

THE REFORMATION OF MUSLIM EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA: ENSURING RELEVANCE AND OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Prof Rosnani Hashim
Institute of Education
International Islamic University Malaysia

Abstract

Education in the Muslim World is at a crossroad – to decide whether to continue the inherited secular education system left by the colonial master; or to fall back on the conservative, traditional religious education system that has survived despite the secular onslaught; or to find a new system that can synthesize the best of both. In the context of Malaysia, by the time the British colonial master left in 1957, education for the Muslims became divided into three categories: traditional *pondok* and madrasah education, Malay vernacular schools, and the English schools. The latter two categories offer secular education with nothing on religion but the English schools had more racially diverse students in contrast to the Malay vernaculars. The religious *pondok* and madrasah offer only religious knowledge and Arabic and not much on modern knowledge. Later, in 1970, the government gradually converted both the Malay vernacular and the English schools, that is, the second and third category, into national schools and left the religious schools on its own. These two systems continued to grow, producing Muslims who were in many instances at conflict with one another due to the conflicting worldviews preached in the school systems.

This paper attempts to discuss how Muslim education has developed since Independence. It examines how Islamic education has been able to sustain itself and remain relevant in the contemporary world when many have abandoned traditional religions. It examines some of the challenges the national education system had to face and the reform it had to make to remain relevant.

Introduction

Education in the Muslim World is presently at a crossroad – to decide whether to continue the inherited secular education system left by the colonial master; or to fall back on the conservative, traditional religious education system that has survived despite the secular onslaught; or to find a new system that synthesizes the best of both in order to actualize the Islamic philosophy of education. This phenomenon of having to decide to change to be relevant or to conserve the status quo and be left behind is a constant in educational life. In fact, this is true for practically all countries since the formation of the formal education systems. “However, the rate of reform has increased since the end of the Second World War in both developed and developing countries. Following the war, education acted as a catalyst for economic expansion and as a leveler of social inequalities” (Reily, 1993:11).

In the context of Malaysia, before the period of Western colonialism there already existed the non-formal Qur’anic school in a teacher’s house and the *pondok*, which is

a loose form of residential school with a very flexible time table and where the students' huts surrounded the mosque which was the centre of activity (Ishak, 1995). The English colonized Malaya in the late 18th century until its Independence in 1957. By the time they left, the education for the Muslims became divided into three categories: traditional *pondok* and madrasah religious education; Malay vernacular schools; and the English schools. The latter two categories offer secular education with nothing on religion being taught. The English schools had more racial diversity in contrast to the Malay vernacular or the religious schools that were meant to cater to the Malays' needs. The *pondok* or madrasah were left on its own as private community institutions with various curricula to prepare students for al-Azhar University in Cairo and other universities in the Middle East. Henceforth, for the Muslims there have always been two systems of schooling: the national, secular English and Malay vernacular schools and the traditional, religious *pondok* or madrasah (Hashim, 2011a).

With Independence from Great Britain in 1957, the Malay vernacular schools, that is, the second category, became the thrust of the national education system. Gradually, Islamic religious study was introduced as a subject into the National Schools and also the English schools. Later, for a period of 11 years beginning in 1970, the government gradually converted the primary and secondary English schools, that is, the third category, into public or national schools having Malay language as its medium of instruction, while English remained an important school subject. Hence, the educational dualism for the Muslims after 1970s remained between the national, secular schools and the religious madrasah or *rakyat* (people or community) schools. These two systems continued to grow, with the national system producing Muslim professionals through the local universities, while the religious system producing religious teachers and officers through the universities in the Middle East, in particular Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In many instances the graduates of both systems were at conflict with one another due to the conflicting worldviews that were absorbed from the systems they studied.

How has Muslim education in Malaysia developed since her Independence? How has Islamic Education been able to sustain itself and remain relevant in the contemporary world when many have abandoned traditional religions? What are some of the challenges the national education system had to face and the reforms it had to make to remain relevant? These are the major questions that will guide this chapter.

Conflicts between *Kaum Muda* and *Kaum Tua* prior to Independence

Conflicts within the Muslim community in Malaysia were not unusual. During the early 20th century, that is, during the colonial era, the first major conflict that occurred was between the two camps of the scholars of Islam, the *Kaum Muda* (Young Turk) and the *Kaum Tua* (Old Turk). This happened as an aftermath of the reformation ideas brought about by Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, especially

when the latter was associated with the al-Azhar University where many students from Malaya then, gathered to pursue higher Islamic Studies. There was a division between those who took up Abduh's modern reform of education which encouraged the pursuit of the modern sciences such as the natural sciences, mathematics and geography in addition to Islamic studies (Hashim, 2011a; Shafie, 1999), and the establishment of madrasah, and those who continue to subscribe to the traditional Islamic studies found in *pondok*. In addition, the reform movement stirred by Abduh, the Grand Mufti of Egypt in 1899 encouraged the activity of *ijtihad* or freedom of intellectual thought as opposed to *taqlid* or mere following. Those who subscribe to the modern reform ideas were known as the *Kaum Muda* (Young Turk) and those who upheld the traditional ideas became known as the *Kaum Tua* (Old Turk). At first the *Kaum Muda* found it difficult to win over the masses and many found their ideas strange. For example, their attempts to open up new schools, called the madrasah did not receive good response from the people initially. Some branded them as *kufir* (disbelievers). But it was only much later that many became convinced to also learn from the West for their advanced sciences and technologies. These madrasah introduced a more formal system of learning with proper school schedule, a greater range of subjects and have a proper classroom setting with chairs, desks and blackboard and grouped the classes by the age. The madrasah also began to apply the mother tongue as its medium of instruction in contrast to the use of Arabic in the earlier *pondok* and madrasah which had actually led to a decline in their graduates' fluency in the language as compared to previous batches.

Conflict between the religious and the secular graduates after Independence

The next major conflict was between the graduates of Islamic religious schools and the English schools and later the national, secular schools especially just before and after Independence in 1957. This is a more serious conflict because it involved differences of world views. The English national-type and the Malay national schools did not offer Islamic studies in the school curriculum during this period. These schools typically taught the Malay and English language, the natural sciences – general science or pure sciences, the social sciences – geography and history, mathematics and arts and craft. Thus, their graduates would be lacking in the Islamic worldview and the shari'ah sciences – aqidah, fiqh, Qur'an, Sirah, hadith, and Islamic ethics. Yet, these are the people who led the country politically and administratively. They were the ones who became lawyers, civil service administrators, professional doctors, engineers, and scientists and ruled the country. On the other hand, the graduates of the religious schools studied in depth about the shari'ah sciences and Arabic language but lacked knowledge of the modern sciences.

The ratio of the shari'ah sciences and Arabic on the one hand, to the modern acquired sciences on the other hand, is 60:40. For example, the Pre-Second World War main subjects offered by Madrasah Saadiah-Salihiah Perak were Islamic studies: *tawhid, fiqh, tafsir, Hadith, tasawwuf, mantiq* and *Arabic*. But after the Second World War, geography, Malay Language, Islamic history, mathematics, homescience,

rhetorics, *usul fiqh*, *fara'id*, *musthalah al-hadith*, and *tajwid* were added (Salleh, 1984). These graduates would become the teachers of the religious schools set up by the Community, State or Federal government, administrators in the State Religious Affairs Department, or political activists especially in the Islamic Party (PAS). Since the private people religious schools (SMAR) did not receive funding from the British government, their physical conditions and school facilities were poor and teachers were not highly trained. Some however, were employed by the national schools since after the Education Act 1961 there were more serious attempts to teach Islamic Religious Studies in the these schools. This conflict was evident in the two major political parties that were formed in the 1940s, namely the *Parti SeIslam Malaysia* (PAS) or Pan-Malay Islamic Party that uphold the Islamic struggle and the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) that support the nationalist and liberal ideas. These parties continue to battle to win the hearts and minds of the Malays until today but now with both attempting to champion the interests of the nation, the Malays and Islam, albeit through different approaches.

Based on this historical background, it was clear that there were problems with the dualistic educational system. Surely the conflicting world views had contributed to the conflicts even among the Muslims in governance, politics, law, economics, education and much more. It was clearly evident then that the religious educational system had not been able to produce leaders and professionals. Their education had not prepared them to understand human behaviours, the political, social and economic development of society, and also modern technology in addition to being critical, creative and scientific in solving problems. It was more for preparing preachers who can guide the community in religious practices, knowledge and values or fill in the role of imams in prayers and social, religious functions. Similarly, the secular educated Muslim leaders and professionals lacked religious commitment and practiced separation of religion and state, and did not give much thought to the tenets of Islam such as serving alcohols in public functions or ridiculing Islam laws.

In dealing with national policy on various issues, one would find that the graduates of the liberal, secular education were more liberal in their ideas and in certain cases propose actions that contradicted the Islamic injunctions. On the other hand, the graduates of the Islamic religious education system tended to have a more rigid and conservative views and were not in sync with the changes in the contemporary world situation. The conflicts spread into the legal fields and also in politics. In fact, political parties also reflected on this division with the more liberal one associated with UMNO the reigning political party and the conservative, traditional one with PAS the opposition party, although this is beginning to change slightly as both parties began to be more open and accept members from the 'other' side. In terms of the criminal laws, some will agree on *hudud*, while others will oppose; some would allow Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) practices while others opposed it from the human rights perspective. This is very true especially when the two sets of laws– the civil law and shariah law, continued to be

applied and taught in several universities where students can major in either although there are some who major in both. Thus, this dualistic education system has led to a dichotomy in values and knowledge which also led to the disunity of the Muslim community.

The Muslim dilemma

Given these situations in schooling, the Muslim parents faced a dilemma in their desire to give the best education to their children. They have a choice of continuing the inherited secular education system which paid only lip service to religious studies or falling back on the conservative, traditional religious education system which do not prepare their children for a different era. They realized that both systems have defects that could be overcome if the best of both systems were taken out and combined as one. They desired for a new system that can synthesize and integrate the best of both and be relevant. They also desired that there should be more Muslims' participation in natural and applied sciences so that more Muslim professionals can be produced especially being wary that they live in a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society and despite being the biggest majority, they comprised the greatest number in poverty. In general, the challenges Muslims faced can be summarized into three questions as follows:

- How to overcome the educational dualism and produce Muslims who are grounded in their faith despite of their professions?
- How to create Muslims who consider their careers as a calling and not just a vocation?
- How to increase Muslims' participation in sciences other than the religious or traditional sciences?

The challenge of educational dualism

The Muslim masses were proactive and did not wait for the government to act in overcoming the challenge of the dualistic education system. Several Islamic organizations or movements decided to take the lead in education. For example, the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) began to establish community-oriented modern Islamic preschools (TASKI) in the early 1980s throughout the country. At this point of time all of the preschools or kindergartens were run by various Christian missionaries in churches. Subsequently, the ABIM Islamic Primary Schools were established a few years after the preschools. ABIM's footstep was later emulated by other Muslim organizations such as the now defunct Darul Arqam and Jemaah Islam Malaysia (JIM). Even PAS began to set up its chain of kindergartens (PASTI). Most of these schools were not profit oriented but more as social service. It was only much later that private profit-oriented organizations established Islamic private schools such as ADNI, SRI Abim, Setiabudi, Wadi Sofia and Al-Ameen. How do these institutions differ from public schools? Definitely the philosophy of the

Islamic kindergartens, preschools and primary schools differs from the existing institutions. These schools aim to preserve the Islamic tradition and values and at the same time to prepare the children for their lives in this world because Islam teaches Muslims to pray for the best of both worlds. For both preschools and primary schools, the reading and memorization of the Qur'an and the practices of prayers were given prominence, in addition to *Sirah* (history of the Prophet Muhammad) and *Tawhid* (Pillars of Faith). Hence, the ability to read the Qur'an with proper pronunciation, recite supplications and conduct prayers emerged strongly among the children. This is in addition to the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetics in the Malay language. To accommodate for this additional subjects, school hours for the primary school were extended to 4pm in the evening. These schools were affordable and popular. Thus, it drew the government's attention to the desire of the Muslim masses for a change in the education system especially a desire for an integrated education to prepare the new generation for both worlds.

Reforms toward Integrated and Comprehensive Islamic Education

This first, great challenge in solving the Muslim dilemma led to the reform of the education curriculum. There was a desire to formulate an integrated education and to achieve this and meet the need for a stronger Islamic foundation in addition to adequate knowledge and skills, the National Philosophy of Education (NPE) was formulated in 1987. This was followed with the introduction of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (KBSM) in 1989 (Ministry of Education, 1989). The KBSM was a translation of the NPE into the curriculum. The NPE aspires for a holistic and balanced education that is capable of developing the students' intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual potentials, with excellence knowledge, skills and moral values based on a belief and devotion to God. Thus it is a faith-based and value-based system. The KBSM that went along with the NPE provided for more hours of Islamic studies and moral education, the introduction of Arabic language classes in the national secondary schools (or SMK) and in selected primary schools (SK), and a major change in the curriculum of the National Religious Secondary Schools (SMKA), State Religious Secondary Schools (SMAN) and Government-aided Religious Secondary Schools (SABK) which enabled its students to be prepared for specializations in the areas of Islamic Studies, Natural and Applied Sciences and the Social and Business Sciences. This effort really helped to revolutionize the SMKA and all the other religious schools (Table 1). It is common now to have professionals who came from these schools, probably something not heard of previously. This helped to revolutionize the idea of the comprehensiveness of Islamic education. Finally, the KBSM upheld the principle of values across the curriculum by which is meant that every teacher should instill values regardless of the subject matter he or she teaches. This is crucial because previously only the religious studies or moral education teachers were expected to play the role of inculcating values or disciplining students. Thus this curricular change has been able to provide the

balance and integrated education sought by the Muslims as a solution to their dilemma.

Table 1 State and Rakyat Religious Schools and enrolment 2012

School type	SRAR	SMAR	SRAN	SMAN	SMKA	SABK
No of schools	231	133	976	100	56	142
No. of students	40,017	33,387	192,347	53,001	39,088	53,855

SRAR- People Religious Primary School

SMAR - People Religious Secondary School

SRAN – State Religious Primary School

SMAN – State Religious Secondary School

SMKA – National Religious Secondary School

SABK – Government-Aided Religious School

Source: EPRD, MOE (2012). *Quick Facts 2012 Malaysian Educational Statistics*

The challenge of Muslims’ consciousness and identity

The second challenge is that of creating Muslims’ consciousness of their callings and this was achieved through the school ethos. The emphasis on religious practices in the National Education system resulted in the *Musalla* (a hall or room for prayer) becoming a permanent fixture of any public primary and secondary school, thereby enabling religious prayers and activities to be conducted within the school premise. The culture and ethos of the school began to be permeated with Islamic values such as reciting supplications during the school assembly or before classes begin, and putting on the Islamic dress code for the Muslim girls. The curriculum change that increased the number of periods in shari’ah sciences and tasawwur Islam provides for a greater understanding of the Qur’an and the roles of Muslims in social and economic development of the society as vicegerents (khalifah) and servants (‘abd) of God.

The reform in the National schools also influenced the People religious schools or Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) which began to change its curriculum after the KBSM which means a reduction of the Arabic language to make space for social studies, natural science, humanities and languages. The SAR too has begun thinking of its students’ prospects for higher education and jobs. The SAR lack financial capabilities to pay for qualified teachers and school facilities such as science and computer laboratories. The lower quality of the SAR is evident from the statistics (Quickfacts 2012) in 2010 that show only 29.6 percent of its secondary students met the minimum competency level for the Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR), while it was 63.3 percent for the State Religious Secondary Schools (SMAN) in comparison to 67.4 percent average at the National level. The SMAR and SMAN have been offered since 2004 to become government-aided religious schools (SABK) by which its teachers were offered training to upgrade their professional knowledge and skills. The number of SMAR and SMAN that accepted to become SABK in 2004 was 34 but

by 2012 the number grew to 140 in contrast to 233 schools that have still not accepted the offer (Quickfacts 2012). Why the remaining schools refuse the aids need to be researched because there are many factors involved.

The discussion above has highlighted the educational reforms taking place in the schools with respect to the more friendly school culture which has succeeded in ensuring the Muslim identity and consciousness, without disregard for the students of other cultures, ethnicities and faiths. It also explains how the reform in the national school system influences change in the religious school system.

The challenge of participation in the modern sciences and technology

The third challenge that faced the Muslims was to increase their participation in the modern sciences and technology, especially in the natural and applied sciences. The revolutionizing of the SMKA was meant to meet this challenge. In fact the almost 56 SMKAs today trained only 10 percent of its students to major in Islamic religious studies in the universities. The rest are prepared for the other professional studies. This helped in preparing future professionals who would have a strong religious foundation and similarly, to prepare future Islamic studies scholars with foundations of scientific knowledge. This is not only true for the religious schools but also for the Fully Residential Schools (SBP), Integrated Fully Residential Schools (SBPI), Secondary Science Schools (SMS) and the MARA Junior Science Colleges. Thus all these schools meant for the elite Muslim students have been integrated in terms of curriculum and also the school ethos.

The nature of integrated knowledge and higher education

Under the Integrated Curriculum (KBSM), the two kinds of knowledge that are regarded as equally important from the Islamic worldview, namely the Islamic Shari'ah sciences (*Aqidah, fiqh, akhlak, Qur'an and sunnah*) and the acquired sciences are now studied together under the same roof. This is definitely a positive improvement. But questions have been raised as regards to its adequacy. Some see this as not a genuine integration but still compartmentalization of the two sciences. The principle of values across the curriculum does help because it means injecting values into the subject matter or the classroom teaching and learning. However, it is still possible for example that science is taught from the Western epistemology in which case it means that the students are not going to see the role of the Creator in the functioning of Nature as is emphasized in the Islamic epistemology. This would contradict the aims of Islamic education, one of which is to increase one's faith through studying God's signs in the universe which means the natural and physical sciences. They raised the question, "Isn't there a need for the reconstruction of knowledge to fulfil its natural function?" As a consequence this, effort are made to restate knowledge from the perspective of the Islamic worldview or sometimes known as Islamicisation of Contemporary Knowledge (Al-Attas, 1978; al-Faruqi, 1981). It is only after the Islamic worldview is implanted in the human mind that knowledge that

is acquired through empirical means, experience and rational thinking would be able to perform one of its many functions, namely, instilling of faith in God. However, this is a complex task and should be the responsibility of lecturers of higher education.

Development of Higher Islamic Education

There are limited number of institutions of higher education that offer Islamic Studies discipline in Malaysia, the first being the Klang Islamic College which was set up in 1955 to produce Islamic studies teachers with the teaching diploma. This College was transformed into the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in 1970, the year of its establishment (Md. Zin, 2005). The other institutions that offer this discipline are the Islamic Studies Academy of the University of Malaya (UM) set up in 1981, The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 1992; and finally, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) in 2009.

Are merely having faculties or colleges of Islamic studies or sciences sufficient to produce the future Muslim leaders? This will depend on the curriculum structure and contents of the programmes. It was adequate when the graduates were needed in the schools and States Department of Islamic Religious Affairs. But when these institutions reach the saturation point, where would the graduates find employment? Because of this many new programmes in these faculties that have been created take job prospect into account. As a consequence, one would notice a lot of multidisciplinary programmes such as Shari'ah and Economy, Shari'ah and Management, Shari'ah and Law, Da'wah and Human Development, and Usuluddin and Islamic thought in the case of University of Malaya.

Finally, an innovative idea in Islamic higher education which was the brainchild of Mahathir Mohamad, the former premier of Malaysia, was the establishment of IIUM in 1983. Unlike other Islamic universities which only focused on the Shari'ah sciences, IIUM is a comprehensive university whose mission is Islamization (or harmonization with the Islamic worldview and values), Integration, Internationalization and Comprehensive Excellence (IIICE) with English and Arabic as the medium of instruction. Some programmes are completely taught in English while others are taught in Arabic and English. It has a unique integrated curriculum structure whereby about four courses from the Islamic sciences – Islamic World View, Ethics and Fiqh for Everyday Life, Methods of Da'wah and Islam, Knowledge and Civilization-- form the university core courses which are required of all students, in addition to the respective College's core requirement. Islamic shari'ah sciences majors whose Islamic studies courses are mostly in Arabic are required to take up minor courses from the social sciences which are taught in English. Thus these students must be bilingual. This programme is capable of producing a new breed of Muslim professionals who are competent in at least two languages. This not only made the graduates more versatile but also more employable not only for Islamic

studies but also in other fields. Their command of English has made them more attractive to the private sectors too.

In a survey of 159 alumni and existing postgraduate and undergraduate students of this University, of which 53 were Malaysians and 106 were international students, Hashim, R. (2011b) found that many students perceived that they have improved their English more than Arabic – 83 percent for English as opposed to only 31 percent for Arabic (see Figure 1 & Figure 2) and 34 percent felt they have improved tremendously as compared to 11 percent for Arabic. But this is understandable because 98 percent of them used English in their life most frequently whereas only 29 percent most frequently used Arabic.

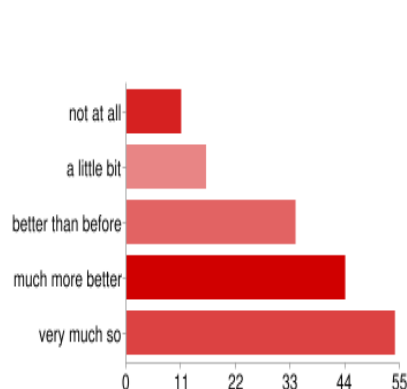


Fig 1 IIUM helps improve English

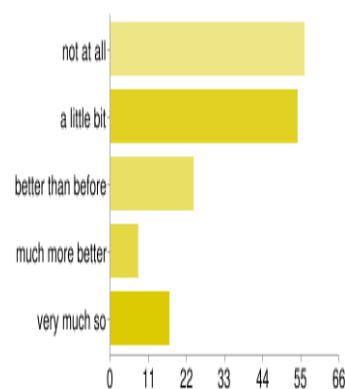


Fig 2 IIUM helps improve Arabic

Some 71 percent of the 159 respondents surveyed chose to study in IIUM for its Islamicity and mission of integration. Fifty two percent agreed and 28 percent strongly agreed (total of 80 percent agreed) that IIUM has been important in giving an integrated knowledge of both the shari'ah and acquired sciences (Figure 3), while 85 percent felt that their understanding of the unity of knowledge and its relation to faith and life was better after studying in IIUM. In fact 30 percent felt very much so (Figure 4).

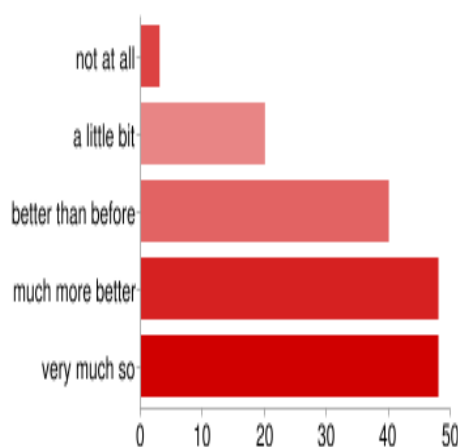
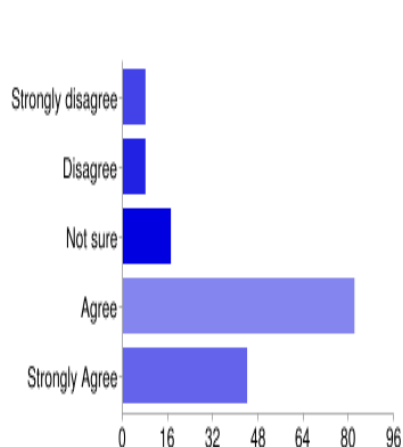


Fig 3 Integration of knowledge

Fig 4 Unity of knowledge and faith

The study found that 52 percent agreed and 28 percent strongly agreed that IIUM has been important in giving a proper understanding of the Islamic Worldview (Figure 5) while 72 percent felt that their life as a Muslim has been transformed to the better (Figure 6).

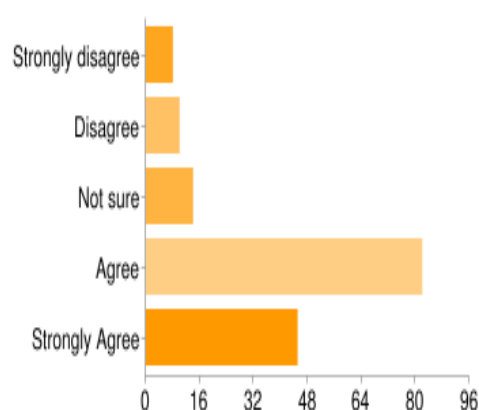


Fig 5 Understanding of Islamic worldview

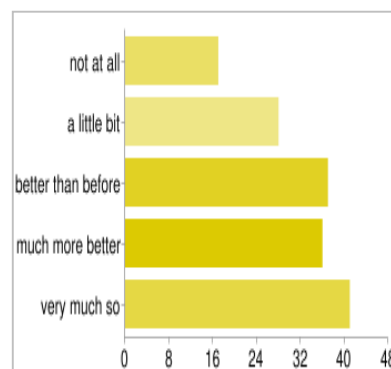


Fig 6 My life as a Muslim has been transformed

Staying relevant in the age of Globalization

The age of globalization poses a lot of challenges for education in general and Islamic education in particular. Globalization is spurred by information and communication technologies which drives the Knowledge economy. K-economy requires new skills beside the content of the discipline such as the skill of finding and managing data, verifying the reliability of data, the ability to do research, to collaborate and work cohesively as a team in problem solving and decision making. K-economy has brought about the commodification of knowledge and as knowledge is now a commodity, the most serious concern is on how to generate more money out of it. Since this is the major concern the nature of the university or college curriculum will change to mostly offer the popular programmes that have market demand such as business, accounting, finance and engineering programmes. Programmes that do not have economic values such as philosophy, sociology, religion and history might have to be trimmed down, if not weeded out, whereas these are important for cultivating the 'human' spirit.

Globalization also means the permeation of English worldwide. English is the language of the modern sciences and technology, and also of the internet. Most of the information available in the internet is in English. However, English also brings with it a cultural baggage and influences the local cultures. The pervasive use of English can cause the death of certain other less spoken languages. English will just gobble the less dominant local language. The English worldview and also values could also

overwhelm the local Muslim values and worldview, and thus another form of modern colonization will take place. Globalization also brings with it the concept of the global village because information reaches all corner of the universe as soon as the events occur and low cost flights enable people to move across continents. As a result most societies are becoming heterogeneous and culturally diverse. There is now a greater movement of students between countries in the pursuit of knowledge. Probably, in the past only traders and businessmen travelled a lot to different parts of the world. But today, in the spirit of pursuit of knowledge, internationalization brings about diversity into the classrooms and cities through international students. This diversity or pluralistic society can brings about conflicts due to miscommunication, cultural differences, intolerance, no mutual respect, and lack in the skills of deliberation and conflict resolution. However, it cannot be denied that diversity can also enrich knowledge on others' cultures, values, and way of life. The availability of social media in the internet is a double-edge knife, just as the television. It can be good or harmful depending on how it is used.

How are all these going to affect Muslims and Islamic education? Firstly, in higher education, Islamic traditional sciences will have to compete with the other sciences to get the best students to ensure the survival of the programmes. It will have to change and also offer the best selling knowledge product or programmes. It can retain its goal by the offering an integrated curriculum that offers courses that kill two birds with one stone, that is, offering wider contents that combines the traditional sciences with the relevant, modern sciences taking into account the vocational perspective but also ensure that these modern sciences are approached from the Islamic perspective which is to enhance their Muslim identity and worldview.

In actual fact, with globalization the need for Islamic education has become more pronounced. This is because globalization erodes the values of the younger generation to the point that they might face an identity crisis and may even lose their identity. Thus, the position of Islamic education in the primary and secondary schools will be more important. Hence, secondly, to be relevant, the school curriculum for this subject needs a lot of revision. First, philosophically the aims of education should be holistic and balance, for this world and the hereafter. There ought to be a renewed emphasis on knowledge of human nature especially the human spirits and moral values which have been neglected. The recognition of lesbians and homosexuals (LGBT) and their right to marriage is an example of breaching of traditional, Islamic law and moral values that offend the society although this might be acceptable to some other societies. Second, Islamic education should emphasize the goal of developing Muslims who can think wisely in the context of living in harmony with others. This requires the skills of communication and deliberation, and also mutual respect for human dignity. To achieve these, the content of Islamic education should reflect an emphasis on the learning process and not just on the product. Emphasis on the learning process will help develop the skills mentioned above including problem solving and inquiry skills.

Third, the pedagogy of teaching Islamic studies needs to be revised to consider all the new media including all information and communication technologies in order to be more effective and attractive. The methods of teaching should foster 21st century skills. The classroom of Islamic sciences has to change its orientation and focus – to be more balanced in applying both subject-centred and student-centred approaches in teaching and learning. There should be less lectures but more discussions. Students should be trained to ask higher order thinking (HOT) questions. Teachers should make use of materials available in the internet for illustrations. The mode of assessments has to change in an effort to encourage critical thinking, creativity and collaboration. The test questions should be more open ended, and of HOTS. There ought to be project-based and inquiry-based works in team. To avoid examination oriented learning, and encourage self learning, assessments should change from central-based to school based. In the context of improving methodology of teaching and assessments, the teachers of Islamic education or Islamic studies should be enlisted from among the best candidates and be given proper training to achieve independence.

Fourth, the curriculum needs to consider diversity through comparative religion, civics and citizenship education, and multicultural education especially in the context of multicultural Malaysia so that there will be mutual respect, tolerance and harmony. Co-curricular activities that could foster character building, leadership skills, responsibilities and sensitivities to all citizens regardless of faith, culture and race should be encouraged.

Finally, students in Islamic schools and the universities ought to be tasked to have a command of both Arabic and English for the purpose of their religious understanding and contemporary knowledge acquisition and communication. The ability to command these languages will enhance their usefulness in both the sacred and the mundane domains which will give a good impression of Muslims.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the evolution of Muslim education in Malaysia in its attempt to respond to the changing time and its challenges, and to maintain its relevance. It is evident that there were several changes beginning from the Qur'anic classes in homes of the teacher to the *pondok*. The *pondok* itself later gave way to the madrasah because the latter was more organized like the modern school and had a broader content that is, Islamic studies and general studies such as mathematics, logic and languages. After Independence, the national education system was more organized, responsive and improved to include Islamic religious studies. This led to the decline of the madrasah since parents prefer the free national schools.

But the most significant improvement was the reform of the curriculum toward an Integrated Curriculum in 1988 to ensure that the students from the system would be holistic and balanced. The setting up of partially boarding religious

secondary schools (SMKA) in 1977 to improve Islamic studies and its subsequent curriculum change in 1988 which offered a broad range of major electives to select from further improved the quality and relevance of Islamic education. The establishment of Faculties of Islamic studies to provide more opportunity for higher education opened a wide opportunity for graduates from the Islamic studies track to further their studies in higher education. As a result of KBSM more emphasis was given to values inculcation across the disciplines. Thus the goal of producing professionals who are balanced and religious in a positive sense could be achieved sooner or later. Another contribution to the cause of Islamic studies disciplines was through the establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia whose major goals are Islamicization, Integration, Internationalization and comprehensive excellence. The uniqueness of the programme is the ability of its graduates to communicate in both Arabic and English making Islamic studies graduates more employable and knowledgeable. Finally, even university programmes on Islamic studies discipline became multidisciplinary to cope for graduates' employability. Thus, the responsiveness of the providers of Islamic education and Islamic studies in the university has enabled the programme to be relevant and sustain itself.

References

- Al-Attas, S.M.N. (1978). *Islam and Secularism*. Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia.
- Al-Faruqi, I. R. (1981). *Islamization of Knowledge*. Herndon, Va.: International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Bahagian Pendidikan Islam, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 2013, Statistik Sekolah Agama 2012. Personal contact, 2013.
- Curriculum Development Centre. (1989). *The Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School (ICSS)*. Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education, Malaysia.
- Hashim, R. (2011a). *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice*. 2d Edition. 2d Reprint. Petaling Jaya: The Other Press.
- Hashim, R. (2011b). Internationalization of Islamic Higher Education: the Case Study of IIUM, April-Aug 2011. Unpublished report.
- Ishak, Abdullah. (1995). *Pendidikan Islam dan Pengaruhnya di Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur.
- Muhammad Zin, Abdullah. (2005). *Pendidikan Islam di Malaysia: dari pondok ke universiti*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Quick Facts 2012, Malaysia Educational Statistics*. Educational Planning and Research Division. Ministry of Education Malaysia. Retrieved on emisportal.moe.gov.my/emis/emis2/emisportal2/.../quickfacts2012.pdf

- Pengenalan Ringkas Akademi Pengajian Islam Universiti Malaya*,
http://apium.um.edu.my/student/undergraduates/handbook/2012_2013/03.pdf.
Retrieved on 29th March 2014
- Reily, D. (1993). Reform in the Soviet Union and the United States: An Analysis and Comparison. *International Journal of Educational Management*. Vol. 7:1 pp. 11-19.
- Salleh, Badriyah (1984). *Kampung Hj. Salleh dan Madrasah Saadiah-Salihiah 1914-1959*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Shafie, Ahmad Bazli (1999). 'Conceptual and curricular dimensions of Abduh's educational reform,' *al-Shajarah* 4:2.