

Navigating Academic Pursuits in the Middle East: Insights for Indonesian Muslim Students

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Abstract

This study provides information for Indonesian Muslim students who want to study in the Middle East. The Middle East is a major hub of Islamic knowledge, with a rich Islamic culture, customs, and teachings. Studying in this location allows students to expand their grasp of Islamic ideas and values, connecting theoretical and practical applications in their daily lives. The Middle East is known for its renowned scholars who provide hands-on learning experiences and mentorship, contributing to intellectual and spiritual growth. Students also benefit from substantial academic resources such as famous universities, libraries, and Islamic literature and manuscripts collections. This presentation's technique included considerable research, personal experiences, and encounters in Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey. The goal is to motivate and encourage Indonesian Muslim students to pursue their academic goals. In the end, seeking knowledge in the Middle East necessitates determination, endurance, cultural adaptation, and a dedication to personal and spiritual growth. The provision of free education and scholarships in the Middle East emphasizes the significance of education as a fundamental human right, with countries trying to increase access and create a more equitable society. Students must stay connected to their roots, seek guidance, and embrace opportunities to become their best version.

Keywords

globalization; islamic knowledge; middle east education; indonesian muslim students; academic pursuits; cultural adaptation; pursuit of knowledge



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INTRODUCTION

In this age of globalization, many Indonesian students are interested in studying in the Middle East. The Middle East is well-known as a center of Islamic knowledge, with a rich heritage of Islamic culture, traditions, and teachings. As a result, it is my pleasure to present an introduction that will guide Indonesian students who wish to continue their studies in the Middle East. Studying in the Middle East is extremely valuable for Muslim students in Indonesia. It provides a setting steeped in Islamic culture, knowledge, and rituals. The region offers a diversity of Islamic traditions, access to renowned thinkers, a plethora of academic resources, and a thriving Muslim community. Immersion in this Islamic environment has far-reaching repercussions for intellectual and spiritual development (Darlan et al., 2021).

Students can increase their understanding of essential Islamic principles and values by studying in the Middle East. They can comprehensively interact with Islamic teachings, going beyond theoretical knowledge and embracing practical application daily. This hands-on learning strengthens their faith and prepares students to apply Islamic teachings in their chosen fields of study and future undertakings. One big advantage of studying in the Middle East is the availability of eminent teachers. The region is well-known for its rich legacy of Islamic scholarship, which provides students with hands-on learning opportunities from experts in various fields. These scholars contribute knowledge, experience, and insights to the classroom, cultivating a profound appreciation for Islamic intellectual traditions while providing vital mentorship and assistance throughout the academic journey (Abdullah, 2017; Mourad, 2006).

Furthermore, the Middle East provides an abundance of essential academic materials for students. Prestigious institutions and libraries in the region have extensive collections of Islamic literature, manuscripts, and scholarly works, providing students with many reference materials to help them with their studies (Humphreys, 1991). This access to extensive resources enhances the educational experience and enables students to explore deeper into their areas of interest. Indonesian students can immerse themselves in a unique educational atmosphere rooted in Islamic traditions, engage with notable specialists, and access various academic resources by studying in the Middle East. This intensive experience improves their academic knowledge and strengthens their dedication to Islam, fostering personal and spiritual development.

METHOD

A thorough methodology was used to generate a qualitative written script for the motivating presentation at Al Kahfi Islamic School Batam on February 14, 2023, at 9:00 AM in Masjid Al Kahfi. Extensive study, meditation, observation, and a literature review provided important insights into the script. From 2007 to 2013, the speaker's personal experience and interactions with students in Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey served as main sources. From these sources, key themes such as resolve, resilience, cultural adaptation, and the pursuit of knowledge emerged and were masterfully incorporated into a logical structure. Personal experiences, struggles, and lessons learned were interwoven into the script to inspire and fascinate the audience. Language and tone were carefully chosen to resonate with the pupils while accounting for their level of comprehension. Thorough review and editing ensured that the script aligned with the seminar's objectives, resulting in a compelling and incisive message that stimulated Al Kahfi Islamic School students' academic aspirations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Praise Allah, the Most Merciful, for providing the opportunity to acquire and distribute knowledge about studying in the Middle East. The speaker, a prominent individual with a background in Islamic Studies, notably as a graduate of Madinah, paired with competence in

the coffee industry and a diversified educational path, takes great honor in delivering this lecture. The goal is to provide significant information and support to Indonesian Muslim students from Batam who wish to pursue Bachelor's degrees in Islamic studies or applied sciences in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, it narrated in the two *Sahihs*, from the companion Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyaan (may Allah be pleased with him), that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُفَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ

"Whoever Allah intends good for, He grants him understanding of the religion." (*Muttafaqun 'alaihi*)

This hadith should be deeply contemplated, as it is an important and noble saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him). In this hadith, we find the motivation to pursue religious knowledge and mention the virtue bestowed upon those to whom Allah grants success in seeking knowledge.

Importance of Studying in the Middle East

Studying in the Middle East is extremely important for Muslim students because of the unique setting profoundly steeped in Islamic culture, knowledge, and customs. The Middle East offers a rich tapestry of Islamic tradition, access to eminent scholars, extensive academic resources, and a lively Muslim society. This absorption in an Islamic environment has far-reaching ramifications for intellectual and spiritual development (Chejne, 1963). Students can strengthen their understanding of key Islamic concepts and values by studying in the Middle East. They can interact with Islamic teachings holistically, moving beyond academic knowledge and into the practical application of these concepts in daily life. This hands-on learning cultivates a deeper connection with their faith and allows students to apply Islamic ideals in their chosen fields of study and future aspirations.

One of the most important implications of studying in the Middle East is having access to renowned professors. The region is well-known for its rich tradition of Islamic study, and students have the opportunity to learn directly from masters in various fields. These scholars contribute a plethora of knowledge, experience, and insights to the classroom, allowing students to gain a profound respect for Islamic intellectual traditions while giving vital mentorship and guidance throughout their academic path (Rahman, 1982).

Furthermore, the Middle East provides a wealth of essential academic materials for students. Prestigious institutions and libraries in the region store huge collections of Islamic books, manuscripts, and research resources. Students can use these tools to supplement their education, conduct research, and broaden their intellectual horizons. The availability of such extensive resources increases their academic experience and equips them to contribute to the growth of Islamic study (Kamel, 2014).

In addition, the Middle East's strong Muslim community plays an important role in supporting intellectual and spiritual progress. Students' relationship to their faith is strengthened by involvement in a community that practices and upholds Islamic ideals. It

provides a friendly and motivating environment where students can engage in religious debates, participate in communal rites, and see how Islamic values are put into practice. This network provides support, collaboration, and lasting relationships far beyond academics (Maspul, 2022).

Finally, studying in the Middle East gives Muslim students a unique and transforming educational experience. It offers unrivaled access to eminent professors, extensive academic resources, and a vibrant Muslim society. This immersion in an Islamic environment improves students' comprehension of fundamental Islamic concepts and allows them to apply these principles in their chosen fields of study. By taking advantage of this opportunity, students can develop a strong connection to their faith, contribute to the progress of Islamic research, and positively impact their communities and the world at large.

Preparing for the Journey

1. Language Proficiency

Learning a foreign language offers significant cognitive and career benefits. Research has shown that language learning strengthens memory processes. The memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules in a foreign language requires the brain to encode and retrieve information, enhancing memory storage and recall (Jansen, 2022). Additionally, learning a foreign language improves focus and concentration. The cognitive demands of language learning require individuals to maintain attention and filter relevant information, leading to enhanced cognitive control (Bialystok et al., 2012).

Furthermore, language learning has been found to enhance both verbal and non-verbal intelligence. It improves language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing, while developing analytical and problem-solving abilities through visual cues (Sternberg, 2008). Moreover, research suggests that language learning can slow cognitive decline and reduce the risk of dementia. The mental stimulation and cognitive effort involved in learning and using a foreign language promote neuroplasticity and help maintain cognitive function with age (Alladi et al., 2013).

In addition to cognitive benefits, learning a foreign language opens up opportunities for career development. In today's globalized world, proficiency in a foreign language, particularly English, can give individuals a competitive edge in the job market (Dewaele & Li, 2021). It enables individuals to effectively communicate and collaborate with people from different cultural backgrounds, expanding their career prospects and facilitating international work opportunities.

Students must improve their language abilities beyond the base obtained in high school to properly engage in the academic curriculum and connect with peers and professors. Students should consider enhancing their English and Arabic skills in addition to the official language of the nation they wish to study, as these are extensively used languages in academic contexts in the Middle East. Language competency can be considerably improved by engaging in regular language practice, using language learning resources such as online courses or

language learning applications, and pursuing language exchange opportunities with native speakers (Gass et al., 2020).

A student from Indonesia, for example, who wants to study in Saudi Arabia can enroll in rigorous language classes focused on Arabic language skills. They can also participate in language exchange programs to engage with native Arabic speakers and practice their conversational abilities. Improving language skills will not only help students succeed academically, but will also allow them to fully immerse themselves in their chosen destination's cultural and social aspects.

2. Researching Institutions

It is worth emphasizing that free education and scholarships are provided in the Middle East by the concept that education is a fundamental human right. Various educational philosophies, notably human capital theory, support this approach. According to human capital theory, investing in education and creating human capital results in individual and societal benefits such as increased productivity, economic growth, and social development (Becker, 2009).

Free education and scholarships can be an effort to enhance educational access and equity in the Middle East, ensuring that individuals have the chance to pursue higher education regardless of their financial circumstances. This approach stresses the fundamental importance of education and its potential to empower individuals and contribute to society's progress.

On the other hand, thoroughly investigating and shortlisting reputable universities and colleges in the Middle East is an important stage in the preparatory process. Students should think about the curriculum, teacher quality, available facilities, and prospective scholarship opportunities. This is compatible with the rational choice theory, in which humans weigh the benefits and drawbacks of numerous options before making a decision (Simon, 1955).

For example, a student interested in Islamic studies could look into prestigious universities such as Al-Azhar University in Egypt or the Islamic University of Madinah in Saudi Arabia. They might look into the curriculum, faculty skills, and the availability of specialist research institutes or libraries in Islamic studies. Furthermore, students can look into scholarship options offered by these schools or external organizations to help them academically. Students may ensure that they choose institutions that correspond with their academic and career goals, giving them the resources and chances to achieve in their studies by completing thorough research and making informed judgments.

These creative ideas and examples emphasize the significance of language skills and extensive research in preparing for the adventure of studying in the Middle East. Students can improve their academic experience, embrace cultural immersion, and maximize their chances of success in their chosen field of study by concentrating on these aspects.

Navigating Academic Challenges

1. Adaptability and Cultural Sensitivity

Accepting cultural differences and adapting to the Middle Eastern academic environment is critical for academic achievement. Students should respect local customs, traditions, and norms while remaining true to their identity as Indonesian Muslims. Being open-minded, attempting to comprehend diverse points of view, and actively participating with the local community are all required. Cultural sensitivity promotes healthy interactions and a positive learning environment (Bennett, 1993).

For example, an Indonesian student studying in Qatar can participate in cultural exchange programs, visit local events, and engage in community service activities. By immersing themselves in the local culture, they can better understand the Middle Eastern way of life and form important connections with their peers. This adaptation and cultural sensitivity contribute to a great academic experience and build cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship.

2. Time Management and Study Skills

Creating good time management and study skills is critical to balance academic obligations, extracurricular activities, and personal growth. Students can use their institution's tools, such as time management and study skills classes or seminars. Seeking mentorship from senior students who have successfully negotiated the Middle Eastern academic system can also provide significant insights and direction (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010).

Organizing study groups or developing study partnerships with other students can also improve learning outcomes. Collaborative learning allows students to share knowledge, explore difficult subjects, and provide academic help to one another. Students can expand their comprehension of the subject topic and build critical thinking skills using the different expertise and opinions within the study group.

For example, a Malaysian student studying engineering in the United Arab Emirates can join a group with peers from various cultural backgrounds. They can set aside specific study time, share study materials, and participate in group discussions. This collaborative method not only aids in the mastery of complicated engineering ideas but also encourages teamwork and builds a sense of camaraderie among students. Students can confidently negotiate the academic hurdles of studying in the Middle East and achieve academic success by adopting effective time management practices and study skills and promoting teamwork.

These novel concepts and examples emphasize the significance of adaptability, cultural sensitivity, time management, and study skills in managing academic hurdles while studying in the Middle East. By embracing these approaches, students can prosper in their academic pursuits, make important relationships, and gain essential abilities for their future ambitions.

Balancing Work and Study

Because certain countries do not give scholarships, some people study in the Middle East while working. In such instances, it is critical to provide direction and suggestions to assist them in navigating this challenging issue. Balancing professional and academic

obligations can be difficult for persons pursuing postgraduate degrees while working. Without scholarships, examining alternate choices such as school loans or structured payment schemes to manage educational costs is critical. Individuals can overcome hurdles and achieve their academic goals by applying these tactics and staying motivated. This difficulty is consistent with the work-study balance hypothesis, highlighting the need to manage competing demands to succeed in both areas (Clark, 1998). Innovative techniques can be implemented to address this difficulty.

1. Prioritizing Tasks

Developing strong time management and problem-solving skills is key to success. Individuals can effectively navigate their challenges by identifying priorities, organizing tasks systematically, and overcoming potential barriers. This aligns with the self-regulated learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of self-directed strategies in achieving academic goals (Zimmerman, 2002).

Moreover, it is critical to effectively manage time and prioritize duties when juggling employment and education. Individuals can better organize their time and energy by recognizing and categorizing jobs based on urgency and importance. Setting clear goals, breaking down major jobs into smaller, manageable chunks, and using tools like to-do lists or project management applications to stay organized are all part of the process. For example, a financial professional obtaining an MBA in the Middle East can prioritize tasks and deadlines based on their relevance to their career aspirations. They may set out particular time slots each day for studying, research, and coursework completion. They can efficiently meet their professional and academic commitments by managing time and prioritizing assignments.

2. Establishing a Routine

They are developing a planned routine that aids in consistency and productivity optimization. Individuals can develop a sense of discipline and attention by dedicating study hours and sticking to a steady plan. The theory related to developing a planned routine for consistency and productivity optimization is the theory of habit formation and self-regulation. According to this theory, habits are automatic behaviors developed through consistent repetition and reinforcement (Neal et al., 2012). When individuals establish a planned study routine, they create a structured environment that promotes self-discipline and attention, increasing productivity and improving learning outcomes.

Besides, this regimen should include rest and self-care periods to avoid burnout and preserve overall well-being. For example, a working professional in the Middle East pursuing a part-time master's degree in teaching can construct a regimen in which they completely devote specified evenings or weekends to academic activities. They might share this practice with coworkers and family to ensure undisturbed study time. By sticking to a routine, they can efficiently manage their work-study balance and make steady progress in their academic journey.

3. Leveraging Technology

Effective time management is required. Individuals can optimize their leisure time and organize chores more efficiently by using technology such as reminder applications and calendars. Furthermore, using traveling or idle time at work to read or listen to course materials might optimize learning chances. This is consistent with the microlearning notion, which states that short bursts of focused learning can improve knowledge retention and skill development (Cheung et al., 2011).

On the other hand, technology in the digital age provides many tools and resources to boost productivity and streamline work-study activities. Productivity apps, time-tracking tools, and digital note-taking platforms can help with effective organization and information management. Online learning platforms and virtual collaboration technologies facilitate remote study and communication, allowing individuals to access course materials, attend virtual lectures, and engage with classmates and faculty members. A working professional in the Middle East pursuing a distance learning degree in computer science, for example, can use online platforms to access course materials, participate in virtual discussions, and submit assignments. They can use productivity applications with features like task reminders and progress tracking to remain on top of their academic and professional commitments.

4. Seeking Employer Support

It is critical to establish a supporting network and seek social help. Collaboration with coworkers, students, or academic mentors can promote information exchange, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. This is consistent with the social support theory, which emphasizes the positive impact of social ties on well-being and academic success (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Besides, open contact with companies who value educational endeavors might be advantageous. Sharing academic goals and requesting support from employers prepared to accommodate flexible work arrangements, such as changed timetables or decreased workload during peak study periods, can help to reduce the stress of managing work and study. For example, an employee attending a part-time MBA program in the Middle East can discuss their educational goals with their company. They can discuss modifying their work hours or looking into remote work opportunities to fit their academic obligations.

Employers prioritizing ongoing learning and professional growth are more likely to encourage employees to pursue advanced degrees. Individuals can maintain a healthy work-study balance while pursuing advanced degrees by prioritizing responsibilities, adopting a routine, harnessing technology, and seeking employer help. These creative solutions allow professionals to further their education while excelling in employment, boosting personal growth, and improving long-term prospects.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the availability of free education and scholarships throughout the Middle East demonstrates the value put on education as a fundamental human right. Countries in the Middle East hope to expand access to education and create a fairer society by providing these

possibilities. Pursuing higher education in the Middle East necessitates careful planning, cultural adaptability, and the capacity to balance commitments. It is critical to stay connected to one's roots, seek guidance from a higher force, and grab opportunities as they arrive. Finally, pursuing knowledge and personal progress necessitates tenacity and a dedication to being the best version of oneself.

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