

Teaching Islamic Studies Program in Present Context of Thailand: Ongoing Development, Prospects and Challenges

Niloh Wae-u-seng

*Ph.D. (Educational Administration), Assistant Professor, Lecturer in Islamic Law,
College of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
Email: niloh.w@psu.ac.th*

Abdulhakam Hengpiya

*Ph.D. (Educational Administration), Lecturer in Islamic Law,
College of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
Email: abdulhakam.h@psu.ac.th*

Samsoo Sa-u

*Ph.D. (Educational Administration), Lecturer in Islamic Law,
College of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
Email: samsoo.s@psu.ac.th*

Abstract

The ongoing developing Thailand 4.0 strategies pursuing stability, prosperity, and sustainability gives rise to the urgent need to keep existing study programs aligned with it. This article attempts to examine if the prevailing Teaching Islamic Studies program undertaken by College of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University, pertaining to its educational philosophy, expected learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and learning resources are in line with the present context. In addition, prospects and challenges of teaching Islamic Studies program are also presented. It is hoped that this article would help those concerned be aware of how to make the program implementation in the present context more practical and kept abreast with Thailand 4.0

Keywords: Thailand 4.0, Teaching Islamic Studies Program, Ongoing Development, Prospects, Challenges, Prince of Songkla University

Introduction

Thailand 4.0 becomes a springboard for the present-day development of the country towards stability, prosperity, and sustainability. Its goals are to turn Thailand into a value-based economy based on innovation, technology and creativity, to create social well-being through realization of the full potential of all members of society, to raise human values by transforming Thais into competent human beings in 21st century, and to protect environment to become a livable society (*What is Thailand 4.0?*, n.d.). It also focuses on healthcare, smart devices, robotics, automation, digital industry, internet of things (IoT), better technology, culture and creative industries, as well as a high-value services sector (*Industry 4.0, Thailand 4.0: What's if All Mean?*, n.d.).

Recently, Thailand undergo a five-pronged policy approach i.e., technology, human resource development, infrastructure, enterprises, and targeted industries to attract investments from the private sector. Rather, Thailand concentrates on productivity, stability, infrastructure, entrepreneurs and education (*Thailand 4.0 Means Opportunity Thailand': Government taking steps to attract investments in targeted industries*, n.d.).

In conjunction with Thailand's higher education, issues like graduates' uncompetitiveness, lagging in innovation, quality weakness in the R&D field, little communication and collaboration between university and industry (*Six steps to achieve Thailand 4.0*, n.d.) become the motivating factors leading to Education 4.0.

As far as the efforts to keep an educational program at a tertiary level aligned with the ongoing notion of Thailand 4.0 and Education 4.0 are concerned, the College of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University, under its program implementation – Teaching Islamic Studies - has undergone its development from time to time to produce well-rounded graduates who are professional and creative in learning and teaching. This is even more important when it has to deal with systematic thinking, competitiveness competency, social responsibility, innovation, and production.

The Teaching Islamic Studies program has been introduced with the aim to produce graduates who will serve as professional teachers in both private and government schools in southern border provinces of Thailand in particular and in the upper part of southern Thailand in general. Its success was apparently witnessed as an increase in demand and contributions to the development of Islamic studies program in government primary schools. However, as Thailand is moving towards the developed country under the emerging strategy of Thailand 4.0 which pursues prosperity, stability and sustainability and Education 4.0 which emphasizes on creativity and

innovation, the present program needs to be relooked into its educational philosophical foundation formulated, expected learning outcomes identified, teaching approached applied, learning resources utilized, prospects and challenges encountered in order to make sure if efforts put towards the attainment of the desired goals are aligned with the present development. It is hoped this article would result in contributing to the program improvement.

Educational Philosophy

Educational philosophy is a statement that identifies the beliefs and values of an individual or group with respect to education. It directs the purposes, objectives and focus of an educational institution (Lambert, n.d.). It also serves as milestones towards program implementation in a given setting.

As for the educational philosophy of the present Teaching Islamic Studies program that is offered by College of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University, it states as follow:

The program is developed to produce the knowledgeable and capable graduates who can fulfil the needs of educational institutions, society, and professional Islamic Studies teaching and learning community through managerial skills and integration of knowledge. It also aimed to produce a perfect man who are distinct in his/her personalities that are equipped with Islamic ethics, critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility (*Department of Islamic Studies*, n.d.: 8).

The above statement depicted some sort of desired attributes of graduate production. Rather, looking into its underlying philosophy, it does to some extent reflex the alignment with the present context especially with respect to critical thinking and creativity. However, it seems that the notion of innovation is less highlighted.

This underpinning educational philosophy entails those concerned to come up with the preparation of the program implementation to meet with the notion of Thailand 4.0 and Education 4.0. By doing so, the program may employ a new pedagogy through which learners are allowed to have a platform to maximize their capabilities in terms of generating new ideas and transforming them to real practice.

Expected Learning Outcomes

Expected learning outcomes are statements that define the knowledge, skills, and attitudes the students should have after completing a program of

study. As for the Teaching Islamic Studies program, it posits below (*Department of Islamic Studies*, n.d.: 8-9):

- Being knowledgeable and mastery in Islamic studies teaching pedagogy
- Emphasizing on self-directed teaching approach, hence being able to learn new things independently
- Being able to conduct research for developing teaching and learning accordingly
- Being able to make use of the emerging information technology and teaching innovation for more effective educational provision
- Being a charismatic leader molded with high quality of moral and ethics
- Having positive attitudes, good relationship with other and distinct character as a role model
- Working in collegiality
- Mastery in the art of critical thinking, systematic synthesis, application of gained knowledge to problem solving,
- Being able to deal with the issue of ideological conflict
- Being responsible for themselves and others and endlessly committed to work for the cause of the betterment of the society
- Being able to work out the program to help upgrade the assigned work accordingly and effectively

From the above statements, it would be implied that upon the graduation of the program, students are supposed to be able to demonstrate their capabilities in terms of knowledge in relation to their specializations, skills such as problem solving, conflict resolution, teaching pedagogy and so on, and positive attitudes that open for change and development of their competence. Only with these inspiringly expected learning outcomes would the notion of prosperity, stability and sustainability as mentioned in Thailand 4.0 and creativity and innovation as depicted in Education 4.0 be materialized.

Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies are dealt with the methods of teaching that teachers use to help students learn what has been identified in accordance with course learning outcomes.

Looking deliberately through what has been identified in the present Teaching Islamic Studies program, it is worth mentioning that there are diverse teaching strategies being employed such as lecture, discussion, problem-based approach, and active learning. Through these teaching strategies, students are expected to be able to think critically, to apply creatively, to synthesize constructively, and to evaluate authentically. Put it in another way, students are required to be more responsible for their learning via the deep learning process.

It is noted that the present development of Thailand 4.0 and Education 4.0 paves way for the program to be more responsive to how to prepare students to assume their roles as a 4.0 citizen via the creation of more interactive learning environment by dint of collaborative learning approach and integrating technology into their experiences. This would be aligned with the notion of **Education 4.0, as posits Wirat Pansirirot (n.d.), which emphasizes on teaching strategy through which students are able to access and to integrate accessible knowledge worldwide in order to create an innovation in response to social needs in more creative and productive ways.**

Furthermore, in viewing of certain key terms derived from Education 4.0 in connection with Thailand 4.0 such as connectivism, individualized, creative, innovative, information and digital literacy, problem solving, self-directed study, open sources, online study, to just name few, it is required to reassess how the present program applies the teaching strategies to help promote such themes. More importantly, it is necessary to use the teaching strategies that engage students in active learning process, thus stimulating their critical thinking and enhancing their capability to think, apply, create, and innovate.

Learning Resources

In consistency with the education 4.0 scheme which pays high emphasis on the use of educational technology and innovation, the program provides a rich collection of learning resources and innovative educational materials for formal classroom instruction and personal learning outside the classroom. The availability of learning resources in the form of reference books and text books can be accessed in the faculty learning resource center and the university library. In addition, the program provides online learning materials which can serve students who need enrichment beyond the core classroom materials.

As one of the goals of this program is to produce competent Islamic studies teachers equipped with necessary knowledge, skills and attributes relevant to teaching profession, micro teaching laboratories are specifically equipped to provide platform for teaching practice. Computer labs are typically equipped with modern facilities of networking to enhance students'

engagement in online learning activities and promote student engagement through active learning.

It is, therefore, noted that learning resource becomes instrumental in driving the Teaching Islamic Studies program towards its success for it provides with rich accessible sources of knowledge and practical skills related to teaching profession.

Prospects

Presently, the competition that grows for teaching job in southern border provinces of Thailand is posing challenges to teaching Islamic studies program to produce competent Islamic studies teachers equipped with knowledge, skills and attributes in accordance with the professional standards of the Teachers' Council of Thailand. To win out the stiff job competition, the program needs to analyze the existing weaknesses/gaps and make a revision of its curriculum in order for it to stay relevant in the teaching job markets. The urgency to revising its curriculum, introducing integrated teaching methods, building a quality teaching profession, providing test preparation service for teacher recruitment exams become more critical if the program is to survive in a competitive and variable environment of today world.

The following are some identified prospects of the program offered.

1. The curriculum of teaching Islamic studies program should be revised. Social science subject and early childhood education should be added into the curriculum to provide students with a more relevant knowledge for their future teaching careers. Moreover, the learning contents of the subjects are helpful for them in taking teacher recruitment tests in the future. As the prime goal of this curriculum is to produce professional Islamic studies teacher, specific course related to the use of Islamic innovations such as the used of Nasheed and Qiraati method seems to be imperative. These innovations are relevant and should be taught to students as they can use them in their future career. The successful use of the innovations can engender students' feeling of enjoyment and satisfaction in learning. Particularly, Nasheed offers interesting method of teaching which can satisfy student's need of enjoyment. Students, especially those at primary education, are driven by the need for entertainment or fun, far more than teachers are usually willing to accommodate. In Islam, learning is a lifelong pursuit, and entertainment is inherently a part of it.

2. Integrated teaching methods should be adopted.

Teaching Islamic studies program offers a wide range of learning contents, which can be categorized into several subject groups namely, content specialization, instruments and innovation, language courses and teaching profession. Accordingly, students are required to take a number of

courses/credits per semester as they are not only to enroll on courses of the program but also to take core courses required by the university. Under this circumstance, integrated teaching method become inevitable as to reduce students' overloading with their course schedules. The integration can be done as follows, the work assignment should be integrated whereby a single assignment can serve to fulfill different course requirements, contents of each courses should be analyzed and synthesized for integration purpose at the level of TQF (Thai Qualifications Framework), teaching-learning process and evaluation.

3. Quality teaching profession should be championed.

As teaching Islamic studies program is not only revolved around content-based knowledge (sciences), but more importantly, teaching expertise (arts). Thus, building a high quality teaching profession become a vital task to which the program has been entrusted. In an effort to produce quality teaching profession, standards of practice for the teaching profession are established. The template forms for teaching practice observation are constantly reviewed for improvement and special verification committee should be formed to verify grade given for student practice teaching.

4. Tutoring students for teacher recruitment tests become imperative

This should be done in view of competitive environment of getting into government servants or teacher government employees. Work preparation for this program can be done by reviewing the previous test and inviting outstanding tutors to train them for the teacher recruitment exam purpose.

Challenges

Several challenges are to be considered in keeping the Teaching Islamic Studies program up-to-date and applying its outcomes to national and global changes. However, only three possible challenges i.e., content, technology and pedagogy, are highlighted below.

1. Content

Many issues related to Muslim societies such as Islamophobia and terrorism have been projected in concomitant with a problem of migration, global warming, or human right that are highly concerned at the global level. Though these issues recently emerged as serious challenges, teachers to some extent are still not dealing with them seriously. Hence, the most important thing to do is to get teachers involved in the current situation and discuss these issues in their class. Without considering the current

problems, teaching Islamic Studies classes would be outdated, resulting in a lack of students' capability of problem solving and quality teaching profession.

2. Technology

Teaching media is likely to develop fast. Various teaching methods are introduced to classrooms in order to improve students' performance. Teachers tend to employ a teaching method that they are familiar with without thinking about what teaching method is appropriate for students. Choosing an appropriate teaching method is very important as it can either "make or break" the class. Based on in-class observation, students tend to paid more attention to lessons taught by using audiovisual devices. Classes with use of related videos can seize students' attention more easily although few Islamic teachers are willing to learn to use new technology in their class. Nowadays, there are a lot of educational applications available that can be used in class in order to help teachers to make their classes more interesting and to allow students to understand and be familiar with what they learn more easily. Using cutting-edge technology in class can also help making future digital-friendly Muslim educators who could be able to teach Islamic education by using the latest knowledge.

3. Pedagogy: "Traditional Education vs Education of Tradition"

From a perspective of tradition, students are encouraged to develop critical thinking to extend their capability of learning. However, misunderstanding the notion of "traditional education vs education of tradition" may lead to make passive learners rather than active ones whose learning attitude is very important in the 21st century. With a lack of such critical thinking skills, students can be a target of "digital fitnah" that are seen in the online world in the form of hate speech, fake information, or digital crimes. Thus, developing students' thinking skills is one of the most significant things that teachers are required to work on. At this point, questions such as, "what pedagogy of teacher can be introduced in the actual class and how teachers can improve their students' pedagogical capability?" may rise to ensure that their students are able to select appropriate choices from the authentic Islamic teaching and apply them to their daily life properly.

The above three key elements should be reconsidered to combat current religious-related issues. The most important thing is that both teachers and students are required to keep themselves up-to-date in terms of their knowledge and learning skills. In addition to that, Islamic education can be better by taking a look at its contents of classes, teaching devices, and thinking skill development. For example, behavior of their local communities can be adopted and related to what is happening in the world. By looking at things at the local

level, it makes it easier for students to think more seriously and closely in order to improve problem solving skills. Technology can also be introduced while teaching. By touching useful technology, it can also help interest students and make them more interested in the latest technology and knowledge.

In order to make it possible, teachers are urged to change their teaching attitude since teachers are generally not willing to use unfamiliar devices. Improving students' learning behavior and thinking skills is also very important so that they can accurately deal with problems by themselves based on Islamic teaching. Considering these three factors, it can be said that both teachers and students are urged their teaching or learning attitude in order to catch up with and deal with the current issues.

Concluding Remarks

The present context of teaching profession in Thailand is promptly changed due to the promulgation of current strategies known as Thailand 4.0 that pursues stability, prosperity, and sustainability and Education 4.0 that gives emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and production. As a result, it is imperative that the Teaching Islamic Studies program keep up with this phenomena and come up with leading roles through the process of recasting its educational philosophical foundation as well as graduate attributes. Providing full-fledged learning resources is also important and inevitable. Teaching strategies that engage students in active learning process are also distinct entity of the present context. Rather, prospects and challenges need to be tackled wisely under the spirit of concerted efforts. By doing so, it is hoped that the program would take a lead in teaching profession within the present context.

References

- Department of Islamic Studies. (n.d.). **Bachelor of Education Program in Teaching Islamic Studies (Revised Program 2017)**. College of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University.
- Industry 4.0, Thailand 4.0: What's it All Mean?* (n.d.). Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://aecnewstoday.com/2017/industry-4-0-thailand-4-0-whats-it-all-mean/#axzz5CCg10RmC>
- Lambert, I. PM. (n.d.). **Educational philosophy: what is it all about?** Retrieved August 5, 2018, from <https://www.tsc.nsw.edu.au/tscnews/educational-philosophy-what-is-it-all-about>
- Six step to achieve Thailand 4.0*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://modernm diplomacy.eu/2017/10/03six-steps-to-achieve-thailand-4-0/>.

Thailand 4.0 Means Opportunity Thailand': Government taking steps to attract investments in targeted industries. (n.d.). Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://www.opengovasia.com/articles/7386-thailand-40-means-opportunity-thailand-government-taking-steps-to-attract-investments-in-targeted-industries>.

What is Thailand 4.0? (n.d.). Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <http://thaiembdc.org/thailand-4-0-2/>.

Wirat Pansiroot. (n.d.). Education 4.0. Retrieved August 1, 2018, from <https://www.applicadthai.com/articles/article-education/education-4-0/>