

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### The Challenges of Producing Islamic Scholars via *al-Azhar* Curriculum in Religious Schools in the Malaysian National Education System

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Azizi Umar, Ezad Azraai Jamsari, Hasnan Kasan, Wan Zulkifli Wan Hassan, Aminuddin Basir and Azwira Ab. Aziz; The Challenges of Producing Islamic Scholars via *al-Azhar* Curriculum in Religious Schools in the Malaysian National Education System

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#### ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss the challenges faced by the owners and administrators of religious schools throughout Malaysia in producing Islamic scholars through the national education system. Historical evidence shows that most of the Islamic scholars produced are from outside the national education system, such as *madrasa*, peoples' religious school (*Sekolah Agama Rakyat* or SAR), state's religious school (*Sekolah Agama Negeri* or SAN) and a few from the Federal owned schools. The first three schools' education system is yet to be legally inside the national education system. The methodologies employed in this research are interviews and document analysis. Findings illustrate that several efforts have been made to include these institutions within the mainstream education system, nonetheless, not only the schools had to deal with various constraints, these efforts undermined the aspirations, identity and the mechanism of producing Islamic scholars. The major aspect in producing Islamic scholars depends on the implementation of specific curriculum as the core and not the teachers, administration, environment, co-curriculum or any other processes. The core curriculum of Islamic school is the curriculum of the religious subjects of *al-Azhar*. Implementation of this curriculum in the main stream education is in dilemma due to differences in approach, understanding and purpose in fulfilling each own educational policy. The author recommends that *al-Azhar* subjects be given recognition and be part of the National Curriculum as complementary curriculum to the existing one. This recognition is vital in ensuring the successful implementation of *al-Azhar* curriculum and the operation of religious schools be given its due course, especially in the aspects of legal and financial resources to be at par with those being received by schools in other education streams.

**Key words:** Islamic scholars, *al-Azhar* curriculum, Islamic Religious School, National Education System

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#### Introduction

The question that arises is why religious issues are more important than the worldly issues? According to the ontological doctrine of Islam, religious preference is due to the fact that the world itself is valueless, is not permanent, and is full of satanic seduction and lust. Al-Attas is in the opinion that the content of knowledge is very important and of higher priority in values compared to the methods and techniques for teaching and learning (Al-Attas, 1979). History of Islamic education has proven to show a balance between religious and worldly knowledge. This equilibrium continues to occur at Muslim time of greatness in history. Islamic education curriculum objectives can only be achieved through the *al-Qur'an* and *as-Sunnah*. However, in the subsequent era, because of the imbalance factor between them, the Muslims have been weakened by the enemies of Islam and the manifestation of that separation and its impact are still felt until today (Hussain and Ashraf, 1980).

*The Challenge for Islamic Scholars and al-Azhar Curriculum:*

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Implementation of the dual teaching and learning curriculum in religious schools today is the result of the transformation from conflict between both types of aforementioned knowledge. It gives greater emphasis to the curriculum of *al-Azhar* in its curriculum. In Islam, the separation should not occur because in nature both knowledge is integrated to each other. The separation of the curriculums does not mean that the knowledge has to be necessarily separated. Rather it is the main effect which serves as the evidence of the existence of knowledge conflict as has previously happened in the lives of Muslims which have given problems to the epistemological of knowledge in Islam. *Al-Azhar* curriculum was the one who became the school's identity in accordance with its objective to produce Islamic scholars in the true sense.

The big question to be discussed in this article is the extent of the challenges faced by the parties involved in administering the religious schools to ensure that *al-Azhar* curriculum are maintained even when the school is in the current mainstream education. Based on past experience, Islamic scholars, thinkers, and educators were not produced within the national education system, rather from the outside. Their participation in the mainstream education is intended to fill the needs and voids that existed. Is it still being so and relevant today? Or has time changed? Their achievements are recognized only when they were able to excellently progress forward but they were not given the needed support during the early stage of their establishment. This attitude can be equated to the act of only reaping the 'results' without being involved during the 'nursing' process. Therefore, this study revolves in answering some of the following questions:

- Which aspects present the challenges towards the implementation of *al-Azhar* curriculum in the national education?
- How do the challenges and barriers come to exist?
- To what extent would those challenges give effect in the scenarios of today and the future?

Based on the above three questions, the discussion of this article will answer how Islamic scholars, as discussed in the earlier part of this article, could be produced in the national education system.

#### *Classification of Knowledge and the Influence of Secularism:*

Muslims view knowledge as something sacred because all knowledge is the manifestation of God to man. It colours the whole Islamic education system to this day, which causes it to be inseparable from religious organisations and institutions such as mosques and places of *waqf*. Due to this intimate rule, the concept of Islamic knowledge is then attributed to two basic principles, namely unity and hierarchy. All knowledge is ultimately one and at the same time belongs to a hierarchical system. In Islam, the knowledge domain is given attention but religious knowledge still remains the core in the formation of curriculum, and then followed by other knowledge. In line with the concept of a hierarchy of knowledge, the Islamic curriculum should include *shari'ah* knowledge as its core and paradigm while *naqliyyah* knowledge is learnt based on the reality about nature and man. This means that in term of ontology, Islamic curriculum covers natural environment and environmental issues as well as supernatural or physical nature and metaphysical nature altogether, in which the highest hierarchy is religious knowledge and divinity.

Historically, the knowledge classification development was pioneered by al-Kindi who gave answers to the problems faced by the society at that time, concerning the determination between religion and knowledge or rational and revelation. Al-Amuli classifies knowledge into two, namely philosophical knowledge and non-philosophical knowledge. Similarly, Imam Al-Ghazali also divides knowledge into two, namely the *shari'ah* knowledge and the *'aqliyyah* knowledge. *Shari'ah* knowledge is the origin of knowledge such as the al-Qur'an whilst the *'aqliyyah* knowledge is the knowledge being sought after such as medicine and mathematics (Hassan, 1991). Islam also comprehend that there are two ways for people to acquire formal knowledge namely by the truth of revelation and by imparting the revelation from one generation to the next. The former way is known as the *naqli* knowledge (transferred). The second is the knowledge gained through the intellect or mind. This way is known as the knowledge of *al-husuli* (acquired). In a later development, the concepts of knowledge classification in Islam were summarized in the World Islamic Education Conference in Islamabad in 1980 with the division of perennial knowledge and acquired knowledge.

Secularism is defined as "a belief or doctrine that rejects or separates religion or religious characteristics from the affairs that are not connected with religion". It originate from the Latin language *saeculum* and bring forth two connotations which means time and place. Dualism means "a theory which is based on two different policies". Dualism which exists in the education system in Muslim countries is a system of religious education and secular education. According to Rosnani (2004), the incidence of two forms of education system predicated upon a dilemma among the Muslims themselves to the modern education system. Many Muslims feel that the teaching of Islam in national schools is not effective. This resulted in the teaching of Islam in the traditional education system continues to survive and remain to exist even to this day.

Development of knowledge integration and relationship between both types of knowledge intimately has led to the great success and glory of Islam at one point in history. However, the progress was halted because of

the introduction of the separation between the Islamic scholars and state leaders or *umara'*. When the intellectual leadership was overwhelmed by the political leadership, its members, together with Islamic scholars withdrew from public life. Finally, one school of thought emerged that isolate the two groups. This has led the political and social leadership of the community to be in the hands of a group of people who are intellectually less efficient in politics.

On the other hand, the reality of dualism in Islamic education system also covers part of the religious group whose aims are to be pious religious member in the Islamic ritual. The objective also aims to meet the current needs at this time. In the author's view, dual-curriculum does not necessarily be affected by secularism because fundamentally, religious schools have adopted the concept of an integrated and holistic education even though not in the form of absolute integration.

#### *Implementation of al-Azhar Curriculum:*

Implementation of *al-Azhar* curriculum was previously mentioned by the author and it was not regarded as in the National Curriculum as it has yet to be agreed by the Central Curriculum Committee. This curriculum has been practiced in religious schools along with other National Curriculum all this while. It is designed with different purposes and goals. Through reading and data collection, the author attempts to summarise the meaning of *al-Azhar* curriculum as follows:

One group of subjects in Islamic studies, Arabic language and literature, with the Arabic language as the medium of instruction, following the *Ma'ahad Bu'uth al-Azhar* curriculum model in Egypt, taught according to the modern school system which consists of teachers, classrooms, education level, syllabus and textbooks, timetable, predetermined school and examination schedules. The learning process are carried out simultaneously and alternately in conjunction with the National Curriculum. Syllabus should also be certified by the state Curriculum Committee and knowledge is assessed through the examination system according to certain levels (Azizi & Supyan, 2007).

Based on the studies conducted, no specific names were given to these subjects. Most were named religious subject curriculum in official affairs. Various names have been given to *al-Azhar* curriculum or *Azhari* such as *thanawi* curriculum, religion and Arabic curriculum, Islamic studies curriculum, *madrasah* curriculum or curriculum of *al-Azhar*. It is also called non-academic subjects to differentiate it from other general subjects such as Malay Language, Mathematics, Geography and others. The authors chose the use of the name *al-Azhar* curriculum as it was felt as the most accurate and appropriate. *Al-Azhar* means religion. The word *din* is generally accepted by society as the only religion which was referred to the religion of Islam since it means a way of life. It was written in Arabic to portray that each of these subjects are taught in Arabic which aims to know, understand and explore the religion of Islam by referring to its main source namely the Holy al-Qur'an.

#### *The Goals of Religious Schools are Different?:*

The goals of the national education schools are differently in contrast with the objective of the establishment of the religious schools which is to meet the manpower requirements as required by the country. This can be seen in the Education Act 1996 as follows:

Whereas the purpose of education is to enable the Malaysian society to have a command of knowledge, skills and values necessary in a world that is highly competitive and globalised, arising from the impact of rapid development in science, technology and information.

The goals of religious school is not superior or at par with the national educational goals, rather it merely exist to achieve some of its objectives. While the country's goal to produce employability is not rejected by the religious schools, they face other problems in terms of achievability either in financial ability or in limited authority. Concerns for the clash of these goals are high. According to today definition of employment, the position of Islamic scholars in religious schools' is with high expectation, but young Muslim scholars who are called *ustaz* and *ustazah* also fill in the positions in government and non-government institution apart from being school teacher, Islamic affairs officer or other similar posts.

*Al-Azhar* curriculum is the most important identity for Islamic School. It is consistent to the initial purpose of the establishment of these schools. Its curriculum is a manifestation of the goals of the establishment of the religious school. Both aim to achieve the goals of Islamic education. In Islam, any particular goal in education should be based on the philosophy of Islamic education. In the philosophy of Islamic education there is a goal which is reserved to the type of people we want to inculcate through any particular curriculum. In other words, what is the purpose of life for a Muslim. Hassan (1997), comprehends that among the importance of education in developing societies is through personal development and it expansion into all aspects as desired by the community.

In the context of a religious school which originated from the *madrasah* system of pre-colonial era is the result of the manifestation of schooling which is rooted from the purposes of Islamic education. This means that

the main reason of introducing the *al-Azhar* curriculum is the aspiration and fundamental hope for the scheme of religious schools establishment to produce Muslim scholars or *ahl al-din*. Muslim scholars in this context are defined as individuals who possess the highest quality compared to other individuals in the sight of Allah. The quality aspect is of course being assessed based on the individual who fear the God most. This argument is consistent with the words of Allah: "Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge" (al-Qur'an, Fatir: 28).

The above meaning meant it does not bind Islamic scholars to only have the skills learned in the field of religion but also the need to master other areas. It is not the field of knowledge that ties him to God, but the value of obedience to God. This does not mean his skills in the field of religion are not taken into account whereas it is still needed and forms the core to the discipline of other fields of study. If they have a tendency to enter other fields, it is not an issue because what is more important is that they need to know the basics of their religion. At the same time, basic religious knowledge lacking learning other areas is also recognized, especially for the needs of the country in filling job vacancies and employment that is suitable for Islamic scholars as religious officials, teachers and staff in the office related to Islamic affairs. Nevertheless it was not a major concern in viewing the purpose of establishing a religious school.

The above principle can be further strengthened by what has been mentioned in earlier discussions about the religious school's aims in producing Islamic scholars. It is in line with the philosophy of Islamic education that emphasises the character and moral formation in the students. This is because Islamic scholars are considered as individuals who possess noble and respected moral. Wan Mohd Nor (2005) in discussing the philosophy of Islamic education stressed the priority of individual formation compared with the formation of the community in achieving well-being and happiness for human. The purpose of education is also the purpose of Islamic education in the history of its greatness. This is proved by the first World Conference of Muslim Education in Makkah on 31<sup>st</sup> March to 8<sup>th</sup> April 1977 that emphasised the main purpose of Islamic education as follows: "...education should aim at balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily sense".

Hassan (1997) view that the above purpose can be easily translated in the establishment of religious schools whether in the form of formal and informal education at all levels from primary to beyond. In another example, the educational objective of Kelantan Islamic Foundation (Yayasan Islam Kelantan or YIK) emerged as the result of its educational goals which reads: "To produce faithful, noble, knowledgeable, obedient Muslims who are qualified to serve in developing family, community, nation and *ummah*". According to al-Nahlawi (1996), differences in this goal should not exist because the main goal of Islamic education is to devote oneself to God in all aspects of life. *Al-Azhar* curriculum is to meet the individual needs whereas on the other hand, the national curriculum is more towards fulfilling the needs of the community. When the needs of the community take precedence over the individual needs, core values tend to prioritise towards achieving well-being and the happiness in the world and overlooking the aspects of obtaining Allah's approval (Wan Mohd Nor, 2005).

#### *Concerns for Losing al-Azhar Curriculum:*

*Al-Azhar* curriculum is an important curriculum that has been formulated by Islamic education experts with the intent for implementation at religious schools. This curriculum is the core curriculum when compared to other curriculums. Its existence is in accordance with the purpose of the existence of religious schools which has made this curriculum as their identity that cannot be tampered with or set aside. The introduction of this curriculum is also as a result of changes from the *'umumi* system to *nizami* system. These changes are consistent with current developments that require restructuration of religious knowledge. In *'umumi* system, the learning process employs old books authored by local and foreign Islamic scholars. The *'umumi* system does not have specific syllabus or education levels for students. This system is similar to today's traditional educational system. (Abdullah, 1995).

The concerns for losing the *al-Azhar* curriculum are not baseless because it can be seen in the curriculum being practiced in Religious National Secondary School (*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama* or SMKA) today where the *al-Azhar* has virtually disappeared. For example, the curriculum of religious subjects in the national curriculum taught in that school has been changed to the Islamic Education, Islamic *Tasawwur*, Islamic *Shari'ah* Education and al-Qur'an and Sunnah Education. All these subjects are taught in Malay language and not in Arabic as before. Furthermore, when the lesson period time allocated is only for 12 sessions which is approximately about 480 minutes a week. This means that less than 30% of lesson period time is allocated for religious subjects in the national school curriculum compared to 60% to 70% prior to the institutionalisation.

#### *Modification of al-Azhar Subjects to be Elective Subjects for Non-Core Subjects Group:*

*Al-Azhar* subjects are basic subjects in religious schools since the beginning of its existence. Even from its historical perspective, a religious school in the early stages only offers *al-Azhar* subjects without coalescing

with the national curriculum as being practiced today. This means that the existence of the religious school itself is a result of the need to establish *al-Azhar* curriculum. The absence of this curriculum means there is no need for a religious school.

Should religious schools be part of the national system, they would not be allowed to have religious subjects to be the important core subjects. New ideas to re-introduce the subject of *al-Azhar* are not a simple matter because it will challenge the position of the existing curriculum. Despite the effort to put the subjects of *al-Azhar* as in the elective subject group, they are still facing with problems such as constraint in the acts, the regulations, and the long period of time and the consent of all parties. Sacrifices towards this effort would not be meaningful if the planning does not take into account all the key factors. Many policies related to religious school will in effect affect its educational systems, such as philosophy, goals of the curriculum and the purpose of the school establishment. This situation will challenge not only the existing value in the religious school community yet could even potentially change the value into the unneeded one.

At the time of this study, the subjects of *al-Azhar* are not in the national curriculum, although it has long been implemented in religious school. The explanation regarding the nature and category of the national curriculum in the Education Act is mentioned in Education Regulations (National Curriculum) 1997 No.3 (2) which states:

Curriculum for government schools and government assisted schools will consist of the following subjects:

- (a) core subjects specified in Table 1 and 5;
- (b) the compulsory subjects specified in Table 2, 6 and 7;
- (c) additional subjects specified in Table 3 and 8;
- (d) elective subjects specified in Table 9.

When referring the particular tables from tables 1 to 10, especially at the secondary level, there were only 7 subjects that have similarity with *al-Azhar* subjects, namely Islamic Education, Arabic, Islamic *Tasawwur*, Qur'an and Sunnah Education, Islamic *Shari'ah* Education, Usuluddin and Syariah. From the point of category division, only one subject, that is Islamic education included in the list of core subjects, there were no subjects that is categorise in the compulsory subjects. Arabic (Communications) and the remaining subjects were merely elective subjects for secondary and higher level. Groups of elective subjects are subjects which the students are given the prospect to choose according to their interests, talents, abilities and potential.

In the present system of national education, national curriculum is the core curriculum while *al-Azhar* curriculum has never been recognized as the national curriculum. The existence of the Islamic education curriculum and elective subjects in Islamic studies group is a result of changes to the requirements for Islamic education after being urged by the various parties. But the practice and implementation vary with the *al-Azhar* subjects especially from the aspect of the medium of instruction that is used which is not Arabic, its limited content and depth. Moreover, it is only electives and non-compulsory subjects for each student except the Islamic education subject.

To sum up the discussion on the priorities of this curriculum, the author take the example of classification of knowledge taken from the *madrasah* system since the days of Nizam al-Mulk when the priority reflects the importance of the three groups of knowledge signified by an equilateral triangle. The first two groups sit on the upper side of the triangle, while the other groups sit on its bottom. Islamic studies take honorary place on the right side, and philosophy and natural knowledge in the left corner at the same level while knowledge of literature or language is at the lower angle.

#### *Deviation from the Main Goal of Establishment:*

According to Tajul Ariffin (2002), the goals and philosophy of national education is influenced by western education, rooted in the liberal democratic and secular state. This situation has given the religious school competition in achieving her noble virtue. This contradiction when viewed in historical term is not new because the existence of early English School itself is to provide competition to the religious school. English school created by the missionary board certainly has the religious influence and sentiment, and it is considered as a major threat to the Muslims. The existence of Malay-medium schools is a manifestation of western education philosophy which separates religion from education and life.

Based on the above aspects, many other religious schools that were originally proposed for the acquisition process at the time, did not succeed because of concerns over the deviation from the original goals founded by the founders of religious schools in its beginning. The same thing happened today when a religious school registration campaign as a result of Tan Sri Murad Report was not fully welcomed by the religious school. Recent data shows that only 168 religious schools from 385 registered. Of the 168, there has been concern and fear for the state of the goals of *al-Azhar* curriculum because it is in the responsibility of the Federal

Government. This situation could potentially causes religious schools to once again deviate from the goals and philosophy of education which the curriculum is based on (Dangiran, 2008).

A study by the author on the acquisition of religious schools by the Ministry of Education in 1977 proved that a religious school no longer meets the Islamic educational philosophy. The acquired religious school was even given a new identity and named SMKA (Azizi & Supyan, 2001). According to the former Chairman of the Management Board or the Chairman (*Jemaah Pengelola dan Kemajuan Sekolah* or JPKS) of the Naim Lil Banat Religious School, Dato' Nik Nik Hassan Yahya, SMKA no longer maintain *al-Azhar* curriculum which form the basis of the existence of religious schools even though it was initially requested by the JPKS of the religious schools during the handover. A situation can be seen that when there is submission and acquisition, the curriculum is not emphasised but only issues on the financial, the problems of teachers and the lack of students were taken into account. This has affected the original purpose of the school which was built on the introduction of specific curriculum.

Based on the data collected, the claim that Government Aided Religious School (*Sekolah Agama Bantuan Kerajaan* or SABK) would end up as SMKA seems almost true, demonstrated with the two important points that the author presented which explains the confusion. First, the Federal Government is not responsible for *al-Azhar* curriculum since it is under the purview of state governments. This means that the Federal Government cannot provide financial assistance and teachers to a religious school. Secondly, teachers' requirement for SABK today has been considered as what practiced in SMKA. Teacher requirements are only considering the national curriculum because the subject of *al-Azhar* is not considered as in the national curriculum. Based on these two matters, the author believes that the goal of religious schools will change though not directly but gradually, unless there is a serious initiative from the state religious authorities to prevent it.

The cooperation and coordination atmosphere between the two sides do not exist because they needed the political power of various state religious authorities which understand the religious school education, a high level of commitment and the sense of love for Islamic education. Without which, religious schools will continue to repeat the exercise in the previous acquisition, which among others has failed to continue its role and maintain the goals of its establishment.

#### *Conflicts in Preserving al-Azhar Subjects as the School's Identity:*

When a problem occurs on a religious school, such as the loss of *al-Azhar* curriculum as the school's identity, the responsible parties are the school and the state religious authorities. This blame is natural because from day one, the curriculum has always been the responsibility of the school and the state. In 1977, during the acquisition of religious schools conducted by the Ministry of Education, loss of identity occurs without being consciously detected, because the religious schools are no longer classified as Government School according to the Education Act 1961. Government schools are not the same with the Government Assisted School according to the Education Act 1996 as was the case in religious school registration process.

However, the perception of the public at large inclusive of the religious schools and the state has put the blame of the loss of identity to the ministry since it was the Federal Government that has taken over that role. This means that the ministry should take a more concrete responsibility to preserve the curriculum. As a result, the states are now skeptical on the commitment and the ability of the Ministry of Education on this issue.

In the instance of the registration of religious schools, although the ministry is still putting the responsibility to states and schools, marginalization and negligence of the curriculum to the curriculum will still be affected due to the lack of commitment and cooperation from the ministry. This shows that the coordination cooperation is biased because it did not consider the factor on best mechanism for the state. This is certainly due to the fact that the state and religious schools have a limited ability to sustain the changes. The ability of the state must not only be seen in the financial context, but also in good management skills, legal security and a more systematic educational planning. Therefore, the options available to the state and religious schools are to protect it according the strength that they have.

The institutionalization of religious schools into the national education policy has previously made their existing curriculum to slowly disappear as what had happened to all SMKA schools which part of it was previously religious schools. The loss of this identity means that the religious schools have deviated from achieving the Islamic educational philosophy as designed when it was in the traditional system. However, at the same time, there have been no examples of modern education system, a model that can replace the objective the establishment of religious schools that can achieve the Islamic educational philosophy. The tendency of some government schools is to take their own initiative in creating the *al-Azhar* curriculum and preparing the students for the Malaysian Higher Religious Certificate (*Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia* or STAM) qualification which is the highest evaluation method for *al-Azhar* curriculum.

In the author's opinion one important aspect to consider is the aspect of a school transformation towards Islamic educational philosophy. Is it worthwhile for a total of 55 SMKA and Federal Religious Secondary School (*Sekolah Menengah Agama Persekutuan* or SMAP) which was established in Malaysia merely achieving

some of the goals which was long implemented by a religious school? Is it worthy for a new school to be established merely to introduce religious stream schools which do not introduce the *al-Azhar* curriculum? Is it enough to introduce it in the national mainstream schools as Integrated Full Boarding School (*Sekolah Berasrama Penuh Integrasi* or SBPI) as of today? Where is the wisdom of promoting the common religious mainstream schools when the schools that implement *al-Azhar* curriculum were simply sidelined since the beginning of independence?

In the matter of religious schools registration, the interpretation on the implementation of *al-Azhar* curriculum has raised suspicions among the state religious authorities and religious schools and this situation continues to occur. This can be seen clearly in the memorandum of understanding between the states with the Ministry of Education. For example, an early draft of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) reads: "...these religious schools shall implement the National Curriculum as prescribed under the Education Act 1996". In the same paragraph regarding the *Al-Azhar* curriculum, it is stated as follows: "...These religious schools may implement Religious Education curriculum approved by the Council of Rulers".

The status of *al-Azhar* subjects has been neglected in the MoU draft. This can be seen in different statements where the use of the word 'shall' when referring to the national curriculum and the use of the word 'may' for *al-Azhar* curriculum. These words have widespread legal implications for the curriculum in terms of implementation. The same situation occurred to the state religious authorities and other religious schools. Discussion on other states is not included in this study. It requires other different study to make comparisons on the implications and on the result when the memorandum of understanding was signed. This situation should not have happen even with appropriate amendments and modifications made if the state religious authorities did not approve. In Kelantan, the MoU draft has been modified with a word that can save the *al-Azhar* curriculum to be maintained as follows: "...*Al-Azhar* curriculum shall be implemented as currently practiced by schools under the administration of the Foundation".

Based on the above, the definition is more rigid and it secures the position of *al-Azhar* curriculum in religious schools in term of its implementation. Consolidation occurred in Kelantan is based on experience over the years, especially from the history of the acquisition of religious schools in 1977. This experience has served as a reminder to Kelantan to be more careful in decision making. Careful decision making can be seen when registration of religious schools in Kelantan only involves 20 religious schools in comparison to a total of 60 religious schools. This means that the State Government only registered 31% of its religious schools whilst the remaining is dependent on the outcome of the registration of the first 20. Registration of these 20 schools is an initial step to see whether the desire and ambition of the original religious school can be reinforced in national education system.

Abdul Halim (2001) views this identity as an Islamic legacy that will strengthen faith and is a pride to the Muslims community. Any attempt to deny, reduce, neglect or sideline it will result in a never-ending conflict of goals and would pose trouble in finding a solution. However, the implementation of the curriculum will not be successful without strong financial resources and strong teams of teachers where both aspects continue to be a dispute between the state and federal jurisdiction

#### *Adaptation in al-Azhar Curriculum in Producing Muslim Scholars in National Education System:*

For a better understanding of this research, the authors have divided the conclusions of the study as follows:

- Differences in understanding the concept, purpose and philosophy of education has become a point of conflict and created a gap between the two parties in formulating appropriate policies for religious schools. Any empowerment efforts made will not have great meaning but merely physical and temporary such as the aspects of national curriculum requirements and other infrastructure facilities.
- The practice of dual curriculum in religious schools has created large implications to Islamic education system and national education system because it has created the problems of knowledge separation thus the dualism dilemma in its mechanism. This has in turn made the integration and prioritisation processes a difficult process which ultimately put *Al-Azhar* curriculum as the secondary curriculum or ancillary in the national education policy whereas it was the core curriculum for religious schools.
- Standardisation for the subjects in *Al-Azhar* curriculum is not an easy task because its existence is based on the curriculum independently managed between states according to their expertise and interpretation. In fact, these differences also exist in different schools in the same state. The standardisation and recognition calibration are the national examination certificates which may be considered as an initial effort towards standardisation.
- The status of the subjects in *Al-Azhar* curriculum is lacking in the aspects of federal legislation. The absence of laws and regulations that guarantee the identity of any religious school in terms of *Al-Azhar* curriculum retention led the state religious authorities and the religious schools to continue to distrust and fear any efforts undertaken by the Federal Government. The position of *Al-Azhar* curriculum is actually weak in term of assurance from the state legislature. Status of implementation practices and structure of studies cannot be

demonstrated in term of quality assurance and recognition because there are no coordination and rating efforts in accordance with certain standards.

#### *Conclusion:*

The presence of secular education system which received colonial support and encouragement has resulted in religious school education system which was the actual Malay education system continued to be isolated. This has led to the mindset of the Malays to deviate further from the genuine outline of Islamic thought. Islamic education is only viewed in terms of a subjects and no longer as an institution that has managed to establish the true way of life and the culture of the Malay Muslims before the arrival of the colonial masters. *Al-Azhar* curriculum is the core curriculum and the manifestation of the actual Islamic education curriculum. Its absence will result in failure to the aspiration of individual development or retardation in its implementation process.

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