

## Islamic Worldview on Knowledge Management: Implication for Muslim Education System

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**Abstract:** In modern times, ‘knowledge’ is understood as cognitive, subjective and as an ever evolving concept. In contrast, knowledge in Islam is conceived within a ‘certain’ worldview, i.e., Islamic Worldview (IW) set by the authentic sources of Islam; the Holy Qur’an and the authentic collection of Prophetic traditions. Within this worldview, the concept encompasses spiritual, intellectual, moral and ethical, psycho-social, civilizational and developmental dimensions of human life. This paper aims to present a framework grounded in the IW for ‘knowledge’ creation and management, with special reference to the Muslim Education system.

**Key words:** Islamic Worldview • Structure of Islamic Worldview • Knowledge management • KM in Muslim Education system

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### INTRODUCTION

The concept of knowledge has been debated at many critical points in the history of education [1]. In the contemporary context of abundance and increased velocity of information and the modern technological advancements and post-modernist trends, the concept of knowledge is hotly discussed since it is understood as ever evolving cognitive, subjective, ‘non-transcendental, non-directional and non-rational’ [2-5]. This poses a dilemma for Muslims for they understand ‘knowledge’ within the paradigm of certitude and truth and they draw a ‘distinction between the ‘universal and the absolute and the local and relative’ [6]. It is in this context that concerns regarding how to manage voluminous ‘knowledge’ created and accumulated by humans through their intelligence and imagination have become extremely important to them. This is significant when discussing the system of Muslim education. Hence, the first part of this paper defines knowledge management (KM), its characteristic and strategies. Second, it presents Islamic worldview in terms of its dimensions. This paves the way to the key purpose of the papers which is to briefly discuss the theoretical and conceptual basis for developing a framework for KM based on Islamic worldview. This is the main part of the study. Third, the paper suggests to the means of translating the framework to the Muslim

Education system. The approach of the paper is basically conceptual and descriptive.

**Knowledge Management:** There are many definitions of knowledge management (KM). Yet there are many approaches to KM depending upon the contexts where ‘knowledge’ is being managed, as in learning and teaching, banking, military, political and other sectors. At the most basic level, when defined from a process perspective, KM is a set of processes that helps to improve the capturing, sharing, storing and retrieving of knowledge for its functional purposes [7]. The end result of KM ‘functional purpose’ is imperative due to the fact that it “... can lead to the achievement, stability and maturity in society ...” [8] Beside this, KM has been variedly studied from technical and social perspectives as well. From the technical view KM is about managing and developing tools such as Internets and other IT facilities through which organizational members can capture, share, store and retrieve data and information [9]. For social perspective, KM is about facilitating organizational and behavioural change and developing human resources required to achieve knowledge management [10].

Both the process and social perspectives focus on the functional aspect of creating and applying knowledge and on the needs to share distinctive knowledge [11]. Thus, KM can only be viewed from a diversity

perspective rather than a universality perspective, because it is people, not systems, who manage knowledge and for different functional purposes [12]. This is very true of the traditional KM strategies where the application of knowledge “begins with users and also ends with users” [13]. Without understanding people and their culture and contexts, knowledge cannot be managed satisfactorily [10]. How people manage knowledge and what strategies they utilize are influenced by human limitations and situations. General and personal limitations of people, as well as the collective culture and heritage of the society or organizations that they work with affect the means and ways they manage ‘knowledge’. Then what is knowledge? What underlies the concept of knowledge?

**Knowledge:** Knowledge refers to mean a fluid mix of ‘insights, understandings, experiences, contextual information and the practical know-how’ that provides a framework for evaluating new information [14]. It is accumulated over experience, through which one can understand the underlying patterns and principles, so that it can be put in context and combined and applied appropriately resulting in wisdom [3]. This understanding is tacit and intangible and thus knowledge is tacit and intangible. It is the end result of data-information-knowledge continuum, where people process them with the help of tools and technologies (see Figure 1).

Neil Fleming (nd) gives an apt description of what data, information, knowledge and wisdom are in Figure 2. Data are ‘just a meaningless points in space and time’ or disjointed facts. People process ‘data’ by ‘finding a way to attribute meaning to them by associating it with other things [15]. Thus, when data is organized and related to each other they are turned into ‘information’ [15].

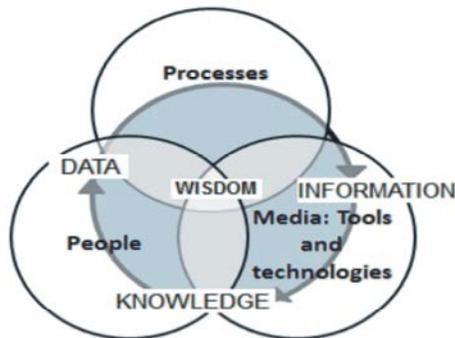


Fig. 1: KM continuum [7]

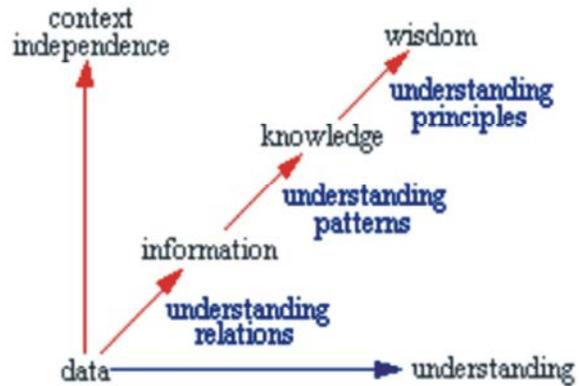


Fig 2: KM Elements in Perspective [20]

Knowledge is the interpreted information. People interpret information to create knowledge. People utilize the patterns that already reside in them when creating knowledge of various bits of information. Thus, as summarized by Sajjadi,

“Knowledge is dependent on and based on information and it is the transcendent stage of information. Although information and knowledge are related, information per se contains no knowledge; however, knowledge can contain information.” [16].

According to Fleming (1996), ‘wisdom is even more so than knowledge and wisdom arises when one understands the foundational principles responsible for the patterns representing knowledge...’ [14, 5]. He prefers to refer to these foundational principles as ‘eternal truths’ [14], whereas in the organizational setups it is also called as ‘organizational intellect [17]. Such a wisdom or intellect is key assets and resources to the organization and a successful management of them helps organizations to deliver value-added services and products. Throughout all these exercises of making relations, finding out patterns and principle, human beings engage in a key human process called ‘ratiocination’ [18]. The logical coherence achieved through ratiocination make the knowledge possible to be “applied to the real life situations and problems for the evaluation of one’s perception about his/her conclusion about the world” and the purpose of living [19].

KM thus brings together three core organizational resources- people, processes and media in tools and technologies- to enable organizations to use and share data-information, knowledge and wisdom [7]. Any of these three organizational resources can be ignored, ‘but only at great cost to the organization and to those within it’ [6].

In a business context, achieving the organizational mission is central to why such an organization is keen to manage its organizational knowledge. In the process, people in the organization might have already developed a big chunk of knowledge. They create this knowledge by interacting with each other and with the sources of knowledge and through experiences. And the byproduct of this human interaction is 'the human knowledge, which is the source of wealth for these organizations' [7]. Thus, 'familiarity with both the concept and context' where knowledge 'normally belongs' is much required when defining the concept of management and creation of knowledge' [21]. This emphasizes the social dimension of knowledge creation and utilization where primarily the focus is not on the individual process, but more on the participative and collaborative process [22].

Thus, there is a sequence and continuity as people progress along the continuum and as their understanding develops. What technologies and tools do is the media part or just facilitation of the processes. Technology provides people with easy access to data, so that they figure out the relations and patterns and principles that underlie in the sequence where data are converted to information and that to knowledge and ultimately into wisdom.

So, in summary:

- Data are disjoint and discrete facts
- Information relates to description, definition, or perspective (what, who, when, where).
- Knowledge comprises strategy, practice, method, or approach (how).
- Wisdom embodies principle, insight, moral, or archetype (why).

When dealing with the Muslim Education (ME) which is the focus of the discussion of the present article, the data, information, knowledge and wisdom need to be seen from the 'faith-based' perspective and within the particularity of Islam. 'Familiarity with both the concept and context' of knowledge within this particularity is *sine quo none* to those managing institutions that cater for educating Muslims [21, 24]. Outside this context, the unequivocal religious facts and figures are just data to its first informants. They turn to be information, when these links are understood. Information is so much elastic and confusing and thus can be unworthy of attention unless

they are interpreted based on the underlying patterns that form the links and relations. Thus, information turn into knowledge; and when that is done based on the principles underlying the patterns they become wisdom.

Although data as such, be it religious or not, are true and real, but do not make sense, are meaningless, dry and uninspiring unless data sets are related to each other and unless the 'links' among them are explored. However, there is a 'natural, but distinct relation' between those pieces of data and information related to 'faith' and this relation is determined by the factor called 'religion'. This makes the religious facts and information distinct from scientific data. Nevertheless, this fact in itself does not negate the requirement on religious facts and information that one should know them or 'cognitively process' them in the most reliable manner. Rather, in the faith-based context, the relations, patterns, principles are also decided by the religion; and they also require cognitive comprehension. This is because, a Muslim man or woman needs 'willpower' supported by his/her 'rational' power, in order to be able to submit, his/her feeling, thoughts and behaviour, words and deeds and action and aspirations willingly and whole-heartedly to the Almighty Allah [24]. It is knowledge that creates this willpower and rational support. In the words of Osman Bakar (1991),

the unity of *'ilm* and *imān* is so well established in Islamic *Weltanschauung* that the customary notion of dichotomy of belief and knowledge, prevalent in the West, is not tenable within the Qur'anic framework. The nature of the Islamic faith is such that the distinction between knowing and believing is rather blurred.... [25].

This is particularly relevant to education institutions and very particular to those providing for the ME. Before venturing into that, the following section elaborates on KM in education, thereby leading the discussion to the concept of education in Islam and its relation to ME.

**Knowledge Management in Education:** In the post-modern times, phrases like 'knowledge-based society, knowledge-based economy and knowledge-worker' are so commonly used, thereby implying the top priority given to education in every country. Education is about the growth and development every individual potential in the most balanced manner, thereby contributing to the development of economy, power and prosperity of any country and well-being of its people. Knowledge and its transmission, reconceptualization and reproduction for functional purposes are the core of this education

process. Knowledge is the key asset to the educational institutions. But how would educators remain abreast of many external and internal demands for accountability and improvement in education, such as effective student assessment, value-added issues and a wide variety of changing standards in curricula and pedagogical methods while they are on the perils of information overload. This is the *raison d'être* that the educational institutions need to be adaptive to the 'information culture' as well as effective and innovative Knowledge Management Strategies (KMS).

In education, thus KM can be described as a set of practices that helps to improve the use and sharing of data, information, knowledge and wisdom in value-based, reasoned decision-making, especially with regards to enhancing student learning and development. Thus, in the education process, 'knowledge' is managed deliberately and in a purposeful manner, where significant contexts in terms of the unique and particular indigenous culture and ethical beliefs of the learners are not put aside [3, 10]. Thus, KM as such cannot be argued to be a new concept, for that is what educators do when they plan, design, implement and evaluate curriculum.

As Hebert Kliebard (1975) critiques, 'to determine what subjects should be taught we must already know what those subjects ought to be' [26]. That is, when educators decide upon what knowledge (subject-matters) are to be taught and how best they can be learnt by the student, they are actually making reasoned-judgments.

In short, in the education process, 'knowledge' is valuable information or values and insights emerging of human minds; knowledge is about beliefs, commitment and action; knowledge is truth, beliefs, perspectives, judgment, know-how and methodologies [27]. Without understanding the people, therefore, knowledge cannot be managed satisfactorily, because 'knowledge affects thought, behaviour and civilizing effectiveness or (in the case of lack of knowledge,) ineffectiveness' [28]. Add to this, the personal and social dimensions of knowledge-creation mentioned above which promptly suit the faith-based knowledge creation as happens in the ME context. These are mostly in contrast with the concepts of knowledge 'predominantly embedded in western philosophy and values', which 'tend to ignore the growing multicultural nature of educational institutions' [29]. This is especially true about how 'knowledge' is conceptualized in the mainstream KM literature, which has developed from the Western point of view. Rather, as indicated by the definitions of knowledge mentioned above, even within the intellectual and ideological

traditions of Western society itself, there are different assumptions regarding the nature of man and society [30]. To put it short, the culturally embedded theories and practices influence the practice of 'knowledge' management [10]. In this regard, it is essential to identify the epistemic beliefs of Muslims with regards to the concept of knowledge, its sources, nature, purpose and the methods of acquiring and managing knowledge. The Qur'anic Sciences (QS) and Muslim Education (ME) is the core of this process.

**The Qur'anic Sciences and Muslim Education:** The Holy Qur'an as the foundational text and the Qur'anic education as the fundamental element of educational system at every level of Muslim education remain as such due to the fact that Allah, as the Origin of everything in the universe including the human beings, has better knowledge of every minute thing about His creations. His knowledge about them is unique 'in certitude,' and thus QS are ranked the most high. This is monolithic about what Muslims believe.

Human beings need this knowledge due to the fact that, they need to nourish the transcendental and spiritual, which are essential component resident in their body, i.e., the soul. Another reason is the grandness of the responsibility of man as a servant (*abd*) and vicegerent of Almighty Allah (*khalifah*) on the earth, which is also due the presence of the spiritual soul. The revelation, thus, provides a system of beliefs, which is a direct and immediate disclosure of what God wants man to realize on the earth.

Furthermore, the Qur'anic Sciences (QS) fundamentally make the knowledge of the reality outside the sensual and physical world more understandable or intelligible to humans, so that they make meaning out of it. Subjects such as the existence of God, what is the being, what is freedom and what is the truth, what is soul, what are the destiny and the role of humans, what are the major virtues and so on, are all well-defined subject matters included under the spectrum of the QS [31]. They are simultaneously formative and 'normative'; formative in the sense they 'form' the course of the human history, giving them meaning, purpose, directions and inspiration to further investigate the physical, natural and intellectual spheres of knowledge, essentially directing them towards decisive aims and goals; normative in the sense that they set the norms on higher truths that are transcendental and spiritual. They establish certain spiritual, moral and ethical codes for humans and their interpersonal dealings and transactions.

Practically, this denotes the prior-most place of the QS in determining the parameters and criteria of the foundational principles in various disciplines under intermediary human sciences, physical, natural sciences. The spectrum of Revealed Sciences (RS) is spiritual, metaphysical and transcendental. However, since it is humans who make meaning out on the transcendental realms for practical and applied purposes, there is the second group of sciences called Intermediary Human Sciences (IHS).

The Intermediary human sciences investigates the implications of the Revealed sciences on man, his family and the society. They establish certain spiritual, moral and ethical codes for men and their interpersonal dealings and transactions. However, at the applied and practical levels, the intellectual knowledge is of tentative truth and always to be judged in the light of the RS.

Then, there is the Physical and Natural Sciences include sciences such as physics, astronomy, biology and abstract sciences such as mathematics and logics, whose subject matter is nature [31]. They investigate the physical reality, not the spiritual or metaphysical reality. The Holy Qur'an repeatedly encourages humans to reflect upon them, in order to acquire its knowledge', not as independent intellectual exercise, but in the name of his Lord, because all the laws of nature are placed into it in such an intelligible manner that they also point to the transcendental realm covered by the RS.

In broad terms, thus, there are three categories of knowledge sources, i.e., (a) Revealed, (b) Intermediary Human and (c) Physical and Natural sciences [32]. The latter two sources of knowledge indicate another key principle that, caring for the spiritual values does not mean the suppression of the biological or social needs [33]. Together they comprise 'all possible avenues of reflective, contemplative and imagery methods of acquiring knowledge.' The hierarchy and rank of 'knowledge' under each source is determined by their degree of contribution to the perfection of man's knowledge of God and to 'the perfection of the soul to the point of being God-like, either directly or indirectly' [34]. The Holy Qur'an has well manifested this unitary character of all knowledge, for it calls its verses *āyāt* (sing. *āyah*) as well as the signs of nature as *āyāt* (signs). Both are 'signs' pointing to the same source and originating from the same source [34].

Figure 3 summarizes these points and denotes the 'unitary consistency of the Islamic worldview' and by extension, the unitary and holistic nature of Islamic education.

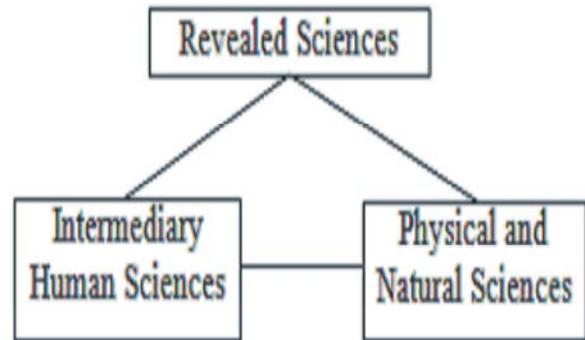


Fig 3: Knowledge in Islamic Worldview [35]

To summarize, these elaborations suggest to the wide and extensive scope as well as complex nature of the QS and ME. The Holy Qur'an thus presents Islam, not merely as belief or faith system, rather as a faith-based way of life, where faith works in the life. Faith sets the foundations for how to lead the life, thereby casting various dimensions of human life within a certainty paradigm. To put the above point succinctly, within this Islamic Worldview (IW), a Muslim should develop the idea of 'knowledge' within the purview of 'faith structure,' and thereby providing universal and objective code of 'virtues' which humans need to personalize and realize in the psychosocial and civilizational dimensions of practical life. Thus, in total, there are five structures within the Islamic Worldview (IW): the faith, knowledge, virtue structures which are the theoretical and conceptual foundations of IW, whereas the Psycho-Social and Civilization structures are applied and practical foundations. Essential concepts, themes and practices related to 'knowledge' as well as the relation, pattern and fundamental principles under each of these five domains or dimensions, therefor should be regulated by the criteria and parameters of the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, where the latter is the interpretation of the former.

**The Dimesions of Islamic Worldview and the Islamic Framework for Knowledge Management:** A brief description on the five dimensions is subsequently addressed here to point out how 'knowledge' with reference to each of these dimensions is conceptualized and what are the core principles that form the pattern and links among them which in turn should be done through a collaborative endeavour made collectively by a group of Muslim theologians, *Shari'ah* scholars, various subject/domain specialists, educationists, curricularists and social and human scientists, practitioners having knowledge and experience in Educational system and

Information Technology and others. In other words, KM with regards to the educating Muslims is rather collective than individual effort. A framework developed in collective manner, principally should promote, not a fragmentary or compartmentalized approach to knowledge, but the most balanced, integrative and progressive approach as enshrined by those fundamental principles, concepts and themes contained with these five structures of IW. In this regard, we should be very mindful that Qur'an was the starting point of Almighty Allah's '*ta'dib*' of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); it was the only 'text' with which he started educating his companions. The Holy Prophet nurtured an ideal Islamic society within the shadow of the Holy Qur'an and the Divine Wisdom, highlighting the ultimate purpose of human life. Hence, the role of scholars at the *Suffah* School, according to Açıkgenç (1996), was at once cognitive (intellectual) and affective (spiritual) [31]. They had to comprehend the Qur'anic message in its original form and then they had to apply it in purifying their souls. At once, the Holy Qur'an was guidance and motivation for reflection on their own nature and the nature of the universe. The message of Islam was not 'just emotionally and spiritually satisfying' but also 'intellectually fulfilling' [36]. This is why the Holy Qur'an has been and continues to be the core of the 'veritable Islamic Educational System' [37].

**The Faith Dimension:** Faith (*imān*) is the core subject dealt in the Holy Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an discusses faith in the human context. Muslims are obliged to have an indelible and unflinching faith in Almighty Allah and other higher truths that they are reverberated in their inner belief, thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, rituals and external actions, deeds. This denotes that faith is essentially intellectual and spiritual in nature...." [18]. Faith should not remain at the level of confession only, but should remain as dynamic and inspiring but as the unifying and integrating factor. This justifies why, in early Islamic history, the Holy Prophet enormously emphasized on consolidation of Islamic faith in the minds of new believers, thereby elaborating the meaning of life [31].

**The Knowledge Dimension:** Instilling faith in the minds of students in a way the most inspiring and motivating manner is indispensable to the educational endeavour in general and the ME in particular. This necessitates a thorough and in-depth knowledge of its various elements of the faith structure. Thus, knowledge is not only an essential condition of healthy faith, but also in

realization of faith in character and behaviour of students. Thus, knowledge is the second fundamental structure of IW. This realization on the other hand, point next structure of IW, i.e., the virtue.

**The Virtue Dimension:** Simply, virtue functions as criterion and means of deployments and enacting of the faith principles, which is the goals of human life; and consequently, the goal of education. That is, the pursuit of knowledge about Absolute truths and about the human, physical and natural sciences is useless devoid of any creative and constructive purpose and unless they are put into practice. They are points of reference having implications on "man's relationship with God, humanity and the universe" [38]. That is, values are appreciated not as norms, but rather for their 'formativeness'. They import certain meanings to this relationship. The Attributes of Almighty Allah, for example, are not regarded as just some metaphysical theories, but for their creative influence on 'forming' and nurturing the character and attitudes of man.

Various virtues required for protection and preservation of the five essential fundamentals; *dīn* (religion), *naḥs* (life), *'aql* (intellect), *naṣl* (progeny), *māl* (property) and *ird* (honour), therefore, should be imparted according to their place in the hierarchy and once again they are determined by the Qur'anic criteria and parameters [39]. That is, the Islamic conception of a successful and virtuous life develops so closely to its concept of faith.

To put the above point succinctly, within this Islamic IW, a Muslim should develop the idea of 'knowledge' within the purview of 'faith structure,' to be authenticated in its 'virtue-structure' and realized within the human and civilizational structures.

**The Psycho-Social Dimension:** This dimension of IW summarizes the Islamic viewpoint on humans; the various spiritual and physical components in them, the nature and ultimate purpose of human existence on the earth. They are subservient to the first three foundations and they examine various psychical, social, political, economic principles related to the utilization of individual and collective potentials for the wellbeing of the individual, family and the humanity at large.

This dimension corresponds to the concept of man as servant and vicegerent of Allah on the earth ('*abd* and *khalifah*). The ME therefore should stress the personal or individual scope of education to meet the spiritual, intellectual and psychic needs of man.

The human exemplification of this is historically preserved in the life, activities and saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which, can be emulated as the perfect model that the educational institutions can project as their end product [40, 37].

**The Civilizational Dimension:** Humans live in the physical world and among other members of the society where the principle related to the first three foundations being materialized earlier. In order to facilitate this process, Almighty Allah has succumbed (*taskhîr*) the physical and natural resources for man; for his consumption as well as their effective utilization for the overall human welfare [33]. Thus, an engaging positive vision of the Islamic perspective of progress, development and reform should be developed based on the IW. To be more specific, this dimension stresses the wisdom behind striving for material advancement. It is all about struggling for creating an attachment to morality and awakening the moral consciousness among the people.

These five key dimensions; faith, knowledge, value, man and life correspond to the five essential principles; faith, life, intellect, progeny, property and honor, basically at theoretical, applied and practical applications. But, how to translate these dimensions and essential principles enshrined in them into lived experiences? How could we maximize the benefit of such a paradigm in the civilizational and developmental planes, especially utilizing the Instruction Technology platforms? The Holy Qur'an being the essential core through which the above mentioned five structures get to be conceptualized and thereby applied in the actual life, the ME at different levels of educational ladder should be strategically planned and manned.

As such, inevitably the educational institutions and centres providing for ME should make concerted efforts (1) to further developing the framework and (2) to device their curriculum for all the levels to effectively make the learning experiences of the Holy Qur'an authentic, meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging and active ones [41]. For example, at pre-school levels, the interest to learn Arabic alphabets needs to be imbued in children. Knowledge already available in the field of Educational Technologies (ET) hence needs to be tapped well, but without failing the spirit enshrined within the framework of IW. In the school level, children need to be introduced to basic facts and their interest should be kept alive so that at the next level they are introduced to the relations that link between them. This is much mandated

in the pervasive influx of the Western-centric education system, thought system, way of life and worldview of uncontrolled material progress and development. We should not choose to remain in the periphery, for we are 'the best ever produced for mankind'. The criteria of the best Ummah ever produced for mankind is that they enjoin good and forbid evil and believe in Almighty Allah [42].

That means, it is 'ideas and teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet should become guides and references while delineating any key term such as reality, knowledge and virtue. To put it more explicitly, all the five dimensions, independently as well as coherently as one architectonic whole provide epistemological foundations and principles which set parameters and criteria to the concept of 'knowledge,' knowledge creation, management, management strategy, sharing and all other related concepts such data mining, information retrieval etc.

Such a framework develop on the Qur'anic criteria should present a blue-print and roadmap for every endeavour in Muslim education. It is in this regard, the article calls the institutions and centres providing for ME at various levels to adopt an enlightened vision, that is to mould a community of religious scientists, who would focus on integration of the moral and the intellectual ideals, which made the early Muslims to be very successful to establish themselves in a very short time [31].

## CONCLUSION

Given Islamic point of view as the focal concern, the paper concludes that 'knowledge' although theocentric in essence is anthropocentric from realistic and practical terms. Hence, it is essential that when various concepts, models and practices in KM adapted to fields such as ME, first, they are understood for all its consequence, positive and otherwise, second conceptualized within purview of the Qur'anic Framework for the purpose.

This is in line with the finding of Waseem (2013) where in contrast to the traditional KM, in Islamic knowledge management (IKM) the application of KM strategies "starts with knowledge resources for the purpose of user development and then ends up with the source of knowledge... where all knowledge understanding (KU) and output (OK) should be a reflection of knowledge source (KS)" [43]. In this regard, this paper presents an outline for the Qur'anic framework grounded in the Islamic Worldview for KM in the educational settings.

The paper does that only in general terms, for the authors realize that it cannot be done in an individual manner. Therefore, the authors call institutions providing for the Muslim Education to initiate concerted collective effort to gather various related scholars to develop such a framework and means of practically implementing in a collective effort (ijma’).

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