

## Islamic Educational System in Kelantan, Malaysia: Traditional and Modern Approaches

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**Abstract:** Islamic Education in Malaysia began as an informal institution in its early days. This is because of the nature of development during those times, where some places such as *surau*, mosque and *madrasah* became centre for teaching the aspects of the religion. The system develops gradually, from informal to a formal system which has changed the style of learning. Nevertheless, the informal system is still existed even until today, along with the formal educational system. This is especially in Kelantan, where it becomes clear that both institutions are still running concurrently. In this paper, the authors aim to examine and analyse the Islamic Educational system in Kelantan as it is a unique experience for such a state to keep traditional institution running in this day. This paper will also discuss the development of the formal system that is established for educating the religion to the people.

**Key words:** Islamic Education % Kelantan % Traditional education % *Pondok* % *Madrasah*

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### INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Malaysia has grown over the years. There is no single agreement to which date it has started to develop in this country. There are several dates submitted by the states. For example, in Selangor, Islamic Studies believed to have started at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, based on some notes as presented by Frank W. Haines, the Selangor School Inspector (1894). He mentioned that there are 17 classes of the Qur'an during the year under the supervision of the State Government at the time. It is also mentioned that Islamic Education flourished in Selangor during the time of the late Sultan Sulaiman Ala'eddin Shah, the 5<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Selangor (1898-1938). During his time, the religious schools received continuous support from the sultan and the schools develop very well.

Meanwhile, for the state of Kelantan, the history of Islamic Education began much earlier, which is believed

around the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Some believe it began even long before that, which is during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This is according to the gold coin found in Kelantan, which has stated a date in Arabic "OVV", that is believed to mean the year of 577AH / 1180CE. The coin has an inscription of "*al-Julus Kelantan*" the word in Arabic which means the government of Kelantan [1, 2, 3].

Islamic Education in Kelantan is said to begin with studies in Royal Palace for the family of sultan and state government dignitaries, using books from Makkah. This has continued in *surau*, the *madrasah*s and mosques. However, this history is referring to the informal Islamic Education activities. It is more famous by educational researchers that Islamic Education had started formally in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until around the year 1945 in which the public schools were established. These schools have to teach Arabic and Islamic education introduced by presenting subjects related to religion in their schools. Education system in Malay schools and religious

schools are better in term of management and facilities, more manageable and more comfortable than with the traditional *pondok* system. Thus, religious schools started to get a place and the attention of the people to send their children to dig treasures of religious knowledge.

**The Islamic Educational System in Kelantan:** In Kelantan, there are at least two types of Islamic Educational system running in the state up to the current time. There are namely the *pondok* system (traditional) which most of them are independent institutions and the formal system (modern) funded by the federal or even state government. Both of them have attracted many students to pursue their studies on Islam. Further discussions on both of the system are as follow:

**The Pondok System:** The word *Pondok* (literally: Hut) originates from the Arabic word *al-funduq* which means “residential house”, hostel or hotel. It also means a residential arrangement in the form of small houses for between three to four students. In Indonesia, it is known as “*pesantren*” from the word “*santri*” meaning religious students. Whereas according to Kamus Dewan (a Malay dictionary) *pondok* means “*madrasah*” (school) and *asrama* (hostel) means a place for recitation and religious studies. One fact which is poignant in connection with hut education according to Karel A. Steenbrink is that it is not of Arab origin, excepting India. He explained that in terminology that hut education from the point of view of form and system actually originated from India [4]. Hut schools form the Islamic educational institutions which emerged earliest and these were initiated by scholars who had been educated exclusively originally from Pattani, Thailand [5]. According to Abdullah Taib, the hut schools began when scholars from Aceh fled to other places including Pattani during the war of crusades (1821-1838) and war of Aceh (1878-1904) in Sumatra. Among the huts which became famous at that time were Dala, Berming, Semela, Dual and Pondok Teluk Manak. Not only were these huts the focal points for local students, but also for overseas students such as those from Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Malay Lands, the Philippines and Indonesia. In the beginning these hut institutions were located in the deeper, more isolated areas, to avoid negative or foreign influences. Hut education not only focused their orientation towards the next world or taught subjects which are connected only to religion but also provides instruction in other subject areas such as mathematics and earth sciences too.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that is after the Second World War, the (Arab) hut institution and madrasah emerged in the whole of the Malay Peninsula in particularly in Kelantan, Kedah, Perak and Penang Island. Hut education in Kelantan is said to have begun since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and attained its full glory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Around the year 1900, the hut education began to attract competition from the national school education system which was sponsored by the British colonialists. It can be explained that the emergence and popularity of hut system of education as traditional education which had been so well received by the society in Kelantan was because the people of that state were interested and inclined towards Islamic education provided by the mosques and prayer houses. Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Hassan explained about hut education in Kelantan as follows [5]:

“Religious studies environment in Kota Bharu became an attraction to students from outside Kelantan for example Cambodia, Southern Thailand, the Island of Sumatera and Vietnam and other states in the Malay Peninsula for study and stay in Kelantan. With that, Kelantan became more famous with the nickname Meccan Verandah”.

The institution of Islamic studies had a positive role in expanding Islamic teachings whether through prayer houses, huts and schools. With inspiration from reformists from the Middle East such as Sayid Jalaludin Al-Afghani (1839-1907) and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) religious schools became a momentum which was appropriate from which society gained education at that time. With that, the influence of reformist personalities in the Middle East especially the three linked chains who were also the personalities responsible, also thinkers who laid foundations to the mammoth idea of Pan-Islamism, Syed Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1838-1897) [7], Muhammad Abduh and Syed Rasyid Ridha flowed into the thoughts of local scholars such as Tok Kenali [8], Haji Wan Musa, Haji Mohd. Said and Datuk Haji Muhammad Bin Muhammad Said, (Lord Admiral) who disseminated them to society at large. It was pioneered by learned scholars from Pattani. From studies that were done, the first hut in Kelantan was erected in the year 1820 in Pulau Chondong. This hut was erected by Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Samad Bin Muhammad Salleh (Tuan Tabal) [9] who is better known as Tok Pulau Chondong. The hut was located at Jalan Kuala Krai about 28 kilometers away from Kota Bharu. After his demise, that institution continued operating under his son Haji

Arshad. In the year 1880 there was advancement in the hut in the form of an increase in the intake of students to nearly 800. After the Bangkok agreement in July 1909, the northern Malay states were handed over to the British which caused studies in the hut to expand in Kelantan and this is followed by the state of Kedah. The development of hut education system in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century followed the system led by scholars such as Haji Abdul Samad Bin Muhammad Salleh (Tuan Tabal), Haji Wan Ali Bin Haji Abdul Rahman (Tok Wan Ali Kutan), Haji Nik Daud Bin Wan Sulaiman, Haji Awang atas Banggol, Hakim Haji Abdullah dari Johor, Haji Wan Ismail Bin Jamaluddin dan Haji Nik Abdullah.

**Pondok as a Central Institution:** *Pondok* institutions at that time were more formal and centrally located in the capital city. A sizeable number of the hut scholars also taught part time in state mosques and at the same time, they led the activities of the *Pondoks* in their respective areas. This group of scholars were called “Tok Guru” by locals. Reference resources in the form old (yellowish) texts which had been written in original Jawi Malay were available to the scholars and there were only few Arabic texts. This was different from methods used at the end the 19<sup>th</sup> century in which Arabic texts were used extensively. From the point of view of lodging, the scholars did not live very far away from the mosque, which made it easy for them to go to and from the mosque. This method of study spread in Kota Bharu and subsequently spread to the whole of Kelantan. Scholars who came to study here were not only locals but also came from the whole of Southeast Asia. This method of study were then continued by a second generation of scholars among whom were Haji Muhammad Yusof (Tok Kenali), Haji Pakcik Musa Bin Abdul Rahman, Haji Wan Daud Bin Husain, Haji Cik Idris Bin Haji Hassan, Haji Cik Ibrahim Bin Yusof, Haji Wan Musa Bin Abdul Samad and others. At the same time there were scholars who came from Kota Bahru who opened their owned huts such as Haji Othman (Tok Selehor) and Haji Uthman Bin Haji Muhammad (Tok Bachok). In the year 1940 until 1950, there emerged a number of hut institutions which subsisted until today such as Pondok Terusan, Pasir Tumbuh which was opened by Tuan Guru Haji Mustaffa Abu Bakar, Pondok Sungai Durian, which was established by Tuan Haji Guru Abdul Rahman Che Wan.

From an organizational angle, the *takbir* would be heralded by a teacher of the hut institution who would be given the name “*Tok Guru*” (Grand Teacher). The home of the Tok Guru, his servants and the mosque was usually

surrounded by huts erected by the scholars. Also more usual than not the scholars who reside in these huts had already completed their basic studies in their respective states before continuing further their studies in greater depth at the hut institutions. Initially, there were no fees imposed, but subsequently a small amount was imposed to help fund the mosque activities and also to organize religious gatherings such as celebrations on the Blessed Prophet’s birthday and celebrations on the tenth day the first month in the Islamic Calendar (Assyura). From the point of view of syllabus coverage, the Grand Teacher (*Tok Guru*) will ascertain the book which is used is suitable for use by the student. The syllabus and book to be used is in accordance with student category. Basic studies which are taught include and reading and writing. Learners are expected to master these before proceeding to read other subjects such as law, eloquent recitation, doctrine, life history of the Prophet, interpretation of tradition, jurisprudence, origins of interpretation, knowledge of the traditions of the Prophet, origin of jurisprudence and others. This is because with understanding of these elementary topics comes the ease to students who can understand other subject areas too.

#### **Men and Women in Pondok Educational System:**

Those who study in a hut are divided into two groups: the “receivers” and the “listeners”. The receivers are those who study religion seriously and use books during the time when they are present in lectures. The reason why they use books is because they wish to be scholars in the future. On the other hand, the listeners attend lectures only to hear lessons. They attend lectures only to gain knowledge as a guide on how to get on with their lives. The receivers are always exclusively men, whereas the listeners in general comprise of both men and women and many of them were old. Initially, educations for receivers were not open to women. Nonetheless, due to popular pressure, this type of education became open to women too. For example, in Terusan Pasir Tumbuh Kelantan had made lessons available for women to learn together with men as well.

**Open Education in Pondok:** The approach using “the open book” means that each student is required to be ready with their own books. For those who could not afford to buy books, they would have to take the initiative to copy these books. Teachers will teach from sheet to sheet and every question which is raised will be explained in detail. This approach will require 10 years to complete the entire syllabus. Every lesson takes place in the

mosque, at the home of the Grand Teacher (*Tok Guru*) and in the home of the assistants because they do not have classrooms. Daily study schedule begins after predawn prayers and extend to 10 at night (inclusive of rest period). No study is conducted on Fridays and usually students would who live nearby would return to their villages. For those who live far away, they will stay in the hut while at the same time revise their studies and also memorize the Qur'an. They return to their villages during Ramadan because the hut will be on holiday too.

Every offence of absence and lateness will warrant an explanation to the teacher either through speech or writing by offering a credible excuse. Action will be taken if they were not able to produce a reasonable excuse and they could face expulsion as well. What is clear is that an Islamic institution had long existed in Kelantan, established and practiced. This situation contributed to the development in Kota Bharu. In the beginning, this hut education system was pioneered by scholars from Patani in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. After that the *pondok* education system became widespread and also became one of the most modern Islamic educational systems in these times [10].

**School (Formal) Educational System:** A formal and modern Islamic educational system had existed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Peninsula Malaysia, a system of formal Islamic education had existed in Anson Bay, Perak when a madrasah was built in the year 1906. Besides that, madrasahs were also built in Pulau Pinang in the year 1907 and is followed by Kuala Terengganu, Muar and Singapore in 1908. After that the system expanded to the entire Malay Peninsula. According to Kamus Dewan "Madrasah" originated from Arabic and gives the meaning of place of study connected with the Islamic religion, school and pedagogy [11]. Madrasah is also defined as school, track or mazhab (school of thought) [12].

**Purpose of Formal Islamic School:** Citizen Islamic School formed one of the important Islamic education centres in Kelantan. The purpose of establishing religious schools is to educate and produce legal officers, imams and learned scholars as well as disseminating Islamic teachings as well [13]. Education in schools in Kelantan began in the year 1904 CE when religious schools were established in Kota Bharu. Because of the deep interest in religion by the people of Kelantan, in 1910 CE the first religious school was built, that is Sekolah Madrasah Khairiyah in Lorong Tok Semian Kota Bharu, while

others are of the opinion that it was built in 1906 CE during the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV. The subjects that were taught at that time included Quranic Studies and Arabic [14]. Then it expanded rapidly to the whole country after the founding of the Islamic Religious Council of Kelantan in the year 1915 [15]. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 1917, the first school was built under its administration, that is, Madrasah Muhammadiyah al-Kelantaniah. This madrasah was located in Masjid Kayu, where students comprise of residents of Kelantan and students from other states and overseas students as well. Religious schools in this state are divided into two categories, that is, schools under the Islamic Religious Council of Kelantan and the Citizen Islamic School. The first Religious Council school was the Madrasah Muhammadiyah which was located in Kota Bharu was built in 1917. In the beginning after it was built the school was attended by 310 students and the upper limit for each teacher was 50 students. Composition writing and mathematics were subjects taught besides religion. The main objective in building this school is to produce scholars who can be absorbed into state administration.

In the year 1918, MAJLIS (council) stepped up efforts to upgrade schools in Kelantan by building new schools. In that year two more schools were opened that is in Pasir Mas and another in Pasir Putih. On 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1919 another school was built in the village of Kutun, whereas schools in Pasir Mas and Pasir Puteh were forced to close due to financial problems [16]. At that time, the medium of study was Malay. The books which had been translated became primary references in this study system. In the year 1931, the total number of students in religious schools in particular those managed by the Religious Council increased greatly [17]. After waiting until 1937 finally the Arab stream school was opened, that is towards the end of that year. That school was known as Al-Madrasah Al-Muhammadiyah Al-Arabiah and was led by three teachers whilst in the year 1938 yet another school which formed a branch of the Muhammadiyah Al-Arabiah school was opened in Pasir Puteh. Subjects taught include Arabic subjects such doctrine, law, tradition, grammar, elocution, semantics, proving techniques, inheritance, Islamic History, classification of traditional sayings (Hadith) and other subjects.

**Parents Preferred Formal Educational System:** Rapid expansion had occurred after the schools were well received by the people. Parents prefer to send their children to these schools because it would guarantee that their children would lead wholesome lives in the future.

Because of resounding reception, more schools emerged and it could be said that every district has a religious school be these Council religious schools or Citizen religious schools. The expansion of Council schools ran concurrently with that of Citizen schools. In 1943, the Islamic Religious Council and the Malay Customs and Traditions of Kelantan took over the Citizen schools and placed them under the Council management in order to attain concurrent advancement within the system. Among the religious schools that were taken were Madrasah Al-Islah in Kota Bharu, Madrasah Al-Balagh Al-Mubin in Pasir Puteh, Madrasah Ad-Diniah in Gual Perioik, Madrasah Yaakubiah Nipah in Bachok, Madrasah Al-Ar-biah in Pankalan Chengal, Madrasah Sa'adatul Qur~ and Madrasah Diniah in Pasir Pekan. In the year 1952 CE, 10 government religious schools were built with sponsorship from MAIK, that is Madrasah Arabiah Pasir Mas, Madrasah Falahiah Pasir Pekan, Madrasah Amir Indera Putera Beris, Madrasah Isma'iliyyah Semerak and a number of other schools. Subsequently, after World War 2, these schools grew at a great pace.

**Systematic and Further Development:** The madrasah school form of system is formal and more systematic. The expansion of the school education became more intense in the early 1920s and still persists until today [18]. School education gave guided nurturing, robustness and strength to the students to face the challenges and trials as a result of the secularization process launched by the western institutions. Through this system Islamic subjects did not only focus on questions on worship and doctrine but became more comprehensive with the incorporation of other subjects in the curriculum such as Arabic Language, mathematics, geography, history and others which could help students acquire a more holistic education [19]. After completing studies at the madrasah institutions, many students further their studies in West Asia such as the Sacred Mosque, Mecca and University Al-Azhar, Egypt. These students are graduates of Madrasah Al-Masyhur Penang, Madrasah Muhammadiyah Kota Bharu and Maahad Al-Ihya' asy-Syarif Gunong Semanggol, Perak.

Even though *madrasah* school administration has a separate operation, basic curriculum such as the tenets of Faith, Islamic Law remains the same and Arabic Language was recommended to be the medium of instruction in the process of study and teaching. The process of education is balance because it encompasses the aspects of obligatory and optional duties.

Among the modern elements which can be considered to have been introduced by the British rulers into the Malay society through coercion are [20]:

- C To build modern infrastructure amenities such as the road system, telephone lines, hospitals, etc [21].
- C To build a vernacular system the British way for each of the three ethnic groups separately [22].
- C To implant open attitude and bravery to criticize the shortcomings of the Malay leaders [23].
- C To introduce a better system of administration at all levels including the sector connected with Islam [24].

Formal Islamic Education at a higher level in Malaysia began in 1955. This was because of the setting up of Kolej Islam Malaya (Islamic College Malaya) in Selangor [25]. This college was officially opened in 1955 CE (1374 H) after which it was managed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education in 1971 [26]. The graduates in this college at that time had the opportunity to further their studies at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Malaysian National University (UKM) whether in the area of Islamic Law, fundamentals of Religion (*Ususluddin*), Arabic Language and Islamic Civilisation. The set-up of formal higher Islamic Education has followed the development of Islamic Studies in the Middle East especially Al-Azhar al-Sharif in Egypt [27].

## CONCLUSION

The institution of Islamic education in the past in the mosque, palace and the home of the religious teacher, *pondok* and school play an immensely positive role in producing a Malay society which is aware of knowledge, particular about religion and satisfying the elements of modernization which can be shown with pride. In the contexts of the history of the Malay world, many western intellectuals make the connection that the process of modernization which emerged is caused by factors arising from British rule. This immediately rejects the argument that Islam left a positive influence on the Malay society, which was wrong. Hence, this study proved that Islamic Education has developed since the coming of Islam and it develops in Malay World thereafter.

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