

ULUM AL-QURAN COURSE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Ulum al-Quran is one of the courses offered to high school students, especially for those in Islamic studies program. This course is offered to students studying in the program because it contains the basic knowledge about the Qur'an which is the main reference for the Muslims as a guide to life. The topics covered in this course typically contains an introduction and the meaning of Ulum al-Quran, its history and development, the revelation of Quran which also includes the first and last verses, the reasons behind the revelation of the verses, the revelation of Quran with 7 letters, *makkiy* and *madaniy* verses, compilation of the Quran, the organization of verses and chapters in the Quran and the writing of the Quran and *qira'at* (art of recitation of the Quran). In addition, this course also usually includes discussions of interpretation sciences and methods used by certain scholars, translation of the Quran, the abolition of certain verses in the Quran and discussions on *mutashabihat* verses. The main objective of this study is to see a comparison of the course from general aspects, its course outline and the books or modules used. In Malaysia, there are several higher learning institutions that offer Islamic Studies programs such as *shariah*, theology (*usuluddin*), Islamic civilization, Islamic faith (*akidah*), studies of the Quran, Sunnah studies and other similar programs. Therefore, this study focuses only on public universities that offer programs that include Ulum al-Quran course. Institutions involved in offering such a course and involved in this study include University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, International Islamic University Malaysia and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. This study was carried out by observation of the course outlines provided by each institution, hence the researchers made a comparison of all the institutions involved in this study.

Keywords: Ulum al-Quran, higher education institutions, Malaysia, Islam, university.

1 INTRODUCTION

Quran is a revelation from Allah to the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w through the angel Gabriel. It contains a variety of messages, stories, lessons learned from previous people, rulings of sharia law, and the history of human civilization and so on. Muslims not only need to understand the content contained in the Quran, but

also various disciplines related to it that needs to be researched and explored. Thus, the sciences in the field of learning the Quran emerged such as Ulum al-Quran, Qiraat, Tajwid and others that were pioneered by the previous Muslim scholars (Muhiden and Abd Latiff, 2011, p 267).

1.1 DEFINITION OF ULUM AL-QURAN

Generally, studies of Ulum al-Quran is an Islamic knowledge that is very important to be studied and examined because it represents the most important source of Islamic law. Previous scholars have defined Ulum al-Quran as the knowledge discipline which includes debates about the Quran in terms of the cause of the revelation, collection and organization of the Quran, knowledge of *makkiy* and *madaniy* verses, *nasikh wa mansukh*, *al-muhkam wa al-mutasyabih* and other similar titles that are associated with Quran (Mana 'al-Qattan, 2008, p 11).

Ulum al-Quran studies play a very important role for students of Islamic studies either in secondary schools or higher education institutions. This is because one of the objectives of the Ulum al-Quran studies is to understand the historical development of the Quran since it was revealed to Prophet p.u.h until the recent development of studies related to the Quran.

In addition, studies of Ulum al-Quran continuously enable students especially in the field of Islamic studies to master the interpretation of the Quran in various disciplines. The impact of the acquisition of knowledge enables the students to practise it in his life and reason with a knowledge discipline that is accurate and true. In fact, this reasoning ability allows the students to counter argue various doubts raised by the orientalist against Quran and Hadith, and the Prophet s.a.w.

2 HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF ULUM AL-QURAN IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, studies of Ulum al-Quran which is a branch of Islamic education has begun since the arrival of Islam in the Malay Peninsula in the 14th century. However, the education system at that time was informal (Roslan, 2011). When Islam came to Malacca in 1414, the acceptance of the religion by Parameswara had caused it to spread widely.

Islamic studies at that time were manifested by the teaching and learning of the Quran. This is proven by the discovery of the manuscripts related to the Malay World Quran by the researchers. Observations made by the researchers show that some areas in Ulum al-Quran equally expanded in the Malay World. Among the areas were the interpretation of the Quran, advantages of Quran, *tajwid* of the Qur'an and the stories in the Quran (Yakob, et. al., 2014,). Institutions of learning the Quran only took place in huts and palaces of Malay rulers.

Studies of the Quran were developing and as the result, various sciences such as Tafsir al-Quran, Ulum al-Quran, I'jaz Quran and so on emerged. Consciousness of most Muslims in Malaysia about the dignity of the Quran as the most important source in Islam not only led Muslims in Malaysia to learn the Quran and the *tajweed* but also various studies related to the Quran. This knowledge was not only learnt in religious schools, but also became one of the main subjects at the faculty or the academy of Islamic studies at both public and private tertiary institutions.

3 FACULTY THAT OFFERS ULUM AL-QURAN COURSE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA

Among the earliest institutes of Islamic studies in the world which provide Quranic studies program include al-Azhar University, the Islamic University of Medina and Yarmouk University and others (Muhiden & Abd Latiff, 2011). Along with the passage of time and development of knowledge, various higher learning institutions in Malaysia either public or private universities offer specialization in Islamic studies such as studies of theology (*usuluddin*), jurisprudence (*syariah*), *dakwah* and so forth (Muhiden & Abd Latiff, 2011).

This also applies to the field of the Qur'an and Sunnah studies. Now, studying the Quran is no longer offered as a course alone as it has become a program with the establishment of a department or faculty of Quranic studies at a university. This rapid development is not only at degree level, but also up to post-graduate studies and master's degree and PhD programs.

In Malaysia, there are a number of public universities that offer Quranic studies and Ulum al-Quran such as the Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia under the Department of Qur'anic and Sunnah Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia

under Kuliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia under the Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies.

3.1 Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya

Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, through the Department of Quran and Hadith in this university offers a number of programs that specialize in the Quran and Hadith studies for undergraduate, masters and doctoral degrees. The courses offered by the department of Quran and Hadith include classical and contemporary knowledge to prepare students to face the current challenges. Among the objectives of this department is to produce scholars of the Quran and Hadith that have credibility and expertise in the disciplines of the Qur'an and Sunnah. It is also to promote the improvement of intellectuals who adhere to the teachings of the Quran and Hadith and able to work with the true teachings of Islam. In addition, the department also plays a role in contributing to the quality and beneficial publication to the country and Muslims. From the aspect of Uloom al-Quran curriculum in this department, it is a compulsory course at the Academy of Islamic Studies with 2 credit hours (Course Outline of Uloom al-Quran, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya).

3.2 Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia

Faculty of Islamic Studies was established on May 18, 1970 along with the establishment of the National University of Malaysia. The faculty is one of the earliest established faculties in the university with two other faculties at that time namely Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Science. Syariah Department and Usuluddin Department are the first two departments operating since the establishment of this faculty in addition to Arabic Unit. On May 15, 1974, the Department of Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization was established. Currently, there are five departments under the auspices of the Faculty of Islamic Studies which are the Department of Syariah, Department of Usuluddin and Philosophy, Department of Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization, Department of Da'wah and Leadership Studies and the Department of al-Quran and al-Sunnah and the Arabic Language Unit. In the National University of Malaysia, Uloom al-Quran course is offered to the students of this faculty under the Department of al-Quran and al-Sunnah. Uloom al-Quran course is offered in the first semester of the first year with a total of 3 credit hours (Course Outline of Uloom al-Quran, Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia).

3.3 Kuliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia

Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage in Quran & Sunnah Studies bachelor's degree program was developed to equip students with comprehensive knowledge in the course of the Qur'an and Sunnah. It offers courses relevant to combine both theoretical and practical methods of studies for students, including matters involving classical and contemporary knowledge and issues related to the study of the Quran and Sunnah. The implementation of the program of Quran and the Sunnah aims to form students to acquire knowledge and expert in applying the sources of Islam, namely the Quran and Hadith. In the International Islamic University of Malaysia, Uloom al-Quran course is offered in the second semester with 3 credit hours (Course Outline of Uloom al-Quran, Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia).

3.4 Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies is the first faculty established by Islamic Science University of Malaysia in 2001. Among its objectives is to raise the knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah to a higher level in line with the mainstream education system. In addition, it aims to expand Islam by giving an opportunity for researchers and educators to study, research and disseminate the knowledge contained in the Holy Quran and Sunnah to the country and society. To achieve this noble goal, the faculty has established three programs of studies; Bachelor of Quranic and Sunnah Studies with Honours, Bachelor of Quranic Studies with Multimedia with Honours and a Bachelor of Sunnah Studies with Information Management with Honours. Uloom al-Quran course at this university is offered to second-year student at the Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies with 3 credit hours whereby 2 credit hours is allocated for lectures and the remaining session of 1 hour is for tutorial (Course Outline of Uloom al-Quran, Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia).

4 COURSE OUTLINE OF ULUM AL-QURAN IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA

Course outline is a lesson plan prepared before the start of teaching and learning. Preparation of the course is very important to ensure the lecturers and students achieve teaching objectives that have been set. Therefore, this study will review the course outline of Ulum al-Quran of four public universities in Malaysia, namely University of Malaya, National University of Malaysia, International Islamic University Malaysia and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia.

4.1 Course Outline of Ulum al-Quran in University of Malaya

Teaching and learning at the University of Malaya lasted for fourteen weeks. Thus, the weekly lesson plan of Ulum al-Quran course at this university has set the topics that need to be studied and finished in accordance to a stipulated syllabus. The first week begins with the definition and importance of Ulum al-Quran. It is followed by revelation and writing of the Quran (Course Outline of Ulum al-Quran, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya). The following topics are covered according to the scheduled course outline which ends with the topic of sources and references for the study of Ulum al-Quran course. A week before the end of the lesson, students are given one week to do revisions for final examinations.

The course outline in this university also provides its list of resources and references namely *Mabahith fi Ulum al-Quran* by Manna 'al-Qattan, *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an* by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti and *al-Madkhal li Dirasah Tafsir wa al-Ulum al-Quran* by Thabit Abu al-Hajj. This course is written in Arabic.

4.2 Course Outline of Ulum al-Quran in National University of Malaysia

Ulum al-Quran course outline at the National University of Malaysia is more detailed as it provides important information that can be benefited by the user. Among the information provided is the name of the course and the course code PN1113. In addition, the Ulum al-Quran course at this university is offered in the first semester of each academic session. The design also provides information of the course evaluation and scoring. It is assessed through three aspects, namely 20% for students' presence in tutorial while 30% is for assignments. Furthermore, 50% is allocated for the final examination (Course Outline of Ulum al-Quran, Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia). Furthermore, the synopsis and the objectives of the course are also stated in the course outline. Among the topics to be analyzed in the course are introduction to Ulum al-Quran, classification of *surah*, verses and its importance, the first and last verses revealed, meaning of revelation of the Quran, *asbab al-nuzul*, methods of revelation of the Quran and the collection and compilation of the verses and *surah*. The objective of this course is to understand the history of the Quran, to master the division of *surah* and verses and to summarize interpretation based on the interpretation of the Prophet s.a.w.

Weekly lesson plan of Ulum al-Quran course has determined the topics to be studied and finished in the fourteen weeks of lecture. From the aspect of resources and references, Ulum al-Quran course at this university refers to Manna 'al-Qattan's book, namely *Mabahith fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, *Itqan al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Qur'an* by Fadl Hasan' Abbas, *al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Qur'an* by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti and *Ta'rif al-Darisin* by Salah al-Khalidi. This course outline is provided in Malay language.

4.3 Course Outline of Ulum al-Quran in International Islamic University Malaysia

Ulum al-Quran course outline in the International Islamic University Malaysia is seen more detailed and in depth. It begins with information related to the faculty offering this course namely Faculty of Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences under the Department of al-Quran and Al-Sunnah and offered for undergraduate students of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage in Quran & Sunnah Studies program. The title of this course outline is also named as Ulum al-Quran, code RKQS 2011A and a core subject for the bachelor's degree program (Course Outline of Ulum al-Quran, the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia). This course is offered in the second semester with 3 credit hours. In addition, the Ulum al-Quran course in the International Islamic University Malaysia assesses four scoring aspects which is 20% allocated for the mid-semester exam, 20% for assignments and 10% for presentations. The remainder of the marks of 50% is allocated for the final examination.

In addition, the course synopsis and objectives at the university are provided to explain the topics that will be discussed during the lecture sessions. Ulum al-Quran course outline in the International Islamic University

Malaysia also lists resources and references for the subject which are *Mabahith fi Ulum al-Qur'an* by Manna 'al-Qattan, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirun* by al-Zahabi and *Manahil al-'Arfan fi al-Ulum al-Qur'an* by al-Zarqani.

4.4 Course Outline of Ulum al-Quran in Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

At first glance, the Ulum al-Quran course at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia is not much different from the International Islamic University of Malaysia's. Information in the course outline begins with the course title that is Ulum al-Quran and QQQ2072 as its course code. Total credit hours for this course are 3 credit hours. Ulum al-Quran course at this university is offered to the second year, third semester students in Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies.

In addition, the synopsis and objectives of Ulum al-Quran course in Islamic Science University of Malaysia are also stated in the course outline. Basically, this course discusses matters related to the sciences of the Qur'an in terms of the history of the emergence of Ulum al-Quran and its development, the meaning of the Qur'an and its knowledge disciplines, the issue of *Makkiy* and *Madaniy*, *asbab al-nuzul*, *Naskh* and *Mansukh*, collection of the Qur'an and others. This course is offered in order to expose students to the basic knowledge of Ulum al-Quran. It also provides an overview to the students about Ulum al-Quran and its related issues.

For the evaluation aspect, it can be divided into two parts: the first part of the scoring is 60% for the activities in lectures and tutorials that cover 25% for mid-semester test, 20% for assignments and presentations, 10% for student-lecturer activities and 5% for students' attendance. The remaining 40% is allocated for the final examination. Among the references used during teaching and learning of Ulum al-Quran at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia is *Manahil al-'Arfan fi al-Ulum al-Quran* by al-Zarqani Abdul 'Azim, *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran* by Jalal al Din al-Suyuti and *Mabahith fi Ulum al-Quran* by Mana 'al-Qattan.

5 DISCUSSION

Analysis of Ulum al-Quran course outline was done by focusing on the four public universities in Malaysia, namely University of Malaya, National University of Malaysia, International Islamic University of Malaysia and Islamic Science University of Malaysia. The analysis that was carried out focuses on the similarities and differences of the course outline in the four universities. Among the aspects analyzed are the assessment marks, the credit hours, offered semester, objectives, synopsis, weekly lesson plans and references used during the teaching and learning process of this course.

In particular, through the analysis carried out, there are similarities and differences among the course outlines of the four universities that are not very significant. The findings show that Ulum al-Quran course is offered by University of Malaya to the Academy of Islamic Studies students, while at the National University of Malaysia, this course is offered to students of the Faculty of Islamic Studies. In the International Islamic University Malaysia, this course is offered to students of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences while at Islamic Science University of Malaysia, this course is offered to students of the Faculty of Qur'anic and Sunnah Studies and compulsory for all programs in the faculty. In other words, generally the course is offered to students in Islamic studies.

National University of Malaysia and the International Islamic University of Malaysia offer Ulum al-Quran course during the second semester. Islamic Science University of Malaysia also offers this course to students in the second and third semester. National University of Malaysia includes additional information of time and venue for this course. This information can help students to identify the location and time of the lectures in the semester by referring to the course outline.

All three universities namely National University of Malaysia, International Islamic University of Malaysia and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia have provided information such as a synopsis and the objectives of the course Ulum al-Quran in their respective course outlines. Synopsis and objectives of this course are very important for students and instructors to get a true and complete understanding of the topics and issues on Ulum al-Quran which will be learned in lectures or tutorials. Based on the course outline set by each university, the study found out that the number of credit hours for the National University of Malaysia, International Islamic University of Malaysia and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia is the same that is the total of three credit hours. As for University of Malaya, researchers found that the number of credit hours allocated for this course is not clearly spelled out. The study also found out that Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia has stated the distribution of the credit hours in more detail which is two hours of lecture and one hour of tutorial session.

This study of the Ulum al-Quran course also found that there are differences in terms of marking and assessment in National University of Malaysia, International Islamic University of Malaysia and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. Coursework evaluation in National University of Malaysia is divided into three parts. 30% is allocated for tutorial skills, 30% for essays that are the assignments given by the lecturer. Meanwhile, 50% is allocated for the final examination. In the International Islamic University Malaysia, the coursework assessment is quite different from National University of Malaysia. Of the 100% mark, it is divided into 20% for the mid-semester test. 20% is allocated for essays and 10% for presentations. The remaining 50% is allocated for the final examination. For Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, the marks are broken down into two main parts. The first part of 60% is for the activities in lectures and tutorials that are mid-semester test (25%), assignments and presentations (20%), participation in lectures and tutorials (10%), and attendance (5%). The remaining 40% is allocated for the final examination.

On the weekly lesson plans for the four public universities surveyed, all of them list out the weekly lesson plan. Similarly, every university has stated the references used for Ulum al-Quran teaching and learning process. The study also found that there was no significant difference in the weekly topics of the lesson plan of each university such as definition of Ulum al-Quran, revelation of the Quran, division of chapters and verses of the Quran, *Makkiy* and *Madaniy* and others. However there are certain topics in a university that are not listed by other universities. For example *israiliyyat* is only studied in University of Malaya while the remaining three universities do not list the topic. The study also found a weekly lesson plan of Ulum al-Quran course at International Islamic University of Malaysia is more detailed compared to the other three public universities. The composition of the topics on a weekly lesson plan is almost the same for all universities. This is because the use of resources and references is almost the same for all four universities studied. Among the resources used are *Mabahith fi ulum al-Qur'an* by Manna 'al-Qattan, *al-Itqan fi ulum al-Qur'an* by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, and *al-Burhan fi ulum al-Qur'an* by al-Zarkashi.

6 CONCLUSION

From the analysis carried out, it can be concluded that Ulum al-Quran course is compulsory to be taken by the Islamic Studies students in all public universities in Malaysia. The study also found out that the course outline provided by the departments offering this course can still be further improved by comparing theirs with other institutions, and hence make improvements in their own departments. Indirectly, it will create a more comprehensive course outline and brings a greater impact on the course itself, as well as provides more effective guidance to students.

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