

THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM TOWARDS ARABIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION BEFORE AND AFTER MALAYSIA'S INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Arabic language education in Malaysia is believed to begin with the inclusion of Islam to Malaya. Hence, this study seeks to see the extent to which Islam affected Arabic language education in Malaysia before and after its independence. Qualitative study is used as an analysis of this document which will focus on inductive literacy. The study found that Islam has had a great influence on the Arabic language education in Malaysia so much so that its learning was sustained and continues to be popular. Among found, Islam had laid the foundation of Arabic language education at the beginning of its existence either indirectly or directly. It sparked an Arabic-Malay assimilation process that helped a lot in education. Islam also has had a great impact on Arabic education, post-independence. When the pulse of Arabic language education began to decline due to colonization, the rise of Islam had moved the responsible parties to organize and empower Arabic language education in Malaysia.

Keywords: Islamic Religion, Arabic Language, Arabic Language Education, Jawi Script.

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that there are more than 422 million Arabic speakers worldwide. It is the official language of 22 Arab countries. In 1973, the language was recognized as one of the languages allowed for use in the United Nations apart from English, French, Russian, Spanish, and Chinese. It continues to be recognized when UNESCO declared December 18th each year to be World Arabic Day (UNESCO, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that it continues to be a popular language and is increasingly being studied.

Now the learning and use of Arabic is increasingly widespread throughout the world. Current needs especially in the sectors of economy, tourism, and sociopolitics have become the catalyst for learning Arabic language, especially those that are characterized by communication. The learning of this language in non-Arab countries continues to be popular, especially from Muslims.

Malaysia is also not left behind in this matter. In fact, Arabic is a language that cannot be separated from the general Malay community and Muslims in particular. Its history dates back to the 13th century with the advent of Islam to Malaysia. Among the important indicators of the beginning of Islam's arrival to Malaysia is the discovery of Batu Bersurat in Hulu Terengganu written on February 22nd, 1303 AD (4 Rejab 702 Hijrah). The Inscription indicates that the coming of Islam to Malaysia is earlier than the date it was mentioned. Since then, Arabic has been studied by Muslims in Malaya. It continues to flourish to gain a place in the mainstream

national education. At the same time, Arabic had triggered the process of language assimilation when the Malay vocabulary was heavily influenced by the language. Jawi scripts used in the archipelago were also the result of Arabic influence on the Malay language. Until now, the process of language assimilation continues to occur, and the interest in learning and using Arabic continues to grow among the people in Malaysia. In short, the arrival of Islam has brought great influence on Arabic language education in Malaysia.

The influence of Islam in converting beliefs, socioculturalism, education and language is viewed cynically by some Western scholars. They believed Islam will not have a lasting effect on the Malayan population at that time. Leur (1955) a Dutch orientalist has likened the influence of Islam on the people of Malaya to the Indianization process that came before it with his words: "*The two religions of the world (Islam and Hinduism) are just a thin layer, in the form of pieces that embroil the body of the local civilization*". R.O. Winstedt, a scholar who studied Malay culture, had denied the importance and influence of Islam on the life of the Malay community. He believed that the impact of Islam on the Malay community was mixed with Hindu religious beliefs (Winstedt, 1951). Such a view certainly denies the influence of Islam in spreading Arabic in the archipelago, but the current scenario shows the relationship between Islam and Arabic language learning is inseparable. Consequently, a study that leads to a review of the extent to which Islam's arrival affects Arabic language education in Malaysia is duly needed.

In addition, tracing the initiation of formal Arabic learning in Malaysia is somewhat difficult. Researchers rarely can elaborate the early history of Arabic learning in Malaysia clearly. There are some scholars associating the beginning of Arabic language learning with the advent of Islam (Hassan, 2003). But the sequence of events and their documentable development is fuzzy.

These issues may be due to a lack of research related to Islam's influence on Arabic language learning in Malaya. Most studies are more focused on the relationship of the spreading of Islam and Islam's influence on Islamic education in general. This is like a study conducted by Ishak (1995) and Redzuan (2005). Rarely, such studies have touched on the influence of Islam on Arabic language education in a focused and detailed manner. Hence, an early study in relation to the relationship of the arrival of Islam and its influence on the founding of Arabic learning and its development up till now is one of the first steps that can pioneer towards a more systematic and detailed research.

Based on the issues and problems raised, this study aims to look at the extent to which Islam affects Arabic language education in Malaysia before and after its independence. This qualitative study will refer to relevant literature. Document analysis is done inductively. The information synthesis process allows this study to explore the influence of Islamic religion on Arabic language education in Malaysia before and after its independence.

Arabic Education before Independence

Scholars differ in their views of those who played a big role in bringing and introducing Islam in Malaya. Most Western scholars think Islam was brought to the archipelago by merchants from the Indian Continent. Among those who pioneered this view are Marrison, Kenneth Hall, Winstedt and others. Local researchers have argued that Islam came to the archipelago through merchants and preachers who came from the Arabian Peninsula. This view is also agreed upon by some Western scholars such as Keyzer, Hollander, John Crawford and William Marsden (Redzuan, 2005).

The matter on the date of Islam's entry into Malaya, most Western historians consider it happening around the 15th century and Malacca is the first district to accept Islam. According to D.G.E. Hall, this incident happened in 1414M with Parameswara's conversion to Islam when he was about to marry the daughter of Sultan Pasai. He changed his name to Megat Iskandar Syah (Ishak, 1995). However, other historical evidence shows that Islam had entered Malaya earlier than that. Among the evidence are:

1. The discovery of Batu Bersurat in the upper part of Sungai Berang, Terengganu in 1899M. The stone is written Jawi which describes Islamic law dated 4 Rejab 702H equivalent to 22nd February 1303M.
2. A piece of "*Dinar Money*" was discovered in Kelantan in 1914M. On the front cover is the word 'al-Mutawakkil' and dated 577H equivalent to 1181M using Arabic script.
3. The discovery of a tombstone in Teluk Cik Munah, Permatang Pasir, Pekan, Pahang, which contains the verses of the Qur'an and Arabic poetry. Additionally, there is a note that the deceased died at dawn, Wednesday 14th Rabiulawal 419H equivalent to 1028M.
4. The discovery of some tombstones in Kedah. Among them is Nisan Sheikh Abdul Qadir b. Husin Syah Alam ('Alirah) in Langgar found in 1962M. The tombstone is dated 290H equivalent to 902M.
5. The conversion to Islam of the King of Kedah, Emperor Derbar King II in 531H equivalent to 1136M through the hands of Sheikh Abdullah b. Sheikh Ahmad al-Qaumiri, an Arab scholar from Yemen.

Based on the above historical evidence, it can be concluded that Islam had begun to arrive in Malaya before the 10th century. This explains that Arabic had begun to be introduced and studied in Malaya around the 10th century. Its arrival had caused many Malayan residents to embrace the religion. To understand and practice Islamic teachings, adherents will certainly learn Arabic either directly or indirectly. At least they will study it for use when practicing their day-to-day charities such as *azan*, prayer, *wirid* and reading the al-Qur'an. Thus, among the early influences of Islam in Malaya is to lay the foundation of Arabic language education.

Although there were no entries indicating the teaching of Arabic in Malaya was formally taught in the era, Arabic language learning, whether informally and indirectly taught, was definitely believed to have taken place. Islamic religious education began in Malaya as soon as it entered it and it gained strong support from the Kings and the rulers. Teaching and learning were held at the palace, mosques, *surau* and houses. They exalt religious knowledge, holy books, scholars, religious deeds and important Islamic dates (Ishak, 1995; Ismail et al., 2017). Such an atmosphere would have allowed the Muslim community to learn Arabic indirectly (Sakiah et al., 2015).

In addition, everyday relationships between preachers and Muslim traders with locals had caused them to learn Arabic informally and indirectly. This refers to the existence of many Arabic words used by the Malay community at that time. Such as: *sultan* (government), *wazan* (economy and trade), *nikah* (social) and so forth (Hassan, 2003). These words needed to be learned to enable communication between them to go well in various areas of life.

The arrival of Islam to the archipelago had brought in many Arabic words into the Malay language. It covers various fields, such as religion (“*doa* [prayer], *haji* [hajj], imam, *kiblat* [qiblah], mufti, *nabi* [prophet], and *wali* [guardian]), custom (*fitnah* [slander], *karib* [closeness], *kaum* [race], *kerabat* [kinship], *maruah* [dignity], *nikah* [marriage], *salam* [greeting], *sedekah* [alms], *tahniah* [congratulations], *takziah* [condolences]), punishment (*adil* [fair], *batal* [null], *halal*, *haram*, *hakim* [judge], *hukum* [law], *mahkamah* [court], *wajib* [obligatory], and *zalim* [cruel]), knowledge (*falak* [astronomy], *falsafah* [philosophy], *hikayat* [story], *hisab* [reckoning], *ilmu* [science], *kamus* [dictionary], *kitab* [book], *tabib* [physician], *takwim* [calendar] and *tarikh* [date]), creations (*alam* [the nature], *dunia* [the world], *haiwan* [the animals], *insan* [the human

beings], *jasad* [the body], and *salji* [the snow]), and feelings and minds (*akal* [intellect], *aman* [peace], *faham* [understanding], *fikir* [thought], *hajat* [intention], *ikhlas* [sincerity], *ilham* [inspiration], *insaf* [conceit], *niat* [intentions], and *yakin* [beliefs])". Furthermore, literary works and history written in Malay were titled in Arabic such as *Sulalatus Salatin*, *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, *Bustanus Salatin* and others (Zainal, 1992).

The researchers also differed in views in determining the number of Arabic words that were absorbed into the Malay language. Muhammad Abd al-Jabbar Beg (1979) argued that the Arabic vocabulary which is relinquished is as much as 2000 words. Amran (1987) summed it up to 1647 words. Yusoff (1994) summed it up to 2260 words. All these numbers do not include thousands of other derivative words.

This phenomenon tremendously helped the Arabic learning process in Malaysia since the entry of Islam into Malaya. Students could easily understand and use Arabic words that sounds and means the same in Malay. This in a way had enabled students to have a number of vocabularies in order to start learning the Arabic language.

The inclusion of Islam into Malaya also had the effect on the formation of Jawi letters in Malay. It consists of a mixture of Arabic letters of 28 letters and 5 Persian and Barbaric characters such as *ca* (خ), *nga* (غ), *pa* (ف), *ga* (ض) and *nya* (ث). The Jawi script was firmly established in Malaya. The teachings of Islam as well as Malay language and literature had evolved through the use of Jawi texts. Prior to 1941M, almost all Malay newspapers were published in Jawi script as it was understood by most Malays. Several attempts to publish newspapers in roman scripts were failing as the Malays regarded this paper as foreign (Redzuan, 2005).

A very strong Jawi writing position in Malaya had led the developers of Christianity to think about publishing their religious material in Jawi so that it can easily reach local people. Albert Conelius Rayl translated the Gospel of St. Matthew in Malay in 1629 M. It was readily translated using Jawi and Rumi in 1735M. Christian missionaries also published the Bustan Ariffin newspaper in January 1821M in order to spread Christianity. The newspaper which proposed for its publication to be done four times a year only lasted up to six editions when it ended in April 1822M. Shellabear (1862-1948M), a prominent Christian religious leader who came to Malaya in 1887M, suggested that all material of Christianity be rewritten in Jawi scripts to enable it to be distributed to the Malays. However, this effort was not agreed upon by some Christian religious developers as they view it as recognition of the Malay language and the Jawi text. They believe the use of roman scripts should be expanded to curb and diminish the privilege of Islam in Malaya.

The influence of Islam till Jawi letters were formed helped many Arabic language learning. Little by little the Malay community was taught writing and reading in Jawi. This skill helped the Arabic language learning process. The character of Arabic letters had become familiar to the students. They could pronounce and write them well.

The awareness of the importance of Arabic learning had arisen for a long time in Malaya. It is often associated with religious influences. This was clearly exposed in Munsyi Abdullah's views (1796-1854M): "*Even from the time of our ancestors, no one ever hoped for a place of Malay learning but rather examines and reads the Qur'an. One should indeed learn Arabic as it is useful to religion and in the afterlife*" (Munsyi, 1974). This quote illustrates the general view of the Malay community at the time of the importance of Arabic language learning and its relevance to religious teachings. The importance of Arabic in Malaya was also acknowledged by some Christian missionaries. Shellabear had suggested that Christian teaching developers learn

Arabic language and literature to facilitate the development of Christianity. Strictly speaking, the above views either by a Muslim or non-Muslim show that the inclusion of Islam has had a major influence on Arabic language development in Malaya. Arabic had a high position in the Muslim community at that time.

Arabic language education in Malaysia that can be documented began before independence through Islamic cottage institutions or *pondok*. The existence of this cottage (pondok) study can be channeled from the days of the Pasai Kingdom, Malacca, and Aceh especially in the 17th century AD (Shafie, 1984). Then it became a popular learning system in the traditional society especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Arabic was one of the core subjects in the institution. However, its teachings were more focused on *Nahu* (Syntax) and *Sarf* (Morphology), while other components such as *Balaghah* (Rhetoric), Literature and *Insya'* were not addressed.

The influence of Islam on the establishment of Arabic language education through cottage institutions is evident. This is because the cottages were then to produce preachers and scholars who could spread and educate the community with Islamic teachings. In order to achieve that objective, hut students will first learn Arabic as a means of understanding religious books. Among the popular books in the era of the cottage system are *Matn al-Ajurrumiyyah*, *Mukhtasar*, *Mutammimah*, *Sharh Ibn 'Aqil*, *Ashmuni*, and *Mughni al-Labib* (Hamdan, 1985). The method of grammar and translation was a widely used teaching method. Presentation of lessons was done verbally based on the text of the book without any teaching aids that can speed up understanding. Memorization was a very important learning orientation.

At the same time, a scenario that undermines Islamic educational institutions was also taking place. Since 1854M, most of the Quranic school administration had been taken over by the British by providing full aid. The curriculum was modified to having taught Rumi, Jawi, Mathematic, Health, Painting and Religion. Gradually, the administration and school progress had changed. School time was divided into two sessions, morning and evening. The morning session was devoted to academic subjects and was referred to as the "*Malay School*", while the afternoon session was a religious lesson session and was called the "*Quran School*". Academic teachers were funded by the government and religious teachers were funded by parents privately (Ishak, 1995). This was an issue that Muslims did not like. The foundation for the building of the Quran School was taken away while the administration and funding of religious and Quranic lessons were neglected. Religious and Quranic lessons that were previously basic subjects were made subjects and placed in additional curriculum only. Religious education had also been separated from non-religious or academic studies, thus creating dualism in the education of Muslims. This had resulted negatively in the learning of Arabic language in the Quran School.

Post-Independence Arabic Education

After Malaysia's independence in 1957M, Arab's position and importance began to be threatened and neglected. Islamic education also experienced similar fate. This is a result of the British colonial legacy. According to Ishak (1995), the fall of the cottage institution was also affected by the Islamic Malay political crisis until the birth of the Islamic Party Se Malaysia (PAS) which originated from the Ulama Board in UMNO in August 1951. This event brought about a change in the community's value to cottage institutions. Those who are members of UMNO did not want to send their children to the cottage led by "*tok guru*" which tend to PAS

and vice versa. More unfortunately, the huts began to dwindle with the death of “*tok guru*” (religious teachers) without a caliber replacement.

In the 70's, arose a great wave known as the era of Islamic revival. The Islamic community then wanted to see the teachings of Islam being restated. Hence, Islamic Religious Knowledge subjects were introduced in schools and subsequently led to the establishment of higher Islamic learning institutions (eg: Malaya Islamic College-1955, University of Islamic Studies Department-1959, Nilam Puri Islamic Higher Education Foundation, 1965, National University of Malaysia-1970, Islamic Teaching College-1980, Religious College Sultan Zainal Abidin-1980, and International Islamic University Malaysia-1983). Simultaneously, the Arabic language began to be given attention as it is a ‘medium’ of mastery of religious knowledge.

Arabic language was gaining momentum in the mainstream of national education when it continued to be offered by the government and the private sector. Through the government's education system, Arabic was offered in primary schools, boarding schools, religious schools, religious aid schools, and in universities either as a course or as a program of study. The Arabic curriculum was constantly assessed and updated to enable its students to master the language as best they can. In addition, the demand for admission to these schools exceeded the amount allocated. Many students with good exam results did not get a place at the school.

Malaysia's position as an Islamic state had greatly opened up to the updating and strengthening of Arabic language education. Among them, Arabic language experts from The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) have assisted the Ministry of Education in establishing Arabic textbooks using communicative approaches in 1986 and teacher handbooks for textbooks in 1988.

The Jawi, Al-Qur'an, Arabic and Fardu Ain (j-QAF) program inspired by the government at the end of 2003 allowed all Islamic students to have the opportunity to learn the language of the Qur'an. The program laid a solid foundation for students to understand the teachings of Islam and learn Arabic. Although Arabic is one of the four j-QAF components, the other three components contributed greatly to the acquisition of language. The Qur'an was taught in Arabic, while Jawi lessons were related to writing Arabic letters. Fardu ain would also increase the number of Arabic words. All of these activities helped students improve language skills.

In addition, there were several other institutions offering Arab language courses. Such institutions were the Mara Junior Science College, private schools, madrasahs and cottages. Early childhood education centers such as the Islamic Children's Nurseries and Tunas Islam Center also began offering Arabic language courses at pre-school level (Dangiran, 2004). In addition, organizations, mosques and the like also organized Arabic language courses for the public. The community was willing to spend some money in Arabic language courses. All these were the result of increasing awareness of Islam among Muslims in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of Islam into Malaya had led to the placement of basic Arabic language education in Malaysia. Its learning began indirectly and informally, and then changed to formal, direct and focused. The change in the form of Arabic language learning resulted from the influence of Islam, can be seen clearly. The influence of Islam through the assimilation of Arabic and Malay had facilitated the teaching and learning process of the language in Malaysia. Islam also had a profound effect on post-independence Arabic education through the awareness and

awakening of religion among Muslims so as to mobilize responsible parties to organize and empower Arabic language education in Malaysia.

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