

STUDYING ISLAM AND ITS ADHERENTS IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Islamic studies is a relatively new yet growing phenomenon in Australian universities. With increased focus on Islam and Muslim in the age of the War on Terror and with the Australian Muslim population fast increasing, Islamic studies is an important intellectual tool to better understand Islam and Muslims as well as the many challenges facing them. This paper investigates recent trends and developments in Islamic studies as an academic discipline in Australian universities. This is an important intellectual task because Islamic studies continues to play a significant role in Australian academia. The data were collected from a literature review and analyzed descriptively. The findings of the study show the intellectual tools developed in Islamic studies can be deployed to build relationships between fragmented Muslim communities and between Muslims and non-Muslims, particularly in multicultural Australia. Islamic studies draws on a variety of fields, making it cross-discipline. As such, it offers a rich and analytic investigation of the world's second largest religion and its multiple expressions. Australian universities offer Islamic studies ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate programs. The topics studied include Islamic philosophy, jurisprudence, education, history and Arabic.

Keywords: Australian Universities, Islamic Studies, Modernism, Multicultural

ABSTRAK

Studi Islam adalah fenomena yang relatif baru, namun berkembang di universitas-universitas Australia. Dengan peningkatan fokus pada Islam dan Muslim di era Perang Melawan Teror dan populasi Muslim Australia yang meningkat pesat, kajian Islam adalah alat intelektual penting untuk lebih memahami Islam dan Muslim dan banyak tantangan yang dihadapi mereka. Artikel ini menginvestigasi tren dan perkembangan terkini dalam Studi Islam sebagai disiplin akademis di universitas-universitas Australia. Penelitian ini adalah tugas intelektual yang penting karena Studi Islam akan terus memainkan peran penting dalam dunia akademik Australia. Data dikumpulkan dari studi literatur dan dianalisis secara deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perangkat intelektual yang dikembangkan dalam Studi Islam dapat digunakan untuk membangun hubungan antara komunitas Muslim yang terfragmentasi dan antara Muslim dan non-Muslim khususnya di Australia yang multikultural. Studi Islam mengacu pada berbagai bidang menjadikannya lintas disiplin. Dengan demikian, ia menawarkan kajian intelektual yang kaya dan analitik tentang agama terbesar kedua di dunia dan berbagai ekspresinya. Universitas Australia menawarkan Studi Islam mulai dari program sarjana hingga pascasarjana. Topik yang dipelajari meliputi filsafat Islam, fiqih, pendidikan, sejarah, dan bahasa Arab.

Kata Kunci: Modernisme, Multikultural, Studi Islam, Universitas-Universitas Australia

INTRODUCTION

Popular interest in Islam as a way of life and its adherents in recent years have incentivized universities in the West to establish a range of programs, centers and institutes devoted to the study of Islam and Muslim communities. However, the study of Islam and Muslims in the Western intellectual tradition has a long history going back at least two centuries (Buskens, 2016) when scholars and thinkers traversed the Islamicate in search of different kinds of knowledge and to gain some understanding of Islam and Muslims (Voll, 2009). In other

words, intellectual efforts have been geared and aimed at exploring better understanding toward the religion and its adherents.

In the last 20 years, particularly after the events of 9/11, the study of Islam and Muslims has increased in prominence and importance in Western universities (Auda et al., 2008). Universities have made efforts to study the religion and its adherents and the programs have evolved into an independent academic discipline known as Islamic studies (Keskin & Ozalp, 2021) within higher education. Islamic studies in Western universities has become a key instrument for better understanding of Islam and Muslim communities worldwide. Universities have also explored the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in local and international settings. The concerns largely address an issue revolving around a central question – what is the relationship between the study of Islam as a divinely prescribed way of life and the study of different traditional values and cultural practices that have influenced the shaping of the religion?

In an Australian context, Islamic studies is a relatively new, yet growing, field especially in the higher education sector. For a while, the study of Islam and Muslim societies in Australia was focused on the study of Southeast Asia, in particular Indonesia. The issue was chosen due to its geographical proximity as the country containing the largest Muslim population to Australia and the Middle East where most “Muslim” actions have been occurring. Australian universities have seen a transition in Islamic studies recently with the area focusing increasingly on Islam and Muslim societies, Islamic and Muslim issues such as terrorism, radicalism, the governance of Muslims and Islamic law emanating globally and within Australia, and the interplay with other disciplines.

Australian universities manage their efforts to address Islamic studies. As a result, new research and/or teaching centers have emerged in some universities in Australia. For instance, the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies was established at the Australian National University. Stand-alone university degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, for example, Bachelor of Islamic Studies and Master of Islamic Studies are offered at Charles Sturt University. It also offers short courses and programs that have been developed to study Islam and Muslims from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

There is a little concern from scholars investigating the issue of Islamic studies offered at Australian universities. This study tries to fill the gap. This paper examines recent trends and developments in Islamic studies as an independent and growing discipline in Australian universities. With the gradual growth of Islam and Muslim communities in Australia it is only fitting to study this phenomenon using academic tools from a variety of disciplines. This paper probes how universities do this through their programs and degrees. The key idea of this paper is to learn in some depth the nature of Islamic studies in Australian universities and the direction it is heading.

METHOD

To achieve the objective of this study, a qualitative method was applied. Unlike quantitative, qualitative research deals with textual data or words. It is an approach to data collection, analysis and report writing that differs from traditional, quantitative approaches. To gain the data, this study applied observation and survey. The first refers to the way data are gathered in their natural setting. In addition, a survey was applied to gain data for this research (Creswell, 2014).

Survey and observation were conducted to gain data on Islamic studies at Australian universities. The universities’ websites were visited and explored to collect the data concerning the Islamic studies offered. They are categorized in terms of undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate levels. In addition, the courses taught at each level were collected. The data were

analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) framework. The qualitative data in this study have undergone three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the data described include a definition of Islamic studies, Islamic studies in Western scholarship and Islamic studies in Australian universities. The results of this study are discussed with relevant literature.

Islamic Studies Defined

Within the modern secular context, Islamic studies constitutes a systematic exploration of Islam and its adherents, and issues and challenges surrounding them. Employing the analytical tools and research methods of social sciences, humanities and philosophy, it has morphed into a distinct academic discipline. As an umbrella term, Islamic studies draws on a range of fields such as sociology of Islam, anthropology of Islam, philosophy of Islam, Islamic civilization, Islamic history, Islamic scientific heritage, Islamic cosmology, Islamic economics and finance, Islamic law and jurisprudence, Islamic scripture, human rights, gender studies, comparative religions and Sufism. With the instruments of crossdisciplinarity and comparative analysis, it investigates Islam's inner dynamics, Muslim socio-cultural diversity and the numerous challenges surrounding them in the modern world. It also provides important insights into multiple expressions of Islam as a way of life, the role of Islamic civilization in world history and its contribution to modernity, and the importance and relevance of Islam in the contemporary world. Islamic studies further examines the modern intellectual tradition and the roles and thoughts of the major modern Muslim intellectuals and their attempts to reconcile tension between Islam and secular modernity. Other areas for consideration include the protracted impact of colonialism, ongoing influence of secularism, renewal and reform, and concerns associated with civil society.

In light of this, Islamic studies is not a monolithic specialty but a multidisciplinary discipline with various sub-disciplines and multiple ways of studying Islam and Muslims. Regarding Islamic Studies, Waardenburg observes "that its boundaries are not clearly fixed, and that there are no uniform and generally accepted programs. It constitutes a field of studies employing various disciplines" (Waardenburg, 1997). Similarly, Siddiqui remarks based on English experience that "Within the universities, there are indications that Islamic studies are dispersed in politics and economy, sociology and anthropology, gender studies etc." (Siddiqui, 2007). The *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (Martin et al., 2021) provides further evidence of the various characteristics of Islamic studies encompassing a vast field of research, theories, cultural spheres, disciplines and concepts. More importantly, Islamic studies pursued in modern universities is unlike what is often described as traditional or classical Islamic studies where knowledge is two-dimensional, both of which are important. "Revealed knowledge" found in the Quran and Hadith, and "acquired knowledge" secured through reason and exploration.

It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that defining Islamic studies is not a simple or easy task. Many disagreements about what constitutes Islamic studies exist among scholars. Some advocate the incorporation of Arabic language into Islamic studies as the core of the discipline. Some approaches like philosophical, sociological and ethnographic inquiries of Muslim societies are viewed as unnecessary and improper elements of the Islamic studies curriculum. Others, however, argue the teaching of Arabic, scripture and textual analysis does not address the problems facing contemporary Muslim societies. Yet some believe the knowledge of Arabic has the potential to form a strong basis for the understanding of the Quran and *sunnah* (sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad) supplemented with the

knowledge of various sciences. Then there are some who claim Islamic studies has evolved from a mixture of disciplines as a well-defined independent discipline. Some disagree with such a claim and question if Islamic studies can be even called a discipline because, according to them, it does not have the requisite components of a discipline.

Regardless of the disagreements about the definition of Islamic studies in the literature, in this paper, the working definition used is that Islamic studies is a systematic cross-disciplinary investigation grounded in scientific methodology of Islam as a complete way of life and Muslims, and the many issues and challenges facing them in the modern world.

Islamic Studies in Western Scholarship

The interest in Islam as a religion and Muslim communities in Western intellectual scholarship goes centuries back all the way to the period of the birth of Islam and the early Islamic expansion into different lands (Bisati, 2016; Martin et al., 2021). In Britain, for example, the study of Islam and Muslim society as an academic field started in the 15th century with the investigation of the cultures and languages of the Muslim world, covering the Near and Middle East (Said, 1979). The first chair in Arabic was established in Cambridge in 1632 (Voll, 2009). At the University of Oxford, qualifications in classical Arabic and Islamic studies were offered, “originally as a sub-division of Divinity” (Bisati, 2016). The modern academic discipline of Islamic studies, however, can be traced to the Enlightenment era of European intellectual tradition (Nanji, 1997). At the time, scholars and thinkers concentrated on gaining some understanding of Islam and Muslims as Western civilization penetrated the East and, through travel, exploration and trade, encountered Islamic civilization and Muslim world (Hourani, 1991). The breed of scholars at the time had an open tendency to oppose Islam and studied Islam “with polemical and negative approach” (Bisati, 2016); as such, their worldviews and perspectives developed in sharp contrast to the Islamic worldview during the 19th and 20th centuries (Voll, 2009).

The study of Islam and Muslims was conceptualized as an intellectual endeavor of Western civilization’s engagement with non-Western cultures and civilizations. In this approach, non-Western cultures such as Islam were seen from a European historical perspective and post-Enlightenment epistemological lens. This framework produced Orientalism within which a study of Islam and Muslims was pursued. Studying Islam and Muslims within Orientalism had many inherent biases including pursuing the study for political and ideological interests (Mahdi, 1997).

During the early modern period (late 19th and early 20th centuries), the study of Islam and Muslims was essentially focused on the investigation of major historical and philosophical works that were produced during the classical Islamic era. The study was pursued at a time when colonial powers such as Great Britain and France were attempting to understand the religious traditions and what motivated their colonized subjects in a belief system they did not understand. Research then was oriented toward acquiring knowledge of the “other” with a specific goal, which was to better understand the values and practices of the newly colonized and gain full mastery of the techniques that would help in the optimization of the management of the colonial subjects and help advance the “civilizing mission.” The main methodological approach was that of philology (Rane et al., 2021).

In line with that, Bisati (2016) remarks:

The Orientalist approach to the study of Islam became the dominant perspective in Western scholarship during the first half of the twentieth century. It primarily involved text-based study and identified Islam with the “great tradition” of urban literate civilization in the Muslim world. It paid little attention to what were viewed as the superstitions and perversions of so-called “popular Islam.” In the West, the establishment of professorial chairs, journals, and institutions like the School of Oriental and African

Studies in London in 1917 reflected the dominance of the Orientalist approach to the study of Islam in the West until the middle of the twentieth century.

There are some disadvantages to Orientalism. Jung (2011) notes that one of the major weaknesses of this approach was that it offered an interpretation of Islam and Muslims from a strong Western perspective, which only highlighted certain casual observations. Often, these observations were presented to others as a true and complete reality about Islam and Muslims. In doing so, many facts were ignored and a systematic study of Muslim societies and existential Islam was never undertaken.

In the 20th century, Orientalism came to accept the tradition explanation of Islam and Muslim societies including the early formation of the Muslim community. For scholars such as Edward Said, who offers a penetrating analysis of Orientalism, this was problematic as rational and scientific methodologies were not deployed adequately within Orientalism as a “truth-finding” process. By the mid-20th century, however, methods and theoretical approaches to the study of Islam and Muslims in Western academic institutions witnessed a paradigmatic shift. Muslim scholars with technical and research skills and specialization in academic disciplines gradually started securing teaching and research positions in Western academia and started making important scholarly contributions; in the process, they began transforming the study of Islam and Muslim societies (Bisati, 2016; Rane et al., 2021). New social scientific approaches to the study of religion, including Islam, started to emerge. Regarding Islam, scholars using social scientific tools started examining it more as a socio-cultural phenomenon than simply a belief system. However, in the last three decades, further development has occurred in the study of Islam and Muslim societies with new specialists in the fields of political science, international relations, gender studies, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, and terrorism and counter-terrorism studies (Ramadan, 2007). This has in the contemporary context made the approach to the study of Islam and Muslims interdisciplinary. While this is all very well, what needs to be given serious attention is how Islamic studies in Western academic institutions can operate under purely scientific reasoning as a complete independent academic discipline that is free from the influences of the Enlightenment era and Western ideology and politics.

Islamic Studies in the Australian Higher Education Sector

The September 11 attack (also commonly referred as 9/11), the Bali, Madrid and London bombings, and various other terror-related incidents in different parts of the world have drawn intense focus on Islam and Muslims, particularly in the West including Australia. Since these events, Islam and Muslims have increasingly been equated with terrorism, and vilification of the religion and its adherents has been on the rise (Ali, 2018). In Australia and various other countries of the West, Islam and Muslims have come to be negatively viewed and their complicity in these events has been alleged. This is an exaggeration and misunderstanding. Islam and Muslim reality have been deeply distorted by the popular construction of Islam as a monolith and Muslims as a homogeneous people such that both are now associated with acts of terrorism and political violence (Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Neyazi, 2014).

For Australia, one of the most pressing concerns has been the close presence of the militant group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Indonesia. Whether JI or, for that matter, Indonesia as the world’s largest Muslim country poses a ‘real’ or perceived threat of terrorism or undermining of secular liberal democracy, Australia nevertheless remains concerned and has taken the matter seriously. It has cast its focus on Indonesia and South-East Asia generally to better understand Islam and the internal dynamics of the Muslim population in Muslim-majority countries and diaspora Muslim communities. Shahram Akbarzadeh (2004) and his colleagues assert:

There has been an acknowledgment in the Australian policy-making circles of the increasing relevance of scholarly research into our region. The importance of research into Islam in South East Asia and its implications for Australian security have become even more salient in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attack in New York and the October 2002 attack in Bali.

Against this background and the fact the Muslim population is fast growing in Australia, academic and Muslim religio-spiritual interest in Islam is growing speedily. The increased academic research and teaching interest in Islam is noted by Akbarzadeh (2004) and his colleagues, who say, "Studies of Islam and Muslim societies constitute a relatively new, but growing, field of research in Australia". Australian Muslim religio-spiritual interest in Islam is evident in the emergence and growth of a plethora of new centers and hubs in universities teaching and researching Islam and Muslims. Examples of centers and hubs in Australian universities include: the Centre for Islamic Thought and Education at the University of South Australia, the Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation at Charles Sturt University, the National Centre for Contemporary Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, the Centre for Muslim States and Societies at the University of Western Australia, the Centre for Arab and Islamic at the Australian National University and the Study of Contemporary Muslim Lives at Macquarie University. Those universities offer the centers and hub conducting studies on Islam religion and its adherent or Muslim. They try to meet the demand to investigate the issues concerning the religion and its adherent.

Islamic studies offered at Australian universities, which are based on *modern science*, allow students from Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds to formally enroll in a university course or subject to study existential Islam and Muslim communalism. Here, students learn scientific research methods and apply sociological, anthropological, historical and philosophical principles to better understand different aspects of Islam, the role of Islamic civilization in global history and contemporary Muslim peoples. Therefore, a growing trend in research activity and heightened interest in various aspects of Islam, particularly its sociocultural and political role in a globalized world, are penetrating academia with great force. The universities offer modern science to study Islam and its adherent. This can be seen as a breakthrough to study the religion and its adherent since the approaches of modern science is used to enrich the analysis and interpretation on the academic endeavor (Ozalp & Keskin, 2015; Ansari, 2018).

It is critical to understand the growing effects of globalization and the post-9/11 world order. Those two factors have important ramifications for Muslim residents in Australia. Issues of Muslim citizenship in relation to their ability to access the labor market and participate fully in civic life, as well as the growth of the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism and its impact on governance in numerous Muslim states, are also important considerations in better understanding the role of Islam today. This can be made possible through academic research and formal and comprehensive Islamic studies programs. Those efforts are expected to contribute to the better world for Muslim residing in Australia.

The modern science-based Islamic studies is usually recognized as secular. Since it is pursued in secular educational institutions, they serve as spaces for anyone keen to learn about diverse aspects of Islam and develop a critical and 'rational' understanding of Islam and Muslims and their place in modernity. One of the arguments of this paper is that Islamic studies in Australian universities is useful and even necessary in multicultural Australia. Although at the moment universities offer their programs independently and in isolation from each other, there is a fast-growing need for interaction and collaboration between them and between universities and community-based organizations who offer Islamic studies and the

promotion of intercommunity relationships. This circumstance is positive for a better interaction in terms of academic exchange to comprehend Islam in Australia.

Islamic studies is an empirical phenomenon in Australia and its overall impact, particularly on Muslim everyday living, is inevitable. As a learning process, Islamic studies serves as a means through which the aims and habits of Muslims are communicated from individual to individual, group to group and generation to generation. Islamic studies promotes socialization, which sociologists claim inevitably impacts on human beings directly or indirectly. Those efforts are clearly useful for the society in Australia to introduce Islam and appreciate the values it promote to create a harmonious society.

Socialization is the multifaceted process through which individuals learn and internalize cultural norms, codes, and values. This process enables entry into and sustained membership in one or more social groups. Individuals develop social and cultural competencies through (1) interaction with other individuals and social institutions and (2) response to their macro- and micro-sociocultural contexts. Socialization does not occur in a vacuum: this process operates in social locations that both afford and constrain interaction and opportunity ... Socialization facilitates processes of inclusion and participation of diverse individuals and groups in society. At the same time, socialization contributes to the stabilization of social order, which can include reproduction of existing stratification by race, gender, and social class. Processes of socialization continue to shape generational cohorts and intergenerational dynamics as well as across various social institutions (Saras & Perez-Felkner, 2018; Ozalp & Daqiq, 2016; Saeed, 2014).

Research conducted on Islamic studies in various other Western countries reveals it has had a significant impact on Muslims (Musharraf, Bhutto & Bux, 2019; Ansari, 2018). There is no reason to believe the same is not true about its impact on Australian Muslims and shaping their identity. Therefore, Islamic studies is crucial in understanding Islam and Muslims in Australia. It contributes to the shaping and making of a distinct Australian Islam, one with distinct Australian characteristics—that is, an ‘Aussie-Islam,’ an Islam emanating from and for a Australian multicultural context. An Aussie-Islam allows for Muslims to maintain their Islamic heritage and character but at the same time participate in the social and cultural life of multicultural Australia. An Aussie-Islam is a project in the making that involves Australian-born Muslims and young migrants and seeks to weed out ethnic and parochial accretions from scriptural and rational Islam through the educational process. In this way, it can share values such as pluralism and tolerance with Australia and coexist in a political system where there is separation of church and state.

Although by no means exhaustive, contains a list of Islamic studies courses and subjects offered by certain universities in Australia at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It shows the great diversity of units available to students in Australian academia. In some instances, universities offer distinct subjects; in others there is overlap between subjects across institutions. Most of the universities that offer Islamic studies offer only a small number of subjects as electives that can be counted towards a degree such as Bachelor of Arts. Some, such as Western Sydney University, offer students this option as well as the opportunity to take up an entire Islamic studies program by doing a major or sub-major in Islamic studies while pursuing a Bachelor of Arts or BA (Pathway to Teaching Primary) or BA (Pathway to Teaching Secondary). A handful of universities offer a complete undergraduate and/or postgraduate degree in Islamic studies.

Australian universities provide more robust and formal Islamic studies programs and courses with a strong focus on analysis and theorizing. For example, Western Sydney University lays down a theoretical foundation in the first year of study, and students can then gradually progress to topics and disciplines critical to understanding Islam. This field of study

considers text and context, historical and modern Islamic studies, and research methods. There is emphasis on the relevance of Islamic studies to the modern world through developing solid understanding of past traditions in Islamic scholarship and their social and historical contexts. Preparation for graduate study is another important aim of Islamic studies at Western Sydney University, with strong attention paid to developing analytical and interdisciplinary research skills by combining several approaches.

The University of Melbourne offers an undergraduate program. The courses are: understanding Islam and Muslim societies; Islam in the modern world; the Quran: an introduction; genders and desires in Asia; Israelis and Palestinians: conflict, peace; modern Israel: good bad and disputed; politics in the Middle East and South Asia; spirituality in Islam; the first centuries of Islam; international relations: key questions; Indonesia in the modern world; contemporary challenges and Islam; Asian religions in societal context; Islam and ethics: doctrines and debates; the modern Middle East; diplomacy: international relations/Islam; Islam, human rights and Muslim states; Islam and democracy: cooperation and conflict. The university also offers postgraduate program. The courses are: critical Asian perspective; the Quran and its interpretation; methodologies of Hadith; Muslim philosophical traditions; contemporary Middle East and Central Asia; Islam and politics; postgraduate Arabic; human rights in Southeast Asia; development, culture and conflict; gender, globalization and development; rethinking rights and global development; Middle Eastern wars: jihad and resistance; Islamic theology: schools and methods; topics in Arabic and Islamic studies; methods of Islamic law; Islamic studies thesis; Islam and questioning of modernity; special seminar in Islamic studies; social justice and Islamic finance; trans-cultural communication at work; justice, democracy and difference; and US foreign policy.

Western Sydney University offers an undergraduate program. The courses taught are understanding Islam and Muslim societies; *Hadith*: the prophetic tradition; the Quran: An introduction; Islam in Southeast Asia; Islam in the modern world; Islam, media and conflict; women with Muslim identity; Islamic law in a changing world; ethical traditions in Islam; Islam in the west; Islamic revivalism in the globalized world; and history of Muslim civilizations and ideas.

Charles Sturt University offers undergraduate programs. The courses taught are Islamic worldview and faith essentials; *fiqh* (Islamic law) of the five pillars; *ih̄san* (spirituality) essentials; *sirah* (life of Prophet Mohammed); *ūsul al-Dīn* (foundational Islamic theology); *ūsul al-fiqh* (methodology of Islamic law); *ūsul at-tafsīr* (methodology of Quranic exegesis); *ūsul al-hadith* (methodology of prophetic traditions); advanced study of *tafsīr* (Quranic exegesis) literature; advanced study of hadith literature; Arabic skills; introduction to Arabic reading; beginner Arabic language; intermediate Arabic grammar; advanced Arabic grammar; *mantiq* (logic) and critical reasoning; Islam in the modern world; *akhlāq* (morality) and *adab* (manners) in Islam; purification of the heart; history of prophets: Adam to Jesus; religious service and community leadership; Islamic family law; world religions in Australia; women in Islam and Islamic cultures; Islamic history and civilizations; and guided research. The university also offers postgraduate programs. The courses taught are Islamic worldview and theology; methodology of Islamic law (*ūsul al-fiqh*); methodology of Quranic exegesis (*ūsul at-tafsīr*); methodology of prophetic traditions (*ūsul al-hadith*); Islamic jurisprudence of five pillars; Islamic family law and society; Islam in the modern world; women in Islam, civilizations and cultures; essentials of Islamic spirituality; Islam: morality and etiquette in daily life; philosophy of Prophet Mohammad's life (*sirah*); Islamic history and civilizations; modern history of the Muslim world; Arabic skills; introduction to Arabic reading; beginner Arabic language; intermediate Arabic grammar; advanced Arabic grammar; interpreting Islamic sacred texts; Islamic theology: classical to contemporary thought; Islam and science: contemporary ethical issues;

contemporary Islamic movements; Islamic economy, banking and finance; guided research; and Islamic studies project.

Three universities offer Islamic studies. Based on the graduate level offered by these universities, there are some differences. For graduate level, the University of Melbourne and Charles Sturt University offer programs. Western Sydney University only offers an undergraduate program but not postgraduate. In terms of courses, the University of Melbourne and Charles Sturt University have a broad course to offer undergraduates. The University of Melbourne has integrated humanities and social sciences with Islamic studies. On the other hand, Charles Sturt University tries to combine Islamic studies with civilization.

Generally, research into Islam and Muslim societies and formal Islamic studies programs have important benefits. Based on the result of this study, it can be seen the courses allow students to structure a career or professional path such as primary or secondary school teaching. This has something to do with academic matters. Those programs might attract scholars who have the same concerns about Islamic studies.

Another important benefit is that individuals gain better appreciation of lived Islam and learn more about Muslim societies and Muslim diaspora communities. Islamic studies programs help students to focus on various aspects of Islam. At the same time, students gain more specific knowledge of the religion as a cultural and belief system. It goes without saying that Islamic studies program are important in understanding Islam's contribution to the multicultural and multi-faith nature of contemporary Australia.

Another benefit is that Islamic studies offered at Australian universities enhances researchers' and students' knowledge of different Islamic values, rituals and practices. To some extent, this dispels some of the myths and misconceptions propagated by the media. For example, it defuses the threat wrongly ascribed to Islam in the "Age of Terror." The media has framed so far that the act of terrorism is closely associated with the religion and its adherent.

Islamic studies is undeniably a fast-growing phenomenon in Australian. People from different religious and ideological backgrounds plus Muslims seek to study Islam to gain better appreciation of an important world religion. Islam shares its traditions in a fundamental way with other religions like Christianity and Judaism. Islam is a complex phenomenon and studying it can mean a variety of things, including exploring its holy texts (the Quran and Hadith), laws and artefacts. Islam can be analyzed in term of its sociocultural, economic and political impacts not only on individuals and social organizations in Australia but around the globe. It can also mean investigating the internal and external factors behind Islam's internal religious dynamism. In the age of the 'War on Terror,' Islamic studies can be a valuable source to understand the rise, causes and consequences of Islamism and Muslim radicalism and terrorism.

It is important to appreciate that Islamic studies is not about the study of the religion alone, but also about Islam's adherents. The two aspects – the religion and its adherents – are closely related and inseparable to explore to gain better understanding. In other words, Islamic studies in a university context is about social-scientific exploration. It particularly explores the ways in which Muslims describe and pursue their everyday religious life. Muslims' lives to some extent can be investigated to understand the way they embrace and bring their understanding about the religion to seize and practice in their daily life.

Islamic studies is also about how Muslims in Australia go about constructing their identity. The term identity is crucial when it comes to exploring a particular religion. Since Islam is being interpreted and practiced by its followers in a variety of ways, understanding this dimension of Muslim everyday living is critical. Ignoring those aspects may bring failure to

better effort to understand the religion and its adherent. This identity exploration is better offered in the higher education especially in the university settings.

This study has contributed to scholarly works on the issue of Islamic studies particularly offered in Australian universities, focusing on Islam and its adherents. The result of this study is expected to enrich scholarly works on Islamic studies offered worldwide. However, it has a limitation. In terms of method, this study applied a qualitative method. Further research could combine mix methods to investigate the issue for a more robust result.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the recent trends and developments in Islamic studies as an academic discipline in Australian universities. Islamic studies can be deployed to build relationships between fragmented Muslim communities and between Muslims and non-Muslims particularly in multicultural Australia. It draws on a variety of fields making it a cross-discipline. As such, it offers a rich and analytic investigation of the world's second largest religion and its multiple expressions. Based on the results of this study, some conclusions can be drawn. Islamic studies is a systematic cross-disciplinary investigation grounded in scientific methodology of Islam as a complete way of life and Muslims and many issues and challenges facing them in the modern world.

In the context of Western universities, Islamic studies has developed over time. In Britain, for example, the study of Islam and Muslim society as an academic field began when scholars started exploring the issue in the 15th century. Unfortunately, Islamic studies in the first phase of Orientalism had many inherent biases and negative attitudes towards Islam from the scholars. During the early modern period (late 19th and early 20th centuries), the study of Islam and Muslims was essentially focused on investigation of major historical and philosophical works that were produced during the classical Islamic era. By the mid-20th century, however, methods and theoretical approaches to the study of Islam and Muslims in Western academic institutions witnessed a paradigmatic shift.

In the Australian context, Islamic studies is offered by several universities: the University of Melbourne, Western Sydney University and Charles Sturt University. However, they have differences when it comes to their Islamic studies program. The University of Melbourne and Charles Sturt University offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Western Sydney University only offers an undergraduate program. The University of Melbourne has integrated humanities and social sciences with Islamic studies. On the other hand, Charles Sturt University combines Islamic studies with civilization.

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