

## Teaching the Science of Kalam in Selected Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia

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### Abstract

The science of Kalam is a branch of knowledge that emerged from the manifestation of logic. In the history of Islamic civilisation, it played a role as the basis for the explosive development of new knowledge, later known as science, chemistry and physics. Because of the presence of its pioneers, who were also trained in philosophy, this science is usually associated with debates that are philosophical and not within the scope of science. However, the context of the study of knowledge in the world in general, and even in Malaysia in particular, is only known among groups with a background in the study of usul al-din majors. This paper focuses on the teaching of the science of Kalam in selected higher education institutions in Malaysia. This study uses a qualitative methodology with a survey method. As a limitation of the study, in addition to focusing on informants and responses from the background of usul al-din studies, the study will also select selected respondents and informants from backgrounds other than Islamic studies that are deemed suitable with strong justification.

**Keywords:** ‘Ilm Kalam, Mantiq, Usul al-din, The science of Kalam.

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### Abstrak

Ilmu Kalam adalah bagian dari pengetahuan yang lahir dari manifestasi logika. Dalam sejarah peradaban Islam, ilmu ini berperan sebagai dasar bagi meledaknya perkembangan ilmu-ilmu baru yang kemudian dikenal dengan sebutan sains, kimia, dan fisika. Kehadiran para pionirnya yang juga piawai dalam bidang filsafat, membuat ilmu ini biasanya disandingkan dengan perdebatan-perdebatan yang bersifat filosofis dan bukan dalam ruang lingkup sains. Namun, konteks kajian ilmu kalam di dunia pada umumnya, dan

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bahkan di Malaysia pada khususnya, hanya dikenal di kalangan kelompok yang berlatar belakang jurusan ushuluddin. Penelitian ini memfokuskan pada pengajaran Ilmu Kalam di beberapa Institusi Pendidikan Tinggi di Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dengan metode survei. Sebagai batasan kajian, selain memfokuskan pada informan dan tanggapan dari latar belakang studi ushuluddin, kajian ini juga akan menyeleksi beberapa responden dan informan dari latar belakang di luar studi keislaman yang dianggap sesuai dengan justifikasi yang kuat.

**Kata Kunci:** ‘Ilm Kalam, Mantiq, Usul al-din, Ilmu Kalam

### A. Introduction

The science of Kalam is a branch of knowledge that emerged from the manifestation of logic. In the history of Islamic civilisation, it played a role as the basis for the explosive development of new knowledge, later known as science, chemistry and physics. The presence of its pioneers, who were also trained in philosophy, means that this science is usually associated with philosophical and scientific debates. However, the context of the study of knowledge in the world in general, and even in Malaysia in particular, is known only to groups with a background in usul al-din studies. In fact, the syllabus for the science of Kalam is usually discussed together with the syllabus for the subject of Aqeeda. Therefore, this

research focuses on the syllabus of science of Kalam by also examining the syllabus of religious knowledge in selected higher education institutions in Malaysia. This study adopts a qualitative methodology by using a content analysis approach for the study of faith and Islamic knowledge in the syllabus of Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) in Malaysia.

The science of Kalam has a long and important tradition in the Islamic scientific civilisation. There are at least four important disciplines of aqliyah or nazariyyah in the tradition of the Islamic knowledge civilisation, namely Kalam, Philosophy, Usul al-Fiqh or Fiqh, and Tasawwuf. The scientific discipline that is the main source of reference for the content of Islamic

teachings, namely Tafsir and Hadith, can be considered closer to the scientific discipline of Naqliyyah as mentioned above. The science of Kalam has a special place in the Islamic scientific tradition because it is considered the most universal discipline (kulliyyah) compared to other disciplines that are considered specific (juz'iyyah). The science of kalam is also referred to by Abu Hanifa as fiqh al-Akbar (the greatest fiqh) in comparison to other fiqhs. Various names have also been given to 'Ilm Kalam, such as Usul al-din, Tauhid, Aqedah and the like, all of which refer to its role in clarifying and explaining the principles of Islamic teachings related to the pillars of faith or belief. It is not surprising that the science of Kalam is accepted as the most noble and highest knowledge in the classification and hierarchy of Islamic knowledge (Amran: 2018).

The speciality of Kalam is not only that it is universal (kulliyyah) and discusses the principles or axioms of faith, divinity (Ilahiyyat), prophethood (Nubuwwat) and resurrection (Aakhirat/Sam'iyyat), but also that Kalam begins with a discussion of logic

(Mantiq), Epistemology (Nazariyyah al-Ma'rifah) and Ontology (Mawjudat/Mumkinat), all of which are the main attributes and habits of metascience or philosophy of science. In fact, the science of Kalam also discusses Axiology (Tahsin and Taqbih), understanding important values in the question of the relationship between knowledge, values and ethics. In this context, this paper aims to present how Kalam is very relevant and has the potential to play a role as a philosophy of science due to its theoretical (Nazariyyah), universal (Kulliyyah) and fundamental (Usuliyyah) characteristics in describing the nature and habits of science and other disciplines (Amran: 2018).

After the death of the Prophet SAW, Muslims were faced with issues related to faith, will, freedom, provisions and leadership. The rapid expansion of Islam also meant that foreign ideas influenced and challenged Muslims' basic understanding of the faith. Thus, by the second century of Islam, debate on these issues had developed into a discipline called the science of Kalam. Among the early

figures who discussed the issues of Kalam were Hasan bin Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyyah (b. 99/718-101/720), Umar b. Abd al-Aziz (d. 99/717-101/720) and al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728). Then came the Qadariyyah group through Ma'bad and Ghaylan, and the Jahmiyyah group through Jahm bin Safwan (d. 128/745-6) and Dirar bin Amr (d. 200 /815), before the emergence of the first large and influential school of Kalam, the Muktazilah, through figures such as Wasil bin Ata (d. 131/748-9), Amr bin Ubayd (d. 144/761), Abul-Hudayl al-Allaf (d. 227/842), Abu Ali al-Jubba'i (d. 303/915-16) and Abul-Qasim al-Balkhi (d. 319/931).

In response to the thoughts of Muktazilah, the thoughts of figures such as Ibn Kullab (d. 240/854-5), al-Muhasibi (d. 243/857) and al-Qalanisi (lived in the third century/9 AD) became an early reference for the formation of the Kalam Asha'irah school. Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324/935-6) became the founder of the Kalam Asha'irah tradition, which together with the founder of the Kalam Maturidiyyah sect, Abu Mansur al-

Maturidi (d. 333/944), forms the largest religious sect of Muslims to this day.

Kalam Maturidiyyah has strong roots from the influence of Abu Hanifa (d. 150/767) through his book *Fiqh al-Akbar*. The tradition of Kalam Asha'irah-Maturidiyyah represents the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamaah as the mainstream of Islamic belief and thought throughout the Muslim world today. In this context, Kalam Asha'irah-Maturidiyyah, with a tradition rooted from the beginning of Islam and a long tradition throughout the history of Muslim civilisation, has the potential to undergo a process of renewal to produce a new synthesis of Kalam knowledge with current sciences.

## **B. Research Methodology**

Therefore, in this paper, the study takes three syllabus for teaching the science of Kalam in Malaysia, namely Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Islam Selangor (UIS) as a study sample.

This study uses a qualitative methodology with a survey method. Data collection techniques using

observation, questionnaires and documentation. The data analysis technique used in this study uses the Miles and Huberman data analysis model, namely analyzing data with three steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

#### **1. Syllabus of science of kalam study at um, ukm and uis**

In general, the syllabus and teaching of the science of Kalam offered in institutions of higher learning in Malaysia focuses on the introduction to the science of Kalam as well as the issues that are used as Kalam debates between various schools of thought. However, outside the scope of the Science of Kalam syllabus, other course syllabuses also discuss the debate of the pen but from the point of specialisation of their respective syllabuses.

The syllabus used in the study and teaching curriculum of Usul al-Din at UM, UKM and UIS generally coincides with the teaching goal of Kalam, which aims to inculcate the Islamic faith in the hearts of students in accordance with the purpose of the discipline of Kalam

by scholars. Research into the sources of the reference texts used in the courses shows that many works of faith from the Asha'irah school are included in the course reference list. This situation is not foreign as the Asha'irah movement is the main movement in Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamaah that pioneered the discipline and practice of Kalam and has even become the belief of Islamic scholars in Malaysia along with the development of Islam in Malaysia.

UKM sets the Aqeeda course as a core subject to be taken by all students of the Usul al-Din programme and students of other programmes under the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FPI) through the course PY 1182: The Islamic faith is appropriate and correct. It is appropriate and consistent with the position of faith as the core of Islamic Studies. This means that Usul al-Din students and all FPI students are provided with complete information about the Islamic faith. At UM, through APIUM, the course IXEU 1102: Introduction to Usul al-Din was introduced, which lays the foundation and basis of Usul al-Din studies in general to the main issues in Usuluddin and the differences in manhaj between

Islamic schools. This means that UM students are also exposed to Firaq Islamiyyah and the thought of each school. During the al-Aqidah al-Islamiyyah course at UIS, he helped to explain preliminary information about the Islamic creed to the students so that it would become the basis and support for the Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamaah before the students studied the 'Ilm al-Kalam course. UIS offers the Firaq Islamiyyah course separately and it can be seen as an introductory knowledge to understand the knowledge of the science of Kalam (Mohd Fauzi: 2006).

The role of Aqeeda in the fields of human development is also highlighted in the Aqeeda Study Course. It is important because understanding the principles of Aqeeda can not only develop the Ummah, but also revive it from 'death', backwardness, backwardness and backwardness. This is because one of the weaknesses of Muslims today is backwardness and backwardness in the fields of economic, social, political and cultural development due to humanitarian factors rooted in their lack of understanding and appreciation of the

values of monotheism in managing these fields. External challenges such as globalisation, orientalism, the spread of liberalism and others also need to be addressed through an understanding of the principles of monotheism, and this needs to be emphasised in Religious Studies courses. Such an understanding is expected to be a catalyst for the success of the community's efforts to address these challenges. The concept of monotheism therefore relates not only to theological issues, but also to anthropology, cosmology, axiology and culture.

One of the themes of Kalam is Samciyyat. It is no less important in the life of a society and is capable of bringing about changes in attitudes, personal behaviour, society and the country on a larger scale. Therefore, UM has created the syllabus IAEU 2302: al-Samciyyat to discuss the related debates. UKM also offers PH 2323: The Issue of aqeeda in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, which does not exclude discussion of the debate on al-Samciyyat (Mohd Fauzi, 2006).

The basis of knowledge for a student entering the study of Kalam is

that the student must know the names of the figures and works that discuss the fundamentals of the faith. UM offers IAEU 3120: Bibliographical Study of Creed and Islamic Thought, while UKM offers PH 2343: Study of Creed and Sufi Texts and PH 3142: Study of Usul al-Din and Philosophical Texts. While UIS offers the course IBUM 2053: Usul al-Din Bibliographical Study. Through information on these figures and works, it will help and facilitate students to explore the knowledge of Kalam, which is loaded with the names and works of scholars.

One of the reasons for the establishment and construction of the ideology of classical Islam is the degree to which they translate verses from the Qur'an and Hadith. This is accompanied by the development of *manhaj isbat* (*isbat al-macna*), *tafwidh* and *takwil* in understanding the verses of the Qur'an and Hadith. At UM, the debate on the classical Islamic interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith is studied through the courses IAEU 2103: Methodology of Belief in the Qur'an and al-Sunnah and IAEU 2310: *Nusus al-Aqa'id*. While at UKM

through the course PH 2323: Questions of Faith in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

In another edition, the study of the science of Kalam, formerly known as *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, should be able to produce Muslim individuals who can appreciate and implement *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* in the most perfect way. In a language that is easy to understand, the orientation of the study of *aqeeda* should not stop at the goal of making students understand the unity of Allah SWT theoretically and purely philosophically, rather than just discussing the Kalam debate as described by the *mutakallimin*, but in the context of today, the orientation of the study and teaching of Kalam must be integrated with classical philosophy as well as modern philosophy.

In order to achieve this desire, the question arises as to what is the weakness of the teaching or the weakness of its content that there is no philosophical debate in the science of Kalam. Or the weakness can be related to the failure of the teaching approach adopted by the teachers of Kalam who have failed to relate philosophy in the teaching of Kalam. Or there is no effort

to build a syllabus of Kalam Science that unravels the philosophy of science or to evaluate the extent to which the truth of divine thought or ethics is true in western philosophy.

Indeed, the answers to these questions are not easy to give by someone who does not know Western philosophy - Catholic philosophy, Islamic philosophy, Islamic dissent, Islamic creed and Kalam.

Even the teaching of the course instructor, who is blind in the study of philosophy and the tradition of Kalam, not only fails to explain the true nature of the knowledge debate, but makes the courses in Usul al-Din and Aqeeda majors seem to have no connection with each other.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Based on the description, it was concluded that the study of Kalam offered by Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Islamic Selangor has generally achieved the main objective of the study of Kalam, which revolves around divinity, prophethood and samciyyat. This means that in terms of

theory, it has discussed what should be taught in the discipline of Kalam Studies. But in the syllabus of kalam knowledge, it is not specifically linked to philosophy or philosophy of science. But a broader sub-debate on the knowledge of kalam is also provided but discussed in a specific and unique syllabus such as the science of faith, the science of mantiq (logic), the science of philosophy, the science of usul al-din bibliography or the science of faith and the science of methodology of faith in the Quran and the Sunnah. Although they are taught separately, they support each other in the study of Kalam.

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