Integrated Islamic Education in Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia: Reforms and Challenges

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Abstract

The Muslim world is in the midst of a dilemma due to the dualism in education systems. In response several scholarly initiatives have emerged to ensure the necessary balance between the secular and religious curricula through integration. Integrated Islamic education has been implemented in southern Thailand and several states of northern Malaysia to address varied requirements of these states. This research attempts to compare the reforms and challenges faced by these two neighboring countries in implementing an integrated Islamic curriculum mainly in medium level schools. Both documentary research and semi-structured interview methods have been used to

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collect data. The research has identified the underlining differences in the contexts, implementation, and extent of the integrated Islamic curriculum in the two countries. It has revealed the qualitative aspects of the integration, which aim to forge a link between developing a responsive citizen and a better religious person. It has identified that Malaysia has significantly developed the policy and curricula but has come up short in developing skills for implementing such integrated Islamic education. On the other hand, curricula and skills remain a challenge for integrated Islamic education in southern Thailand. The researchers argue that the challenges of longer school hours, lack of wider student involvement, and poorer integration can be addressed through extending cooperation among various stakeholders. It is recommended that the cooperation shall not remain limited within national borders but, rather, it should explore the huge potential of cross-border cooperation.

Keywords: Dualism in Education, Integrated Islamic Education, Southern Thailand, Northern Malaysia and Cross-Border Cooperation.

Introduction

The most crucial crisis faced by the contemporary Muslim world is rooted in the problem of educational dualism, i.e. the existence of two systems of education, namely the national, or modern secular, system and the traditional, or Islamic religious, system (Yaacob, and Embong, 2008, p.1). Education systems in the Muslim world are based extensively on the compartmentalized and secularized Western educational system. Muslim scholars feel that there are short-comings in both systems. In 1977, the First World Conference on Muslim Education held that the problems of education in the Muslim

world stemmed from the dual education systems inherited from the colonial masters, i.e. the national system and the religious system (Adebayo, 2013).

The national education seems to be designed to produce professionals deficient in religious values while religious education has developed religious specialists who were unable to participate actively in society and were not critically and creatively responsive to deal with current issues of the *ummah* (people) (Yaacob and Embong, 2008). This dualistic problem creates a dilemma in the Muslim *ummah,* which demands an urgent solution (Hashim, 1996, p.10). The seminal conference called for educational reform in the Muslim-world; contending that modern disciplines taught in the Muslim world were not value-neutral, but in fact reflect the experience and worldview (with ideologies) of post-enlightenment Europe (Amin, et al., 2011). The conference proposed a critical review, reform, and integration between modern knowledge and Islamic heritage. Eventually, Muslim scholars have started to urge an Islamic Education Movement to integrate the two systems into one by removing or minimizing the segregations between religious and non-religious education.

It appears that acceptance of the newly proposed integrated curricula by the national authority is ever more difficult than its preparation. Since education is an effective instrument for bringing about change in individuals, society, and people according to the direction determined by a state authority (Atique, 2013, p.1), notable numbers of governments around the world are quite hesitant about initiating the integrated Islamic education. Muslim scholar Azra (2012) mentions that it is clear that the extent of reform in Islamic education (integrated Islamic education is one way of reform) differs from one

place to another. Thus it is essential to examine the state of such integrated Islamic education along with the standards and contexts of each case. In the Southeast Asia region, two neighboring countries, namely Thailand and Malaysia, are important examples of implementing the policy of integration of Islam in education curricula. These two countries are selected as cases due to the researchers' convenience and access. This also allows an understanding of information about the system of integrated Islamic education as implemented in certain types of schools in Muslim majority Malaysia and Muslim minority Thailand. This paper examines the policy, objective, and process of integrated Islamic education in these schools in Thailand and Malaysia. By describing such integration as reform to the existing Islamic education, it identifies and addresses several challenges to the success of the integration.

Methodology

The paper is part of a wider research and follows a mixed methodology. Data sources are both primary and secondary. The researchers used extensive sources of documents as secondary data to provide the initial lining of the research.Relevant texts, conceptions, and ideas from the three main kinds of sources were reviewed and analyzed. The documentary data was particularly valuable in answering the question of dualism regarding the education system in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia. Secondary information helped to understand the implementation strategy of integrated Islamic education in both regions. The documentary data was used to construct the educational context within which the private Islamic schools exist. This was followed by field level data collection. The

researchers used in-depth interviews and observation as tools to collect primary data. The primary data substantiated the findings from the secondary information. The in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion. The sample size is ten and interviewees were selected on the basis of convenience. However, the interviewees are well recognized in the Islamic education and education policy.

Concepts of Education and its Integrated Nature in Islam

Education comes from Latin word *educare*, *educere*, or *educatum*, which means to lead pupils or to draw out their latent talents. The word *educare* also means rearing, where *educere* means to bring out and *educatum* means to practice. The Arabic language defines three etymological meanings of education.

28. Ta'lim: the root *alima* (to know, to be aware, to perceive, to learn), which is used to denote knowledge being sought or imprinted through instruction and teaching.

29. Tarbiyah: the root *raba* (to increase, to grow, to rear) implies a state of spiritual and ethical nurturing in accordance with the will of God.

30. Ta'dib: the root *aduba* (to be cultured, refined, well-mannered) suggests a person's development of sound social behavior. Acquiring Ta'dib requires a deeper understanding of the Islamic conception of human being. (Rabbani, 2009).

The universally accepted meaning of education today is

growth, i.e. continuous unfolding of one's potential; it is a life-long process (Khan, 1988, p.1). On the other hand, Islamic education is education in the Islamic spirit, which is universal and relevant to all mankind. It has no segregation between religious and secular knowledge. It aims at developing all human aspects physically, intellectually, and spiritually. This is done by educating the learner through connecting his/her nature with roles as the servant of God. Education is supposed to promote the realization of the role of humans as the vicegerent of God on this earth.

When the Qur'an was revealed, the first word of its first verse was *iqra*, meaning read. Thus in Islam, education is the starting point of every human activity. Allah the Exalted says in the Qur`an: "Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition" (Al-Quran, Part 39, Verse 9). Education and knowledge are mandatory for both men and women in Islam (Knowledge Exchange Program, 2013). The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, hereafter referred as SAWS) said: "Seeking Knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim" (Related by Ibn 'Adiyy, Al-Bayhaqi & Al-Tabarani).

Muslims are bound by their religious order to be educated. Islam calls Muslims to seek knowledge. The prophet of Islam, Muhammad (SAWS), made seeking knowledge an obligation upon every Muslim, and he explained that the superiority of the one who has knowledge over the one who merely worships is like the superiority of the moon over every other heavenly body. He said that the scholars are the heirs of the prophets and that the prophets did not leave behind dinars and dirhams (i.e., money), rather their inheritance

was knowledge, so whoever acquires it has gained a great share. And he said that seeking knowledge is a way to paradise. He said, "who-ever follows a path in the pursuit of knowledge, Allah will make a path to paradise easy for him" (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, Kitaab al-'Ilm, 10).

According to Muhamad Hafiz Khamis Al-Hafiz Mohamad Johdi Salleh, Islamic education is an essential need derived from Islam as a religion or way of life, as Allah wanted (Salleh, 2010: 1). Thus the sources of Islamic education are similar to that of Islam itself. The holy Qur'an is the main source of Islam, which contains every principle of Islamic thought. The Qur'an demonstrates the guidance to the right path. It calls for eternal salvation and declares the oneness of almighty Allah. Islamic educational philosophy is also uniquely different from other types of educational theory. The larger differences are due to the goals of education, which in Islam is related to *ibadah* (submission to the will of Allah). In another words, it brings Muslims to understand the basic relationship between God and His subjects, as well as between subjects and other subjects. This all-encompassing influence of the Qur'an plays a significant role in constructing the philosophy of Islamic education. The Qur'an serves as a comprehensive blueprint for both the individual and society and is considered as the primary source of knowledge. Islamic education emphasizes the following concepts:

i.   Lifetime education;

ii. The development of the total potential of the human soul, mind, and body. This is also perceived as being integrated in the three aspects of cognitive, effective, and psycho motor; and

iii. The capability to carry out duties as a servant of God and as a

caliph of God or representative or vicegerent of God on earth, including gaining knowledge and performing virtuous deeds to achieve happiness in life in this world and the hereafter (Al-Shaybaniy, 1991). In other words, the Islamic direction of education is to serve God and His creation (the entire world and humanity).

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 setting. 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 the hereafter, virtue and vice, life and death, and freedom and freewill. Therefore, learners must consider the world and where it belongings with the notion of life hereafter. Based on the above discussion the interrelations of the objectives of integrated Islamic education are illustrated in the following figure:
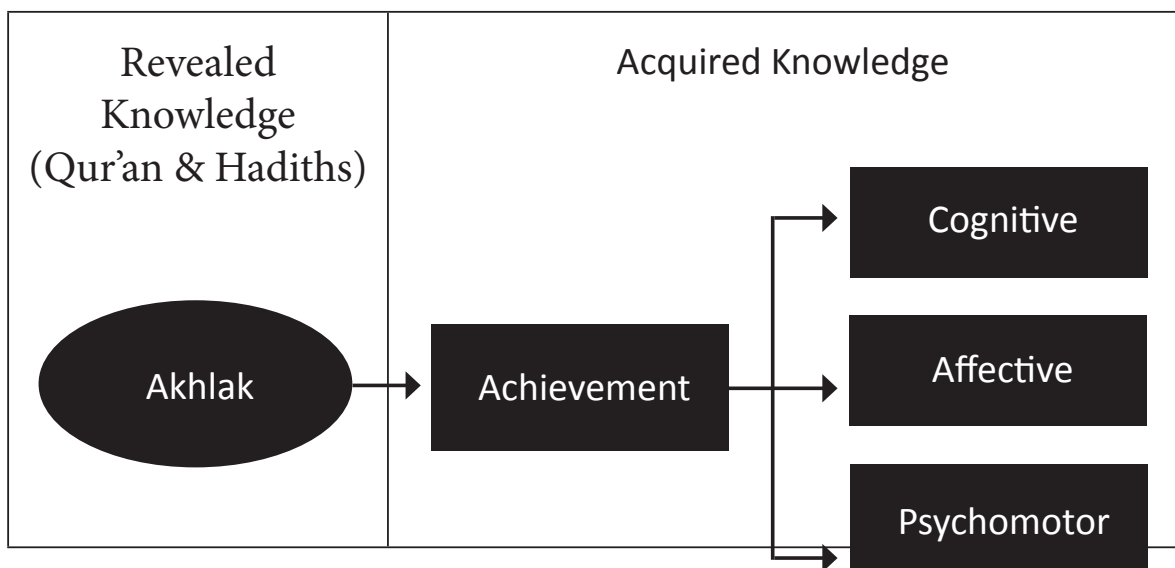

Figure 1: The Relationship between the Components of Education in Integrated Islamic Education.

In Figure 1, the aim of integrated Islamic education may be viewed as a distinct equilibrium between moral development, derived from spiritual Islamic education, and personal achievement in life as reflected in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Graduates of integrated Islamic education are expected to possess a wide scope of knowledge, both secular and Islamic, and project a balanced personality so they will be less likely to be involved in negative activities.

The philosophy of Integrated Islamic education arises from the notion of humans as vicegerents of God. God created humans to build the highest civilization on face of the earth. Human civilization will not exist without proper education. Thus, Islam considers the acquisition and propounding of knowledge as an honourable religious service/worship *(ibadah)*. Muslims believe in the Qur'an as the most ultimate reliable source of knowledge. The importance of knowledge, hence the importance of education in Islam, is evident since the early history of the faith.

Historic Links of Modern Integrated Islamic Education

Islamic education started at the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). *Kuttab* or *Maktabe-merged* was a type of school established after the *Ophath* (passed away) of the Prophet (SAWS). The first *madrasah* (religious school in a formal setting) was built during the period of Seljuk rule in Baghdad (1055-1194) by vizier Nizam al-Mulk (1092). *Madrasahs* proliferated in Egypt under the rule of the Saladin (1193), who was the original founder of the famous Al-Azhar mosque-cum-university in 975. Later, madrasahs hosted multiple

educational complexes including mosques, libraries, hostels, lecture theatres, and housing quarters for teachers and other staff members (Al-Attas, 2008, p.38). Hereafter began formal state-subsidized Islamic education institutions.

Islamic education suffered a significant blow prior to the European colonization. Since the Islamic world suffered huge internal conflicts and power struggles, reform in education was virtually nonexistent during the 1500s. As Muslims lost ground to Europe after the fall of Al-Andalus (Spain, Portugal, and part of France) in 1492 AD, what was left was the seed of the European Renaissance. Eventually, Europe started colonizing most of the Islamic world to find markets, labour, and raw materials in order to feed their hungry industries, which were one of many outcomes of the Renaissance. As a result, Muslims were mostly resilient in accepting the colonial forces as well as their reformed education system. Dr. Kamal Hossian of International Islamic University of Malaysia describes how the Muslim world rediscovered the importance of education when they encountered modernity and westernization in the nineteenth century during the Euro-colonial expansion. As colonial powers expanded into the deep territory of the Muslim world, modern educational institutions were founded (Interviewed on March 24, 2015).

Mohammed Munir Mursi (2004) describes how Egypt was the first among the Arab countries to implement the French system of education, sending students to France and establishing modern schools. The establishment of modern schools in the Muslim world was not to destroy the traditional Islamic education institutions, which during that time were only focused on teaching Arabic language and Islamic studies (Mursi, 2004, pp.15-16). Instead, a dual system of

education was established throughout the Muslim world, one fully secular and another only focused on the dogmatic part of religion.

In order to position the Muslim countries back to progress in all directions, an integrated system of modern and Islamic education is needed. That is to integrate and synthesize the secular and Qur'anic systems of education.

Map 1: Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia
(Source: Wikipedia)

Integrated Islamic Education in Southern Thailand

Southern Thailand refers to the southernmost provinces of Thailand, an area often referred to as Patani, which includes the modern-day Thai provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, and parts of Songkhla. In southern Thailand, followers of Islam constitute the religious majority. Pakorn Priyakorn explains that Islam came to Thailand from three directions: the south, central, and north. It first arrived in southern Thailand in the 13th and 14th centuries C.E., brought by Arab traders. Islam reached central Thailand during the 15th century through Shia Persian and Sunni Indian traders stationed in Ayudhya. Indian, Bengali, and Chinese Muslims arrived in northern Thailand between the 1870s and 1890s (Priyakorn, 2010).

The southern Thai provinces are predominantly Muslim. It is estimated that about 44% of the total Thai Muslim population live in those provinces. Historically the region was the kingdom of Patani, which was ultimately annexed by Thailand. Thai Muslims maintain, express, and symbolize their identity mainly through religious institutions including religious education institutions. While ethnically the southerners consider themselves Malay and speak Malay as their mother tongue, they remain strong in their traditions based on Islam. This led them to establish *pondok,* or traditional Islamic schools. The Thai government promoted the establishment of Islamic private schools to replace *pondok* schools with the purpose of enhancing their efficiency and quality (Saleemad, 2012). This prompted the promulgation of policies to streamline the traditional Islamic schools side by side with modern-secular educational institutions. As a result, the school curriculum has been changed from offering solely religious

education to integrating non-Qur'anic subjects such as science, math, and foreign languages, including Arabic and English.

The private Islamic schools are the result of an earlier government campaign to modernize traditional *pondoks*. What percentage of pondoks have been transformed to private Islamic schools is not yet clear. But the number of these so called modern *pondoks* is more than 300. This type of school offers a balanced religious and secular education complying with government standards. Unlike traditional *pondoks* the government controls the private Islamic schools. Although initially these were mostly secondary education schools, now many are extending towards the primary school level to get more students and create extended Islamic private schools (Parameswaran, 2011).

At present, Islamic private schools in Thailand are administrated and operated accordingly the private schools' norms. Staff members are provided with training programs and the schools are housed in proper buildings in accessible locations. The secondary school curricula have been implemented according to the Basic Education Curriculum or the B.E. 2008 (Curriculum of the Ministry of Education). The Islamic education curriculum is divided into 10 levels as follows:

i.   Primary Islamic Education (*Ibtidaiyah* - Year 1-4);

ii.   Middle Islamic Education (*Mutawassitah* - Year 5-7); and

iii. Higher Islamic Education (*Sanawiyah* - Year 8-10). The same curriculum explains the aspects of the integrated Islamic education in Thailand as follows:

i. Clear separation of general and religious subjects in private Islamic schools;

ii. Religious study is accorded with national curricula in Islamic private schools;

iii. Graduates from private Islamic schools are qualified for national tertiary education; and

iv. Institutions to monitor the curriculum of the Islamic private schools.

In order to monitor the curriculum of the Islamic schools in the southern provinces, the Ministry of Education established the Office of Local District Education Region (OLDER) (Narongraksakhet, 2003, pp.9-14). This office works closely with individual Islamic private schools, Islamic private school foundations, and the Islamic Private School Association to coordinate the curriculum at elementary, middle, and secondary levels. The curriculum provides religious and academic subjects. In Islamic private schools the religious subjects are taught 18 to 22 hours per week and the secular academic subjects are taught 22 to 28 hours per week.

Integrated Islamic Education in Malaysia

Northern Malaysia is the land of upper Malaysia, where Kedah and the neighbouring states serve as the centre in terms of administration, trade, and culture. This region has especially close relations with the Thais of the lower south for whom Pattani was the centre. The Pattani *pondoks* became the model for *pondoks* in neighboring Kelantan and Terenganu States of Malaysia. The *pondoks* played

important roles in providing Islamic instruction as well as grounding the traditional values of the community. Present day modern Malaysia is also embarking on this approach of implementing Islamic integrated education to tackle the colonial legacy and the current philosophical issues in education. During the colonial times, secular English schooling and traditional Islamic education were practiced side-by-side in Malaysia. Rosnani Hashim (2007) identifies the continuation of the dualistic education in modern times as a problem of Malaysian education. This phenomenon posed a serious dilemma for Muslims in Malaysia. As a result, the Education Act 1996 paved the way to establish a national integrated curriculum in Malaysia. This shows that Malaysia has decided to settle the problems of dualism by utilizing integrated Islamic education. In his research on integrated Islamic education in Malaysia, Hashim (2007) found that teachers of the Islamic religious education hold a positive attitude regarding the curriculum. The Islamic Integrated Education Programme (IIEP) is conceptually regarded as modern teaching, where secular subjects are taught through a moral/Islamic lens. It is seen as an opportunity to provide an enriched and improved Islamic curriculum in the Malaysian education system.

At the primary level, Islamic education is supplementary, focusing on teaching students to read the Qur'an properly in Arabic and to perform religious worship correctly. The syllabus of Islamic primary schools in the three northern states of Kelantan, Kedah, and Terengganu follow the *Kelas Pengajian Al-Quran dan Fardhu Ain,* or KAFA, program which is organized by the state's religious departments in coordination with the Advisory Council for the Coordination of Islamic Education (LEPAI). The syllabus consists

of: (a) *Muqaddam* (text for Arabic letters and spelling) and Qur'an; (b) *tajwid;* (c) *tawhid;* (d) fiqh; (e) *akhlaq;* (f) *tarikh;* (g) *jawi* and *khat* (calligraphy); (h) rudiments of Arabic; and (i) *imla'*. The KAFA programme stresses the recitation of the Qur'an and writing and reading jawi. The importance attached to the various subjects taught under the syllabus can be gauged from the amount of time allocated weekly to each subject at the various primary levels (Hashim, 2007).

The dissemination of Islamic religious education at the secondary level in the private Islamic schools tends to closely follow the curriculum set by state religious departments for state religious schools. The content of secondary education varies little among the various states despite their not having a centralized agency. The same subjects are included in curricula, with variation as to the quantity of time allocated for each. In Kelantan's curriculum, approximately 60 per cent of study time is allocated to Arabic and Islamic studies, while 40 per cent is devoted to secular subjects. It is significant that Arabic language consumes 30 per cent of total study time weekly.

The secondary level of the private Islamic schools follows the newly revised curriculum of the Advisory Council for the Coordination of Islamic Education (LEPAI), which classifies subjects according to core and elective subjects. The core subjects broadly consist of revealed sciences, the natural and human sciences and languages, which include Islamic studies, Arabic language studies, Malay language, English language, mathematics, science, history, and physical and health education. These core subjects are recognized as important tools for communication and acquiring contemporary knowledge. The components of Islamic subjects include *tajwid* (Qur'an-reading and methods), *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh* (Law and its principles), *tawhid*

(theology), *hadith* (tradition), *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), life of the Prophet (*sirah*) and Islamic civilization, and *akhlaq/tasawwuf* (ethics). The components Arabic language studies are grammar (*nahu and sarf*), reading comprehension (*muthala'ah*), memorization (*mahfuzah*), short composition (*ta'abir*), essay (*insha'*), metaphors (*balaghah*), literature (*nusus adabiah*), and dictation (*imla'*). The elective subjects consist of reading (*oira'at*), writing (*khat*), geography, commerce, living skills, communicative Arabic, humanities, natural sciences, and additional Islamic studies.

The government of Malaysia has promoted the growth of the private Islamic schools as it has other private enterprises. It demands adherence to national standards, yet it encourages individuals and private groups to undergo a certification process so that they may collaborate with the Ministry of Education in delivering quality Islamic studies programs.

The SAS schools are generally well funded and employ highly trained professional staff. Administrators tend to follow a corporate management model and strive to advance achievement on standardized tests. These schools are highly selective in terms of student admissions. Students are prepared to take college entrance exams and high numbers of them go on to university studies. According to the Ministry of Education, in 2011 there were 36 private primary Islamic schools and 19 private secondary Islamic schools in Malaysia (Hashim, 2012).

The content of the intellectual sciences and languages (Malay and English) follow those set by the Ministry of Education. Curriculum experts of LAPEI determine the rest of the content. Students in the

upper secondary level would be given the freedom to choose from any of the Islamic studies, pure sciences, humanities, or vocational/technical streams. At the upper secondary level, Islamic studies is taught 16 periods per week, which constitutes 31 percent of total periods of core subjects in a week.

The federal government of Malaysia puts an emphasis on the states of Kelantan and Kedah, and provides more support for Islamic instruction there. In comparison with other states, both these neighboring states are of Muslim majority. Currently, Malaysia has three instructional systems as follows:

    i. Entire school system under the federal government's supervision;

    ii. Schools under private entity's supervision; and

    iii. Schools under local government's supervision.

In general, the entire schooling system is under the federal government's supervision. Meanwhile, the operation and administration of the schools are under the supervision of private entities or the local government. The legal and factual aspects of integrated Islamic education might differ from state to state depending on the policy of each state. For example, the instruction in the states of Kelantan and Kedah are different in certain aspects. In this regard, the Islamic instruction in the state of Kedah consists of two systems:

    i. Islamic schools under the supervision of the state of Kedah provide the primary-level education; and

    ii. Private Islamic schools provide the secondary-level education.

There are a total number of 32 schools under both systems: 7 Islamic schools under the supervision of the state of Kedah (Sekolah Rendah Islam Negeri Kedah) and 25 private Islamic schools (Yala Rajabhat University, 2005, p.3).

The Department of Islamic Affairs in Kedah (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Agama Islam Negeri Kedah) is the agency directly responsible for the supervision of the private Islamic schools in the state of Kedah. Section 9 of the Administration of Islamic Education (State of Kedah) Act 1962 governs the establishment of private Islamic schools.

However, it is a well-known fact that the Islamic education system in Malaysia is an extension of the Western educational system, which is compartmentalized and secularized. As a consequence of the Western influence and the weaknesses of the Muslims, the religious curriculum in schools and at university levels in Malaysia is still compartmentalized. However, Dr. Sukree Langputeh of Fatoni University said, "the integrated Islamic education in Malaysia is following a better curriculum. There are substantial institutional supports in formulating the curriculum" (Interviewed on March 23, 2015). It is a fact that Islamic schools either public or private are obliged to implement curriculum that is integrated and strives to realize the aim of Islamic education. Some organizations or foundations have assisted this endeavor. Those are producing instructional materials for these schools. Therefore, Muslims should recognize the presence of certain non-profit organizations comprises of committed individuals who put serious effort into equipping those Islamic schools to better realize their mission. For example, IQRA, the International Educational Foundation, has planned to develop an integrated curriculum that would harmonize divine and worldly knowledge.

It has proceeded with the production of instructional materials including textbooks and study guides. Another movement has launched an educational work called the Tarbiyyah project that promotes the inspiration and transformation of students through the process of teaching and learning in order to transform the world in the future. It has integrated the national curriculum with Islamic principles and outputs of a brain-based research. Hence it avoids pure rote learning and makes learning more meaningful teaching the students to think and comprehend (Shamma, 2005).

Comparative Analysis

A. Educational Policies and Objectives of Integrated Islamic Education

Interestingly, there are many aspects of similarity of overall policies and objectives of the Islamic studies curricula in Thailand and Malaysia, despite the difference in certain details. The recognition of the significance of Islamic and moral education is the first similarity. However variably, under the Malaysian educational policy, the new integrated curriculum provides non-Muslim students with moral education, while more Islamic education is arranged for their Muslim counterparts. Comparatively, the curriculum of Islamic studies under the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) in Thailand puts an emphasis on the systematic study of general and religious subjects. It can be assumed that moral development is the focal point of the educational systems in both countries. This is an obvious objective of Islamic educational philosophy as explained under the conceptual framework of this study.

Second, the Malaysian and Thai educational systems emphasize Islamic and moral education for different reasons. For Malaysia, Islamization influences Islamic and moral education. This has emerged across the Muslim world resulting in an awareness of the balance between the integration of secular education and religious knowledge. Meanwhile, the increased importance of Islamic education in Thailand is in response to the needs of the Muslim community. This reflects the incomprehensive nature of Islamic instruction in the educational institutions and short class hours. Such perception of Thai Muslims potentially contributes to shaping the characteristics of the community. Suraphong Sothanasathian (1988) explains that the Muslims, as a minority group, are concerned about losing religious purity because of the effects of surrounding factors on all aspects of the Muslim community. Hence, the recognition of the importance of education with particular focus on religion is one of the preventive measures for the Muslim community.

Third, the introduction of the Curriculum of Islamic Studies under the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) is an educational policy of the Thai government. It is based on the diversity of and conformance to the culture and demands of the community. Its focal point is general and religious education and decentralization. So the educational institutions may tailor their own specific curriculum using the Curriculum of Islamic Studies as a guideline. In contrast, Malaysia, as a Muslim country, is influenced by Islamization and has a centralized educational policy under which the integration aims to create a single standard for national education and Islamic studies under the close supervision of the Ministry of Education. In particular, the Islamic and Moral Education Division (Jabatan

Pendidikan Islam dan Moral - JAPIM) is the federal agency having specific responsibility for Islamic education.

Fourth, the freedom of religious learning, which is one of the main important policy issues in both the country's education systems. Malaysia and Thailand have long adopted the secular-based education, which is regarded as part of the difficulties for the Muslim communities of the two countries. The common target of the freedom of religious learning may thus be a starting point for Malaysia and Thailand to strengthen their collaboration in developing integrated Islamic education. The two countries also have different educational objectives in light of the goals of servitude and vicegerency (*khalifah*). These goals are obviously determined in the Islamic education of Malaysia due to the trend of the Muslim world. However, Islamic education in Thailand under the Curriculum of Intensive Islamic Studies aims to create faith in Allah. The educational objectives are important to the integration of general and religious education because Islamic education has no separate line between the two subjects. That is to say that the ultimate goal of both general and religious education is to be in theservitude of God, or His vicegerency on earth. This involves awareness of the compulsory duty of all Muslims to perform his/her mandatory role (*fard ain*) and the communal obligation or the social responsibility for Muslims (*fard kifayah*).

B. Similarities in Integrated Education for Better Participation in State

Despite the difference of the main objective, the Malaysian and Thai educational systems share similar approaches. First, the

common goal is to develop a balanced individual. Students' capacity and human fullness are developed in a balanced manner including their intelligence, mind, body, and morality. This philosophical objective aims to repair the weaknesses of the past educational system, which was based on Western liberal ideology and secular education with less focus on moral and spiritual dimensions. In addition, the past religious education of both countries also overlooked the intellectual and physical aspects. Consequently, the balanced development of human intelligence, mind, body, and morality is the key for integrated human development. This conforms to Islamic educational philosophy because it is the only way to enable human beings in the servitude of God or as His vicegerency on earth to take the responsibility for themselves and society.

Second, the promotion of educational integration is the other similarity shared by the two countries. Morality is incorporated not only into religious and moral education but also into every subject because education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge. Rather, it also includes discipline, morality, and goodness. In addition to the duty of knowledge transfer, teachers need to instruct their students to distinguish between good and bad perceptions and behaviors.

Third, one can see the similarity of the educational policy and philosophy of Malaysia and Thailand in light of the promotion of life-long learning and the youth's equal access to education up to the secondary level. The other important target of education is to instill the students with the perception that knowledge acquisition is a continual process; even after they have graduated from school.

Finally, the Malaysian and Thai educational policies focus on the creation of unity of the people within diversity since disrespect to

and misunderstanding of diverse neighbors' cultures, beliefs, and life styles may be a threat to national stability as a whole. The promise for integration inspires the citizenries of both countries. It ideally provides ethical strength and enhances responsiveness and the citizens' role for better participation in state affairs.

C. State of Integrated Islamic Education

The overall aspects of the integration of Islamic studies in Malaysia and Thailand, especially in its southern border provinces, are similar. Both countries put great effort into curriculum development to integrate religious and general subjects. However, certain differences of socio-cultural structure should be taken into account. As a Muslim country, the integrated Islamic education provided by the Malaysian Ministry of Education is well accepted. There are comprehensive programs for teacher development to enhance their capacity in transferring integrated Islamic knowledge to students. The complementary curriculum is also developed for those students who still have poor Islamic knowledge. The learning timetable is arranged in a suitable manner to enable the students and teachers to engage in their own self-study.

Although Thailand is not a Muslim majority country, the Thai government and the Ministry of Education have attempted to improve the understanding of the Islamic way of life among Muslim citizens through a focus on Islamic education based on various curriculums of Islamic studies. However, the agencies responsible for Islamic studies in Thailand are scattered and have no unity and there is a lack of trained teachers. Currently, it is a structural and subject integration

in which each subject is merely incorporated with a division of the timetable between religious and general subjects. Such integration is still problematic and causes poorer learning quality because, with more subjects, the timetable allocation becomes more challenging. It is then difficult for the students to learn eight general subjects along with the religious subjects. Therefore, one viable solution may be to place more emphasis on comprehensive and suitable integration.

D. Human Rights Perspective of Providing Integrated Islamic Education

The right to education is a basic human right. The educational right is not limited to formal education provided under the national curriculum. Education has to respond to the social and community needs and knowledge by providing education about socio-cultural aspects which form an important part of our identity. The earlier discussion about integrated Islamic curricula indicates that integrated Islamic education is vital to the religious and cultural identity of Islamic populations. This means that people should have options to choose the type of education he/she wants to pursue. State as political institutions need to be responsible for such rights. In southern Thailand and northern Malaysia, the government initiatives for integrated Islamic education are a solid step in the right direction, which can potentially bring a specific section of diverse citizens to fulfill their right to education through their preferred means.

Challenges of Implementation of Integrated Islamic Education

Integrated Islamic schools, both in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia, still encounter a range of problems. For example, in Thailand, as religious figures, school leaders may lack the suitable skills and characteristics to be effective educational administrators. Also, teachers are insufficiently trained in pedagogical methods. The seamless integration of general and religious subjects is also problematic. In a critical way, when both general and religious subjects are taught in tandem, the school hours of Muslim students increase and teachers also take on heavier teaching loads. This causes fatigue, which decreases the effectiveness of teaching and the students' rate of absorption. As a result, the expected academic outcomes are not fulfilled, despite the increased workload. Many graduates of Islamic integrated schools fail university entrance exams, and the depth of their religious knowledge pales in comparison to graduates of specialized religious schools.

Both southern Thailand and northern Malaysia face the challenge of lack of skilled educators or teachers. There are a large number of religious teachers; however they have little understanding of scientific knowledge. Meanwhile, some Muslims who have scientific knowledge are not well versed in Islam. Hence, establishing specialized Islamic universities or modifying existing universities to support or facilitate teachers' training in integrated Islamic curricula may be a long-term solution for this particular problem.

Nonetheless, numerous development processes are required to strengthen integrated Islamic instruction and those processes are inter-related with overall national education policy and the state's position to be responsible for the right to education of its citizens. For example, it is necessary to prepare a conceptual paper related to the implementation of the integrated Islamic education, to plan and coordinate school activities which support the purported curriculum, to plan activities and practice based on the curriculum, to develop assessment and evaluation systems, and to prepare the textbooks required as reading material for the integrated Islamic education curricula. Thus, it is crucial for all concerned parties, including the world Muslim community, to work collaboratively. Both in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia, these policy issues are yet to be harmonized.

Conclusion

This study is an endeavor to understand some of the causes and effects of the presence of dualism in education systems, a chronic problem in the Islamic world, by discussing the examples of southern Thailand and northern Malaysia. The post-colonial Islamic world has lost its enormous might and wealth of knowledge due to its long denial of the mandatory initiative of education. In Islam, education has its highest role in a sense of rights and duties of each individual in defining the human perspective towards to the Almighty and His creation. Thus Islam directed two essential components in its education. This paper has taken the examples of southern Thailand and northern Malaysia. These two examples represent two countries - one with Muslim minority and another with Muslim majority, one

that responded to the crying demand of religious and cultural rights of Muslims and another that formed integrated Islamic education as a national strategy to address the protection of national identity. The research argued, in order to sustain the benefit from such a system, the integrated curriculum needs to be uniform and centrally coordinated or managed. At the same time, the priority of teacher training, as well as harmonizing the Islamic subjects with general subjects, is vital. The system needs to be inclusive and sensitive towards both spiritual and national needs. The system should also have sufficient budgetary allocation. There is the potential to minimize the gaps among various faith groups by providing non-bias perspectives. Eventually it can widen the window of cooperation between these two countries.

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