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Islamic perspective of creativity: A model for teachers of social studies as leaders

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Abstract

This paper aims at identifying the main features of creativity from an Islamic perspective. To achieve this aim, the researchers used a content analysis approach. The Qur'anic verses were the source of the analysis. In accordance with this perspective, a model for teachers of social studies as leaders is suggested. It is an attempt to contribute to the development and understanding of creativity in the social studies classrooms. The study highlighted the Qur'anic methodology that enhances creativity among people. Moreover, the study looked at the objectives of creativity in Islam as part of fulfilling the duty of vicegerency on earth, strengthening one's relationship with Allah, finding the truth and serving the society. The paper also managed to highlight the main fundamentals of creativity from an Islamic perspective such as sincerity, conformity with the *shari'ah*, beneficial products, usage of lawful means, the ethical and moral system, *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning) and rejection of imitation. The study ended with conclusions and recommendations.

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1. Introduction

Although some contemporary Muslim scholars have highlighted the necessity of studying creativity from an Islamic perspective, studying creativity from an Islamic context has not received a great deal of consideration by scholars or writers. They have tried to examine the subject from within an Islamic framework. However, only very few have managed to address creativity in a reliable scientific manner that could give a clear understanding of the theory of creativity in the Islamic thought.

First of all, in terms of Islamic perspective of creativity, it is considered necessary to explain the conceptual meanings of this concept and its development in the Islamic heritage. The Arabic dictionary *Al-Mo'jam Al-Waseet* defines the verb "to create" as "to bring something into being in a way that was not before" (Mustafa et al. 1989:150). Therefore, creativity is producing something that was not in existence before or has nothing similar to it. Likewise, the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, to create is "to cause to exist; bring into

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being; originate.” (Morris, 1981: 311). Creativity therefore means “having the ability or power to create things.” (Ibid).

On this basis, the writers of the present paper somewhat agree with Yousif (1999: 137) when she defines creativity as, “the process of realizing, applying or elaborating Divine Principles and Ideals at any given time or place, to meet the challenges that arise, in all spheres of life.” furthermore, it can be inferred that creativity is a special condition, attitude or state of being that reflects passion for work, independence, goal setting, originality, flexibility, a wide range of interests, average or above-average intelligence and motivation (Goertz 1991: 3). Yousif (1999:137), as stated above, emphasized that creativity should aim at applying the Divine Principles to all aspects of life. In this case, those who are dealing with creativity should ensure that their works or inventions do not contradict Islamic principles. At the same time, they should feel a responsibility to raise Islamic societies to a higher level, allowing them to face future challenges creatively and successfully. Also, Al-Mazeidy (1993) has added a new dimension to the definition of creativity. He defined it as “the ability of designing new forms that are beneficial for humanity and are in accordance with the Islamic *shari’ah* and principles.” (p. 306). In his definition, Al-Mazeidy emphasized that the newly created things should be useful and helpful to human beings in their life. He emphasized also that the new things should follow Islamic foundations and principles. Creative Muslims in this case, will be distinguished from others by following the divine guidance from Allah (s.w.t.). They will consider the approval of the Islamic *shari’ah* before creating anything. However, Islam is creative by nature; It came with new and unique principles that rejected the prevailing practices of the Arab society in terms of worshipping God. It was very different from the beliefs of the people at that time. It came for the purpose of change for the better. This kind of change was a shift from a system based on mere imitation of the old generation to a new and unique model based on thinking, realizing and understanding the mission of people on earth. The Qur’an itself contains great and creative ideas including a complete system of guidance for life, enabling people to live in accordance with Islamic foundations. The Qur’an was revealed as a miracle to the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.). It challenged all people to produce a few verses like the Qur’an but they failed. It is a sign of divine creativity to reveal an inimitable book that is unique and relevant to all people in all places and times.

Furthermore, the Prophet Mohammad’s (p.b.u.h.) role was also creative. He was able to create and build a Muslim society from scratch. He transformed people from worshipping idols to worshipping one God and from fighting one another to building a strong solidarity and brotherhood among all. The Prophet was the door through which a completely new system of behavior for human beings was displayed. The first Islamic society established by the Prophet was creative in nature in the sense of newness and uniqueness, and that small society was to be the base of the great Islamic civilization to follow.

It is in such situations that the religion, the Qur’an, the Prophet and the Muslim society are creative in nature, and many Muslim scholars were able to produce creatively. The four great jurists of the new jurisprudence schools or *mathahibis*; Abu Hanifa al-No’mān, Malik Bin Anas, Mohammad Idris al-Shafi’I and Ahmad Bin Hanbal are excellent examples. Each was able to establish a unique school in Islamic *Fiqh*. Each scholar had his own school using a different methodology. They had their own students who continued the development of their respective schools.

Regarding the related literature, the writers found several studies dealing with the subject of creativity from an Islamic perspective. The best study among those is titled, *Creativity in Islamic Thought: A Comparative Analysis* by Wahida Yousif. The author conducted a comparative study between the Islamic and Western perspectives of creativity. She investigated Islamic thought on creativity in depth, and in a very systematic manner. She explained the main characteristics of the Islamic concept of creativity such as its multi-faceted nature, as well as dealing with concrete issues and problems (Yousif, 1999: 117- 123). The author has derived a methodology of creativity in Islamic thought by studying Islamic sources; the Qur’an in particular. She further elaborated on the sources of inspiration, tools and techniques as a help to understanding creativity from an Islamic perspective. Another good book that is found in the field of creativity from an Islamic perspective is *Moqaddimah fi Manhaj Al-Ibda’: Ro’yah Islamiyyah [An Introduction to the Methodology of Creativity: An Islamic Point of View]* by Zuheir Mansour al-Mazeidy. The author investigated creativity systematically and addressed the subject in an attempt to come up with an Islamic methodology of understanding creativity. He started with examining the Qur’anic verses and the Prophetic traditions related to the methodologies of sight, sound and dialogue as means towards “better understanding of the world around us.” as he stated (al-Mazeidy, 1993: 32). He then elaborated on the Muslim pioneers who lived creatively. Finally, the author presented some conditions for practising creativity in Islam.

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