

## The Importance of Studying History in Increasing Individuals' Awareness: A Case Study of Muslim Students in Saudi Arabia

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to identify the effect of studying history on individual's awareness in political and cultural aspects. In this study, the researchers sampled 315 Muslim students and aged between 17 and 50 years. These students have been selected from different faculties at Saudi universities to participate in this study including Jeddah University, King Abdelaziz University, and King Saud University, and they participated voluntarily in this study. All respondents completed the online questionnaire given; because the difficulty to collect data directly because of COVID-19. The results of this study reveal a strong, positive and significant correlation of studying history with political awareness and cultural awareness as well.*

**Keywords:** History; Islamic History; Political Awareness; Cultural Awareness; Studying History

### Abstrak

*Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui pengaruh pembelajaran sejarah terhadap kesadaran individu dalam aspek politik dan budaya. Dalam studi ini, peneliti mengambil sampel 315 siswa muslim dan berusia antara 17 dan 50 tahun. Para mahasiswa ini dipilih dari berbagai fakultas di universitas di Arab Saudi untuk berpartisipasi dalam studi ini termasuk Universitas Jeddah, Universitas King Abdelaziz, dan Universitas King Saud, dan mereka berpartisipasi secara sukarela dalam studi ini. Semua responden menyelesaikan kuesioner online yang diberikan; karena kesulitan mengumpulkan data secara langsung karena COVID-19. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan adanya korelasi yang kuat, positif dan signifikan antara mempelajari sejarah dengan kesadaran politik dan juga kesadaran budaya.*

**Kata Kunci:** Sejarah; Sejarah Islam; Kesadaran Politik; Kesadaran Berbudaya; Mempelajari Sejarah

### Introduction

Student awareness of the main and hot global issues especially what is happening in the Islamic world and in the middle east in particular is increasingly

important as the countries of the world become more interdependent. Today's students and Muslim students in particular need more understanding of the world's economy, politics, culture, social structures, and environment in order to make the best and right decisions about how to live their own lives, as all these issues are related to their awareness and the correct way to understand events in a historical context. Awareness of current events requires a reading, studying and understanding of history because most current events result from past events. In this way, history plays an integral part not only regarding how people understand their society, but also themselves and the people around them. This is because history plays a crucial role in our lives (Karlsson 2011), as history examines the past, present, and future together. History is not just stories that we have heard and will tell for future generations, but history is events and lessons from which we learn to avoid the mistakes made by others, we also learn from history how to create glory as well as how to see the future through past events. For example, Onsko (2000) said that the history does not stop at the narrative events of the past, but offers in the interpretation and development of

human beings by linking past events and their reflections on the present and future.

Studying history is very important as it allows individuals and students in particular to gain additional knowledge that it helps them to understand current events in a different way. This helps them to increase their level of awareness. Understanding history and studying it in depth enables individuals to clearly understand past events. This may help them understand the present. If we want to know many current events and their causes, we can refer to the study of history to find out the secrets of the events and answer many of the vague questions (Talekau and Nayak 2007). Nations without enough knowledge of their history seem like individuals who have lost their memories, so better for them to search for their personality and identity in the dark (Kartodirdjo 1993, Hariyono 1995). Many students at university don't understand the importance of their nation's history (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012). Students should be aware and sufficiently aware of political knowledge, and this may help them to show up real democracy within the country and the effective participation in the political system as a future leader (Ijaz 1976).

Students are future leaders and a strong potential force who must have a political awareness and a clear understanding of what is happening around them in terms of political, social and economic issues, and knowing when to oppose and when to support the political system of their country. This may help them stand out in their community. Reading history helps us gain political awareness because it provides us with a way to understand the world (Issam 2020). This can encourage students to have a good and respect level of awareness in different aspects that enables them to understand reality objectively. This affects both political and cultural awareness and explains the absence of studies of history and its effect on political and cultural awareness among Muslim students. After reviewing the literature and previous studies, the authors confirmed that there are a very few and limited empirical studies that address the role of studying and understanding the history on political and cultural awareness of Muslim students at the university level, the current study seeks to assess the role of studying history and its effects of political and cultural awareness of Muslim students at Saudi universities.

### **The Importance of Studying History**

The importance of history in the life of individuals is like the moon in dark nights, so taking care of it is one of the necessary things, preserving it, and transmitting it to generations in a correct way, so that it becomes a light and guide for them in their present and future. Peoples that have no history do not exist, for in him are the strength of nations, they live by his existence and die by his absence. Studying history can help the students to improve their understanding of the current events that happening in the world now. People who study history deeply and aware of historical events are able to compare the difference between time periods, and this also helps them to understand and know cultural differences and social systems. Ata (2009), as well as have enough awareness about cultures, religions, ideologies, political conflict and wars. Studying and understanding history helps students live better and purposeful lives, as it helps them to understand their-selves and personal growth (Bentley 2007, McCully 1978).

The purpose to study history is to help students understand the world in which they live and all the events around them accurately and clearly and to be ready to face future challenges (Seixas et

al. 2013, Sheehan 2011). Studying history is very important for the individuals and students in particular; because this is good and benefits for the society. Studying and understanding history well and clearly may help the individual to understand how things change and develop. It also helps to understand the factors and causes that lead to change, and to understand the components and elements of the institution or nation that remain stable and have the ability to continue despite the change that occurs. It helps also to create a good business people and political leaders as well (Stearns 2007). In the Islamic history, the importance of using historical knowledge in public debates, and through many of the examples he gave in his book, he wanted to show that he was not aiming by trying to restore consideration to history that historical knowledge can provide ready-made solutions to current problems. Through many of the examples that he gave in the book about the events of the invasion of Iraq and the issue of Al-Aqsa Mosque, he confirms in his analyses that his goal is not to say that "history is repeated" in the Middle East, rather, it is to emphasise the importance of returning to "reading history" in order to

make appropriate decisions (Tosh, 2008).

### **Studying History and Political awareness**

This study focuses only on students' awareness of general issues at the local and international level, which have a direct link to history, such as places, religions, conflicts, revolutions, and wars. This will be of great help to students as potential future leaders. Seixas *et al.* (2013) stated that there many studies and reports that describe and confirm the standards of teaching of history in Western countries, where the past is linked to the present and the future as well, and the goal for that is to prepare students, qualify them and provide them with sufficient awareness of their future role as distinguished citizens in their society. History can help the students to understand the current issues in different aspects like in culture, social, religious, political, and economic conditions of people. Without enough information about history, we are unaware of the background of our religion, customs, institutions, administration and so on. History may help individuals to understand today's problems at the national and international levels accurately and clearly, as most of today's problems are

directly and indirectly related to historical problems and events (Talekau and Nayak 2007).

History is considered as an institution that has the ability to qualify and aware students, because it helps individuals to acquire political awareness, by studying the origins of political ideas and acquiring the required and necessary terms and vocabulary to understand processes and political issues. Studying and understanding history and mastering the skills of historical analysis and thinking helps to enhance students' ability to improve and develop opinions and confirm them through existing arguments that are based on facts and qualify them to participate in political and social discourses (Barton and Levstik 2004, Davis 2009, Jarnadona 2006).

### **Studying History and Cultural Awareness**

Studying history makes a person more aware of culture. It enables him/her to understand better and accept the actions of different people (Reasons to Study History, 2018) such as understanding the racial tensions that occurred in Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1948 that continue to exist presently. People are linked in one way or another to history,

and delving deeper into the study of civilisations reveals its importance to forming one's character and personality, especially religions civilisations (Merwan 2018). One of the most important elements for development or backwardness of any nation is studying and understanding of history, as history has a strong relationship with most other sciences. In other words, if any nation follows the path of knowledge, which has a link with the history it will definitely develop, if it follows different way, so, the results will opposite.

The cross-cultural may help students to define a clear concept of culture and to identify the main cultural components and understand them clearly and realistically in line with what they read in books. Therefore, for many reasons, including their different history and different traditions, as each country has its own religions, beliefs and cultures that distinguish it from other countries and nations as well, and this greatly affects the way of thinking of its people and the concept of value (Wang 2018). All kinds of Media including audiovisual and written are considered sources of information, especially cultural ones, because they reflect the daily and occasional people's way of life in terms of

diversity, contemporary and truth (Wang 2018). Studying history can help the individuals more familiar with historical information which related to different aspects such as culture, religion, citizenship, education, and art. This would help individuals and students in particular to increase their awareness. Also, studying history can help them to understand the culture and lifestyle of others.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The researchers collected online questionnaires from Muslim students (112 Male and 203 Female) by using snowball technique. These students have been selected from different faculties at Saudi universities to participate in this study. The researchers selected this sample of students as they have sufficient knowledge of history and modern issues. Their ages ranged from 21 to 60 years, and they participated voluntarily in this study. The researchers in this study used online questionnaire as there are difficulties to collect data directly because of COVID-19.

### Measures

Studying history consisted of 21 items. This variable was developed by the researcher and cited also from (Berg 2019, Devine-Wright 1999). The sample

items include “History is important to me.” (Item-1).

Cultural awareness consisted of 17 items. This variable was developed by the researcher and cited by the PISA (2018). The sample items include “I respect the values of people from different cultures.” (Item-8).

Political awareness consisted of 15 items. This variable was developed by the researcher and cited by the PISA (2018). The sample items include “I am often interested about international news to understand what is happening in the world.” (Item-1).

### Validity of Research

For validity of the instruments (questionnaire) which used for data collection, the researchers used pilot study with 40 participants studying at Jeddah University in Saudi Arabia, and the data were analyzed using SPSS, and also received the comments from different experts for improve readability and understanding.

### Correlation

Table 1: Correlations between studying history, political, and cultural awareness.

Scales/ Variable	Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	M	S.D	1	2	3
1. Studying History	.960	67.8413	15.7948			

2. Political Awareness	.951	51.5498	15.4200	565**	1
3. Cultural Awareness	.950	67.0000	15.0097	735**	.616** 1

\* $P < .05$ . \*\* $P < .01$ .

Table 1 shows that there is a strong positive and significant correlation between studying history and political awareness ( $r=.565$ ,  $p = .000 < .01$ ), as well as studying history and cultural awareness ( $r=.735$ ,  $p = .000 < .01$ ), and also cultural awareness with political awareness ( $r=.616$ ,  $p = .000 < .01$ ).

### Regression Analysis

Table 2: Regression Analysis for Political Awareness

Independent Variable	B (t-value)	Sig
Studying History	.551 (12.103)	.000
R Square	.319	
Adjusted R Square	.317	
F	146.491	

The linear regression procedure examines the relationship between studying history as independent variable and political awareness as dependent variable using regression analysis, and the results are as shown in Table 2. Regression Analysis for Political Awareness (B (t-value) = .551 (12.103),  $p = .000$ ), R Square = .319, Adjusted R

Square = .317,  $F = 146.491$ . As expected, the result of studying history is positively correlated with political awareness and significant.

Table 3: Regression Analysis for Cultural Awareness

Independent Variable	B (t-value)	Sig
Studying History	.698 (19.175)	.000
R Square	.540	
Adjusted R Square	.539	
F	367.678	

The linear regression procedure examines the relationship between studying history as independent variable and political awareness as dependent variable using regression analysis, and the results are as shown in Table 3. Regression Analysis for Cultural Awareness (B (t-value) = .698 (19.175),  $p = .000$ , R Square = .540, Adjusted R Square = .539,  $F = 367.678$ ). As expected, the result of studying history is positively correlated with cultural awareness and significant.

### Discussion

The aim of this study is to identify the effect of studying history on individual's awareness in political and cultural aspects. Studying history was found to be positively related to the

political and cultural awareness of Muslim students. The results of this research reported that those who had studied history would have more aware of current events such as revolutions, cultures, religions, conflicts wars, and so on. The study of history is very important because it studies the past events, that can help readers to understand the present in which we live and expect future features. Studying history may help students to develop their understanding and thinking about the human condition (Low-Beer and Blyth 1990). Being knowledgeable on local history informs the people about the political, social, economic, and cultural phases of the community (Walker 2015). By studying history and politics side by side, one will learn how to analyse and untangle the past in order to tackle the problems facing society today (Leicester 2015).

In the context of Islamic history, history is key to understanding political problems. Political science concerning history helps determine the type of political decisions taken, and the extent of their application to reality (Arab Post 2016). The Islamic Golden Age dated from the mid-seventh century until the mid-thirteenth century, when the Muslims were able to establish the

largest empires in the history. During this period, the Muslim artists, engineers, scholars, physicians, poets, philosophers, geographers and traders have good contributions to the world in various aspects including agriculture, economics, sciences, technology, sociology, political sciences, philosophy, industry, military industries, law and literature. As the Islamic world in that period of time became a major intellectual centre for science, philosophy, medicine, sociology, psychology, culture and education (Abdul Hakim, Tahir Abdulrahman, and Kabara 2015). Study of Islamic history helps a lot in understanding many of the events that occur in the Middle East, especially since many conflicts exist in the Arab region, such as the events of Jerusalem, the Levant, Iraq and North Africa. If Muslims want to succeed, they must first understand their religion by understanding the achievements of their predecessors who contributed significantly to the human civilisation. This is achieved through the study of history and the Islamic heritage (Mabara and Mates 2019).

### **Conclusion**

This study focuses on studying history and its effects on political and cultural awareness of Muslim students at Saudi universities. Studying history was

found to be positively related to both political and cultural awareness of Muslim students. The results of this research stated that those who studied history would have more awareness of current events compare to those who do not study history. History's purpose is to help students better understand the world they live in and prepare for the future. For future research, the researchers should do more research to encourage students to study history. This can help students to increase the level of their awareness about different issues around their life in certain aspects. For future research, the researchers should do more research to help people and students in particular and provide them by knowledge and highlights the benefits for studying history.

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