Searching for excellence in Islamic studies, within the unique perspective of South East Asia, provides a rather unique insight into a number of methods and techniques particularly relative to Malaysia. Malaysia is effectively known for its distinction in specific spheres of knowledge attached to the international Islamic finance industry, halal management sectors and Islamic religious studies. The special issue provides a distinctive opportunity for the exploration of an Islamic studies discipline looking beyond curricula by investigating the significant subject of specific inherent characteristics of teaching and learning methods and techniques to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, alongside the creative use of technology. Thus, it displays two articles pertaining to religious education, two relative to the significance of innovation by means of interdisciplinary research for technology within Islamic studies and one on spirituality, art and the creative ethos in Islamic civilization.

In relation to religious education, the article by Tamuri et al. may be viewed as a practical contemporary investigation into perceptions of Muslim students on religious education while the article by Bensaid and Machouche can be seen as a traditional theoretical framework on religious learning. Traditional in such a context however, refers to existing views from that are by no means dated and inapplicable in our present times. Both articles share a focal point regarding the imperative significance inherent within religious learning. The articles emphasize on ethics or in a deeper sense akhlaq, by means of nurturing critical and scientific thinking. Interestingly, these two articles covers viewpoints of religious learning by contemporary and traditional scholars from the era of al-Ghazali (1980) and Ibn Khaldun (1406) to the more recent era of Ben Achour (1972) and Halim (2004).

In relation to technological innovations within Qur’anic lessons, the article by Ibrahim et al. discusses implementation of Tajweed speech recognition system while the article by Raja-Yusof et al. analyses a visualization system for learning histories and an atlas of the Qur’an. The technologies detailed are utilized through both audio and visual receptors. Some of the technical aspects covers in these articles are the Mel-frequency cepstral coefficients (MFCC) algorithm, hidden Markov model (HMM), the hyperbolic tree and the concept map. These systems however, are meant as a means to support the learning process and not as an alternative to traditional instructional learning.

One other article by Grine et al. is on Islamic spirituality and art in relation to temporal civilization, effectively pinpointing their placement in a unique systemic configuration geared towards civilizational growth. The role of spirituality in the Islamic faith may be seen as essential to catalyzing Islamic art and intellectualism, with emphasis that theological and civilizational influence are not reflective of Islamic art’s sustainability and vitality.

These articles may be considered a reflection of expression on the uniqueness and dynamics of Islamic education, as well as the insistent drive to progress in all spheres inclusive of technological and innovative paradigms, towards enhancing the spiritual and religious life presently and in the hereafter.

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