

**RESEARCH TRENDS IN THE HUMANITIES:  
AN ANALYSIS OF MASTER'S THESES AT THE  
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA**

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***ABSTRACT***

*Thesis is a key indicator for academic achievement. Analysing and studying theses assist in assessing and evaluating the quality of students' researches, as well as productivity level of supervisors and their departments. It also helps in identifying research trends and monitoring research activities. This study analyses master's theses in the Humanities submitted to the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) from 1991 to 1999. A compilation of master's theses abstract was used as the source of information. A total of 308 theses were analyzed in terms of departmental and geographical affiliation, periodical growth, supervisors' contributions, and major subject area. The amount of theses grew by 266.7 per cent with greater emphasis on religion and philosophy. The number of supervisors also increased from 35 during 1991-95 to 94 during 1996-99, indicating an increase rate of 168.6 per cent from one period to another. Results of the analyses help identify research trends in the Humanities that have been developed during the 9-year period.*

Keywords: Thesis; Master's Theses; Research in Humanities; Research Trends; Bibliometrics

**INTRODUCTION**

The Humanities are a group of educational disciplines that study human beings and their culture. The term is often used to denote non-scientific scholarly fields such as spiritual or human sciences. Today, many tertiary educational institutions offer not only first degree programs in the Humanities but also at the postgraduate level, and the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is no exception. In 1983, the University started master's programme under the Centre for Fundamental Knowledge. With the expansion of the University, the Centre was transformed into the Department of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (IRKH) as part of the new Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (IRKHS) in 1990. The

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Centre offered, in 1988, a three-year master's programme in Islamic Fundamental Studies. The programme was designed for the continuing education of assistant lecturers serving at the Centre. Twelve students registered for the programme in the 1988/89 session. Subsequently, the programme was renamed Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage. In 1990, the Faculty introduced the Master of Education (M.Ed.) programme, followed two years later by the Master in Library and Information Science (MLIS). By 1996, twelve departments had successfully started their master's programme.

The faculty has been successful in producing professionally competent graduates able to contribute meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge. In 1992, the Faculty graduated its first batch of 14 students. Since then, the number of graduates has increased. By 1999, the faculty had produced 487 master students. Most of these graduates earned their master's degree through a combination of course work and dissertation mode. Recently, the faculty offers two new master's programmes: Master of Human Sciences (History and Civilization) and Master of Human Sciences (Communication), while it has lost two others, M.Ed. and MLIS. In 1999, the Department of Education separated from the faculty, while MLIS was transferred to the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in 2002.

Thesis is a key indicator for academic achievement. Analyzing and studying theses assist in assessing and evaluating the quality of students' researches, productivity level of supervisors and their departments. It also helps in identifying research trends and monitoring research activities. Because of these reasons and the like, studies on students' theses and dissertations have attracted the attention of many researchers. Sze and Ngah (1997) analyzed 259 dissertations of postgraduate research in the Humanities at the University of Malaya. The authors found that the number of researches has increased accordingly with the increase in student enrolment. Submission of thesis at the master's level is higher than that at the doctoral level. Zein (1998) and Abdoulaye (2002) also have paid attention to the Humanities theses. Zein reviewed master's theses submitted to the Department of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (IRKH). The analysis showed that Malaysian students in general prefer field or applied research to textual or library research while students from the African countries prefer textual to field research. Many theses in the Humanities also emphasized on Hadith or issues on Islamic law. In his analysis of 20 MLIS theses, Abdoulaye (2002) found most of them targeted on information technology, while none explored the history of library, cataloguing and classification, indexing and abstracting, and cooperative work among libraries. Chatterjee et al. (1995) and Lahiri (1996) analysed doctoral dissertations in Indian universities between 1950 and 1995. From 1950-93, Chatterjee et al. found 1984-88 to be the highest growth period of research, and the Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) of Karnataka was the most productive school. On the other hand, Lahiri's study found 1991-95 to be the most remarkable period, producing almost equivalent to what was produced within the earlier 40 year period (1950-90). Tejomurty (1988) conducted an empirical analysis on MLIS theses

submitted during 1972-1987 to Vikram University. The study examined the theses by subject, year and language. Most of the theses focused on library users' survey, followed by research on academic libraries. The least attracted research areas were on library cooperation and reference service. By examining 56 theses received by the University of the Punjab during 1975-1981, Anwar (1982) on the other hand, found information needs of special group as the most researched area (23.2% of the theses) as compared to 5.3 % for bibliometric studies.

Most of these theses focused on those submitted to a specific department. However, none of them analysed more than 300 theses or dissertations, or discussed the contribution of the supervisors. This paper analyses 308 theses from eleven departments at the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (IRKHS) IIUM. It compares departmental productivity and analyses geographical affiliation, periodical growth as well as the major subject area. The study also identifies the number of supervisions for each lecturer. Findings would help IIUM to monitor students' research activities and lecturers' supervision.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper presents an analysis of master's theses submitted to the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (IRKHS), IIUM. A compilation of master's theses abstract from 1991-1999, by Moten and Ismail (2000), was used as the source of the information. The compilation consisted of 308 theses supervised by 107 lecturers. The theses were checked in the OPAC/WebPAC of IIUM library to determine their availability in the library and their broad categorization in accordance with the Library of Congress Classification scheme. Subject area for the available theses was classified as indicated in the OPAC/WebPAC, while the researcher determined the subject area for the remaining theses not found in the system.

The theses were grouped into two periods, 1991-95 and 1996-99. The first period witnessed only a few departments offering master's programme. However, at the beginning of the second period, 12 departments had successfully started their master's programme. The reason for analyzing these periods is to see the changes that have taken place from one period to another. The analysis of 308 theses is considered adequate for indicating research trends and strengths. It identifies the areas of emphasis in the Humanities at IIUM.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Periodical Growth**

Three hundred and eight theses were produced during 1991-1999. The period indicates two stages of growth: foundation period, from 1991 to 1995 with 66 (21.4%)

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theses, followed by rapid growth period between 1996 and 1999 with 242 (78.8%) theses. This shows an increase of 266.7 per cent from one period to the other. The annual average theses submission is 34.2 during the 9-year period. The yearly breakdown of the 308 theses shows that although the first master's programme was offered in 1988, no single thesis was produced within the first three years (1988-1990). Similarly, no thesis was approved in 1992, and the subsequent year, 1993, is the least productive year, while the most productive year is 1998. Figure 1 shows a growth trend evident from

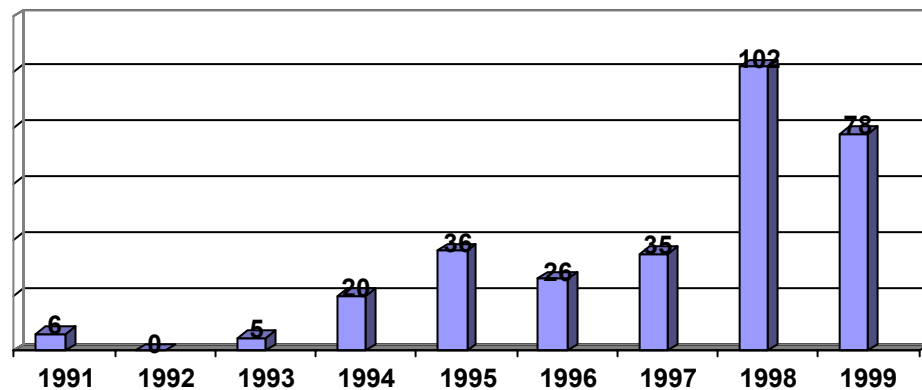


Figure 1: Year-wise Growth

### **Distribution by Departments**

Table 1 presents the total number of thesis produced by the various departments in the Humanities and compares the growth between the two periods, 1991-1995 and 1996-1999. As illustrated in the table, the Department of Education comes in the third position during the first period (1991-95), however, it leads in the total number (78) of the theses submission during 1991-99, followed by Arabic Language and Literature (71) and IRKH (46). During 1991-95, IRKH received the highest number of theses (27), followed by Arabic Language and Literature (25). Eight departments produced, at least, 10 theses each during the 9-year period. The least reported number of theses is from the newly established departments (i.e. Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology and Anthropology). These three departments reported submitting only ten theses within the nine years. Although this analysis only reports 10 theses for the Department of Library and Information Science, an earlier study, by the author, reported 20 theses for the Department (Abdoulaye, 2002). This difference is due to the fact that the other 10 thesis were submitted after 1999, and the period is not taken into consideration in this analysis.

Table 1: Distribution by Departments

Department	Total	1991-95	1996-99	+/-
Education	78	7	71	+64
Arabic Language and Literature	71	25	46	+21
IRKH	46	27	19	-8
Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion	37	0	37	+37
English Language and Literature	25	6	19	+13
Fiqh and Usul al Fiqh	20	0	20	+20
Qur'an and Sunnah Studies	11	0	11	+11
Library and Information Science	10	2	8	+6
Political Science	6	0	6	+6
Psychology	3	0	3	+3
Sociology and Anthropology	1	0	1	+1

### Distribution by Geographical Location

Out of the 308 theses analyzed, a total of 150 cover a specific geographical location. This means that the researches are on a particular country. Figure 2 provides the theses that belong to the top six countries. Out of 150 theses, Malaysia, being the host country of the university where the majority of students are Malaysians, received the highest number (99; 65.5%) of theses, followed by Indonesia (19; 12.6 %) and Thailand (15; 9.9%). Three countries (Singapore, Bangladesh, and South Africa) have between 2-3 titles each. Other countries with less than two titles include Sri Lanka, Spain, The Philippines, Brunei, China, Somalia, Britain, Greece, and Iran.

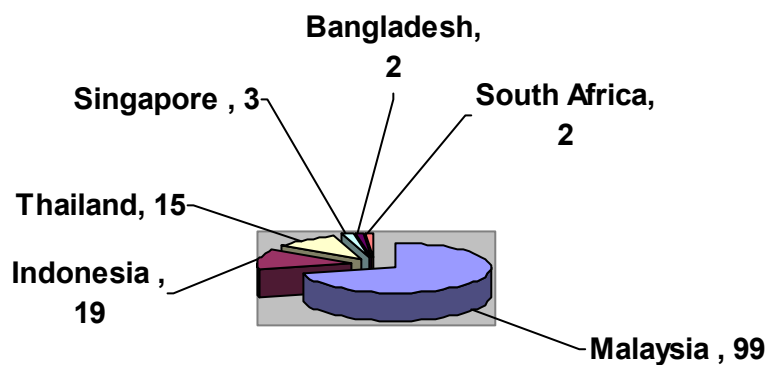


Figure 2: Top Geographical Areas

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### **Subject Area and Availability**

The 308 theses were checked in the OPAC/WebPAC of HUM library to determine their broad categorisation in accordance with the Library of Congress Classification scheme, and to verify their availability in the library. The major subject areas for the available theses were classified as found in the OPAC/WebPAC, while the researcher determined the areas for the remaining theses.

As illustrated in Table 2, seven major subject areas have been identified. Religion and Philosophy (B) is the highest productive subject area, with more than 37% of the total theses submitted for the past nine years. Among the areas studied in this discipline are the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic Philosophy and Islamic Law. None of the theses studied Buddhism or Hinduism. Although the highest number of theses submitted was in the areas of Religion and Philosophy, the majority (92; 80%) were unavailable at the library. Meanwhile, library education, information technology, information seeking behavior, and library competencies, were among the issues explored in Library and Information Science (Z) area, while grammar, socio-linguistic, poems and poetry, and language usage were popular in Language and Literature (P). It should be noted that, no thesis of LIS (Z) were found on cataloguing, publishing or copyright law. However, the number of the available theses for P or Z is higher (55.5 to 66.7%) as compared to those unavailable (44.4 to 33.3%). The least productive area is Technology (T). The average submission over the nine years for the seven subject areas are 12.8 for class B, 10 for P, 7.2 for L, 2.1 for D, 1 for Z, 0.8 for J, and 0.3 for T.

### **Number of Supervision**

Table 3 shows the number of theses supervision departments. For the nine-year period, a total of 107 lecturers supervised 308 theses, with an average of 2.9 theses per supervisor. During 1991-95, the Department of Fiqh & Usul Fiqh recorded an average of six theses per supervisor; Arabic Language and Literature recorded below three, while Department of IRKH, English Language and Literature, and Education recorded below two. Nevertheless, the second period (1996-99) witnessed a significant growth. During this period, 94 supervisors supervised 242 students, compared to 35 supervisors who supervised 66 students during the first period. This indicates that the number of supervisors increased by 168.6 per cent, while the number of theses increased by 266.7 per cent from one period to the other.

During the second period (1996-99), two departments (Education and Fiqh & Usul Fiqh) recorded an average of more than three theses per supervisor, three (Arabic, English Language & Literature, and IRKH) above an average of two theses, and six (Political Science, Psychology, Qur'an & Sunnah, Sociology & Anthropology, Usul al-Din & Comparative Religion) below an average of two.

Table 2: Subject Areas and Availability of Theses

Major Subject	Subject Dispersion	Available	Unavailable
<b>B</b> (Religion & Philosophy)	Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic movements, Islamic ethic, Islamic values, Islamic doctrines, Islamic philosophy, Islamic state, Islamic law, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic scholars, juristic rules, customs, zakat and charities, Christianity, Judaism, orientalist, Islamization of knowledge, and Da'wah,	23	92
<b>P</b> (Language and Literature)	Grammars, dictionary, orthography, socio-linguistic, syntactic, semantics, poems, poetry, prose, translation, lexicography, and language usage.	50	40
<b>L</b> (Education)	schools, school administration and management, students and faculty members, curriculum, teaching,	25	40
<b>D</b> (History)	Islamic identity, Islamic movements, methodology of Quranic exegesis, development of Islamic Da'wah, crisis of Muslim countries, Islam and Politics, and Muslim scholars	4	15
<b>z</b> (Library & Information Science)	library education, faculty members, system librarian, computer literacy, IT(internet, CD-ROM, Multimedia), library use, information seeking behavior, and competencies,	6	3
<b>J</b> (Political Science)	political rights, political crisis, political corruption, Islam and politics, foreign policy, and regional globalism.	0	7
<b>T</b> (Technology)	computer, computer programs, and CD-ROM	1	2

Table 4 reveals 22 names who received the most number of supervision (i.e. at least five students) between 1991 and 1999. During the first period (1991-95), six supervisors supervised 3-6 students each, four supervised 1-2 students, and 12 supervised none. It is probable that these 12 supervisors belong to those departments which did not offer master's programme during the first period, or they only joined the university during the second period. In the second period (1996-99), three supervisors supervised 10-12 students each, seven supervised 6-9 students, and 12 supervised 2-5 students. Further analysis shows that, of the remaining lecturers who supervised less than five students within nine years (1991-99), 21 of them supervised 3-4 students, while 64 supervised 1-2 students.

Table 3: Average Thesis per Supervisor

Department	Average Thesis per Supervisor	
	1991-95	1996-99
Arabic Language & Literature	2.4	2.5
Education	1.4	3.9
English Language & Literature	1.5	2.4
Fiqh and Usul Fiqh	6.0	3.5
IRKH	1.6	2.9
Library & Information Science	1.0	1.6
Political Science	0.0	1.6
Psychology	0.0	1.0
Qur'an & Sunnah Studies	0.0	1.8
Sociology & Anthropology	0.0	1.0
Usul al-Din & Comparative Religion	0.0	1.4

Table 4: Number of Supervision (5 Theses and above)

Supervisor	1991-95	1996-99	Total
1. Ibrahim M. Zein	6	12	18
2. Ahmad M.H. Hassoubah	0	11	11
3. Aref T. Mohad. Ali Al-Atari	0	10	10
4. Ahmad Sheu Abdussalam	4	5	9
5. Irfan Abdul Hamid Fatah	0	9	9
6. Rosnani Hashim	0	9	9
7. Louay M. Safi	4	4	8
8. Ahmad El-Hassan Simsaa	5	2	7
9. Hasan Langgulung	2	5	7
10. Abdul Khaliq Kazi	3	3	6
11. Sano Koutoub Mostapha	0	6	6
12. Munjid Mustapha Bahjat	1	5	6
13. Nasr El-Din Ibrahim Ahmad	3	3	6
14. Mohd. Zain Mahamood	0	6	6
15. Mohd Sahari Nordin	0	6	6
16. Rantnawati Mohd Asraf	0	6	6
17. Subramaniam Govindasamy	0	6	6
18. Ghulam Nabi Saqeb	0	5	5
19. Adrian Hare	2	3	5
20. Jamal Ahmad Badi	0	5	5
21. Mujahid Mustapha Bahjat	0	5	5
22. Abu Saiid Muhammad	1	4	5



## CONCLUSION

This study has analysed master's theses in the Humanities submitted to the IIUM during 1991-99. It has explored and evaluated 308 theses that contributed to the understanding of research trends, departmental and geographical affiliation, periodical growth and contribution of supervisors. The theses were produced by eleven departments at the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (IRKHS). Growth rate for the two periods (1991-95 and 1996-99) varies from department to department but is much higher for the Department of Education and the Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion as compared to others. There was a strong emphasis on researching in the areas of Religion and Philosophy; however, none of the theses studied other religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism. The average submission of the theses is between 0.3 and 12.8 per annum.

Although a large number of the theses (150) were related to a specific country, there is a very strong focus on South-East Asia, particularly Malaysia, which received 32.1 per cent of the total theses, submitted between 1991 and 1999. The finding is in line with Zein's (1998) and Sze and Ngah's (1997) studies, which found that most of the students' researches focus on Malaysia. This might be due to the lack of interest in researches related to other countries, or for the convenience of gathering data. Other possibilities include scarce of research materials and financial or time constraints. IIUM and faculty members therefore, should encourage especially the International students to conduct research on other countries which will enable the university to achieve the mission of "Internationalization" at the research level.

Findings show that, the number of the theses has grown from 67 theses during the first period (1991-95) to 242 produced during the second period (1996-99), with an increase of 266.7 per cent. The growth rate from year to year also varies, and the annual average thesis is 34.2 during the 9-year period. One hundred and seven (107) lecturers supervised 308 theses, on an average of 2.9 theses for each. The number of supervisors increased from 35 during 1991-95 to 94 during 1996-99, indicating a growth rate by 168.6 per cent from a period to another.

According to the University's requirements, students taking dissertation as a mode of study at the postgraduate level are required to submit three copies of the thesis to the university. One copy is to be given to the IIUM library. Nevertheless, results indicate that the number of the unavailable theses at the library is much higher as compared to available one, probably because the library did not receive a copy of those theses or has no space for them. The University should identify the main cause for this problem and make sure that researchers have access to all theses. Branch libraries or resource centers may be utilized to overcome space limitation at the main library.

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