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Analysis Of The Development On Islamic Education System In Malaysia

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Abstract

In this study, the author will explain the historical development of the Islamic education system in Malaysia in general. It aims to observe the changes in the education system, including physical aspects such as buildings and branding, curriculum aspects, and teaching and learning activities. Also discussed in this section is the implementation of teaching and learning methods that form the basis of this study's discussion. This study employs a library research method by referring to scholarly books, journals, and related articles. The study's findings indicate that the development of Sekolah Agama Rakyat (People's Religious Schools) has undergone three phases or stages of change. The first stage involved religious studies conducted face-to-face between teachers and students in prayer houses, mosques, and traditional religious schools (pondok). This practice is also known as pondok education or traditional religious school education. In the second stage, religious studies were carried out in a more organized and structured manner based on schedules that included both academic and religious subjects. Teaching activities were conducted in madrasahs with dedicated buildings. In the subsequent stage, Sekolah Agama Rakyat replaced madrasah education when the state government agreed to allocate specific funds for infrastructure development and teaching.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Pedagogy, Curriculum, Traditional Religious School.

1. Introduction

The development of education and religious teaching occurs in many aspects. The aspects that are the focus include physical development, curriculum, and pedagogy. The physical aspect encompasses the structures and buildings used as places of learning, starting from traditional religious schools (pondok), prayer houses (surau), mosques, madrasahs, schools, and eventually universities. The curriculum aspect includes subjects or courses and teaching and learning activities. The pedagogical aspect emphasizes the methods and approaches a teacher uses to impart knowledge. Such an approach is seen as having similarities in the development of Islamic education in Southeast Asia, particularly the significant role of sultans/kings in supporting and elevating Islamic education.

2. Development of the Education System in Religious Schools in Malaysia

The National Islamic Education Philosophy (FPIN) was officially implemented in 1988, following the formation of the National Education Philosophy (FPN) and the concept of integrated education. Although the FPIN was established in 1988, the process of teaching and learning Islamic Education began much earlier, dating back to the arrival of Islam in the country (Mohd Yusof Ahmad, 2002). This statement is supported by Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Wan Mohd Tarmizi Wan Othman (2011), who state that the implementation of Islamic Education subjects in Malaysia (then known as Malaya) started as early as the arrival of Islam in Malacca, around the 14th century. However, the Islamic Education system at that time was informal (Rahimah Embong, 2020). As a result, there were no specific provisions or laws requiring Islamic education to be taught to all Muslim children (Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Wan Mohd Tarmizi Wan Othman, 2011).

Before the country achieved independence, the teaching and learning of Islamic education took place in Quranic classes, at the homes of teachers or ustaz, in mosques, and in suraus (Ramli Saadon, Khairi Ariffin & Ishak Saat, 2016). The focus of Islamic education philosophy at that time was the delivery of knowledge related to Quranic recitation and prayer reading. Skills such as Quranic reading and memorizing short surahs from the Quran were also emphasized (Mohd Yusuf Ahmad, 2002; Rosnani Hashim, 1996; Abdullah Ishak, 1995). Besides Quranic studies and widespread teachings on prayer, there were also teachings on Fiqh, Tauhid, Tafsir, History, Tasawuf, and Islamic Philosophy, although in limited situations (Abdullah Ishak, 1995).

Ramli Saadon, Khairi Ariffin & Ishak Saat (2016) provide an interesting picture of the learning process and methods at that time, where Malays had only a few places to learn Quranic reading and religious writing from Quranic teachers. The

teachers were chosen by the parents and taught various subjects such as martial arts, healing practices, divination, writing, and copying. Quranic schools were usually held at the teacher's home, where parents would send their children along with supplies like mats, pillows, cooking utensils, and a bag of rice. Classes were held three times a day, each lasting an hour. In their free time, students helped the teachers with tasks like working in the rice fields, doing household chores, or working in orchards. The students were also taught Arabic letters for writing and copying religious books, with Quranic recitation being the core subject. Every student was required to perform the five daily prayers. Female students were taught Quranic reading only and not the other subjects taught to male students, though in some places, they were also taught reading and writing in Malay.

Nur Atiqah Tang Abdullah & Ong Puay Liu (2018) provide a more detailed account of Malay society's educational life. Parents sent their children to the teacher's home to study Islam from the age of six. Students were taught Quranic reading, ethics, manners, and prayer skills, typically after Subuh, Zuhur, and Maghrib prayers (Nur Atiqah Tang Abdullah & Ong Puay Liu, 2018; Mohd. Yusoff, 1986). Initially, students learned to recognize Jawi letters and memorize and identify Quranic letters. The subjects taught included basic Islamic education, Quranic reading, prayer, fasting, and other fundamentals like purification, halal and haram, sins and rewards (Nur Atiqah Tang Abdullah & Ong Puay Liu, 2018; Awang Had, 1980).

Informal learning at the teacher's home became popular and grew so much that space became an issue due to the increasing number of students. The community then took the initiative to build suraus near the teacher's homes. These suraus became not just places of worship but also educational centers for continuing Quranic studies and other basic Islamic knowledge like prayer, fasting, and religious poetry. Suraus thus became the earliest informal educational institutions in Malaya (Nur Atiqah Tang Abdullah & Ong Puay Liu, 2018). Through surau education, Malay children began learning theological texts discussing the essence of Allah, His attributes, Islamic laws, and various knowledge and stories that provided moral lessons (Nur Atiqah Tang Abdullah & Ong Puay Liu, 2018; Hassan Langgulung, 1986).

Islamic education continued to gain importance among the Malay population after independence in 1957. In 1960, the government introduced educational laws based on the Rahman Talib Report, mandating Islamic Education for Muslim students in schools with at least 15 Muslim students (Abdul Halim Hj. Mat Diah, 1989; Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Wan Mohd Tarmizi Wan Othman, 2011).

Before the British established Malay schools, the Islamic education system continued as usual. Abdullah Munshi noted Quranic schools during his visits to Malacca, Singapore, and Penang (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1972). After 1854, the British East India Company took over Quranic schools, providing full support on the condition that they taught reading, writing, and arithmetic alongside Islamic education and Quranic reading.

Teaching and learning took place in the same buildings but were separated by sessions. Morning sessions were for fully-funded Malay schools, while Quranic schools operated in the afternoon, as outlined in the 1938 Malay Education Code (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1972). Despite British efforts to establish Malay schools and separate Quranic sessions, the Malay community maintained Islamic education and Quranic learning as a religious and cultural legacy. Islamic and Quranic education remained popular, evidenced by many parents sending their children abroad for advanced religious studies. These students, upon returning, established higher and more advanced educational institutions known as pondoks (Abdullah Ishak, 1995; Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Wan Mohd Tarmizi Wan Othman, 2011).

In pondok institutions, teaching and learning were flexible and not bound by specific times, depending entirely on the teachers' discretion. Classes typically started after dawn and ended around eleven in the morning, with a break for lunch before resuming from two to four in the afternoon, and again after Maghrib until ten at night. Teachers were lenient about student attendance and punctuality, considering their need to manage personal chores (Ramli Saadon, Khairi Ariffin & Ishak Saat, 2016).

Teaching methods in pondoks often involved the halaqah method. According to Mohd Zahirwan Halim Zainal Abidin (2018), halaqah involves small group learning with up to 12 students, although some say it can range from 5 to 500 students (Zamakhsyari Dhofier, 2011). Students sit in a circle or semicircle around the teacher, who explains topics from a text, with students using the same text in the halaqah (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2010; Achmad Muslimin, 2015; Zamakhsyari Dhofier, 2011). Mohd Zahirwan Halim Zainal Abidin (2018) further explains that halaqah can occur with students facing the teacher, who usually sits slightly elevated, using chairs, desks, or other teaching aids.

Another common method was talaqqi musyafahah, particularly for teaching Quranic recitation. This method involves direct, face-to-face learning where students imitate the teacher's recitation (Sedek bin Ariffin, 2009). Talaqqi musyafahah means meeting the teacher in person at a specific time, observing

the teacher's lip movements, and following their recitation, with the teacher correcting mistakes (Nik Ja'far, 2004).

Islamic education advanced from the pondok system to more structured madrasahs or religious schools with buildings, administrative offices, dormitories, and recreational facilities (Ghazali Darussalam, 2004). Madrasahs continued discussing religious matters like laws, theology, and Islamic issues in a more comprehensive manner (Shafie Abu Bakar, 1984).

The emergence of madrasahs coincided with the Islah movement in the Middle East, influenced by Malay students studying at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Upon returning, they sought to reform Malay understanding and practice of Islam (Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Wan Mohd Tarmizi Wan Othman, 2011). These reformists, known as the Kaum Muda, introduced modernist ideas, contrasting with the conservative Kaum Tua. To spread their message, the Kaum Muda published the Al-Imam magazine to raise awareness among Malays (Ramli Saadon, Khairi Ariffin & Ishak Saat, 2016).

Syed Sheikh al-Hadi, a prominent figure in systematizing education, founded Al-Madrasah al-Misriyah in Bukit Mertajam, Seberang Prai, in 1906 (Ahmad Kilani Mohamed, 2003). Islamic education flourished with the establishment of Madrasah Iqbal in Singapore in 1907, offering secular subjects like Geography, Science, and History alongside religious studies. However, it faced resistance from Malays who saw the Kaum Muda's ideas as contrary to Islam, leading to its closure after a year (Ramli Saadon, Khairi Ariffin & Ishak Saat, 2016; Rosnani Hashim 1996).

In the Straits Settlements, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Hadi founded Madrasah Al-Hadi in Malacca in 1915, and Sheikh Mohamad Tahir Jalaluddin established Madrasah Al-Masyhur in Penang in 1917 (Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Wan Mohd Tarmizi Wan Othman, 2011). Madrasah Al-Hadi later became known as Madrasah Alsagoff. Madrasah Al-Masyhur offered religious subjects and Western education (Abdullah Ishak, 1995; Abdul Razak, 2002).

By the early 20th century, Malay religious schools flourished in the Straits Settlements and other Malay states, with many Malay students studying in the Middle East. Upon returning, they became well-respected in society (Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Wan Mohd Tarmizi Wan Othman, 2011). The establishment of madrasahs marked a turning point, fostering the philosophy of integrated Islamic education in the country (Ramli Saadon, Khairi Ariffin & Ishak Saat, 2016).

3. Conclusion

From the examination of the facts presented above, it can be concluded that the history of the development of Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) in Malaysia is a long one. It began with the role of parents, religious teachers (tok guru), and scholars working together to ensure that children and future generations could deepen their religious knowledge, starting from home and extending to religious studies abroad. This study also highlights the transition or shift in the terminology of Islamic education centers, which originally were known as studies in surau, then moved to pondok studies, subsequently to madrasah studies, and eventually to Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR), making it an interesting topic of discussion.

Essentially, Islamic education goes through two main phases: the informal education phase, where parents provide religious education to their children at the homes of teachers and in pondok. The curriculum and subjects focused on the children's mastery of reading the Quran and the basics of religion, emphasizing Fardhu Ain and Fardhu Kifayah. The subsequent phase is the formal education phase, where education underwent significant changes. The curriculum and subjects became a combination of academic and religious studies taught in an integrated manner.

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