

## EFFECTS OF ISLAMIC STUDIES ON NON MUSLIMS: A CASE OF ECONOMIC UNDERGRADUATES

Shafinah Rahim  
Faculty of Economics & Business  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

### ABSTRACT

*The provision of Islamic studies at schools, both public and private, is obligatory for all Muslim students in Malaysia since independence. However, at institutions of higher learning certain Islamic related courses have been made compulsory for all, including the non-Muslims. A case of interest is the offering of an introductory course on Islamic Economics by the Faculty of Economics and Business, UNIMAS to its final year candidates. To date, at least 700 graduates with a Degree in Economics from the University are exposed to the basic concepts and fundamentals of economics from the perspective of Quran and Sunnah. The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding of Islam in general and its implications on economic matters amongst the non-Muslims students. Subsequently, the objective is to investigate whether and how these students benefited from the new knowledge which was imposed on them. Another goal is to compare the motivation, commitment and performance between the Muslims and non-Muslim students in general. Information gathered from surveys and personal interviews clearly indicate that the non-Muslim students are open to Islamic economic ideas provided it is backed by strong evidences. A majority of the students claims that the course is a platform to clear doubts and misperceptions about Islam. The most appealing topics within the syllabus that draws the highest attention include the concepts of haram and halal relating to sources of income, relevance of zakat towards poverty and Islamic banking and finance. Given the 6 year record, the non-Muslim students have performed relatively better due to factors such as personal concern for final grade and the lack of background advantage owned by the Muslim students. Findings demonstrate that the course ought to be considered as an elective for all business programs, allowing increased participation from students from the Accounting, Finance, Marketing and Management Degree programs. However, the content and delivery need to be revised and adjusted to the respective practices to enable students to maximize their learning experience.*

Keywords: Islamic Economics, non-Muslims, understanding, performance

### Introduction

The making of Islamic Studies compulsory for Muslim students in primary and secondary since 1957 is seen as necessary but not sufficient by parents wanting for Islamic related teaching to be continued at higher learning institutes. The Department of Education made the subject matter of Moral be taught for non-Muslim students, while Islamic studies for Muslims in 1983 (Balakrishnan, 2011). At the tertiary level, Islamic studies in Malaysia were first introduced in by the University of Malaya, with the formation of the Department of Islamic Studies in 1959. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abdul Rauf, a renowned Islamic scholar from Egypt, was appointed as the first head of this department. Later, in 1981, it expanded into a full fledged faculty known as the Academy of Islamic Studies.

Another significant development in Islamic studies programs in Malaysia was the establishment of the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) in 1983. The actualization of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences resulted in Islamic studies becoming a core course for all students registered. The subject was oriented towards the idea of the Islamization of knowledge (an idea developed by a prominent figure Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib Alattas at the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization better known as ISTAC). The strongest feature of ISTAC's academic curriculum is reflected in IIUM'S ability to produce academics of high international reputation. The establishment of INCIEF As the world's first and only international university specialising in Islamic Finance by Bank Negara Malaysia in March of 2006 was in line with its goal, to spearhead the development of Islamic Finance professionals that will help the country to become a leading hub for Islamic financial services.

To date, almost all public universities in Malaysia are offering academic programs embedded with Islamic studies and the number of private higher learning institutions interested in capitalizing on courses of great demand such Islamic Banking and Finance is growing fast. There seems to be a wave of awareness and adoption of the business principles salient to Islamic historic trade practices. The challenges brought forth by modern commerce is endless, leaving players desperate for coping strategies. In order to equip fresh graduates with market driven competencies which inevitably affects the probability for employability, colleges and universities are finding ways to design their academic programs with syllabus with alternative schools of thought. A good example is the inclusion of Islamic Economics as a final year core course for all Economics majors in UNIMAS. Similar exercises are common amongst other higher learning institutions too. For instance, courses on Islamic Management and Marketing specially tailored for Business Management Degree Programs and Introduction to Islamic Finance for most Accounting and Finance Programs.