

Re-emergence and Re-configuration of Islamic Education in Malaysia: Ensuring Relevance and Overcoming Challenges¹

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Abstract

Education in the Muslim World was at a crossroad not long after Independence achieved in 1940s and 1950s. The leaders had to decide whether to continue with the inherited secular education system left by the colonial master; to fall back on the conservative, traditional religious education system that had survived despite the secular onslaught; or to find a new system that can synthesise the best of both. The gathering of Muslim minds during the 1977 First World Conference on Muslim Education testified to the concern over educational dualism and secularism. In the context of Malaysia, despite the popularity of the secular public schools for its bright job prospect, by the 1980s there had been a greater demand for integrated Islamic Education offered by private, local community or NGO-based Islamic schools. There has also been an increase in State Islamic tertiary institutions. Why is there a rekindling of interest in Islamic education? How has Islamic Education been reconfigured for the challenges of the twenty first century? How effective is the training of Islamic Higher Education? What are the implications of this re-emergence and re-configuration on political, economic and social development, in particular the sustainability of cultural diversity and Muslims' general wellbeing? This paper is an attempt to answer these questions.

Introduction

Education in the Muslim World was at a crossroad not long after Independence in the 1940s and 1950s. The leaders had to decide whether to continue with the inherited secular education system left by the colonial master; to fall back on the conservative, traditional religious education system that had survived despite the secular onslaught; or to find a new system that can synthesise the best of both in order to actualize the Islamic philosophy of education. The gathering of Muslim minds during the 1977 First World Conference on Muslim Education testified to the concern over educational dualism and secularism. 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 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 held in a teacher's house and later the *pondok*, which is a loose form of residential school with a very flexible time table and where the students' huts

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surrounded the mosque which was the centre of activity (Ishak, 1995). The pondok played an important role in educating the community especially in literacy and religious thought and practices even before the period of colonialism. 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 a curriculum 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 on the one hand, and the traditional, religious *pondok* or madrasah on the other hand (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, preachers, and officers through the universities in the Middle East, in particular Egypt, Jordan 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. In the following section, we will discuss these conflicts in regard to the form of Muslim education in Malaysia.

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

Conflicts within the Muslim community in Malaysia were not unusual. During the early twentieth 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 spread of the ideas of reformation (*Islah*) brought about by Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, especially when the latter was associated with the al-Azhar University where many students of the *madrasah* and *pondok* from Malaya, 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 the *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 of *úlama* (religious scholars). 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.¹ For example, Sheykh Ahmad al-Hadi's attempts to set up new madrasah in Singapore and Malacca, did not receive good response from the people. 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. Madrasah Masyhor Islamiah that al-Hadi set up much later in Pulau Pinang was successful and it remains until the present but has been converted to a National Religious Secondary School (SMKA). Hence, 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 students grouped into classes by their 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*. In fact many of the *pondok* evolved into madrasah. This lack of usage of Arabic had actually later led to a decline in the graduates' proficiency in the language as compared to earlier graduates.

Conflict between the religious and the secular graduates after Independence

The next major conflict between the graduates of Islamic religious schools and the English schools and later the national, secular schools occurred 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 lacked Islamic understanding and many neglected the Islamic religious practices. They lacked knowledge of the Islamic worldview and the shari'ah – *aqidah* (faith), *fiqh* (law), *Qur'an*, *Sirah* (history of the Prophet Muhammad), *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet), and Islamic ethics. Yet, these were the people who led the country politically, administratively and legally. They were the ones who became lawyers, civil service administrators, professional doctors, engineers, and scientists and ruled the country and its citizens. On the other hand, the graduates of the religious schools studied in greater depth about the Islamic worldview and shari'ah sciences and Arabic language but they lacked knowledge of the modern sciences – natural sciences and technology, social sciences and the humanities which did not enable them demonstrate the relevance of religion as a solution to problems in modern living.

In the madrasah curriculum, the ratio of the combined shari'ah sciences and Arabic on the one hand, to the modern acquired sciences on the other hand, was 60:40. For example, the Pre-Second World War main subjects offered by Madrasah Saadiyah-Salihiah Perak (Table 1) were Islamic studies: *tawhid*, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *Hadith*, *tasawwuf*, *mantiq* and *Arabic*. But after the Second World War, geography, Malay Language, Islamic history, mathematics, domestic

science, rhetorics, *usul fiqh*, *fara'id*, *musthalah al-hadith*, and *tajwid* were added (Salleh, 1984). This provides evidence for the broadening of the Madrasah curriculum then. Since the People Religious Schools (SAR) did not receive any funding from the British government before Independence, their physical conditions and school facilities were poor and teachers were not well trained.

Table 1 Subjects Offered at Madrasah Saadiyah-Salihiah, Perak before and after the Second World War

<i>Pre-Second World War Main Subjects</i>	<i>Post-Second World War Additional Subjects</i>
<i>Tawhid</i>	Geography
<i>Fiqh</i>	Malay language
<i>Tafsir</i>	Islamic history
Hadith	Mathematics
<i>Tasawwuf</i>	Cooking/needlework
	Rhetorics
<i>Mantiq</i>	<i>Usul Fiqh</i> (Science of the laws)
Arabic Language:	
<i>Nahu</i> (Grammar)	<i>Fara'id</i> (inheritance)
<i>Sarf</i> (Grammar)	<i>Musthalah al- Hadith</i>

The madrasah had al-Azhar in Egypt as its focus while the secular public schools had British universities as its focus. This led to a conflict in worldview which was evident in the two major political parties that were formed in the 1940s, namely the *Parti SeIslam Malaysia* (PAS) that upholds the Islamic struggle and the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) that support the nationalist and liberal, secular ideas. These parties struggled to win the hearts and minds of the Malays for the choice between Islam and Nationalism until today. However since the 1980s, both have evolved to be more moderate and now champion the interests of the nation, the Malays and Islam, albeit using different approaches. After the Education Act of 1961, the madrasah graduates from the People Religious Schools (SAR) began to be employed as teachers of the national schools which had begun to be more serious in teaching Islamic Religious Studies. Others became teachers in the People Religious Schools or State Religious Schools or as administrators in the State Religious Affairs Department. This was before the Islamic Teachers' Training College (*Maktab Perguruan Islam*) was established by the government for this purpose. Thus these private religious schools, SAR had contributed to the growth of Islamic education by producing its teachers. Before Independence, graduates of the *pondok* and madrasah had also contributed to this growth, in addition to providing leadership in the struggle for Independence.

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. For example, there were two separate laws for civil and religious matters and the banks were still using the principle of *riba* (interest). It was clearly evident then that the

religious educational system had not been able to produce leaders and professionals in contrast to the secular school system. 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 teachers and 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 subscribed to the Western notion of separation of religion and state, or the public and the private domains and did not give much thought to observing the tenets of Islam in running the State such as serving alcohols in public functions or ridiculing Islamic laws. Al-Attas claimed that they caused confusion of values among the Muslim masses leading to errors and the loss of adab due to this ignorance.²

In dealing with national policies 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 especially when dispensing legal fatwa (rulings). The conflicts spread into the legal fields and also in politics. In fact, political parties also reflected on this division with the more liberal ones associated with UMNO the reigning political party and the conservative, traditional ones 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, a group proposes the enactment of Islamic criminal laws (*hudud*), while the other camp opposes it as barbaric; one argues that premarital sexual offenders ought to be punished while the other protects the unwed mothers and their babies on humanitarian ground; a camp supports the cause and practices of the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) based on human rights while the other opposes it from the perspective of the Shari’ah. This is very true especially when the two sets of laws– the civil laws and the shari’ah laws, continue 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 differences and conflicts in the Muslim community.

The Muslim dilemma

Given these situations in schooling and their outcomes, the Muslim parents faced a dilemma in their desire to give the best education to their children. They have a choice of continuing with 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 nor a good opportunity for higher education. They realized that both systems have defects that could be overcome if the best of both systems were selected and combined as one. They desired a new system that can synthesise and integrate the best of both and be relevant. They also desire 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 of knowledge and material. 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 inspite 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?
- How to educate the Muslims for the diverse culture and values associated with globalization?

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 in the early 1990s. 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 for social and community service. How do these institutions differ from the 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* and *Aqidah*. Hence, the ability to read the Qur'an with proper pronunciation, recite supplications and conduct prayers emerged strongly among the children of these schools. 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 to the middle and upper classes. This phenomenon in the 1980s 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 philosophy and 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 firm belief and devotion to God, so that they could be of service to themselves, the community and the society. Thus it is a faith-based, knowledge-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. It is common now to have professionals who come from these schools, probably something unheard of religious schools of the past in Malaysia. This helped to revolutionize the idea of the comprehensiveness of Islamic education and the initial restoration of Islam's pioneering role in the acquired sciences in the tenth century. Finally, the KBSM upheld the principle of values across the curriculum by which is meant that every teacher should instill values and discipline 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 held a promise to provide the balanced and integrated education sought by the Muslims as a solution to their dilemma.

Consequently, this new understanding and the integrated curriculum offered by all religious schools led to its increasing demand from 91,464 in 1986 to 123,539 students in 1992, an increase of 35 percent (Table 2).

Table 2 Distribution of schools and students in religious secondary schools in 1986 and 1992

Year	1986		1992		% increase
	sch	stud	sch	Stud	
State	112	46,964	101	63,403	35.00
Rakyat	172	44,500	170	60,136	35.13
Total	284	91,464	271	123,539	35.06

Source: Rosnani (2004: 90).

The increase is also significant in recent years especially for primary religious schools with 38,783 students in 2010 to 61,059 in 2014, an increase of 57.4% (Table 3). The increase for secondary religious schools is slight with 128,951 secondary religious students in 2010 to

143,704 in 2014, an increase of 11% (Table 4). The number is more if the SMKA is included. In addition, in 2012 there were 330 tahfiz in Malaysia of which 42 were federal/states-owned and 288 were private-owned (Jakim paper, 2012). It was in the 1990s that ABIM established its Sri ABIM and JIM its Al-Amin and their chain of primary schools which are still community and service-oriented. However, later private profit-oriented organizations established Islamic private schools such as ADNI, Setiabudi, Wadi Sofia, and Little Caliphs and its chain. There are 19,784 students enrolled in 156 private primary schools (SRAS) of this nature in 2014 (Table 3).

Table 3 Enrolment in State, Rakyat, Private Religious Primary Schools 2010-2014

YEAR	SRAR		SRAN		SARBK		SRAS		TOTAL
	sch	stud	sch	stud	sch	stud	sch	stud	stud
2010	24	8663	19	11201	16	4827	34	14092	38783
2012	20	8900	18	10028	18	6037	36	16669	41634
2013	77	16,690	11	6667	35	14936	43	17888	56181
2014	60	19,384	11	6633	36	15258	43	19784	61059

Source: BPPM KPM, *Perangkaan Pendidikan Malaysia* 2010, 2013,2014 and EPRD, MOE (2012). *Quick Facts 2012 Malaysian Educational Statistics*

SRAR- People Religious Primary School

SRAN – State Religious Primary School

SARBK – Government-Aided Religious Primary School

SRAS – Private Religious Primary School

Table 4 Enrolment in State, Rakyat, Private Religious Secondary Schools 2010-2014

YEAR	SMAR		SMAN		SAMBK		SMAS		Total	SMKA		TOTAL
	sch	stud	sch	stud	sch	stud	sch	stud	stud	sch	stud	stud
2010	105	26,745	68	44723	140	51004	17	6479	128,951	55	38374	167,325
2012	66	21,162	81	50238	142	53855	20	6194	131,449	56	39088	170,537
2013	94	24,549	80	43400	163	62083	29	8659	138,691	57	40293	178,984
2014	85	26,061	80	42879	168	65285	30	9479	143,704	57	40685	184,389

Source: BPPM KPM, *Perangkaan Pendidikan Malaysia* 2010, 2013,2014 and EPRD, MOE (2012). *Quick Facts 2012 Malaysian Educational Statistics*

SMAR - People Religious Secondary School

SMAN – State Religious Secondary School

SMKA – National Religious Secondary School

SAMBK – Government-Aided Religious Secondary School

SMAS – Private Religious Secondary School

How does one explain this rejuvenation for integrated Islamic Education? The most important reason was the realization of Islam itself and her demand on the adherents brought about by the da'wah movements in the 1970s and 1980s. Islam was seen as a liberating and motivating force for change and progress. Thus, parents were looking for schools that meet the goal of the Islamic philosophy of education. Second, parents realize that they could not afford the time to impart to their children the basic of reading the Qur'an, the basic of prayers

and memorization of some verses for it because of their hectic working hours. Third, they found that Islamic knowledge and practices taught in the national public schools are inadequate because the time table was already too packed. Fourth, parents found that the ethos and environment of the religious schools are more conducive for developing their children's character and also help in protecting from different forms of social illnesses. These have been supported by an empirical study (Che Noraini and Faisal, 2014) of factors driving parents to enrol their children in an Islamic private school by means of a survey of 50 parents. The study revealed the following factors in order of importance: (1) religious goal/ Islamic orientation (mean=4.23 on a scale of 5); (2) parents' awareness and parenting skills (mean=4.07); (3) socialization/ environment (mean=4.02); and (4) school location and accessibility (mean=3.28). Parents were also found to have positive perception of the quality as indicated by a mean of 4.36 for improvement in reading the Qur'an and memorization of chapters, and a mean of 4.12 for satisfaction with child's overall character development. However, there is a fifth factor which is a significant for the 21st century but not uncovered in this study and it is related to the change in Muslim family dynamics where women began to leave their homes and pursue careers of their own. The difficulty of families getting child minders for their children and the long hours of the religious schools especially private ones that coincide with the parents' working hours, became another selling point of these schools. So some parents had no other places to turn to but the private integrated, religious schools.

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 to include memorization and proper recitation of the Qur'an, Arabic and Islamic Studies elective in selected national schools, and introduction of *tasawwur* Islam (Islamic worldview and civilization) 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 had 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 showed only 29.6 percent of SMAR 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 persuaded since 2002 to become government-aided religious schools (SABK) by which its teachers were offered training to upgrade their professional knowledge and skills. By February 2003, 14,916 of the 74,000 students (66,000 in secondary schools and 8,000 in the primary schools) had withdrawn from the 268 SAR and enrolled in the national schools (Rosnani, 2004). Similarly, 1,937 teachers from a total of 4,429 teachers in SAR had applied to transfer to the national schools. 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 refused the aids need to be researched but the basic issue is the fear of losing school ownership and control, and also the change in curriculum components.

The discussion above has highlighted the educational reforms that occurred 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 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, and economics and business. Revolutionizing the SMKA was meant to meet this challenge. In fact, the 57 SMKA 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 (MRSM). Thus all these schools which are meant for the selected, elite Muslim students have been integrated in terms of curriculum and also the school ethos.

Integrated knowledge and Islamization of Knowledge in 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 compartmentalisation of the two types of 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 emphasised in the Islamic epistemology. The secular sciences have lost their sacredness and is thus, inconsistent with the aims of the Islamic philosophy of education and the nature of true knowledge. Subsequently, the following question arose, “Should knowledge be reconstructed to also fulfil its natural function?” As a consequence of this, efforts have been made to recast knowledge from the Islamic perspective or more commonly known as Islamisation of Contemporary Knowledge (Al-Attas, 1978; al-Faruqi, 1981)³. It is only after the Islamic worldview is implanted in the human mind that the knowledge generated through empirical means, experience and rational thinking would be interpreted in a way that instill faith in God, in addition to its other utilitarian purposes. This complex task of recasting acquired knowledge to perform the two functions of faith and worldly material benefits is the responsibility of scholars of higher education.

Development of Higher Islamic Education

There were a limited number of institutions of higher learning that offer Islamic Studies discipline in Malaysia before 1983, the first being the Klang Islamic College which was set up in 1955 to produce Islamic studies teachers with the professional 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.

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 (Idid, 2009). Unlike other Islamic universities which focused only on the Shari’ah sciences, IIUM is a comprehensive university whose mission is Islamisation (or harmonisation 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, others completely in Arabic, while others are taught in both Arabic and English. The Kulliyyah (College) of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS) was established in 1992. 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. Initially there were nine courses that made up the core but this was further reduced to four to make way for more hours demanded by each Kulliyyah for its specialization. In the KIRKHS, 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 have to 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 already at work and those pursuing postgraduate degrees at this University, of which 53 were Malaysians and 106 were international students, Rosnani (2011b) found that many students perceived an improvement in their English more than their Arabic – 83 percent for English as opposed to only 31 percent for Arabic (see Figure 1 & Figure 2) and 34 percent felt they had improved tremendously as compared to 11 percent for Arabic. This is understandable because 98 percent of them used English in their life most frequently whereas only 29 percent most frequently used Arabic.

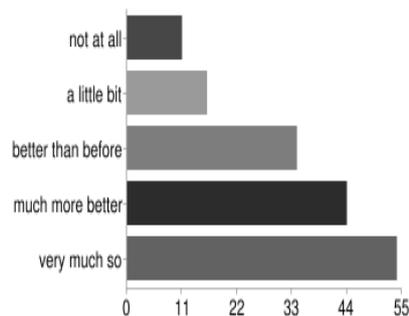


Fig 1 IIUM helps improve English

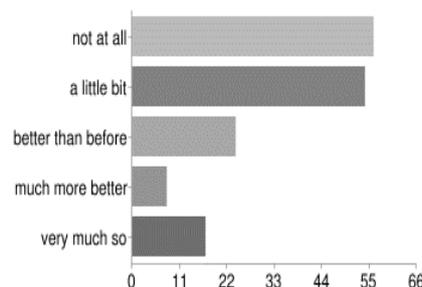


Fig 2 IIUM helps improve Arabic

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).

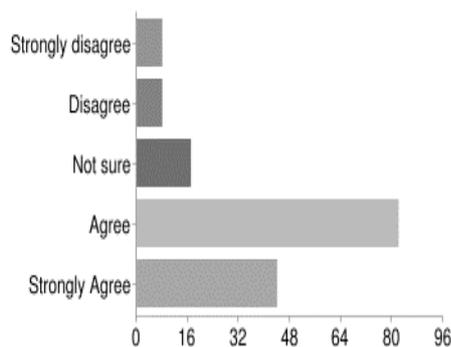


Fig 3 Integration of knowledge

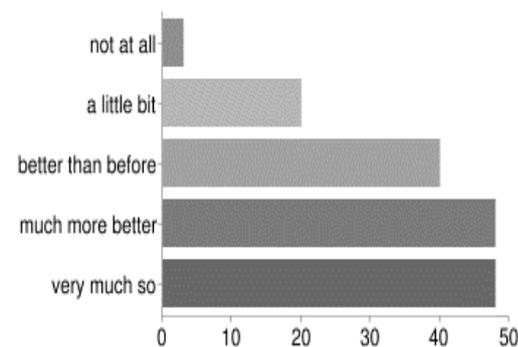


Fig 4 Unity of knowledge and faith

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).

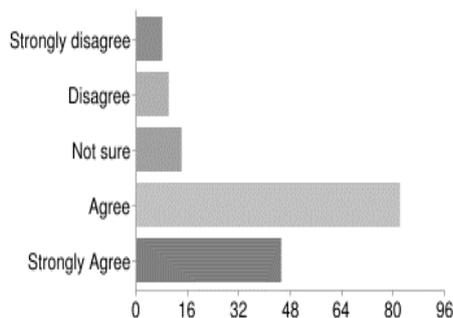


Fig 5 Understanding of Islamic worldview

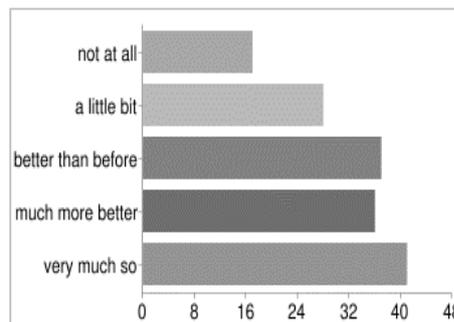


Fig 6 My life as a Muslim has been transformed

These figures and the success stories of the IIUM graduates provide evidence of the success of this experiment and has led to the founding of more Islamic universities in the country such as Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) founded in 2007 and Universiti Islam Malaysia (UIM) in 2011 and other state Islamic colleges.

Are merely having faculties or colleges of Islamic studies or sciences sufficient to produce the future Muslim leaders? This depends 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? Due to this several new programmes that take job prospect into account were created. 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. USIM offered the programme of Qur’an Studies and Multimedia, Sunnah Studies and Information Management, Economics and Muamalat Administration in her eight faculties that include Economics, Management, Shari’ah, Qur’an and Sunnah, Medicine, Dentistry, Language, and Science and Technology, while UIM offers postgraduate degree in comparative financial studies and other comparative sciences in finance, law, management and heritage. Most of the State Islamic Colleges offer economics and business administration programmes with the Islamic perspective.

Implications of the re-emergence and re-configuration of Islamic Education

The paper has demonstrated that Muslim education today is more comprehensive, integrated and balanced than previously in all religious schools and institutions of higher learning, with some limitations in private institutions due to the financial constraint which limit their natural and applied science electives or specialisations. However the mushrooming of private religious schools that are not registered with the Ministry of Education but only with the State Religious Departments is a major concern with respect to quality and control. Among the reasons for the Prime Minister Department’s withdrawal of financial aids to SAR that led to the crisis in 2002-03 were poor quality of academic performance and the tendency of SAR founders to get involved in politics, inciting their students to hate the Government and to cultivate militant political Islam among its students” (Musa in Rosnani 2004: 224). Musa, the Minister of

Education reported that 19 out of the 25 members of the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) who were arrested in 2001 had once studied in SAR or *pondok* and then became SAR teachers. Presently 87.2% of the tahfiz are private and not registered. Only 36 of the 150 primary religious schools (24.9%) and 168 of the 363 secondary religious schools (45.4%) are registered with the Ministry of Education (MOE). This means many more are not registered. Several steps have been taken by the MOE. Among them is setting up a policy that any private religious schools that desire to offer the MOE curriculum needs to register also with the Private Education Division of the MOE and the State Religious Departments have been instructed about this. The second step was to improve the National schools to include the religious needs of the Muslim students. Mahathir maintained that if sufficient time was allocated for religious studies in national schools, the Malays would not go to privately-run SAR. He also emphasized, “we also do not want Chinese or Indian families rejecting national schools, thinking that national schools are only for the Malays and are emphasizing Islam (in Rosnani, 2004: 225).”

The second implications of the re-emergence and re-configuration is the claim that the National schools are becoming religious schools and thus had deterred the non-Muslims for attending them and making them as the schools of choice for all Malaysians (Zaid, 2008). This issue is related to another claim that the different types of national primary schools by ethnicities does not help in forging unity among Malaysians. No large scale study has been conducted on both claims. However, is it not the function of schooling to cultivate and preserve values and cultures as well? If the other vernacular primary schools preserve the Chinese and Indian language and cultures respectively, then where would the Muslims obtained theirs if not in the Main National school that they form the majority? Actually, this is the Malaysian dilemma – preservation of communal values and cultures against education for unity through a common school. There is a solution to this and Rosnani (2001) has suggested for a single school system for all with prolonged school hours where the afternoon session after lunch be devoted to the language, culture and faith of each ethnic group. But Malaysian leaders do not have the political will to be unpopular and had not acted on this matter even after more than 50 years of Independence. In this regard, the decisive action of Lee Kuan Yew in the context of Singapore whereby a single national school for all with English as the medium is commendable because it had put Singapore on a clear direction towards national unity.

The statistics of enrolment in the primary religious schools and the National Type Tamil Schools are not as alarming as those of the National Type Chinese Schools. Table 5 shows that the number enrolled in the former are less than 5 percent of the cohort respectively, unlike 28 percent for the latter (Chinese Type Schools) which means that Chinese students are almost negligible in the Main National Schools. In 2014 about 27 percent of the cohort are not in the Main National schools which is better than in 2010 where the figure was higher at about 35%. The figures for the secondary schools seem better with only about 7 percent of the cohort in each of the religious and 4 percent in the Independent Chinese schools respectively, a total of 11 percent (Table 6).

Table 5 Number of Schools and Students in Primary Schools in Malaysia (2010-2014)

YEAR	TOT SRA		%	SRJKC		%	SRJKT		%	SK	
	sch	stud	SK	sch	stud	SK	sch	stud	SK	sch	stud
2010	93	38,783	1.8	1291	604,604	28	523	104,966	4.8	5826	2,181,096
2012	92	41,634	2	1294	591,121	28	523	97,884	4.7	5859	2,106,603
2013	166	56,181	2.7	1293	564,510	27	523	92,934	4.5	5865	2,069,109
2014	150	61,059	2.3	1295	559,157	21	523	88,880	3.3	5867	2,709,340

Source: BPPM KPM, *Perangkaan Pendidikan Malaysia* 2010, 2013, 2014 and EPRD, MOE (2012). *Quick Facts 2012 Malaysian Educational Statistics*

Table 6 Number of Schools and Students in Secondary Schools in Malaysia (2010-2014)

YEAR	Total SMA		%	Chi Indep Sch		%	SMK	
	Sch	stud	SMK	sch	stud	SMK	sch	stud
2010	330	128,951	6	60	69842	3.25	1876	2,147,438
2012	309	131,449	6.29	60	68102	3.26	1928	2,088,207
2013	366	138,691	5.98	60	75518	3.25	1950	2,320,287
2014	363	143,704	6.97	60	82784	4.01	1970	2,062,250

There are other implications as a consequence of the re-emergence and re-configuration. The social implication is the strengthening of each ethnic group's identity especially race and religion vis-à-vis the national identity. This has led to many conflicts between the ethnic and religious community such as the case of the usage of the word "Allah" in the Bible, the religious conversion of children involving newly converted Muslim father and the dispute over the burial of a dead person who had converted to Islam but kept it a secret. A survey of 1,013 Malaysians by the Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research from May 24 to June 8, 2011 also reveals that "66 per cent of respondents said ethnic relations were "good" — a 15 per cent decline from the 78 per cent who said so in February 2006" and "over a third believed that there was "sincere and friendly ethnic unity," down from 54 per cent five years ago, and those that thought unity was superficial rose from 29 per cent to 44 per cent." The Centre attributed this increased insecurities and distrust to the competitive political environment especially after the landmark Election 2000 (Teoh, 2011). In another survey in 2015 by Merdeka Centre, it was found that "60% of Malays saw themselves as being Muslim first, as opposed to 27% who identified as Malaysians and just 6% as Malays," a drop from 11% in 2006. On the other hand, "most Chinese (58%) and Indians (63%) saw themselves as Malaysians first, while 24% Chinese and 11% Indians identified themselves by their ethnicity. Thus most Malaysians see themselves as Malaysians first with the exception of the dominant group Malays" (Anisah S., 2015). This will have an impact on national politics that is based on race in the future.

Another implication of the re-emergence and re-configuration of Islamic education is positive in the sense that by having a well-planned and systematic education that serves the need of the Muslim populace, it can lead to a greater understanding, and the dominance of moderation and non-extremist views. This is important because terrorists are found mostly

from among the ignorance. With integrated education, there will be more literate Muslims that are not easily manipulated. But there can also be drawback the private traditional madrasahs or religious schools have deviant teachings or extremist inclination which could result in aggression and terrorism.

Economically, there is a greater desire for Islamic products in banking, food production, medicine and many more fields that help spurs Islamic economics and businesses. Halal products are not only for Muslims but has benefited the non-Muslims as well as in the products of Islamic banking and halal food.

Politically, with the proper and critical understanding of Islam, there is lesser loyalty to race but loyalty to Islam first among the Malays. They have adopted a more universal value and faith which show that Islam has always been more global and less parochial. Hence, there will be more commitment to social justice among them as this is a most important virtue in Islam which many secular scholars attempt to achieve through critical theory or pedagogy.

Staying relevant in the age of Globalisation

The age of globalisation poses a lot of challenges for education in general and Islamic education in particular. Globalisation is spurred by information and communication technologies which drove the Knowledge economy. The 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. The K-economy has brought about the privatization and commodification of knowledge and the most serious concern is on how to generate more money out of the programmes offered. 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 but human values such as philosophy, sociology, religion and history might have to be trimmed down, if not weeded out, although these are important for cultivating the 'human' spirit. So with this came the ratio of 60:40 for natural and applied sciences to social sciences and humanities being practiced in Malaysia higher education.

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 (or rather global pillage from the critical perspective) because information reaches all corner of the universe as soon as the events occur. 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 bring 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 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, and benefits humankind.

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.

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 paper has presented the development of Muslim education in Malaysia in attempts to response 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 of the lack of successors of high caliber to lead the *pondok* and the latter was more organized like the modern school and had a broader curriculum that is, Islamic studies and general studies such as mathematics, logic and languages, that served the need of the generation. After Independence, the national education system was more organized, responsive and improved to include Islamic religious studies, Islamic values and practices. 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 (KBSM) 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. As a result of KBSM and the SMKA, the prospect of producing Muslim professionals who are balanced between theory and practice, between living in the world of the mundane and the sacred was brighter. The resurgence of political Islam in the 1970s that led to a rise in Islamic consciousness among Muslims was also an important factor that led to the reforms and improvement of Islamic education and concomitantly its re-emergence and re-configuration.

The establishment of Faculties of Islamic Studies and comprehensive Islamic universities provided more opportunity in higher education for students specialising in Islamic Studies and other tracks in the religious schools. Arabic and English became indispensable in these universities and the addition of debating society and other co-curricular activities make its graduates more knowledgeable, skillful and marketable. Finally, even university programmes on Islamic studies discipline became multidisciplinary to cope with the need of the age. Thus, the responsiveness of the providers of Islamic education, in particular Islamic studies in the university has enabled the programme to be relevant and sustain itself. The paper also briefly analyses the impacts of this rejuvenation of Islamic education to national development from the social, economic, political and educational aspects.

With globalization and the rise in extremism, aggression and terrorism, the author argues that proper Islamic education is all the more necessary because it can prevent many from being manipulated or from blind adherence due to ignorance of Islamic knowledge and spirit. It is also the ignorance of Islam among non-Muslims that led them to Islamophobia which is spread by careless and mindless journalism and also to conclude that aggression and terrorism are a part of Islam. Finally, the author argues that from the perspective of cultural transmission it is natural to inculcate universal Islamic values and practices as the school ethos so long as it does not impose faith and does not alienate the non-Muslims. Therefore based on the statistics, it is not right to allege that the Main National school has become Islamic religious or Arabic school. Instead the author argues that what is lacking in the Malaysian education system is education for national integration which was the spirit of the Razak Report in 1956. There has to be a bold step to reform the primary school system into a single school system. Rahman Talib was bold enough to accomplish this for the secondary school in 1961 despite all the protests. Malaysia needs another Rahman Talib to do this for the primary school.

Endnotes

¹ Among them were Shaykh Ahmad al-Hadi who opened up Madrasah al-Iqbal in Singapore, Za'ba who called for reformed of education and establishment of an Islamic university modeled after Cambridge and Al-Azhar and HAMKA who called for return to philosophy. See Rosnani (2010) for more detailed discussion.

² This has been well analysed by S.M.Naqib al-Attas in his work, *Islam and Secularism* (1978).

³ Although both scholars call for Islamisation of knowledge, their approaches differ. Al-Attas emphasises on the Islamic worldview and the individual whereas Al-Faruqi emphasises on the community or ummah. See Rosnani and Imron (2000) for more detailed discussion.

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