

OPINIONS OF THE DIVINITY FACULTY STUDENTS ON RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE: A CASE STUDY OF ANKARA UNIVERSITY DIVINITY FACULTY

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Abstract

The debates on the epistemological background of Islamic thought continue to be the subject of Islamic philosophy and theology. The manifestations of these scientific debates and teachings as traditions and customs can be observed in the daily lives of Muslims. In contemporary Islamic thought, Islamic understandings of knowledge that can be described as *bayânî*, *irfânî* and *burhânî*, and lifestyles based on them are observed. Furthermore, In fact, there may be a struggle and conflict between them, and their reflections on religious, political and educational lives. The divinity faculties are among the environments where they are learned, discussed and experienced in theory and practice. For this reason, people studying theology are expected to be aware of these discussions. And with this infrastructure, the question of what are the possibilities of correct religious knowledge and the ways in which it can be reached is a question that preoccupies the mind. Within the framework of this study, it have been tried to be identified in the viewpoints of religious knowledge of the students of divinity faculty via focus group interview, one

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of the qualitative research methods. Findings have been analyzed through the codes of the content analysis of the data achieved, categories acquired through these codes and the themes attained of the categories. According to the findings of the research, it is observed that the contemporary students of divinity faculty set forth remarks reflecting the different periods of the discussions and approaches of Islamic knowledge in the history. However, these views mainly focus on the experience of contemporary Islamic thought.

Keywords: Viewpoint, Religious Education, Religious Knowledge, Divinity Education, Islamic Thought.

İlahiyat Fakültesi Öğrencilerinin Dini Bilgiye Bakışları: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Örneği

Öz

İslam düşüncesinin dini bilginin imkânı, ortaya koyulması gibi konuları içeren epistemolojik arka planı üzerindeki tartışmalar İslam Felsefesi ve teolojisinin konuları olmayadevametmektedir. Bubilimseltartışmaveöğretilerin ve hayata yansiyarak gelenek halini almış biçimlerinin Müslümanların günlük hayatlarındaki tezahürleri de izlenebilmektedir. Çağdaş İslam düşüncesinde Beyani, İrfani ve Burhani olarak nitelendirilebilecek İslam bilgi anlayışları ve bunlara dayalı yaşam biçimleri gözlenebilmektedir. Hatta bunlar arasında çekişme ve çatışmalar ve bunların dini, siyasi ve eğitsel hayatlara yansımaları olabilmektedir. İlahiyat fakülteleri İslam düşünce geleneğinin teorik ve pratik olarak öğrenildiği, tartışıldığı ve yaşandığı eğitim ortamlarıdır. Bu nedenle ilahiyat eğitimi alan kişilerin bu tartışmalardan haberdar olması beklenmektedir. Ve bu alt yapı ile de dini bilgiye bakışları, dini bilginin imkânı ve ona ulaşma yollarına dair çıkarımlarının ne olduğu sorusu zihinleri meşgul eden bir sorudur. Bu çalışmada, İlahiyat fakültesi öğrencilerinin dini bilgiye bakış açıları nitel araştırma yönteminin odak grup görüşmesi yoluyla tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonucunda elde edilen bulgulara göre günümüz ilahiyat fakültesi öğrencilerinin tarihsel süreçte ortaya çıkan İslam bilgi yaklaşım ve tartışmalarının farklı dönemlerini yansıtan nitelikte görüşler ortaya koydukları anlaşılmaktadır. Ancak bu görüşler ağırlıklı olarak çağdaş İslam düşüncesi birikiminde yoğunlaşmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bakış Açısı, Dini Bilgi, Din Eğitimi, İlahiyat Eğitimi, İslam Düşüncesi.

Summary

The Islamic tradition of thought, which focused on the meaning and scope of the concept of knowledge in the early periods of Islam, later systematized as a result of social and political changes and facing with different cultures. The fact that the introductory chapters of early Islamic works on theology include the nature, sources and classification of knowledge is indication that Islam has its own epistemology and paradigm (Uyanık 2012). When we look at the epistemological process of discussions made in the classical period of Islamic thought around the concepts of knowledge-knowing-science, it is obvious that there has been a conceptual transformation from the 11th century onwards, and a classification has been made that centred the concept of science. Although, the criteria, purposes and methods of these classifications have caused many discussions to take place, they have also established new discussion grounds, since they provided a framework for the epistemological process in Islamic thought. It seems that with the movement of re-construction, though its formation period and the characterization of “Modern Islamic Thought” are not clear within the framework of the search for novelty led by these discussions (Ulukütük 2012), the focus was especially the question of how to produce knowledge and the epistemology present in Islamic thought was analyzed with a structural method (Kardaş 2016).

Since modern science has progressed from Western origin since the beginning of the 20th century, Islamic thinkers raised the issue of Islamization of knowledge after the second half of this century. In the background of this system of thought, which can be described as the way of establishing relations with Western knowledge and disciplines, and called “Last Era”, lies the idea that the concept, language and thought used in education, especially in higher education should be Islamized (Attas 1991), and all of information in the universe should be organized in line with the principle of Tawhid, regardless of the area in question (Faruqi 2016). However, this view is also criticized (Muhammed 1994).

Divinity faculties are educational environments where Islamic tradition of thought is conveyed, discussed and experienced theoretically and practically. For this reason, people studying on theology are expected to be aware of these discussions. And with this background, the question of what are the possibilities of correct religious knowledge and the ways in which it can be reached is a question that preoccupies the mind. In this study, holistic (single unit of analysis) single case design is used which is one of the qualitative

research methods and a single unit of the case study is analyzed (Yin 1984: 41). And, it is aimed to determine the views of students of Divinity Faculty of Ankara University on religious knowledge in the framework of holistic single case. The holistic single case of the study consists, in total, of 8 people, 4 women and 4 men who graduated from the Divinity Program of Ankara University in 2018.

According to the findings of the research, it is seen that the students of theology faculties today present the views that reflect the different periods of the Islamic knowledge approaches and debates that emerged in the historical process. The conceptual framework in the works that formed the early period of Islamic tradition of thought concerning the knowledge, the process of obtaining knowledge and the importance of obtaining knowledge has been the starting point of producing knowledge. In this sense, the fact the students of divinity faculty begin to discuss the issue of religious knowledge, when talking about the process of producing the religious knowledge present an image compatible with this tendency in the tradition. When the elements that students accept as source and criterion of religious knowledge are examined, it is seen that they reveal the data that overlap with the epistemological classification made in line with Contemporary Islamic Thought where the Qur'ān, reason and sense are centred.

The third theme obtained from the research covers the students' thoughts about the process of producing religious knowledge. The process of searching for knowledge, which they regard as a difficult process, has been accepted by the students as the beginning of the act of producing knowledge. While students do not count among the sources and criteria of religious knowledge, it is seen that they include catechism, scientific articles and internet as a reference source when talking about the process. It would be an ideal educational situation for contemporary theological education to convey all stages of the Islamic thought system to its students in all dimensions. In addition, it is normal for people who have received theological education to think about the information as individuals and to reach different interpretations.

Introduction

The nature of knowledge, which is one of the basic problems of epistemology, has been debated since the early stages of the history of philosophy. With the emergence of Islam, this issue has been discussed by Muslim scientists within the framework of Islam's understanding of knowledge. The Qur'ān, the holy

book of Muslims, also touches on the subject of knowledge in many verses and deals with knowledge in three categories. It is seen that the Qur'an refers to the first of these categories with “knowledge (علم)” (al-Nisa 4:162), the second with “assumption (الظن)” (Yunus 10:36), and the third with the concept of “khars (خرص)” (Yunus 10:66) in the sense of misestimating, and the concept of علم in this classification is used as absolute knowledge (Atay, 1968, p.167). According to the Qur’ān, God is not only the first teacher (Baqarah 2:31; ‘Alaq 96:4-5), but also encourages humanity to be firm in knowledge in the process of acquiring knowledge. Besides, in Hadith literature, there are many hadiths about the nature and importance of knowledge. The hadith “It is obligatory for all men and women to seek knowledge” (Ibn Mājah, Muqaddimah 17) is important in terms of revealing the value that Islam gives to علم.

The Islamic tradition of thought, which focused on the meaning and scope of the concept of knowledge in the early periods of Islam, later systematized as a result of social and political changes and facing with different cultures. The fact that the introductory chapters of early Islamic works on theology include the nature, sources and classification of knowledge indicates that Islam has its own epistemology and paradigm (Uyanık 2012). When we look at the epistemological process of discussions made in the classical period of Islamic thought around the concepts of knowledge-knowing-science, It is obvious that there has been a conceptual transformation from the 11th century onwards, and a classification was made that centred the concept of science. According to the literature of Islamic thought, it is seen that the most basic distinction was made at the point of origin in the classification of the sciences which were seen as the starting point of conceptual transformation and science was divided into two parts as religious and worldly, and the epistemological process after this distinction progressed through the conceptualization of religious science and non-religious science (Kocabaş 1996). Although, the criteria, purposes and methods of these classifications caused many discussions to take place, they also established new discussion grounds, since they provided a framework for the epistemological process in Islamic thought. It seems that with the movement of re-construction, though its formation period and the characterization of “Modern Islamic Thought” are not clear within the framework of the search for novelty led by these discussions (Ulukütük 2012), the focus was especially the question of how to produce knowledge and the epistemology present in Islamic thought was analyzed with a structural method (Kardaş 2016). It is noteworthy that the reconstruction process of contemporary Islamic thought focused primarily on linguistic awareness (Arkoun 2003). Afterwards, a new

analysis was made based on the view that the scientific classifications in Islamic thought were insufficient to reveal the epistemological infrastructure of Islam, and a classification was made on the process of producing knowledge in Islamic thought. Accordingly, the current epistemological infrastructure of Islamic thought is shaped around the concepts of *Bayân*, *Burhân* and *Irfân* (al-Jâbirî 1997). In the Islamic tradition of thought, the thinkers who centred on the discursive (*bayân*) information based on the linguistic explanations and interpretations of sacred texts were Islamic jurists and theologians, especially those working in the field of language and grammar. Based on the idea that real knowledge of God, existence, events and religious matters can be obtained through inspiration, the Gnostic (*irfânî*) system of knowledge is represented by mystics. *Burhânî* system of knowledge which seeks for the true knowledge with reference to the absolute consequences of mind and logic is represented by the logicians and philosophers. This classification, which was put forward in the modern period, systematized the points of view of the controversial issues such as nature of knowledge ever since the early days, the possibility of knowledge, the value of knowledge, the ways of acquiring knowledge, the nature of religious knowledge and so on. The last step of the reconstruction that matures in this classification is the identification of the elements that is to bring about the transformation (Hanafi 2011).

Since modern science has progressed from Western origin since the beginning of the 20th century, Islamic thinkers raised the issue of Islamization of knowledge after the second half of this century. In the background of this system of thought, which can be described as the way of establishing relations with Western knowledge and disciplines, and called “Last Era”, lies the idea that the concept, language and thought are used in education, especially in higher education should be Islamized (Attas 1991), and all the information in the universe should be organized in line with the principle of Tawhid, regardless of the area in question (Faruqi 2016). However, this view is also criticized (Muhammed 1994).

This research arisen after we realized in the insights we entered at the undergraduate level in the divinity faculty that the common knowledge codes in the tradition are important in terms of students’ approaches to the courses. Being aware of the fact that pre-learning/readiness and learning outcomes in divinity education of the students is important elements in the educational activities, we tried, with such a research, to put how the tradition and learning outcomes about Islamic thoughts affected the students' ways of thinking. Divinity faculties are educational environments where Islamic

tradition of thought is transferred, discussed and experienced theoretically and practically. For this reason, people studying theology are expected to be aware of these discussions. And with this infrastructure, the question of what are the possibilities of correct religious knowledge and the ways in which it can be reached is a question that preoccupies the mind. Therefore, what we are aiming to achieve in this study is to show a situation/case. Although this modest work is not expected to allow for generalization on such a profound issue, it is hoped that it will raise the issue in terms of its impact on theological education. We believe that if we succeed in putting forward such a projection scientifically, this can lead to a more efficient progression of processes in theology education and the strengthening of our communication with students.

When the literature related to the subject area of the research is examined, it is seen that Ekinçi's work "Standards of Acceptance of Religious Knowledge by the Students of the Faculty of Divinity in the Context of Universality (Erzurum Example)" (2006) is a quantitative field study conducted with 150 students from the Faculty of Divinity of Ataturk University. In this study, students' attitudes towards the acceptance or rejection of the interpretation of the Qur'an and the separation of religious and scientific knowledge are examined. A qualitative study by Ege region in 2015 "Religious Guidance, Source of Knowledge and Knowledge Generation Processes" with senior students of the Department of Non-Formal Religious Education and Practices in the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University can be seen among the related studies. Ege focuses on "religious knowledge in religious guidance practices" the functionality of religious knowledge used in this field is discussed and the importance of reproducing individual and life oriented religious knowledge is emphasized. In this study, unlike the other two studies, it is focused on the students' thoughts about the possibility of religious knowledge and production processes before they encounter with the target group.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, holistic (single unit of analysis) single case design is used which is one of the qualitative research methods and a single unit of the case study is analyzed (Yin 1984: 41). In this study, it is aimed to determine the views of students of Divinity Faculty of Ankara University on religious knowledge in the framework of holistic single case. In accordance with the main purpose of the research, it is aimed to identify students'

334 • OPINIONS OF THE DIVINITY FACULTY STUDENTS ON RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE: A CASE STUDY OF ANKARA UNIVERSITY DIVINITY FACULTY

- views about the possibility of the religious knowledge,
- criteria to produce religious knowledge,
- processes to produce religious knowledge.

The holistic single case of the study consists, in total, of 8 people, 4 women and 4 men who graduated from the Divinity Program of Ankara University in 2018. In the creation of the working group, it is ensured that the participants come together voluntarily by using homogenous sampling strategy in which a small and homogenous sample is chosen and certain sub-groups are studied in depth. (Patton 2002: 235). The fact that the entire group consists of senior students at the Divinity Faculty of Ankara University and the gender distribution rates are the factors providing homogeneity.

Table 1. The Features of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Graduated High School Type
P1	Male	İmam Hatip Lisesi (Religious Vocational High School)
P2	Female	İmam Hatip Lisesi (Religious Vocational High School)
P3	Male	İmam Hatip Lisesi (Religious Vocational High School)
P4	Female	Kız Meslek Lisesi (Vocational School for Girls)
P5	Female	Anadolu Lisesi (Anatolian High School)
P6	Female	İmam Hatip Lisesi (Religious Vocational High School)
P7	Male	İmam Hatip Lisesi (Religious Vocational High School)
P8	Male	Anatolian High School

Collecting and Analyzing the Data

The data has been collected through a small group of participants and a focus group interview (Morgan 1997), which is an in-depth interview on a specific subject, in light of the main questions open to discussion by consulting seven different field experts (Patton 2002: 466). It is thought that this technique would be more convenient in terms of revealing the data variety in the search of the main purpose and sub-questions of the research. A pilot study has been conducted with another group of students about how the prepared questions worked in practice, and it is found that the questions worked in reaching the expected data but the focus of the interview could be moved away. In this

respect, the researcher reminded the participants that the question should not be separated from the focus point and the discussion was continued in the focus. In this respect, in case of separation from the main topic during the interview the researcher re-reminded the participants the relevant question and that the focal point should not be separated and thus the discussion could be continued in the focus.

It is recommended that the process be managed together by two researchers because it is a complex situation to manage the interview and collect the data proper to focus group studies (Krueger 1997). In this study, the process is managed by two researchers together, one of whom managed the interview and the other is interested in the record and the order of the group. Again in the light of scientific guidelines on the process of conducting the interviews during the qualitative research process, general information about the research has been given to the participants before the interview begins and the volunteer consent form is submitted by providing the assurance that the information obtained from the interviews would be used only in this research and in a reliable manner.

Due to the nature of the focus group interview, in the research, a discussion topic is presented and the data is tried to be reached in this way, instead of asking the participants questions to be answered directly. In this direction, the questions which are prepared in consultation with the field experts to guide the researchers during the interview are shaped as follows;

- We would like to talk to you about religious knowledge today. What do you think what it happens if there is a confusion about religious knowledge? You can take this in terms of yourself, your environment, society or the Islamic world.
- If the situation is complicated and problematic, what are the ways to resolve this confusion? What would be your individual preferences and suggestions about this?
- So, what is *exact religious knowledge* for you?
- By which criteria do you determine religious knowledge? Why is that?
- What sources do you use primarily to identify religious knowledge? For example, what kind of a method do you follow to reach the right information about any religious issue you are having problems with? Why is that?

Data is analyzed based on descriptive content analysis model (Neuendorf 2016:53). In the study, analytical induction method was used as the method of analysis of the obtained data (Patton 2002: 454). According to Patton, analytical induction begins from the hypothesis of a researcher's inferential propositions or from theory, and is seen as a process to verify or propose hypotheses. In this process, sometimes, deductive or semi-deductive analysis can be started. In this research, the analysis process has progressed in this way, data has been analyzed by deductive method in accordance with the sub-objectives of the research, and then the inductive method has been used because of the possibility that the data may also present themes other than hypotheses (Yin 2011: 209; Miles et. al. 2013:148; Neuendorf 2016: 53-55). After the coding process has been completed, the whole data set has been re-examined by both researchers in order to eliminate possible errors in the coding process. The NVIVO8 program has been used as an aid tool for coding the data. The encodings made with this program have been then manually checked. The participants have been given codes P1 (condensation code of *Participant1*), P2, P3 to determine which participant the data has been obtained. In order to eliminate the margin of error that may occur in every stage of the study, expert opinion has been consulted and regulations have been made in line with the recommendations.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings and comments obtained within the framework of the research are given. The findings were revealed in accordance with the codes obtained after content analysis of the data obtained from the interview, the categories obtained from the codes and the themes obtained according to the categories.

As a result of the analysis on the interview texts, the following three themes have been reached:

- Views about the Possibility of the Religious Knowledge
- Criteria for Religious Knowledge
- The Process of Producing the Religious Knowledge

1. Views about the Possibility of the Religious Knowledge

As a result of the analysis, the theme ideas about the possibility of the religious knowledge have been composed of three categories: *Practice and*

Theory Conflict, the Possibility and the Validity of the Interpretive Religious Knowledge, and View on Religious Knowledge and the sub-headings of these categories.

1.1. Tension Between Theory and Practice

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Muslims benefited from the Qur'ān and the Sunna, two primary sources, and produced interpretations and formed a bridge between religious knowledge and life. The knowledge of revelation and Sunnah which kept, by nature, in communication with human did not detach, with the contribution of comment and thought, from its basic emphasis and maintained its functionality within the framework of geographical and periodic conditions and needs (Selçuk 2000). But in recent centuries, the gap between the tradition of religious knowledge and the life made the dilemma of faith and experience a topic of discussion (Bardakoğlu 2015). It seems inevitable for the individual to have inner disturbances about his/her faith when cultural, economic, political, educational etc. situations in daily life and the realities of religion believed are not in harmony (Kırca 2012).

It seems that among the findings of the study, one of the important points at the stage of questioning the possibility of religious knowledge expressed by the participants is the theoretical dimension of religious knowledge and the dilemma that appears in the reflection of the theory to the practices. Participants expressed in various statements that they could not establish a connection between the knowledge that should be and existing one, and that this situation raised problems with the quality of religious knowledge. P1 summarizes this situation in the light of the difference between the theoretical knowledge on intercession in Islam and the situation in practice as follows: *“There is a conflict between reality and the specific state of religion... After discussing the theological situation of intercession in the faculty, I hesitate in telling the discussions we made here to the people around me when I walk out of that door”*. P8 shows this dilemma more clearly using the following words, *“...I think that in correct religious knowledge, there is a problem that arises from the incompatibility of theory and practice. That is, in theory we explain everything, but in practice we do not see the equivalent.”*¹. Similar to this data of the study, in the study of Ekinçi (2006), students state that they have problems in distinguishing the theoretical religious knowledge and the settled acceptances encountered in life. Therefore, the data of the study and the data of the study overlap.

1.2. Possibility and Validity of Interpretational Religious Knowledge

The question of the possibility of knowledge and, if possible, what the criteria will be is one of the important epistemological issues discussed in the field of philosophy (Çüçen 2003: 5). These main discussions that philosophy put forward about the possibility of knowledge also had reflections on Islamic thought. When the possibility of knowledge is examined in terms of Islamic tradition of thought, it is seen that Qur'an and Sunnah have an absolute place to be the main source of religious knowledge both in classical and modern period (Bardakoğlu 2015: 16). However, the methodology discussions on the knowledge to be produced with the interpretation of these two main sources continue until today (Kırca 2011). When the findings of the study are examined, it is seen that when expressing their opinions on the possibility of interpretive religious knowledge, the participants focus on the concepts of knowledge, correct knowledge and correct religious knowledge; while sometimes they claim that interpretational correct religious knowledge is not possible; sometimes they are hesitant in this regard. Some participants are found to be in a dilemma about whether it is necessary to obtain the accurate religious information. While P8, for example, enters into a mental debate over the relevant concepts as follows “*We must examine the concepts in pieces, that is, true, religion and knowledge. I am of the opinion that these concepts should be taken separately and finally reached a conclusion. The philosophical grounds of truth, is there a truth, according to whom or what?*” With the following statements, P5 displays a different attitude than the other participants on the possibility of interpretational true religious knowledge “*The concept of right and wrong is a comment for me. For me, there is no true religious knowledge. It is completely one’s comments.*” From the following statements, it is also understood that P4 does not have a definitive judgment on this issue “*Besides, it needs to ask if true knowledge is possible? Is this religious knowledge to accept different perspectives? Or is it not also necessary to give it to people?*” From the aforementioned statements of the students, it is seen that the students also transfer the methodological perspective of the discussions about the possibility of correct knowledge in the philosophy of knowledge to the discussion of the possibility of correct religious knowledge. Therefore, it is natural to see that the ambiguity of the philosophy of knowledge in the discussion of the possibility of the right knowledge is reflected in the possibility of the right religious knowledge. However, the individuality of interpretive religious knowledge and the possibility of its shifting to arbitrariness have also raised concerns among students about this issue (Ege 2015: 81). As stated, in the Islamic tradition of

thought, these individuality and arbitrariness issues are discussed. In order to prevent these, it is stated that the methodological common perspective should be established in the process of producing interpretive religious information. It is seen from the statements of the participants that in terms of methodological necessity, they revealed data parallel to the tradition of Islamic thought about the possibility and absoluteness of the religious knowledge reached by way of the interpretations to be made on the main sources.

1.3. View on Religious Knowledge

According to the interview data, it is identified that the senior students of the Divinity Faculty who have participated in the research have developed various perspectives on their communication with the religious knowledge based on their own lives and the examples they see in their environment. According to these findings gathered under different headings, the students' profiles and the influence of objectivity or subjectivity on communication with religious knowledge are the subjects highlighted by the participants.

1.3.1. Objectivity or Subjectivity?: In the Islamic system of thought, the question of objectivity or subjectivity of interpretative religious knowledge is discussed with different dimensions in different fields such as Islamic Jurisprudence and Kalam (Koşum 2016; Genç 2018). During the interview, it is seen that in parallel with this issue discussed in the Islamic thought, the participants discussed if there could be an objective reality in the nature of religious knowledge and stated that interpreting the sacred texts may be subjective. These discussions, which may also be related to the possibility of interpretive religious knowledge show that the students are far from mental clarity in putting the bayânî knowledge based on explanation and interpretation of sacred texts and burhânî knowledge based on examination through reason and logic. Based on the example of Van Gogh's understanding of God, P6 explains the fact that religious knowledge which shaped religious attitudes is personal as follows: "...I think that all people have their own god in terms of reaching God. Everyone is shaping his god in his mind as he understands religion. I think it was said by Van Goh 'When I want to reach God, I draw a picture of the stars.' For me, this perception, which identifies God with creativity, is much more religious than the prayer we have made formally."

Saying "The criterion for me is me; myself... it must be so for every believer. It's not selfish, for example. Egology. To put me in the centre and understand everything through me. God, religion, book... everything", P5

similarly puts himself into the centre as a believer and states that subjectivity is a necessity rather than a problem in the view of religious knowledge because the addressee of the sacred text is human. In her work in 2015, Ege concludes that knowledge concerning human is excluded from religious knowledge. In this respect, this data of the research seems to contradict the research results of Ege (2015).

Based his own experience, P3 states the fact that in the process of acquiring religious knowledge, objectivity can be put aside from time to time and can be carried out through the subjective situations of the process as follows: *“Sometimes when I look at the Qur'an in a completely emotional mode, I say that when I see a verse in something, it is exactly talking about me... And sometimes what the verse talking about has nothing to do with me. I'm not sure that those who comment on the scriptures can get out of their moods”* with the different of P6 and P5.

Participant 8 stated in his speech that the subjectivity that emerged in religious knowledge opens the door to otherizations in the following statements. *“...Excommunication. There's an excommunicating mechanism out there, it's very hard. I know because it happened to me... When I say something, when it's said there's a comment a sudden a reaction can be met, and the reactions can be quite harsh.”* This data of the research leads us to attitudes towards the tendency to exclude religious interpretations other than their interpretation, which has been going on since the beginning of Islamic thought and political history, and to carry out this exclusion based on religious references (Arslan 2017: 540).

1.3.2. Students' Common Profiles: Participants stated that there may be various profiles shaped by the perspective of correct knowledge in the Divinity Faculty. It is seen that among these student profiles there are those who methodically have a uniform perspective on communicating with religious knowledge as well as identities that can transform this communication into an effective process. P4 categorized the students of divinity faculty in terms of their communication with religious knowledge and divided them into four groups with the following statements: *“...First of all, there are prototypes that are aware of the problem and try to solve problems with their own possibilities ...People who read, research, are aware of the situation and try to find a solution ... Second group of my friends are those who are aware of the problem, but keep their head down, they only come to take lessons, take lecture notes and go out in the same way. The third group is our friends who*

are not aware of the problem. They don't care too much. What's the problem? What could it be? They take the exams. And some says I already know the truth. These are friends who refer to out-of-school resources."

These findings show that there are different types regarding knowledge and that the sources utilized to obtain religious knowledge are effective. It is possible to mention a clear differentiation between those who consciously consider the faculty as a learning environment and those accepting an external source as an ultimate authority on religious knowledge.

2. The Sources and the Criteria of the Religious Knowledge

Another important theme that emerged in the interviews with the participants who answered the basic question of research is the criteria that guide the participants to reach the religious knowledge. According to the findings obtained in this direction, religious knowledge criteria of the participants are grouped under three categories: The Holy Qur'ān and Reason-Conscience and Sense.

2.1. The Holy Qur'ān

In the tradition of Islamic thought, The Holy Qur'an and Sunnah which includes the words and behaviours of the Prophet Muhammad to explain the Qur'ān have been recognized as the main source of religious knowledge regardless of a period of time (Bardakoğlu 2015). All of the participants shared the view that the Holy Qur'ān is the unique source of religious knowledge. For P2, for instance, the Qur'ān is one of the essential references when she needs a religious knowledge saying that the Qur'ān is a book from life and based this opinion as follows: *"...I think Qur'ān is a book from the life which sets rules. Therefore I am sure that Qur'ān always overlaps with anything humanistic...Therefore, I always refer to the Qur'ān."*

2.2. Reason - Conscience and Emotion

In the Islamic tradition of thought, in grounding the religion and faith, reason has been the primary source of knowledge for philosophy, logic and theologians (al-Maturidi 2005), in applying it to the life, for Muslim Jurists (al-Sarakhsi 1973), although the order of priority has changed. The participants also shared a common view on this basic source, but they differed on the

priority of reason as a source just as in the Islamic tradition of thought. P7 argues *“I don't think the Qur'ān can be understood without reasoning due to the nature of comprehension. But sometimes sense can come to the fore more.”*

In the Islamic tradition of thought, there have been views arguing that the basis of faith is the heart and emotions rather than reason and senses (Öğük 2014), as well as opinions that suggest that emotions cannot surpass reason (Mustafa Sabri 1950). When the statements of the participants are examined in this context, it is seen that they consider the conscientious and emotional dimensions of knowledge among the elements that they put forth as the criteria of religious knowledge, and consider conscience and emotion as criteria for reaching religious knowledge. First of all, religious knowledge is compatible with reason and conscience. Because sometimes the religion in which I believe is confronted with information that you can say.

For instance, with the following words *“First of all, religious knowledge compatible with reason and conscience because sometimes you come across with information and can ask “how my religion commands me such a thing... Because in the basis of a religion that claims to be universal there should be both conscience and reason.”* P6 clearly stated that in searching for religious knowledge, conscience must be used besides reason. However, P7 expresses the need for not to neglect emotion in communication with religious knowledge as follows *“...This religion has both emotional and spiritual dimension. When we ignore them, what remains is nothing but gammon, beliefs and rituals.”*

With these data, the participant students show that they think that irfânî knowledge cannot be ignored while centralizing the bayânî and burhânî knowledge in Islamic tradition of thought. In this respect, it is seen that even though they have a distant stance to rational knowledge throughout the research, they do not exclude conscience and emotion in terms of being the source of religious knowledge.

3. The Process of Producing the Religious Knowledge

Regarding the question of how students of divinity faculty produce religious knowledge, another important problem of the research, three categories as *First Questioning, Being Happy in Search for Knowledge, Application Resources of the Process and Factors Affecting the Process* and the codes under these categories have been reached.

3.1. First Questioning

The questioning ability is considered as an individual's original assessment of the subject or situation in which the individual is thinking with a systematic and rational perspective (Cevizci 2000: 104). As such, it is considered as the first step in the process of producing knowledge. Findings obtained within the scope of the research indicate that the communication of the students of theology with the religious knowledge started after a questioning process.

Stating *“When I arrived, I was already in uneasiness. I didn't think of anything. What if it is? I was saying. I was going to find out the reason for the infrastructure of things. I found the answer to my questions here”* P3, for example, points out that he started to experience this process before starting his faculty education.. P1 revealed that the first searches started after the arrival of the faculty: *“...I had already questioned a lot in the preparatory class... I was also excluded by my friends. There was a concept called torment of conscious, I read it and liked it a lot. I was suffering from conscious not from conscience ... for that, many times I was up all night.”*

3.2. Being Happy in Search for Knowledge

In the system of knowledge which started from the early Islamic thought, whose effects have been seen in the modern times, which centred on the idea that true knowledge about God, existence, events and religious issues can be obtained through inspiration (*kashf* and *ilhâm*) as well as sensory data and reasoning (Öztürk 2003), it is stated that the process of obtaining information has a feature that brings happiness to individuals (Özgen 2013). The emergence of this feature is connected to the work of all elements such as thought, sense, imagination and behaviour in harmony, and it is stated that when this harmony does not occur, the process of obtaining information may turn into an agony rather than happiness (Şebüsteri 2011:3). It is observed that the participants of the research mentioned a cognitive unhappiness about the production process of religious knowledge. P5 says: *“Knowledge never makes people happy. We have no purpose of being happy about these matters, we are pursuing knowledge.”*

When the participants' statements about the process of producing the religious information are examined, it is identified that the beginning of the process has not been very easy for them, and that after a long-term intellectual struggle, they could pass to the process of producing knowledge. For example,

when P2 describes this difficult process, she makes the following statements: *“When a question preoccupies me, and if it is particularly something to determine the course of my life... Firstly, I enter into an introversive state of mind for a long period, nearly about a week. I think of it in my mind. What is actually the problem, what is that thing disturbing me? It lasts about a week. I keep it in my mind night and day. I struggle myself asking help from the God.”*

Although the data obtained from the participants direct us to the discussions in Islamic thought related to the personal characteristics in the process of obtaining knowledge, it cannot be said that the data are sufficient to reach a judgment on its own. In order to do this, additional studies seem to be essential.

3.3. Reference Sources of the Process

While the participants of the research stated that the process they experienced in putting the criteria of religious knowledge and religious knowledge as above, they stated that the Qur'an, Sunnah, catechism, scientific publications and internet are among their sources of reference in the process of obtaining religious information.

Participants state that the Qur'ān, which they put first in the theme of religious knowledge criteria, is also the first reference source to produce religious knowledge. For example, P4 explains this as follows *“First of all, I look at the Qur'ān considering it the context of Islamic history and exegesis, of course, not in modern context...”* Participants state that although they do not mention the Sunnah among the criteria of religious knowledge, they applied to them as a reference for understanding. For example, P3 states that he uses hadith and Sunnah as a source, but, in doing this, he has been more critical *“...I do not question much if the source is a verse, but when it comes to hadith or Sunnah, I might say I doubt if the Prophet Muhammad said something like that or not for it is not certain.”*

The fact that information about the theoretical and practical aspects of religion, the catechisms compiled with legal interpretations aim to gain the perspective of a particular religious' interpretation makes them controversial in terms of being objective sources (Okumuş 2015). It is among the findings that the participants who will specialize in the field of theology benefit from catechisms as a source of reference. For example, while P2 states that he

uses catechism as a reference book as follows “*I look at catechism. I look at catechisms about legal problem.*” P4 underlines that there may be situations in which catechism is insufficient as follows “*When you say I have a question, can you find the answer of the question in Catechism? You cannot find.*” This emphasis by P4 suggests that the Catechism as a source may lose its functionality in the face of emerging problems, which supports the debate on the limitations of the catechism studies (Okumuş 2015).

The participants of the research also listed the scientific studies among the reference sources in the process of producing religious knowledge. For example, P4 details her application process to scientific articles saying “*I read scientific articles first, because they seem to me a summary. They give explanations about the literature and evidence on the matter. You can even go to the main sources in the footnotes. First, I read them and get a general opinion.*” It is noteworthy that one of the reference sources used by the participants is internet. The reliability of internet data, which is considered as one of the first sources of reference in many areas, is a questionable issue (Vardı 2012:136). In spite of this controversial situation, it is seen that when the P8 encounters any problem, the first method he uses is to do a research on the internet “*...I look over internet right away. If I cannot find it on internet, then I look for if there is any verse or hadith about it.*” This data revealed by P4 shows that participants who have an ideal attitude about the criteria of religious knowledge have moved away from this tendency in terms of reference sources.

3.4. Factors Affecting the Process

As a result of the interview, it is found that there are several factors affecting the process of producing religious knowledge. When the data are analyzed, it is seen that geography and culture and the necessity of adaptation to time are stated as factors affecting the process.

The individual will be able to create an information frame by means of the possibility of being aware of the social context in which he is involved in his relationship with religion and the horizon of thinking he has gained. Therefore, it also appears in the data of the research that the individual who tried to make sense of the religion which is discussed in the Islamic tradition of thought from the first period (Kılıç 2017) can produce objective information independent from the historical, cultural and geographical conditions of the society where he/she lives in (Arabacı 2004:10-11). For example, saying “*I accept Islam as*

absolute truth and I believe this. I kept asking myself, "What's the point?" What does God want, to what extent he wants him to believe, or why he wants him to believe, or does he want him to believe? So what's his criterion in the Qur'an? People who live in different countries have never seen much in that geography. Let's think about technology now, but I'm saying let's think of an African tribe, for example, whether God wants one to find Islam and to fast, whether there is intercession or fate, or just wants to know that I exist, that I will be worshipped..." P5 states that the geography and culture can play a fundamental role in the process of producing religious knowledge, while P8, opposing P5, states that geography may have an impact on the process of producing religious information, but this is not a problem that cannot be overcome as follows "...*The right geography can be a destiny, but change is in the hands of human being. Human being is already open to change.*"

Some of the participants touched, particularly, on the cultural dimension of religious knowledge, and how the cultural codes in the background could be effective in producing new information. For example, P2, with an example she gives on this matter, underlines the importance of cultural elements and that whole process can be prevented them from time to time. "*These comments were made culturally at that time and are made today. It may not be inconvenient for me to marry a non-Muslim right now, but I take care of my family first because it is inconvenient for them.*"

In the production of existing religious knowledge by way of interpretation, the context in which the knowledge is first produced and the context in which the mental structure of the individual who will communicate with this knowledge is the two basic elements that should be considered. It is unthinkable that the existing contexts are independent of the practices of everyday life (Çetin 2017). In the Islamic tradition of thought, there are different examples of practices that are changed according to different needs in different contexts from the times of companions onwards by bringing different interpretations to the verses (Çuçak 2017).

The views of the participants that the needs of religious knowledge should change according to the changing conditions and this change must bring the transformation in religious knowledge show that they have put forward equivalent ideas with those in Islamic tradition of thought, especially concerning the practices on the adaptation of religious practices to the day. For example, P5 explicitly grounds this requirement in the following terms "*When we consider the paradigm shift, the answer for many questions may be*

different after 14 centuries, answer of the same question...” Again continuing his words as follows “...*Time can change everything. When we look at the abrogation (naskh), if there have been changes even in 23 years, so would it be in 14 centuries. And perhaps this benefits religion instead of harm.*” P5 is of the opinion that it should progress in parallel with time.

Conclusion

According to the findings of the research, it is seen that the students of theology faculties today present the views that reflect the different periods of the Islamic knowledge approaches and debates that emerged in the historical process. The conceptual framework in the works that formed the early period of Islamic tradition of thought concerning the knowledge, the process of obtaining knowledge and the importance of obtaining knowledge has been the starting point of producing knowledge. In this sense, the fact the students of divinity faculty begin to discuss the issue of religious knowledge, when talking about the process of producing the religious knowledge present an image compatible with this tendency in the tradition. When the elements that students accept as source and criterion of religious knowledge are examined, it is seen that they reveal the data that overlap with the epistemological classification made in line with Contemporary Islamic Thought where the Qur’ân, reason and emotion are centred. For example, while all of the students’ presenting the Qur'an as the main source of religious knowledge is seen as an emphasis on the bayânî system of knowledge, inclusion of the mind in the presented criteria indicates that the burhânî type of knowledge is an important choice for the students. However, although the individual emotions that students put forward as a source of religious knowledge seem to be close to the subjectivity of the irfânî system of knowledge, it seems that what exactly is meant by these internal criteria is a situation that can be understood by different studies.

Considering the possible reasons for this result, first of all, the necessity of evaluating the curriculum of divinity faculties emerged. It is observed that there are courses in the curriculum of Divinity Faculty of Ankara University that refer to elements of the Islamic tradition of thought. For example; In the 2nd class, the Quranic Semantics course that targets “to use semantics on the sample in the context of understanding the Qur'anic text”, that aims to give students the competence of “discusses the use of Islamology, which has similar functions to semantics, and semantics as a method of interpretation of the Qur'an” can be seen as a reference to the bayânî system of knowledge.

Again, in the 3rd class, the course of Contemporary Interpretations to Hadith and Sunnah that aims to know the new interpretations and approaches brought to the hadith and Sunnah, that discusses traditional hadith approaches with pros and cons” can also be cited as a course referring to the elements of bayâni and burhânî systems of knowledge. In the 4th class, the Contemporary Islamic Thinkers course, which has acquisition “he/she knows the basic sources of contemporary Islamic thought” and “knows the prominent names in Islamic thought” is a course that presents the tradition of contemporary Islamic thought from a chronological point of view.² Considering the findings of the research, it is seen that although the other courses³, apart from the aforesaid courses, emphasize the elements of the bayâni and burhânî systems of knowledge, students do not reach the mental clarity about the possibility of understanding, objectivity-subjectivity and interpretive religious knowledge. In order to explain the reasons for this, studies focusing on such issues as “measuring the efficiency of the training process, identifying the resources that students feed outside of theology programs, students’ gaining methodological knowledge, but not embracing it or questioning their competence in this subject and seeing themselves as source or not, to think that even if they can produce the correct knowledge, there is no value in practice” should be carried out.

The third theme obtained from the research covers the students’ thoughts about the process of producing religious knowledge. The process of searching for knowledge, which they regard as a difficult process, has been accepted by the students as the beginning of the act of producing knowledge. In every period of the Islamic tradition of thought, this difficult process has been emphasized and also mentioned as a process that leads the individual to happiness as a result of the systematic progression of the human mind. In this regard, the fact that students expressed that they are experiencing unhappiness rather than happiness has led to the investigation of the causes of this unhappiness. While students do not count among the sources and criteria of religious knowledge, it is seen that they include catechism, scientific articles and internet as a reference source when talking about the process. Although this situation seems to contain some contradictions, the fact that scientific articles are a source of reference for the students shows that the concern of being scientific that became prominent in the last period of Islamic thought also goes for the students. Similarly, the geography, background, culture and time that students list as factors affecting the process reveal that they tend to be able to look at events from a sociological perspective.

It would be an ideal educational situation for contemporary theological education to convey all stages of the Islamic thought system to its students in all dimensions. In addition, it is normal for people who have received theological education to think about the information as individuals and to reach different interpretations. However, although this situation can be accepted as natural, they also have the function of producing science and providing services to the society. This research focused on how the views of religious knowledge of the students of divinity faculty reflected the debates in the Islamic tradition of thought, but the findings of the research revealed two fundamental questions in the minds of researchers that necessitated new studies:

Can the graduates of divinity faculty succeed, while serving society, in establishing the balance of objectivity and subjectivity in the understanding of knowledge when they meet the target group?

Are these discussions of the possibility of knowledge results of the human mind's process of producing knowledge or are they products of the scientific point of view given to them by the theology education?

Notes

- 1 Taking account of the scientific principles, the expressions the participants used during the interview are translated into English reflecting their originality in Turkish. The interview texts have been translated into English by researchers and a professional translator.
- 2 For more information on the curriculum of the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University and the contents, objectives and acquisitions of it scourses, see http://bbs.ankara.edu.tr/Amac_Hedef.aspx?bno=1892&bot=489. Access: 10/11/2019.
- 3 For other course examples, see; http://bbs.ankara.edu.tr/Ders_Bilgileri.aspx?sdgNo=860543&dno=395453&bno=1892&bot=489 Access: 10/11/2019 and http://bbs.ankara.edu.tr/Ders_Bilgileri.aspx?sdgNo=860538&dno=395397&bno=1892&bot=489 Access: 10/11/2019.

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350 • OPINIONS OF THE DIVINITY FACULTY STUDENTS ON RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE: A CASE STUDY OF ANKARA UNIVERSITY DIVINITY FACULTY

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**352 • OPINIONS OF THE DIVINITY FACULTY STUDENTS ON RELIGIOUS
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