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The Contribution of Islamic Education in Strengthening Malay Identity

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ABSTRACT

Islamic education is able to preserve and transmit the basic values of society and in contrast, it also can be a source of confusion in the society. In addition, education can also help developing the growth of personality and nurturing the individual identity. This article will be aiming to discuss Islamic education and its role in strengthening the Malay civilization. Islamic education has its own strength because through it we are able to put a solid foundation of excellent human civilization in terms of worldly life as well as hereafter. In the Quran there are many verses that address the educational aspects of human civilization, and even arrival of the Quran itself is intended to educate people. Similarly through the Hadith and sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), many of his narrations are focused on the importance of education in empowering the civilization of community and further enhanced by a few examples of his actions that in encouraging Muslims to love knowledge. Therefore, this article will further discuss about the role of Islamic education in empowering the Malay identity, especially in holistic, first-class minded human development.

Key words: empowering, Islamic education, Malay identity, Malay Civilization, holistic

Introduction

Education is well known in playing a very crucial role to develop the civilization of one community. It also behaves as a medium to structure the culture, identity of individuals and community. Thus, it can be an important element in growth processing and one’s maturity by which can be the reliable generation with good morality. Generally, society will live in poverty from which can lead to unrestrained moral destruction without education. Therefore, education needs to be implemented as a critical agenda which is should be applied based on the due guidelines in accordance to its importance. A failure of placing The Quran and The Sunnah in Islamic education will cause a collapse in the development of self-identity and Muslim personality which are committed to religious obligation.

The arrival of Islam in Malay society has brought a great change in their history and civilization. Malay community which was originally obligated to Hindunisme thought has finally chosen Islam as a way of their life. Furthermost, free-thinking of Malay people from the constraints of myths and imagination has lead to acceptance of tauhid-based belief (Awang Sariyan 1989, 22). The recognition of Islam by Malay community also become the initial source of Malay civilization in tradition of education, language, knowledge, arts, literatures, philosophy, and thoughts, in addition to its ability to understand the original element of affected and affecting variables as long as it does not mislead the Tauhid (A. Aziz 2002, 102). Islam has ironically being the core of self-identity development among the Malay society. All values and norms of Malay community are referring to Islamic teaching, the normality between Islam and Malay community has came to the extent that there is a statement of which whoever converts to Islam will be considered as ‘Malay convert’. 

Methods:

In the interest of validity and reliability, the study provides multiple sources of evidence. These include tape recorded in-depth interviews with specific researches in particular with an expert educationalist in Malaysia. Also included are data-gathering techniques such as library and document analysis. Research methods used to examine the contribution of Islamic education in strengthening Malay identity is largely qualitative.

Result and Discussion

Concept and Philosophy of Islamic Education:

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Education is a narrative noun from a root word of 'educate' which is defined as watch, preserve, and teach according to Kamus Dewan. The word of education also synonyms to teaching, 'tarbiyah', lesson, guidance, and care (Kamus Dewan 2007, 350). In Arabic language, there are several words which referring to education such what are regularly used (Rosnani 2006, 6; al-Attas 1979, 2-4) as ‘tarbiyyah’, ‘ta’lim’ and ‘ta’did’. The word of ‘tarbiyyah’ originated from the root word ‘rabbu’ (caring, preserving and leading). It also addresses the development of individual potential, caring or educating to move forward into a comfortable, well-done condition (Halsted, J.M 2004, 522). The word ‘ta’lim’ in addition derived from ‘alima’ connotation (knowing, informing, viewing, perceiving, and assuming). It refers to the process of delivering or receiving knowledge which is commonly found out through training, instruction, guidance, or other forms of teaching (Halsted 2004, 522). Furthermore, the word of ‘ta’did’ narrated with the word of ‘aduba’ (refining, disciplined, and cultured). It refers to the process of character growth and teaching of important basics to live in a community including to understand and accept the most basic principle which is justice (Halsted 2004, 522).

Generally these three words are defining the education, however if it is being deeply perceived, in fact these three terms have different definition. According to Prof. Al-Attas, the word ta’did is accurately defining the education rather than the other three words since it has a specific definition to picture the process of human education compared to tarbiyyah which has wider definition in which up to animal level, in addition to its enhancement of physical education is more important than wellness of mental and moral (al-Attas 1992, xxi; Rosnani 2006, 6). The argument was being further strengthened by choosing Rasulullah’s examples of actions that used the word ta’did to refer on education which was given by Allah to him.

The word ta’did is providing a definition by which bringing up a process of developing growth and forming one’s individual personality in all aspects of life including in intellectual, social, physical, moral, and esthetic field. It is not merely a process of manners, wisdoms and justice which eventually help to bring human being to know and acknowledge Allah as The Creator and The Owner of this nature and we are human being as His slaves. Accordingly, there are some other words or terms that give meaning to the education such as tarbib, tadiris, tazkiyyah dan riyadah (Kamarul & Ab. Halim 2007, 3). However, explanation on those words will not be discussed in this paperwork. In accordance to the above description of which can be summarized that islamic education is a process to educate and train human being. It involves three main elements which are mind, body and soul based on the main sources of Islamic education namely the Quran and the Sunnah. Islamic education aims to generate a human being who devoted and dedicated to Allah with true dedication.

Self-Identity of Malay Nation:

The word self-identity is derived from two words which are identity and self. Identity means natural, pure and non-mixed (Kamus Dewan 2007, 612). In addition, the word self means someone or belonging owners (Kamus Dewan 2007, 354). These two words once they have been combined known as self-identity, hence it brings the definition of unique, special characters or features in terms of customs, language, culture and religion from which can be a core and symbol of individual personality or a nation (Kamus Dewan 2010, 613). Self – identity or ‘huwiyyah’ means attributes or features or natural characters which belong to someone or a nation that can form the identity and characters of the nation (Ahmad 2009, 59).

Formation of individual or nation characteristics and attributes is influenced by many factors among which are environmental factors, environment, historical experiences and beliefs. However, the most important, dominant factor is a factor of religion or beliefs. Religion gives a clear, comprehensive view about ourselves, the Creator and of nature and also its position and role in the universe (Ahmad 2009, 59). Furthermore, we should know more about the term 'Malay' itself in order to in define the identity of the Malays, since the term 'Malay' can be defined differently.

In a condition it is defined in terms of social and cultural, the term is not limited only to the Malays who settled in Malaysia, but across the entire settlement known as the 'group of the Malay Island' (S. Husin 1978, 1-2).

In Malaysia, the Malay term according to the Federal Constitution is a person who embraces Islam, normally speaks Malay language and customize Malay customs and cultures (Federal Constitution, section 160 [2]). The main element which is clearly underlying the Malay identity is Islam in accordance to the definition of Malay by The Constitution. Identity of the Malay can be summarized as the value of religion and faith (Islam), a language of (Malay) and customs practiced by them over the years in which these traditions are not contrary to Islam. Based on the statements contained in this constitution, if it happens the Malay is not longer confessing Islam as the religion, no longer practicing Malay language and no longer following the Malay tradition then that person is no longer a Malay or in other words it has no real identity of Malay (Ahmad 2009, 62).
Relationship Between Identity of Malay and Islam:

Relation between the Arabs with the Malays are limited in the areas of business and trade only before the arrival of Islam. The arrival of Islam in the Malay world has opened a new chapter in the history of the community civilization. Islam has been the foundation for the revival of Malay community in terms of every life aspects such as social, economic and political (Mahayudin 2009, 23). Islam not merely managed to change the outer structure of Malay society, even has changed the structure of their mind or soul (al-Attas 1972: 22). Islam has very clearly changed and revolutionized Malay self-identity and soul, and it has found the Malay with self-identity which is very compatible, valuable and most essential (Ahmad 2009, 61).

Accordingly, the Malays are seen as having a self-identity is not merely because of their strength to uphold their cultural values and customs, but also because of their strength to uphold religious values of Islam which is not mixed with any form of ideology, beliefs and wrong practices. Cultural values of a nation can only be accepted as a basis for the national identity if only it is really compatible with religious values. Conversely, if there is a conflict between cultural values and religion, the values of the culture itself must be regarded as eroding factors that could possibly diminish the self-identity. Hence there is no other ways to effectively refresh and increase the strength of Malay identity, unless by returning them to the understanding of the true religion in which based on the basic education of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Azwira 2006, 4). Thus, all forms of customs or beliefs that are practiced before converting to Islam has been abandoned or modified so as not to be a conflict with Islamic teachings.

In term of language, thousands of words in the Quran and the Arabic language has become an important basics in the construction of Malay terms and it provides a very unique, universal view of the Malay language itself (Sidek 2009, 29). Islam managed to promote the Malay language as an international language, especially in the era of the Malay-Melaka regime. Arabic language has been absorbed into the Malay language and brings new concepts that have not previously existed in the Malay vocabulary (Ahmad 2009, 65). Words such as charity, manner, justice, nature, knowledge, faith, goodwill, worship, halal, haram, life, body, jihad, goodness, meeting, sustenance, Qur'ah, obedience and many more which were taken from the Arabic vocabulary (http://temanteras.wordpress.com / futhuhat / Malay-self-identity, 28 April 2011). These words are not only complementary to Malay vocabularies but also have become a basic feature of the development of Malay personality and their national identity itself. Here the authors would like to stress on that Islam has strong, great influence in the formation of identity and self-esteem of Malay. If they lose their Islamic identity, they will also lose their self-identity as a Malay.

The Role of Islamic Education in Strengthening the Malay Identity and Self-Esteem:

History proves that Islamic education which is based on philosophy and Islamic principles has successfully developed human civilization generally and Islamic civilization in particular. The emergence of the knowledge era and educational excellence during the reign of Islam has shown how relevant the knowledge-based Islamic education and supported by the science of revelation and understanding to be implemented (Aswati 2006, 30). Islamic emphasis on integrated education has successfully enlightened an excellence in civilization and developed a dynamic human principal and it is really great in terms of knowledge, faith, morality and skills. Muslim intellectuals in the early age of Islam have proven this achievement in which they are not only mastered the science of world, but also learned and mastered the science of hereafter.

Tajul Ariffin & Nor 'Aini Dan (2002, 53-54) stated that in a way to generate the strength of a nation and state, the strength of religion needs to be constructed and developed at all levels of education. Meanwhile in terms of the goals to have good citizens, the foundations of human development should be integrated, and starting with the development of a true and strong faith. The potential of the human intellects should be nurtured to the truth, to the creative, innovative, logic and analytic thinking that will produce beneficial knowledge in terms of theory and practice. In addition, the spiritual potential should be carving the aspects of confidence in God, appreciation of moral values and norms of society and also the courteous, noble character. Furthermore, physical potential is to be driven to the aspects of physical and mental health that works to serve the community and the nation (Tajul & Nor 'Aini 2002, 13).

Here the authors perceive the role played by the Islamic education in empowerment of Malay identity and self-esteem in several stages. First stage is seeding and cultivation of Islamic values into Malay community as such explained previously by the writer. The second is during the colonialism of the West in Malaysia and the third is post-independence stage. The first stage, namely the early arise of Islam in the Malay world, Islamic education was taught informally to the public community. At this stage the main focus is on teaching the Holy Quran, good behavior and morals and good deeds of worship, Islamic knowledge and spirituality (Shahril @ Charil Marzuki et.al 1993, 36). Through educational institutions such as mosques, prayer room, religious school or pesanteran, all groups of Malay society began to know the sciences of Islam. Islam as a religion that emphasizes on knowledge has pointed out to the mastery of knowledge and this condition has generated an
appropriate education system to the society circumstances and needs at that moment (Hasnah 2009, 51). Hence, the education serves as a mechanism and process of delivering religious teaching to the public. Furthermore, the existence of the Malay-Islam regimes around the Nusantara, such as the Malacca, Terengganu, Kelantan and Kedah has stimulated the development of Islamic education in the Malay world that there is a significant correlation between those Islamic governments (Ab. Halim & Kamarul Azmi 2009, 35). This traditional system of education continued to serve until the arrival of Western colonists who had left the impacts on the development of Islamic education.

Western colonial era showed the development of Islamic education began to be eroded. Western colonizers, especially the European has placed the economic value in the education caused the Muslims began to leave their formal education and did participate in formal education introduced by the colonizers. In order to solve this problem, Muslim thinkers have introduced a system of madrasa schools as an alternative to the former religious schools for the Muslim community at that time. These efforts yielded positive results since many of the Malays further their studies in theology at the universities in the Middle East even though their qualifications were not recognized by the colonizers (Ab. Kamarul Halim & Azmi 2009, 42).

Era of western colonization also witnessed the development of Christian propaganda in the Malay world. The Christian missionaries with the support of the UK authorities have set up English schools for local people to propagate their religion. However, Malays had paid less attention to this type of school. Parents are worried about sending their children to this type of school because it is being handled by the Christian missionaries thus they fear their children will be a Christian (Ahmad 2009, 94). Thus the colonial party had established the Malay Vernacular schools in 1856. A similar situation also occurs when this type of school is not getting the attention from the Malays, who fear that their children did not receive a good religious teaching. Finally, Skinner has merged the school with al-Quran lessons in the afternoon session caused the Malay community to send their children to this type of school (Shahril 1993, 37; Ab. Halim & Kamarul 2009, 42).

Reformation in education which was brought by the colonial authorities has resulted in neglecting the Islamic education by Malays. This is because the colonial authorities did not see the Islamic education as something that has commercial value and important to society, in fact they see Islam as not more than a threat to them. Therefore, to prevent the Islamic education from continuously being forgotten by the public community then certain parties have taken the initiative to offer a form of formal Islamic education. For example, in 1895, Sultan Ibrahim has established the Johor Religious Department then followed by establishing a religious school to the Johor citizens. These formal religious schools were opened in the evening and the key areas of focus have been given to the educational aspect of the Qur’an, tajwid, worship, unity, and tasawuf. These religious schools have fully used the Malay language as the language medium (Ab. Halim & Kamarul 2009, 43).

In line with efforts by the colonizers to keep the Malay society away from the Islamic education, the Malay community has established a Madrasah system. The system was first introduced in Malaya in 1908 when the Iqbal School opened in Singapore. Hence, this system has been developed to Penang, Muar, Kota Bahru, Terengganu, Alor Setar and elsewhere. The Madrasah education system offers the ibtida’i (former/standard), thanawi (middle/secondary) or takhasus (major fields). These Madrasah have used the syllabus from some informal Arabic books in addition to the books that has been prepared by the religious teachers. There are also Madrasah that integrate academic syllabus such as mathematics, English and others in the school system in which mainly dominated by the reformist or youth. Madrasah system also provides examination to assess student performance and teaching staff consists of graduates from the Middle East or who have completed their field specialization (Ab. Halim & Kamarul 2009, 43).

In 1955, the Islamic center of higher education in Malaya was first established in Selangor known as Islam Kelang College of which later known as the Malaya Islam College. The College offers two levels of courses that college level courses for four years (degree of al-Shahadah al-Aliyyah) and takhasus level courses for two years (degree of al-Shahadah al-'Alamiyyah). In addition to religious higher education, academic education has also been given priority (Abdul Rahman al-Ahmadi 2000, 503).

Efforts of elevating the Islamic education at this age is very important since the Malay community began to get influenced by the western culture and ideology which are contrary to Islam. Although there are many efforts to promote Islamic education before state independence, in fact the schools and learning centers of Islamic education are still not accepted in the federal education system (Ab. Halim & Kamarul 2009, 43). The struggle of the Islamic supporters has positively fruited when Tun Abdul Razak in his report had included studies of religion, morality and ethics into the education system as an attempt to introduce Islamic education into the national education system (Shahrir et.al. 1993, 56). In addition, prior to state independence, the Public Religious Schools (SAR) and State Religious Schools (SAN) which are not parts of the national education system was established. After the state independence, this type of schools began to attend financial assistance from the government to ensure a smooth administration of the school (Ab. Halim & Kamarul 2009, 44). In 1959, Department of Islamic Studies was established at the University of Malaya as collaboration and good relations between the University of Malaya and the Islamic College of Malaya (University of Malaya 2007).
After the state independence, the first attempt was made to promote the Islamic education in the national education system is the 1961 Rahman Talib Statement Report. In this statement, the religious education is made compulsory for Muslim students in primary and secondary schools. For the schools with minority of Islamic students, the school is required to establish a class of religious education if there are 15 Muslim students. This statement also stressed on the moral education in schools. The result of this statement was also made the Islamic education as a compulsory subject in examination of secondary school in 1964 (Ab. Halim & Kamarul 2009, 44).

Since then many attempts have been made to develop the Islamic education from various levels of school to the higher education. However, based on observation by the author, the national education system in our country is still unable to develop and cultivate the values of self-esteem among the students especially the Malay. Efforts from various parties should be mobilized in order to make the Islamic education as a core in the national education system so that the Malay identity can be protected since nowadays we are exposed to various faiths, cultures and influences that clearly contrary to Islam and our self-identity as Malays. The author would like to stress on that Islamic education is the only one of the greatest way to empower the Malays in all aspects of life. Development of a mechanistic, robotic system of education can lead the younger generation to lose their touch of humanity and be the most vulnerable to the popular Western customization and also can lead to looseness and leakages of the self-identity of the Malays (Sidek 2009, 206).

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Islamic education has played an important role in building and strengthening the self-identity of the Malays. Since the early arrival of Islam in Malaya, Islamic education operates as a platform for the development of the Malay community from all aspects of life. Islam has become the core of the Malay identity and managed to enhance the Malays to a higher level of civilization. Thus, if Malay has lost their Islam so thus they will definitely lose their identity as Malay.

**References**


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