

# Trajectory of Islamic psychology in Southeast Asia: Problems and prospects



## Authors:

Septi Gumiandari<sup>1,2</sup> 

Subandi Subandi<sup>3</sup> 

Abd. Madjid<sup>1</sup> 

Ilman Nafi'a<sup>2</sup> 

Safii Safii<sup>4</sup> 

Fatah Syukur<sup>5</sup> 

Wanda Listiani<sup>6</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Islamic Educational Psychology, Postgraduate Program of Islamic Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Islamic Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Syekh Nurjati, Cirebon, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Gajah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Department of Islamic Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup>Department of Islamic Education Management, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia

<sup>6</sup>Department of Craft, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

## Corresponding author:

Septi Gumiandari,  
septigumiandari@  
syekhnurjati.ac.id

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This study aims to answer the following research question: what are the problems and prospects of the development of Islamic psychology studies in Southeast Asia? This study used descriptive qualitative research and employs data triangulation during data collection. Documentation study, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to obtain the data. Data were analysed using patterns of data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing. It can be concluded that Islamic psychology presents many problems and prospects for those who are concerned about the development of Islamic science. The finding strengthens the perspective that there are three problems of developmental studies of Islamic psychology in Southeast Asia: (1) the discussion on the issue still focuses on theoretical integration and philosophical levels rather than on applicative ones; (2) methodological problems; and (3) polarisation of the capacity of Muslim psychologists. Apart from the problems, the development of Islamic psychology studies has good prospects. This indication can be seen from the following transformations: (1) from the formulation phase towards the research phase, (2) from comparative study patterns towards developing concepts of psychology based on Islam and (3) from a normative-cognitive approach towards the substantive-Sufistic approach.

**Contribution:** Through this study, it is hoped that strategic attempts will be made by Muslim psychologists to collaborate and develop networks on designing more targeted studies in solving the various problems that arise around the integration of psychology and Islam at the ontological, epistemological or axiological levels.

**Keywords:** Islamic psychology; Southeast Asia; normative-cognitive approach; Sufistic approach; polarisation.

## Introduction

Psychology has become inseparable from the discourse surrounding the issues of the Islamisation of science. As one of the scientific disciplines, psychology is considered to represent an empirical-realistic science which can only be analysed through an objective approach. Its objective nature keeps it away from religious disciplines. Some psychologists such as Haque (1998), Nashori (2002) and Edis (2010) believe that religion contributes to scientific stagnation. However, in the last 25 years, there has been an awareness amongst Muslim psychologists regarding the limitations of science in providing solutions to various problems regarding the spiritual crisis of modern humans (Badri 2018; Razak & Hisyam 2012; Skinner 2010, 2019) This awareness invokes a scientific spirit to transplant Eastern psychological values in reconstructing contemporary psychology, as well as calls for developing psychology with an Islamic perspective (Haque 1998, 2004; Razak & Hisyam 2012).

In several parts of Islamic countries, especially Southeast Asia, new concepts concerning the integration of psychology and Islam began to emerge (Haque & Masuan 2002; Shahabi & Sharbat 2015). The development of Islamic psychology studies is increasingly being preached in various forms of study: discussions, seminars and national and international scientific meetings. Some international organisations have also been formed under the International Association of Muslim Psychologists (Nashori 2002). Likewise, the publication of books and scientific journals with the themes of Islamic psychology has begun to be widely discussed (Al-Afify 2018; Arifin 2016; Bonab & Koohsar 2011; Diana 2015; Hasanah 2018; Istiningtyas 2013, 2014; Khasan 2017; Masroom & Abd Rahman 2015; Rothman & Coyle 2018), as well as efforts to include the discipline of Islamic psychology as part of compulsory or elective courses in several universities' curricula (Mujib 2005b; Saifuddin 2018; Sham 2016).

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Although there is optimism for the birth of Islamic psychology as a new discipline, its development is considered to be a bit slower than the Islamisation of other sciences. It has been more than 25 years since Islamic psychology was established, and this study seems to be rotating at the level of normative issues rather than applicative ones. Responding to this condition, some experts sneered at the growing development of this science, as well as the scientific standards of Islamic psychology which are considered not scientifically verifiable (Al-Karam 2018; Nashori 2005; Zaharuddin 2013). The negative response that was expressed was that the existence of Islamic psychology and the presence of Islamic psychological figures were because they were benefited from 'opportunities'. Some argued that Muslim intellectuals in the field of psychology are not yet very capable, seem fragile and tend towards easy justifications when they discuss the basic concepts of Islam which are used for the theory of Islamic psychology (Abu-Raiya & Pargament 2011; Nurhayani 2016; Zaharuddin 2013).

Regardless of the pros and cons of the existence of Islamic psychology, it remains a never-ending issue for intellectual *ijtihad*. It is the responsibility of all Islamic intellectuals to present more complete studies in order to contribute positive input in the fight to create Islamic psychology as a solid scientific subject in the future. In other words, Islamic psychology remains one of the urgent disciplines to study because of the following arguments: (1) the increasing problems of modern life have implications for the growing number of people who have mental disorders and are mentally unhealthy, easily upset and stressed, who demand the presence and contribution of religion as a psychiatric therapy through Islamic psychology and psychotherapy; (2) modern psychology has not been significantly successful in dealing with the drought of modern human spirituality – the presence of Islamic psychology is required to overcome this psychiatric crisis; and (3) the increase of universities in Muslim countries interested in opening Islamic psychology study programmes. Therefore, discussing the development of Islamic psychology studies, including its problems and prospects, becomes important.

Previous studies have attempted to explain the link between psychology and Islam. Still, none has provided a comprehensive study about the problems and prospects that arise around the integration of psychology and Islam at ontological, epistemological or axiological levels in Southeast Asia. This is where the significance of this scientific research is put forward. This research attempted to examine the issues and the potential of Islamic psychology studies in Southeast Asia. Through this study, it is hoped that there will be a strategic effort from Muslim psychologists to collaborate and build networks to design more targeted studies in solving the various problems that arise around the integration of psychology and Islam at ontological, epistemological or axiological levels.

## Literature review

A review of several publications using the words 'Islamic psychology' in the title demonstrates that the term is defined in a variety of ways. Islamic psychology, according to

Siddiqui and Malek (2021) in their book chapter 'Islamic Psychology: Definition and Scope', is 'the study of humans who have complete surrender and submission and obey the rules of God'. Islamic psychology, as defined by Vahab (1996) in his book *An Introduction to Islamic Psychology*, is the study of God's manifestation in nature as reflected in the behavioural patterns of all living and non-living things in all aspects of life, utilising Islamic paradigms. Islamic psychology is defined by Iqbal and Skinner (2021) as one of the religion-based viewpoints that respects human beings' spiritual essence and their spiritual needs. From those definitions, Islamic psychology, in conclusion, is the study of all human behaviour and personality based on the Islamic worldview.

Islamic psychology has a different task from that of Western psychology. Western psychology explains, predicts and controls human behaviour. Islamic psychology in general is meant to empower humans so that their quality of life will increase. Islamic psychology will warn humans that humans are multi-dimensional (Nashori 2005). In Islamic psychology, humans are social and spiritual beings as well as physical beings. Therefore, Islamic psychology explains, predicts and controls, directing humans to get blessings from Allah. The main purpose of Islam is to save humans and guide them to return to Allah. Islamic psychology is based on the Qur'an and hadiths. In the discussion of human personality, for example, the Qur'an reveals two conflicting human potentials caused by conflicts between three kinds of *nafs*: *nafs ammarah bi as-suu'* [souls who always tell to ugliness] (al-Quran Surah [QS]. Joseph: 53), *nafs lawwamah* [unstable soul] (QS. al-Qiyamah: 1–2) and *nafs muthma''innah* [a peaceful soul] (QS. al-Fajr: 27–30). The conception of the three *nafs* is several different conditions that become the nature of a soul during a psychological struggle between the material aspect and the spiritual aspect. Likewise, in a hadith, Hudzaifah said that the Prophet (SAW) once said: 'Do not be dislodged'.

'You say, if men do good, we also do good, and if men do dholim, we also do dholim; But stick to your stance. If people do good, do you good, and if people do evil, do not do evil.' (Hadith narrated by Turmudzi, hadith expert, theologian)

The two main references above are passed down not only for Muslims but also for the good of humankind. Therefore, the development of the study of Islamic psychology is not only a demand for Muslim scientists but also the results of research from non-Muslim scientists. This is in line with the statement of a figure of modern psychology, Erich Fromm, who revealed that modern humans face the fact that they feel the emptiness of spirituality. They manage to achieve material feats, but their lives are unsettled (prone to stress, depression and feelings of being alienated) (Purnamasari 2019).

Looking at the limitations of the current mainstream psychology paradigm, Islamic psychology has a good chance of becoming the next paradigm in psychological science growth. One of the reasons that might be made is that Islamic psychology restores religion's place in human life. Islamic psychology could be one of the initiatives to reconstruct human civilisation and develop the concept of faith-based

human behaviour (Saryono 2016). It is provided to supplement the fundamental notions of human behaviour and to represent the religious aspects of human life that are believed to be capable of sustaining moral elements in modern science applications.

## Methodology

This study used a descriptive qualitative research, a research that involves data that were collected and expressed in the form of words and images and words arranged in sentences, such as the result of interviews between researchers and informants (Ridder 2014). The presence of the researchers is a measure of success or understanding in several cases. The researcher acted, with the help of other people, as the main instrument in collecting data from people. As stated by Creswell and Baez (2020), the instruments in qualitative research refer to the researchers as a data collection tool.

The techniques for the data collection were data triangulation, which involves combining various methods of data collection and in this case included (1) documentation study, (2) in-depth interviews and (3) focus group discussion. Documentation study was conducted by examining published documents related to the issue, whilst in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with research informants using semistructured interview guidelines. The participants (informants) in this study were selected using an expert sampling technique, a type of purposive sampling method that does selection based on knowledge and experience to

provide valuable insights related to the study objectives (ed. Frey 2018). Some experts from Islamic higher institutions (Universitas Islam Negeri [UIN]) Yogyakarta, Malang and Jakarta were chosen as informants representing Indonesia, whilst the International Islamic University Malaysia, Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia were chosen representing Malaysia.

The data analysis involved organising data and sorting them into manageable units that could be managed, synthesised and searched to find out what was important and valuable to convey. Instead of that, as for understanding the views and ideas that were objective data obtained, content analysis and descriptive analysis techniques were used (Neuendorf & Kumar 2015). Data analysis was carried out since the researcher was out in the field during data collection and after completion of data collection in the field. In simple terms, data were analysed using patterns of data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing (Mezmir 2020). Based on the data processing, the researchers summarised the interview results in Table 1.

## Results and discussion

### The development of Islamic psychology studies in Southeast Asia

Islamic psychology has the same historical roots in Southeast Asia as it does in other Muslim countries. It arose as a result of Muslims' efforts to Islamise knowledge

**TABLE 1:** Matrix of interview results.

| A. The development of Islamic psychology              |  |
|---|--|
| 1.  | 'Islamic psychology is undergoing many significant developments. Various universities in Malaysia have warmly accepted Islamic psychology. The indicators show that there are many seminars, webinars, conferences discussing about this issue, besides increasing numbers of scientific studies, researches and publications talking about the integration of psychology and Islam' (Interview translated by DR).   |
| 2.  | 'Efforts to make greater space for the study of psychology and Islam are increasingly visible when this study is included in the curriculum set by the college. Some universities in Indonesia have offered Islamic psychology courses, even starting to open interests in Islamic psychology studies, so inevitably, the discussion of the curriculum and patterns of integration of psychology and Islam became the main topic' (Interview translated by DR).  |
| B. Problems in the development of Islamic psychology  |  |
| 1.  | 'So far, the development of Islamic psychology, which is considered a new school of psychology, is still circling in theoretical concepts, rather than concrete and applicable ones. This should be a challenge for experts to further socialise and ground Islamic psychology in real life' (Interview translated by DR).   |
| 2.  | 'Islamic psychology has not yet reached the idealised level. The discussion of Islamic psychology has only touched a philosophical level and has not yet entered the level of its application. If this discourse stagnates in the philosophical debate, it is difficult to expect practical benefits. For this reason, the younger generation needs to be more involved to be able to play a role in supporting the development of Islamic psychology, so that it can become an alternative approach in the psychological environment, both at the national and international levels' (Interview translated by DR).  |
| 3.  | 'Among the problems that are stumbling to the development of Islamic psychology is the polarisation of the ability of human resources who pursue Islamic psychology studies because of their background study. Those with a purely psychological educational background are generally very expert in the fields of psychological theories and are very experienced in their practice, but they do not have a strong religious knowledge base. Despite the fact that they tend to start touching, conversing and researching Islamic psychological topics, they still use the existing modern psychology as a tool for analysis, but they include Islamic views on psychology. As a result, their analysis of Islam is less in-depth when they comment on or make judgments regarding material components of Islam' (Interview translated by DR). |
| 4.  | 'Around Malaysian universities, there appears to be a significant separation between Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS) psychology scientists and other universities, such as the University of Kuala Lumpur (UKM), and the University of Malaya (UM). Psychology lecturers at KUIS are considered to have a conservative, normative mindset, including within the scope of the integration of psychology and Islam. Meanwhile, those from UKM and UM are seen as more scientific and non-conservative. They do not want the integration model that is applied in KUIS' (Interview translated by DR).   |
| 5.  | 'Muslim scholar sometimes faced obstacles in integration between theories of Western psychology and Islam. They hesitated to use methods outside the scientific method that have been manifested so far. This can be demonstrated in the fields of psychological study and diagnosis. Because of lack of confidence when making the research instrument, they finally returned to download the results of previous research using Western psychology instruments that were considered permanent, so that the Islamic-oriented theoretical frameworks had no connection with the research instruments taken' (Interview translated by DR).  |
| C. Prospects in the development of Islamic psychology |  |
| 1.  | 'There has been a lot of progress in the study of Islamic psychology. Muslim psychologists have begun to move from the phase of criticism to the formulation and a more intense research phase. They have come out of the discourse of criticism of theory and methodology leading to the initial formulation of Islamic psychology; meaning, why this perspective is essential to raise, who implements the application of Islamic psychology and the Muslim psychologists themselves and how to reconstruct the theory' (Interview translated by DR).  |
| 2.  | 'Muslim psychologists seem to have moved from research activities that try to compare the concepts of modern psychology and Islam to research activities that try to build the concept of psychology based on Islam. This pattern focuses its discussion on trying to present a new perspective in understanding humans psychologically, including efforts to formulate the concepts of human, <i>fitrah</i> , etc.' (Interview translated by DR).   |
| 3.  | 'The approaches used by Muslim psychologists began to vary, not only using normative-cognitive approaches through rationalisation and filtering of modern psychological concepts through Islamic religious norms that are full of psychological aspects, but also using a Sufistic-substantive approach. Islamisation of psychology is not only done by giving religious legitimacy to the theory of psychology, which is considered suitable with the Islamic perspective, but also the concept of psychology must depart from the various Islamic treasures: the Qur'an and hadith' (Interview translated by DR).  |

in various parts of the world (Ancok 2011; Siddiqi 2011). Three major trends in the Islamic world inspired the concept of Islamisation of psychology: (1) the awakening of Islam, (2) criticism of science and (3) the aridity of modern human spirituality because of the dehumanisation of knowledge (Nashori 2002).

Since the 15th century *hijriyah*, Muslims have strengthened their enthusiasm to return to Islamic teachings, because the moral-spiritual parts of humanity have not prospered in modern society, which is dominated by the West. The spirit of Islamic revival, amongst others, is marked by the Islamisation of science. Figures such as Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Sayyed Hossein Nasr tried to build Islam as the basis of science in particular and life in general, whilst making sharp criticisms of modern Western thought and civilisation. As a result, there emerged the Islamisation of scientific disciplines such as Islamic anthropology, Islamic economics, Islamic sociology and others, including Islamic psychology.

One of the sharp criticisms of modern science is the tendency of modern science to understand reality empirically, whereas reality is not merely something empirical but there are also non-empirical realities (Ancok 2011). Therefore, modern science has failed to understand the non-sensory reality and the reality of the spirit world or the unconceivable area. The scientific method's usage in psychology has aggravated the dehumanisation process (humans are only experimental objects that can be controlled). The mainstream psychologists' process of analysis and synthesis of the conception of the entire human personality has been constrained, if not completely eliminated, by the scientific framework. Human behaviour can only be observed through visible experimentation (objective-empirical), whereas things that are not visible (metaphysical) are regarded as unscientific and not a reflection of their knowledge. As a result, it is unavoidable that psychology, which holds the status of 'one of the sources of authority' for human activity because of its concern with human psychological problems, suffers from conceptual incoherence and alienation from the mainstream of culture.

Psychology with Islamic values returns the position of religion in human life to prominence, which in the history of the development of science is tug of war, perfecting the concept of human behaviour and bringing back the divine (spiritual) factor in human life, and it is believed to be able to become a moral element in the application. The criticism levelled at contemporary theories in the discipline of psychology greatly opens the possibility of a progressive attitude to make initiation efforts to build alternative psychological paradigms or theories that are more in line with the context and beliefs of the community (Siddiqi 2011). Therefore, psychology with spiritual values (Islamic psychology) becomes necessary as the next paradigm in the development of psychology.

The two major trends in the Islamic world discussed above interacted and led to the establishment of the International

Symposium on Psychology and Islam in 1978 at the University of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Nashori 2002). A year later, 1979, a very monumental booklet was published in England entitled *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists* by Badri (1979), a psychologist from Sudan. This book had received tremendous response and became a trigger for the rise of the discipline of Islamic psychology in Southeast Asia.

In Malaysia and Indonesia, Islamic psychology is increasingly developing in line with the spirit of Islamisation of science in various higher education institutions in Malaysia and all Indonesian Islamic universities, through the policies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Bastaman 2011; Bin Baba et al. 2018; Hafizallah 2019; Haque & Masuan 2002). Efforts to provide more space for the study of Islamic psychology are increasingly visible when this study enters the curriculum established by public or Islamic-affiliated universities offering Islamic psychology courses (Abdullah & Riyanto 2014; Abidin 2017; Ali 2020; Embong & Hashim 2013; Fanani, Sholihan & Karnadi 2014; Saifuddin 2018; Sham 2016).

Recognition of the existence of Islamic psychology is also manifested in scientific works, researches and books on psychology and Islam. There are around 50 more books that have been published to show the increasing interest of scientists and academics who are concerned about using Islamic psychology material as objects in their research, as well as the increasing number of journal articles, theses and even dissertations in state and private universities (Zaharuddin 2013; Zarkasih et al. 2019; Zulkarnain & Herdianti 2019). The academic discourse struggle above actually shows the existence of formal recognition of Islamic psychology in Southeast Asian universities (Haque et al. 2016).

Efforts to provide greater space for the study of psychology and Islam are becoming more concrete now that this study is included in the curriculum set by various universities. Because several universities have offered Islamic psychology courses and have even begun to open specialisations in Islamic psychology studies, inevitably, discussions about the curriculum and patterns of integration of psychology and Islam are the main topics. For the sake of the above interests, both national and international seminars or conferences began to emerge. Several seminars and conferences discussed the inclusion of Islamic psychology studies into the curriculum and focused on several topics: (1) formal recognition of Islamic psychology discourse, (2) the occurrence of intensive dissemination of Islamic psychology thought so that it will give birth to enthusiasts or new thinkers of Islamic psychology and (3) the recognition of certain institutions that will facilitate obtaining support from other institutions for the discourse of Islamic psychology (Zarkasih et al. 2019).

However, the debate that arises in getting the pattern of integration of Islamic psychology in the curriculum is about whether to create separate courses or include them in existing courses. The first pattern is by forming their courses.

The advantage of this method is the awareness of placing Islam as a paradigm. By making Islam a paradigm, all concepts presented to students are based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. This method will get optimal results if the discussion is mature (Haque et al. 2016). The second pattern is by incorporating Islamic views into certain courses. This means that the view of Islam is inserted as a small part of an advantage, namely the existence of an Islamic perspective on various aspects of human life. However, this method is difficult to realise, because it uses the paradigm of modern science, not the Islamic paradigm. If this happens, there will be substantial confusion regarding the Islamic perspective. The debate above is still going on today. Seasoned Indonesian psychologists still have different opinions in determining which pattern is more effective in internalising Islamic psychology into the teaching curriculum in higher education institutions (Zulkarnain & Herdianti 2019).

### Problems of the developmental studies of Islamic psychology

Some problems hinder the expansion of Islamic psychology studies in Southeast Asia. Some of them are (1) theoretical integration rather than applicable, (2) methodological problems and (3) polarisation of the ability of Muslim psychologists. The explanation for each problem is presented next.

#### Theoretical integration rather than applicable integration

Efforts to make Islamic psychology as *rahmatan lil alamin*, of course, require a lengthy procedure involving both hard and clever work. As with the Islamisation of other sciences, Islamic psychology must have a good theoretical concept and be useful in creating a better human life. But the question then is, 'has Islamic psychology gone out of these theoretical matters into an action that has a real impact?'

The preceding question is particularly intriguing, given that Islam's inclusion in the scientific structure of psychology is ideally extremely action-oriented. Talking about Islamic psychology is pointless unless it results in actual outcomes. As a result, Islamic psychological theory is only useful if it can be applied to a variety of situations (Nashori 2005; Rusdi & Subandi 2020; Zaharuddin 2013).

Responding to this, a leader of the scientific integration team in UIN Yogyakarta stated:

'So far, the development of Islamic psychology, which is considered a new school of psychology, is still circling in theoretical concepts, rather than concrete and applicable ones. This should be a challenge for experts to further socialise and ground Islamic psychology in real life levels.' (Interview translated by DR)

The findings of Nurlena Rifa'i's research supported this argument (Rifai, Fauzan & Bahrissalim 2014) that only two of the 57 Islamic universities or institutes have attempted to apply the concept of scientific integration in the development of syllabi, lesson plans, learning processes

and academic culture, whilst others, such as UIN Bandung, Jakarta and Makasar, have stopped at the normative-philosophical level.

A director of the Islamic Science Institute of the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) agreed with this fact, as did an expert and professor in the Islamic psychology integration. He emphasised the challenges that arise when Islamic knowledge is put into practice. According to him:

'Even though so far Islamic psychology is undergoing many significant developments, it has not yet reached the idealised level. The discussion of Islamic psychology has only touched a philosophical level and has not yet entered the level of its application. If this discourse stagnates in the philosophical debate, it is difficult to expect practical benefits. For this reason, the younger generation needs to be more involved to be able to play a role in supporting the development of Islamic psychology, so that it can become an alternative approach in the psychological environment, both at the national and international levels.' (Interview translated by DR)

Some of the statements above indicate that whilst the topic of Islamic psychology studies in Malaysia and Indonesia has progressed in terms of academic discourse, nothing has been done in terms of practical application.

#### Methodological problems

One of the big problems in the study of Islamic psychology is the methodology used by Muslim psychologists in formulating theories (Abu-Raiya & Pargament 2011; Anas et al. 2013; Bastaman 2011). This problem is important to discuss because according to modern psychologists, one of the requirements for building science is the accuracy of its methodology. A theory will be tested for reliability if the reality on the ground supports it. Unfortunately, Islamic psychology is seen as still struggling with the use of test kits adapted from Western theories, without questioning the validity of the theories behind them. If Islamic psychology is considered a practical science, then the position of the test tool becomes the benchmark for its existence. Ironically, Islamic psychology does not yet have a unique test tool in measuring certain criteria. Islamic psychology has not been able to construct its own truly Islamic test kits (Amiq 2008; Anas et al. 2013; Ismail & Anwar 2017; Nashori 2005).

Responding to the above shortcomings, several seminars, discussions and conferences were held. Some of the meetings debated the formulation of the Islamic psychology method. Some argue that Islamic science does not only work in observable areas but also works in conceivable and unconceivable areas. Because of that, the ways of understanding the data or facts themselves in Islamic science are very diverse.

According to this group, whilst modern science believes that the 'senses' are the most objective tool in observing natural phenomena and realities, according to the perspective of

Islamic psychology, this tool has very limited capabilities. The senses can only observe reality that can be observed sensually (conceivable area). To observe the conceivable and unconceivable areas (transcendental-spiritual things such as the reality of spirits or ecstatic experiences), it needs another method outside the scientific method, namely *kasyaf* [intuition] (Faridah 2016; Mujib 2005; Purwanto 2007).

It can be said elaborately that Islamic psychology uses a more diverse method than Western science using the scientific method. Islamic psychology does not only use senses and reason in formulating a concept but also strategically uses several methods at once. Islamic psychology uses observational methods and empirical experimental methods for spiritual experiments that are recognised in Islam, including *qalb* and revelation. In Islamic science, all the various methods are considered legitimate ways to know nature in their respective fields of application (Alizi 2005; Bakar 2016; Sulaiman & Syakarofath 2018; Ushama 2011).

Responding to the above argument, Muslim psychologists themselves questioned: 'can this intuition be accepted by the scientific community, Muslim or non-Muslim, as a tool for understanding reality? And how to measure the accuracy of the truth?' (Result of an interview with a senior lecturer at the Islamic Science Institute, USIM, Malaysia). This question implies the hesitation of Muslim psychologists to use methods outside the scientific method that have been manifested so far. This can be demonstrated in the fields of psychological study and diagnosis. At the theoretical level, case studies undertaken by numerous Muslim experts attempt to blend Western psychology ideas with Islam. However, when making the research instrument, they were still hesitant and finally returned to download the results of previous research which were considered permanent, so that the theoretical framework had no connection with other research instruments (Nurhayani 2016; Zaharuddin 2013).

From the methodological debate above, it can be understood that the idea of psychology by taking the perspective of Islamic studies is still being developed. The method of Islamic psychology as mentioned above still needs to be continuously tested until it is found, which is considered to be a strong foundation in its development efforts.

### **Polarisation of the ability of Muslim psychologists**

Attempts to build a discipline of Islamic psychology that is widely accepted, as well as the existence of Islamic psychology in Southeast Asia, are difficult. According to the findings of a documentation research and brief interviews with experts in the field of Islamic psychology, it is found that this difficulty occurs because of human resource problems engaged in Islamic psychology studies, which unintentionally present polarisation of ability because of their educational background (Abdullah & Riyanto 2014; Abidin 2017; Gumindari 2011).

On one side, those with a purely psychological educational background are generally experts in the fields of psychological theories and are very experienced in their practice, but they do not have a strong religious knowledge base. Despite the fact that they tend to start engage with Islamic psychological topics, they still use existing modern psychology as a tool for analysis, however they include Islamic views on psychology. As a result, their analysis of Islam is less in-depth when they comment on or make judgements regarding material components of Islam (Zaharuddin 2013).

On the other side, they have a religious educational foundation (Islamic studies), but not enough psychological expertise (Abdullah & Riyanto 2014). This group is made up of people who aim to understand Islam's classical repertoire (at-Turats al-Islami) in order to develop Islamic psychology. They have access to Arabic literature that contains classic Muslim philosophers' views on psychology, such as Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawaih, al-Balkhi and others. They take their sources directly from Islam's classical repertoire and contextualise it through the perspective of modern psychology. Because of their strong religious educational background, when they attempt to integrate psychology and Islam, the ideas from Islamic studies that are linked to psychological studies are frequently irrelevant (too normative, theoretical and less applicable). Even if their thoughts are present in this topic, the psychological analysis is superficial and does not address the concerns highlighted, making the differentiation appear rigid, partial and even distant from the Islamisation of science's idealism.

The above reality is confirmed by Islamic psychology experts in Indonesia and Malaysia. Fuat Nashori, in his book *Agenda Psikologi Islami*, showed the polarisation of the ability of Islamic psychology scientists who are still fragmented by the scientific mainstream. However, according to him, there are still positive and negative values. On the positive side, the expansion of Islamic psychology studies in Indonesia will be richer with perspectives, but the drawbacks can occur if there is less networking, completeness and dialogue amongst them (Nashori 2002).

The same thing happened in universities in Malaysia. A lecturer of the Kolej Universiti Islam Antarbangsa Selangor (KUIS), Malaysia stated that:

'Around Malaysian universities, there appears to be a significant separation between KUIS Psychology scientists and other universities, such as the University of Kuala Lumpur (UKM) and the University of Malaya (UM). Psychology lecturers at KUIS are considered to have a conservative, normative mindset, including within the scope of the integration of psychology and Islam. Meanwhile, those from UKM and UM are seen as more scientific and non-conservative. They do not want the integration model that is applied in KUIS.' (Interview translated by DR)

Apart from the above debates, scientists who have a knowledge base of psychology should be balanced with adequate mastery of religious insight. Conversely, religious

scientists who are concerned with the disciplines of philosophy and Sufism should be equipped with a sharp mastery of Western psychological analysis. Because when this scientific polarisation is sharp, dichotomic patterns of thought here and there will still occur. Islamic studies-based scholars, for example, still focus on normative approaches, whilst those based on Western psychology when integrating with Islam are mostly concerned with their understanding of Western psychology.

### Prospects of the developmental studies of Islamic psychology

Based on a literature review of the current development of Islamic psychology studies and observations in several universities in the two countries, it turns out that there are quite good prospects. The indication can be seen from the following transformations:

#### From formulation phase towards research phase

Nashori (1996) mapped the phases carried out by Muslim psychologists in integrating psychology and Islam. When sequenced, there are four phases of development: (1) the enchanted phase, the phase in which Muslim psychologists feel in awe of the reliability of modern psychological theories. They fully believe that modern psychology can help them explain scientifically the condition of Muslims or Islamic teachings. They use modern psychological theories or concepts as an analytical tool to discuss various problems of Muslims. (2) The criticism phase, the phase in which Muslim psychologists use critical analysis on modern psychological theories. Several differences and contradictions between Islam and psychology are sharpened. In this phase, Muslim psychologists begin to realise that the concepts of modern psychology are highly questionable, doubtful and contain fundamental weaknesses. (3) The formulation and research phase is a phase of awareness that is more crystallised amongst Muslim psychologists about the need to present a psychological concept with Islamic insight. At this phase, there is an attempt to formulate the Islamic view of humans, then the theories developed by Muslim psychologists go through the formulation process and need to be tested for their reliability in discussing what happens in real life. (4) The application phase begins with the application of Islamic psychological concepts in human life and the use of research results to solve various problems that occur in human life (Nashori 1996).

Based on the phase mapping above, the development of Islamic psychology studies in Southeast Asia is in the formulation and research phase. This can be seen from some of the literature produced by Muslim psychologists who have tried to formulate and research various Islamic psychology concepts in Indonesia and Malaysia (Ampuno 2020; Diana 2015; Gumindari & Nafi'a 2019a, 2019b; Gumindari, Nafi'a & Jamaluddin 2019; Hairina & Mubarak 2020; Halimah 2020; Hartati & Wae 2019; Istiningtyas 2014; Noor 2010; Rusdi 2017; Saefudin 2018; Shahabi & Sharbaf

2015; Sham 2016; Skinner 2010; Ulfa 2015; Ushama 2011; Warsah & Uyun 2019; Yani 2013; Yudianti 2013).

#### From comparative study pattern towards developing concepts of psychology based on Islam

Nashori (1997) stated that there are four patterns used by Muslim psychology scientists to produce Islamic psychology. The first pattern is to explain the problems of Islamic teachings or Muslims using psychological concepts. The second pattern is to compare the concept of humanity from Islamic scholars with the view of humanity from modern psychologists. The third pattern is to provide an Islamic perspective on modern psychological concepts. The fourth pattern is to develop knowledge of the human soul which is based on the Islamic worldview.

Amongst the four patterns of the development of Islamic psychology mentioned above, Indonesia and Malaysia seem in the phase of transformation of study patterns from comparative study towards developing concepts of psychology based on Islam. In line with the phases discussed earlier, Indonesian and Malaysian Muslim psychologists have tried to build a psychology concept based on Islam. The use of an Islamic point of view is carried out with the consideration that Islam is a source of guidelines, views and values of life for humans. Besides, there are many concepts about humans in the Qur'an. Islam is a source of knowledge. Islam can be seen as an analytical tool to dissect modern psychological theories. This effort is quite challenging because there are attempts to present a new perspective in understanding humans psychologically, including efforts to formulate the human concept, the concept of *insan kamil* and so on.

Amongst the works of Malaysian and Indonesian Muslim psychologists is Abdul Razak's (1997) *Human Nature: A Comparative Study between Western and Islamic Psychology*. This work tries to compare the concept of humanity, personality and human behaviour between modern psychology and Islamic psychology. This comparison is an attempt by Abdul Razak to produce Islamic psychology, but what happens is more like a similarity process, namely only equating the concept of psychology with concepts originating from Islam. Muslim psychologists may find this context to be trapped in a tendency to view concepts as comparable or equal to one another. On the other hand, Mujib's (2005a) work on *Personality in Islamic Psychology* tries to formulate the basic concept of human personality which 'should be', not 'what it is', from the behaviour of Muslims. Through Mujib's thoughts, the perspective of Islamic psychology has distinctive nuances and colours in building the concept of personality compared to philosophical, theological and sociological approaches. Similarly, the work of Malaysian Muslim psychologists such as Alias's (2008a,b) *Psychology of Consciousness from an Islamic Perspective* and his collection of writings in the book *Biological Psychology from an Islamic Perspective* indicate that there is an early stage of formulation regarding the Islamic psychology

concept. In this book, the author tries to formulate concepts and theories about consciousness, soul and reason. The formulation of concepts or theories contained in the book is still a human philosophical view and has not moved in a certain context, for example, in the world of work, social life (society), family life, education and so on.

These efforts have been proven by the development of various concepts based on an Islamic perspective, such as the concepts of learning psychology (Alias & Majid 2015), motivation (Alias & Samsudin 2005), human cognitive development (Arifin 2016), contemplation (Badri 2018), *fitrah* (Al-Afify 2018), controlling emotion (Diana 2015), human personality (Gumiandari 2011; Haque 2020; Hasanah 2018), hardiness (Istiningtyas 2013), humour (Istiningtyas 2014), forgiveness (Khasan 2017), hesitating (Masroom & Abd Rahman 2015), worry (Nugraha 2020), responsibility (Rochmah 2016), sex education (Rusdi 2012), character building (Saefudin 2018), gratitude (Rusdi 2016), *rida* (Rusdi 2017), positive thinking (Rusydi 2012), the concept of *ruh* (Samad 2015), critical thinking (Sulaiman & Syakarofath 2018), honesty (Suud 2017), anger (Wigati 2013), dreaming (Yuminah 2018), managing stress (Yuwono 2010) and so forth.

#### **From normative-cognitive approach towards substantive-Sufistic approach**

At the beginning of the study of Islamic psychology, and even today, there are still Muslim psychologists who tend to give a touch of Islamic norms to the concepts of Western modern psychology. This can be seen from the scientific works written by Indonesian and Malaysian Muslim psychologists. Alias and Samsudin (2005) tried to provide legitimacy for the Islamic concept of motivation in building the modern psychological motivation theory. Likewise, Istiningtyas (2013) discusses the hardiness personality which incorporates Islamic views into the concept of hardiness in Western modern psychology, so that the resulting concept is more religious. Likewise, the concept of the psychology of Islamic development written by Hasan (2008) still uses developmental concepts from Western psychological treasures which are given Islamic values.

The conventional method used by Muslim psychologists in the context of the Islamisation of psychology is not to start from zero, but to assemble concepts in a 'patchwork' and filter the various weaknesses of Western psychology (Bastaman 2011). This process of psychology's Islamisation, as compared by Badri (1979), is like babies mixing with mud in a large tub. Muslim psychologists do not need to completely dispose of the contents of the tub, but what they need to do is to dispose of the mud and keep the babies. Muslim psychologists only need to discard the wrong sciences, then direct the parts of the correct sciences to conform to Islamic values. Furthermore, according to him, everything is not easy, and there is a long process that needs to be passed until finally many people accept our idea of Islamic knowledge (Badri 1979).

The approach built by Muslim psychologists above is more normative and tries to use a cognitive approach through a process of rationalisation and filtering of modern psychology

concepts with Islamic religious norms which are full of psychological aspects (Bastaman 2011). However, further developments are more substantive-Sufistic approaches. Some Muslim psychologists do not always want to be trapped in justification or verseisation approaches, but more than that, the concepts and ideas of Islamic psychology must transform to eliminate secularisation views that have ignored the human nature towards more substantive thinking, the content of Islamic studies departing from various Islamic treasures, al-Qur'an, hadith and also Islamic Sufism, which is rich in human psychiatric and spiritual elements (Abidin 2017). This can be seen when discussing the theory of human personality. Mujib (1999), Mujib (2005a) and Mujib and Mudzakir (2001) were not trapped in the Western concept of personality theory, but through their creativity and seriousness in conducting Islamic literature studies – al-Qur'an, hadith, Sufism and others – they can discuss the personality of a Muslim. Likewise, the formulation of learning psychology written by Alias and Majid (2015) and the formulation of psychological measures such as gratitude (Rusdi 2016), positive thinking (Rusydi 2012) and others have started to move towards a substantive-Sufistic approach (Susanty 2018). From this explanation, it can be concluded that Muslim psychologists in the two countries have begun to focus on the substance of Islamic studies, which indeed depart from various Islamic cultural treasures: the Qur'an, hadith and also Islamic Sufism, which is rich in elements of human psychology and spirituality.

## **Conclusions**

This research shows that there are three problems in Islamic psychology developmental studies in Southeast Asia: (1) the debate on the subject still focuses on theoretical integration and metaphysical levels rather than applicative ones; (2) methodological problems; and (3) polarisation of the capacity of Muslim psychologists. Apart from the problems, the development of Islamic psychology studies has good prospects. These indications can be seen from the following transformations: (1) from the formulation process to the analysis phase; (2) from comparative study patterns towards developing concepts of psychology based on Islam; and (3) from the normative-cognitive approach towards the substantive-Sufistic approach. Through this research, it is anticipated that strategic efforts from Muslim psychologists are needed to collaborate and build networks to design further targeted studies to solve the numerous problems that occur at ontological, epistemological or axiological levels around the integration of psychology and Islam.

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## Authors' contributions

The authors contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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