

## Introduction to Research Methodology in Islamic Studies

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### Abstract

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This paper presents to researchers an overview of research methodology in Islamic Studies domain, indicating that researchers in the field are not trained to use methodology of scientists. The paper reiterates that Islamic Studies paradigm is centered on the message of the Quran, Sunnah and other instruments of knowledge align with the spirit and objectives of the Islamic Shariah. Solution has been suggested for the attention of the specialists and experts in Islamic Studies to set out sound paradigm valid for the domain, which will be adopted by researchers in the field of Islamic Studies.

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**Keywords:** Islamic Studies, Research, Methodology, Paradigm, Shariah

### 1. Introduction

Research generally implies diligent and systematic enquiry to discover or refine facts of knowledge in any particular field of endeavor. The essence of research in any field is to extend knowledge, and to cope with the demand of the area, a valid approach has to be developed by experts and specialists of the domain. A close study of the nature of various domains suggest that the application of invalid approach to research can put that field at risk, and thus, the research in that case will be faulty or at least not useful to the domain under which it is conducted. Research is served as a corner-stone upon which a genuine contribution of knowledge is made, and hence, it is important for experts and specialists of any field to articulate a valid methodological foundation upon which their research will be based without compromising the general aim and objectives of their respective domains. There have been many controversies about general research method stemmed from the philosophy of positivism (Wikipedia the free encyclopedia), suggesting that the only true knowledge is that which its research's data is derived from experiment and observation, using the scientific method.

This positivistic research paradigm as unrealistic as it is, led to methodological supremacy and hegemony, penetrating in most rather than all research areas, including the areas in which using such methodology may not offer legitimate contribution in that particular field. Considering this conflict of paradigms, scholars from various field emphasized the necessity of restricting scientific methods to domains which require scientific inductive or deductive principles. The concern of researchers in the Islamic Studies is the accuracy, authenticity and reliability of interpretation of the message of Islam as contained in the Quran and Sunnah, their discussion therefore on the attitude of human society or human civilization is based on the guiding principles of the revelation. To that end, this paper contributes with explanation on the areas and suggested methodology of research in the Islamic Studies, for researchers to understand better what may be served as valid contribution in the field.

### 2. Islamic Studies As The Domain

Islamic Studies as the particular field of learning in the curriculum of university education can be portrayed in two ways. The first is that which is related to those who include it under the field of humanities and social sciences, concentrating only on Islam and Muslims heritage and civilization.

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Their emphasis in this regard is on exploring how Islam and Muslims influenced the world in social aspects of life such as education, religious dominance, politics and economic relations. The second dimension is broader in that it aims at studying and understanding the absolute sense of Islamic knowledge, exploring all facets of Islamic teachings. Many Nigerian universities and beyond, considering the large population of Muslims, decided to teach the religion as a subject of modern scholarship, putting at the disposal of those pursuing it all important aspects of the religion.

If one refers to the subjects offered in those universities, he will find that the subjects suggest the program to be geared towards producing well-informed individuals as well as producing responsible citizens. The curriculum of the program therefore is understood to be capable of producing well-informed, righteous individuals, who will lead happy and fruitful lives in this world and aspire through good deeds to achieve spiritual bliss in the hereafter (Afendi & Baloch, 1980). It is also expected to instill in the mind of those individuals the sense of belonging, in order for them to be friends not enemies of the national development. This is the essence of introducing Islamic Studies in modern programs of scholarship, otherwise, teaching Quran, Hadith, Tawhid, Fiqh, Sirah and Morality will be for negligible importance and benefit. If it is now established that the domain of the Islamic Studies in those universities is designed toward achieving that aim, then it is of great importance also to examine the area of differences between Islamic Studies field and others in their research methodology, notably natural and social science.

A useful way to distinguish research in Islamic Studies field is to be aware of the general purpose and objectives of the domain. Quite often, an error of choosing the research topic consistent with the real educational purpose of Islamic Studies is made by researchers in the field. Consequently, real Islamic Studies research topics are always brushed aside at the expense of social science research topics. Educational purpose here does not imply what for instance, national policy on education spells out as purpose in its classical sense. What is meant with the purpose is what underlies the solid basis upon which in-depth scholarship and instruction is based. In the Quran, the primary source of knowledge to researchers in the domain of Islamic Studies, what may be served as the broad aim of Islamic Studies research is clearly stated. The sense of direction of any research and indeed the entire domain, provided by the Quran centered on guiding the individuals how to earn Allah's grace and bliss in this world and in hereafter, by encouraging them to doing that which pleases Allah the Exalted. The intent as well as the broad focus of the research therefore is to guide man to divine teachings of Islam, bringing him out of darkness of disbelief, perversion, injustice, wrong-doing, ignorance into the light of belief, justice, knowledge and social harmony. Allah the Exalted said thus:

*"(This is) a Book which We have revealed to you (O Muhammad) in order that you might lead out of darkness into light by their Lord's leave to the path of the All-Mighty, the Owner of all-praise" (14:1)*

Researchers in the field of Islamic Studies are heirs of the Prophets of Allah, inheriting the legacy of inviting individuals into the path of Allah the Exalted. The primary mission of their research therefore should be geared towards what is likely to accomplish that general objective rather than dissolving their area of profession by resorting to topics which could not explain the message of Islam such as social science research topics. In the same vein, the researchers as indicated by the glorious Quran should motivate the good-doers, warn the wrong-doers or constitute what may be served as a meaningful contribution for the benefit of the curious minds in the world of the intellectuals. This is in line with the verse below:

*"O Prophet! Verily We have sent you as witness and a bearer of glad tidings and a Warner, and as one who invites to Allah by His leave and as a lamp spreading light (through your instructions from the Quran and Sunnah)" 33:45-46*

Defining the assessable and observable meaning or outcome of any entry of behavior expected to occur as a result of the research gives rise to sound objectives of research. Such stated objectives should be right and clear and should allow better understanding of the field.

What has been highlighted thus far is easy and enough for one to understand even by a common sense that research in Islamic Studies field is peculiar in that all its relevant data is related to the Quran and Hadith. A set of rules, values, patterns and standards which constitute a legitimate contribution in the domain should then be undoubtedly be at variance with a commonly accepted paradigm in the field of natural or social science. It is obvious that some of the information gathered by Imam Gazali (n.d) in his book *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* is through observation and a fieldwork conducted by him to study human behaviors of various groups in matters of religion, in order to get the evidence of conviction.

In the book, Gazali gave account to his early intellectual pursuits which left him skeptical that he was forced to go on a fieldwork, wandering and seeking way to God, only to achieve that knowledge after some years in the form of Sufi illuminative experience. If one considers his report in the book, he will realize that he was unable to report a useful evidence of conviction, as what he stated were mere hover observations, the result of which raise questions than the proofs of facts. This is because scholars from Islamic Studies are not trained to use such methodology and cannot claim any competence in using it.

### 3. Guidelines To Islamic Studies Research Methodology

Islamic Studies comprises six major themes, which are Quran Studies, Hadith Studies, Usul al-Din (principles of faith), Fiqh (Jurisprudence) Sirah (biography) and civilization. For the benefit of researchers, the field can be categorized into four branches of scholarship. The first branch studies the general laws and rulings concerning the Islamic legal provisions on matters of Ibadat. Its major areas of study are the five pillars of Islam, dealing with such concepts as Shariah law, economic relations and family laws. The second is that of Usul al-Din, which studies matters of belief. Its major area of study are six articles of faith, also studies al-Milal wa al-Nihal, a comparative study of various groups, sects as well as other creeds other than Islam. The unseen matters such as Day of Resurrection, appearance of Isa, Mahdi, the earth beast, Gog and Mogog are also studied within this branch of scholarship. The third branch is served as the instruments and means to the Shariah provisions, supporting or allowing better understanding of the Islamic Studies subjects. These subjects are the means through which accuracy and precision of Shariah provisions is known. It studies subjects such as Usul al-Fiqh (Principles of Jurisprudence), classical Arabic language, Morphology, Sirah, Science of Hadith, Sciences of the Quran and Tajweed. The last branch is concerned with civilization, which addresses questions such as Muslim political thought, economics, education and other social aspects of human life.

A close study of these branches of scholarship suggest the Islamic Studies to be classified into three areas of research, all of which is characterized with peculiar method and procedure, only in some points do they inter-weave. The first requires the methodology of Fuqaha' (Jurists), discussing al-Ahkam al-Shar'iyah (legal laws), dealing with al-Ayat al-Ahkam (Quran legal studies), al-Ahadith Ahkam (Hadith legal Studies) and then the contributions of the Jurists in the field. Researchers in this area emerge as a jurist, and the research documents produced contain legal matters and interpretations. It may not therefore be valid here to use the methodology developed by social science scholars, since the research under study is analyzing all relevant data in relation to the Quran and Hadith. The researchers in this area should consult *al-Risala* of Imam al-Shafi'i (2010), who laid down the basis and the method to interpret the Quran and Sunnah, understanding *al-Am* (General term) and *al-Khas* (Specific), *Mutlaq* (Absolute) and *Muqayyad* (conditional), *Nasikh and al-Munsukh* (abrogated and abrogated verses) and other concepts of that nature. Imam al-Shafi'i emphasized that understanding the Quran requires Arabic language; a researcher therefore needs it should he succeed. Meanwhile, the researcher uses the guidance of the Quran and Sunnah as the basis of legal *Qiyas* (analogical deduction), and in the case of *Darurah* (Necessity or Compulsion), he resorts to the principles of *Maslaha* (public interest).

The second area of research is that of Usul al-Din, also called Tawhid. Researchers in this area are interpreters of the Quran and Sunnah on matters related to the fundamentals of faith. They use the methodology of jurist in their interpretations and analyses, but are not compelled to adopt the principles of *Qiyas* and *Maslaha*.

The third area of research within the domain of Islamic Studies is the field of Hadith and Civilization. This area comprises various fields of Hadith Sciences, Muslims contributions in politics, economics, history and other similar subjects. The methodology valid for this area is that of Hadith Scholars, who are not interpreters of the Quran and Sunnah, but prepare the material for interpreters of divine revelation. They do that by determining the validity and reliability of reports or works upon which legal judgment is based. The methodology is also valid in ascertaining historical facts, establishing links and value of it. Ibn khaldun (2010) in his critical analysis on the mistakes committed by researchers in the fields of history mentioned things such as inability of the researcher to fully understand the rules governing the transformation of human society, inability to place events in its real context and over confidence in one's sources.

Likewise, this area involves researches in which dealing with *Makhtutat* (manuscripts) works can best be edited, using the methodology of ascertaining the authenticity and reliability of manuscripts in relation to its authorship, copies and its publications. This area of research is all about refinement of culture, heritage, documents of wisdom or improving the quality of productions in civilization consistent with the spirit and objectives of Islam. The duty of the researchers in this area as already stated is preparing the material, and the principles of dealing with matters of civilization is the same with the methodology of Hadith Scholars in determining the reliability or otherwise of a report. But if they wish to produce crafts, arts, architecture, inventions or medicine, they at that time need to consult resource persons of the field. In such situation, their duty falls outside the domain of the Islamic Studies as they are not longer interpreting the Shariah, nor are they preparing the material, rather they are making contribution to humanity as men of crafts or profession not interpreters of the message of Islam.

#### 4. Choosing A Research Topic, Research Ethics And Qualities Of A Good Researcher

Although a researcher during his work may be compelled to conduct a research due to the fact that it is incumbent upon him to present at the end of his program what will certify or confirm the achievement of aim, but in Islam it is also a way through which the researcher will earn through his valuable work a grace from Allah the Exalted. He should therefore devotedly conduct it for the sake of Allah the Exalted, bearing in mind that his duty is to explore truth. He should possess good qualities of concentration, patience, passion, curiosity, critical mind, dedication and other qualities related to that aspect. On selecting the research topic, one should choose the topic of significant importance and benefit, and should be topic of one's interest. Most researchers at many times think that it is difficult to identify a research topic, but his success in choosing a suitable topics depends on his familiarity with undergraduate courses, especially Quran, Tafsir, Hadith, Usul al-Din, Usul al-Fiqh, Sirah as well as various aspects of Muslim civilization, and once one notices an unexplored areas, choosing a sound topic will not be problematic. Researcher can also identify the topic through discussion with experts and super visors. But generally, one needs to know the current status of research topic, which will help him know if that topic is worth research or not. This is all known through one's literature familiarity with relevant materials, since vast literature review helps him know the gaps of knowledge which require attention of researchers, providing him the contributions of Scholars and the deserted or un-noticed areas.

More often, it is found that some researchers filled their work with irrelevant or absurd statements, while some filled it with statements that are highly philosophical, using a tricky complex terms. A good researcher should always bear in mind that he is interpreting Shariah provisions of al-Ma'ruf and al-Munkar (what Shariah deemed right or wrong respectively), his statements should not lend itself to range of divergent interpretations. In fact, the work should give the readers a concise, informative and satisfactory reference of knowledge. This does not however imply narrowing his statements at the expense of clarity of the work. It should also be made clear the researcher's comment, direct quotation and paraphrasing. Only then can his objectives be achieved, making it a useful research in the world of intellectuals.

#### 5. Stages Of The Research

Stages of the research are phases which under normal circumstance, a researcher has to go through should he produce a meaningful work. The first step is introducing the research topic by stating the circumstance and problem connected with the topic, and the urgent need for conducting the research. The next stage is describing the topic or even defining it in the best possible way, clarifying the complex terms if any. The disputed point or area of the topic will then be brought into lime light, sifting carefully the problem understudy from irrelevant or commonly accepted side of it. Consider for instance a researcher is to examine the divergent views on *Jilsah al-Istirahah* (a brief sitting after the second prostration before standing to the second or forth Raka'ah) as to whether it is *Lil-Hajah* (based on conditional circumstance of need or necessity) or *Mullaq* (absolute). One is expected here to examine as a matter of emphasis these issues, giving his readers all important arguments raised regarding the problem. Similarly, one in his work should specify each aspect of sequences related to the topic, enumerating the divergent views of Scholars on the matter, and clarify whether the problem understudy relates to matters of belief like research on *Istiwa'* (Allah's elevation above his creatures and the fact that He rose over the throne in a manner that truly suits His majesty), or jurisprudence like Shari'ah provisions on Islamic Banking, or even in pointing out the right meaning of certain terms which are obscure such as *Quru'* which designates both menstruation and cessation of blood. Researcher should ensure proper citations and documentations, stating the primary source in which every view is stated.

In the same vein, he needs to trace an attributed statement or view back to its original material in which that Scholar is said to have championed that view. This is because many at times, a view is attributed to Scholars, but on tracing back to the original material it is found to be not accurate. As a matter of fact, such statements may be discovered to be false or distorted, take for instance what Taqi al-Din al-Subki (1347) stated on Ibn Taymiyyah that the latter described Allah as having human qualities. This when referred to the works of Ibn Taymiyyah, is discovered that he only condemns the absolute denial of Allah's attributes, but at the same time emphasized that nothing from that attributes are in any sense similar to His creation. He therefore affirmed the attributes in manner that suits Allah the Exalted without likening Him with His creation. Researcher needs to take into account such distortions or incomplete statement cited to give a false or misleading impression on some Scholars. A researcher should all examine such views in detail without bias, evaluating critically the accuracy and precision of any view.

## 6. Sources And Research Design Format

There is no doubt that the primary source of knowledge in Islamic Studies is the Quran and Sunnah. However, what is meant with the source here is what researcher consults of literacy works written by Scholars. Al-Mure'shliy (2006) in his discussion on the sources of research in his book *'Masadir al-Darasat al-Islamiyyah'* stated that sources of research are the original works, serving as the original material which treated deeply the topic under study such as Tarikh al-Tabari, Tafsir al-Tabari, the authentic Hadith collections of Bukhari and Muslim, Ibn Hisham Biography and other works similar. References as stated by him is used to designate any work consulted in which specific matters are treated, originally extracted from their original sources, such as Riyad al-Salihin of al-Nawawi, Bulug al-Maram of Ibn Hajar, al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah of Ibn Kathir and other works related to that aspects. Researchers in their masters or doctoral degree program are always recommended to depend on the original sources during their research, unless when such primary sources are hardly attainable, and in such situation, reference works may be tolerable.

To find out the relevant sources and references of research, one can consults the literacy works written solely for that purpose such as Kashf al-Zunun of Hadji Khalifah, al-Fihrasat of Ibn al-Nadim, Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi written by an orientalist, Karl Broklemann and other books similar. In dealing with Quran and Hadith legal Studies, researcher can consult Ahkam al-Quran written by Jassas and Abubakar ibn Arabi, al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Quran by Imam Qurtubi and other books treating that aspect. Tafsir of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, and Adwa' al-Bayan in Tafsir, Fath al-Bari, Nayl al-Awtar, Subul al-Salam, Fatawa of Ibn Taymiyyah all form good samples regarding one's reference of research.

The research procedure, design and format depend on the research topic and the valid method employed. But generally speaking, researcher needs to study the Quranic verses and hadith relevant to the research topic, and then good research works done in the field, which will enable him to know all research conventions concerning the structure of thesis and documentation, to assure the linkage and continuity of knowledge, and then followed by the analysis. Consider for instance Imam al-Shafi'i style of data collection in his book *Risala*, his objectives in the book was to document a legal basis of interpreting the Quran and Sunnah, so he relied extensively on verses of the Quran and Sunnah in rooting and regulating the principles of *Qiyas* and *Ijtihad* (subjective opinion). But *al-Mustasfa* of Gazali offers another approach in that, although the objective is jurisprudence matters, but the method adopted by him in the book includes refinement of what is typical jurisprudence, where he distinguishes it from logic, then identifying areas of *Ijtihad* and *al-Masa'il* (research questions).

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has been presenting to researchers a guidelines for research in the Islamic Studies. It indicated that the domain constitute a set of subjects that are directly or indirectly related to the understanding of the teachings of Islam, emphasizing that the real research in the field is that which relates to the message of Islam as contained in the Quran and Sunnah. The paper cautioned researchers regarding the tendency of adopting a methodology not suitable to Islamic studies, for researchers in this domain are not trained to use the methodology of natural or social science. They may require the contributions of scientists as resource persons on some cases but not determining the final form of research. In the light of what has been discussed, the paper recommends the following:

- Specialists in the Islamic Studies domain should join hand in hand in laying the basic principles and methodology of research in the field.
- The evaluation of any research material in the field should be measured based on its ability to be consistent with the spirit and objectives of Islamic Studies field.
- Methodology of the Jurists should be used in researches related to laws, but what relates to Tawhid or matters of comparative religion requires the methodology of Scholars of Usul al-Din.
- Areas of Hadith and civilizations requires authentication of reports and ascertaining its reliability, and thus, the methodology of Hadith Scholars is required.

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