

ENGAGEMENT, OUTREACH, AND ICTD : TOWARDS DEVELOPED ISLAMIC HIGHER-EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract: As we know that higher education institutions (HEIs) have three main mandates—teaching, research, and extension. The first refers to the transmission and transaction of knowledge, skills and competencies to learners so as to equip them for their role in the employment market and society. The second refers to the critical role of advancing knowledge through research in different domains. The third refers to the institution reaching out to the community in which it is located, providing the community with a valuable contribution to social development. Outreach and engagement at the higher-education Institution is that aspect of teaching that enables learning beyond the campus walls. That aspect of research that makes what we discover useful beyond the academic community. That aspect of service that directly benefits the public. When the Islamic discourse comes under discussion, the concept should be applicable to the cultural discourse, the literary discourse, the artistic discourse and the information discourse, though the latter can be of more comprehensive nature and encompass all other levels of discourse, in such a way as to become for example the religious information discourse, the philosophical information discourse, the political information discourse, etc. In terms of using ICT or media, the content, again as mentioned before using all media forms, should seek to promote dialogue, understanding, co-existence and co-operation.

Keywords: Engagement, Outreach, and ICTD.

Introduction

The common sense that some authorities always indicates anywhere under the sun is that higher education institutions (HEIs) have three main mandates—teaching, research, and extension. The first refers to the transmission and transaction of knowledge, skills and competencies to learners so as to equip them for their role in the employment market and society. The second refers to the critical role of advancing knowledge through research in different domains. The third refers to the institution reaching out to the community in which it is located, providing the community with a valuable contribution to social development.¹

This paper draws from the collective wisdom of colleagues in some of the conferences, training, and seminars involved, together with the writer, in the field of management, education, communication and development in the USA and Canada for the last three decades. Some materials are from papers, reports, and other references; however, no material violates any disclosure restrictions.

Engagement and Outreach

The relationship between engagement and outreach in general can be easily understood from the following statements: "Execution of "US Muslim Engagement", Obama Creates New Office for Outreach to the Ummah". Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has appointed Farah Pandith to serve as special representative to Muslim communities, in charge of a new office that is responsible for outreach with Muslims around the world. According to a notice published by the State Department June 23, Special Representative Pandith and her staff will carry out Clinton's efforts to "engage with Muslims around the world on a people-to-people and organizational level."²

¹ See Prof. Usha Vyasulu Reddy, Ph. D "India How Do You Put Reality into the ICT for Development Curriculum" in ICT for Development Consultant Hyderabad 500 082, A case Study Presented at the International Conference on Engaged Learning and ICT Development, Kuala Lumpur, 2014.

² quotations are from bits and pieces of newspapers found through internet

In terms of Higher-education in particular, engagement involves and benefits everyone, staff and students, the University as a whole and the community. It contributes to the University's core business, teaching and research, and positively enhances student experience and employability. It, however, demands a wide range of skills in communication and project management and broadly involves :

- a. **Communicating knowledge and enriching cultural life** e.g. public lectures, media work, writing for the non-specialist, exhibitions, showcasing academic know-how, communicating research to the public, acting as the lead for major festival themes, contributing to the organisation and delivery of engagement activities.
- b. **Providing a service and being in dialogue with the public and communities** e.g. volunteering, promoting and employing user involvement in research and the co-production of research, forums, focus groups, seminars and debates that involve the public, pro-bono schemes, drama outreach, museum education, continuing education and lifelong learning, contributing to the organisation and delivery of engagement activities.
- c. **Being in dialogue with the public and policy-makers** e.g. governmental committees involving the academic as the 'expert', such as an expert panel, government led public consultation and task forces, and active membership of professional bodies.

Key external drivers for doing engagement :

The Formal agreement for Engaging the Public with Research – this provides a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders. It is binding upon all research organizations and is a condition of research council funding. The formal agreement has four key principles, one of which is that researchers are enabled to participate in

public engagement activities through appropriate training, support and opportunities. Another is that researchers are recognised and valued for their involvement in public engagement activities.

Public Engagement as a Pathway to Impact – engaging the public with research can improve the quality of the research and its impact, raise the researcher’s profile, and develop skills. Project-specific engagement activities, which are relevant and appropriate to the proposed research, are valid to include as ways of creating potential impact.

The Research Excellence Framework - the REF is the new system for assessing the quality of research. The engagement and impact can occur before, during or after the research

The Public Engagement Manifesto - UEA (the University of East Anglia)’s Vice-Chancellor, for example was one of the first signatories to this national Manifesto. The Manifesto incorporates a number of key commitments to action e.g. to assess current support for engagement and address areas of improvement, work with students to develop a student volunteering pledge and develop a UEA (the University of East Anglia) community engagement strategy in consultation with community partners, for instance. Engagement all in all enhances teaching, the student experience and employability as well as research.

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What is Outreach ?

Outreach is an activity of providing services to populations who might not otherwise have access to those services. A key component of outreach is that the groups providing it are not stationary, but mobile; in other words they are meeting those in need of outreach services at the locations where those in need are. In addition to delivering services, outreach has an educational role, raising the awareness of existing services.

³See <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/kei/impacts/Pages/home.aspx> See also guidance and top tips on engagement and pathways to impact - <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/guides/pe-and-pathways-impact>

Outreach is often meant to fill in the gap in the services provided by mainstream (often, governmental) services, and is often carried out by [non-profit, nongovernmental organizations](#). This is a major element differentiating outreach from [public relations](#). Compared to staff providing traditional services, Dewson et al.⁴ notes that outreach staff may be less qualified, but is more highly motivated.

There are three types of outreach that could be distinguished one another: domiciliary (undertaken at individual homes), detached (undertaken in public environments and targeting individuals), and peripatetic (undertaken at public or private environments and targeting organizations rather than individuals). Dewson further lists another type in addition to those three, i.e. the satellite type, where services are provided at a dedicated site.

The tools of outreach are commonly leaflets, newsletters, advertising; stalls and displays, and dedicated events, with the common location being local community institutions such as libraries, community centres, markets and so on. Compared to traditional service providers, outreach services are provided closer to individuals residence, are voluntary, and have fewer, if any, enforceable obligations.

Outreach can target various populations, from [sex workers](#) and [drug](#) users to museum goers, [wikipedia](#) editors, and devoted religious people. The [Jewish counter-missionary](#) organization describes itself as "an international organization that responds directly to the issues raised by missionaries and cults, by exploring Judaism in contradistinction to fundamentalist Christianity.

⁴ Dewson S, Davis S, Casebourne J. *"Maximising the Role of Outreach in Client Engagement"*, Research Report DWPRR 326, Department for Work and Pensions, 2006.

An example of the higher-education institution that enables the outreach and engagement is that of The Ohio State University as can be traced from the following pictures:



Endeavor Center Earns University Outreach and Engagement Award



Outreach and Engagement Grants Awarded in 2014 Outreach and Engagement Forum

ICTD and Media in Engagement and Outreach: How Should be Utilized

In the contemporary world the mass media provide the meeting ground for our interactions with others beyond our “world”. The media supply the role models and the scenarios for our encounters with others. What we see, what we say, and what we do when we encounter foreigners, for instance at home and abroad, are shaped by media images.⁵ And the media -also new media⁶- could stort the image.

Approximately one century ago, the word “neighbor” referred to people very much like one’s self—similar in dress, in diet, in custom, in

⁵ See Gary Gumpert and Robert Cathcart, *Media Stereotyping : Images of the Foreigner*, in in Larry A. Samovar & Richard E. Porter, *Intercultural Communication : A Reader*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. Belmont, California, 1992. p. 349.

⁶ New media is a broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century. For example, new media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content any time, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the “democratization” of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. What distinguishes new media from **traditional media** is the digitizing of content into bits. There is also a dynamic aspect of content production which can be done in real time, but these offerings lack standards and have yet to gain traction. Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, is an example, combining Internet accessible digital text, images and video with web-links, creative participation of contributors, interactive feedback of users and formation of a participant community of editors and donors for the benefit of non-community readers. Facebook is an example of the social media model, in which most users are also participants. Most technologies described as "new media" are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive. Some examples may be the Internet, websites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMS, and DVDs. New media does not include television programs, feature films, magazines, books, or paper-based publications – unless they contain technologies that enable digital interactivity. See Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

language—who happened to live next door. Today, relatively few people are surrounded by neighbors who are cultural replicas of themselves. Tomorrow we can expect to spend most of our lives in the company of neighbors who will speak in a different language, have different values, move at a different pace, and interact according to a different script.

Dean C Barlund⁷ wrote that within no longer than a decade or two the probability of spending part of one's life in a foreign culture will exceed the probability a hundred years ago of ever leaving the town in which one was inborn. As our world is transformed, our neighbors will be people whose life styles contrast sharply with our own. Barlund even said long ago that the technological feasibility of such a global village is no longer in doubt. The means already exist : in telecommunication systems linking the world by satellite, in aircraft capable of moving faster than the speed of sound, in computers which can disgorge facts more rapidly than men can formulate their questions. The methods for bringing people closer physically and electronically are clearly at hand. What is in doubt is whether the erosion of cultural boundaries through technology will bring the realization of a dream or a nightmare. Will a global village be a mere collection or a true community of men ?⁸Will its residents be neighbors capable of respecting and utilizing their differences, or clusters of strangers living in ghettos and united only in their antipathies for others ?

One thing that one should pay attention to is that communication, especially that among Indonesians and the Muslim Worlds in one's effort to have collaboration needs mutual effort, benefit and good will, sincerity, friendship, and brotherhood. It is easy to be misled by instant friendship which

⁷ See Dean C. Barlund, 'Communication in a Global Village' in Larry A. Samovar & Richard E. Porter, *Intercultural Communication : A Reader*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. Belmont, California, 1992.

⁸ See Azhar, Arsyad, "Musaahamatul Qiyam al-Diiniyah fi al-Tafaahum wa Ishlahi al-alam al-Mumazzaq", NESIL in *Mumaarasatu Hayyatin Imaniyyatin Fa'aalatin*, International Symposium in Istanbul, Turkey, 2004. P. 396.

may appear to be deep and personal but are really superficial. The effort is superficial, the good will is not sincerely intended, and in many cases the benefit is felt by the other side to be not just. Friendship and friendliness are not synonymous. Friendliness characterizes much of some people daily interaction but is not always an indication of friendship.⁹ Characterizing instant friendships is the appearance of two parties becoming close but, in reality, there is no strong bond between them. We do not want this case to happen. Communication should be affective (not only effective) in which head and heart or reason and emotion are expected to be kept. Affective communication in collaboration among Indonesians and the Muslim Worlds is the communication of feelings, of honest, heart-felt emotions.

Media Discourse: How Should be Paid Heed¹⁰

⁹ See Deena R. Levine & Mara B. Abdelman. *Beyond Language : Intercultural Communication*, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1982. See also Daniel Coleman, *Social Intelligence : The New Science of Human Relationships*, Bantam Dell, New York, 2006 p.51

¹⁰ Abdul Aziz Othman al-Twajiri explains that discourse or “wacana” in bahasa Indonesia and “khitab” in Arabic has two meanings. The first one is pure, consistent and simple. It was recognised by the Arabs and mentioned in the Holy Quran, the Hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH), and the early dictionaries. The second one is a contemporary concept, much complex in nature and goes beyond the linguistic information-related. Clear distinctions can be observed in the various connotations of discourse and which vary according to the contexts in which they occur. **First : At the linguistic Level :** Lisan Al Arab defines discourse (Khitab and Mukhataba) as the exchange of speech. Speech is described as the medium of Khitab and Mukhataba, and two interlocutors, engage in a discourse (yatakhataban). It is also defined as a medium of differentiation between two opposites: between right and wrong and the means of distinguishing between a rule and its opposite (See also Ibn Manzur, Lisan Al Arab, Volume 2, page 856, Edition of Dar Al Jeel and Dar Lisan Al Arab, Beirut, 1988). Discourse, as defined in Kitab Al Kulliyat, is the speech or the words of which the purpose is to clarify a matter to those able to understand. Words that do not serve the purpose of clarifying a matter to the listener cannot be termed as discourse (see Abu Albaqaa Al Kafawi, Al Kulliyat, page 419. Edition of Arrisala Institution. Dr Adnan Drawiche and Muhammed Al Basri. Beirut, 1992). **Second : At the Quranic Level :** The term “speech” in the form of ‘Khatb’ occurred nine times in the Holy Quran and three times in the form of Khitab. The latter incidences are Allah’s verse ‘*And He said : Entrust it to me, and he conquered me in speech*’ (Sad, verse 23). In his verse : ‘*And we made his kingdom strong and gave him wisdom and decisive speech*’ (Sad verse 20) , and in the following

Before discussing the renewal of Islamic Media discourse in detail, Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajiri¹¹ was very blunt in addressing the issue. The following statements in his article about “Islamic Discourse between Tradition and Modernity” hopefully would help us grasp the issue.

verse: *‘Lord of the Heavens and the earth, and (all) that is between them, the Beneficent; with whom none can converse’* Annabae, verse 37) He further mentions that in the Dictionary of Quranic Terms, the words *khatabahu*, *mukhatabatan*’ and *‘Alkhatb*’ are defined as: to speak and converse, while *Al Khatb* is the matter about which the conversation takes place (Moujame Al-Fath Al Qorane Al-Karim, V.2, Arabic Language Academy, General Body in charge of the Emiral Libraries Affairs, Cairo, 1996). In the above-mentioned three Quranic instances, the speech is often associated with pride and honour, might, and wisdom, as well as with magnanimity and eminence of Allah, Exalted be His Name. This association provides a good opportunity to ponder the deep meaning of discourse that transcends the original synonym of discourse as the exchange of speech or the desire to enlighten the other, to a much loftier sense closely associated with sublime notions that range from pride and honour *‘he conquered me in speech’*, wisdom *‘And we gave him wisdom and decisive speech’*, and divine greatness and eminence: *‘Lord of the Heavens and earth, and (all) that is between them, the Beneficent; with whom none can converse’*. Both the linguistic and Quranic connotations affirm the noble significance of discourse for decisive speech can only become ideal if associated with wisdom, and if the purpose behind it is to shed light on truth. **Third: At the level of modern Concepts :** Discourse is a philosophical term (See Al Amadi, *Al ahkam Fi Usul Al Ahkam*, Part 1, page 136, Dar Al Kutub Al Ilmiyya, Beirut 1980, Al Amadi says in this book ‘Discourse is the term agreed upon to mean explain a matter to he who is receptive and ready to understand it’, Dr Taha Abdulrahlane says in his book’ *Al-Lisan Wal Mizan*’, page 215 (edition of the Arab Cultural Centre-Casablanca 1998): “What is spoken-the speech or discourse- and is fit to be considered as speech, is what serves the purposes of communication that are compulsory in what is referred to as discourses. Discourse is no more than every utterance addressed to the other with the purpose of explaining to him a given idea), that is closer in meaning to the philosophical theory or thesis. The philosophical discourse of a person is his way of thinking, perceiving and expressing his ideas and conceptions. This discourse can either be in line with or opposed to the philosophical discourse of another person. When this concept became part of modern political thought, it gave rise to the political discourse which carries and intellectual weight as well as an ideological content. Thus, the political discourse of a group becomes the expression of its political creed and its choices. It becomes in this case more than a way of communication or the expression of an opinion, to become the receptacle that stands for spirit, creed, philosophy and doctrine. See further Abdul Aziz Othman al-Twajiri, *Islamic Discourse Between Tradition and Modernity*” in *Future Islam*, A journal of Future Ideology that shapes Today The World of Tomorrow, 2004.

¹¹ Ibid.

“One of the prerequisites of an active interaction with the multiple changes witnessed by our world is a reconsideration of the systems and patterns adopted in our intellectual and cultural life, and a rethinking of the positions we adopt and the choices we make in all political and economic matters. Only through such a review that we would be able to assess our work, meet the needs, redress and correct eventual errors, and rationalize, strengthen and steer our march in the right direction”.

This reconsideration would pave the way for us to renovate, develop, modernize and keep pace with the swift changes occurring in the various fields of life. It would help us achieve higher levels of global development in a way conducive to a better life, and that aims at developing society, enriching man and edifying civilization. Further, It’s very interesting to quote the expression of the late Abu Rabi when he talked about “civilization” in the Muslim world today as follow :

“To put bluntly, the Arab and the Muslim Worlds cannot boast an Arab or Muslim civilization at present. The political and economic elite in the Arab or Muslim Worlds, regardless of their culture, are true participants in the civilization of capitalism. True, there is an Arab or Muslim culture, but it is currently dominated by the larger capitalist civilization. We cannot compare a normative civilization (Islamic worldview) to a concrete and historically present civilization; that is, the global capitalist civilization. That is to say that it is impossible to fathom modern global identity outside the rubric of capitalism. In other words, we cannot view religious identity outside the domination of the capitalist system. Capitalists (proponents of a capitalist civilization) can be found all over the world, including the Muslim World, and class conflict still defines social relation. Furthermore, the Muslim World, unlike Europe, has failed to develop its capitalist system in the modern period and has thus become dependent on the world capitalist system, which has been pioneered by the West. The Muslim World has culture but lacks civilization.”¹²

Thus, renewing the Islamic discourse to establish a harmony between tradition and modernity entails renewing the civilizational edifice of the Islamic world by strengthening and immunising the self, reaching high levels in knowledge and science and being creative in these fields, instilling the spirit of Islamic solidarity for the latter to become a force of advancement and

¹² Ibrahim Abu Rabi, “The Muslim World in the Twenty First Century” in Kustiwan et.al (eds.) , *Islam, The West and the Rest*, Makassar, Alauddin Press, 2009, p. 54..

civilizational competitiveness, and a source of inspiration and impetus for progress in all fields. In fact, an Islamic discourse that lacks in scientific and professional prerequisites could turn to be of a boomerang effect, entailing, therefore, counter-productive results, the more it goes astray of the wisdom, gentle exhortation and fair practice of dialogue.

Among the endeavors to rethink patterns and systems, working methods, stances, choices and policies is the review of the Islamic discourse at its various levels. This discourse is indeed the mirror of the Islamic entity, a vehicle of Islamic call and an instrument for highlighting the truths of Islam, refuting the allegations leveled at it and the doubts cast on it in many ways. This discourse is furthermore the only tool available for the sage, the thinkers, the reformers and the decision and opinion makers of the Ummah to defend its existence before the escalating hostile campaigns that strive to distort the image of Islam and denigrate Muslims, undermine the vital interests of the Islamic world and subjugate it to hegemonic policies that serve the designs of the New World Order imposed by the unique pole on the rest of the international community and which hold the rein of international policy at this stage in history.

In form and content, the Islamic discourse is a human discourse using all media forms : media technologies, including the internet, video games themselves having developed into a mass form of media and traditional media forms such as the printing press, computer, even plastic as a media form, CD, DVD, etc. Including the new media which has something to do with electronic and the internet. The content seeks to promote dialogue, understanding, co-existence and co-operation with all the parties of the international community, in order to spread the values of justice, peace and welfare as well as the values of *Shidq, Amanah, Tabligh, and Fathanah*. With Islam as its reference, the Islamic discourse shuns violence and extremism, calls for the respect and preservation of the soul rights, and for banishing injustice, hegemony and the earth's

spoliation towards the noble character which is the goal of why prophet Muhammad was sent to the Earth.

Conclusion

Outreach and engagement at the higher-education Institution is that aspect of teaching that enables learning beyond the campus walls. That aspect of research that makes what we discover useful beyond the academic community. That aspect of service that directly benefits the public.

When the Islamic discourse comes under discussion, the concept should be applicable to the cultural discourse, the literary discourse, the artistic discourse and the information discourse, though the latter can be of more comprehensive nature and encompass all other levels of discourse, in such a way as to become for example the religious information discourse, the philosophical information discourse, the political information discourse, etc.

Islamic discourse should not be limited to preaching. It is every form of discourse that expresses the specificities of the Islamic Ummah, defends the supreme interests of the Islamic world, presents the true image of Islam and Muslims, rectifies errors, dispels suspicions, refutes accusations, and stands up, armed with knowledge, logic and the appropriate language, to the malicious campaigns waged against all Islamic countries, no exceptions made.

The latter as Othman al-Twajjiri mentions, being the way Muslims address the rest of the world, the mould that shapes their ideas, opinions and the standpoints that they wish to convey to the international public opinion. Based on this, we can safely argue that the Islamic discourse is the larger framework of Islamic Dakwa, practiced at its deepest and most comprehensive levels.

Many of the acceptable modes and techniques of modern journalism must be particularly repugnant to an Islamic perspective as noted by Schleifer. Spying and seeking to confirm suspicions (e.g. most investigative reporting) are

forbidden by Quran and hadith (the reported sayings of the prophet) as are slander and backbiting, which means spreading stories, even though true, which injure the feeling and honor of a Muslim. Slander is not simply a legal error or an occupational hazard; it is a great sin. In numerous hadiths the Muslims are forbidden to publicize their own and others' faults; on the contrary, the Muslim is urged to cover up or hide faults¹³.

As pointed out further by al-Twajjiri¹⁴, the articulation of Islamic discourse in term of **content** must be genuine, truthful, honest, serving first and foremost the Islamic interests, moderate, fair, equitable and derived from the principles, virtues and moral values of Islam. This discourse must be universal. It must be relevant to all human societies, upholding humanity's interests, achieving co-existence and co-operation among nations and peoples for the welfare of all humanity, and fostering the principles of justice, equity and peace. It must also be flexible, renewable, well formulated and fulfill all the objective conditions required when addressing people in a language understood by all, with a sound and acceptable logic that is compatible with the conditions of every environment and every category of people. It must be constructive, beneficial, purposeful and must aim at reforming, renewing and developing at the internal level. It has also to strive to clarify and highlight the truths of Islam and dispel the doubts harbored about it, in a moderate, gentle and flexible way that shuns all forms of extremism, violence, vehemence and zeal, inviting to the righteous path without being impulsive, undermining the interests of the target audience or offending the latter. The discourse must be sublime and elegant in form and content. It must be free of imitation and must transcend ephemeral trends or overwhelming currents, in such a way as to preserve its independence and its distinction. Last but not the least, It must be open unto dialogue, and mutual

¹³ See S. Abdullah Schleifer, "Islam and Information: Need, Feasibility, and Limitations of an Independent Islamic News Agency," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 3, no.1 (Spring 1986) pp. 122-123

¹⁴ See Abdul Aziz Othman al-Twajjiri, *op.cit.*

understanding, and must be receptive to the regional and international environment, fully assimilating changes and new developments.¹⁵

Finally, In terms of using ICT or media, the **content**, again as mentioned before using all media forms, should seek to promote dialogue, understanding, co-existence and co-operation with all the parties of the local, national, and international community, in order to spread the values of justice, peace and welfare. With Islam as its reference, the Islamic discourse should shun violence and extremism, calls for the respect and preservation of human rights, and for banishing injustice, hegemony and the earth's spoliation. In term of Style, the writer's choice of words should be full of wisdom and spirituality using deep, amazing, and meaningful imagery which is the evoking of any experience of the senses, as well as good order of words in sentences and paragraph and the functioning of the Ruh which God has blown into human's inner capacity. *Wallahu a'lamu bishawaab.*

¹⁵ see also Azhar Arsyad "Renewal of Islamic Media Discourse :Form, Content, and Style" presented at 'The 2nd International Conference on Islamic Media, 13-15 December 2011

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