

# A Case Study of Malaysian Islamic Education Novice Teachers' Experiences of Student-Centered Learning

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## ABSTRACT

Given the complexities in relation to the realities of novice teachers in applying student-centred learning, this article reveals Malaysian Islamic Education novice teachers' encounters with their student-centred learning classroom. Executing qualitative semi-structured interviews, ten Islamic Education secondary school novice teachers were selected as informants by utilising purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was utilized to analyse and present the research findings. Findings of this study revealed that even though they successfully applied the student-centred learning, they encountered several forms of struggles and challenges. Two dominant forms of conflicts emerge as themes to be discussed in this article. First, the struggles in assisting students to take responsibility of their learning and second; the challenges of implementing active learning. Findings of the study have recommended educators, especially novice teachers, to better understand and possess student centred learning skills more effectively in order to be able to build up a new generation students that is more competitive, in line with the rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technology moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Islamic Education novice teachers, student-centred learning, qualitative research, Malaysia.

## INTRODUCTION

Extensive integration and development have developed a paradigm shift in various aspects. How great a country is can be observed from their educational system, as it is the backbone to a developed country. An education system ventures the young minds and help extracting their latent skill to enable a dynamic and systematic improvement. Media and technology have given the opportunity for individual to think outside the box and to create innovations, thus, to address the challenges of the new era. Nowadays, education is the weapon to be possessed by everyone to survive the changing world.

Malaysia has introduced the fourth industrial revolution which began at the end of 2017. These changes are also closely related to the country's education system which needs to be in line with market demand to produce a balanced human capital development. Mastery of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) has been intensified to meet the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0), where the new century skills are starting to be taken seriously by various quarters. The new century skills are indispensable skills in the job market of the 4.0

revolution era, as a degree qualification is no longer the only determinant for a graduate to get a job. Philbeck and Davis (2018) state that there are no obvious boundaries between the physical, digital, and biological domains in the era of Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0). On the other hand, 21st century skills such as the ability to work in a diverse environment, effective oral and written communication skills, creative, critical, and analytical thinking skills, leadership, problem-solving and decision-making abilities, time management and teamwork skills, will be assessed by the employer. Therefore, all these skills need to be integrated through an effective education system, in accordance with the 21st century framework that has been introduced in "The Partnerships for 21st century skills" to guide educators to implement 21st century education through the curriculum (Joseph, 2015).

The Malaysian education system is moving towards the 'Teaching and Learning 4.0' to be competitive and remain relevant with this transformation. Teachers need to be alert and getting ready to all the changes made in education's field. This transition includes the teaching and learning approaches for Islamic Education subject. The change is vital as it has the responsibility in developing students'

dynamics to deal with 21st century education which requires complex thinking without neglecting the values of Islam. Enormous changes on education have been made to have an adaptable system that applies to the current modern era.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century integration and development in education has brought about a huge shift in Malaysia's education system, through the introduction of Secondary School Standard Curriculum or in Malay, *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* (KSSM) in 2017 and Primary School Standard Curriculum or *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* (KSSR) which was implemented in 2011 to replace the old curriculum that was focusing too much on the content of the subjects. KSSM addresses teaching and learning strategies that should be learner-centred, collaborative, fun and emphasising the development of thinking skills and soft skills. Some research carried out by scholars acknowledged that the approach is an effective way of learning in the current century (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Du et.al., 2020; Liu et. al., 2015; Zairul, 2020). Moreover, literature has shown that student-centred learning promotes learning in various ways such as enhance student motivation and learning performance (Gibbs, 1992; Harden & Crosby, 2000; Lea et al., 2003; Yuen & Hau, 2006). Thus, shift in teaching and learning from a teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach is vital, instead of directed on instruction (teacher-centred approach), the student-centred approach addresses the construction of learning by the student's own discovery and focuses on student learning outcomes.

In Malaysia, the government expects these educational changes to occur in teaching and learning development in Malaysia's primary and secondary schools and in its higher education system. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has put much emphasis to implement specific courses, such as community service and co-curriculum through the Malaysia Qualifications Agency (MQA). It is assumed that these efforts can improve students' certain skills which is very much required in today's competitive business world (Ching, Lawrence & Abdullah, 2019). Teachers are expected to adopt the student-centred learning approaches, and Islamic education teachers are no

exception. Hence, Islamic education that is still bounded by traditional approaches in teaching and learning, need to offset the teachers' mindset on the usage of various teaching methods as well as empowering students in their learning. With the implementation of student-centred learning approaches, teachers can evade themselves to not directly poured knowledge into students' brain, or spoon feeding, as the process will lead students to passively learn, by merely receiving the knowledge, and memorizing the information from their teachers or textbooks.

Despite its acceptance in the education industry, the student-centred learning approach is not without critiques. Literature showed that there are some difficulties in its implementation, such as the resources needed to implement it and the readiness of the teachers and students to have a positive mindset to shift from traditional teaching method to student-centred learning. Thus, this study aims to examine student-centred teaching experience among Islamic Education novice teachers during their early years of teaching. As recent graduates from teacher training programs, their pedagogical theory-based knowledge should be imperative in helping them applying current teaching methodologies. They are expected to be well equipped and conducted the teaching and learning process efficaciously as a new educator. However, not all teachers, particularly novice teachers, are able to translate what they have learned back in their respective programs and practicing it in school classrooms. The first five years of teaching experiences for novice teachers normally serve as a trial-and-error process.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Issues among novice teachers

A novice teacher is a teacher that has less than five years teaching experiences. In Malaysia, novice teachers are required to attend and complete the induction course provided by the Ministry of Education. After going through officials' bureaucracies (certified by head of department and passed security clearance), their statuses will later be confirmed by Educational Services Commission. During these early years, they are struggling to build up their competencies in teaching profession and

translate what they have learned back in their respective programs and practicing it in school settings. In accordance with the twenty-first century education, Islamic Education novice teachers are expected to switch their role from conventional technique into student-centred approach as it will automatically trigger their creativity to create better strategies in teaching. They are envisaged to conduct their teaching and learning process into student-centred learning strategies such as group work, gallery walk, parking lot, discussion etc.

However, there is a volume of published studies that documented topics related to novice teachers and their teaching practice. The following subjects are debated and concerned with novice teachers' implementation of teaching and learning inside and outside the classroom, building their social relationships with colleagues or administrators, as well as administrative work to be done besides teaching. Novice teachers seem to be more vulnerable to the pressures of the profession compared to experienced teachers. There are a variety of personal, climate and professional factors that often join forces to make their first year of teaching challenging. These include the focus on new teaching roles, the change from students to teaching, loneliness non-supportive cultures in the school, instructional challenges, and ineffective teaching activities. Novice teachers tend to feel exhausted with the extent of their responsibility during the first month of training. These feelings remain as the demands of everyday lesson planning, marking, grading, parent-teacher meetings, curriculum meetings and student behaviour management seem endless (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Goh, 2013; Orgoványi-Gajdos, 2015; Oshrat-Fink, 2014).

Several other studies identified setting up the classroom, preparing for the first week of school, curriculum expectation, salary, and the maintenance of personal sanity as matters which considered the greatest difficulties for novice teachers (Ganser, 1999; Mandel, 2006). Çakmak (2013) on his analysis, mentioned that novice teachers were grappled with: (1) lack of experiences and confidences, and unable to manage their classroom; (2) facing difficulties understanding the best way to teach and suit with their students; and (3) theoretically know how to evaluate students, but incapable to

practice it. On the other hand, in Finland, the obstacles affecting novice teachers' sense of professional agency, the findings showed that novice teachers discerned many limitations in developing the pedagogical practices such as lack of facilities and time-consuming during preparation and planning (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, & Hökkä, 2015). Saeedeh Shohani et. al (2014) mentioned that novice teachers have a low self-esteem and inferior, hence, rate their performance low due to their inability to control one or two problematic students.

### Student Centred learning

Student-centred learning has gained popularity as a learning education approach. Some researchers have defined student-centred learning as offering the student role of actively seeking out and construct meaning from information and previous experience (Gibbs, 1992; Yuen & Hau, 2006). Gibbs (1992) proposed a definition that student-centred learning “*gives students greater autonomy and control over choice of subject matter, learning methods and pace of study*” (p. 23). Gibbs defined this in more detail regarding the main decision: “*what is to be learnt, how and when it is to be learnt, with what outcome, what criteria and standards are to be used, how the judgements are made and by whom these judgements are made*” (p. 1). This perspective will train and guide student toward freedom and responsibility as an individual learner to construct his/her own learning experience. Rogers and Freiberg (1994) were strong believers in personal responsibility and freedom to choose.

In student-centred learning, students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge, but have more responsibility towards their own learning (Gibbs, 1992; Harden & Crosby, 2000; Lea et al., 2003; Yuen & Hau, 2006; Wang & Zhang, 2019; Zairul, 2020). Student-centred learning allows students to take on more responsibility for thinking what and how to learn so that they can play an active role in their learning (Yuen & Hau, 2006; Zairul, 2020). The approaches focus on students' learning and what the students do to achieve, rather than what the teacher does (Harden & Crosby, 2000). It involves a collaborative synergy

where teachers see the benefits to students, regarding increased enthusiasm, participation, and better preparation in the class project (Zairul, 2018). The most common approaches in the current SCL method such as cooperative, inquiry-based, problem-based, and technology-based learning (Zairul, 2020).

Student-centred learning requires application of strategies to increase awareness of what is done and why it is done, foster higher order skills, activate prior knowledge and experience, help develop independent learning skills, provide multiple representations of the content, and encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning (Aliusta & Özer, 2017). Thus, in applying the elements of student-centred learning, students are expected to be active and independent participants in their learning process, responsible and initiative to recognize their learning needs, finding sources of information to respond to their needs, building and presenting their knowledge based on their needs and sources. Students are allowed to be selective in what they will learn within the control environment.

Western literature has exhibited various means on how the student-centred approach is able to

promote learning. Some researchers found that teaching that is guided by student-centred approaches can enhance student motivation. Several attempts have been made to show the success of the student-centred teaching approach on student learning performance, particularly the positive effects on students' cognitive and affective outcomes. In student-centred learning, students are expected to develop independent learning skills and gradually take more responsibility for their own learning. According to Glasgow (1997), with the necessary experience and guided practice, students will gain full independence, with the teacher becoming more of a co-worker. The focus is on active student acquisition of information and skills suitable for their ability, level of experience, and educational needs. Student-centred learning recognises individual student differences and their unique learning styles.

The review of the literature shows that some researchers have identified the central characteristics of student-centred learning (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Gibbs, 1992; Lea et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2007). The following Table 1 depicts commonly identified student-centred characteristics.

Table 1 Student-centred characteristics.

Source	Student-centred learning characteristics
Lea et al. (2003)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reliance on active rather than passive learning</li> <li>2. Emphasis on deep learning and understanding</li> <li>3. Increase responsibility and accountability on the student</li> <li>4. Increase sense of autonomy on the learner</li> <li>5. Interdependence between teacher and learner</li> <li>6. Mutual respect within learner teacher relationship</li> <li>7. Reflective approach to the teaching and learning process for both teacher and learner.</li> </ol>
Gibbs (1995)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emphasis on learner activity rather than passivity</li> <li>2. Student experience on the course outside the institution and prior to the course</li> <li>3. Process and competence rather than content</li> <li>4. Key decisions about learning are made by the student through negotiation with the teacher.</li> </ol>
Brandes and Ginnis (1986)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The learner has full responsibility for her/his learning</li> <li>2. Involvement and participation are necessary for learning</li> <li>3. The relationship between learners is equal, promoting growth and development</li> <li>4. The teacher becomes a facilitator and resource person</li> <li>5. The learner experiences confluence in his education (affective and cognitive domains flow together)</li> <li>6. The learner sees him/herself differently as a result of the learning experience.</li> </ol>
Lee et al. (2007)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-monitoring of own learning process</li> <li>2. Meaningful collaboration</li> <li>3. Technology to support deep thinking</li> <li>4. Instructor as active facilitator</li> <li>5. Active knowledge construction process</li> <li>6. Engaging in authentic task</li> <li>7. Multiple forms of scaffolding.</li> </ol>

The characteristics applied to define student-centred learning have constructed the roles for students and those of teachers. The outcome suggests that student-centred learning is transactional between teachers and students. As Elen et al. (2007) argue, student-centred learning entails a continuous renegotiation of teachers and students in learning process. They may execute the same tasks and assume similar responsibilities in learning process. Although learning is an active and constructive process, both teachers and students have their own responsibility to ensure the success of learning. In other words, teachers should continuously facilitate and guide student learning by developing the student's gradual growth of responsibilities.

Student-centred paradigms are rooted in constructivist epistemology, where "knowledge and context are inextricably connected,

meaning is uniquely determined by individuals and is experiential in nature, and the solving of authentic problems provides evidence of understanding" (Hannafin, Hill, & Land 1997, p. 94). This constructivist learning approach has its foundations in cognitive learning psychology, and its roots in theories by Dewey, Piaget Bruner and Vygotsky. Constructivist learning theories emphasise human learning as active and that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning. Constructivism emphasizes the construction of knowledge based on the interaction of existing knowledge and new knowledge through experience (Von Glasserfeld, 1995). According to Vygotsky (1978), students construct their own knowledge through their own experience and through learning process which students would then require the assistance from their peers and adults in the form of scaffolding. The theory

suggests that learning through constructivism will improve students' critical thinking skills and problem solving. In addition, they will also be able to use scientific understanding to solve various problems and will continuously absorb and cultivate the information obtained. Vygotsky explained how teacher develop learning potential in the 'zone of proximal development'. The zone of optimal development is:

“The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more able peers” (Vygotsky, 1978: 89).

In other words, constructivist learning theories promote students to work individually or in small groups to explore, investigate and solve authentic problems and become actively engaged in seeking knowledge and information, rather than being passive recipients. In this process, the learners must play an active part in their learning process and become autonomous learners who are actively engaged in constructing new meaning within the context of their current knowledge, experiences, and social environments. Learners can be successful in constructing knowledge through solving problems that are realistic, and usually work in collaboration with others. Generally, constructivist learning places emphasis on the learners and proposes that learning is affected by their context, their beliefs, and their attitudes. Learners are encouraged to find their own solutions and to build upon their prior knowledge and experiences. Moreover, in a constructivist learning environment, students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know and actively construct their own understanding. In doing so, they would gain better understanding of an event and thereby be able to construct their own knowledge and solutions to problems.

In line with current education trending, Islamic Education novice teachers are expected to position their role from conventional into constructivist approach as it will automatically trigger their creativity to create ideal strategies

in teaching. Moreover, from Islamic perspective, a teacher should change his or her teaching methods from time to time to obtain effective learning outcomes (Al-Ghazali, 1978). Al-Ghazali's (1978) asserted that education is not merely a procedure whereby the teacher imparts knowledge that the students may or may not absorb, however, it is an interaction which influencing and benefiting teacher and students similarly by giving learners a practical use of their knowledge. In this sense, all novice teachers, including Islamic Education novice teachers in Malaysia are expected to be well trained by their respective institutions and meet the demands of education industry. Their roles were not restricted to teaching and learning, but nurturing students to prosper a balanced life as well, which coincides with the expectations of the Ministry of Education who envisage a holistic education. However, there are limited articles focusing on Malaysian Islamic Education novice teachers. Thus, this study has been conducted to better understand the experience of Islamic Education novice teachers in applying the student-centred learning in their classroom teaching practice.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was employed in this study resulting from author's interest in examining Islamic Education novice teachers' experience during their services as novice teachers in secondary schools. Qualitative research is a study on laying the purpose of interpreting an occurrence or phenomenon pertaining to the meanings researchers about to uncover (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell also emphasize it as “understanding the meaning people have constructed” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). As a mean to collect data, in-depth interviews, document analysis and observation in the classroom have been used. Constructivism is the education that is based on experience and individual tendency because of the qualitative approach. The variation of individual experiences will create different life realities thus resulting the concept of multiple realities (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). This method involves a case study assessing the situation and the individual, through the interpretive inquiry process. This is to comprehend the issues or social issues by

highlighting the uniqueness of the studied environment (Stake, 1995).

Semi-structured individual interviews were applied to ten Islamic Education novice teachers as a method for data collection. By doing so, the author has the opportunity to gain informants' perspectives on their challenges of practicing student-centred learning during their early years of teaching, together with discovering unique findings from it. Flick (2014) claims that semi-structured interviews were a form of open-ended questions that were built as a framework to guide the interviewer on asking in-depth questions. Interview protocols were developed based on the research objectives. Interviews were used to retrieve information regarding facts, beliefs, feelings, desires that are based on the research questions. This stand was also supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), which suggest that by providing interview protocols can be an easier alternative to gather feedbacks from informants. This research further conducted observation in the classroom to observe the subject i.e., the Islamic Education novice teachers at its natural habitat (classroom). In addition, this research also approaches the documentation analysis approach. Researchers need to require documents on related data. The aim is to support the existing findings.

Research participants were amongst secondary school Islamic Education novice teachers from four different zones (north, south, east coast and East Malaysia), who were recruited by using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was applied to identify and select research participants because it enabled the incorporation of the research interest and purpose (Creswell, 2007). The process of recruiting the informants started with seeking approval from the Ministry of Education, then followed by obtaining a list of Islamic Education teachers and their years of teaching experience from the selected State Education Department. From the list, the names of novice teachers, i.e., who have less than five years of teaching experience were selected. Thus, the purposeful sampling of the study was based on the following criteria: (1) informants were Islamic Education teachers, (2) had a background in Islamic Studies, with either the Diploma, Bachelor or Master degree, and (3) had less than five years of teaching experience. Afterward, ten novice teachers who served less than five years of teaching were chosen for this study. Out of ten informants, only seven gave permission to be interviewed and observed during their classroom teaching. The other three informants opted for interview only for personal reason.

Table 2-Research Participants

Informants *	Teaching experience (years)	Qualification
Ammar	2	Bachelor of Islamic Education
Aira	2	Bachelor of Islamic Education
Afiq	2	Bachelor of Islamic Studies
Ainun	3	Bachelor of Islamic Education
Amir	3	Bachelor of Islamic Studies
Qistina	4	Bachelor of Islamic Studies
Norli	2	Bachelor of Islamic Education
Jannah	3	Bachelor of Islamic Education
Syauqi	3	Bachelor of Islamic Studies
Ibrahim	4	Bachelor of Islamic Studies

\* \*Pseudonyms are used in this article to preserve the anonymity of the research participants.

As a method of data collection, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted by having a two-way interaction process to obtain information from research participants. According to Yin (2011), it is a must to have a

framework or protocol to remain consistent with the objectives of the research. Therefore, a set of interview protocol had been sent to panel of experts to verify the validity. Other than that, researchers need to maintain flexibility in

responding towards any issues that emerge spontaneously while interviewing through dialogue and interactions. In any case, any spontaneous issues are welcomed, and researchers can redirect the flow back to the research context. All interviews took around 45 to 60 minutes per novice teachers to ensure the data is unique and sufficient.

Then, data from this study were analysed using M & H Interaction Model Qualitative Data Analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data analysis was also carried out with the help of NVivo program, a computer software designed specifically for the analysis of qualitative data, through application of the concept-based and inductive analysis (Bazeley, 1997).

## FINDINGS

The data analysis discusses the qualitative data acquired via interviews with ten Islamic Education novice teachers with teaching experience between one to four years. The information revealed that informants acknowledged the importance of student-centred learning. Thus, efforts were made to practice the learning approach in classrooms even with some struggles.

### First Theme: The struggles in assisting students to take responsibility of their learning

An important facet of learning is developing learners' capability to accept increasing responsibility for their learning. Interviews with the novice teachers showed that they were aware of their roles to support their students in learning process, by giving the students more responsibility, enabling them to take risks and learn from their mistakes. For example, IENT Aira said;

*Sometimes I worry when my students repeat the same mistakes during their discussion and project-solving... but then I realize, that is how students learn, through a trial-and-error process... doing mistakes over and over...thus I help them to learn from their mistakes, correct the mistakes, know why the mistakes happen... I guide them to develop new ideas and link those with the previous information (IENT Aira).*

IENT Ainun also accepts the idea of sharing control and give students more responsibility in learning process. She mentioned that “*students cannot become more responsible learners unless teachers give them more responsibility*”. For her, students can learn many things from having choices and alternatives.

*I give my students some say in their learning... for example, I give each of my students the choice between an in-class or a take-home exercise...if they choose to do a quiz after the lesson... I will happily agree...but sometimes, it's difficult to encourage them to work independently (IENT Ainun)*

Even though she seems to feel comfortable with the notion of student-centred learning of sharing power in the learning process, she becomes concern when some students feel discomfort when asked to take more control over their learning and assume responsibility for what and how they want to learn. In that scenario, she found difficulties to assist her students.

*Some students do feel discomfort, reluctant to participate or give ideas...so I tried my best to help them feel more comfortable in their new and more proactive roles...I allow them to decide what to do by themselves, and provide guidance to them with the appropriate issues, giving suitable words and terms to the topic of discussion, which would assist them in solving certain problems...but of course to do this, I need to feel comfortable first with the idea of sharing responsibility (IENT Ainun).*

Meanwhile, IENT Ammar mentioned that sharing power with his students over their learning was the most difficult adaptation he encountered when moving to student-centred approach.

*I have been conditioned by traditional teacher-centred approaches such as..., have authority and control over the learning process and the classroom... So it was kind of uncomfortable when I tried to give away some of that power, such as let the students themselves to discuss the topic, or let them choose their own preference learning style... (IENT Ammar)*

The more control our students take, and the more choices we offer them, the greater will be their desire and willingness to engage in the learning



process (Zull, 2002, p. 52). However, teachers' concern about sharing power are felt by most teachers because they do not know what will happen if students have too much control or if they make poor choices about their learning. This feeling raised by IENT Qistina;

*I must pick up the class and the lesson when students fail to take charge of their learning or make poor decisions about certain issues... that is the problem, I need to add time to develop new assignments and activities for them... normally asking them to write a summary for the topic*  
(IENT Qistina)

IENT Amir mentioned that even though he satisfied with his efforts in assisting his students to have more responsibility for their learning and knowledge construction, but he realized that students' own perception about their capabilities and potentials is more valuable. As students assess their skills based on how they 'feel they are doing' rather than on how they are doing (Henry, Morrell & Scott, 2018).

*For me, I must provide my students with a lot of opportunities to take responsibility for their learning, such as involve them in learning activities, participate in group discussion, doing presentation etc.... we must do that and from my part I'm satisfied..., but of course, in the end, the most important part is they themselves...how they feel about their learning and role, they should be the ones who need to recognize their responsibility... (IENT Amir).*

## **Second theme: The challenges of implementing active learning**

The data showed that the Islamic Education novice teachers understand the important of involving students in learning process as active learners, rather than passive recipient of knowledge. The novice teachers reported that in the beginning, they struggled to engage students to actively participate in student-centred learning activities. However, they continuously explained to their students the importance of active engagement, which is to expose their potential by the application of "inquiry-based approaches, independent learning, problem solving, higher order thinking skills and more", as suggested by student-centred learning.

The data revealed informants' experience to help students actively engage with student-centred learning approach.

*The easiest ways to get students started with the learning is to have them make presentations in front of the class. They shall report their work in small groups. (IENT Afiq).*

*When the student's complete classroom presentation, I opened the floor to discuss... I let other students to question, disagree, or suggest alternatives to their friends.... to the presenter... (IENT Norli).*

IENT Afiq and Norli seem to encourage their students to initiate with student-centred learning by actively participating with classroom activities. For them, "small group work" and "classroom presentations" will lead students to better engagement with the lesson discussed, which will result in greater learning.

IENT Ibrahim and IENT Jannah explained how they help students to set goals by working together in groups, and ensure they know how to use all available learning resources.

*I guided them to create an I-think map on their own and do a gallery walk. Since my class was held at the musolla, my students were cooperating well...*

(IENT Ibrahim)

*I applied various of activities in class, such as hot seats, dragon ball, musical chairs etc. My students are less sleepy during my teaching and are more enthusiastic to learn... (IENT Jannah)*

IENT Syafiqah and IENT Qistina reported their challenges in encouraging students to actively engage with active learning strategies. They mentioned that students' engagement is vital as it relates with students' skill building, which is to promote students' development in all aspects of lives.

*I tried very hard to instil learning skills into my students. Normally what I do is to work through the medium of student homework and projects...As teachers, we must build their [students] behaviour and skill... our roles are not just limited to developing students'*

*cognition but also their skill, emotions, and conduct... (IENT Syafiqah)*

*Now we have, what we call ... soft skills evaluation. We evaluate how good a student is at various generic skills, for example, how they lead their group during class group discussion, or evaluate their lifelong learning skills, such as their usage of learning technology... The soft skills implementation helps us in the whole development of the student. We must stress and build skills through our teaching... be facilitators and skill builders... Otherwise we are only transmitters of knowledge, just focussing merely on the intellectual aspect, and ignoring the other rest of the other aspects, such as emotional and physical development...*

*(IENT Qistina)*

Meanwhile, IENT Aira shared on how she endeavoured to facilitate student learning in the classroom by helping and guiding the students in group discussions. According to her, she offered some guidelines for the topics discussed, but also encouraged her students to use their own creativity to make the discussion more fruitful. She frequently interrupted the students' discussions by posing questions or providing feedback. When asked during the interview about the rationale of her style, she replied that

*Through the students' group discussions, I can facilitate student learning rather than merely transmit information during my class... I give them problems to solve, and space for them to find solutions by exchanging ideas and thoughts in groups... But I think I still need to increase their levels of thinking by asking questions and giving comments. My instruction seemed to be able to lead the students towards further development of the concept discussed... (IENT Aira)*

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study showed that the Islamic education novice teachers employed methods and techniques that are featured in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education. This 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning has transformed the dynamics of education into

technology-friendly, which has various methods that can be applied in teaching Islamic education and satisfy current needs and desires. Learners who are directly involved in their learning are expected to put their own commitment to learn along with the support of their peers and constant guidance from the teacher. Ultimately, by actively engaging in the learning process, they are more exposed to enhancement in problem-solving skills, communication efficiencies, team-building competencies and more.

This study adds to the research reviewed about the successful experience of novice teachers in implementing student-centred learning, even though they encountered several challenges in their journey. The study revealed that the Islamic education novice teachers' participants faced the challenges by adopting student-centred approach in their classroom. The data illustrate the trend of teaching Islamic Education in 21<sup>st</sup> century that has shifted from teacher centred to student centred paradigm which prompts to the need of student autonomy in learning process, and support the notion of student-centred learning, where students should be actively engaged in the learning process itself.

In contrast to behaviourism, it offers the basis for learner-centred learning in which comprises viewpoint on how learning occurs. The approach emphasizes on learners' actively constructing knowledge towards a meaningful learning (Hoidn, 2017). Beyond doubt, student-centred is a learning situation that initiated by the learners themselves, not imposed by others. Ultimately, by engaging in the process of learning, students were expose to cognitive and problem-solving skills, communication efficiency, and more to be mentioned. The responses from participants in this study demonstrated their understanding that a good teacher should serve as a facilitator, so that students can further develop in their own learning experiences. It appears from the interview data that the novice teachers endorsed the characteristics of a facilitative teacher. Facilitative teaching involves teachers in making student easier to learn by encouraging students to be active in their own construction of meaning. Teachers are the facilitators for their learners in the development of skills, not only with regards to the outcomes of learning, but also on the application of knowledge (Rogers & Frieberg, 1994).

For some participants, they had to be “skill builders” as they were required to infuse skills into students through the curriculum. They mentioned that they are expected to play the roles of facilitators or skill builders through the infusion of soft skills. This reflects their support for the policy of soft skills that was introduced by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, to be implemented for all students. Seven soft skill elements have been identified and chosen to be implemented namely: i) communicative skills; ii) thinking and problem-solving skills; iii) team building; iv) life-long learning and information management; v) entrepreneurial skill; vi) ethics, morals and professionalism; and vii) leadership skills (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2006). Although there are no specific soft skills, most of these skills are associated with positive values, such as leadership skills, teamwork, communication efficiencies, and lifelong learning. The following skills are identified as being the most important skills in the 21st century education to help students to interact with others; communication, negotiation, change adeptness, flexibility, teamwork, relationship building and listening skills. These require the expertise of the teachers to adopt various student-centred teaching strategies such as questioning, class discussion, brain storming, teamwork, presentation, role play and simulation, task/project, field work and site visits. Teachers should undertake the role of facilitator, and students are expected to develop the soft skills by actively participating in classroom activities.

Moreover, this study showed that in making the case for relegating power to students, teachers need to consider aspects such as what if the students do not want to make all the choices or take more control of their learning. What if they see these actions will give them more work and more responsibility, and they resist? In this situation, “*teachers must go slowly*” with the process (Weimer, 2002, p.29) because of the benefit. Thus, teachers need to increase students’ desire to take control of their learning by creating learning environments that are safe. Moreover, researchers have proven that having choices in what and how to learn improves the motivation and engagement of the students, by letting them work on things they are interested in learning (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

The data further demonstrate the struggles of Islamic Education novice teachers’ participant in inspiring students to be involved and put emphasis on their commitment to learn, with the support of their peers and guidance from the teachers. Ultimately, by actively engaging in learning process, they are more exposed to upgrading problem-solving skills, communication skill, team working and more to mention. This approach also creates an environment where students and teachers are partners in learning, share ideas openly and able to communicate honestly with one another. Moreover, well-prepared, and capable teachers have the largest impact on student achievement.

In summary, the trend of teaching Islamic Education in 21<sup>st</sup> century has shifted from teacher centred to student centred learning which requires student autonomy in the learning process. This transition demands all teachers to equip students with 21<sup>st</sup> century attributes, including technology and digital literacy, critical thinking, becoming autonomous learner, and ability to solve problem. This study is in line with findings by other scholars who have reported that there were numerous learner-centred teaching methodologies or techniques that have been practiced in Islamic pedagogy, such as cooperative learning, collaborative learning, scaffolding, group discussions, inquiry learning, learning by doing and more (Abdullah, 1994; Abdullah, 1995; Ghazali, 2001; Hisham, 1989; Kamarul, 2013; Mansoor, 1983; Nasr, 1978; Tengku Kasim & Md Yusoff, 2014; Zairul, 2020). These methods have been used by several Islamic scholars such as Al Biruni, Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Malik, Abu Hasan al-Basri, and Wasil Ibn ‘Ata’ as teaching tools for their students (Abdullah, 1994; Abdullah, 1995; Ghazali, 2001; Hisham, 1989; Mansoor, 1983; Nasr, 1978). This is not surprising as the Islamic philosophy of education emphasizes that learners should be active in their learning. Al-Ghazali (1997) recognized that, according to Islam, knowledge has two expressions: 1) theory (knowing or ‘*ilm*’); and 2) practice (doing or ‘*amal*’). These two dimensions are inseparable. Al-Ghazali (1978) claimed that “nobody can be learned unless he puts his learning into practice” (p. 71). He believed that “doing or ‘*amal*’” includes not only those manifestations of the five senses, but the practices of the heart as well. He emphasized that learning something without

putting it into practice invalidates what has been learned.

This has abolished the thought of teaching Islamic education is influenced solely on conventional approach, which the way of learning is limited to deductive thinking and memorisation. This shifting demands to all teachers to equip students with 21<sup>st</sup> century attributes, including technology and digital literacy, critical thinking, being autonomous learner, and able to solve problem. The most prominent characteristic is being autonomous learner (Holec, 1981). The characteristics of being autonomy is having the ability to manage someone's own learning, which then influence the emergence of independent mentality. In the context of classroom organization, it involved learners' ability to take responsibility for their own learning and to be autonomous learner. Holec (1981) describes autonomy as the qualities of autonomous learners as 'taking charge of one's own learning involves emphasized planning, the selection of material, monitoring of learning progress and self-assessment'. In contrast, Little (1991) placed psychology at the heart of learner autonomy.

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