

The Scientific Principles of Islamic Psychology

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The purpose of this article is to argue about how to define Islamic psychology based on the fundamental concepts of Islam and science, since the development of Islamic Psychology is driven by the spirit of Islamization of knowledge. Therefore, this article will also discuss about the goal of Islamic Psychology, its scopes, and its focus, which will lead our efforts in developing Islamic Psychology as a science. The last part of this article will explore the possible methods, with the example of their research designs, for further studies in Islamic Psychology. This article offers some basic principles in developing Islamic Psychology as a knowledge for all human beings, regardless of their religion or race.

Keywords: integrated psychology, Islamic Psychology, science, scientific principles

Received May 21, 2021; Accepted November 12, 2022; Published November 16, 2022.

Introduction

There is not enough well-established theoretical study of Islamic Psychology yet, which provides a comprehensive theory, assumption, and proposition. The limited of those theoretical studies means that it is difficult to conduct a further Islamic Psychology research which are essential to build a scientific discipline. Some studies have been conducted to explore the religiosity of Muslims (Anggarasari, 1997; Rahayu, 1997; Nashori, 1998; Widjanarko, 1997), but those studies were not derived from Islamic paradigm since those studies were based on contemporary theories in psychology. Another article of this kind is the study of the attachment to God (Ghobary, Miner & Proctor, 2013), which tries to rationalize how Muslims use God' as the coping strategy. This article discuss about God from the perspective of attachment theory. These facts indicate that the majority of studies in Islamic Psychology is still focusing on studying Muslims from conventional psychology paradigm. Islamic Psychology is still put as an object of study from the framework of conventional psychology. Other studies already try to develop psychological concept from Islamic perspective, but most of them still in the

philosophical area (Rassool, 2022; Arroisi & Rahmadi, 2022; Mahmood & Noori, 2021). When the discussion of Islamic Psychology limits itself in philosophical discourse, there will be no practical benefit for the ummah. Scientific method is needed as the bridge that connects the philosophical discussion to the daily practices, so that it will give benefits to human's life.

It is so important to develop the fundamental scientific principles that is built from Islamic Psychology paradigm. Those principles should advocate further discussions in related issues which can be used for the good of all human beings, nature, and environment (*"rahmatan li al 'alamin"*). Therefore, this paper can be an initial guide for the Islamic Psychology scientific methods and a reference to build a workable Islamic Psychology discipline.

Psychology is a scientific discipline, so it has certain characteristics that distinguish it from non-scientific knowledge. We will discuss Islamic Psychology as a science and its principles. The scientific principles will guide the method of inquiry to ensure the validity of the study.

The first important thing is choosing the right terminology to divine the basic concepts. Allah has taught the names in the beginning process of delivering knowledge (*"ilm"*) to human beings (Al-Quran, 2:31-34). This ability to differentiate "names" or terminology is the fundamental scientific principles. The mastery of those names is a necessary requirement for human to be a

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“khalifah fil ardh”, then “Allah will raise those who have believed to Him and have been given knowledge, by degrees” (Al-Qur’an, 58:11).

Therefore, the consistency of the terms that are used in Islamic Psychology should be confirmed. However, many previous studies used inconsistent terms, such as in the first publication of Islamic Psychology Newsletter (1998), which used inconsistent terms of ‘methodology’ and ‘method’ (p.9), ‘methodology’ and ‘theory’ (p.10), and ‘method’ and ‘paradigm’ (p.10). Another contemporary study by Rothman & Coyle (2018), that tried to develop a theoretical framework of Islamic Psychology, does not divine the term “nafs” quite distinctively. On one hand “nafs” is defined as the lowest quality of human soul but on the other hand the term nafs is also used to describe the “nafs al-muthmainnah” which is highest level of the human soul. This incoherence of definition has to be avoided in order to comply the principle of precision in science.

The first step to do is to define the term ‘Islam’, as one of the two main terms in ‘Islamic Psychology’. Islam as a “deen” is the core of the Islamic Psychology paradigm, so that Islamic Psychology could be differentiated from other stream in conventional psychology. The failure in understanding the concept of ‘Islam’ leads the whole failure in defining Islamic Psychology. In other words, the precise understanding of the concept of ‘Islam’ as a “deen” is the main requirement to develop Islamic Psychology paradigm.

The Meaning of Islam as a “Deen”

Islam, conventionally, has been defined as one of the existing religions among others in this world. This kind of understanding is not the true meaning of Islam. If we adopt this understanding, it means that there should be other alternative religion-based approaches which are equal to Islamic Psychology, e.g., Christian Psychology, Buddhism Psychology, or Jewish Psychology. Consequently, Islamic Psychology would be defined as a cultural-based psychology. This kind of definition has significantly lost the universal nature of psychology as a science.

From the scientific perspective, Islam means a certain worldview and paradigm of science that is based on the Qur’anic messages. Therefore, Muslims should improve their way of defining Islam as a deen, not only as a religion, where Islam as a truth is the basic assumption that they should have. The presence of this assumption is important

in scientific discourse, so that scientists can discuss a subject from the same presumption. We will discuss this in further discussion about theory and scientific paradigm.

The true meaning of Islam as a deen is a way of life that is approved by Allah. As mention in the Qur’an, “This day I have perfected for you your deen and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as your deen.” (Al-Qur’an, 5:3). Islam and deen, both has a meaning of submission. It means that if you embrace Islam you should submit to Allah as the one and only God that has power over us and guide us to the true path. “Deen” also means become in debt or debt everyone must pay. This means that human being is created by Allah and granted with so many blessings in their life. So, it is only natural that human being has to acknowledge this gift and has to return it by totally submitting to Allah and follow His guidance, which is return to the Qur’an. On a scientific meaning Islam is a worldview of knowledge that is based on Allah guidance which is written on the Qur’an. Therefore, Islamic Psychology is a knowledge and discipline and science that is guided by Qur’an.

In Islamic psychology as a science, the Qur’an is the basic reference for the essence and principle of human existence. However Islamic scholar should conduct studies on the universe and the human soul as well, to understand the messages of the Qur’an. As mention in Al-Qur’an chapter 41: “*We will show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that this ‘Qur’an’ is the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is a Witness over all things?*” (Qur’an 41:53). This shows the structure of knowledge of Islamic Psychology, which integrates observation, contemplation and understanding of the Qur’anic messages.

Based on this paradigm, then Islamic Psychology should be an integrated psychology, since it is derived from an integrated paradigm. Islamic Psychology will also embrace other streams in psychology, and complete them. Therefore, Islamic Psychology could also be called as ‘Integrated Psychology’. Islamic Psychology as Integrated Psychology should integrate all of the partial findings in psychology to be developed in a complete and comprehensive paradigm.

Besides that, Qur’an does not treat Islam as the same as other religions. Qur’an teaches how to be a taqwa person, ways to improve human faith, etc. Muslims are not allowed to act like Jewish and Christian which define religion as a symbol of a group, and act like they are the most correct one.

“And they say, “None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian.” That is [merely] their wishful thinking, Say, “Produce your proof, if you should be truthful. Yes [on the contrary], whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.” (Qur’an, 2:111-112).

This shows that to have faith in Islam could not be simplified as joining a group of Muslims, or self-claiming as a Muslim then accusing other religions as wrong. As mentioned by Prof. Jasser Auda (2008, 2021), we have to differentiate between Islam and Muslims. Therefore, the subject of this article is Islamic Psychology, not the psychology of Muslims. Islam is the essence of religion and it is not bounded to any social construct of religion. Therefore, when humans decide to have faith in Islam, they should put themselves completely to Islam (kaffah). Since Islam is “kaffah”, then they who are not “kaffah” are not belong to Islam, because that means that they are not different from Jews and Christian whose ‘their religion’ is not “kaffah”.

“O, you who have believed, enter into Islam completely (“kaffah”) and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.” (Qur’an, 2:208).

Furthermore, Qur’an also teaches that the quality of faith on humans is not only determined by their social attributes, e.g., Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, but it is based on their attitude toward Allah and the Hereafter, and their deeds. The teaching of Islam is not totally contradictive with Christianity or Judaism because the basic worldview of Christianity and Judaism also similar with the Islamic teaching, especially the belief in Allah and the hereafter and also the command to do good deeds.

“Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans – those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness – will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.” (Qur’an, 2:62).

Although Qur’an prioritizes its essence than its attributes, Qur’an does tell Muslims to do good deeds (amal shaleh) as a proof of doing worship and part of the essence itself. Having faith (iman) and doing prayer (‘amal) are not contrary. A Muslim should have faith (iman), do prayer and make good deeds. Qur’an teaches that establishing prayer (shalat) will prevent

immorality and wrongdoing (Qur’an, 29:45). This means that doing prayer (shalat) is the minimum requirement which is necessary but not sufficient enough to make human into noble person.

Based on the above explanations, then Islamic Psychology should be universal due to the universality of Islam, where its benefits are not only for Muslims, but also the universe. Islam is “rahmatan lil ‘alamin”, so is Islamic Psychology. Then, the next parts of this article will use the concept of Islam as a “deen”, and the main reference is Qur’an. Islam as a “deen” means that in order to perform the obligation to pay back to Allah’s blessings, the teaching of Islam elaborate the syariah, which is the way how to think and how to behave as an expression of the “deen”.

The Meaning of Science

The similarity between Islam and science is their goal to discover the truth. Islam suggests human to use deductive approach and collect the proofs using inductive approach, while science originally uses inductive approach. Qur’an tells the truth and challenges human to think about it logically and look for its supporting evidences.

Science as one of many ways to discover the truth has certain procedures, characteristics and techniques. There are three main aspects that determine whether a particular method in finding the truth is scientific or not. Those aspects are (1) the goal of science, (2) its key values, and (3) its best perspective to explore the knowledge through science (Whitley, 2002).

There are four goals of science, those are (1) to describe, (2) to explain, (3) to predict, and (4) to control phenomena. First, the description of phenomena has three main principles, which are (1) it should contain a unique definition of phenomenon that can distinguish its phenomenon from other similar phenomena, (2) provide notations of worthwhile and interesting phenomenon, and (3) capture related-phenomena (Whitley, 2002).

Thus, between-phenomena relation links the descriptive goal of science to the second goal or the explanation goal. This means that science should explain the causality relationship of phenomena (how certain phenomenon causes another phenomenon). If that causality relationship between them cannot be testified, so the scientific degree of this science is low. Therefore, a researcher needs certain guidance to state that a particular phenomenon is the cause of another phenomenon.

John Stuart Mill, a philosopher from the 19th century, explained three conditions to confirm that there is causal relationship within certain phenomena (Whitley, 2002). First, those two phenomena should have correlation (consistent relationship between phenomena). Second, 'the cause' should be happened before 'the effect'. For example, westernized behavior in adolescence positively correlates with the frequency of watching Western movies. When they started to act like Western before they watched Western movies, then the frequency of watching western movies should not be the cause. Third, there is no other causes than the mentioned cause. The phenomenon would only be caused by that cause.

The third goal of science is to predict a phenomenon. This is kind of forecasting the upcoming phenomena. For example, the entrance examination can predict completion of the educational process. Another example is, based on Maslow's hierarchal needs theory, free lunch as an incentive can predict the increasing motivation of low-level employees.

The fourth goal of science is to control or do intervention to the phenomenon. For example, previous studies have shown that mass aggression is influenced by the decreasing fear caused by the fused self-identity. Therefore, this aggression can be controlled by bringing up the source of fear to the protesters.

There are four key values of science, those are (1) empirical-based, (2) skeptical, (3) temporary, and (4) publicly-known (Whitley, 2002). Those key values should be respected according to these two reasons. First, people have their limits so their work in certain time and place will never be perfect in one work. Second, scientific work needs replication to reassure its universality and benefits, as if that work is only beneficial for certain group in particular time, so people will never know whether that is a true knowledge or just a false science.

Empirical-based science means that science should be supported by objective evidences, so it could be delivered to people accurately. This communication makes people can testify the study results and look for the existing evidences.

Being skeptical in science is needed since there is no perfection in human, and the development of science should only be achieved when there is critic and doubt to the findings. When people just believe that science, then science will be stopped to be developed.

The temporary characteristic of science should be highlighted as well, as people and the situations change. This simultaneous change will make some findings are beneficial during certain period, but useless in another period.

Lastly, the final works on science should be published, so that other researchers or other people can testify and replicate the study. Hence, the previous study can be improved, or revised, or developed, or strengthened, where they will simultaneously produce better quality of research.

Paradigm, Theory, and Scientific Method

Each stream on psychology is derived from certain paradigm, or basic assumptions which lead the flow of the study, or as a framework of thinking and developing ideas. Whitley (2002) described paradigm as below.

"... general ways of conceptualizing and studying the subject matter of a particular scientific field." (p.10).

According to Kuhn (1956), the development of science has experienced scientific revolution in some periods. This scientific revolution is signed by the change of its paradigm which leads the emergence of certain pattern on researchers' ideas. For example, Newton developed physics based on the paradigm which assumed that the universe is ruled in its constant natural laws, i.e. the law of conservation of mass. While Einstein promoted his theory of relativity then, where he stated that the natural law of universe is not constant, but it depends on its situations. Therefore, Einstein said that mass could be changed into energy in certain condition, that is when the speed of moving mass is like the speed of light.

To develop a science, its paradigm determines the formulation of theories, where those will be testified through many studies. Theory is a conceptual framework of some related-constructs, or variables, in certain relationship pattern. A good theory, or a theory that which fulfills the basic principles of science, has three primary characteristics, e.g. (1) logically consistent, (2) falsifiability, and consistent with its evidences, and three secondary characteristics, e.g. (1) clearly explained, (2) simple, and (3) consistent with other related-theories (Whitley, 2002).

A theory is the main tool of scientific method. A researcher can use theory to analyze the collected information systematically, and its aspects. Besides paradigm as the component of a theory, theory also

has other components, which are the hypothetical construct and its definitions, and proposition or relationship within those constructs. The hypothetical construct is an abstract variable that has been created and approved by the group of scientists. For example, the terms ‘personality’, ‘emotion’, and ‘motivation’. This hypothetical construct is like a name, which has certain definition and characteristics, such as ‘motivation’ which leads, maintains, and influences the intensity of human behavior.

One of the concepts in Islamic Psychology is ‘sabr’, this can be seen in relevance with other constructs, such as ‘life-satisfaction’. ‘Sabr’ as a construct should be defined before being operationalized in further study

and practice. The source for its meaning or definition is available on Qur’an and Hadist, that is described in verse 146, ‘Ali-Imraan below.

“But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allah loves the steadfast (sabr).” (3:146)

Based on that verse, ‘sabr’ has three psychological characteristics, which are: (1) does not lose assurance because of suffering, (2) does not weaken, and (3) does not give up. This description can be used to operationalize the definition of ‘sabr’ as a conceptual framework to do further empirical studies and optimize its practical benefits of ‘sabr’, such as in the form of designing intervention to improve the quality of ‘sabr’.

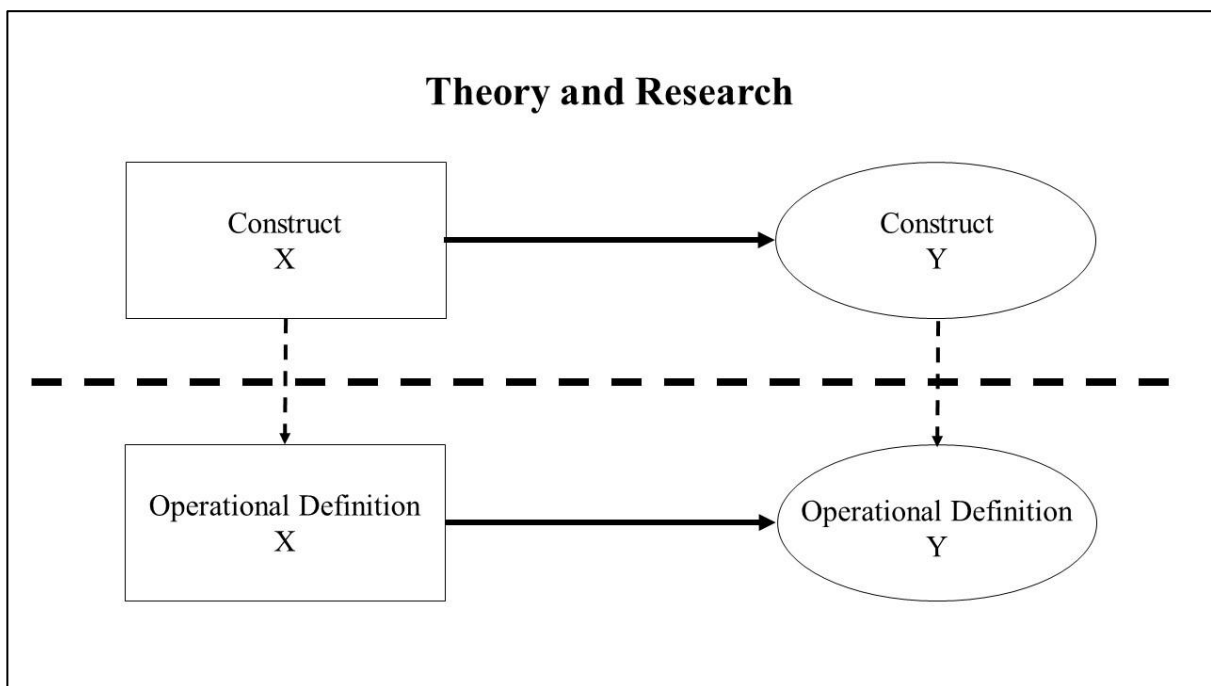


Figure 1. The Relationship between Theoretical Construct and Its Proposition

The third component of theory is its theoretical proposition or the relationship pattern within two or more hypothetical constructs in this theory. This relationship can be in form of causality relationship, or conditional. For example, work motivation influences work achievement, where this appropriate motivation improves work achievement.

A theory should be operationalized to be used in research and its application. The operational definition is the articulation of operationalization used in objectively defining a construct in certain theory. For

example, ‘arithmetic skill’ can be operationally defined as the ability in doing addition and subtraction on numbers.

The relationship within operational definitions in certain theoretical construct is called as hypothesis, which will be tested through conducting empirical study. The finding of this empirical study can be used as the supporting or refusing argumentation of certain theory. Further discussion on this will be illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between theoretical construct and its proposition, where the hypothesis operationalizes its theoretical construct, from abstraction into measurable and observable description, to collect its supporting evidence. Besides that, this will ease its application using its guidance of intervention.

The Role of Faith (*Iman*) to Understand the Knowledge (*‘Ilm*)

The difference between scientist who has faith (*iman*) and secular scientist in articulating research

findings, in forms of scientific work or not, is the effect of that knowledge on themselves, as a human, or as a scientist. The scientists who has faith (*iman*) experiences great transformation on themselves when they find new findings. Those findings will strengthen their faith (*iman*) to Allah.

Besides that, the scientist who has faith (*iman*) and strong analytical skills, and continuously remember Allah, will be easier to understand the relevance of those knowledges (*‘ilm*), new knowledge to previous ones, where all of those knowledges have one source of knowledge, that is Allah as the only God (the principle of *tauhid*).

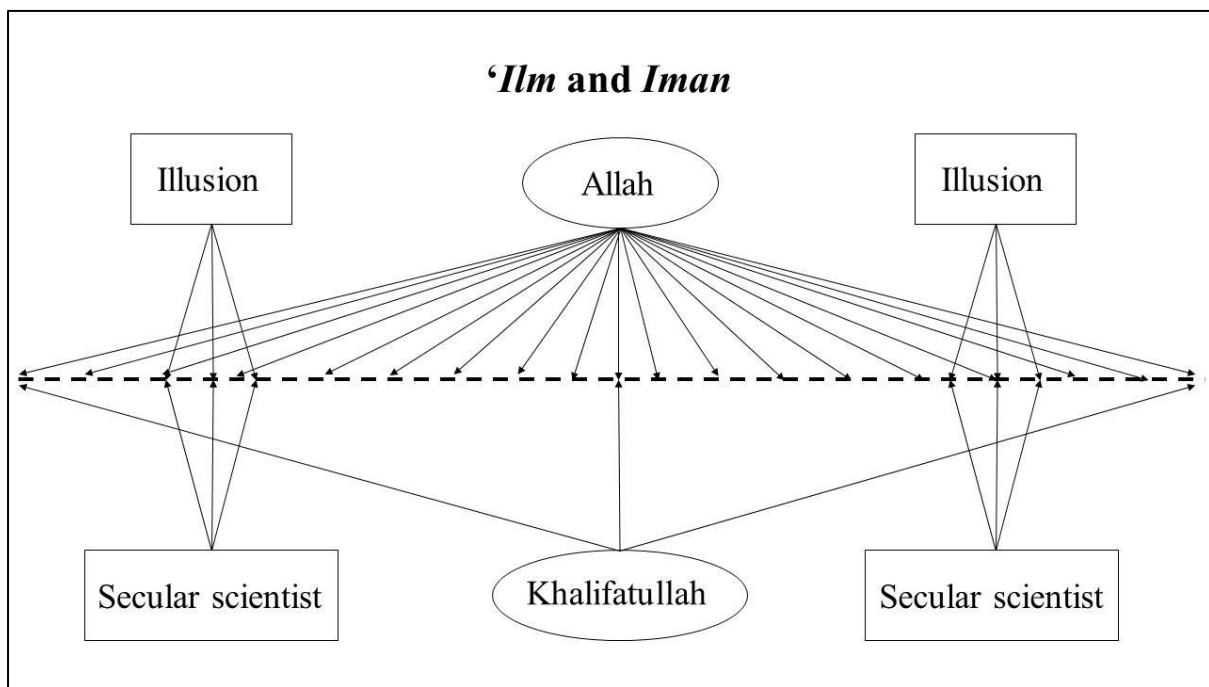


Figure 2. The Role of ‘Ilm and Iman in Scientists

Then, Figure 2 illustrates the difference between the believer and secular scientist, where basically secular scientist sees knowledge (*‘ilm*) and faith (*iman*) are such separated matters. They see the same things, but conclude differently. For example, Freud has found that human is dominated and controlled by his unconsciousness, thus the conception of God in his decision-making is kind of repression of the figure of his father. That repression exists in his unconsciousness since his childhood. While scientist who has faith (*iman*) may see it differently, and he knows the implication of using Freud-like perspective in understanding human. If it is true that originally human cannot control and keep himself away from the influence of his

unconsciousness, then his consciousness is priceless and important, where it should be defended simultaneously.

Therefore, everything that causes human losing himself should be prevented, and everything that maintains human’s consciousness should be done. This also explains why alcohol is prohibited (*haram*), or why there should be many detailed rules or procedures in doing prayer (or *ibadah*) as it will stimulate human’s brain in certain ways to mindfully realizes every acts. For example, ablution (*wudu*) consists of certain procedures, such as washing the face, arms, and so on. And doing *shalat* should be done in certain rules, such as doing “*takbir*”, “*ruku*”, “*sujud*”, etc., with various

number of “raka’at”. And fasting has its own regulation as well which stimulates human to fully aware of time.

Figure 2 emphasizes that even though the research findings are the same, but scientist who has faith (iman) can conclude those findings differently from secular scientist, due to their differences on worldview in objectively responding the evidences. The paradigm of scientist who has faith (iman) is tauhid, where this means that everything is connected to Allah. In contrary, secular scientist denies the role and existence of Allah as the All-Knowing, including those evidence, so that they cannot associate them as an integrated knowledge which has connection to Allah.

Conclusion

Based on the above-mentioned arguments, it can be understood why many great Muslim scholars have very strong integrity. More knowledge will lead into improved faith (iman). While this cannot be found in secular scientist, where the amount of knowledge does not correlate with the faith (iman). In some cases, even those knowledges lead them into arrogance.

After all, Islamic Psychology has higher goals in developing knowledge (‘ilm). Islamic Psychology should develop the quality of the researcher as well, so that they deserve greater degree from Allah, the Almighty.

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