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LIFELONG LEARNING EDUCATION FOR FARDHU ‘AYN SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY FROM THE *BUSTAN ‘ILM* PROJECT OF CENTRIS IIUM

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Abstract

The research “Lifelong Learning Education for Fardhu ‘Ayn Skill and Knowledge: An Analytical Study from the Bustan ‘Ilm Project of CENTRIS IIUM” explores the role of lifelong learning in enhancing Fardhu ‘Ayn skills and knowledge. The study focuses on the Bustan ‘Ilm project, an initiative by the Centre for Islamisation at the International Islamic University Malaysia (CENTRIS IIUM), aimed at promoting continuous learning among the elderly Muslims. This study employs a qualitative research approach, specifically adopting a library-based technique to examine existing literature. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data. The research highlights the importance of Fardhu ‘Ayn in the holistic development of an individual and society. The findings of this study show that lifelong learning is crucial as one way to acquire and enhance Fardhu ‘Ayn skills and knowledge especially for the preparation to obtain *Husnul Khatimah*. Hence, through one of the initiatives established by the CENTRIS IIUM, the foundation of the *Bustan ‘Ilm* project is seen as one of the solutions provided and offers the Islamic-based learning syllabus. The study concludes that the *Bustan ‘Ilm* Project is a valuable initiative that contributes to the Islamisation mission of IIUM and the empowerment of elderly citizens in the Muslim community.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Fardhu ‘Ayn, Aging Citizens, CENTRIS IIUM, Malaysia



INTRODUCTION

It is essential for human beings, especially Muslims, to continuously seek knowledge and learn. As a *caliph fil ardi* and *ubudiyah ila Allah* who bears a “lifetime contract” with the One and Only Creator, Allah, it is mandatory to have a strong understanding of Islamic teachings to effectively navigate life and share knowledge with others for spiritual growth (Abid, 2023). According to Su’eb (2021), knowledge including *Fardhu ‘Ayn* is considered the most valuable gift from Allah to His subjects, distinguishing one individual from another based on this criterion. One can find support for this in the verses of Surah Az-Zumar (39:9), where Allah's words are mentioned:

أَمْ مَنْ هُوَ قَبِيحٌ عِندَ اللَّهِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَخْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُوا رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِمْ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ
وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

‘Are they better’ or those who worship ‘their Lord’ devoutly in the hours of the night, prostrating and standing, fearing the Hereafter, and hoping for the mercy of their Lord? Say, ‘O Prophet’ “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” None will be mindful ‘of this’ except people of reason.

Based on the *ayat*, logically speaking, by pursuing knowledge, one naturally aims to enhance their morals, achieve a good life, and seek the pleasure of Allah throughout one’s life without any discrimination and biases on age, races and ethnic. The description of the stated situation is known as the concept of lifelong education.

Therefore, this study, divided into four sections, aims to understand the concept of lifelong learning education in religious knowledge, particularly *Fardhu ‘Ayn* knowledge, and its relationship to the attainment of *Husnul Khatimah*. The first section aims to provide an overview of the existing literature on the definition of lifelong education and its role in addressing the growing number of elderly citizens in Malaysia. The second section explains the importance of instilling *Fardhu ‘Ayn* knowledge in the elderly. The following section provides an analysis and discussion on the cultivation of a knowledgeable and skilled *Fardhu ‘Ayn* elderly society, highlighting the *Bustan ‘Ilm* Project of CENTRIS, IIUM, and its relevance to the preparation for the attainment of *Husnul Khatimah*. The final section concludes the study with some suggestions for future research.

Scope and Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach to offer a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or event, with the objective of avoiding generalisations in its findings. First, the study included two methodologies for data collection. The study has utilised a documentation technique to collect data from journal papers, online news, and websites. This methodology helps to support and confirm the validity of the study's values. Second, a semi-structured interview was carried out to gather data on the feedback regarding the impact of the *Bustan ‘Ilm* initiative in improving the skills of the elderly in *Fardhu ‘Ayn*. The participants in this experiment were selected using a purposive sampling method, specifically targeting individuals between the ages of 65 and 70. Once the data has been gathered, we will analyse and interpret it using the thematic analysis method.

Literature Review

1. Definition on Concept of Lifelong Education

There is no fixed definition for the concept, yet the definitions proposed by the scholars in the area have shared a similar understanding. The concept of lifelong education is simply known for

its association with formal, non-formal, and informal learning that happens throughout one's life. Haydar and Kadir (2012) simply define lifelong education as an ongoing process that encompasses one's entire life without being limited to specific time periods, years, or particular organisations or institutions. Likewise, Laal's (2011) definition of lifelong learning consists of the basic elements of Haydar and Kadir, with some additional concepts, where she adds that the process that includes all life contexts ranging from the school, workplace, home, and community as well as it is one of the ways of providing opportunities like updating basic skills to be more advanced.

To simplify the understanding of this context, the UNESCO (Institute for Lifelong Learning, n.d.b) includes five critical elements of lifelong learning that encompass: "(1) all age groups; (2) all levels of education; (3) all learning modalities; (4) all learning spheres and spaces; and (5) a variety of purposes." From the available literature, it could be concluded that almost no scholars do not agree that lifelong education comprises all backgrounds of age and a variety of modalities to "supply the demand for knowledge."

In comparison to Islamic perspectives and Western perspectives, there was disagreement in terms of their establishment. As per the Western perspective, there were different opinions about the establishment and development of this concept. The first opinion was based on the establishment of the first lifelong learning institute, The New School for Social Research, in 1962 as an experiment in "learning in retirement", which later included non-retired people in the same age range. The other opinion was rooted in the original term "lifelong learners" and the now-lifelong learning concept proposed by Leslie Watkins and first used by Clint Taylor in 1993. Meanwhile, in the current context, the initiative for lifelong learning by UNESCO is one of the key efforts to overcome global challenges along with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It aims to build a quality learning ecosystem and foster skills for life, work, and learning as well to ensure that no one is left behind (Institute for Lifelong Learning, n.d.a).

As from Islamic perspectives, according to Miftahul Huda (2019: 44) in her article entitled *Lifelong Education in Islamic Perspectives*, lifelong education through Islamic perspectives is,

“A concept that is one of them produces one view of continuous and sustainable learning (continuing-learning) from the cradle to the end, in line with the phases of development in humans. Therefore, every phase of the development of each individual must be passed to learn in order to fulfil the tasks of development; learning that begins at childhood to adulthood and even old age, beginning with the phases of the development, implies the need to learn continuously.”

This aligns with the encouragement of lifelong education and the emphasis on the significance of pursuing knowledge from birth to death, as advocated since the period of Prophet Muhammad. This is evident in a hadith that Ibn Majah describes (cited in Abid, 2023):

Rasulullah SAW said: Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim.

Based on the citation and hadith mentioned, it is clear that both sources imply a shared idea that the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory and linked to different stages of human development, and this process is systematic and does not involve any sudden advancements. This comprehensive process is carried out with the aid of the interdependent functions of a sound physical and mental state, cognitive and emotional abilities, conduct, and individuality, as well as a positive mindset and comprehension of cognitive processes. Islam considers the pursuit of knowledge to be a duty for all individuals, irrespective of their age, gender, or social standing, as inferred indirectly by Wikhdatun (2021). The Qur'anic account of Musa A.S. and his assistant's quest for knowledge from Khidir A.S. lends historical support (for example: across Surah al-

Kahf: 60-82) to the idea that Islam encourages lifelong learning (Aminuddin et al., 2015). This statement acknowledges that lifelong education has been a longstanding practice in Islam.

While discussing this concept, it is important to consult the concept of lifelong education elucidated by Imam al-Ghazali to gain a deeper comprehension. Al-Ghazali, a distinguished Islamic scholar, highlighted the significance of lifelong education in his acclaimed masterpiece, "*Ihya' Ulumuddin*." In this work, he examines several learning techniques that foster lifelong education (Siti Raudah et al., 2021). Al-Ghazali's concept of education in *Ihya'* can be summarised into three key aspects, as outlined by Ridha (2002). The following are three components: (1) an elucidation of the supremacy of education and knowledge over ignorance; (2) categorisation of education integrated into the curriculum; and (3) a set of ethical principles for educators and learners. However, for the sake of this study, it does not cover all of al-Ghazali's ideas. Instead, it focuses on a small part of his educational classification, specifically on the curriculum.

According to Al-Ghazali, there are four types of knowledge: sharia and rational sciences, as well as non-religious sciences; theoretical and practical sciences; presented knowledge (*budhuri*) and acquired knowledge (*bushuli*); and finally, knowledge into individual duty (*Fardhu 'Ayn*) and communal duty (*fardhu kifayah*) (Siti Raudah et al., 2021). The study will primarily focus on the latter part of *Fardhu 'Ayn*. This category encompasses religious knowledge, such as the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as the fundamental principles of worship. Further explanations will be discussed in the latter section.

The Islamic approach to lifelong education encompasses the aspects of *tarbiyyah* (physical and intellectual growth), *ta'dib* (cultivating good behaviour and ethics), and *ta'lim* (the process of imparting knowledge and acquiring it). These dimensions collectively strive to foster a well-rounded individual who makes positive contributions to society (Raudlotul and Shah Jani, 2013). The basic learning process is applicable to learners of all ages, but there is a particular emphasis on the ageing population, which includes senior citizens who are returning to institutional learning. In support of this noble mission, CENTRIS IIUM has created a project called *Bustan 'Ilm* to encourage and promote lifelong education. This project aims to enhance *fardhu 'ayn* skill and knowledge, regardless of age, and encourages the idea that it is never too late to learn to obtain the pleasure of Allah (CENTRIS, n.d.).

2. Lifelong Education as a Response to the Increased of the Aging Citizens in Malaysia

According to UNESCO, the concept of lifelong learning first gained popularity in education in the 1980s and has since undergone extensive research to address the changing needs brought about by the challenges of the twenty-first century (Guyen, 2020). This refers to the transformations that have occurred in the past 50 years, which have had a notable impact on educational learning and teaching methods. This aspect is referred to as rapid globalisation and continuous scientific and technical progress. As a result, it also changed the characteristics and organisation of the workforce and society from an industrial model to an information-based society (Haydar and Kadir, 2012). In addition, Haydar and Kadir (2012) emphasise the importance of lifelong education, which is essential for four main reasons. Firstly, it aims to address the increasing life expectancy of older generations, since the percentage of younger generations is becoming lower and alarming. Secondly, it aims to enhance the quality of life for older generations, enabling them to learn and effectively utilise technological advancements for a better life. Lastly, it aims to ensure a secure future by promoting good physical and mental well-being, thereby reducing the risk of unemployment and mental health issues. Haydar and Kadir's analysis reveals that Islam advocates for the idea of continuous learning throughout one's life, which offers benefits in terms of personal well-being, family dynamics, and societal progress (Nik Yusri et al., 2023).

In Malaysian society, the elderly are traditionally held in high regard, reflecting cultural and religious values that prioritise respect for age and experience. This respect is evident in different facets of social life, ranging from family interactions to community engagement and governmental decisions. In Malaysia, the older generation is highly valued for their role in preserving cultural traditions and providing valuable advice (Free Malaysia Today, 2021, September 21). They have a significant impact on the family dynamic, frequently contributing to the upbringing of grandchildren and passing down values and traditions to the youth. Many communities are deeply involved in religious and neighbourhood activities, playing a vital role in shaping the social fabric of society (Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN), 2009). Despite the long-standing reverence, the position of the elderly is shifting as a result of changes in demographics and modernization. Malaysia is facing a situation where the population is ageing, and by 2040, there will be a nearly equal number of young and older individuals (Zahin, 2023, November 14). This demographic change brings about various challenges, such as the requirement for sufficient healthcare, social assistance, and chances for staying active in older age (Lee, Huey, and Shajahan, 2020, November 10). With the ageing population, it is increasingly important to guarantee that the elderly receive the necessary support and acknowledgment to help them live satisfying lives.

Given the study's specific emphasis on the elderly in Malaysia, it is worthwhile to take into account the definition provided by the National Policy on Older Persons 2011 (NPOP), which is derived from the United Nations World Assembly of Aging 1982 in Vienna (MyGOV, 2011). Individuals who are 60 years old or older are considered elderly or senior citizens. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023), the population of individuals aged 60 years will grow to 3.6 million, accounting for 11.1 percent of the total population. The numbers have been on a steady rise, going from 3.3 million in 2020 to 3.6 million in 2022. By 2030, these trends would have rendered Malaysia an antiquated nation (Nor Adha et al., 2023). The priority issues for the elderly constitute aspects like finance and economy, health, emotion and psychology, family, and accessibility (KPWK, 2017). This focus group has been put under the various supervision of ministries and agencies, for instance, the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (KPWK) and the Social Welfare Department (JKM) (MyGOV, 2011).

In the Malaysian context, lifelong education is seen as one of the strategic approaches to tackle the issues brought about by an ageing population. The goal is to offer the elderly chances to pursue further education, improve their quality of life, and stay active in society based on the Five Dimensions Framework NPOP, which comprises the economy (productive ageing), health (healthy ageing), social (active ageing), spiritual (positive ageing), and environment (supportive ageing) (KPWK, 2017). In materialising the stated goals, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2035 emphasises the importance of lifelong education in addressing the evolving skills required for a high-income economy and unlocking the potential of individuals, especially those not currently in the workforce, by providing opportunities for reskilling and upskilling (Human Resources Development Fund, 2019). These initiatives demonstrate a strong dedication to supporting the elderly population in ageing gracefully and making meaningful contributions to the community through ongoing education and personal growth. Nevertheless, to compare Malaysia and Brunei's overview in this area, Brunei is looking at lifelong learning that is mostly confined to vocational education and occupational, professional, or training skills development that mostly provide practical and non-academic courses (Nurul Atiqah and Lilly, 2021).

Even though various initiatives and strategies have been executed to assist this group, the development of lifelong education for the elderly in Malaysia is hindered by a number of obstacles that restrict participation and accessibility (Mashitah et al., 2023). In most cases, the elderly in

urban areas are more accessible to the available opportunities than the elderly living in rural areas. Despite this contributing factor, it is essential that everyone is treated fairly and given the same chances without any form of discrimination, including the elderly, as it is guaranteed by Article 5 to Article 13 of the Federal Constitution (Hasiah et al., 2022; Nisar et al., 2021). Besides that, other obstacles could manifest as physical hindrances like mobility challenges or cognitive obstacles such as struggles with grasping new ideas, such as barriers to technology and digital skills, which may restrict older persons from participating in learning. Moreover, certain older individuals may be hesitant to attend educational programmes offered in institutional settings as they prefer to attend the informal ones (Soo et al., 2019).

Enhancing accessibility to lifelong education for the elderly in Malaysia involves a blend of policy changes, engagement in the community, and leveraging technology. Some strategies that could be implemented to address the above concerns are policy reform, *maqasid shariah*, community-based programmes, technology integration, and tailored educational materials. Mashitah et al. (2023) propose in their study that policy reform is necessary to enhance the inclusivity of lifelong learning for senior citizens. This involves tackling obstacles and difficulties in elderly education and improving coordination and cooperation among different parties. In addition, the authors advocate for aligning educational programmes with the objectives of Shariah (*Maqasid Shariah*) to enhance the relevance and benefits of learning for the elderly. This method focuses on upholding faith, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Mashitah et al., 2023). Furthermore, each neighbourhood has the opportunity to establish community programmes for senior citizens to engage in. For instance, local mosques and community centres could arrange religious discussions and study groups tailored for the elderly, emphasising the practical elements of faith that are relevant to their current life phase. Creating educational materials that are easy to read and understand, with larger fonts and clear language, can greatly benefit the elderly in understanding Islamic teachings. Lastly, considering the impact of globalisation and technological progress, the use of technology like online platforms and webinars can enhance the accessibility of lifelong education for the elderly, enabling them to learn conveniently from home.

Although the majority of the existing literature has focused on the external characteristics of individuals that should be incorporated into lifelong education curricula, there has been a lack of research addressing the internal factors that could potentially have a more substantial influence on enhancing quality of life (Sayyed and Prakash, 2013), particularly among Muslims, in order to prepare them for the afterlife and equip them with Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge (Syazwan et al., 2021). A survey carried out by Amalina, Yarina, and Azizan (2019) among Malay older individuals to explore social participation indicates that the primary factor that promotes social participation is the strong emphasis on religiosity. The research has revealed a strong connection between spirituality, religiosity, and the well-being of elderly individuals in Malaysia. Thus, it is sound to conduct the study to contribute to the area in reference to the *Bustan 'Ilm* project with its dissemination of Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge and skills to the elderly.

3. The Importance of Instilling Fardhu 'Ayn Knowledge to the Elderly

Fardhu 'Ayn, as per Al-Ghazali's definition, denotes the essential information and acts that are mandatory for every Muslim to acquire and perform. This encompasses the fundamental principles of Islam, which consist of prayer (*Solat*), fasting (*Saam*), almsgiving (*Zakat*), and other obligatory responsibilities that are crucial for a Muslim's individual religious practice (Sujat, Muhammad Taqiyuddin, and Rakhmad, 2022). The importance of Fardhu 'Ayn in Islam is substantial, as it establishes the fundamental basis for a Muslim's spiritual existence and individual connection with Allah. It includes the obligatory worship practices that every Muslim must undertake on a daily basis, which are regarded as the essential elements for one's faith and practice to be deemed complete. The execution of Fardhu 'Ayn is an immediate duty of the individual, and failing to fulfil these requirements is regarded as a sin (Abdul Mutalib et al., 2021).

Al-Ghazali further highlights that Fardhu 'Ayn encompasses not only the outward observance of religious obligations but also the interior assimilation of Islamic principles and moral standards. The comprehension and application of Fardhu 'Ayn enable a Muslim to foster self-control, devotion, and a profound connection with the divine, all of which are essential for the formation of a virtuous and God-centred personality (Abdul Mutalib et al., 2021). According to Al-Ghazali, relating lifelong education to the acquisition of Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge for the elderly requires comprehending his educational philosophy and its application to ongoing learning throughout one's life. Al-Ghazali highlighted the significance of knowledge (*'ilm*) that fosters spiritual development and self-improvement. He held the belief that acquiring knowledge is a lifelong endeavour and that the pursuit of knowledge is a mandatory duty (*Fardhu 'Ayn*) for every Muslim (Siti Raudah et al., 2021). From his perspective, the concept of lifelong education for elderly people can be understood as an ongoing process of personal development. He additionally claimed that it is a continuous process that improves one's comprehension of the world and the afterlife, particularly as one grows older and has more opportunities for contemplation and education. Furthermore, Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge, according to Al-Ghazali, is not merely theoretical. The subject necessitates practical implementation in everyday life (Siti Raudah et al., 2021). Therefore, lifelong education programmes for the elderly might specifically emphasise the practical components of Islamic teachings that are applicable to their current life stage.

Besides that, Al-Ghazali's teaching methods can be adjusted to accommodate the cognitive abilities of older people, guaranteeing their successful acquisition and application of Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge. Al-Ghazali's educational method was comprehensive, encompassing the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of learning (Siti Raudah et al., 2021; Kemil et al., 2020; Mahyuddin and Barni, 2017). Comprehensive education programmes for older adults should also encompass these aspects, so enhancing their total welfare. Considering the present circumstances, ongoing education on essential knowledge and skills can be enjoyable and engaging, as it encourages social interaction. Likewise, it is stated profoundly in one hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah that,

“He who follows a path in quest of knowledge, Allah will make the path of Paradise easy for him.” (*Jami` at-Tirmidhi*: 2646)

The promise of attaining Paradise through the pursuit of Fardhu 'Ayn serves as a compelling incentive for the elderly to actively participate in learning. This not only motivates senior citizens to engage in community service but also enables them to share their knowledge and expertise. By integrating lifelong education with Al-Ghazali's teachings, it is possible to create programmes that enable the elderly to not only gain crucial religious information but also to continue developing and making valuable contributions to society (Mahyuddin and Diny, 2017).

Every Muslim is required to acquire Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge, which pertains to the personally necessary knowledge in Islam. This process is especially crucial for the elderly. This knowledge comprises the fundamental comprehension of Islamic beliefs, practices, and ethical behaviour that every Muslim is obligated to acquire and implement in their day-to-day existence (Shah Rizul et al., 2018). The importance of teaching Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge to the elderly can be attributed to various factors, including spiritual satisfaction, community integration, ethical direction, and the passing down of information and instruction. One important aspect is the attainment of spiritual fulfilment, which can be achieved by drawing individuals closer to Allah. The purpose is to ensure that the elderly possess the requisite knowledge to complete their religious duties, which might offer them spiritual solace and satisfaction, particularly in the hereafter (Mohd Fauzi et al., 2019). A study indicates that incorporating Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge into lifelong learning initiatives can improve the overall well-being of older individuals and bolster

their societal contributions (Fatimah et al., 2024; Sayyed and Prakash, 2013). By possessing a deep understanding of Fardhu 'Ayn, elderly people can actively engage in religious activities within the community, so boosting their confidence and establishing a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Also, it is regarded as a means of paying tribute to the elderly's contributions and recognising their esteemed role in the community (Statista Research Department, 2022). Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge functions as a moral guide, assisting elderly people in making ethical choices and living in accordance with Islamic values (Kemil et al., 2020). Transferring this knowledge to younger generations at a later stage ensures the perpetuation of Islamic beliefs and values. Hence, it is imperative to create educational models and programmes that specifically address the requirements of the elderly, facilitating their access to and utilisation of this knowledge.

By understanding the significance of this Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge, it can facilitate the elderly in Malaysia to engage in Islamic education more easily and enhance their comprehension of their faith, so enabling them to continue their spiritual development. An example of this is the initiation of the *Bustan 'Ilm* Project by CENTRIS, IIUM.

Research Findings

1. Introduction to the Bustan 'Ilm Project of CENTRIS, IIUM and its Dissemination

IIUM has been progressively applying the comprehensive philosophy of education and the integrated notion of knowledge since it was established 30 years ago. This has been achieved through various educational programmes and activities, with a special focus on the Islamisation of Human Knowledge (IOHK) projects and initiatives. This exercise aims to apply the Islamic worldview and epistemology to many areas of knowledge, with the goal of helping Muslims achieve success and a fulfilling existence in both this world and the hereafter (CENTRIS, 2024). During that time, it has effectively provided educational programming for different segments of the population, as seen by its diverse range of educational courses, including pre-school, primary, secondary, college, and university-level education. Therefore, it is appropriate that the university currently offers chances for older persons and the elderly who wish to improve their religious knowledge and practice during this stage of life, known as the *Bustan 'Ilm* Project.

Before in-depth exploration of the aforementioned project, it is worthwhile to comprehend a model of Islamic education specifically for elderly education. Shah Rizul (2022) and Shah Rizul et al. (2018) have elaborated on the development of an Islamic education model for the elderly based on the Quran. There are at least four elements and factors that have addressed the aforementioned obstacles and problems to ensure the success of elderly education. These underlying elements are subject, teacher, elderly psychology and physical, and time, place, and infrastructure (Shah Rizul et al., 2018). Firstly, it is important to carefully consider the selection of subjects to be taught to the elderly, as highlighted by Shah Rizul et al. (2018). The topic should be designed to accommodate the cognitive limitations of the elderly and should not include a complex curriculum that could potentially discourage them from pursuing further education. Furthermore, the essential consideration is the choice of instructors and the instructional methods to be employed when instructing the elderly. The criteria for selecting teachers should be that they possess a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive and physical limitations commonly experienced by the elderly. Shah Rizul (2022) emphasised the principles that teachers in senior education should follow, as derived from the Al-Quran and Hadith. The following conditions are as follows:

1. Sincere
2. Patience
3. Caring

4. Committed
5. Lenient
6. Teacher to be smart in building a positive relationship.
7. Matured
8. Wise
9. Good listener
10. Humble (Tawadhu')
11. Understanding psychological knowledge in the elderly
12. Friendly/humour
13. Caring
14. Empathic
15. Understanding the elderly Characteristics of the elderly.
16. Understanding the Necessities of the Elderly.
17. Good experience managing the elderly.
18. Understanding physical, cognitive, and social issues
19. Understanding communication knowledge for the elderly
20. Teacher to have good experience in teaching al-Quran to the elderly.
21. Teachers must demonstrate ethics and discipline.

It is necessary to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the teachers' selection process to guarantee their consistent adherence to the syllabus's standards.

Another crucial aspect that requires meticulous attention is the field of elderly psychology and physical health. Teaching elderly individuals requires a significant level of comprehension and dedication because they tend to be more sensitive than children and adolescents (Shah Rizul et al., 2018). Furthermore, the elderly are prone to losing focus and experiencing fatigue due to the extended duration of studying and the demanding nature of the syllabus. The elderly may also encounter hearing and articulation difficulties as a result of physical degeneration, such as tooth loss and auditory impairment. This is due to the effects of the ageing process. Last but not least, factors such as time, location, and infrastructure are crucial in the advancement of Islamic education for the elderly (Shah Rizul, 2022; Shah Rizul et al., 2018). It is recommended to schedule the class either in the morning or in the evening. Zuhur time is typically used as a period of relaxation, as the elderly tend to start their day early in the morning. In observing the above model, the *Bustan 'Ilm* Project aligns closely with the model of Islamic education for the elderly, showcasing many of the necessary components.

The *Bustan 'Ilm* Project initiative, led by CENTRIS at IIUM in 2014 (Berita Harian, 2014, July 14), provides a diverse range of courses specifically designed to promote lifelong learning opportunities for the elderly. It is founded on the Islamic tenet that the pursuit of knowledge is mandatory for all Muslims, from birth until death (CENTRIS, 2024). The project aims to apply a comprehensive educational philosophy and integrated understanding of knowledge, highlighting the pursuit of knowledge as a kind of worship and a lifelong duty for Muslims. In general, the aims of the project indicate that the courses probably emphasise Islamic education, values, and practices in accordance with the comprehensive Islamic philosophy of education and the integrated concept of knowledge. The establishment of *Bustan 'Ilm* aims to fulfil one of the criteria for Islamisation as outlined in the IIUM Strategic Plan, aimed at making a substantial influence on the Ummah and executing the university's corporate social responsibility initiatives. It is expected to have a significant impact on the Ummah in the future (CENTRIS, 2024). The objective is to offer the elderly the chance to improve their religious knowledge and practice, therefore benefiting the overall well-being of the community. The internal and external pilot projects have already been done in partnership with Masjid Wilayah, KL, IIUM Kuantan campus, and SHAS Masjid Tuanku Mizan Zainul Abidin, Putrajaya, respectively (IIUM, 2024).

Among the objectives of the *Bustan 'Ilm* Project (CENTRIS, 2024),

1. To establish a modern religious learning centre for senior citizens that is in line with the holistic Islamic philosophy of education and the integrated concept of knowledge;
2. To instil Islamic values, norms, and perspectives among participants as part of the religious obligation of “enjoining the good (*ma'rūf*) and prohibiting the bad (*munkar*)” in IIUM;
3. To inculcate the concept of pursuing useful knowledge as an act of ‘*ibādah* (worship of Allah) among participants;
4. To be the first of its kind among IPTAs that provides lifetime education in line with the Islamic ‘from cradle to grave’ concept of learning;
5. To implement one of IIUM’s corporate social responsibility programmes
6. To provide an opportunity for participants to occupy their time with beneficial and religious activities;
7. To exemplify the IIUM community as the Ummah with the mission of *Rahmatan li'l-'Alamin*

In light of the above model, the *Bustan 'Ilm* has initiated to provide eight modules comprising Ulum al-Quran, Usul al-Fiqh, ‘Aqidah, Ulum Hadith, Akhlak (*Tasamuf*), Fiqh, Sirah Nabawiyah, and Tilawah al-Quran, all of which will be instructed by certified IIUM lecturers. This project is aimed at anyone aged 45 and above, regardless of gender. The *Bustan 'Ilm* programme has three stages in order to obtain a certificate of completion. Every level requires a total of 12 weeks to be completed. Throughout a 12-week period, a total of 24 meetings were held, with each meeting lasting for a duration of three hours.

Two interviews were conducted to reflect the role of the *Bustan 'Ilm* project in helping the elderly enhance their Fardhu 'Ayn skills, questioning the institution's feedback based on the underlying elements mentioned above: subjects, teachers, elderly psychology, as well as time, place, and infrastructure. Pertaining to the subjects and syllabus matter, there were divergent opinions. Some individuals believed that the module, which included various subjects, was commendable because it covered all aspects. Conversely, others disagreed, arguing that it included an excessive number of subjects within a single timeframe, which posed challenges for elderly people who may struggle to comprehend each subject. Similar viewpoints have been noted regarding the teachers and their instructional approaches, which had a profound impact on the mental and physical well-being of the elderly. A few teachers effectively imparted knowledge by employing interactive methods. Meanwhile, certain teachers persist in employing a conservative approach to teaching, resulting in students experiencing feelings of boredom and sleepiness.

The final element is time, place, and infrastructure. The prevailing view is that it would be beneficial to enhance the facilities by establishing a dedicated and conveniently located space or hall, preferably near the restroom and other facilities. This would be more efficient than utilising the facilities within the mosque, which can sometimes have a disorganised layout. In terms of time allocation, they proposed extending the duration of the study beyond what was scheduled due to the participants' perception that the syllabus arrangements are excessively condensed and not easily understood. Overall, according to the results of the interviews, the participants expressed that the *Bustan 'Ilm* project was a noteworthy initiative that aided them in comprehending the Fardhu 'Ayn more effectively and in preparing themselves to attain Allah's rewards in the Hereafter.

Additionally, they proposed the continuation and expansion of awareness initiatives, not limited to only three specific mosques, but including many locations. This would allow a wider audience to have a more profound understanding of Islam.

In nutshell, the *Bustan 'Ilm* project holds importance that transcends personal intellectual development. It is of utmost importance in the overall growth and progress of the Muslim community in Malaysia. By providing the elderly with the essential resources to reflect on their spirituality and live ethically, the project aims to foster a more united and morally upright society.

2. The Significance of the Project in *Husnul Khatimah* Preparation

The crucial role of religious education in preparation for *Husnul Khatimah*, which refers to a favourable outcome or a “beautiful ending” standing before Allah, is a fundamental part of Islamic faith. *Husnul Khatimah* is the belief that a Muslim's death occurs while maintaining faith, ensuring their entry into heaven (Novi et al., 2021; Abdullah, 2007). Religious education is essential in this preparation as it shapes the comprehension and application of one's beliefs.

The process includes receiving comprehensive knowledge about the fundamental tenets of Islam, gaining a deep understanding of the Quran and Hadith, and actively applying the teachings in one's daily existence. It involves acquiring knowledge of the Quran, comprehending the Hadith, and applying the lessons in one's everyday existence. This knowledge acts as a compass for Muslims, directing them towards living a life that adheres to the teachings of Islam, with the ultimate goal of attaining a death that is pleasing to Allah. Religious education empowers believers to make well-informed judgements that are in accordance with Islamic values, ultimately leading to a life that strives for a positive and righteous end (Novi et al., 2021).

As aforementioned, the Quran and Hadith are fundamental sources of religious knowledge, offering unequivocal evidence of the behaviours and beliefs that lead to a favourable outcome (Abdullah, 2007). An essential component of religious education involves comprehending Tawhid, which refers to the concept of Allah's unity. Besides that, it also emphasises strict obedience to Islamic principles and the avoidance of grave transgressions such as shirk. Acknowledging and confirming the uniqueness of Allah is essential to the belief system and is a crucial element of *Husnul Khatimah*. The *Shahada*, which is the Islamic profession of faith, serves as a confirmation of this conviction and is recommended to be the last words of a Muslim (Wan Ahmad, 2019). The concept of leading a life that culminates in a blessed conclusion is firmly ingrained in the Quran and Hadith, which offer explicit guidance on how to achieve this.

The Quran discusses life and death as means by which Allah evaluates individuals based on their performance in deeds. One of its pieces of evidence lies in Surah Al-Mulk (67:2),

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ۗ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

“He who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed - and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.”

This passage underscores the significance of virtuous actions, which stem from religious education and comprehension. Other evidence is highlighted in Surah Al-Nisa' (4:48). It emphasises the seriousness of shirk (the act of associating with Allah) and the significance of Tawhid (the belief in the oneness of Allah). The passage states that,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ ۗ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

“Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills. And he who associates others with Allah has certainly fabricated a tremendous sin.”

This emphasises the importance of religious education in order to prevent committing such grave sins and to strive for a righteous end. Additionally, the Hadith literature provides a

better understanding of the indicators of a favourable end. According to a hadith reported by Abu Dawud,

"There is no deity but Allah,"

It is stated that if someone's final words as above, they will be granted entry into Paradise. This hadith emphasises the importance of the *Shahada*, a proclamation of faith, which represents the climax of a believer's religious education and conviction (Wan Ahmad, 2019).

Based on the above evidence, it highlights the significance of religious education in adequately preparing for a positive end of life. The purpose of this is to provide Muslims with the information and structure required to live a life that aims for a positive outcome. Also, it disseminates important lessons, such as the significance of repentance and actively seeking forgiveness for one's misdeeds. It is generally acknowledged that an individual who genuinely repents and corrects their behaviour will obtain Allah's mercy, which is crucial for attaining a favourable outcome in the end (Wan Ahmad, 2019). The process of ongoing self-improvement and strict devotion to religious responsibilities serves as evidence of the influence of religious education on an individual's experience at the end of their life.

Moreover, religious education cultivates a feeling of togetherness and shared accountability. It promotes solidarity among Muslims in their spiritual quest, facilitates the exchange of knowledge, and serves as a reminder of the importance of a good ending (Siti Mudrikah, 2016). The communal nature of this feature serves to strengthen the notion that the preparation for *Husnul Khatimah* is not solely a personal undertaking but rather a collaborative endeavour (Wan Ahmad, 2019). Ultimately, religious education is essential so that adherents can aspire to acquire a state of tranquillity and satisfaction upon the culmination of their earthly voyage, finally securing the benevolence and satisfaction of Allah.

The *Bustan Ilm* initiative had the underlying objective of preparing for *Husnul Khatimah*. This is due to the fact that the initiative caters to diverse manifestations. The *Bustan Ilm* project is an educational initiative and curriculum aimed at instructing Muslims on the significance of a favourable death and the behaviours that can result in a positive end. In addition to its course offerings, the institution also places emphasis on spiritual development. This project involves assigning tasks that promote an individual's spirituality and relationship with Allah, such as studying the Quran, participating in prayer sessions, and attending lectures on Islamic principles. In accordance with its Strategic Plan, the project is actively participating in philanthropic endeavours and community service, as acts of charity and service hold great importance in Islam and contribute to a favourable outcome.

Similar to the metaphor of achieving many goals with a single action, the project also enhances the physical and mental well-being of society. This is because maintaining a healthy lifestyle can contribute to the capacity to fulfil religious obligations and live a virtuous life. This project is of great importance since it assists individuals in living a life that is in accordance with Islamic ideals, which is thought to result in a favourable outcome. Additionally, they function as a prompt to acknowledge the impermanent quality of existence and the significance of making arrangements for the afterlife.

In nutshell, religious education is of utmost significance in the life of a Muslim, acting as a guiding light that leads people through the journey of life towards the ultimate objective of *Husnul Khatimah*—a pleasant outcome. This concept is well established in Islamic theology, highlighting the significance of departing this world while being in a state of Islam, accompanied by faith and pure actions. The pursuit of *Fardhu 'Ayn*, which refers to the individual requirement

for Islamic knowledge, is not solely an intellectual pursuit, but rather a transforming process that shapes the believer's perspective on the world and influences their behaviour. It includes the core elements of belief, devotion, and ethics, which are crucial for leading a life in alignment with divine intentions.

By examining the Qur'an, Hadith, and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Muslims gain a profound understanding of their Creator's knowledge and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These teachings function as a guidebook for effectively navigating the complexities of life. Furthermore, religious education fosters a profound sense of direction and guidance. It enables Muslims to make well-informed choices that are in line with ethical beliefs and have a good impact on society.

Also, it cultivates a robust sense of solidarity, as adherents are bound together by common principles and a joint objective to promote justice, empathy, and peace. Understanding Fardhu 'Ayn is essential in the pursuit of a good ending, allowing for a departure from this life blessed with divine favour and mercy. Religious education serves as the guiding principle that steers Muslims towards a meaningful existence and a divine afterlife.

CONCLUSION

Lifelong learning refers to the continuous and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge that contributes to personal and professional growth. In Islam, the principle of lifelong education is firmly established, from infancy to death. In realising the urgency of attaining unlimited education in Islam, the establishment of the *Bustan 'Ilm* Project of CENTRIS IIUM is a notable advancement in the promotion of lifelong learning education in Malaysia. It adheres to this principle by offering a well-organised platform for acquiring Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge, which includes the fundamental principles of Islam that every Muslim is required to study.

This project highlights the significance of Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge, specifically for the elderly, and its role in preparing for *Husnul Khatimah*. Hence, through one of the initiatives established by the CENTRIS IIUM, the foundation of the *Bustan 'Ilm* project is seen as one of the solutions provided and offers the Islamic-based learning syllabus. The study concludes that the *Bustan 'Ilm* Project is a valuable initiative that contributes to the Islamisation mission of IIUM and the empowerment of elderly citizens in the Muslim community, despite there being room for improvement for better facilities.

In Malaysia, a nation renowned for its abundant cultural diversity and robust Islamic legacy, the integration of Fardhu 'Ayn education into the very essence of society is of utmost importance. The elderly, specifically, have the potential to gain substantial advantages from this knowledge. As individuals near the end of their existence, comprehending and adhering to Fardhu 'Ayn can contribute to more enriching spiritual journeys and readiness for *Husnul Khatimah*, which refers to a good ending.

The *Bustan 'Ilm* project functions as a guiding light for Islamic education, enlightening the way for individuals who are committed to continuous learning throughout their lives. It not only rejuvenates the curiosity among elderly people but also promotes a society where information is respected and exchanged among different age groups. The project enhances the development of a society that appreciates ongoing education and spiritual advancement by imparting Fardhu 'Ayn knowledge.

The *Bustan 'Ilm project* is not solely an educational effort but rather a movement aimed at fostering a more enlightened and spiritually attuned community. It exemplifies the genuine

essence of Fardhu ‘Ayn by ensuring that Islamic knowledge is easily available to individuals of all ages. The success of the project hinges on its capacity to foster a lifetime passion for study and its valuable contribution to the noble endeavour of *Husnul Khatimah*. As Malaysia continues to expand and advance, the concepts of lifelong learning and the spread of Fardhu ‘Ayn knowledge will continue to be essential to the nation's growth.

The *Bustan ‘Ilm* project of CENTRIS IIUM serves as an exemplar for other educational institutions, showcasing the profound impact of education and the lasting significance of Islamic learning. By implementing programmes such as the *Bustan ‘Ilm* project, Malaysia can sustain the development of a cohort of persons who possess not just knowledge but also demonstrate the qualities of empathy, honesty, and religious devotion. These efforts are crucial for creating a society that values individual responsibility and aims for a positive outcome, guaranteeing a heritage of knowledge and moral excellence for future generations.

Since the introduction of the *Bustan ‘Ilm* project, which aimed to produce a knowledgeable and skilled elderly society in Fardhu ‘Ayn and helping them in preparing to obtain *Husnul Khatimah*, it is recommended to conduct future research to investigate the long-term impact of the *Bustan ‘Ilm* project on the participants’ spiritual, emotional, and cognitive well-being, as well as a study on developing and assessing new curricula that cater specifically to the learning needs and styles of elderly Muslims.

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