



# Muslim Understanding of Pragmatism and Its Application in Malaysia: A Critical Study

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**Abstract.** This concept paper discusses the ideology of pragmatism. Globalization has exceptionally played an important role in every area of human life, especially in the cultural and religious dimensions. Apart from that, globalization is increasingly affecting Muslims' life. Along with this, pragmatism, one of the modern ideologies, is also affecting Muslims' life. Pragmatism has become one of the important issues nowadays. Some people practice it in their daily life without knowing the suitability of this ideology from an Islamic perspective. The rapid progress of media and technology has changed the lifestyle of people to become more modern across the world, including Malaysia. The changing of the lifestyle has led Muslim people to be influenced by the pragmatism ideology. Therefore, we need to analyze what kind of pragmatism that is suitable for Muslim from Islamic Perspective and Muslim scholar's point of view. A set of in-depth interview questions was instrumented for collecting data from the respondents on their thought and application of pragmatism in Malaysia. The result of this study revealed most of respondents claim there are some aspects of pragmatism that can be applied by Muslim because for them Islam stands for pragmatic decisions. It is suggested that there is a need to understand better the actual practice of pragmatism before get influenced.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism · Islamic Perspective · Muslim life

## 1 Introduction

Nowadays, most people have more freedom in every aspect of their life. They are more focused on undertaking pragmatic measures to their perspective to achieve the objectives and results they aim for. Pragmatism being a famous ideology in the modern world has become very significant. People think it is important to be pragmatic in each aspect of life such as politics, state and especially in terms of education. Today, pragmatism is regarded as a technique to find the answers to the questions of the ever changing world and needs, especially in the Muslim community.

It encourages people to think in a free, liberal and non-sceptical way about everything. Apart from that, people think it produces good practices and results as well as creates new beneficial values for people. In this way, this ideology has influenced Muslim people

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and liberated them from the real Islamic worldview and values. It also creates confusion in a Muslim's life (Kamal Azmi 2016). Other than that, modern lifestyle has brought a new reform to a Muslim's life. Some scholars think it is relevant for Muslims to practice pragmatism. They can deal pragmatically with contemporary issues. According to them, most people depend on the concept of rationalism and empiricism and pragmatism. There are some other Muslims who think rationalism, empiricism and pragmatism are contradictory to the teachings of Islam. On the contrary, some other people think that pragmatism can be accepted depending on the interest and action of people. Therefore, they take it for granted and later adopt it in their practices of daily life.

## 2 Previous Studies

Numbers of studies have been conducted by Islamic scholars on the issue of pragmatism, but there is no clear explanation on the details of which areas and fields that pragmatism has influenced Muslims, and whether it can be applied or not by them. However, the author has managed to review several previous studies about this ideology, which will be explained in the next paragraphs. Many of the articles concentrate on the education system. Some of these will briefly described in order to foster better understanding on the issue at hand.

Aminuddin Hassan, Asmawati Suhid, Norhasni Zainal Abidin, Habsah Ismail, and Haziyah Husin, in their book entitled, "The Role of Islamic Philosophy of Education in Aspiring Holistic Learning" (Hassan 2010) mentioned that the concept of the philosophy of Islamic education can be explained from the perspective of philosophy which includes pragmatism, metaphysic and axiology. It was also discussed in the book whether pragmatism can be applied or not by Muslims. Additionally, the authors also explained the importance of education on the spiritual and physical aspects of Muslims. This book is used as a reference on the implementation of pragmatism from an Islamic perspective. According to the authors this book offers a comprehensive and critical analysis of philosophical issues and implementation in education from the Islamic viewpoint.

Jeffrey Guhin (Jeffrey Guhin 2020), in his article entitled "The Boundaries of Pragmatism in Muslim Education: Comparing the Islamic Pedagogies of Sayyid Qutb and Fethullah Gulen" explained the ideas and approaches of the two the most important Muslim intellectuals in terms of Islamic pedagogy, namely Sayyid Qutb and Fethullah Gulen. This article is used as guidance in understanding the basis of Islamic education and the philosophy of education. It also can be used as a foundation for comparative study on the concept of pragmatism in teaching and how it relates to Islamic education.

According to this articles that deal with pragmatism from, Yusrat Hussain, Niaz Muhammad Aajiz and Muhammad Idrees (Hussain 2019), conducted a comparative study of John Dewey and Muhammad Iqbal as Educationists which attempted at developing a good social institution from education and analyzing the methodology introduced by John Dewey and Iqbal who have different background and approaches.

Based on the detailed analysis on their perspectives and approaches regarding the different aspects of the final aims of education, it was found that both of these scholars have their own value and cannot be justified to judge the value and soundness of other individual's views as Iqbal's ideas is similarly significant compared to the pragmatic approach of Dewey, who is a modern educational thinker of the highest rank.

Muhammad Iqbal Chawla and Aman Ullah (Muhammad Iqbal Chawla 2018), presented a paper entitled “The Politics of Pragmatism in Pakistan: A Case Study of the Pakistan People’s Party” which analysed the aspect of political pragmatism in Pakistan and analysis of political parties in Pakistan. The paper provided some alternatives with regards to pragmatism that can help political parties in Pakistan to develop the country.

Ulrika Martensson (Ulrika Martensson 2015), in his writing of “Islamic Order: Semiotics and Pragmatism in the Ikhwanul Muslimin?” explained the framework of Hassan al-Banna’s political pragmatism by exploring the key concept of the constitution of the Ikhwanul Muslimin. Additionally, the paper examined the hermeneutical dimensions from Hassan al-Banna’s perspective and the concept of the Islamic order in uniting Muslim community. However, more research, interviews and comparative hermeneutics are required to test the present hypothesis of Ikhwanul Muslimin as the embodiment of pragmatism.

Zaid Ibrahim (Zaid Ibrahim 2020), who authored the article of “Pragmatism as a Guidance for Policy Makers” describing the political importance and benefits of pragmatism asserted that it is actually a good idea for political environment to be pragmatic rather than being tied to any doctrine or fixed principle related to political beliefs. This brief review of some articles highlights the views of Muslim scholars on pragmatism. However, this issue requires detail research. The following questions may be ascertained.

### **3 Research Questions**

The proposed research will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics and features of pragmatism from the Western worldview?
2. What is pragmatism from an Islamic perspective?
3. What are the views of Muslim scholar’s pragmatism from ideological and educational point of views?
4. How pragmatism can be applicable from ideological and educational points of views?
5. What are the pragmatic aspects which are practice in Malaysia by Muslims in the field of education?

### **4 Research Objectives**

The objectives of the intended research are:

1. To study the characteristics and features of pragmatism from the perspective of the Western worldview.
2. To analyse this ideology from an Islamic perspective.
3. To explore the views of some Muslim scholars pragmatism from the ideological and educational point of views.
4. To describe how pragmatism is applicable from ideological and educational points of view.
5. To assess the pragmatic experiences of Muslims in Malaysian education.

## 5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will identify the effects of pragmatism on the lifestyle of Muslim people in Malaysia. There are several studies previously done by other researchers regarding this topic. However, these studies mainly focus on the concept of pragmatism and its founder. As far as the proposed research area is concerned, there are no studies focusing on the application and impacts of pragmatism on the lifestyle of Muslims in Malaysia. Therefore, this study will pursue this specific area or context that has not been explored by other researchers.

## 6 Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study consists of two aspects: the library research and interviews. This study is an analytical study on the impact of pragmatism on the lifestyle of Muslims in Malaysia. The data will be collected from the available primary and secondary sources such as published books, thesis, articles, encyclopaedia, journals, conference papers and Internet materials, as well as from some other relevant documents. An interview will be conducted involving the Muslims who have Islamic education background. It is an open-ended interview which is divided into three sections, namely the characteristics of pragmatism, pragmatism in Malaysia, and how pragmatism is applicable in the aspects of education. This is a descriptive and analytical study which aims at providing reliable and insightful conclusions regarding the issue of pragmatism and constructive suggestions to counter its impacts.

### 6.1 Figures and Tables

Four respondents will be selected comprises of people who have Islamic education background. The respondents are two lecturers and two teachers serving at lower and higher learning institutions in Malaysia. They are primarily selected based on their academic background and their degree of understanding of this topic.

### 6.2 In-Depth Interview

The researcher will conduct the interview herself and conclusions will be drawn after listening and analysing the recorded interviews. The same questions will be asked to the respondents irrespective of the institution they are serving. The questions are divided by three sections and are attached as below.

#### *Section 1: Characteristics of Pragmatism*

1. How would you define pragmatism?
2. Do you agree that pragmatism is a Western theory that has strong connection with the Western ideologies of liberalism, pluralism and secularism?
3. Freedom, modernism and non-absolute truth are the main elements of pragmatism. What are other main elements of pragmatism from a Malaysian perspective?

4. Some scholars have said that Muslims should be aware of the threats of pragmatism. What is your opinion on that?

### *Section 2: Pragmatism in Malaysia*

1. Current issues nowadays have led people to practice pragmatism in tackling certain issues in Malaysia. What is your comment on that?
2. During the Covid pandemic, Muslim people cannot go to mosque for prayer and need to keep the distance if we are allowed to pray. Is this situation can be described as pragmatic? What is your opinion?
3. There are Muslims in Malaysia who argue that pragmatism is the best way to deal with current issues in Malaysia at the moment. What is your suggestion?

### *Section 3: Application of Pragmatism in Education*

1. Pragmatism can become a good alternative for students in terms of education?
2. Is it possible for the Malaysian education system to practice the ideas of pragmatism?
3. What would you suggest for a better understanding and practice of pragmatism for Muslim education in Malaysia?

## **7 Conclusion**

All these reviewed articles stress on the importance and significance of pragmatism in Muslims' life especially in the field of education. After thorough review of the relevant articles, it appears that so far, there is no single study focusing on how pragmatism can be implemented by Muslims in accordance to the Islamic principles. This study attempts to fill that gap in the literature.

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