

# Spirituality and Psychology: Integration of knowledge - Rationale, Realities, Prospects and Challenges

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## Abstract

In contemporary times, the integration of theology, spirituality and psychology is becoming more increasingly recognised. The shifting of paradigms in contemporary psychology has been promoted by Muslim academics and clinicians in conjunction with the process of Islāmisation of knowledge in the social sciences, especially in psychology. The rationale for the resurgence of an Islāmic psychology, based on revelation and reason, has its roots in the rejection of secular and “soulless” psychology in its lacunae present in the modern psychological thoughts and the failure to view human nature and development in the holistic dimension. However, the emergence and evolution of an Islāmic psychology cannot exist without the Islāmisation of psychology, in modern parlance, the integration of Islāmic ethics and sciences with psychology knowledge. This paper represents an attempt to examine the problems associated with secular psychology, Islāmisation of knowledge and knowledge integration, and the problems, issues, and the challenges that need to be addressed to make it a reality in the development of an Islāmic psychology.

## Introduction

The integration of theology and psychology have been debated since the separation of spirituality and religion with the social sciences, especially with psychology. The alienation and separation between religion and science have been over the source of knowledge, its epistemology and ontology. This controversy is parallel to the faith versus reason divide. Islam and other Abrahamic faiths and scholars of scientific disciplines do not see any contradiction between science and religion. But there is an acknowledgement that both religion and science deal with different realms of human behaviours

and experiences but are complementary in most aspects of human development. In addition, having a worldview through both a scientific lens and one of personal faith.

Islam as a theology, has always advocated the mastering various forms of knowledge beginning with the Islāmic traditional knowledge of faith (*Aqeedah*), Islamic jurisprudence (*Shar'iah*) and morals (*Akhlāq*), and knowledge from intuition, rationality and observation. Knowledge integration has always been in the psyche of scholars, theologians and physicians during the Islāmic Renaissance period from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century. This system of holistic knowledge is an integration of

transmitted knowledge (*Al-ulum al-naqliyah*) and rational knowledge (*Al-ulum al-aqliyah*), thus providing a dynamic and interactive process. It has been suggested that “The process of bringing the religious and the secular elements together is, from the Islāmic point of view, a restoration of the link between reason and revelation, or between the role of the mind in appreciating (comprehending and interpreting) revelation and guiding the mind by means of the revelation’s objectives, its comprehensive and universal outlook, and its living and civilization values. Thus, the joining of the two wings in the pursuit of reform in an intellectual process in its methodology and style.” [1]

For example, accepting and adopting an Islāmic or Qur’ānic worldview does not require giving up scientific perspectives. The aims of this paper are to examine the problems associated with secular psychology, the Islāmisation of knowledge and knowledge integration, model of knowledge integration and the problems, issues and challenges faced by Muslim academics and to identify some of the solutions.

## What is wrong with secular psychology?

When psychology, the science of the soul, emerges as a separate discipline from its philosophical roots, there was a paradigm shift from the study of the soul to the study of the mind, and eventually to the study of human behaviours and experiences. However, psychology maintains a naturalistic worldview with the influence of Judeo-Christian psychology in disguise. The main schools of thought in psychology were influenced and primed by mostly rationalists who are mainly atheists or agnostics. The rationalist approach, based on reason and evidence, was overtly antagonistic to religion and spirituality, and created a deep fissure between divine revelation and rationality as sources of knowledge. The formal separation of the pseudo-scientific disciplines like psychology from religion was compounded, in part, due to the secularisation of modern society. It has been suggested that “although secularisation has changed the nature and quality of the relationship between psychology and religion it has not undone the relationship altogether. Religion still matters for many people, including psychologists, at some level.” [2]. Initially, psychological knowledge and its application in the therapeutic field were subjected to colonisation and later globalisation. Dudgeon and Walker suggests that “Psychology colonises both directly through the imposition of universalising, individualistic constructions of human behaviour and indirectly through the negation” [3]. Thus, psychology was remoulded in

the image of Western thoughts, values, worldviews and civilisations.

Psychology, with a reductionistic-oriented science of human behaviour and experiences, produces conflicting and distorted ideas on the concept of the nature of man, alien to the Islamic beliefs and practices, and fails to find solutions to the diseases of society. In addition, the exclusion of the dimension of the soul in psychology in the mind-body dualism is reflected in a statement by Badri [4]. He maintained that “There is no mention at all of the other aspects of man. The religious, the spiritual or at least the transcendental.. Criteria which fail to include the spiritual side of man can only find anchorage in a society blinded by materialism. In such a society, the behaviour of spiritually motivated practising individuals may brand them as misfits, eccentrics or abnormal.” One of the major crisis with secular psychology stems from the fact that its failure to recognise peoples’ religious experiences and ethical resources. Zarabozo highlighted the main weaknesses of the secular approaches to psychology: “Humans are viewed as independent of their Creator and Lord. Theories are based upon human intellect alone, while discounting revelation from the Creator. Knowledge and research focus only on the tangible aspects of humans, while ignoring the spiritual and unseen elements. Behaviours are generally seen to be determined solely by drives, reflexes, conditioning, and social influences.” [5].

Psychological theories and research have influenced many facets of life including the nature of man, personality development, parenting skills, sexual behaviours, laws dealing with alcohol and drug, lifestyles and behaviours and personal responsibilities. This has bias and culturally insensitive consequences for Muslim patients receiving psychological-oriented therapeutic interventions based on Judeo-Christian values which are aligned with Western philosophical traditions, individualistic values and worldview. The most significant conundrum in psychology departments in Muslim majority countries is the Eurocentric orientation of psychology curricula and pedagogy in both undergraduate and postgraduate educational programs, thus, teaching ‘Whiteness’ psychology “ [6]. For many Muslim psychologists, relying on Islāmic theology is tantamount to being unscientific as “They prided themselves as scientists being guided by a neutral value-free scientific method in which there was no room for religious “dogma” [7]. The problem with Muslim psychologists is their failure to include ethical behaviours or ethical intelligence within the paradigm of secular psychology. As a consequence, Muslim psychology has

remained in the 'Lizard hole.' The following Hādīth illustrates this point. It was narrated from Abu Hurairah that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "You will most certainly follow the ways of those who came before you, arm's length by arm's length, forearm's length by forearm's length, hand span by hand span, until even if they entered a hole of a mastigure (lizard) you will enter it too." They said: "O Messenger of Allah, (do you mean) the Jews and the Christians?" He said: "Who else?" [8] (Ibn Majah). The dilemmas of Muslim psychologists lie on the blind following of Eurocentric, Orientalist and globalised psychology, coined as "psychological *Taqleed*." [9].

## From Isl misation of knowledge to knowledge integration

The effects of colonisation, now replaced by globalisation, reduced the influence of Islāmic education to a lower-tier level in many colonised Muslim majority countries. The imposition of an alien system of education significantly exposed Muslims to two parallel and contradictory systems of education namely the Eurocentric and Orientalist system and the traditional Islāmic system (*Madrasahs* and *Ulūm*). This duality produced not only "divided loyalties, confusion in the minds of students and intellectual schizophrenia of the Ummah's educated elites," [10] , but also "Double Consciousness" (the internal conflict experienced by subordinated or colonised groups in an oppressive society) [11].

The Islāmisation of Knowledge movement gained momentum in the 1970's "with the rise of Islāmic awakening (*aş-Şahwah l-Islāmiyyah*), the plight of the Muslim Ummah, the secularisation the educational system in Muslim majority countries, the global re-awakening of Islāmic consciousness, and the concern of Muslim scholars towards the adoption of Western-oriented values and life-styles by Muslims," [12] and the incompatibility of a reductionist, scientific naturalist and secular traditions in contemporary psychology. However, the emergence, current conceptualisations and the status of Islāmic psychology should be viewed in their broader context, namely, the Islāmisation of Knowledge (IOK) movement. It is within this context that Badri made invaluable contributions to the revival of the Islāmisation of psychology [13]. In contemporary times, the brand name of the Islāmisation of Knowledge has been replaced with the more palatable and acceptable concept of knowledge integration.

Knowledge in the Islāmic traditions is based on holism. That is nature and process of knowledge focuses on "integration, rather than separation, inclusiveness, rather than contraction, harmony, rather than dichotomy, cooperation, rather than conflict, comprehensive excellence, rather than mediocrity, and dynamism, rather than lethargy, are the main thrusts that need to be subtly interwoven into the fabric of Islāmic education." [14].

Kasule refers to the concept of knowledge integration as an evolutionary process that build and add value to existing knowledge. He suggested that "it involves integrating Islāmic moral and epistemological values in the various disciplines of knowledge that are taught." [15]. The themes of combining, sharing, synthesising and merging of knowledge are a necessary condition for knowledge integration. Knowledge integration can also be viewed as a kind of epistemological integration (*al-takamul al-ma'rifi*) [16]. However, this knowledge integration is based on the *Tawhīdic* paradigm. In fact, the Islāmic principle of divine oneness, i.e., *Tawhīd*, the unity of the source of knowledge and epistemological integration [17] constitute a frame of reference and foundation for a monotheistic Islāmic psychology. From a historical perspective, the notion of knowledge integration seems to be supported and implemented by early classical Muslims scholars in their quest for knowledge during the Islāmic Renaissance and beyond. Malkawi suggested that the classical Muslim scholars, despite their different school of thought, agreed that "knowledge should be interconnected, complementary, and organically linked to the knowledge of God. In the view of these scholars, the fact that all sciences originate from a single divine source is the foundation for the ultimate integration and unity of knowledge." [18].

Thus, knowledge integration in psychology knowledge is the synthesis of revealed knowledge and empirical knowledge. as well as the transfer of knowledge in teaching practices. Initially, the task is to produce a curriculum that will deliver integrated knowledge of Islāmic sciences and worldview with classical and contemporary knowledge of psychology. Both evidenced-based psychological knowledge and Islāmic intellectual tradition are maintained with adherence to the demands of any prescribed national curriculum. The idea of transformation of integrated knowledge during teaching practices allows us to view knowledge integration as a processual phenomenon. Hence, process of knowledge integration itself can be interpreted as a process of exchanging integrated knowledge between the teacher and the student. For psychology, the process of desecularisation has begun and efforts are being made

to reconstruct psychology based upon an Islāmic epistemological paradigm [19].

## Challenges and solutions of knowledge integration

There are key challenges and the realities faced by academics and policy makers for the implementation of knowledge integration in the psychology curriculum and in teaching practices. These challenges and issues include organisational practical challenges, decolonising psychology knowledge challenges, Islāmic commitment challenges and epistemic challenges. This is no meagre task as the dilemmas facing Muslim psychologist are still with us and will remain so for some time to come.

First, organisational practical challenges refer to the many feasibility constraints that limit many organisations and academic institutions to implement knowledge integration in psychology and other social sciences curriculum. Rassool suggested that “In most countries, due to institutional and professional regulations in psychology, counselling and psychotherapy courses, educational institutions are restricted in their attempt to integrate Islāmic psychology in their curricula. Perhaps, that is the rationale behind adopting the ‘Sprinkle or Bolt-on’ approaches in their curriculum” [20] In fact, in most cases, psychology has been influenced by Freudian’s psychoanalysis and phenomenological psychological theories. Ibrahim noted that psychology as an academic and clinical discipline “experiences professional conflicts with psychiatry and education, and to the extent that psychology represents a secular Western perspective, it comes into conflict with traditional Islamic theology.” [21]. Thus, the availability of undergraduate psychology courses which are integrated with Islāmic ethics and studies or Islāmic psychology is limited. This means that the Islāmisation of Knowledge movement failed to reach its target audience in the Muslim world. Few universities of the Muslim world provide Islāmic psychology at undergraduate or post graduate levels with the exception of selected universities in Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia and Pakistan. At present there is no standardisation of the scheme of study either to teach Islāmic psychology or Muslim psychology at a national level. Perhaps, the solution lies with the high academic councils that act as a state level coordinating agency for higher educational activities to look into this and take measures and initiatives to review the current scheme of study in psychology and other social sciences. Currently, there are the only two university accredited course globally. For

example, the Riphah International University, Pakistan-Advanced Diploma in Islāmic Psychology and Psychotherapy, and the Charles Sturt University’s Post Graduate Certificate in Islāmic psychology. .

Decolonisation of psychology is another challenge that needs to be surmounted in order to implement knowledge integration. Decolonisation of psychological knowledge refers to the process of transforming psychology knowledge to an integrated Islāmic psychology which is underpinned by an Islāmic epistemological, ontological, and metaphysical worldview and based on the religion of monotheism, according to the *Creed of Ahlus-Sunnah Wal-Jamā’ah*.

Rassool has developed a model of knowledge integration for the psychology discipline based on six different dimensions: (1) planning, (2) mastering, (3) deconstructing, (4) curriculum mapping, (5) scope /level of integration with Islāmic studies/psychology, and (6) knowledge transfer) A process-driven model of curriculum integration for psychology has also been developed [22]. These mechanisms are operated in a systematic logical development in the context of psychology knowledge.

The third challenge is the Islāmic commitment to knowledge integration which refers to the attitudes and in motivational status and readiness to change. This “Islāmic commitment” incorporates the evaluation of whether Muslim psychologists have adequate knowledge, training and experience to decolonise psychology knowledge. This led to the problems of role legitimacy, role adequacy and role conflict to integrate Islāmic psychology and ethics. In most cases, this particular role is not part of their job descriptions or responsibilities. The problem with Muslim psychologists is to do with role adequacy as evidenced in Rassool’s study. For Muslim psychologists, role conflict is experienced when being pulled between being a Muslim and being a ‘secular’ psychologist or those Muslim psychologists still in the ‘Lizard hole.’ For others there is no role conflict at all between personal and the professional obligations and fulfilling the two statuses in one role. It is plausible that both role adequacy and role legitimacy may constitute important predictors of Muslim psychologists’ willingness to engage in the development and teaching of Islāmic psychology

Fourth, epistemic challenges refer to differences in levels and kinds of knowledge that different psychology university lectures possess in Islāmic ethics and studies, and which complicate the successful knowledge integration in both curriculum development and teaching

practices. There is also the possibility of the Muslim psychologists' having a deficit in 'ethical intelligence'<sup>1</sup> which is based on *Taqwa* [God consciousness] and *Itqan* [Pursuit of Excellence]. It has been suggested that "the Muslim psychologist as a therapist or counsellor is a reflection of *Taqwa* and *Itqan*, which also means focusing on briefer approaches of therapeutic interventions based on Islāmic principles. This creates good will in the light of Islāmic values which is more profitable to the Islāmic therapist, and to reject commercialising the sanctity of this healing profession." [23] However, most Muslim academic psychologists, no matter how religious they are in their personal lives, have not been adequately prepared to integrate or teach Islāmic sciences and psychology. In fact, some may even explicitly reject such inclusion because of their secular attitudes, on the mixing of psychology based on western scientific paradigm with Islāmic ethical values. It is the responsibility of the organisational culture to support and exudes a culture of learning, changing, improving, and, most importantly, sharing in the process of knowledge integration at the contents and teaching levels. The provisions of seminars, workshops and continuing professional development in Islāmic psychology and Islāmic sciences are the first priority of the academic institutions.

## Conclusion

Knowledge integration is an ongoing process that occurs at many levels, it is a journey of transformation for academic institutions, institutional structures, lecturers, researchers and students. There is no "one-size fits all" blueprint for knowledge and curriculum integration for all disciplines as it may involve lots of different approaches and processes.

Rassool suggested that an integrated curriculum may look very different for the sub-disciplines of psychology, because the curriculum or knowledge integration may not be possible for certain themes [24]. There is a need to be proactive in the evolution and development of knowledge integration in Islāmic psychology. In public health, there

is the concept of "upstream" and "downstream" factors. The analogy of the river is used to describe how with the downstream approach to the problem is stationing a man there permanently to rescue people who are drowning in the river. An upstream approach is to teach people to swim before they get into the river in the first place and preventing them from drowning. Our priority should be to focus on undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum in psychology so as we would be able to produce clinical psychologists that could 'swim' within the domain of Islāmic psychology. Teaching them Islāmic psychology, psychotherapy and counselling may be, in most cases, too late. Unless there is a sense of collective action to enact change, the status quo will prevail. However contextual factors, organisational structure, organisational support, resource implications and policy commitment of the Islāmisation of the social sciences, including psychology need to be addressed at institutional level. Finally, Allah says in the Qur'ān

- *Indeed, Allāh will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.* (13:11, interpretation of the meaning):

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<sup>1</sup> This concept is coined by Professor Dr Anis Ahmad, Vice-Chancellor, Riphah International University, 'Ethical Intelligence' is based on the Islamic concepts of what is acceptable (*Halal*) and what is unacceptable (*Haram*) and solely based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. The lecture on 'Psychology: An Islamic Approach' was delivered at the Workshop on 'Islamic Psychology Curriculum Development', 10 February to 13 February 2020, Riphah International University, QIE Campus, Lahore. Pakistan.

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