

## Integrated Islamic Education in Brunei Darussalam: Philosophical Issues and Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of Integrated Islamic Education in Brunei Darussalam. The establishment of Pioneer Schools (*Sekolah Rintis*) in integrated Islamic education in 2003-2004 are solid evidence that Brunei has decided to settle on the Integrated Education for its future generations. However, some problems surface later, which are thought to impede the implementation of the Integrated Islamic Education in the country. This article aims to examine the extent of the implementation of the Integrated Islamic Education system in Brunei Darussalam and to evaluate whether there is an evident needed to revise the current system. The study found that even though the concept of Integrated Islamic Education is well-received by the society, the teachers are ill-equipped with the effective strategies to inculcate the spirit of the Integrated Islamic Education in their classrooms.

**Keywords:** Integrated Islamic Education, Teaching and Learning, Sekolah Rintis, spirit of the Integrated Education in the classroom.

### INTRODUCTION

Education is important because it helps to guide one's life. Al-Attas (1980) mentioned *Education is a process of instilling something into human beings*. Phrase 'a process of instilling' refers to the method and the system by which what is called 'education' is gradually imparted, 'something' refers to the content of what is instilled, and 'human beings' refers to the recipient of both the process and the content. Since education is dynamic in nature, it has the capacity to propel human beings into becoming a better person. Based on several discussions and resolutions of the Islamic conferences held, Muslim scholars have strongly proposed adopting an Integrated Islamic Education system. In 1972, the Brunei government has decided to adopt Integrated Islamic model into public school system in the country. As a nation, Brunei Darussalam is embarking on this approach to tackle the colonial legacy and the current philosophical issues in education. During the colonial times, secular English schooling and traditional Islamic education were practised side-by-side. However, "dualism" in education could lead to failure in producing well-balanced individuals. To produce a "balanced" human being, from the Islamic perspective, an integrated concept must be put in place – a type of education that guides and trains the mind, body and soul of a person based on Islamic values and the revelations (al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah). According to al-Shaybaniy (1991), Islamic education emphasises the following concepts:

1. To produce a pious human being who are devoted to God.
2. To carry out lifelong learning.
3. To develop total potential of a person's soul, mind and body in an integrated way.
4. To develop a person's capability to carry out his other duties as a servant of God and as a "Caliph" of God (representative or vicegerent of God on earth).

There are various models and interpretations in explaining the word “integrated” education. One possible meaning of “integrated” is the co-joining between science and non-science subjects, irrespective of the languages used or whether they are related to co-curricular or non-curricular activities. While these approaches have their own strengths, they do not fully fit into the true meaning of Integrated Education from Islamic perspective. An Integrated Islamic Education emphasizes the unison of knowledge and not merely an installation or imitation of one’s knowledge through secular teaching and learning in a classroom. Islamic education rejects duality between God and the world. The reality of the world is a token from God. Also, Islamic education rejects duality of religion and science, the world and Hereafter, virtue and vice, life and death, freedom and freewill. Learners, therefore, must consider the world and that which belongs in relation to the Hereafter. The natural and empirical sciences have the same religious status as theosophy and philosophical divinity. Social sciences have religious value. The neglect of the empirical sciences in favour of religious teachings is discarded in Islamic education (Maimun Asqha Lubis, 2008).

An Integrated Islamic Education focuses mainly on implementing Islam as a whole. This can be done by integrating Islamic knowledge and belief, matching the belief and practice, balancing the work for “worldly affairs” and the religious duties for the hereafter. Through the Integrated Islamic Education, a person can be educated and trained to understand and uphold the Islamic faith, the laws and the morals in one’s life (al-Shaybaniy, 1991).

The role of the revealed knowledge (sources from Al-Quran and al-Sunnah) in Islam is indispensable. These sources are used in the Integrated Islamic Education widely. Integrated Islamic pedagogy also stresses on creating equilibrium among mind, spirit and body. Any activities that disturb the equilibrium would hurt the total development of a student.

Integrated Islamic Education governs the entire education process and knowledge development and incorporates the spiritual, physical and mental aspects in its implementation. A student is made to understand that revealed knowledge is pure (*quds*) and his/her involvement in seeking knowledge is a religious duty and an altruistic service towards building a prosperous community (*baladun tayyibah wa rabbun ghafur*). However, the integration of revealed and acquired knowledge can only be achieved by implementing the effective strategy, approach, method and technique in teaching and learning.

## PHILOSOPHY OF INTEGRATED ISLAMIC EDUCATION

According to Alamolhoda (2005) Islamic education offers guidance to all people and promotes a healthy society. According to Mahmud Saedon (1998), Islamic Education is based on revealed knowledge, i.e., Al-Qur’an and Al-Sunnah. The integration of Islamic Education requires four realms to be embraced into Integrated Islamic Education namely knowledge-based, physiological, civic and spiritual elements. He further emphasized that the Integrated Islamic Education rejects dualism in knowledge and education while it promotes the importance of integrating all kinds of knowledge.

In Brunei Darussalam, the aim of Integrated Islamic Education is rather holistic and covers a wider scope than secular education. The interrelations of the objectives of Integrated Islamic Education are illustrated in Figure 1.

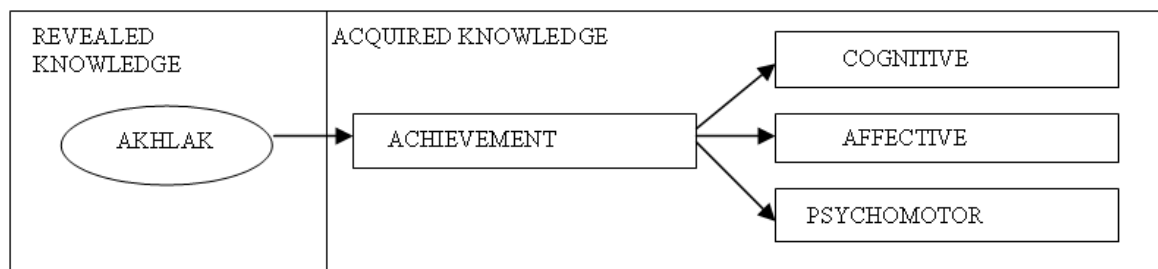


Figure 1: The Relationship Between The Components in The Objective of An Integrated Islamic Education

Based on Figure 1, the aim of Integrated Islamic Education may be viewed as a distinct equilibrium between moral or spiritual development and personal achievement in life as reflected in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects. Graduates of Integrated Islamic Education are expected to possess wide scope of knowledge (secular and Islamic) and project balanced personality. They are less likely to be involved in negative activities.

The philosophy of Integrated Islamic Education arises from the notion of human being a vicegerent of God. God created humans to bring about highest civilization on earth. Human civilization will not exist without proper education. Thus, Islam considers the acquisition and propounding of education as an honourable religious service. Muslims believe that the Qur'an as the most important and reliable source of knowledge. The importance of knowledge and education in Islam is evident since the early history of this faith. The first verse of Al-Quran revealed to Prophet Muhammad 14 centuries ago was dedicated to combat illiteracy and to encourage the people to seek knowledge in all fields. This is clear in *Sūrah Al-'Alāq* verse: 1-4:

*Read! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who creates. Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful. He who teaches (the use of) the Pen.*

The Qur'an makes several clear references to the importance of knowledge. Prophet Muhammad emphasizes the value of seeking knowledge and Muslims are encouraged to continuously seek knowledge. An educated person is regarded as more honourable than those unlearned. *Sūrah Al-Mujadalah*, verse 11 states:

*God will hoist, to suitable ranks and degrees, those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge.*

Education must be given priority since it can help strengthen the Muslims' belief. God gives wisdom (*hikmah*) as stated in *Sūrah Al-Baqārah*, verse 269:

*And he to whom wisdom is granted received indeed overflowing benefits.*

Islam does not differentiate between religious and general education. Both are mutually complementary and are studied simultaneously in an Integrated Education system that aims to inculcate prosperity both in this world and the hereafter. In a coordinated education system, a student should make an effort so that his/her actions are appropriate with the Islamic teaching. One should also study other knowledge that coincides well with one's personal ability, talent and interest.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED ISLAMIC EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BRUNEI

In Brunei Darussalam, the concept of Integrated Islamic Education has been discussed since the early 1970's. The attempt to implement a coordinated education system is rather smooth in Brunei Darussalam because its leadership is extremely supportive and has made strides in this area while adhering to the philosophy of "*Melayu Islam Beraja*" (Malay, Islam & Monarchy).

In Brunei Darussalam where majority of the population are Muslims, the worldly knowledge should be well coordinated with the religious knowledge and not to be differentiated between both. It is justifiable for this country, having made Islam as its official religion, to adopt Islam in its education system just like some countries which strive to produce citizens suited to the national aspirations. A good example of such case will be the doctrines existing in the Communist and Western countries.

The steps towards the implementation of the deemed proposal from the Commissioner of Education in 1972 exhorted that it was important for the country to implement the assimilation of Islam in education. This means that all subjects introduced or being taught should bear the characteristics and the principles of Islam. Long after the approval of the proposal by the Commissioner of Education did the Department of Education introduced the concept in 1985.

Several amendments from the 1972 curriculum were made in line with the Objectives of Education in Brunei as devised by the Department of Curriculum Development Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam. The highlights of the amendments are to emphasize Islamic Education to ensure that Islamic values being assimilated into the Education system through the School Curriculum. A report has been written recently concerning "the progress and achievements of the education system and the steps to be taken towards its successful implementation - to produce children and youth who have good moral". This report has somehow become the main reference in designing the Brunei Education system. An extract of the report has clearly indicated the following:

*The philosophy of the Malay, Islam, & Monarchy is a continuous effort to develop potentials in individuals, as a whole so that the Nation may produce citizens who are knowledgeable and wise, religious and pious, dynamic, disciplined and responsible, well-suited to the religious needs and its values. The sustaining aim is to achieve an education system that emphasizes on the belief and loyalty to Allah and his Prophet, obedient to the King and the country while contributing well to the society.*

This is an effort geared towards developing better citizens, strengthening of the spirit of independence and sovereignty through the strategy of making Malay, Islam, and Monarchy as the country's philosophy where Islam is made as its core foundation. The follow-on steps to substantiate the aspiration above was made by the initiation of The Department of Curriculum Development, having been approved by The Ministry of Education, to organize conventions and seminars to generate ideas among the educators in the region on the effective approach towards the implementation of the Integrated Islamic Education. (Department of Curriculum Development, Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam, 1985). The outcomes of the convention were these following recommendations:

1. To have close discussion between the Ministry of Education with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and other related organizations to discuss mainly about the Integrated Islamic Education.

2. To form committees to plan, co-ordinate and implement the Integrated Islamic Education.

Some of the duties and responsibilities of the committee are:

- a. To prepare conceptual paper related to the implementation of the Integrated Islamic Education,
  - b. To plan and co-ordinate any school activities which support the purported curriculum,
  - c. To plan activities and practices based on the curriculum,
  - d. To develop assessment and evaluation systems, and
  - e. To plan and co-ordinate other related systems especially those pertaining to the administration and management of schools involved.
3. To deepen the understanding concerning Integrated Islamic Education to the entire Brunei citizens through national seminars, briefing and courses, and media coverage.

This effort has been highlighted during His Majesty's decree on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Teacher's Day:

*This holy effort requires planning and conscious endeavors. This is the reason behind the establishment of the National Education Council of Brunei Darussalam that is to come up with the National Educational Philosophy in alignment with the aspiration to create better human beings who are knowledgeable, religious and pious.*  
Speech of His Majesty's, Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan and Yang Dipertuan Negara Brunei Darussalam.

To establish an Integrated Islamic Education, several aspects should be taken into account:

### The Teacher Education

Teachers and educationists should be ready to change their thinking and attitude to accept and understand Integrated Islamic Education as a holistic system. Islamic integrated education is therefore both teacher-oriented and student-centred (Shariatmadari, 1991). The teacher is required to take the interests of his or her student as the starting point of his work. Teachers should be trained to be confident in their way of thinking and attitude while showing good mannerism in accordance to Islamic values as a notable example to the students. Such criteria imply that the selection of future teachers does not rely purely on academic achievements but also on self-reliance and good personality. Iqbal (1996) in proposing an 'Islamic' model of teacher training ends up giving examples of modern teaching methodologies by over-stretched and anachronistic interpretations of Quranic verses and the *hadith*. His 'genuinely Islamic' proposal is that in Islamic teacher training, a reasonable percentage of marks have been allocated to the observation of *ibadah* and Islamic morals and values. *"Each prayer of the day should have a credit of one mark and each Friday prayer, two marks."*

To support this initiative, the Teaching Institutions in Brunei Darussalam should produce future teachers that are capable of promoting growth and development in the children's mental abilities besides good personality. The Teachers' Education Curriculum should be thoroughly analysed, and courses such as Philosophy of Islamic Education, History of Islamic Education and others should be included. A teacher should use innovative methods, aspirations and good role-model in their teachings to mould the students.

The Integrated Islamic Education system will not be effective until there are enough teachers trained to teach subjects in an integrated way. If the teachers are ill-trained, they would not be able to teach effectively in an integrated schooling system. Since teachers are catalysts in any education system, they should first and foremost understand the concepts, philosophy and objectives of the Integrated Islamic Education system. Then, several strategies and methods of implementing the curriculum should be exposed to the teachers. In addition, teachers should not only be exposed to the theories and background, but also being trained on how to be more innovative in the preparation of the teaching materials.

In the Integrated Islamic Education curriculum, the revealed knowledge (*‘Ilm Naqliy*) and acquired knowledge (*‘Ilm ‘Aqliy*) should be integrated. Teachers themselves should receive or undergo their teacher's education training using Integrated Curriculum in university or Teacher Training Colleges. If the university or Teacher Training Colleges are not ready to teach the teacher trainees in an integrated manner since most of the teacher educators were trained in Western or secular systems then the expected integrated thinking of the future generations may not be realized.

### Textbooks

The Department of Curriculum Development plays a vital role in the preparation and distribution of the textbooks required as reading material for the Integrated Islamic Education curriculum. Currently, the Department of Curriculum Development has taken proactive steps by getting feedback and working with the scholars who could share their knowledge and skills especially in religious matters. Some of the books that are readily available are Geography and History Textbooks for Form II and III. The responsible Department is making an effort to produce the Science Textbook for Form I to IV.

### The Roles of Teachers

The job of teaching and educating students is the priority of a teacher. A teacher's duty is instrumental yet dignified and honoured in Islam. It is seen as continuing the Prophet Muhammad's mission. In the light of Integrated Islamic Education, the role of teachers is to integrate values in every subject matter taught. Due to their vital role, a teacher should equip themselves with knowledge, skills, personality, behaviour and attitude to project themselves as a role-model and as an effective teacher. The teacher's role is made more complex with the development and progress in the field of Information Technology (IT). Nowadays, society expects teachers to strengthen the society's spiritual needs especially among the students and young generations. This scenario reflects the importance of the Integrated Islamic Education as a means in developing a better generation. It reflects the primary aim of education in Islam which is 'to facilitate developing those values whose roots are in the attributes of God and which God has planted within human beings as potentialities' (Ashraf, 1995, in Saeeda Shah, 2006).

### Co-curriculum Activities

The Co-curriculum activities have its own values in helping the expanding of student's physical and mental potential. It is a set of activities routinely performed at schools to enhance development in knowledge, skills, experience, attitude and personality of the

students. To fulfil the aspirations of the Integrated Islamic Education system, we need to understand several primary principles underlying this education system, which are:

1. Knowledge is of utmost importance for individual to cope with life's challenges and to acquire more knowledge for life-long learning and continuous life improvements.
2. Acquiring knowledge will increase one's thinking ability. As a result to this, the student should be able to express opinions and views objectively and to think critically. At schools, students must be trained in various aspects of thinking so that students know how to resolve problems effectively.
3. In relation to good values, an Integrated Curriculum should necessarily contain some elements of spiritualism, humanitarianism and patriotism. As such the scope of instilling these genuine values is imbedded almost entirely into the Integrated Islamic Education curriculum to ensure the developments of students with high morals.
4. Promoting the development of the Malay language as the main language for acquiring knowledge and to promote solidarity is viewed as an essential step because it is said that a person's ability to acquire knowledge is related to a person's ability in using a language and the language's capacity to support the knowledge.
5. To instil the culture and habit of being enthusiastic about reading and seeking knowledge.
6. To teach values across subjects; must be done creatively in order to create a rich and exciting learning environment.

All the above principles are being emphasized in choosing the content and approach of learning. Teachers definitely play an important role in coming up with modern approach to Integrated Islamic Education.

#### THE CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED ISLAMIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

The teachings of Islam have become the essence and an indispensable element of knowledge. In the attempt to introduce Islamic teaching into non-Islamic subjects, they bound to be people who rejected the ideas. In real fact, Islam as a form of knowledge may be taught as the normal "Religious Education" as well as through other subjects. Thus, teachers should make themselves ready to take up the challenge. It is perceivable that they should have clear understanding of Islam, deep knowledge in the subject matter that they are teaching and laudable personality to achieve the objectives of Integrated Islamic Education.

To face the challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a person who possesses open-mindedness and practices tolerance among religions is simply what the country needs. These two characteristics are the critical ingredients in the successful implementation of an Integrated Islamic Education. For students to learn and enhance their knowledge there is a need to learn from teachers who can inspire students towards holistic achievements. Besides content knowledge, the values taught to students prepare them to be a good person with the drive to contribute back to the society.

The greatest challenge however, lies in creating conducive learning environment and the kind of reinforcement required to sustain the good values and spirit learnt from the lessons in schools and at home. Undeniably, the task to create and sustain a good learning atmosphere is a lot harder now than before – thus, requiring persistence and patience in teachers.

An important element to take note is that in Integrated Islamic Education, the teaching and learning activities should be conducted in the integrated way, involving mind, hands and heart. The final result is to eventually produce individuals who are not only academically excellent but also those who possess high integrity, sense of responsibility and are able to contribute well to the society. The decision made by Brunei Darussalam in realising the concept of an Integrated Islamic Education is deemed wise, despite some great challenges that cannot be under estimated. It is hoped that the Integrated Islamic Education system can be implemented successfully in the near future. In order to realistically implement the Integrated Islamic Education, educators should focus on the four factors on the heart-mind concept as implemented in Thoughtful Schools:

1. Creativity – using varied methods or approaches in the classrooms. Creativity helps to develop good practice and improve the quality of the future education and “*ummah*” (nation). This may be achieved through the development of non-conventional teaching, learning and administrative methods.
2. Reflectivity – responsiveness in thinking and using meta-cognitive strategies.
3. Reciprocity – system which possesses symbiotic inter-relationship i.e., in contributing and receiving. In the context of the integrated schooling system, equally applied to “Smart School” (*Sekolah Bestari*) and Thinking School or the Integrated Teaching Learning, the learning objectives requires good co-operation, continuous and supportive relationship between the students, teachers and the school administrator to produce sincere and harmonious working environment.
4. Responsibility – to take responsibility in doing the task at hand. Islam pays great attention to responsibility in achieving one’s goals. Islam also links the feeling of responsibility of students, teachers and administrators not only towards the leaders, but also towards God in the hereafter. This implies being careful and responsible for the duties entrusted to him thus producing a fair and sincere person who are able to put things in the right perspective.

## CONCLUSION

Brunei Darussalam has adopted an education system namely the Integrated Islamic Education system after taking into consideration many aspects. This education system promotes the idea that any education should contain both Islamic and worldly knowledge. The values are taught across the curriculum, keeping in view the teachers and the students’ education orientation, the teaching materials, the conception of conducive learning environment, and so on. In the implementation of the Integrated Islamic Education, effort has and is still being made to inculcate thorough understanding of the Islamic philosophy regardless of ethnic, race, culture and religion. After a few years of groundwork, Brunei Darussalam can contentedly declare that it is prepared for the real implementation of the integrated curriculum. Besides the preparation of appropriate textbooks as part of the teaching material, a continuous effort is also being made by holding courses, seminars or workshop to enhance the knowledge, skills and attitudes of in-service and pre-service teachers. One of the immense challenges faced by Brunei Darussalam as a nation in the implementation of the Integrated Islamic Education is the lack of skilful teachers. There is also the challenge of getting the willingness of the science teachers to teach the subjects in such a way that the Islamic principles and values will be blended together with pure science. Besides educating the teachers, another great task is to educate other support groups to eventually understand and offer a hand to work along with the teachers to carry out their duties.



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