

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Islamic Education and The 'j-QAF' Program in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Recently the Islamic education in some Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan are said to produce the supporters of Muslim terrorists. The bad and ugly image of the Islamic education is not in line with the noble, sublime and pristine goals of Islam and its education namely to inculcate the good and beneficial values in human minds and souls. Both human minds and spirits are important to be inculcated and trained with the good and beneficial values because good and useful conducts and actions originate from good, sound, healthy minds and souls. Evil and useless conducts and actions originate from evil and useless minds and souls. Hence both Islam and its education pay attention to human minds and souls with the hope of producing good and useful Muslims. For this good reason, all Muslims rely on their Islamic education for their children. They do not believe that the Islamic education should produce bad and evil Muslims who terrorize human beings since the Muslims themselves are human beings. In Malaysia, the Government promotes and sponsors Islamic education in the national primary and secondary school system. The salaries of the teachers who teach the Islamic education subjects are monthly paid by Malaysian Ministry of Education. The Ministry also develops the curricula for the Islamic education subjects and produces the textbooks for them. The teachers for the Islamic education subjects are trained at the college and university levels. The Ministry has established the Department of Islamic Education and Moral (JAPIM) to manage and administer the Islamic and moral education section or sector. This paper is intended to survey and present the new program for the Islamic education in Malaysian national primary schools. The program is named in short as 'j-QAF' that stands for the Jawi (the Malay-Jawi script or alphabets), the Quran, Arabic and the Fard 'Ayn (the Muslim individual religious duties such as the five obligatory prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, the two confession of faith).

Key words: Islamic education and, 'j-QAF' program, Muslim, Malaysia

Introduction

Historically speaking, it is very evident and reasonable if we classify the history of Islamic education in Malaysia into three different periods since each of them has certain phenomena different from the other in some aspects. The three periods are the Malacca Sultanate up to the 18th century, the Malay Sultanates under the British rule in Malaya, and finally the independent Malaya and Malaysia.

Islamic Education in the Malacca Sultanate:

The history of Islamic education in Malaysia began long time ago when the Malays in the Malay Peninsula converted to Islam. This happened in the 14th century in Malacca when the Malay ruler converted to Islam. However, the Islamic education offered by the Muslims to their children at that period has no clear records and systems. However, we can assume that the Muslims in Malacca provided the Islamic education for themselves and their children at their homes and mosques. The Islamic teachers' homes were also the places for offering the Islamic education for the Muslims and their children. The type of the Islamic education was most likely very informal. The Muslims during the Malacca period needed to teach themselves and their children the Islamic teachings related to the worship and the pillars in Islamic theology. Basically, there are five pillars of Islam related to the worship namely the two confessions of Faith expressing by words 'There is No God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger', the five daily obligatory prayers, the fasting during the month of Ramadan, the Zakah (religious economic duties), and the pilgrimage rituals in Mecca for the Muslims who are able to travel to Mecca.

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At the very early stage of the Malay conversion to Islam in Malacca there was no record of the places for the Muslims to teach the Islamic education to their children since their parents just converted themselves to Islam. The Muslim parents were supposed to teach their children the Islamic education at their homes or dwellings. Later on when the Muslims were able to build the mosques for the prayers and other religious purposes, the mosques became the first place outside their homes for themselves and their children to learn the Islamic education subjects. In addition to the mosques, the Muslims also built the prayer places called in Malay as Surau and Balai Sah where they used them for the prayers other than the Midday Friday Prayer. For example, the Surau and Balai Sah in Kelantan were also the places where the Muslim children read the Quran and learn other Islamic education subjects. The Muslims did not perform the Midday Friday Prayer at the Surau or Balai Sah because the place was often too small to accommodate 40 male Muslims required for the Midday Friday Prayer according to the Shafie school of jurisprudence.

Although Malacca was the first seat of the Malay ruler who converted to Islam in the Malay Peninsula, Malacca was attacked and defeated by the Portuguese in 1511 and the Malay ruler was dethroned. In 1642 the Dutch seized Malacca from the Portuguese. Other Malay states in the Malay Peninsula during the Dutch rule in Malacca remained under the Malay rulers or sultans. They were the states of Perlis, Kedah, Perak, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Selangor, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. The Malay rulers or sultans were the heads of Islam and Malay customs in their respective states. The duty or responsibility to provide the Islamic education for the Muslims and their children was placed upon the Malay rulers in their respective states. The Islamic religious schools were established by the Malay rulers to provide the Islamic education for the Muslim children. However, the number of Islamic religious schools funded by the Malay rulers was not more than one or two in a Malay state. For example, there was one in Kelantan named Maahad Muhammadi located in Kota Bharu that was built by the Malay ruler in Kelantan, one in Kedah named Maahad Mahmud located in Alor Star, one in Terengganu named after Sultan Zainal Abidin located in Kuala Terengganu. In addition to the Islamic religious schools built and funded by the Malay rulers, there were the Islamic religious schools established and funded by the Muslims themselves. These Islamic religious schools were known as the Sekolah Agama Rakyat (the Religious Schools of Peoples) to differentiate them from those built and funded by the Malay rulers from the state budgets.

Historically from the Malacca period up to the period before the British colonial rule in Malaya, the Islamic education was made available for the Muslim children at the Islamic religious teachers' homes or houses, the mosques, the Surau or Balai Sah, the Government or State Islamic Religious Schools and the Peoples' Islamic Religious Schools.

Islamic Education under the British Colonial Rule:

After Malaya came under the British colonial rule, the British Residents were the advisors for the Malay rulers in their respective states. There were no Malay rulers in Penang, Malacca and Singapore during the British colonial rule. Penang became the first state to come under the British rule in the 18th century. Then the British took over Malacca and Singapore from the Dutch colonial rule. The three British colonies namely Penang, Malacca and Singapore were called the Straits Settlements (SS). Then the British gradually extended the control over the states under the Malay rulers one after another. Perak was the first Malay state whose Malay ruler was forced to accept the first British Resident to advise him in all state matters except the matters related to the religion of Islam and the Malay customs. Other Malay rulers gradually came under the advice of the British Residents. The Malay states under the British colonial rule were divided into two administrative units called the Federated Malay States that consisted of Perak, Selangor, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan, and the Unfederated Malay States that consisted of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Johor.

The British Residents in Malaya kept the Islamic religious institutions as they were before the British colonial rule. Hence the Muslims were able to send their children for the Islamic education at the State or Government Religious Schools, the Peoples' Religious Schools, the mosques, the Surau or the homes of the Islamic religious teachers. The Islamic education held at the mosques, the teachers' homes and the Surau were informal. The Islamic education offered by the state and people's religious schools were formal. However, the state and people's religious schools taught only the Islamic education subject namely reading the Quran, the five pillars of Islam related to Islamic worship and rituals, the six pillars of Islamic faith, history, Islamic ethics, the Malay in the Jawi scripts or alphabets and Arabic.

In addition to the state and religious schools, another religious learning institution known as the Pondok was built at the early 19th century in Malaya for the Islamic education. The Pondok system was developed to offer the Islamic education to the Muslim adults and children. There were many of the Pondok in the Malay States of Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis and Terengganu in Malaya during the British rule in the 19th century (Abu Bakar, 2000). The Muslim modernists in Malaya such as Sayid Syekh al-Hadi (d.1934) did not support the Pondok Islamic education system since the system did not offer the vocational and secular subjects as well as there was no formal examinations implemented for the Pondok students. The Muslim modernists in Malaya

preferred the Madrasah Islamic education system since the system offered the Islamic religious and secular subjects and implemented formal examinations to measure their students' achievements (Abu Bakar, 1994).

The British administration in Malaya initiated and established the English schools in the Malayan towns and they were the government or public schools. For example, the English school named Penang Free School was established and operated in Penang in 1816, and other English schools in Malacca, Taiping, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. The British administration also supported the English schools built by the Christian missions in Malaya. The British administration in Malaya also started the Malay schools. For example, there were two of the Malay schools in Singapore in 1856 and nine of the Malay schools in Malacca between 1858 and 1863 (Abu Bakar, 1999). Both the English and Malay schools in Malaya did not provide for the Islamic education. However, the British administration permitted the Malay schools to be used by the Muslims if they wanted to teach the Islamic education for their children during the afternoon or night times since the Malay school session was in the morning only.

During the British colonial rule in Malaya, there were the English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil schools. The English and Malay schools were supported by the British and the Chinese and Tamil schools were permitted by the British. The English and Malay schools did not offer the Islamic education subjects even though the Muslim children were in the English and Malay schools. The Muslim children whose parents wanted to learn the Islamic education subjects could go to the mosques, the religious teachers' homes, the state or people religious schools.

Historically, during the British colonial rule in Malaya, the Islamic education subjects were available at the mosques, the homes of the religious teachers, the small mosques (Surau or Balai Sah), the state and people religious schools, the Pondok and the Madrasah. The English and Malay schools did not include the Islamic education subjects in their timetables. The Malay schools were permitted to be used for the Islamic education subjects in the afternoon or night time if the Muslim parents did not find the state or people religious schools in their areas. The Malay schools during the British colonial rule did not offer the Islamic education subjects. However, after the independence of Malaya the Malay schools have included the Islamic education subjects in their timetables and the Malay schools are called the national primary and secondary schools after the independence of Malaya in August 1957.

Islamic Education after the Independent of Malaysia:

After the independence of Malaya from the British rule in August 1957, the Malayan Ministry of Education was established to deal with the Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil schools built during the British colonial rule. The Ministry changed the Malay schools to the national primary and secondary schools while the Chinese, Tamil and English schools were changed to the national type schools but they all came under the jurisdiction and power of the Malayan Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education provided the Islamic education subjects for the Muslim students in the national primary and secondary schools. The Ministry also provided the Islamic education subjects in the national types of the primary and secondary schools if the Muslim students in those schools were fifteen students and above. This has been provided by the Malaysian national education act. The national primary education was for six years from standard one to standard six while the national secondary education was for five years from Form One to Form Five.

The Islamic education for the national primary and secondary school system has been provided and fully sponsored by the Ministry of Education during the Malayan period and then the Malaysian period. When the Federation of Malaysia was formed in November 1963 Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore were in the Federation of Malaysia. However, Singapore withdrew from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 and since then Singapore has become an independent city state very close to Malaysia. The Malaysian Ministry of Education continues her duties and responsibilities to provide the Islamic education for the Muslim children in the national primary and secondary schools as they were during the Malayan Ministry of Education.

During the premiership of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia from 1981 to November 2003, the curricula for the Malaysian national primary and secondary schools including the curricula of Islamic education subjects were reviewed and the new curricula were introduced by the name KBSR for the national primary schools and KBSM for the national secondary schools. KBSR stands for Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (The Unified Curricula for the Primary Schools) and KBSM stands for Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (The Unified Curricula for the Secondary Schools).

The KBSR for the Islamic education has six major subjects known in Malay as Membaca Quran (Reading or Reciting of the Quran), Fikah (the Islamic worship and rituals), Akidah (the Islamic faith or belief), Akhlak (the Islamic ethics), Sejarah Islam (the Islamic history, and the Malay-Jawi alphabets or scripts). For the Reading of the Quran, the Quranic grammars and meanings are also included. For the Fikah, the five daily obligatory prayers are emphasized including how to perform them, what to read during the prayers, when to perform them the conditions for valid and invalid prayers etc. besides the fasting during the month of Ramadan.

The Islamic faith covers the six pillars of Islamic faith namely belief in Allah, His Angels, His Messengers, His Books, His Decrees and the Hereafter or the Day of Judgment.

Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad also wanted the state and people religious schools established in Malaya and in Malaysia to be surrendered to the Ministry of Education but the Religious State Departments or Councils under the state religious powers did not want to surrender their religious states. However, some of the people religious states were surrendered to the Ministry of Education.

Hence there have been three types of the religious schools offering the Islamic education subjects in Malaysia for the Muslim children at the primary and secondary levels. The first type is the state religious schools established and administered by the state governments in their respective states. The second type is the people religious schools established and administered by the Muslim societies or individuals. Some of these religious schools were surrendered to the Ministry of Education during the later years of Tun Dr. Mahathir's premiership. The third type is called SMKA (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama or the National Religious Secondary Schools) established and administered by the Ministry of Education.

During the premiership of Dr. Mahathir also the program known in Malay as PAFA was introduced to support and improve the Islamic education subjects for the national primary and secondary schools. The PAFA stands for Perkara Asas Fardu Ain (the basic matters in the Islamic duties for individual Muslims). The program gave emphasis on those Muslim individual duties to be understood and practiced by the Muslim students especially to religiously perform the five obligatory prayers within the school compound and time such as the Noon Prayers or in Malay Solat Zuhur for the students in the morning sessions and the Afternoon Prayers or in Malay Solat Asar for the students in the afternoon sessions.

In Malaysia, many of the national primary and secondary schools have the morning and afternoon academic sessions especially the schools located in the big towns and small towns due to the numbers of students for such schools. For the primary schools the students in standard or year one up to year three are in the afternoon sessions while the students in standard or year four up to year six are in the morning sessions because they are prepared for the primary school examinations known as UPSR when they are in the year six. The UPSR stands for the Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah or the Primary School Examination. For the Muslim students, the Islamic education subjects are required to be included in the UPSR in addition to Mathematics, Science, Malay and English. For the non-Muslim students, they are not required to take the Islamic education subjects for the UPSR. The tests and assessments for the PAFA are also for the Muslim students only. The grade for the PAFA is given pass or fail only. However, the grades for the subjects taken in the UPSR are from A to D.

For the Muslim students in the lower secondary schools, form one to form three, they are also required to take the Islamic education subjects for the examinations held during the form three named the PMR that stands for Penilaian Menengah Rendah or the Lower Secondary Examination. For the non-Muslim students, they are not required to take the Islamic education subjects for the PMR.

The final or last examination for the national secondary school students is called the SPM that stands for Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or the Malaysian Certificate of Education. For the SPM, the Muslim students are required to take the Islamic education subjects for that examination while the non-Muslim students are not required to take those subjects.

In the three public education examinations namely the UPSR, PMR and SPM, the Muslim students are required to take the examinations for the Islamic education subjects. In addition, they are all examined and assessed for the PAFA. The UPSR is held for the students in the standard or year six, the PMR is for the students in the form three, and the SPM is for the students in the form five in the national primary and secondary school systems in Malaysia. The national types of Chinese and Tamil primary and secondary school systems also implement those three public education examinations. For the Chinese students, they can take Chinese language in addition to Malay and English in those three public examinations. For the Indian or Tamil students, they can take Tamil or Hindi in addition to Malay and English in those three examinations. The students from the private primary and secondary schools also implement those three public examinations for their respective students. If their students are Muslims, they have to offer the Islamic education subjects in their schools.

The Program of 'j-QAF' in Malaysia:

Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is the fifth Malaysian Prime Minister who succeeded Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in November 2003. Abdullah was trained for his bachelor degree in the Malay and Islamic Studies at University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. It seems that he has great enthusiasm and interest in improving the Islamic education in the national primary schools. During his first official visit to the Ministry of Education on December 30, 2003, he discussed on the means and ways to improve and attract Malaysian children to enroll in the national primary schools as well as the means and ways improve and upgrade the Islamic education. With the good intention to improve and upgrade the teaching and learning the Islamic education subjects for the Muslim students in the national primary schools from the standard or year one to year six, the education program of 'j-QAF' has been introduced based on the idea put forwards by Tun Abdullah. A special seminar to

discuss and plan for the 'j-QAF' was held for three days from 3rd to 5th March 2004. Later on the pilot studies were carried out on the 'j-QAF' program for three months ended in July 2004 in the selected national primary schools. Tun Abdullah agreed to the 'j-QAF' program to be implemented in the national primary schools starting from January 2005 (JAPIM, 2006).

There are four letters namely 'j-QAF' for this special program just implemented in the national primary schools in Malaysia starting in 2005. The first small letter 'j' stands for the Malay language written in the Jawi script or alphabets. The second capital letter 'Q' stands for the Quran, the divine and holy scripture for the Muslims. The third capital letter 'A' stands for Arabic language. The fourth capital letter 'F' stands for the Arabic terms Fard 'Ayn or in Malay Fard Ain that means the religious obligations or duties imposed or prescribed upon each Muslim individually such as the religious obligation to perform the five obligatory prayers during the day and night, and to fast during the month of Ramadan. The program is intended to enhance and improve the curricula of the Islamic education subjects, This program was inspired by Tun Abdullah, who wanted the Muslim children to finish reading the Quran during their six years of schooling in the national primary school system. He also suggested the Arabic language as a compulsory subject in addition to the Jawi and the Fard 'Ayn subjects. This is explained by the Director General of Education Tan Sri Abdul Rafie Mahat (KPM, 2004).

It seems that Tun Abdullah was not content with or satisfied with the wide of scope the Ministry of Education covering the education and training for the primary and secondary schools as well as the colleges and universities. Hence immediately after he succeeded Tun Dr. Mahathir, Tun Abdullah formed a new ministry to deal with the colleges and universities in Malaysia. The new ministry is called the Ministry of Higher Education and the first minister for this new ministry was Dr. Shafie Salleh before he was replaced by Dato' Mustapa Mohamad. The Ministry of Education at that time was headed by Dato' Hishamuddin Tun Hussain whose scope is limited to the primary and secondary schools. He has been asked to pay his due attention to the planning and implementation of the 'j-QAF' program in the national primary schools.

According to Tan Sri Abdul Rafie Mahat, the Director General of Education, the responsibility to implement the 'j-QAF' program is placed upon the Ministry of Education through its Department of Islamic Education and Moral. Indeed, this program is part and parcel of the Islam Hadhari proposed by Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The program of 'j-QAF' has many models in their implementations such as the models for the class to improve the Jawi, for the class to improve listening, for the class to complete reading the Quran within six months, and for the class to expend on the Arabic for communication, and for the Bestari Solat (the Prayer in the best way). The program of 'j-QAF' is implemented gradually for the Muslim students in the national primary schools starting in 2005 with the Muslim students in the standard or year one, and the program will be fully implemented for the Muslim students in the standard one up to the standard six in 2010. The gradual stage for the implementation of 'j-QAF' program is designed to achieve all of its goals.

The 'j-QAF' program has four objectives to be achieved after its full implementation. It is stated that after the full implementation of the 'j-QAF' program for the national primary schools, the Muslim students in the schools are able to do the followings: a) to satisfactorily read and write Jawi, b) to finish reading the Quran, c) to acquire the basic Arabic communicative skill, and d) to consolidate and implement Fard 'Ayn (Marthan, 2006).

The main difference between the PAFA and 'j-QAF' programs is very clear and evident since the 'j-QAF' covers the Jawi, Arabic language, the Quran in addition to the Fard 'Ayn. While the PAFA just covers the Fard 'Ayn only. Another aspect of the difference between the two programs is the number of teachers. To handle and fully implement the 'j-QAF' program, the Government of Malaysia under the premiership of Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has allocated additional allocations or funds to the Ministry of Education to begin recruiting new Islamic education teachers to implement the 'j-QAF' program. Meanwhile the PAFA program only utilized the Islamic education teachers to implement the PAFA. The recruitment is done by stages and its first stage began in 2004. The Islamic education teachers are given the courses or trainings to be familiarized with the 'j-QAF' program.

Conclusion:

It is plausible and reasonable to consider the 'j-QAF' program as a new and pure vision from the leadership of the Government of Malaysia to improve and enhance the Islamic education subjects and the PAFA which have been implemented since the independence of Malaysia. During the premiership and leadership of Tun Dr. Mahathir that lasted for 22 years, the Islamic education curricula had been reviewed and improved and the PAFA was introduced. Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi also paid great attention to improve and enhance the Islamic education by introducing the 'j-QAF' program, by allocating additional budget for the recruitments of the Islamic religious teachers to implement the 'j-QAF' program and to administer and monitor the 'j-QAF' from its beginning in 2005 to its full implementation in 2010 in the national primary schools for the Muslim students in those schools. The 'j-QAF' is linked with the Islam Hadhari in some aspects especially for the

Malaysian multi-racial and multi-religious modern nation-state. No doubt that the success of the 'j-QAF' program depends on many factors. If the 'j-QAF' program is able to fully achieve its stated objectives, the Muslim students who have undergone the program would be better in the aspects or areas covered by the program.

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