

## Al Zarnuji's Learning Principles in the Malaysian National Education Philosophy: An Integrated Model of Islamic Spiritual Intelligence

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the underlying principles of the Malaysia National Education Philosophy (NEP) is to produce well-balanced human capital in terms of physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects. However, of all human intelligence, the concept of spiritual intelligence is less discussed, particularly in the educational context. In this diverse world of complex cultural and religious composition, the spiritual elements in NEP are being separated and narrowed down to religious and moral studies. Among the rising issues regarding morality and ethics pertaining to the Malaysian educational system, the aspect of spiritual intelligence cannot be further neglected. The challenge for Muslims is to have further interpretation from a new fresh outlook of Islamic spiritual intelligence perspective. Thus, this study proposes an Integrated Islamic Spiritual Intelligence (ISI) model in accordance to the Malaysia National Education Philosophy with the aim to provide an integrated view on ISI based on Al Zarnuji's Learning Principles (Ta'lim al-Muta'allim).*

**Keywords:** Islamic Spiritual Intelligence, Malaysia National Education Philosophy, Al Zarnuji, Human Capital.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Academic education is vital and foremost imperative channel in developing individuals to be the key players in reaching Malaysia's aspirations. The most important route in developing human capital for the nation's aspiration is via education. The Malaysia National Education Philosophy (NEP) serves as a platform for guidance concerning all activities and processes pertaining to the Malaysian educational system. The values, beliefs and principles of the Malaysian educational framework is soundly outlined within the NEP itself.

The problem to be addressed in this study is that the Malaysia NEP does not include the spiritual element in its main principles even though it has been inculcated over the course of the past 20 years. The implementation of NEP attempt to bridge the gap between races in accordance to the New Economy Policy. During the post-independence period, NEP has been revamped and rebranded with various names; however, the primary objective has been conserved in order to produce balanced human capital in terms of intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual for the benefits of the nation. The main basis of NEP is the notion of submission to God and religion. It constitutes the perspective that NEP should be able to produce responsible individuals inculcated with good ethics and moral values. However, over the course of 20 years since NEP was implemented, human capital achievement has only emphasised intellectual capability (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ) (Abdullah et al., 2004). The spiritual elements (SQ) of an individual

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was only viewed within the scope of religious and moral studies. This has resulted into many issues regarding moral and ethics in the Malaysian educational system.

From Islamic perspective, the elements of spiritual intelligence are viewed holistically in education in order to create well-balanced human capital for the benefit of the nation. The gap of spiritual elements is widely discussed where majority of schools and educational institutions in Malaysia focus more on the intellectual element and partly on the emotional element. As a result, the spiritual element was narrowed down to only religious and moral studies.

Islamic scholars have long been proponents of the notion that there should not be any separation between spiritual elements and other elements in holistic education (Hasan Langgulung, 1986; Naquib Al-Attas, 1999; and Sidek Baba, 2004). This is further supported by Covey (2004), who stated that spiritual intelligence should be the core aspect among others in upholding education. Spiritual intelligence could only be initiated by encouraging a values-driven education. This is, in fact, in line with the current direction of the Malaysian government where inculcating values in education is being heightened in order to develop more holistic human capital in the country. This was firmly supported by the Prime Minister:

“Our vision is to produce quality, future-proof and values-driven graduates through three main outcomes — firstly, the emphasis on values in education; secondly, increasing quality across the system and thirdly, more autonomy and accountability.”

Therefore, this study was initiated to develop an integrated Islamic spiritual intelligence framework in accordance to the Malaysia NEP.

## **2. SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE**

Spiritual Intelligence has been defined by many researchers (Shamsiah Bahnu Hanefar et al., 2015; Zohar, 2010; King and Decicco, 2009; Emmons, 2000; Amram and Dryer, 2008) in noble endeavours of giving light to the intelligence that is widely disregarded. The fundamental questions such as where we come from, who is our Creator, and where are we destined to in life are normally sought by any man. All these questions are answered through one's intelligence known as the spiritual intelligence (Shamsiah Bahnu Hanefar et al., 2015). The term spiritual intelligence came to the fore in the past decade, as Zohar and Marshall (2000) proposed the definition of spiritual intelligence as “intelligence with which we access our deepest meanings, values, purposes, and highest motivations.” Later through his study, Zohar (2010) described the spiritual intelligence as “the influence obtained through deep sense of meaning, deepest values and sense of higher purpose through life devotion”.

There are secular views which claim that all human beings possess spiritual intelligence, but not all have religious consciousness (Troycross, 1998; Emmons, 2000; King and Decicco, 2009). These perspectives lead to the conclusion that one can have high SQ but not necessarily perform religious practices. As a result, the spiritual concept is not related with religion at all. In another angle, Pete and Bondi (1992) described that the background of cultural diversity is related with both religion and spiritual concept. Now, the question is to what extent can the complexity of spiritual intelligence be generalised across the diverse concepts of religion and spirituality?

Emmons (2000) and King and Decicco (2009) both established a meaning of transcendence as the overarching element of spiritual intelligence. Both studies outlined four main elements of spiritual intelligence. The former identified 4 domains of spiritual intelligence, which are: “(1) the capacity for transcendence, (2) the ability to enter into a heightened spiritual state of consciousness, (3) the ability to invest everyday activities, events, and relationships with a sense of the sacred and (4) the ability to employ spiritual resources to solve problems in living”.

As for the latter, the four elements were defined as “(1) critical existential thinking, (2) personal meaning production, (3) transcendental awareness, and (4) conscious state expansion”. The model showed the level of acceptance of individual to fit and justify the spiritual intelligence. This leads to the individual’s ability to reframe, re-contextualize their thinking towards creating a sense of meaning in life for greater purpose and transcendence awareness. In a similar view, spiritual intelligence is also seen as “the ability to apply and embody spiritual resources and qualities to enrich daily functioning and wellbeing” (Amram and Dryer, 2008). In all the above views, the realm of transcendence evolves around the capability of the mere being of the individual and apart from divine intervention.

In the holistic perspective of man, it is deemed incomplete if core spiritual intelligence is sustained as a secular intelligence. This indeed does not represent the Islamic perspective in general. This secular view of SQ was argued by many proponents (Elmi, 2007; Zainab et al., 2012; and Zainab et al., 2014), which mentioned that there is a relationship between religious knowledge and religious activities among the elderly. In addition, Elmi and Zainab (2013) discovered that knowledge of the elderly is an indicator which displays a person's spiritual intelligence. In fact, Elmi (2013) concluded his study by defining Islamic spiritual intelligence as the inner human strength that is granted by the guidance of Allah alongside good morality. This innate strength could be sensed within the soul, the heart, deep faith, perseverance in practice.

An attempt to derive the shared spiritual intelligence themes from both Islamic and Western philosophical perspectives was conducted by Hanefar et al. (2016). The elicited seven spiritual intelligence themes include: “meaning/purpose of life, consciousness, transcendence, spiritual resources, self-determination, reflection-soul purification and spiritual coping with obstacles”.

A clear definition of spiritual intelligence is still needed in the literature. Lack of direction leads to more critique on how the angle should be viewed across the complexity of diverse religions. For example, spiritual conceptual views of Muslims may differ to those of Christians, and vice versa. This could lead to different interpretations of spiritual intelligence across different spiritual concepts. Thus, this study discusses the domain of spiritual intelligence in accordance to the Islamic perspective.

## **2.1 Islamic Spiritual Intelligence**

The term Islamic Spiritual Intelligence (ISI) is quite new in academia. Fortunately, ISI has started to gain attention among researchers who aspire to rightfully connect intelligence to divine force (Akhtar et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2018; Elmi & Zainab, 2015; Shamsiah Bahnu Hanefar, 2015; Zanariah, 2015; Bensaid et al., 2014). According to Elmi & Zainab (2015), the term ISI was derived from Qur’an and Sunnah and includes 7 domains of Islamic spiritual intelligences namely “al-ruh, al-qalb, al-nafs, al-aql, faith, worship and morality”. The research concluded that these seven domains of spiritual intelligence are important to be practiced by Muslims as a guidance towards worshipping the Creator.

The ISI was proven to be complementary in developing the character of individuals in an organisation in many contexts (Akhtar et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2018; Zanariah, 2015). Zanariah (2015) developed a framework evaluating the ISI quotient in regard to the concept of Islamic leader's characteristics or nature. The study found that the characteristics of Siddiq (truthfulness), Tabligh (deliver), and Fatanah (wisdom) were the most acceptable constructs in shaping the basis of ISI. This study demonstrates that ISI can lead humans to better appreciate the greatness of Allah and help in fulfilling the role as the khalifah (vicegerent of Allah).

Meanwhile, Shamsiah Bahnu Hanefar (2015) developed a framework evaluating spiritual intelligence in the context of education. The study identified the spiritual intelligence context domain from important Islamic educational texts: Ihya Ulumuddin (Book 3) by Imam al-Ghazali

and Manusia dan Pendidikan by Hasan Langgulung. Based on the content analysis conducted, seven elements of spiritual intelligence were identified towards the development of the Spiritual Intelligence Model for Human Excellence (SIMHE).

From previous research, numerous work has been done to investigate Islamic Spiritual Intelligence (ISI) in different contexts, however much research is still needed in the Malaysian context, particularly in the aspect of education that integrate the Malaysia National Education Policy (NEP). The concept of spiritual intelligence in NEP needs to be defined in accordance to Islamic perspective rather than a broad generic framework of spiritual religious concept. Thus, this study intended to take further leap into narrowing Islamic Spiritual Intelligence with the aim to bridge the gap since the core spiritual intelligence presented in literature lacks representation of Islamic perspective.

## **2.2 Al-Zarnūjī's Learning Principles: Realising Islamic Spiritual Intelligence**

In the realisation of Islamic spiritual intelligence in the NEP, this study proposed that the execution of education should inculcate values enlightened by Al-Zarnūjī in his book, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Al-Zarnūjī's teachings deliver significant insights into the essential principles of teaching and learning, which is deemed very much valuable not only from the Islamic educational institutions perspective, but the concept of dynamic teaching and learning. The work of Al-Zarnūjī in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* has been relevant across generations since it was first written in 13th century of the last Abbasid Caliph (Mu'izzuddin, 2014). In al-Zarnūjī's work, he highlighted on how the relationship between students and teachers in creating a conducive learning environment that inculcates values and positive characters (Hitti, 1948). In addition, Hulawa (2018) claimed that Al-Zarnūjī's teachings can be integrated into the education curriculum in Indonesia as a method to build character using education.

The masterpiece has been highly regarded as monumental work not only among Islamic scholars, but among the Western scholars as well. The insight is highly prominent, especially among Islamic education institutions, as such in the pondok or madrasah (Nata, 2000). *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* has distinguished itself to other Islamic intellectual sources with its own unique educational concepts. The book provided the concept of knowledge's pursuit and embedded with the details of ethical dimension within the teaching learning dynamics (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015). Hence, the content of this work focuses on promoting positive values within Islamic educational spectrum.

## **3. LINKING SQ WITH IQ & EQ IN THE IISI MODEL**

Thus, based on the discussion above, the study proposes the model in Figure 1 as an ideal Integrated Islamic Spiritual Intelligence (IISI) which can be greatly tailored into the model of NEP to give a further dimension of how Islamic spiritual intelligence should be viewed as integrated in a holistic education environment. The Malaysia NEP readily upholds the intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional quotient (EQ). To complement the education system with SQ, Zohar's (2010) spiritual intelligence concept as well as Al-Zarnūjī's education theories are proposed to be integrated in the IISI Model as shown in Figure 1.

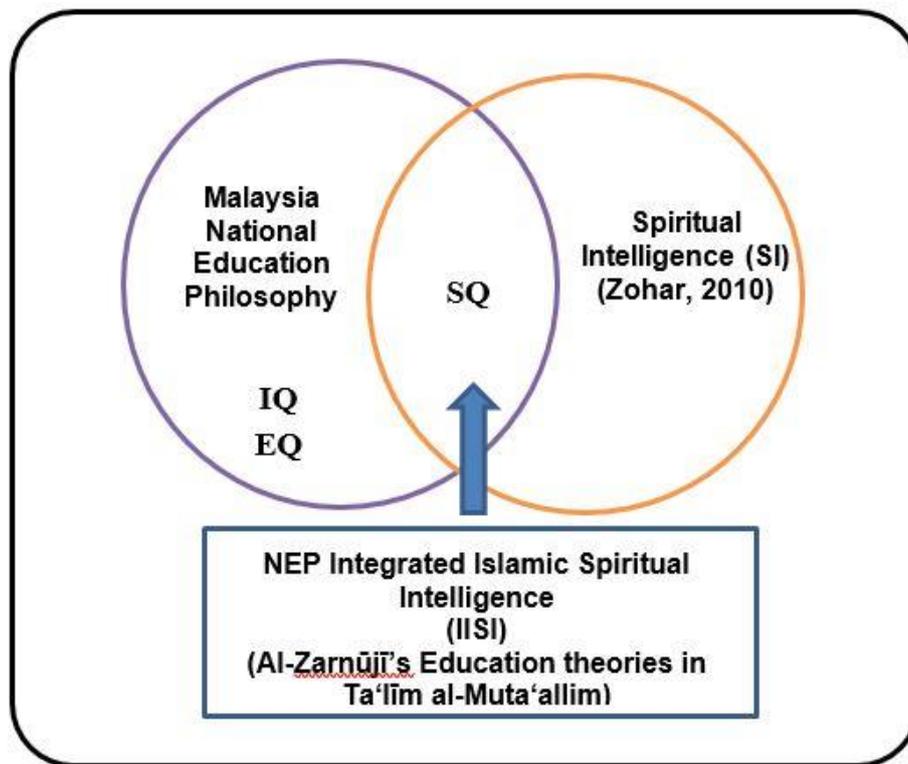


Figure 1. NEP Integrated Islamic Spiritual Intelligence Model (IISI).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article has examined the importance of revising the NEP considering the spiritual intelligence within its implementation. Hence, the IISI model was proposed as a reference towards realizing this. This model is expected to become the foundation for educators to complement teaching principles and beliefs, subsequently reflecting this in teaching enrichment. Indeed, the impact expected by the model proposed in terms of how Spiritual Intelligence should be reviewed by stakeholders. In the long run, this integration seeks to produce a more holistic Muslim generation, who not only aims for worldly success, rather ultimate success in the hereafter.

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