds culture, social class, and language to the primary dimension and healthcare beliefs and recreational interests to the secondary dimension. She further adds a tertiary dimension, which encompasses historical moment experiences such as belief, perception, feelings, and others.

Dimensions of diversity can be seen through the analogy of an iceberg. The obvious and small portions are related to race, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability. Meanwhile, the secondary dimension is below the surface and needs some time to reveal, for instance, religion, personal habits, education, work experiences, language, culture and others. The tertiary dimension is placed beneath the surface. It is the core of the identity and the real essence of diversity such as belief, perception, feeling and others (Mazur, 2010).

Analysing Levels of Understanding the Content of Quran among Diverse Groups of People

To analyse the levels of understanding the contents of the Quran among diverse groups of people, a combination of two main areas are needed as shown in Figure 2. It shows the different levels of understanding the content of Quran among diverse groups of people. The diverse groups of people can be divided into four levels, which are Naïve, Novice, Intermediate, and Expert, based on their levels of understanding.

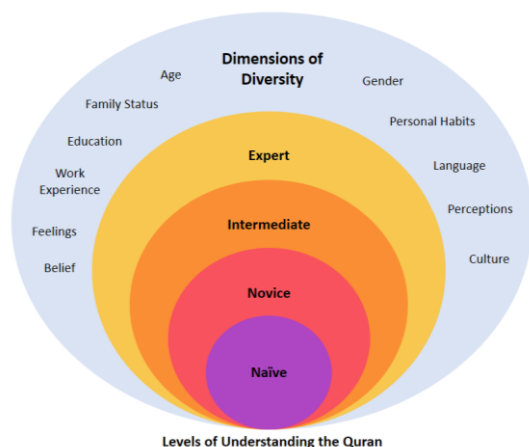


Fig.2: Levels of Understanding the Content of Quran among Diverse Groups of People

At the Naïve level, familiarity towards the verses in the Quran is inadequate and this group of people have limited vocabulary to assist them in understanding the content of Quran. Meanwhile, those in the Novice level will have a basic and minimum layer of understanding that is simple but clear in explanations. At the Intermediate level, this group of people is capable of understanding the content of Quran, more in-depth and higher level of understanding than those in the Naïve and Novice levels. They possess the spiritual meaning of understanding of the verses of the Quran and have the knowledge on the blessing elements from the verses. One example of the blessing element is that they understand that those who read the Surah Al-Mulk, they will be protected from the torments in the grave after they. At the Naïve, Novice and Intermediate levels, people will need translation tools to help them understand the content of the Quran such as *Tafseer*, *Hadith* and others.

As for the Expert level, they are able to provide an explanation at the Naïve, Novice and Intermediate levels of understanding the content of the Quran. Additionally, they have a deeper understanding of the purpose of the meaning and clearer description to the spiritual contexts of the verses or surah from the Quran. They are also able

to merge their opinions from another field of knowledge such as identify Surah Al-Ikhlâs as one of the verses that clarify vague or allegorical verses from the Quran about the features of Allah s.w.t. Those identified at this level do not need additional translation tools to help them understand the content of the Quran.

This study concludes that the levels of understanding the content of the Quran among diverse groups of people can be divided into four levels; Naïve, Novice, Intermediate, and Expert, which are influenced by the differences in the dimensions of diversity. The dimensions of diversity include age, race, gender, language, work experience and others.

Conclusion

The Quran is the final revelation and book from Allah s.w.t to humankind as guidance and direction to the right path. Due to its importance to Muslims, more studies towards how to understand the contents of Quran should be given more attention as to help Muslims understand and apply its teaching.

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