

The Concept of Continuous Improvement from Perspectives of Hamka

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ABSTRACT

Continuous improvement is the concept that has been extensively implemented towards the organization around the whole world. Continuous improvement or Kaizen has been the key to some developed nation such as Japan to achieve competitive successes. Islam is a religion that compromises all aspect of human life and thus continuous improvement is one of those aspects. Therefore, this paper will elaborate on the concept of continuous improvement from Islamic perspective by delving into the concept of continuous improvement that has been outlined by HAMKA in his commentary of the Quran entitled "Tafsir al-Azhar". HAMKA was a prominent figure and Islamic thinker who contributed in various fields and his commentary of the Quran "Tafsir al Azhar" has been analysed from different perspectives. This paper uses the content analysis method. The emphasis will focus on the introduction of the figure, his commentary and interpretation in connection with continuous improvement.

Keywords: Continuous Improvement, Kaizen, Islam, HAMKA, Tafsir al-Azhar

1. INTRODUCTION

Continuous improvement has been major discussion around the world since 1980s. The reason for this is that since 1980s, the marketplace has witnessed an increased pressure from the customer demanding for low cost quality products and competitor that focused on reducing the waste and speeding up the production in order to maintain competitiveness (Jagdeep & Harwinder, 2013). However, during this competitive period, Japanese has achieved its competitive success due to concept of Kaizen which refer to continuous improvement [10]. according to [15] quality culture and way of thinking of the Japanese people contributed greatly to this achievement and therefore to implement Kaizen, the culture itself must adapt to it. Another point to consider, Kaizen is directly linked with Zen Buddhism in the aspect of continuously improving. Zen Buddhism emphasis its followers for continuing striving for enlightenment is quite familiar with Kaizen philosophy on continuously improving all aspect of life [14]. Since Kaizen was linked and originated from religion, the author encouraged to examine another

religion that estimated by 2030, the number of its followers will be 2.2 billion people in this world [7] which is Islam.

Muslim consider Islam not only as religion of faith but also a unique way of life. This uniqueness has been elaborated by Islamic scholars [12] which stated that Islamic way of life is based on a unique concept of man's place in the universe which encompasses of both individual lives as well as society in a way to ensure that the Kingdom of God may really be established on earth. [12] added that there is no clear distinction in Islam between spiritual and physical aspect and therefore both has been equally important in Muslim way of life.

This unique way of life originated from the sources of knowledge in Islam which are Al Quran, Hadith of Prophet Muhammad, *ijma'* and *Qiyas*. Al Quran has been the primary sources of knowledge in Islam. However, according to one of the most influential Islamic scholars [3], Al Quran cannot be interpreted without referring to Hadith and Exegesis of the Al Quran due to prohibition by Prophet Muhammad SAW not to interpret Quran based on own opinion. Therefore, in order to understand, elaborate and interpret Al Quran, exegesis and Hadith of Prophet

Muhammad SAW must be referred. One of the well-known exegesis in Islam written by a scholar originated from Malay Archipelago which known as *Tafsir Al Azhar*. *Tafsir Al Azhar* has been written by Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah also known as HAMKA. Therefore, this research will focus on the continuous improvement based on the HAMKA perspectives written in *Tafsir al Azhar*.

2. METHODOLOGY

The method of this study is library research using various sources of data. These includes primary sources of knowledge in Islam itself which is Al Quran and the exegesis of Al Quran which in this study is *Tafsir al Azhar*. Also included data gathering technique involve documentation study regarding HAMKA and *Tafsir al Azhar*. Research methods used to examine the data are qualitative and consist of approaches of content analyses.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Introduction to HAMKA

HAMKA is known as scholars, reformist and preachers not only in Malay Archipelago but also other part of the world. HAMKA has been considered as multi-dimensional Islamic thinker [9]. The total number of books that has been produced by HAMKA is 113 books including the famous literatures such as *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*

In 1964, HAMKA life suffers downturn where HAMKA was arrested by “Orde Rama” regime which was presided by President Soekarno on multiple issues [1]. To make matters worse, all books written by HAMKA has been banned in Indonesia at that time [8]. However, in that difficult period of detention, HAMKA succeeded in completing exegesis of Al Quran which is known as *Tafsir al Azhar*.

3.2. Tafsir al Azhar

There are two main reason behind HAMKA initiative to produce *Tafsir al Azhar*. One of the reasons is that to assist Indonesian youngsters who committed into learning Al Quran but was unimpeded due to language barrier. The other reason for this initiative is that to assist preachers and teachers to improve the method of preaching which to ensure the

impact are significant [8]. Therefore, this exegesis has been produced and publish in 1968.

There are several aspects of the exegesis of Al Quran that differentiate between each exegesis of Al Quran. One of the most important aspects are the methodology of interpretation. The methodology of HAMKAs’ interpretation of Quranic verses has been a major discussion till today. According to Avansyah (2016), *Tafsir al-Azhar* can be classified as *tafsîr bi al-ma’ tsûr* based on its source which interpret Quranic verses using Quranic verses itself and Hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW. However, Avansyah (2016) also mentioned that *Tafsir al Azhar* can also be classified as *tafsîr bi al-ra’y* meaning that HAMKA interpret Quranic verses based on the interpretation of Islamic scholars.

HAMKA interact both of this method with the various common approach such as history, languages, interaction between socio-culture and many more (Avansyah, 2016). Another point to consider, based on [6] research, not only HAMKA interpret Quranic verses based on the interpretation of Islamic scholar, but also non-Muslim scholars such Charles Darwin which HAMKA criticized the theory of evolution based on exegesis of *Surah al Hijr* verse 26. Other than that, [6] mentioned that HAMKA also interpret Quranic verse based on scientific facts. Both [6] and Avansyah (2016) agreed that the method of using various methodology of interpretation of Quranic verses is what makes *Tafsir al Azhar* is a masterpiece and suitable to be referred regarding contemporary issues.

3.3. Continuous Improvement from perspectives of HAMKA

Continuous improvement was one of contemporary concept that started blooming during the 1980s. To begin with, this paper will elaborate on the continuous improvement from Islamic perspective. There are two terms that has been linked with the concept of continuous improvement which are *islah* and *ihsan*.

According to [13], the term *islah* had been used by Malaysian company named JCorp in defining the concept of continuous improvement. However, according to Al Talib (1991), *islah* does took up the

meaning of improvement but the true meaning of *islah* is reform. Al Talib (1991) also mentioned that since *islah* is reform, *ihsan* took the meaning of improvement. The term of *ihsan* as continuous improvement also mentioned by [4] and [2] which stated that the concept of *ihsan* has been mentioned in the hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW as the concept of continuous improvement.

[8], categorized *ihsan* into two categories which are *ihsan* towards Allah SWT and *ihsan* towards fellow humans. However, according to [11], the concept of *ihsan* towards fellow humans mentioned by HAMKA also involved between the individuals itself to continuously improve self-quality, work quality and further to achieve human perfections. Therefore, author will explore Tafsir Al Azhar regarding the concept of *ihsan*.

3.4. The concept of Ihsan in Tafsir al Azhar

3.4.1. Surah Al Baqarah verse 195

Based on Tafsir al Azhar, the term do good or ‘*Wa ahsinu*’ in Arabic encompasses the meaning of always do good and always improving. HAMKA also insist that this term originated word the word *ihsan* contained a substantial meaning within the term itself. According to HAMKA, the meaning of *ihsan* as to worship to Allah SWT as of Allah SWT is visible in front of the worshippers. Due to the basis meaning of *ihsan*, HAMKA argue that Muslim must continuously improve its quality of *iman* and quality of worship towards Allah SWT. Another point to consider, HAMKA also mentioned that since the context of this verse refer to struggle in the path of Allah SWT, therefore, other aspects that must be continuously improve was the aspect regarding warfare. HAMKA elaborate on one of the aspects of warfare that must be continuously improve is technology. For this elaboration HAMKA mentioned on the example of difference tactical between the period of Prophet Muhammad SAW and Khalid al Walid also the nature of modern warfare which is equipment that are five years that above has been considered outdated. HAMKA also mentioned on the Arab-Israel crisis that which resulted in Arab countries losing to Israel due to outdated tactics and technicalities. HAMKA wrote Tafsir al Azhar during the period of conflict between

the Arab Worlds and Israel (Avansyah, 2016). Therefore, based on Surah Al Baqarah verse 195, the continuous improvement HAMKA suggested compromise of spiritual aspect such as *iman*, *ibadah* and material aspect such as technology, equipment, methods and tactics.

3.4.2. Surah An Nisa verse 146

In this verse, HAMKA linked the concept of *ihsan* with the concept of *tawbah* (repentance). HAMKA argue that *tawbah* can be achieved if it was followed by *ihsan* which is continuously improving because according to HAMKA, *tawbah* was only intention coming from the heart but *ihsan* is the action to finally perfected the *tawbah*. In this verse, HAMKA suggested that Muslim must continuously improve Muslim way of life and improving the devastated soul. The example HAMKA mentioned to improve Muslim way of life is that Muslim that does not observe praying 5 times a day must started to pray first, then continuously improve by praying at the beginning of its time. The other example HAMKA mentioned is that Muslim must start *sedekah* first then continuously improve its action by performing *sedekah* without having recognition by others. Based on this verse, HAMKA mentioned again that the concept of *ihsan* must also be continuously improved Muslim way of life including relationship with other fellow humans

3.4.3. Surah Al Nahl verse 128

HAMKA interpreted this verse by linked the concept of *ihsan* with the concept of *taqwa*. HAMKA mentioned that *taqwa* is the garment of the heart while *ihsan* is the body action. *Taqwa* it the reason for Muslim to be *ihsan*. Again, in this verse, HAMKA mentioned that *ihsan* took up two meaning which do good and improving. Based in this verse, HAMKA mentioned that *ihsan* must be holistic whether *ihsan* in the occupation and profession and also *ihsan* towards other people.

4. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the concept of *ihsan* must be explore and develop to introduce a holistic concept of continuous improvement from Islamic perspectives that compromise the spiritual aspect such as *iman* and

ibadah and material aspect such as occupation and technologies. This eventually become a core idea on producing a more appropriate management concept that can be applied to Muslim all around the world so that it will be benefitted Muslim in this world and in hereafter.

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