

Conceptualization of the Philosophy of *Iqra* through the Lens of Abdulhamid A. Abu Sulayman

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Abstract

Abdulhamid Abu Sulayman was a world-renowned Islamic trailblazer who was inspired by *Iqra*'s Quranic philosophy (reading) and ummatic worldview. According to Pew Research Centre data of 2016 indicated that 65% (sub-Saharan), 42% (MENA), and 32% (Asia) lack formal education, whereas 95% of Muslim in Europe and USA have some form of formal education. These figures indicate the absence of *iqra* culture and philosophy, with effect of inadequate socioeconomic advancement. The objective of this article is to appreciate holistically *iqra* philosophy through the lens of Prof. Abdulhamid Abu Sulayman life and achievements. The study utilized literature reviews, ethnographic, observation and interviews. The findings indicated that *iqra* culture, philosophy and practices implies understanding, analyzing, examining, delivering, studying, researching, knowing, disseminating, and preserving of knowledge and related practices for present and future generations. Through *iqra* culture and practices knowledge, spiritual, moral stability, social transformation and technological advancement of the Ummah are achieved.

Keywords: Abdulhamid Abu Sulayman; *Iqra* Philosophy, Knowledge, Advancement, Ummah

Introduction

Islam and its future are all about reading for today, tomorrow and future. This article is intended to cultivate lifelong learning and social change for sustainable future and hereafter. My insertion is that from my earlier life, I always fall in love with the word *iqra*, that made me admire the Quran and all its injunctions. During my earlier life, I used to hunt for *iqra* magazine produced by some Muslim organizations. I always valued reading and discovered the multiplier benefits associated with this philosophy. This is why Prophet (Saw)

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always encouraged the Muslim to pray for beneficial knowledge, halal (lawful) provision and good deeds. These are positive effects of *iqra* philosophy and practices. The *iqra* philosophy and culture cultivates authentic faith, taqwa, moral values and services to the humanity.

When I landed at the Denmark Technical University in 2000 to pursue my master study, I met a Ugandan brother, who first introduced me to email world. He told me to suggest my preferred name and I couldn't hesitate to give him *iqra*. This term has become a permanent part of life since I came to know that it's a strong word strategically rooted in the Quran in the stories, training and mentorship of all prophets. Islam placed a great importance on education, and as the religion expanded across various peoples, education emerged as a crucial means of forging a unifying and stable social structure.

I also admired and fall in love with IIT publications, where it always starts its publication with the first five verses of Sura Alaq. The interest to read has motivated and benefited me psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, strategically and economically. The reading for life has potential to improve concentration, focus, minds, literacy, health, and personality development, driving change in societies. The *iqra* culture encourages self-assurance, independence, and focus, where people are inspired to pursue education, personal development, skill improvement and innovations. It fundamentally removes risks associated with ignorance, disunity, racial discrimination, and ethnicity.

Further, it removes people from depth of darkness, manipulation, disorganization to the light, prosperity and happiness as *iqra* culture and philosophy always occur based on the reading in the name of Allah, to achieve righteousness, moral reasoning, empathy and sense of belongingness. This is why islam always advocate its followers to pursue the path of reading to acquire more and more knowledge. In Islam, knowledge is one as its truly based on tawhid (oneness of Allah). It is for this reason that Prophet Muhammad always encouraged the Muslims to start the day with prayers for knowledge, pure provision and positive action.

Also significant to mention is that Allah (SWT) first taught Prophet Adam the readings to know names of all things and also the first revelation to our Prophet is reading knowledge from the revealed scriptures (revelation), natural book (the universe) and the humanity developed systems. Through the *Iqra* lens, one becomes humble, develops empathy, increases knowledge, expands vocabulary, improves memory, and develops stronger analytical and writing skills.

As a result, the *Iqra* philosophy has a salutary effect on the mind, heart, character, spirit and thoughts. This boasts the store of person knowledge, expand his reflection, enables him to appreciate the need of the society and make him proactive in the society affairs. Abdulhamid Abu Sulayman exhibited some of these virtues as he always possessed the feelings to assist the needy student, provide solutions to ummah problems. He was never limited by the circumstances he was in. Once a scholar remarked that reading culture have a deeper impact on the minds of the readers.

Islam ruled the world when Muslims are the best readers, thinkers and researchers. However, when the Muslim stopped the *Iqra* culture and philosophy, they lost their global space, wealth, power, and knowledge.¹ Muslim are always honoured community blessed with the knowledge of islam. It was for this reason that Abdulhamid Abu Sulayman decried the sorry state of education in the Muslim world in his books such as ‘Crisis in The Muslim Mind’, ‘The Quranic Worldview: a springboard for cultural reform’, ‘Islamization: reforming contemporary knowledge’, ‘parent-child relations: -a guide to raising children’ and ‘revitalizing higher education in the Muslim world’ among others.

The goal of this article is to advocate for the revisiting of the *Iqra* philosophy and Islamic education culture to effect positive transformation in Muslim societies. The following are the key research questions to be investigated: 1) What factors contributed to the development of Abdulhamid's *Iqra* philosophy? 2) In terms of thought and leadership, what distinguishes him from other scholars? 3) What difficulties did he encounter in examining and determining the current state of Islamic education and Muslim societies? 4) What inspired him to overcome the obstacles, and what helped him stay focused on his goals?

Understanding Islamic Principles and Practices

In this article, I tried to remind the readers about some definition of Islam, and *Iqra* philosophy with objective of improving and deepening understandings, thoughts and pondering. According to the www.dictionary.com², Islam is defined as “submission to the will of God”. It refers to the religious faith of Muslims, based on the words and religious system revived by the prophet Muhammad (SAW), as the final prophet based on the Quran. This definition

¹ Kim Ghattas, “The Muslim World’s Question: ‘What Happened to Us?’” *The Atlantic*, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/01/muslim-world-saudi-iraq-iran-egypt-lebanon/605431/>.

² “Dictionary.Com,” [https://www.dictionary.com/browse/islam#:~:text=Islam means “submission to the, and Muhammad is his prophet.”](https://www.dictionary.com/browse/islam#:~:text=Islam%20means%20submission%20to%20the%20will%20of%20God%2C%20and%20Muhammad%20is%20his%20prophet.)

suffers secularized mentality, where it fails to recognize the Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of the worlds (mankind, jinn and all that exist in the universe). There is no doubt that Islam is the dominant religion in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and western countries. It is also important to correct the wrong notion that Islam was never founded by Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was not sent to abrogate the previous messages of Allah's prophets (25 of prophets mentioned in the Quran), but rather to renew, perfect and confirm their cultural, legal and devotional teachings.

Islam is a word with multiple connotations. It is derived from an Arabic stem that carries the meanings of *peace* and *submission* (to Allah the Exalted and Almighty). The objective of Islam as a complete way of life is to discipline mankind and prepare them spiritually, physically, and intellectually in the way that is best for the fulfilment of the mission they are created for, which is to worship Allah Alone and live within His only natural framework. Islam is meant to build global community characterized with justice, equality, integrity and accountability to benefit civilization, peace and sustainable development.

For this end, Allah commands us to do what is beneficial to us and forbids all that cause harm to us.³ Baharuddin and others have mentioned that Islam contain the meaning of submissiveness and total surrender to Allah SWT and to all His rules that have been revealed to His chosen final Prophet, Muhammad (PBUH). Islam is something that is inherent in human beings (fitrah), recognition and submission to the Tawhid cosmic order. This cosmic order is empirically evident in all natural systems when observed and studied through research. The research methods utilized to generate this article include philosophical method, literature reviews, ethnographic, observation and interviews. The methodology uses a philosophical frameworks derived from the fundamental principles and teaching of the Quran, Sunnah, Ijma, Qiyas and modern scientific discourse, the basis of seeking knowledge is uniformly and equally provided for every gender to benefit humanity development.

The Problems of Muslims and Civilization

Islam in accordance with its characteristics, is like a perfect building with a strong foundation of faith and pillar joints in the form of worship to Allah SWT and beautified with noble morals.⁴ *Iqra* is the first word revealed in the

³ Alfarooqcentre, "Definition of Islam," *Alfarooqcentre.Com*, last modified 2023, accessed September 17, 2023, <https://alfarooqcentre.com/en/islam/definition-of-islam/>.

⁴ Baharuddin Husin et al., "The Meaning and Characteristics of Islam in The Qur'an," *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation* 24, no. 1 (2020), [http://repository.stei.ac.id/4052/5/The Meaning And Characteristics Of Islam In The Qur'an.pdf](http://repository.stei.ac.id/4052/5/The%20Meaning%20And%20Characteristics%20Of%20Islam%20In%20The%20Qur'an.pdf).

Quran, which means recite, and read. The Quran stresses the importance of reading, studying, reflecting and investigating, and this is a commandment prescribed to all Muslims, making seeking of knowledge a sacred duty.⁵

According to the study by Haq and Tanveer (2020), it indicated that a total of 39,46,933 documents published worldwide in the year 2018 as reflected in SJR, the share 57 OIC member countries have been (8.29%), compared to the United States (US) (36.99%) source publications. There are 1,396 universities of 92 countries listed in the world university ranking 2020. Among the top 500 universities in the world, OIC members have 14 universities.⁶

In addition, Muslim nations have less scientists, engineers, and technicians per 1000 people than the global average of 40 and 140 for the industrialized world, respectively. They only account for 1% of all scientific publications published worldwide.⁷ The contributions to global science of the highest-publishing science systems in 15 Muslim-majority countries are still modest.⁸ This paltry contribution is far below the scientists of medieval Muslim civilization, which contributed many new discoveries in all branches of sciences and provision of quality education. Abu Sulaiman lens of *Iqra* was to explore how to solve this problem.

From these data, it indicates that Muslim countries and individuals are not prioritizing the *iqra* philosophy as it should have been desired under the Islamic sharia. Islamic teachings have been more clearly propagating the acquisition of knowledge. Allah says in Holy Quran, “Allah will raise the status of those who believe among you and who are given knowledge by degrees.” (Surah Al-Mujadila 58:11).

This *Iqra* was the first word given to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to enable him learn and disseminate the *risala* (message) to the humanity. This is the reason why he is sent as a mercy to the worlds. Without relevant and beneficial knowledge, mankind will not prosper. The Quran exhorts people to

⁵ Muslim-inspire, “Read Is the First Word Revealed in Holy Quran, *Iqra* (Recite Read),” <https://Musliminspire.Com>, <https://musliminspire.com/read-is-the-first-word-revealed-in-holy-quran-iqra-recite-read/>.

⁶ Ikram Ul Haq and Muhammad Tanveer, “Status of Research Productivity and Higher Education in the Members of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC),” *Library Philosophy and Practice* 3845 (2020), <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7162&context=libphilprac>.

⁷ Jim Al-Khalili, “Science in the Muslim World,” *Stars and Solar Physics*, 2010, <https://physicsworld.com/a/science-in-the-muslim-world/#:~:text=Muslim countries also have fewer,the world's published scientific papers>.

⁸ Wagdy Sawahel, “Muslim Nations’ Impact on Science Is ‘Modest but Growing,’” *University Word News*, 2022, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20221011153020453>.

contemplate, reflect, and learn in order to get closer to God and his creation. The Quran uses repetition to instill important ideas in the minds of those who read it. Knowledge in society will produce and have cumulative effect on human capital development.

The *Iqra* philosophy does not allow compartmentalization of knowledge system. Therefore, dividing knowledge into religious and secular (earthly knowledge) has been a big misnomer in the Muslim societies, since it created thought and practice crisis. Secular knowledge creates materialism, consumerism and atheism while islamic knowledge creates a socially and ideologically balanced human being with a clear worldview.

The Muslims minds and hearts have been poisoned by western education⁹ but this problem will only be addressed by *Iqra* philosophy inspired by the Quran and Sunnah so that the Ummah is removed once again from the modern *jabilliya*, darkness, misconceptions and secular thoughts. The world scholars are currently and strongly engaged in the decolonization of knowledge¹⁰ activities including establishment of religious institutions, awareness and trainings. Decolonization of knowledge are tools, approaches and methods designed to assist in deprogramming to neutralize people worldviews against eurocentric worldviews. Absorption of secular thoughts have produced weak and incapable Muslims who are ignorant about the rich islamic civilization and its contribution to human capital development.

Through *Iqra* culture and philosophy aims to build a well-balanced person and society as stated in the Quran “*Thus We have made you a middle nation*” (Sūratul Baqarah, No.2, Āyat 143). This balance entails positive relationship between man and His Creator, and between man and man to avoid all forms of extremes. Muslims today have remained with spiritual Islam without practical relevance to society affairs and that is what is responsible for their weakness, backwardness, domination and unproductiveness. According to Abu Sulaiman, *Iqra* philosophy aims to strengthens Muslim education, since it’s a corner and building blocks of any society.

Political, economic and social progress is unthinkable with a functioning *Iqra* culture and practices in the Muslim societies. The epistemic *Iqra* lens is an essential ingredient for Muslims to enable them achieve self-rediscovery of the religious, cultural, social and politico- economic transformation and

⁹ Asad Zaman, “Recovering from a Western Education,” *Azproject*, last modified 2018, <https://azprojects.wordpress.com/2018/10/30/recovering-from-a-western-education/>.

¹⁰ Veli Mitova, “Decolonising Knowledge Here and Now,” *Philosophical Papers* 49, no. 2 (2020), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/05568641.2020.1779606>.

contributions¹¹. For example, epistemic *Iqra* lens is critical to the Muslims to hold promise for either the completion of the anti-colonial struggle or the self-re-discovery of the formerly colonized and oppressed ones. Further, *Iqra* philosophy will assist counter hegemonic histories of claimed Western epistemological superiority as well as theories of racism and racist practices against the Muslims and black people of African descent.¹²

Iqra philosophy thrives in a freedom, independent and socially just society, which is an enabling environment absent in many Muslim countries as many of them are marred with political oppression and repression. As a result, there are tendencies that indicates the absence of *Iqra* philosophy and inquiry culture in the Muslim world as indicated by the UNESCO reports and studies that have shown significantly low reading levels in the Arab Muslim world. The average reading time for an Arab child is six minutes a year compared with 12,000 minutes in the West, according to the Arab Thought Foundation's Arab Report for Cultural Development. The reading rate of an Arab individual is a quarter of a page a year compared with 11 books in the US and seven books in the UK, according to a study conducted by the Supreme Council of Culture in Egypt.¹³ *Reading is a prerequisite for society's progress and development while not reading leads to the opposite.*

The reason behind the stagnancy in today's Muslim world is the fault of no one but Muslims themselves who have abandoned the true reading of the Quran, which strongly emphasizes the importance of knowledge¹⁴. Al-Zarnūjī considers knowledge as a means for advancement and the perfection of the individual and the society both in this world and hereafter.¹⁵ With such unreading syndrome and unfriendly political environment in Muslim countries, it will be difficult to determine the precise achievements of *Iqra* philosophy, islamic thought and practices.

The difficult that always impedes the Muslim societies progress are the existence of the perennial problems of underdevelopment and stifled political spaces that render the supposed beneficiaries of the *Iqra* philosophy and *Iqra*

¹¹ Asad Zaman, "What the World Lost Due to Decline of Islamic Civilization," *Azproject*, last modified 2018, <https://azprojects.wordpress.com/2018/07/02/what-the-world-lost-due-to-decline-of-islamic-civilization/>.

¹² Bernard Matolino, "Whither Epistemic Decolonization," *Psychological Papers* 49, no. 2 (2020).

¹³ Unesco, *Arab Reading Challenge*, 2017, <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/governance/periodic-reports/2016/united-arab-emirates>.

¹⁴ Hatem Bazian, "Books and Reading in the Muslim World: A Serious Crisis," *Daily Sabah*, last modified 2015, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/hatem-bazian/2015/08/17/books-and-reading-in-the-muslim-world-a-serious-crisis>.

¹⁵ Miftachul Huda et al., "Al-Zarnūjī's Concept of Knowledge ('Ilm)," *Sage Open* 6, no. 3 (2016).

culture hopeless subjects who continue to be disempowered and oppressed. The unending problem is that the Muslim countries education curriculum and Islamic educational institutions are under the full surveillance of the intelligence world, which are naturally affected by the fear of emerging Islam. The Islamic worldview championed by Abdulhamid Abu Sulaiman has always devoted to addressing these difficulties through promotion of Islamization of knowledge as he was greatly inspired by the work of Ismail Al-Faruqi, Taha Jabir Al-Alwani and other scholars.

Every country in the world is determined to heavily invest in education to make their citizen a learning society because they understood and appreciate the effect of the development of lifelong learning in response to the needs of a knowledge economy, which is now politically hot topic like climate change.¹⁶ A well-learned society is the one that is spiritually, morally, socially and economically upright as described in the Quran Sura Al-anam, verse 151-152, where Allah SWT said “O Prophet, ” “Come! Let me recite to you what your Lord has forbidden to you: do not associate others with Him ‘in worship’. ‘Do not fail to’ honour your parents. Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for you and for them. Do not come near indecencies, openly or secretly. Do not take a ‘human’ life—made sacred by Allah—except with ‘legal’ right. This is what He has commanded you, so perhaps you will understand¹⁷. And do not come near the wealth of the orphan—unless intending to enhance it—until they attain maturity. Give full measure and weigh with justice. We never require of any soul more than what it can afford. Whenever you speak, maintain justice—even regarding a close relative. And fulfil your covenant with Allah. This is what He has commanded you, so perhaps you will be mindful¹⁸.” Quran, Sura Al-anam: 151-152. This is very important teaching by the Quran. These are futures of the *Iqra* society, where the path of success in this world and hereafter are cleared described and presented.

Where what to avoid has been clearly described and failure to uphold these fundamental principles are causing chaos in many parts of the modern world. *Iqra* philosophy works to benefit society as it produces culturally strong

¹⁶ Pham Do Nhat Tien, “Characteristics of Learning Societies and Learning Citizens: A Literature Review,” in *Building a Learning Society in Vietnam: From Vision to Action*, 2013, https://www.academia.edu/5903439/Characteristics_of_learning_societies_and_learning_citizens_A_literature_review.

¹⁷ <https://quran.com/6?startingVerse=151>

¹⁸ <https://quran.com/6?startingVerse=152>

members of the societies like Abu Bakr Al-Sadiq, Umar Ibn Al-Khatab, Uthman Bin Affan and Ali Ibn Abu Twalib. Abdul Hamid authoritatively stated in his work, a lack of *Iqra* philosophy generally results in a crisis of hearts, souls' minds, and poor in-service to societies. Underdeveloped *Iqra* philosophy problems frequently resulted in a weak society, poor citizenship, dictatorship, social injustices, dominance, and unproductivity.

Many Muslims are suffering from thought, identify, values and practices crisis due to the lack of deep faith and inadequate devotional activities. There is need for islamic goals, purity, values and reforms. In different part of the globe today, we have two groups of Muslims, one group is religiously educated while the other is secular educated. However, both of the groups are facing crisis because of the following observations.

1. Religiously educated group suffers the following maladies
 - a. They are excellent in religious doctrines, believes and spiritual practices and contribute to the islamic heritage preservation.
 - b. They have centred their activities to the Quranic schools, madarsa and mosques.
 - c. They are biased and have narrowed islamic worldviews.
 - d. They are in most cases isolated from social, economic and political life of the society.
 - e. Majority of them sometimes lack modern language of societal engagements and communication.
 - f. Extremely limited in focus, priorities and often lack strategic planning.
 - g. Have high interest for religious promotion
 - h. Socially disorganized to certain degree
2. Secular educated group also suffers from the following ailments.
 - a. Often experience inadequate religious knowledge and orientation.
 - b. Limited in religious values and practices.
 - c. Lack religious language for understanding Islam and its sources of knowledge.
 - d. Active in social, economic and political affairs of the society.
 - e. Interest for religious orientation is weak if not poor.
 - f. Threat of secularization is high.
 - g. Posses no tangible religious interest
 - h. Socially disorganized to larger extent due to self-interest dominance

From these two groups, they both face crisis, and through robust *Iqra* philosophy and cultural approach, they can be architected to one system that

is aimed at producing a holistic and vibrant personality as envisaged in the Quran and Sunnah. In Islam, there is no compartmentalization of knowledge.

Knowledge system has always remained one as the true owner is one God, best called Allah. Mankind is one global society that is islamically called Ummah, with common origin, heritage, civilization and religion as indicated by the Quran in the Chapter of Al-Mu'minun 23:52, where Allah SWT said "Surely this religion of *yours* is 'only' *one*, and I am your Lord, so fear Me 'alone. Quran: 23:52. Further, Allah has described that Islam is the best, beautiful and honourable as indicated below. Allah SWT has said "Indeed, that is My Path—perfectly straight. So, follow it and do not follow other ways, for they will lead you away from His Way. This is what He has commanded you, so perhaps you will be conscious 'of Allah" Quran Al-An'am 153.

No true knowledge, science and innovation can potentially contradict the fundamental principles of Quran and Sunnah. In Islam, *Iqra* philosophy is a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary skills and that is why earlier Muslim scholars were the masters of Quranic, Hadith, Aqeedah and Fiqh sciences, so that their knowledge will always remain fresh, relevant and adequate. The problem with modern secular and religious scholars is that they have specialized so thin that that they have nearly become illiterate. Therefore, *Iqra* society is a vibrant society characterized by deep believe of oneness of Allah, commitment and practices of pillars of iman, commitment and practices of pillars of Islam, motivated by Akhira concepts, doer of good deeds, forbid illegal, unity and brotherhood, balanced and truth, model society of excellence, human nature (internal and external), and work for welfare of others.

Factors responsible for the shaping of the *Iqra* philosophy

Abdulhamid was born in the blessed city of Makkah, in a religious family, where he got opportunity to surround himself with best, disciplined and hardworking persons. He appears to have been very close to the Quran, which has greatly impacted his behaviours, character and vision development. This is the best way for one to purify himself as stated in the Quran An-Nazi'at 79:18 "And say, 'Would you 'be willing to' purify *yourself*" and Quran Al-Muzzammil 73:8 "Always' remember the Name of your Lord, and devote *yourself* to Him wholeheartedly". Abdulhamid was granted an honourable entrance and an honourable exit. He was an excellent contemporary scholar with a rich family, institutions, friends and global networks. In sura Al-furqan 25:74 believers always pray by saying "Our Lord! Bless us with 'pious' spouses and offspring who will be the joy of our hearts, and make us models for the righteous".

There is no doubt that Allah granted tawfiq, mercy and guide despite many ordeals Abdulhamid went through. He benefited himself by surrounding himself with religious and pious persons. His heart was pure, and his mind was always fresh, focused to building the future of the Ummah through educational reform. He was someone loved, respected and admired by many. His vision was always to achieve excellence for Islam and Muslims as this Ummah is the best of nation ever-raised for humanity as described in the Quran. As Umar Ibn Khattab (may Allah SWT be pleased with him) indicated that the dignity of this Ummah is always raised and protected by virtue of Islam. Holding to it firm, implies the superiority of islam cannot be doubted. This degree of excellence (golden age of Islam) was well illustrated between 7th and 12th Century of Islam. If the Muslim undermine Islam, then they fall like dry leaves from the trees. Although, the records of the young Abdulhamid are unclear to many, based on intellectual guess, he seems to have been well taught by respected islamic scholars in his basic education while in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia before joining University of Cairo. Cairo environment has traditionally and historically remained an islamic education hub characterized by with highly qualified group of academics, islamic scholars, researchers, reformers and professionals.

The lesson he learnt while in this environment enabled Abdulhamid successful take off in terms of championing human development and educational reform in the Muslim world. Indeed, he was a great asset in championing Muslim scholarship across Africa, Asia and in western countries, when he was working with World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), King Saud University, Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS), International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) and International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). All his projects and programmes laid strong foundation that accelerated global process towards islamic contemporary research, integration of knowledge and islamic civilization. He is motivated and inspired by the Quranic verse in the Sura Ar-Ra'd 13:11 where Allah SWT said “.....*Allah* would never *change* a *people's* state 'of favour' until they *change* their own state 'of faith.....”.

With excellent religious education at earlier age, boasted his intellectual power, which enabled him to successfully joined University of Cairo for his undergraduate and masters. The University was an islamic environment that positively transformed his thought and actions. This was a moment of exposure, contact, exploration and development of his islamic worldviews. His practical orientation at the WAMY and King Saud University positively impacted his professional life, character and imprinted in his heart the service

to the Ummah as he was influenced by eminent scholars like Abdulkadir Audah, Ismail Faruqi, Abu Alaa Maududi, and Sheikh Abul Hassan Nadwi among others.

Abdulhamid was different from many other scholars in terms of thought and leadership

Abdulhamid was motivated and influenced by the character of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), accelerating his intellectual, academic, activism, da'wah and advocacy in near and far horizons. Abdulhamid was not happy and satisfied with the education offered in the Saudi as it was too simplistic, ritualistic and centred on thinking within a box syndrome. So, he envisioned a future and started its journey. He was a straight, rational and a go getter scholar who ensured that he always impacted positively whom he encountered. He could approach old and young and share questions with them to trigger discussion and exchange. 'It is rare to find a combination of scholarly erudition, humility, approachability, and wholesomeness in Abdulhamid' remarks by Sinanović.¹⁹

Makkah-based exposure enabled him to dive into critical reflection on the ummah situation, Muslim world education, and family life in Islam. His interest was to advance Ummatic interest at his heart genuinely. He benefited by surrounding himself with clean, good and visionary hearts and intellectuals, which can be correctly described by the Quran as helpers and protectors, in the Quran Chapter Atawbah (verse 71-72) and Chapter Alkahf (verse 28). These noble teachings assisted him to avoid the company of those people who love luxurious life, those who are heedless and follow their desires.

At many instances and moment of difficulties, he frequently avoided and conquered many of those loopholes that were common at institutional, national and international level through patience and learning and connecting. His relationship with Dr. Hisham Altalib, Ahmed Totonji, Jamal Barzinji²⁰, (cofounders of IIIT), later engagements with the former Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr. Mahathir Mohamed and, current Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr. Anwar Ibrahim and others galvanized his thoughts and supported. All these scholars and others accelerated and supported the establishment of the first global islamic university (IIUM) in Malaysia. Abdulhamid became the Second Rector for the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). He was

¹⁹ Ermin Sinanović, "Reforming Education, Inspiring Muslims: Lessons from Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman," *Erminsinanovic.Com*, last modified 2021, accessed September 29, 2023, <https://www.ermisninanovic.com/blog/reforming-education-inspiring-muslims-lessons-from-dr-abdulhamid-abusulayman>.

²⁰ Alyaa Ebbiary, "In Conversation With Dr. Hisham Altalib about the Legacy of Professor AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman," *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (2022).

hardworking, disciplined, and formidable character who left his imprint on all those who encountered him.

According to Sinanović, as a Rector, he had a genuine concern with the student's well-being, raised funds to assist those from war-torn and poorer regions of the world with tuition scholarship and living expenses. He encouraged students to get married, providing additional financial assistance to married students. Faithful to the Ummatic spirit which he fostered among everyone around him, he advised students from different ethnic and national backgrounds to get married.

He saw the IIUM as the ground for creating a new identity, one that is rooted in the cosmopolitan understanding of the Ummah and not on narrow ethnic, racial, or regional identities".²¹ Today, his contribution to IIUM is globally significant, unmatched and unparalleled. It was at this great institution that Abdulhamid *Iqra* philosophy was galvanized and accelerated, that correctly translated the concept of IIUM as an institution for political expediency to become a global model for civilization dialogue and development.²² Because of his sincere intention, noble character and goals, he was blessed with ability to mobilize and pool resources (e.g., financial, intellectual and human) to build a team for the future of Islam. He believed, social change and transformation is strategically best possible through education reform and support.

Abdulhamid was a clean heart person, which met many other clean hearts, where all these noble hearts get united to form a cohesive team under the infinite mercy of Allah (SWT) with goals to serve the Ummah. They believed that individual work cannot achieve much for the future of the Ummah and hence, through collaboration and cooperation, Abdulhamid has contributed to the formation of more than 30 globally significant Islamic institutions with objective of cultivating and strengthening Islamic-faith identity, character, values, practices and safeguards.²³

Abdulhamid was confronted by the pain to see the Muslim societies suffering in a highly deep-rooted division on education between secular and religious education. With each group experiencing dryness of knowledge with minimal impact on their life. As a scholar, faith-inspired activist, educationalist, and institution builder, many elite and political regimes were not happy with

²¹ Sinanović, "Reforming Education, Inspiring Muslims: Lessons from Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman."

²² Anwar Ibrahim, "My 1999 Letter from Prison to Dr. Abdulhamid AbuSulayman," *Maydan*, 2022, <https://themaydan.com/2022/02/letter-from-prison-to-dr-abusulayman/>.

²³ Ebbiary, "In Conversation With Dr. Hisham Altalib about the Legacy of Professor AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman."

this pragmatic scholar as they always wanted status quo. When Prof. encountered and observed this challenge, he sought ways to reconnect the two forms of education to boast effect of knowledge in Islam on societies and help reform their thought, identities and practices. Although masses considered such thought and approach alien, new and doubted, but there are always groups that accept and support.

Another problem encountered during the shaping of Abdulhamid *Iqra* philosophy was a nearly complete absence of the islamic institutions that could drive the true islamic philosophy of education, reform, dawah and social activism. At that time, there was no institution that could bridge between secular and islamic religious. Another headache for the Abdulhamid was that the level, standard and quality of Muslim scholars emerging from the western universities was quite low and disheartening. The problem of silos mentality was high and extreme. What all these imply are that the Muslim world was suffering an intellectual deficiency, identity and thought crisis.

So, Abdulhamid decided to start a journey of promoting *Iqra* philosophy to bridge the gap between the two disconnected educational world. To also create ummatic awareness on this problem, he authored his globally famous book titled “*crisis in the Muslim mind*” in 1993. This single book electrified the Muslim minds and led to a wake-up call, to revive the *Iqra* philosophy as envisaged by the Quran across the Muslim world.

As a result, many scholars wrote on the need for a more comprehensive Muslim education development, curriculum reforms, human capital development and establishment of linkages and cooperation. This initiative culminated into establishment of many islamic universities, scholarships and academic exchanges across the Muslim world. Currently there is a lot reawakening and awareness on this issue. The success stories from IIUM have facilitated establishment of the islamic universities in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Niger, Uganda and Sudan in 1990s and further motivated organization like Direct Aid International (formerly Africa Muslim Agency) to establish Islamic universities in Somalia, Zanzibar, Tanzania, Kenya and Benin. What is missing and is needed urgently is the linkages, exchange and collaboration among them.

The *Iqra* philosophy and culture is like a good word or knowledge liken to a good and beneficial tree as stated in the noble Quran Chapter Ibrahim (verse 24-25), where Allah SWT said “Do you not see how Allah compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches reach the sky. ‘always’

yielding its fruit in every season by the Will of its Lord. This is how Allah sets forth parables for the people, so perhaps they will be mindful²⁴.”

Factors that Motivated Abdulhamid to Overcome the Obstacles and Helped Him Focus on His Milestones

In the spirit of *Iqra* philosophy and culture, which is a complete and comprehensive learning and educational approach, Abdulhamid appears to have well-understood the importance of equality of Muslim as taught by the spirit of Hajj which he often performed during his lifetime. Further, he was extremely conscious of personal accountability to His Creator, which he devoted to serve during his mission and life. Appreciating that scholars are the true inheritors of the Prophet and this was his biggest motivator. As a result, he is not a man influenced by worldly matters.

He appreciated the noble teaching of the Quran in the following Chapters and verses such as Al-Ankabut (64), Al-An'am (32), Muhammad (36) and Al-Hadid (20). In all these verses, Allah SWT clearly communicated to humanity the true value of this world as play, amusement, luxury, mutual boasting, and competition in wealth and children. Therefore, decided to free himself from many of its *fitna* (tribulations) by deepening his faith. He remained a true believer, committed to seeking Allah pleasure²⁵.

Abdulhamid success can be attributed to his pure intention of working for Islam, where his mind was throughout engaged in thinking for Islam. A manifestation of faith through service to humanity promote public order and stability.²⁶ He strongly believed in Allah and solely depended on Him (Tawakul) for his success as he was greatly inspired by the noble Quran words in Ash-Shua'ara (verse 180), where Allah commanded Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to say “I do not ask you for any reward for this ‘message’. My reward is only from the Lord of all *worlds*”.²⁷ Dependence on Allah SWT alone with patience, faith and good deeds always produce the desired results. faith gives believers the hope that perfect happiness, peace, tranquility, security and freedom from fear.²⁸

²⁴ <https://quran.com/14?startingVerse=24>

²⁵ AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2004).

²⁶ Seyma N. Saritoprak, Julie J. Exline, and Hisham Abu-Raiya, “Spiritual Jihad as an Emerging Psychological Concept: Connections with Religious/Spiritual Struggles, Virtues, and Perceived Growth,” *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 14, no. 2 (2020).

²⁷ <https://quran.com/26?startingVerse=180>

²⁸ Harold G. Koenig, “Maintaining Health and Well-Being by Putting Faith into Action During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 59 (2020): 2205–2214.

Iqra philosophy without doubt strengthens faith and bless actions of the servants of the Most Compassionate²⁹ like Prof. Abdulhamid, where his contribution spanned over 60 years of service to Islam and humanity in general, leaving behind a rich treasure of knowledge³⁰ and islamic heritage. This is the true effect of *Iqra* philosophy in Muslim societies. Without strong patience, believes and practices, such success would not have been possible. Quran teaches and motivates the believers on this issue, where Allah (SWT) said “O believers! Seek comfort in patience and prayer. *Allah* is truly with those who are *patient*.”. The problem common with some contemporary Muslim are that they lack positive thought and action.³¹

Degradation of the islamic civilization and decline took centuries and for us to reconstruct and restore³² it back will definitely call for decades of patience, faith and hard work. Abdulhamid was spiritually strong scholar, who succeeded in reconstructing islamic education thought and civilization³³ through IIT and IIUM experimentation. He always felt solace, happy and avoided extremism and it destructive ideologies. He had a good character that contributed to various strategic relationships building, that culminated into huge network of islamic scholars across the continent³⁴.

His practices and thought inspired thousands of graduates from IIUM, where they got both knowledge, mentorship and motivation to go back and work for their country, and community³⁵. The graduates mentored by him appreciated importance of islamic way of life, high quality morals and ethics so that they remain critical thinkers, responsible, and socially functional. Prof.

²⁹ <https://quran.com/25?startingVerse=63>

³⁰ Sa'idu Sulaiman, “Islamization of Knowledge and Integration of Knowledge: A Conceptual Clarification,” *Academia* (2016), https://www.academia.edu/30341820/Islamization_Of_Knowledge_And_Integration_Of_Knowledge_A_Conceptual_Clarification.

³¹ Salih Yucel, “Positive Thinking and Action in Islam: Case Studies from the Sirah of Prophet Muhammad,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5, no. 1 (2015): 223–234, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274370440_Positive_Thinking_and_Action_in_Islam_Case_Studies_from_the_Sirah_of_Prophet_Muhammad.

³² Zahid Jalaly, “Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman. Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Methodology and Thought,” *Kardan Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2018), <https://kardan.edu.af/data/public/files/zahid-jalaly-book-review27102018061254.pdf>.

³³ Mohammad Mumtaz Ali, “Reconstruction of Islamic Thought and Civilization; The Case of Islamization of Knowledge,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 16, no. 1 (1999).

³⁴ Ssemuddu Imran, “Remembering Prof. Emeritus Dato’ Abdul Hamid A. Abu Sulayman,” *IIUM in News*, last modified 2021, <https://newsroom.iium.edu.my/index.php/2021/08/24/remembering-prof-emeritus-dato-abdul-hamid-a-abu-sulayman/>.

³⁵ Ibrahim, “My 1999 Letter from Prison to Dr. Abdulhamid AbuSulayman.”

Abdulhamid was a unique scholar who struggled to redefine and reconnect reason and revelation by showing the philosophy, methodology and application to benefit growth of knowledge and services to the humanity. To advance the *Iqra* philosophy and recognize the intellectual contribution of Prof. Abdulhamid, the leadership of the IIUM has established a \$250,000 Abu Sulayman International Student Fund³⁶ at the University in April of 2019 in support of educating the present and future leaders of the Ummah.

He will remain permanent history of the islamic movements and reformers history in the Muslim world as his IIUM scholarship is design to advance islamic education for present and future generation.³⁷ Abdulhamid *Iqra* philosophy is a well celebrated giant intellectual and academician in the world³⁸ because of his outstanding contribution to education, economy, politic, islamic movements and civilization. It is only the *Iqra* philosophy and culture that has opportunity to incubate and produce scholars for the Muslim societies.

Abdulhamid was categorical that Muslim should not trust a disbeliever to educate their children if Ummah is to remain safe, because there is a great danger that such children can become a family cancer in relation to the growth and development of the family. They can easily become source of crisis. According to him, islamic civilization for the future will never be achieved through corrupted doctrines, characters and material-focused knowledge. Abdulhamid realized the need to establish a new foundation mandatory course at the university (culminating in a diploma) on Family and Parenting with a view to disseminating the rationale and moral value of good parenting in Islam to students and staff of IIUM. He is gifted to possess a unique perspective to excite Muslim parents that they need to inculcate first the love of Allah in the child rather than the fear of Allah.³⁹ This a great paradigm shift aimed to incentivize the child psychology in Islam to educate them that Allah SWT loves them always, and that they should also love Allah SWT. This is a good way to raise righteous citizens, committed to humanity service as they understand their cosmic responsibility in the society.

³⁶ Ibrahim, "My 1999 Letter from Prison to Dr. Abdulhamid AbuSulayman."

³⁷ Hamid Naseem, "Ah! Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman: A Visionary of All Seasons," *Rising Kashmir*, last modified 2021, <http://risingkashmir.com/history-of-decline-of-education-in-the-muslim-world>.

³⁸ Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, "AbdulHamid Ahmad AbuSulayman's Legacy of Intellectual Reform," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 38, no. 3–4 (2021).

³⁹ AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, *The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform* (London - Washington: International Institute of Islamic Thought, n.d.), <https://iiit.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Quranic-Worldview.pdf>.

Because Abdulhamid was born in a religious family, that indeed gave him, the correct impetus for his psychological foundations of islamic values, knowledge and personality development. The Muslim home is always the first and critical laboratory for learning Islam and generally, the mother is a key leader of this institution. Therefore, when planning to form a home, one must aim to be guided by religiously-based principles and values. That why he advised IIUM students from different ethnic and national backgrounds to get married as a strategy to create a new identity, one that is rooted in the cosmopolitan understanding of the Ummah.

The *Iqra* philosophy is founded on the creation of knowledge, the stimulation of research for development, and the expansion of opportunities for learning. Learning and reading in Islam are intended to bring about positive change in societies through equity, equality, empowerment, and justice. Abdulhamid's *Iqra* philosophy, which can be found in abundance in his books, articles, and speeches on the subject of Islamic reforms, is based on taqwa and moral reasoning. Taqwa and moral reasoning are central to Abdulhamid's *Iqra* philosophy, which can be found in abundance in his books, articles, and speeches on Islamic reforms, particularly in the fields of thought and education.

He was of the opinion that proper *Iqra* philosophy is predisposed to the generation of knowledge, purpose, and society. He demonstrated how *Iqra* philosophy will reform and benefit Islamic higher education by training and producing human capital of high values, such as capable scholars with proper knowledge, thoughts, moral values, and practices, in his many writings. He demonstrated how *Iqra* philosophy transformed and produced historical Islamic landmarks and civilizations.

Conclusion

Numerous scientific discoveries that have benefited numerous global civilizations have been made by Muslims as a result of *Iqra* philosophy and culture. It is fundamentally important to state here that Islam can only grow with knowledge attained through *Iqra* (reading, learning, and practicing). Home-based religious knowledge, societal orientation, and exposure are vitally important since they provide a solid basis and the chance for learning and practice, according to Abdulhamid's analysis of *Iqra* philosophy. In education, reading, learning, and application of the *Iqra* ideology must all take place in the name of Allah in order to develop a fundamentally good relationship with the Creator. Education in Islam is never meant for labour production but to achieve functional, organized and advanced human being in faith, character and societal contribution. The *Iqra philosophy is a faith-inspired* ideology that seeks to

create beneficial individuals or civilizations via education, community building, and service. Abdulhamid's *Iqra* philosophy, which can be found in abundance in his books, articles, and speeches on the subject of Islamic reforms, is based on taqwa and moral reasoning. Taqwa and moral reasoning are central to Abdulhamid's *Iqra* philosophy, which can be found in abundance in his books, articles, and speeches on Islamic reforms, particularly in the fields of thought and education. Abdulhamid believes that the *Iqra* philosophy framework is strongly based on the Quran and Sunnah, which are always used as springboards for social, economic, and political transformation. *Iqra* philosophy promotes lifelong learning reawakening spirits, opening eyes, uniting hearts and minds, and creating hopes.

This study recommends that some of his intellectual work be used as academic teaching, reference material and case studies for students undertaking islamic studies, civilisation dialogue and strategic studies. There is also need to conduct further research on Abdul Hamid education philosophy to achieve islamization of knowledge for islamic sustainability agenda.

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