

Arabic Schools in Negara Brunei Darussalam (1941 – 2005): Development and Challenges

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Arabic schools were introduced in 1941 and since then have undergone vast development in terms of enrolment, academic achievement, and the number of schools and buildings; especially after 1966. Despite these developments, they have also faced various challenges. Not long after their establishment, Arabic schools abruptly ceased to operate because Second World War took place, in which Brunei was also involved. After the re-establishment of these schools in 1966, they continued to grow. The development can be seen as illustrated by the annually increasing student numbers because of growing demand from parents to enrol their children into Arabic school. It became a challenge for the government to cater to the demand. Towards the 1990s, Arabic schools in Brunei Darussalam continued to face hurdles when it was found that the proficiency of Arabic language amongst their students was still low, to the extent that it affected their examination results in school and also, when they later attended Al-Azhar University. Despite all challenges, in terms of academics, a revision of the curriculum was implemented in these schools. To illustrate, science stream classes were introduced in 1981, and was followed by the Al-Azhar curriculum in 1993. Nevertheless, the science stream plan came to an end after it failed to continue. On the other end, the implementation of the Al-Azhar curriculum faced its own set of challenges, when students found it difficult to understand the lessons and text books. All in all, in observation of the development of Bruneian Arabic schools from 1941 until 2005, it is undeniable that these schools largely contributed to provide skilled manpower, especially in the field of religion in Brunei Darussalam.

Key words: School, Development, Challenges

Introduction

This article explores discussions related to the development of Arabic schools in Brunei. Despite the impressive growth of these schools since inception in 1941 until 2005, however, they have continually faced challenges and obstacles to remain operational. Action must be taken for their continuous survival as they are necessary for the prosperity of the nation. Generally, Arabic schools are synonymous with religious education in Brunei Darussalam. Despite that, students from these schools not only partook in religious lessons full time, but they were also taught general (secular) subjects. Aside from Arabic schools, there was one other type of formal educational institution that taught religious education which was provided by the government. This alternative was the religious primary school, established since 1956, which had sessions in the morning or afternoon, according to what the students required. On a different note, since 1931 up until 2005, single subjects taught in schools also played a role in providing religious education to students in Brunei Darussalam.

In 1937 there was a rising awareness amongst the members of the Brunei State Assembly Council to further develop and expand religious education in the country. In effect, they proposed an Arabic school to be established in the country. Evidently, starting from this point, the council members became increasingly aware of the need for the younger Bruneian generation to be given Arabic education. Exposure to this type of education is important for students so that they would be fully knowledgeable in religious education, and in turn, disseminate their knowledge to the Bruneian Muslim people. However, the proposal only came into reality in 1941 when Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (1924 – 1950), under his Majesty's own initiative, founded an Arabic-streamed religious school. Up until that moment the government, under the British Residency administration, had never allocated any financial provisions to fund the development of religious education. With that came the inception of the first Arabic school, of which expenses were borne personally by the sultan. Hence, this type of school was categorized as private, even though it was registered under the Bruneian Department of Education. One of the earliest academic staff members was Syeikh Abdul Aziz Al-Shimi, who came from the Middle East. Initially, this school had an enrolment of 60 students, including five girls. (Haji Awg Asbol bin Haji Mail et al., 2014; Abdul Aziz bin Juned, 1968). However unfortunately, it did not last long due to challenges in keeping it operational during the World War II period, in which Brunei was involved in when the Japanese army attacked and consequently occupied in 1941.

At the dawn of World War II, the British administration, which was in control of Brunei's defence, was largely unprepared to face an attack from the Japanese army. This situation arose because they were preoccupied with the German attacks at the home front. The Japanese occupation, which the locals had hoped to have brought prosperity in their lives, only brought misery. In truth, it left a negative impact on the politics, economy and society of



Brunei, along with the educational sector, which also suffered the effects of the war. With that, the Arabic school that had been newly established by Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin abruptly ceased operations.

The altruistic intention to establish an Arabic school in Brunei Darussalam was rekindled by Sultan Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien (1950 – 1967) in early 1956. It is highly probable that the idea to establish this school was proposed by two Johorean religious officers, who were specifically brought in to study the depth of religious knowledge of Bruneian students in government schools. Studies conducted by these two officers came to the conclusion that the knowledge of the students of that era was not yet sufficient. In response, the establishment of the religious primary school was proposed in order to provide the obligatory religious education needed to the younger Bruneian generation.

Despite that, the proposal faced numerous hurdles and challenges because in order to establish the new school, concrete planning was vital, especially in terms of infrastructure and teaching staff. Aside from that, during this period Brunei faced a myriad of trials and tribulations in the political scene as a result of World War II. Among them was when Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien called for a new Bruneian constitution from the British in 1953. This demand brought forth the Constitution of 1959, which ultimately returned power to the sultan in the state. Furthermore, the uprising in 1962, along with the 1963 Malaysian Confederation issue, preceded all other affairs in the Bruneian political climate. The sultan's attention was focused on all these issues, which had to be resolved in priority over all else for the sake of the future and survival of Brunei (Ranjit, 1991; Graham, 2002). With that, the establishment of the Arabic school was postponed until 1st March, 1966, when the Hassanal Bolkiah Boys' Arabic School was eventually built, funded by the government. The school's first intake had as many as 46 students, chosen from various religious primary schools. Due to not having its own building, it was temporarily housed in the Madrasah (religious class building) of the Department of Religious Affairs, which at the time was located in Bandar Brunei. Hence then, Arabic schooling was re-initiated once more in Brunei Darussalam, with its own learning systems (modules) starting from lower levels known as Preparatory I and II up until upper secondary. Following that, an Arabic school specifically for girls was established. This school was called the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Damit Girls' Arabic School. The first intake of the female school had 61 students (Haji Awg Asbol bin Haji Mail, 2010; Abdul Aziz bin Juned, 1968).

Initially, the establishment of the Arabic secondary school was a response to execute the order of Sultan Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, as stated during the foundation laying ceremony of the Hassanal Bolkiah Arabic School building on 24 April 1964, where His Majesty announced: (Titah, 1971)

“The government is aware that it is time that religious secondary schools are established, with educational policies that are in line with developments of the new millennium, whereby not only religious knowledge and the Arabic language are taught, but also nationalistic and worldly knowledge, in order to prepare graduates of such secondary schools, so that they are able to pursue further studies abroad. And the purpose is to develop, specifically to shape them into wholly educated citizens, who can fend for a better livelihood and also for the benefit of peace and prosperity in our country Brunei Darussalam, aside from becoming knowledgeable and subservient mukmins to Allah and the Prophet.”

Thus in responding to this decree, Arabic schools were re-established, not merely to disseminate religious knowledge, but they were also founded to teach secular subjects as well. Accordingly, their graduates were able to pursue further studies at any foreign higher institutions of learning, and not only limited to do so at educational institutions using Arabic as its medium of instruction. Hence, students were educated in the two necessary types of knowledge, worldly and for the hereafter. Equipped with both, it was hoped that Arabic school students would become umara (leaders) and ulama who are dedicated in service for the development of the people, religion and country (Sistem Sekolah Menengah Arab, 1992; Kertas Kerja Menaikkan Taraf Sekolah Arab Jerudong (Paperwork to Upgrade the Jerudong Arabic School). In the absence of moral values that are firmly instilled by religious education in citizens, a country's civilization is doomed to destruction. Therefore, it can be concluded that religious education is the pillar in laying the spiritual foundation to the physical development of a nation.

Increasing Demand

Since inception, Arabic schools garnered a positive response from the Muslim Bruneian community. This is as illustrated by the increasing number of candidates aspiring to enrol, with numbers from 1000 reaching up to 2000 yearly. In 1985, as many as 1,200 candidates registered to enrol at the school. Henceforth, towards 1995 the number grew to 2,628 registrations and in 2005 there were 1,834 candidates. The annual high demand became a challenge during their period of rapid growth. In response to this situation, the intake into Arabic schools had to be capped to the capacity of the classroom size and ratio of teaching staff, despite the increasing student demand. Due to this predicament, out of the thousands of candidates vying for a place in these schools, in the end only around 200 to 400 students were successful. In essence, this means that the competition to gain entrance into Arabic schools was very tough because only highly qualified and competent students gained admission to study here. Thus, this led to a situation where mothers often made complaints or appeals to



the Ministry of Religious Affairs in order to increase the enrolment in Arabic schools from time to time (Sistem Sekolah Menengah Arab, 1992).

Due to the high demand to gain entrance into Arabic schools, it became necessary for the government to build more of them. Therefore, in 1977 a preparatory Arabic school was built in Brunei and Muara, which was known as the Bandar Seri Begawan Preparatory Arabic School, with its own building and premises. Prior to that, it was temporarily located within the Pengiran Anak Puteri Masna religious School compound. This school was headed by a Head Teacher as a branch of the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Damit Arabic Religious Secondary School. The new school only had its own building in 2003 (Sekolah Persediaan Arab Bandar Seri Begawan 2003).

In truth, despite the construction of this new school, the school administration was still unable to cater to the increasing demand for enrolment. Thus, the government drew a plan to build another Arabic school in Tutong. This school, known as Ma'had Islam Brunei started groundwork in October 1989. This building which cost \$27 million was officiated on 17 July 1990 by His Royal Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah. This school commenced operation on 16 April 1991. The establishment of this school was a great feat in the development of Arabic schools in Brunei because for the first time, an Arabic school was finally constructed outside of Brunei and Muara.

With the construction of Ma'had Islam Brunei in 1991, henceforth the Hassanal Bolkiah Boys' Arabic Secondary School building was reformed to be the form VI premise for its former students and also students from the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Damit Girls' Arabic Secondary School (Buku Panduan Sekolah Menengah Arab Lelaki Hassanal Bolkiah 2004). It was an achievement in the Bruneian Arabic schooling system. With the establishment of the form VI classes, thus, students from the Hassanal Bolkiah Boys' Arabic Secondary School, who had earlier studied in preparatory levels I until V, then transferred to Ma'had Islam Brunei. In order for students to focus better on their studies, they were housed in dormitories. Nevertheless, in 1994, the dormitories were destroyed in a fire. This tragedy posed as an immense challenge because the operation of the school and students' learning were greatly affected. This situation forced the Ministry of Religious Affairs to open a branch of the Ma' had Islam Brunei in Brunei Muara in order to accommodate students at the preparatory level.

In the 1990s, there were insufficient classrooms in Arabic schools, despite the construction of Ma'had Islam Brunei, and this posed a challenge to the government. This issue caught the attention of His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, where he ordered the infrastructure of Arabic schools to be increased or added from time to time (Himpunan Titah Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Dan Yang Di Pertuan Negara Brunei



Darussalam di Majlis- Majlis Keagamaan dan Titah-Titah Yang Berunsur Keagamaan (1967-1996)). The problem of insufficient class numbers was directly related to the premises of these schools. Therefore, in order to solve the problem of inadequate premises in Arabic schools, the Ministry of Religious Affairs responded by establishing a committee to study the problems of the Religious and Arabic School. The results from this study concluded that it was necessary for the government to open Arabic schools in Belait and Temburong, in order to cater for the increasing demand from parents for entrance into these schools. An Arabic preparatory school had been built earlier in 1966 in Brunei Muara, as was previously explained. Thus, the new proposal received a positive reply from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Sistem Sekolah Menengah Arab, 1992) and Arabic preparatory schools were later constructed in Belait and Temburong.

Parallel to that, the Bandar Seri Begawan Arabic Preparatory School, a branch of the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Damit Arabic School as was previously stated, was upgraded to become a separate school which was governed by its own Head Teacher starting 1st January, 1997. This change was implemented to ease and improve the administration of the school. On 2nd January, 2003 the new school shifted to a new building located near the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Damit Arabic School (Sistem Sekolah Menengah Arab, 1992). Despite that, the new premises were still unable to accommodate the increasing number of students, which then led the students to be divided into two groups. Only some of them shifted to the new building, while the rest continued their education at the Pengiran Anak Puteri Masna Religious School.

On one hand, the Jerudong Arabic School, another school in Brunei and Muara, was later constructed following the establishment of the Beribi Arabic Preparatory School, Gadong and also due to the fire incident that occurred to part of the Ma'had Islam Brunei dormitories. As a result of the incident, the school's dormitories were no longer able to accommodate all the students that came from outside Tutong. To solve this problem, on 5th September, 1994 students living in Brunei Muara were temporarily housed in the Pengiran Anak Puteri Majeedah Nurul Bolkihah Kampong Kilanas Religious School building. Later, in April 1995 they were shifted again, this time to the old premises of the Beribi Gadong Religious School (Hajah Mariani binti Haji Md Daud, 2007). Hence, up until 2005 the challenge to accommodate the number of students in Arabic schools continued, to the extent that it forced the government to utilize premises in religious primary school buildings. In addition to that, the government drew up plans to utilize a few religious primary schools that were no longer in use. These included the Jerudong Religious School, the Lumapas Religious School and the Mulaut Religious School that were acquired to become preparatory and secondary Arabic schools (Kertas Kerja Cadangan Pembinaan building Sekolah-sekolah Arab Baru Rancangan Kemajuan Negara Kesembilan, 2007 – 2011). These schools were vacated in order to fulfil the Integrated Educational plan, which aimed to combine religious and secular education. This was a plan that required students who attended the secular primary schools in the

morning session to attend religious school classes in the afternoon session in the same school. Apart from that, a new scheme to construct Arabic school buildings was also included in the National Development Plan.

Despite all the solutions implemented, the challenge to overcome classroom shortage was a perpetual problem in the Beribi Arabic Preparatory School. This predicament became even more serious when more Form II classes were added in 2000. As a measure to overcome this problem, the Ministry of Religious Affairs shifted 135 students, along with a few officers and teaching staff to the Hassanal Bolkiah Boy's Arabic School building. Starting from that, the Beribi Arabic Preparatory School was divided into two branches. The existence of two branches posed a challenge when various difficulties arose on the side of administration, delivery of lessons and students' learning, apart from implementation of co-curricular activities. Due to this factor, the Beribi Arabic Preparatory School was officially moved to the Jerudong Religious School building on 3rd August, 2004, which later became known as the Jerudong Arabic School (Susilawati binti Awg Haji Muhammad et al., 2005).

The idea to establish an Arabic preparatory school in Temburong had long been planned by the government. On one end, the community in the area often voiced their request to the government to build such a school. Having this school would enable the young generation in the area to receive Arabic education. Aside from that, the number of applicants who wished to gain entrance into Arabic schools increased yearly. This reflected how much parents were aware of providing religious education to their children. This type of education is crucial in facing various changes brought by modernization, especially unexpected ones brought by information technology and open skies. Henceforth, the Temburong Arabic Preparatory School was finally established in 1997 (Sistem Sekolah Menengah Arab, 1992).

With the establishment of the Temburong Arabic Preparatory School, another educational facility was successfully provided by the government for the community in this area. It evidently brought a lot of benefit to the people, especially parents and guardians, as they no longer had to go through the hardship of sending their children to Arabic schools in Bandar Seri Begawan. Furthermore, the parents were more at ease because their children were much closer by. The whereabouts and safety of the children were better monitored, as compared to when they had been further apart from their parents previously. The construction of this school within the locality meant that another step towards advancement was reached in the development of Arabic schools in Brunei Darussalam. The first intake of the school had 50 students, with a teaching faculty of nine members (Laporan Tahunan Sekolah Persediaan Arab Temburong, 1997 / 1418H).

On another note, the establishment of the Kuala Belait Arabic Preparatory School was started much later than in Temburong. This school, which had previously used the Sungai Taring

Lumut Religious School premises, only commenced its session on 8th January, 2005 with 47 students, comprising 19 boys and 28 girls. Its teaching staff consisted of 16 members (Penubuhan Sekolah Arab Belait). As is evident, the development of Arabic schools in Brunei continued until 2005, with all four districts having its own Arabic school. This is a clear sign of advancement in the development of Arabic schools in the country. Apart from that, it also illustrates that the government has always been concerned about religious education in this country. The development and advancements in the Arabic schooling system in Brunei Darussalam up to 2005 can be seen in the number of these schools throughout the country, which were seven at that time. In Brunei and Muara alone there were two secondary schools and two preparatory schools. On the other hand, in Tutong, Belait and Temburong, there was one Arabic school each. Out of all these schools, the enrolment reached 1679 students, with 833 boys, and 845 girls (Kertas Kerja Cadangan Pembinaan building Sekolah-sekolah Arab Baru Rancangan Kemajuan Negara Kesembilan, 2007 – 2011). This shows that the ratio of boys to girls was quite balanced. Nevertheless, at higher levels, the number of female students was much higher compared to male.

Proficiency in Arabic Language

During the introduction of the Bilingual Educational Policy in 1985 by the Ministry of Education (Pendidikan Ugama, 1996), there was a direct restructuring of the Arabic school educational curriculum. All the general (secular) subjects in this school were required to use English as the medium of instruction, except for Malay Language and religious subjects which used Arabic. Despite that, students in the Preparatory II and higher classes still had to follow their general subject lessons in Malay up until 1988. Thereafter, Malay ceased to be used as the medium of instruction for all the general subjects. However, it should be noted that the usage of two languages of instruction is nothing new in Arabic schools because since their inception in 1966, students had also been taught in two languages, which were Arabic and English, as was previously discussed.

Notwithstanding, nearing the 1990s, it was found that the proficiency of Arabic amongst students was still below the expected level. It evidently became another hurdle in the development of Arabic schools in Brunei. This situation received the attention of His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah on 15th July, 1990. His Majesty touched on the achievement of Arabic school students who were not only weak at school level, but also during their study at higher institutions of learning abroad, especially Al-Azhar University. Among what His Majesty touched on was:

“Aside from that, prior to that, it is necessary to ensure that these students have access to the best facilities afforded, in order for them to pursue further studies at higher levels. This must be coupled with

effort, and it is not sufficient that we merely send and release them to any educational institution, whilst their situation for example, makes it unfavourable for them to achieve the success that is hoped for them. Should there occur such an incident, thus studies and consultations regarding this are pertinent.”

This issue received the attention of His Majesty because it was found that the examination results of Arabic school students pursuing further study at Al-Azhar University from 1988 until 1990 was not satisfactory. The sending of Bruneian students to study at this university started in 1959. From 1988 until 1990 only around 30% to 40% of male students were successful, whereas for female students, it was much higher at around 60% to 70%. Notwithstanding, this situation was not only faced by Brunei, but it was also a problem faced by Malaysia and Indonesia. Compared to other universities, this rate of achievement is low because in other universities, their passing rate reached 95%. The other universities mentioned included those in Malaysia and also in the United Kingdom. However, it should not be concluded that Arabic school students were incapable of mastering Arabic. In fact, since its establishment, many amongst the students have greatly contributed in spreading the light of Islam in Brunei Darussalam. Al-Azhar University could be deemed as playing an important role in producing Muslim scholars in Brunei because up until 2005, 509 students have pursued various fields in Islamic studies at this prestigious university (Kemajuan Penuntut-Penuntut yang Belajar di Sekolah Menengah Arab dan Universiti Al-Azhar 1990 – 1992; Hajah Mariani binti Haji Md Daud, 2007).

The low academic achievement of Bruneian students at Al-Azhar University must be seriously resolved because it was directly related to powering the future with highly knowledgeable scholars. Aside from that, the government would be eased from bearing higher expenses because sending students abroad require large funding, despite the fact that the success that was hoped for is not guaranteed. Thus, in order to identify the root of this weakness, the Committee for the Development of Arabic Secondary School and Al-Azhar University Students was formed at the end of 1990. Studies conducted by this committee found that there were four factors that contributed to low proficiency amongst Arabic school students. The first factor was weakness in the Arabic language as well as other subjects. The second was the students' poor attitude towards learning and insufficient effort to achieve academic success. The third was low supervision of the students, and the fourth were problems in the administration of Arabic secondary schools, which were lax in maintaining student discipline. Due to these factors, it is clear that mastering a foreign language is not as simple as previously thought, but requires a high level of commitment. Commitment does not only involve concerted effort, but it also involves student discipline, paired with continuous supervision by the school administration, which ultimately contributes towards the mastery of this foreign language amongst students. By clearly detailing these weaknesses, the effort

shown by students in mastering the Arabic language is evidently insufficient, alongside their poor discipline. Having poor proficiency in the Arabic language, it does not seem possible for them to become Muslim scholars who were depended on by the Bruneian people. Linguistic proficiency is important in digging for and researching on the fundamentals of Islamic knowledge, which would enable them to become ulama and Muslim leaders, whom the different layers of society in this country can refer to.

The main factor for low academic achievement amongst students in examinations was poor proficiency in the Arabic language. Hence, an independent committee was formed, which was known as the Committee for the Revision of Arabic Secondary School Syllabus and Curriculum. Kemajuan Penuntut-Penuntut yang Belajar di Sekolah Menengah Arab dan Universiti Al-Azhar 1990 – 1992) This committee was tasked to study all aspects of teaching and learning in these schools from time to time and at the same time, to be the advisory board. Thus, in early 1991 a few measures were taken. Amongst them was to strengthen the proficiency of Arabic at the preparatory level by allocating 60% of the school timetable to Arabic language and the remainder for other subjects.

Aside from that, activities to assist in strengthening proficiency in the Arabic language were also carried out, such as ensuring that all teachers and students only use Arabic to communicate. It was found that Arabic Language subject teachers did not communicate with their students in the language. In fact, they spoke in Malay. The same once occurred at English government schools, where the English Language subject teachers taught this subject in Malay, claiming that students did not understand when they were taught in English. Due to this, students did not feel compelled or interested to speak in the language. Aside from that, Arabic school students were also encouraged to use Arabic, not only in conversations, but also in writing. As a measure to encourage students to write in Arabic, schools started publishing magazines in Arabic. Articles written in Arabic by students were printed in these magazines. Aside from verbal daily communication, writing is an effective method in the effort to gain better proficiency in foreign languages, including Arabic. Another method is the routine to give sermons in Arabic each morning, delivered by students before they proceed to classes.

In addition to that, the curriculum and outdoor activities were also conducted in line with the effort to heighten the effectiveness of learning Arabic. The role of the Arabic Language subject teachers was also pertinent to the students' weakness. It was found that a large number of Arabic language teachers, especially at the preparatory levels lacked training in effective teaching methods for this subject. In fact, it was also discovered that there were also teachers who taught their lessons in Malay, as was previously explained. In order to overcome this problem, a monitoring system was implemented on teachers teaching Arabic Language by appointing two officers responsible as a mentor, so that the respective teachers

were able to deliver lessons to the students in Arabic using correct, appropriate and effective methods. These officers would visit Arabic schools once a week and hold discussions with the teachers to explore the best solutions to increase students' achievement in mastering Arabic. Apart from that, there was a scheme to send Arabic Language teachers abroad to learn teaching techniques for the subject. As an early measure in 1992, two Arabic teachers were sent to do a course in teaching Arabic at the International Language Institute and the American University in Egypt for a year.

Curriculum and Text Books

The Arabic Language and religious studies curriculum and text books were used following the ones in Kelantan. On the other hand, for general (secular) subjects, the curriculum was standardised with other government schools. This is where Arabic schools had an advantage over other schools. Students receive education in two curricula simultaneously, religious and general education.

In order to improve Arabic school students' proficiency in Arabic, starting from 1993 the curriculum and text books used in these schools were standardised with the Al-Azhar Primary and Secondary School in Egypt. This restructuring process was carried out in stages in order to allow students time to adjust to the new, foreign curriculum and text books. With that, it was hoped that this would better prepare students to follow and understand lectures if they succeeded in gaining admission into Al-Azhar University in the future. Other than that, intensive Arabic language courses were also given to students who were chosen to further their study at the university. This course was run over the duration of four months from June to September (Laporan Sukatan Pelajaran Baru Mata Pelajaran Arabic dan Uagama Bagi Tingkatan 1 dan 4 Tahun 1416 / 1995).

Issues Arising from the Changes

For the Arabic school students, the change implemented to use the Al-Azhar School curriculum and text books was an educational culture shock. The format of the text books used contained a large number of topics, and was also in small and crowded type font (Laporan Sukatan Pelajaran Baru Mata Pelajaran Arabic dan Uagama Bagi Tingkatan 1 dan 4 Tahun 1416 / 1995). This scenario led to students becoming disinterested in subjects using Arabic as the medium of instruction. Simpler text books, appropriate to students' ability and in how they physically look may have a strong influence in the rate of students' learning. This predicament further posed another challenge to Arabic schools in reaching maturity and development.

On one hand, some of the Arabic Language subject teachers felt that the curriculum and text books were too difficult to complete and to be understood by students. Although the lesson period allocation was increased in the school timetable, it was still inadequate. The school had to divide the teaching and learning period according to the capacity and skill of the teachers. As a result of this action, there were non-standard lesson period distribution between the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Damit Religious Arabic Secondary School and Ma'had Islam Brunei (Laporan Taburan Period Sekolah Menengah Ugama Arab Perempuan Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Damit, Ma'had Islam Brunei dan Sekolah Menengah).

In realizing that these effects only lead to negative results, a few counter measures were taken. Among them were to simplify the syllabus by selecting only the important contents to be taught to the students. Other than that, on public holidays and during school term breaks, the school provided extra classes, conducted workshops for the new curriculum to teachers and prepared a teacher's guide book to prevent differing and non-uniform interpretation of concepts among different Arabic secondary schools. (Laporan Sukatan Pelajaran Baru Mata Pelajaran Arabic dan Ugama Bagi Tingkatan 1 dan 4 Tahun 1416 / 1995) This measure was successful in increasing the academic performance of students in Arabic secondary schools.

Science Stream

The first intake of science stream students started Form IV classes in Arabic schools in 1987, after passing their Brunei Junior Certificate of Education examinations in 1986. (Pendidikan Ugama, 1996). However, in a closer look at the year of establishment of the science stream, which is 1981, it can be concluded that these students who had previously been in Form I, should have rightfully been in Form IV in 1984, and not in 1987 as it occurred. Thus, they should have taken their Brunei Junior Certificate of Education examinations in 1983 instead of 1986 as was the case. This scenario clearly exemplifies that the science stream encountered problems in its operation. Following that, in 1990 this stream was suspended, but was later started again in 1992 (Aliran Sains Tulin-Arab Tingkatan Enam Sekolah Menengah Arab). To reintroduce the science stream was not an easy task, and many criticized the Ministry of Religious Affairs because the implementation of this stream had not gone smoothly. A majority of parents felt cautious to allow their children to enter the science stream classes because they feared it would only run halfway through, as how happened previously. On a different note, the suspension of the science stream in 1990 and its reintroduction in 1992 could not be further elaborated here due to sources that could not be determined. Thus, this issue remains unanswered as to why it happened. Nevertheless, to propose a possible reason, problems may have arisen due to the difficulty in appointing qualified teachers to teach science stream subjects. In addition to that, the teaching and learning of science subjects also meant that special equipments were needed, which could either be difficult to acquire or there might have been a problem with funding.

In 1992 the student selection process for entrance into the science stream classes was carried out in two stages. The first was according to the students' results for their Primary Certificate of Education examinations, and secondly, it was based on their results in the Brunei Junior Certificate of Education examinations, where they had to obtain the first grade and credits in English, Mathematics, and History or Geography. The first stage was conducted to place students in the general science stream classes, whereas the second stage was conducted to place them in the pure science stream classes. However, students, whether in the religious or general / pure science streams, were given the option to switch into the stream that interests them. It should be noted that the application to switch streams was given consideration based on the student's result in the Brunei Junior Certificate of Education examinations (Minit Mesyuarat Jawatankuasa Mengkaji Semula Kurikulum dan Sukatan Pelajaran Bahasa, 1992).

The placement of students in the pure science stream classes began in 1994. This means that in 1996, students were expected to take the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level examinations and the *Sijil Pelajaran Ugama Brunei* (Brunei Religious Education Certificate) examinations. In order to provide places to Arabic secondary school students from those streams, and also to place them in appropriate institutions, whether local or foreign, the Department of Islamic Studies started the pure science stream at pre-university level in the Hassanal Bolkiah Boys' Arabic Secondary School in 1997 (Aliran Sains Tulin-Arab Tingkatan Enam Sekolah Menengah Arab).

The learning system which divided students into the Arabic religious and science streams was stopped in 2005. It was implemented starting from the lower secondary level. Henceforth, all students were required to study a more balanced syllabus. This change was implemented, amongst others, in order to realize the new National Educational Policy, which was the 21st Century Educational System that made it compulsory for all students to study science subjects over 12 years of schooling (Laporan Perkembangan Sistem Persekolahan, Kurikulum / Sukatan Pelajaran dan Buku Teks Sekolah-sekolah Arab 2002 – 2005). This change was introduced in order to ensure that the quality of education in Arabic secondary schools was on par and up to the same standard as other secondary schools in this country, apart from uniquely being religious educational institutions. The aim was also to provide a form of holistic and integrated education in Arabic schools in order to achieve the objective and vision in providing worldly and ukhrawi (for the hereafter) knowledge to their student.

Change of Ministry

The year 2002 was the starting point for the placement of the Department of Islamic Studies under the administration of the Ministry of Education, following the implementation of the Integrated Educational System. (Taklimat Skim Rintis Sistem Pendidikan Bersepadu, 2004)

Despite so, the Ministry of Religious Affairs hoped that the educational system which had been implemented in Arabic schools remain unchanged. This is because another revision would take time, and thus, affect the learning in this school. Furthermore, Arabic schools were unique because their educational system not only focused on worldly knowledge, but also for the hereafter. The students were also able to master three languages, which were Arabic, English and Malay, and they could simultaneously study in two educational streams, religious and general / science streams (Sistem Sekolah Menengah Arab, 1992).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs also recommended that the dual learning session system of morning and afternoon remain, in order to prevent students from idling their afternoons away. It was also a way to prevent students from being involved in undesirable activities, such as loitering and doing anything against Islamic teachings. However, the Ministry of Education implemented changes in the curriculum, text books and period distribution in the school timetable. At the preparatory level, the Arabic Language subject used new text books published by the Ministry of Education in place of the previous ones, which were no longer deemed appropriate for the current development and changes in education. These books started to be in use from 2004 for Preparatory I and from 2005 for Preparatory II. Thereafter, the previous text books were in use only as reference (Laporan Perkembangan Sistem Persekolahan, Kurikulum / Sukatan Pelajaran dan Buku Teks Sekolah- Sekolah Arab 2002 – 2005). On the other hand, the Arabic Language subjects for lower and upper secondary continued to use text books published by Al- Azhar (Sistem Sekolah Menengah Arab, 1992).

Under the administration of the Ministry of Education, measures to improve the teaching and learning process in Arabic schools continued to be taken, as was previously done by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The development of certain subjects, namely Jawi (Arabic script), practical in religious rites, and Quran recitation were constantly monitored and given high priority because they are the core of the Arabic school education. In the course to improve students' mastery in the Jawi writing script, a few activities were conducted by the school, such as competitions in Jawi calligraphy and composition writing in Jawi script. Aside from that, with advances in information technology, students were also encouraged to use computers with Jawi script (Laporan Perkembangan dan Pencapaian Bahasa Inggeris di Sekolah-sekolah Arab 2002 – 2005). In using Jawi computers, Arabic school students would not only learn the writing, but they would also simultaneously learn to use the latest developments in information technology that are rapidly expanding and have greatly influenced the world of education.

In order to heighten the awareness in practising and the perfection in performing religious rites amongst students, two periods were allocated to teach the theoretical and practical aspects of performing religious rites at preparatory and lower secondary levels. One period each was allocated at upper and higher secondary. On the other hand, the science stream was

not given this period allocation, but the students still had to be involved in the practical component of performing religious rites in co-curricular form through scheduled activities that had been planned throughout the school year. Amongst the activities students participated in include competitions, as well as attending invitations from the public, being involved in awareness programmes for the community outside the school by being the imam, giving sermons or religious lectures, participating in tahlil (supplications and invocations) and performing qiyamullail (late night prayers).

Quran studies was another core subject, aside from Jawi and religious rite practical / solah (prayer). Among the objectives of Quran studies is to train students to read the Quran as a religious rite and to use it as the main reference in daily life. Aside from that, it is taught so that students are able to read it fluently, fluidly, with correct tajwid (pronunciation rules) and also, to master a few Quranic melodies which are muktabar and practise them in their recitation. In the effort to practise Quran reading amongst students at all levels, Arabic schools conducted planned Quran reading programmes as school activities, internally and externally.

In the meantime, proficiency in English was not ignored, and in fact, the school also drove to increase students' proficiency in the language. This was necessary because this subject is important and is potentially the international medium of communication, aside from being the main pre-requisite to win government scholarships to pursue further studies at foreign higher educational institutions (Laporan Perkembangan dan Pencapaian Bahasa Inggeris di Sekolah-sekolah Arab 2002 – 2005). Due to this, the English Language subject curriculum at the preparatory up until upper secondary levels had to follow the standard which had been set by the Ministry of Education. In order to achieve the aim mentioned above, the focus was not only on the teaching and learning aspects, but also, external activities were required. Among those activities were participating in the English Language Club, English Week, story-telling and drama activities, quizzes and morning sermons in the language. All these activities were aimed at familiarising students with using English, especially in communicating.

However, in His Majesty Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkiah's speech in July 2005, all religious and Arabic schools were once again to be administered under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Laporan Jawatankuasa Kerja Penempatan Kembali Sekolah-sekolah Ugama di Bawah Kawalan Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama Negara Brunei Darussalam, 2005). This was done because there had been disorder and confusion in executing religious education during its administration under the Ministry of Education. The full day educational system evidently had good intentions because parents did not have to leave their offices to send or fetch their children during their lunch hour break. Parents were eased of this duty because students can head straight to religious classes in the same school. Nonetheless, not all schools were able to provide the full day educational

system because of the lack of classrooms and teaching staff. This situation led to problems in the implementation of full day religious schooling, especially for those which had very high enrolment and for non-governmental schools (Kertas Kerja Penempatan Kembali Sekolah-sekolah Ugama di Bawah Kawalan Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama Negara Brunei Darussalam, Ogos 2005).

Conclusion

Since the inception of Arabic schools in 1941, they have continued to undergo growth in terms of enrolment, academic achievement, and also the number of schools and buildings; especially after 1966. Despite those developments, they also faced various challenges. Year after year, there was increasing demand from parents to enrol their children in Arabic schools. This became a challenge for the government to fulfil. Following that, the government had to formulate a plan to provide more Arabic schools that could cover the demand in all four districts of Brunei Darussalam. With the establishment of schools in the other districts, it would greatly facilitate the young generation in these districts to receive Arabic education. It would greatly save time and energy, and ease finances.

Nearing the 1990s, Arabic schools in Brunei Darussalam continued to face obstacles when it was found that their students' proficiency in Arabic was poor to the extent that it affected their examination results while at school and later at Al-Azhar University. In an effort to overcome this predicament, a few committees were formed. On another note, in terms of academics, revisions on the curriculum was done by the government on this schooling system, such as introducing science stream classes which started in 1981, and another, following the Al-Azhar curriculum, in 1993. The science stream classes were introduced in the hopes that Arabic school students would not only focus on gaining knowledge in the religious field in the Arabic stream, but also in other streams, such as English Language. Nonetheless, this change encountered great challenges when it failed to continue and was stopped in 2005. On the other hand, the change to adhere to the Al-Azhar curriculum was a step to prepare students in acclimatizing them to the format of the text books used in this institution, and thus, facilitating them to study better if they were selected to pursue further studies in the prestigious university. The revision to follow the Al-Azhar curriculum faced its own set of challenges when students found it difficult to understand the lessons and text books from Al-Azhar. In observation of the development of Bruneian Arabic schools from 1941 until 2005, it is undeniable that these schools largely contributed to provide skilled manpower, especially in the field of religion. Students who succeeded in completing their study and obtained either a certificate or degree were accepted to work in government departments, mainly those under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, or even other governmental departments. A number of them hold high positions, such as Permanent Secretaries, Directors, Assistant Directors, Heads of Departments and some also became



lecturers, teachers and missionaries. In aiming for proficiency in Arabic, the students were also exposed to religious activities. They were often invited to religious events, such as ceremonies for *doa selamat* (supplications for safe undertakings), *doa arwah* (supplications for the deceased), *tahlil* and *zikir* (supplications and invocations in the name of Allah s.w.t) because they were entrusted to lead these ceremonies.

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