

Analising Students' Perceptions in the Learning of English Vocabulary through Islamic Scripture Entitled 'Al-Ghazali on Islamic Guidance' or *Bidayatul Hidayah*

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Abstract: The objectives of this paper is two fold. Firstly, it aims at finding students' perceptions on the learning of English vocabulary in Al-Ghazali on Islamic Guidance or *Bidayatul Hidayah*, which is a great scripture of Islam written by Al-Imam Muhammad Bin Muhammad Bin Muhammad Bin Ahmad Alghazali Attusi or also known as Imam Al-Ghazali R.A. Secondly, it is to obtain students' perceptions on the problems that occurred throughout the teaching and learning activities and how to improve them. This qualitative research adopts two techniques – observation and interview. It is discovered that majority of students show great interest to learn English through this scripture and their knowledge on English vocabulary has generally improved. The researcher also identifies the problems and lists the possible recommendations for improvement of such activity in the future. It is hoped that this study can shed some lights on how to better integrate Islamic elements in the teaching and learning of English language, as well as to produce active, autonomous and lifelong students; who as well, appreciate the ancient scriptures of Islam.

Keywords: Perception, English Vocabulary, Al-Ghazali on Islamic Guidance, *Naqli* and *Aqli*

Abstrak: Kertas kerja ini mempunyai dua objektif. Pertama, ia bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti persepsi pelajar terhadap kosakata bahasa Inggeris melalui manuskrip Panduan Muslim atau *Bidayatul Hidayah* oleh Imam Al-Ghazali R.A. Kedua, mengenalpasti persepsi penghalang dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran dan bagaimana untuk meningkatkan proses pembelajaran tersebut. Kajian kualitatif ini menggunakan dua teknik iaitu pemerhatian dan sesi temubual. Dapatan menunjukkan majoriti pelajar mempamerkan minat yang tinggi dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggeris melalui manuskrip tersebut dan seterusnya meningkatkan kosakata pelajar. Pengkaji juga dapat mengenalpasti beberapa masalah dan cadangan penambahbaikan terhadap aktiviti sedemikian. Kajian ini diharap dapat memberi beberapa idea ke arah integrasi elemen Islam di dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris, dan juga pembelajaran sepanjang hayat serta dapat menghargai manuskrip lama Islam.

Kata Kunci: Persepsi, Kosakata Inggeris, Al-Ghazali, *Naqli* dan *Aqli*

Introduction

The teaching and learning of ancient Islamic scripture or *turath* Book, is very much synonym to the Arabic words *funduk* or *pondok* (in Malay); and *madrasah* (which literally mean classical Islamic school), and is conducted by a knowledgeable scholar who has obtained a degree of mastery called *ijazah*, in that particular scripture from other scholars. In discussing the methodology of how Islamic scripture is taught and learned, there is an essential term that shall be mentioned, namely the chain of transmission of knowledge or *isnad*, from a teacher to the student, in order to preserve the authenticity of the Deen, as Allah Most High says:

"We have without doubt, sent down the message; and we will assuredly guard it." (Surah al-Hijr, Verse 15)

According to Muhammad Adam (2003), the "message" here refers to the book of Allah and also the Sunnah of his blessed Messenger (Allah bless him & give him peace), for whatever the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him & give him peace) says is from Allah Almighty, as Allah Most High says:

"Nor does he (the Messenger of Allah) say (aught) of (his own) desire. It is no less than revelation (wahi) sent down to him." (al-Najm, Verse 53)

He also outlines the benefits and wisdoms in learning from a teacher based on *isnad*, which include 1) sound understanding of the texts; 2) its correct interpretation; 3) being saved from making errors in understanding the texts (for each science has its own special terminologies); 4) getting questions and queries that may arise answered; 5) practical application of the knowledge; and 6) obtaining the *Baraka* or light of guidance from that special teacher-student relationship.

He emphasises the necessity for one to learn the Islamic knowledge from a scholar of knowledge, piety and wisdom, and who himself has been taught and trained by a similar scholar.

Statement of problem

In this era of globalisation, the education industry, specifically the teacher-student roles and the teaching and learning approaches have vastly transformed. The evolution of hi-tech gadgets and the borderless communication play an important factor in this transformation. Learners in the 21st century are netizens who always look forward for instant and accessible information at their fingertips and therefore, the tendency to refer to the ancient Islamic scriptures as a

guide of life is deteriorating. To worsen this scenario, there is a scarcity of knowledgeable scholars who are able to teach ancient scriptures in Malaysia based on *isnad*, as compared to scholars who teach religion in general, without *isnad*.

This phenomena coins the researcher to introduce the Islamic scripture to her students in the English language classroom. Moreover, the integration of Islamic elements into the classroom is nothing new in Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), as academicians are required to implement a blended *Naqli* (revealed knowledge) and *Aqli* (conventional knowledge) curriculum for all courses.

This research is conducted by utilising Al-Imam Muhammad Bin Muhammad Bin Muhammad Bin Ahmad Alghazali Attusi or also known as Imam Al-Ghazali R.A's *Bidayatul Hidayah* or its English version, *Al Ghazali on Islamic Guidance* by M.A. Quasem, in the General English Proficiency course, enrolled by first year students of USIM, who generally come from Islamic education background.

Generally, this study is driven by the 'Islamisation of knowledge' concept and it is hoped that both teacher/researcher and students can mutually benefit from this study, in religious and English language aspects.

Research questions

The study is conducted to answer the following questions:

- What are the students' perceptions about the learning of English vocabulary through this scripture?
- What are the problems occurred during the learning process and how to best fix them?
- Shall this scripture be integrated in the learning of English in the future? If so, what is the best way to use the scripture in order to achieve the learning objectives of this course?

The main objective of the study is to obtain students' general feedback on the learning of English vocabulary in Al-Ghazali on Islamic Guidance. It is hoped that this research is a stepping stone to strengthen USIM's aspiration to produce holistic graduates who are able to master and apply the knowledge in order to be successful in their life and the Hereafter.

Limitation of the research

This study is solely focused on vocabulary due to the constraint of time experienced by both teacher and students. The limited credit hours of English has enabled both to further explore the scripture in terms of other

language aspects (such as grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking) since the curriculum of the course itself is condensed and requires different learning materials. Secondly, the teaching and learning takes place on the language aspect per se as this is to avoid any misunderstanding in the delivery of the scripture. The content of the scripture is not delved thoroughly as the teacher does not have any *isnad* to teach the scripture. Plus, the learning objective of the course is on basic language skills, and not on the content of the scripture.

Literature Review

A glance of Al-Ghazali on Islamic Guidance

The scripture Al-Ghazali on Islamic Guidance is the translated version of *Bidayatul Hidayah* (literally means 'The Beginning of Guidance') by M.A.Quasem, published by National University of Malaysia. *Bidayatul Hidayah*, on the other hand, is abstracted from its main scripture, *Ihya Ulumuddin* (literally means 'Revival of Religious Sciences'). The scripture contains three parts: i) acts of devotion ; ii) the avoidance of sins ; and iii) association with God and man.

According to Nofal, N (2000), in all Al-Ghazali's works, 'the main theme of his philosophy, and indeed of Islamic philosophy in general, is the concept of God and His relationship with His creation (the world and mankind). Although al-Ghazali initially followed the mainstream of Islamic *fiqh*, and in particular of *Ash'ari* (traditional Sunnite), in describing the essence and attributes of God, and Sufi undercurrents in defining the relationship between God and mankind, he then proposes his own conception of the essence, attributes and actions of God'. Nofal (200) also added that Al-Ghazali is rightly considered to be one of the most important and profound Islamic thinkers, who was aptly called the 'renovator of the fifth century A.H'.

About General English Proficiency Course (GEP)

The teaching and learning of English Language in USIM is based on students' performance in Malaysian University English Test (MUET). In the first semester of their studies, students who obtained Band 1 and 2 are enrolled in GEP, while students with Band 3 are enrolled in English for Communicative Purposes. Advanced from the latter, students with Band 4, 5 and 6 are enrolled in English for Academic Purposes.

The learning of English takes two hours a week, and there are fourteen weeks in a semester, where students are not only required to be active in classroom activities, they are also encouraged to participate in online and mobile learning activities, which have been duly planned by the teacher. Students' participation in all activities are recorded by the teacher for the purpose of observation.

For GEP, the learning objective is emphasised on grammar and vocabulary, as these two contribute significantly to the students' poor performance in all language skills- reading, writing, listening and speaking. Since language learning is very significant in USIM, the teaching and learning approaches have to be vary and up-to-date, in line with the requirement of education in the 21st century.

Methodology

To answer the questions in 1.2, the researcher has created five WhatsApp group chats in the early semester, which each group consists of 30 to 35 students enrolled in GEP course. The creating of the group chat is to enable flexible and convenient communication between the teacher and students. Through this group chat, the communication between teacher-student and student-student is observed to discover students' perceptions on the scripture, issues and problems occurred during the teaching and learning activities.

Interview session is also conducted with three male and three female students who are randomly selected in order to get their thorough responses on the use of this scripture as a material in language classroom. The purpose of this research is not vividly informed to them to avoid any biasness in the results.

In the early weeks of the semester, students are requested to read and digest the scripture independently. The scripture is uploaded on their online learning page, namely GOALS (which stands for Global Open Access Learning System), as in the following:

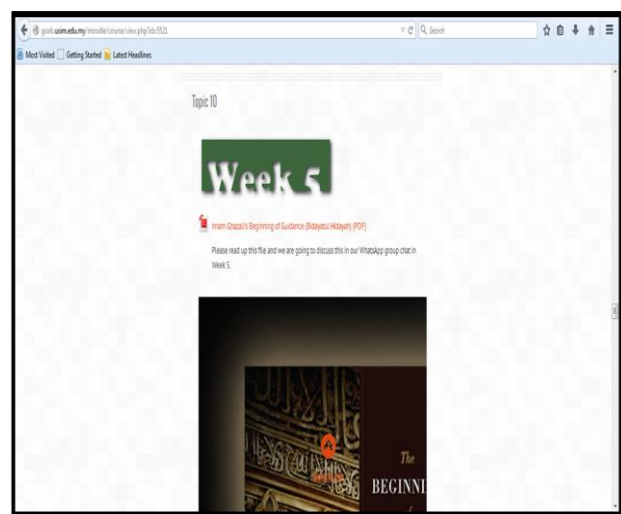


Figure 1: GOALS interface which shows the scripture's file and the task assigned to students

Next, the discussion is conducted on the WhatsApp group chats between the researcher and students.

Students are asked on the scripture, the problems they face during their independent study and how to best solve them. They are instructed to list down the new vocabulary learned from this scripture, as in Appendix 1.

Findings of the Study

Below are the findings of the study, organised based on the research questions in 1.2:

Finding 1 (Students' perceptions about the learning of English vocabulary through this scripture)

Through the WhatsApp group chats, it is generally discovered that majority of students enjoyed reading this scripture and agreed that it is a very meaningful task for them in order to remind them to be a good Muslim:

Response 1:

I think it's easy for me to understand because it has translation in Malay language. I do read the English version too and my vocab has increased. From this book, I can reflect what I have learned in secondary school. I hope that everyone also appreciates it as it's all about the basic things in our life as a Muslim. Yeah, I do enjoy reading this book very much.

Response 2:

I have read the first chapter. It is very amazing. Thank you very much to you for introducing this Book which is about our daily life. I can improve my ibadah to be close to Allah.

Response 3:

To me it is easy to understand because the book tells about our basic daily life like pray, fasting, sleep and others. At the same time, I can improve my knowledge because there are many information about Islam. Thanks teacher for suggestion of this book. It's very meaningful to me.

Finding 2 (The problems occurred during the learning process and the solutions)

However, through interview session conducted in class, the researcher discovered a different tone of responses from them:

Response 4:

I think the book has many difficult words. I like the book very much but I have to admit that it is very challenging

for me to understand it. I need to read the Malay version in order to fully understand the book.

Response 5:

I did read it in English, but I also referred to the Malay version, because I do not fully understand certain words.

Response 6:

Although it is accessible online, I still need the hardcopy because it is easy for me to jot down anything on the book. I love the idea of online learning, but for this particular task, I bought this book.

Although these responses can be associated with the lack of proficiency in the language, Collis and Moonen (2002) argue that students often do not want to become more active and co-responsible for the course. By and large, students are not intrinsically motivated by change or the use of technology; if activities are not part of the evaluation process of the course.

Finding 3 (The integration of this scripture in ESL classroom in the future and the best teaching and learning method)

All students who were interviewed agree with the integration of Islamic scripture in ESL classroom and advocate that it shall be continued in the future. They responded that the teaching and learning methods shall vary and flexible, so that they can learn it at their own pace.

Response 7:

I enjoy mobile learning very much because I can respond to teacher's post while I am waiting for bus, at the hostel or in my hometown. I prefer learning the scripture through this way.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that mostly, all students agree that the use of this scripture as a teaching and learning material in ESL classroom has improved their vocabulary. Despite the advanced and classical vocabulary used in this scripture, which hinders their full comprehension of the content, they enjoy the idea of Islamic integration in the language class. In fact, all of them admitted that this is the first time the learning of religion (although it is just done on a surface level) takes place in English language.

The students show their appreciation to the researcher for the idea of using this scripture in the class. This can prove that students appreciate and benefitted from the reading of this scripture. The discussion that takes place on WhatsApp group chats and in class, have also deepen their understanding on the vocabulary used in this scripture.

It is suggested that similar studies are to be conducted, using other scriptures which are based on *Fardhu Ain*-literally refers to obligatory acts that must be performed by each individual Muslim, including prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. *Fardhu Ain* encompasses of *Aqidah* (or creed), *Fiqh* (the acts of performing purification, prayer, fasting etc) and *Tasawuf* (sufism).

The second suggestion is to conduct similar study using scientific methods, such as to analyse the effectiveness of integrating Islamic scripture in the language classroom. Walliman (2001) asserted that in most research, it is impossible to be free from biasness, therefore, scientific objectivity should be maintained.

Like any other activities, the learning of Islamic scripture in language classroom shall be designed according to principles of effective and fun learning, such as through storytelling, discussion and the list goes on, in order to ensure that everyone benefits from the activity. Indeed, we learn best when we share and debate ideas with fellow learners, to understand their different experiences and perspectives and to fill the gaps in our own knowledge.

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Appendix 1

1.	Rivalry	11.	Corruption	21.	Escorting funerals
2.	Boast	12.	Sins	22.	Unprofitable trading
3.	Obedience	13.	Wrath	23.	Feed the unfortunate
4.	Glorious	14.	Gladness	24.	Quest for knowledge
5.	Ignorant	15.	Calmly	25.	Remembrance of God
6.	Good-doers	16.	Hunger	26.	Ruin your religion
7.	Mindful	17.	Diligent	27.	Destroyed in the Hereafter
8.	Uncleanliness	18.	Jeopardy	28.	Eagerness to acquire knowledge
9.	Patient	19.	Loser	29.	Occupy yourself with intellectual discourse
10.	Hypocrite	20.	Grateful	30.	Reflect upon the shortness of life

Figure 2: List of some practical vocabulary from the scripture, which was discussed in the students' WhatsApp group chats