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Teaching of Arabic in Malaysia

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Abstract: The study aims through a deductively descriptive method to focus on the influence of Arabic on the Malaysian culture. The most important milestones of Arabic in the Malaysian context and the most stand out Malaysia public and private institutions which made the most contributions in spreading Arabic in the Malay culture. The study begins with the arrival of Islam and Arabic in the Archipelago as a precursor to uncover the depth of the influence of Arabic in the minds and culture of the Malays. The influence of Arabic on the following aspects will also be discussed: the writing script of the Malay, the educational system in schools and universities, the mass media in addition to the public Malaysian institutions such as the mosques, the public and private companies.

Keywords: Arabic, Arabs, Teaching of Arabic, influence, Malay culture, Malay scripts.

Abstrak: Melalui kaedah deskriptif yang dilakukan secara deduktif, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan tumpuan terhadap pengaruh Bahasa Arab ke atas budaya orang Malaysia. Pencapaian penting Bahasa Arab dalam konteks orang Malaysia dan yang paling utama sekali dalam kalangan institusi awam dan swasta di Malaysia adalah dengan memberikan sumbangan yang paling besar dalam penyebaran Bahasa Arab terhadap budaya Melayu. Kajian ini bermula dengan kedatangan Islam dan Bahasa Arab di nusantara sebagai pendahuluan untuk mendedahkan sedalam manakah pengaruh Bahasa Arab wujud dalam

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pemikiran dan budaya orang Melayu. Pengaruh Bahasa Arab terhadap beberapa aspek turut dibincangkan: skrip penulisan Bahasa Melayu, sistem pendidikan di sekolah dan di universiti, serta media massa sebagai tambahan kepada institusi awam di Malaysia seperti masjid, serta syarikat awam dan swasta.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Arab, bangsa Arab, Pengajaran Bahasa Arab, pengaruh, budaya Melayu, skrip Melayu

Introduction

The exact date of the beginning of language contact between Arabic and Malay cannot be objectively established since it has been a contested debate among the scholars. Some of them mentioned that it began even before the advent of Islam when the Arab merchants and sailors passed through it on their way to China and India. The contact between the Arabs, Chinese, Indians and Malays was not restricted only to trades exclusively but did include some abstract and literary forms of contact as well. Despite the claim of contact between Arab and Malay before Islam, we did not find any influence of Arabic on the old Malay to support the claim, partly because – if taken to be true- Malay was a local language that was not widely written and recorded on one hand, and it was not widespread as it was in the subsequent periods. In addition, the Arab merchants were primarily keen on establishing trades and profits, to safely return to their homelands filling their ships with camphor, amber and aloe trees in order to trade them with materials from the lands they sail through on their maritime route to China to arrive finally at the Malay Archipelago.

From this point, a more practical ground is to assume that Arabic came with the spread of Islam due to its position as the liturgical language of Islam being the language of the revelation and of the prophetic sayings of which the comprehension of these sources will be rendered impossible without the mastering of Arabic in addition to its role as the language of the Islamic triumphant conquest that open up nations and a religious language that prepare those who are interested in Islam to convert.

Some Malaysian scholars and historians who have been pursuing the topic of the arrival of Islam to the Malay Archipelago but they are also not in agreement on its exact date of arrival. Three theories emerged; that Islam might have arrived during the first one hundred

years after Islam in the Arabia directly form the cradle of Islam; or it might arrive from China in the ninth century C.E.; or it might arrive from India in the thirteenth century CE. A conference in 1963 CE was held to discuss on the issue and it was widely concurred that Islam may have arrived during the first century of Islam – between the 7th and 9th century through Arab traders and missionaries and subsequently began to spread peacefully through individual efforts. When it reached the knowledge of some local rulers they responded favorably to it, bringing their subjects and citizens with them and due to the concept of loyalty to their rulers in all aspects of life. Albeit such progress, Islam did not see a far reaching influence in the Archipelago except after the establishment of a number of strong Islamic Sultanates in the 13th century CE.

The Malay society during those periods were heavily influenced by the Hindu Buddhism influences and beliefs which were pervasive in many aspects of their life. The writing script adapted was that of Sanskrit origin. But after Islam, their life changed to the extent of discarding the Sanskrit script to have it replaced with the Arabic modified Jawi script. Consequently, Arabic began to be taught beside other essential Islamic disciplines such as language, Islamic Jurisprudence and Fiqh, but the knowledge tradition only began to develop beginning from the 17th century. This period had witnessed a more systematic approach to studying and teaching of Islamic disciplines when students and scholars managed to study the disciplines directly from their Arabic sources without relying most of the times on translation. The Malays only began to compile and write on the Islamic topic after they were able to absorb the Islamic sciences from its authentic sources.

Malay Renaissance and The Attention Given to Arabic

Many Malay scholars viewed that the initial Malay knowledge rise was initiated by the Pasai Sultanate in the 13th century. Subsequently its role was assumed by the Malacca Sultanate during the reign of Iskandar Shah whose policy was friendly and cooperative with the Islamic scholars who were encouraged to teach in the houses and mosques. The rulers after him followed his footsteps in committing to knowledge and their palaces continued to be frequented by the scholars and became centers of learning that produce translations and manuscripts. Some of these cities also had big libraries with extensive collections. This was the golden era of Islam in the Malay Archipelago (Abdullah Ishak, 1990, p. 141-142).

The initial Malay society had used Arabic in teaching and learning due to their contention that acquiring the Islamic sciences directly through the sources without the means of translation was more beneficial and significant. This had been the belief on all of the Sultanates in particular during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah (1446-1456 CE), Sultan Mansur Shah (1456-1477 CE) and later Sultan ‘Alauddin Riayat Shah. This had given rise to varied responses from the different strata of the society to the study of Arabic. The Sultan of Pasai Al-Malik AL-Zahir was said to be good at Arabic, and granted audiences to Islamic scholars. The Aceh Sultans had a dedicated department which write letters in Arabic and was headed by a chief scribe. Some of its foreign discussions were done in Arabic apart from formalizing the Arabic script to be used in agreements and accords (‘Alawi bin Tahir, 1985). Abdullah Munsyi, in this regard, explained the interest of Malay in Arabic during the 18th century: “The Malays when asked to make a choice of education would definitely choose the learning of Quran and Arabic as they see them beneficial for the worldly life and the hereafter” (‘Alawi bin Tahir, 1985). On another note, Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah or Hamka, a renowned Malay scholar mentioned in an opening speech of the establishment of the Arabic Language Academy in 1976 that Arabic is not exclusively owned by the Arabs as it is the language owned by all Muslims” (‘Alawi bin Tahir, 1985).

Arabic Language in Malay Writing Script

Due to the special position of Arabic to the Malay Muslims as the language of the Quran, the prophetic sayings in addition to its role as the language of Islamic rituals, the Malay were not hesitant after their conversion and acquisition of the Islamic faith to replace the Sanskrit script with that of Arabic. Their oral tradition was to certain extent transformed into written discourses in a new writing system called the ‘Jawi letters’. Despite the phonological differences between Arabic and Malay; the old Malay only had half of the Arabic consonants and vowels totaling 28 namely: the ‘a’, ‘ba’, ‘ta’, ‘ja’, ‘da’, ‘ra’, ‘sa’, ‘ka’, ‘la’, ‘ma’, ‘na’, ‘wa’ and ‘ya’, the adapted Arabic scripts seamlessly express the Malay phonetics. In a short period of time, the Arabic script managed to spread and displace the old Sanskrit writing thoroughly to the extent that no manuscript was found in traditional Malay except that it was written in the Arabic script.

Among the most significant influence of Arabic script on Malay is its borrowing of three phonemes namely: ‘za’, ‘sha’ and ‘fa’ (Abdullah Hassan, 1974, p. 15). Other Malay specific phonemes which were absent in Arabic such as: ‘nya’, ‘nga’, ‘gha’, ‘cha’ and ‘pa’ were represented by modifying certain Arabic letters.

The influence of Arabic on Malay was not only evident in the adaptation of Arabic scripts but also in the extensive borrowing of Arabic words that include various aspects of life.

Borrowing of Arabic in Malay

The borrowing between Arabic and Malay took place unidirectionally from Arabic without any known Malay word to have entered Arabic. The borrowing began since the arrival of Islam to the Malay Archipelago when the earliest to be borrowed were religious terms such as ‘solat’, ‘zakat’, ‘doa’ etc. After the widespread of Islam in the region, borrowing was an active undertaking that it included various aspects of life such as religious, scientific, intellectual, legal, sociological, material and others (M. A. J. Beg 1979, pp. 83-84).

Malay was even seen as being a more receptive language to borrowing comparing to other languages as some borrowings did occur despite the availability of the terms to represent the meaning and concept such as the borrowing of the word ‘kalbu’ from Arabic despite the availability of its Malay equivalence ‘hati’. Malay occasionally allowed the borrowing of more than one word to express the same meaning such as the borrowing of Arabic synonyms such as: ‘badan’, ‘jasad’ and ‘jisim’ to express a meaning already expressed by the Malay word ‘tubuh’. Sometimes Malay borrowed words and their derivatives such as ‘ilmu’, ‘ilmiah’, ‘alim’, ‘ulama’, ‘maklum’, ‘maklumat’ despite the morphological system of Malay that allows the transformation of the root ‘ilmu’ to its nominative, accusative, plural and adjective forms without the need to resort to borrowing.

The Size of Arabic Words in Malay

Since the 18th century there had been efforts by some Orientalists to identify the number of Arabic words in Malay but their studies were inconclusive due to their lack of knowledge in both Arabic and English which were mentioned by Beg (M. A. J. Beg, 1979, p. 81). Howinson mentioned in 1801 around 150 Arabic words in Malay; Shellabear in

1902 mentioned around 285 words which was revised by Swettanham in 1910 to be 219 words; Winsteadt's study in 1921 saw a significant increase of 1001 words. In 1964 Wilkinson concluded in his dictionary that the Arabic loan words in Malay was 892.

Local scholars who studied the subject concluded with higher results from that of the Orientalists. In 1931 Muhammad Said Sulaiman concluded a total of 1725 words. In 1941 Hamid Ahmad concluded a significantly higher number of loan words when he announced a total of 2000 words (Nik Safiah Karim, 1996, p. xi). Subsequently, in 1987 Amran Kasimin concluded that total number of Arabic loan words was 1679 (Amran Kasimin, 1987).

The Malaysian Language and Heritage Academy in its compilation of Malay thesaurus had indicated the etymology and origin of words by indicating the donor language.¹ Arabic loan words ranked second with 1117 words in Malay after English loan words with 1556 words. But the conclusion of the Academy in this regard was met with some criticisms as mentioned by Amran Kasimin who accused the Thesaurus had ignored to indicate some of the most familiar Arabic loan words in Malay such as 'awal', 'berkat', 'ghalib', 'hemah' and others (Amran Kasimin, 1987, p.23). Aرسال Ibrahim recounted the Arabic loan words in the Malay Thesaurus by the Academy and found an additional 205 Arabic loan words that were left unmarked (Arsal Ibrahim, 1995, p. 189).

Despite the discrepancies between the results of the studies on Arabic loan words in Malay, one cannot simply play down their significances due to the challenge and complexity of such undertakings. Some of these words had been around and became deeply blended with Malay to the point of taking them as natural Malay words despite their Arabic origin. In addition, many of these words had gone through some forms of semantic shift, while as many as 70% of them went through morphological and phonetical shifts (Arsal Ibrahim, 1995, p. 11).

In this regard, it is observed that the studies on the Arabic loan words in Malay were to certain extent, subjective and full of personal judgements. The result of these studies reflects their degrees of observance to the subject matter and their awareness of the changes that take place. For an example, Beg did not indicate the Arabic origin of the word 'Sejarah' (History) in Malay. Some others did indicate their

origin but differed in determining its root. Amran Kasimin viewed that the word was taken from the Arabic ‘sīrah’ with the addition of the vocal ‘jīm’ (Amran Kasimin, 1987, p. 98, 53). Aرسال Ibrahim viewed that the word originated from the Arabic ‘shajarah’ as it was said in Arabic ‘shajaratul al-nasab’ while the word ‘afwah’ was originally taken from the Arabic ‘afwah’ (Arsal Ibrahim, 1995, p. 104)

It is worth mentioning that high number of loan words does not necessarily reflect the reliability of the studies as many of these words are on different levels of absorption in Malay. Some of them were no longer in use and ceased to be part of spoken and written discourse. Many only remain as archaic words in dictionaries and old manuscripts. The word ‘wazir’ for example remains in the old history books, after its Malay equivalent of Sanskrit origin gain more popularity: Menteri (‘Abdul Razzaq Hasan Muhammad, 1996, p. 22). Some of them profoundly add to the list what is perceivable to be of Arabic origin without any justifiable explanation. For example, the thesaurus of Dewan Bahasa relates the Malay word ‘melarat’ (poor) to the Arabic word ‘madharrah’ (calamity) since its semantic range would also include the meaning of poor as it is a type of calamity. But Aرسال Ibrahim viewed this as a pointless exaggeration since the transformation of the vocal ‘dha’ to ‘la’ is very awkward and rare to be found with other words in Malay (‘Abdul Razzaq Hasan Muhammad, 1996, p. 88). On the other hand, some of the studies did not pay attention to some of the Arabic loan words in Malay due to the significant shifts that had affected its structure, sound and meaning. Even Amran Kasimin who criticized the Dewan Bahasa for neglecting to indicate the origin of some Arabic loan words in Malay and Aرسال Ibrahim who discovered an addition of 205 other Arabic loan words in the Malay Thesaurus missed out on certain words such as ‘selesa’ (comfortable) which has a possible origin from the Arabic word ‘salisa’ of the same meaning.

In this regard, the issue of quantitative study of the Arabic loan words in Malay in the studies varied between exaggeration and rejection. Perhaps, a more moderate view on the issue is that of Sheikhu who took in all the previous studied and concluded that Arabic loan words in Malay is between 1300 to 2000 words without inclining to commit to a certain number.

One of the characteristic of borrowing is the naming of Malay Muslim children with Arabic names as it has become a norm in the Malay

culture to gain blessing with the name of the Prophet ‘Muhammad’ in compound names. Male children are given the name ‘Abd’ (servant of) added to a name from the names of Allah. This is in addition to the names of the companions, the members of the house of the Prophet, the names of prominent scholars and jurists. The names of females normally take after the names of the wives of the Prophet, His daughters and companions.

Arabic in Malay Education System

Teaching Arabic in Malaysia went through various periods. In the period before the Independence of Malaysia, there was the traditional Islamic schools during the 19th century. It was similar with study circles normally found at certain corners of mosques or the gatherings at the houses of the masters. Those Muslim scholars and educators taught Arabic in their schools to the children of the Malay society as part of the Islamic education curriculum. The method of teaching Arabic during that era was highly dependent on the grammar translation method which focused chiefly on the reading skills rather than on the communication skills.

After the independence of Malaysia in 1957, the teaching of Arabic in Malaysian schools had taken a systematic turn to keep up with the demand to understand the primary sources of Islam: the Quran, prophetic sayings and other Islamic Sciences. In 1977, 11 national religious secondary schools of which Arabic is a compulsory subject in its syllabus for the religious school students (*Prosiding Wacana Pendidikan Islam (Siri 1)*, 2002, 179). These schools apart from teaching English and Malay, also used Arabic as a medium of instruction in learning the Islamic subjects such as Quranic sciences, Islamic Monotheism and Jurisprudence. Students would finish their study on this level in five years before they sit for the Malaysia General Certificate (Zainal Abidin Abdul Kadir, 1990, p.3). Subsequently, some States governments established their own religious schools through donation drives, or sponsorship from the Endowment Fund and Zakat contribution from the Muslim public. The Islamic Religious Council of the states were responsible for the operation and maintenance of these schools. The number of governmental religious schools now accounted for 1187 schools nationwide (Abdul Rahman Chik, 2012).

The religious schools, apart from the mainstream national curricular, had more subjects being taught for Islamic disciplines and Arabic. Textbooks are normally available in Arabic, imported from abroad or locally compiled. In normal non-religious schools, Arabic is offered as one of the elective subjects of foreign languages beside French and Japanese. Interested students can take the Arabic subject for three years to finish the intermediate level.

Arabic at the Malaysian Primary School

The Malaysian Ministry of Education issued in 1998 a circular to teach Arabic at all public national primary school in accordance to the recommendation by the Central Committee Curriculum in November 1996. The implementation of this new policy was in several stages. Initially Arabic as a subject was offered in the early primary school years as an additional subject entitled Arabic Language for Communication. The Ministry began by implementing the teaching of this subject in 97 primary schools as experiments.

In 2003, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi the then Prime Minister of Malaysia embarked on a national agenda campaign called the Civilizational Islam. Within the agenda, is a new approach of in education to nurture a character aspired by the teaching of Islamic. The program was known with the acronym J-QAF of which each letter stands for the elements that make up the program; the teaching of the Arabic scripts Jawi, the skill to recite the Quran, the teaching of Arabic and the practice of Islamic essential known as Fard 'Ain (Nik Mursyidah Nik Din, 2009, p. 9).

J-QAF Program

The Program had contributed significantly to consolidate the teaching of Arabic in Malaysia. From being offered as an elective, it was eventually made compulsory to all students of national primary schools in Malaysia until the secondary schools. As for the non-Muslim Malaysians, Arabic remained an elective subject along with other foreign languages subjects such as Mandarin and Tamil.

The J-QAF program was implemented seamlessly by the Ministry of Education in different levels due to the initial problem of lack of teachers to implement the program at school. In 2005 the program was implemented at 1221 schools with the assignment of 3663 teachers to

implement the program. Every year there was an increase of 16% of the total schools which launch the program and this was also to keep up with the growing number of graduates from the Islamic studies and Arabic Language who can teach the program. In the end of 2010, the number of national primary schools which implement the program was 7835 with the number of Arabic language teachers of 32171 (Nik Mursyidah Nik Din, 2009).

Objectives of Arabic Language Subject at the Primary Level

The Ministry of Education Malaysia in 1967 formed a special committee to observe the quality of textbooks in schools and it was known then as the Textbook Committee under the Department of Educational Research and Planning at the Ministry. Its functions and responsibilities were varied and grown over the years and in 1972 it became a specific department responsible for textbooks development. Among its functions were to endorse and authenticate the textbooks selected, ensuring quality observance in the textbook production, determining textbooks pricing, distributing the textbooks to schools under the book loan program, observing the use of textbooks at schools and reviewing the contents of textbook (Muhammad Baqir Yaakub, 2008, p. 66).

The process of writing of textbook began at the Department of Textbooks at the Ministry. Within this purview lies the responsibility to prepare a comprehensive syllabus for Arabic Language that includes the preparation of the manuals for the textbooks, the outlines and objectives it aims to achieve. A number of subject matter experts and teachers were involved in this project. After that, the Language Academy will select writers of these textbooks for the Arabic Language subject for all the primary levels. This would be done through a public advertisement for calling for proposals openly from experts in Arabic Language among the Malaysians. After the selection of the best proposals, three of the best writers will be selected to write the textbooks for Arabic Language subject for the primary school level.

The Director General of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, Abdul Rafi'e Mahat mentioned that the general objective for offering Arabic language at the primary level is to enable the students to master the basic listening, conversational, writing and reading skills, in addition to strengthening the grammatical rules in their minds with regards to Arabic Language as an international language widely used in various

fields such as politics, economy, communication, culture and others (Buku Panduan: Dasar, Pelaksanaan dan Pengurusan Kurikulum J-QAF, p. 123).

To implement this objective, Arabic Language teaching should have a set of processes that will cover all the necessary aspects of training, curriculum design and assessment. The textbook department at the Ministry had laid down the principles, standards and criteria for preparing the textbook in Arabic. Writers selected to write the textbook should adhere to these conditions (Kurikulum BERsepadu Sekolah Rendah: Sukatan Pelajaran Bahasa Arab, p. 5-18):

First: Language Skills (Listening, Conversation, Reading, Writing) that was regarded as the backbone to learn language for students.

Second: Situations; the selection of topics for the subjects for primary schools is according to the various situations related to the students, their immediate experience and their surroundings. These topics revolve around the students' world at home, school, games, wishes and moving on to the apparatus of modern time such as sciences and technology. This is inclusive of topics related to the nation to spread awareness and love to the country to prepare for a generation who is willing to defend its freedom and sovereignty. Students are taught to express these situations with different language functions such as greetings, instructions, requests, conversations and others.

Third: Language materials; the teaching must be make use of the 600 essential words list derived from the surrounding of the students and related to the subjects being studied. These words are common words that are fond in various fields and are updated according to the latest linguistic progress. The presentation of these words in stages to suit the physical and mental development of the school children. In addition to above-mentioned, the syllabus also focuses in teaching Arabic Language Grammar to enhance the capability of students to use grammatically and morphologically correct Arabic. Most significant Arabic Grammar was introduced indirectly through certain subjects without exposing the students directly to the grammatical terms. These are: Attached and detached pronouns, Indicative nouns, particles, questioning tools, nouns that signify time and place, verbs (past, present, instructive), singular, dual and plural.

Forth: The foundations of the curriculum that aim to nurture the noble patriotic values in the students such as:

1. Cognitive and Knowledge: This foundation includes elaborating the understanding of the students through their exposure to the various other fields such as geography and sciences. Some significant current issues are also dealt with in the context of the students teaching and learning.
2. Noble values: Inculcating noble values through the process of teaching and learning Arabic aims at preparing a noble man that has a positive ethic that would subsequently be a member of a mannered society. This is also to develop the local noble values for the Malaysian society directly or indirectly and bringing those values over to the international level to keep abreast with the global needs.
3. Local values: Nurturing local values in the process of teaching and learning Arabic language to inculcate love towards the nation and submission to its law and order. This is to produce citizens who are responsible on his country and fellow citizens.
4. Social systems and culture: Taking into consideration the systems in the society and culture in the process of teaching and learning. This is achieved through nurturing the students to observe manners in their conversation, using the polite styles suit with the norms of Malaysian society and its customs. This is in addition to the etiquettes of the Arabic culture and its most noble values.
5. Skills with added values; taking into consideration the experience of the students inside classrooms, the real world they are facing and the contemporary issues. Based on this, the comprehensive curricular in teaching Arabic Language relates with teaching other skills required in this contemporary era. These skills are: Thinking skills, IT and social media platform literacy skills, learning strategies skills, futuristic studies, multi intelligence and comparative learning.

Arabic in Malaysian Higher Institution of Learning

Seven out of twenty Malaysian public universities offer teaching Arabic programs on all of the tertiary levels: bachelor degree, Master and Doctorate. These universities are: International Islamic University

Malaysia (IIUM), National University Malaysia (UKM), Islamic Sciences University Malaysia (USIM), Putra University Malaysia (UPM), Sultan Idris University for Teaching (UPSI), Sultan Zainal Abidin University (UNISZA) and the University of Malaya (UM). Some other public universities such as Mara Technology University offers Arabic as one of the foreign languages beside Japanese, Mandarin and French. As for the private universities totaling 32 in number scattered all over the country, 16 of them offer diploma course in Arabic Language or twinning program with a university degree from a reputable university such as Al-Azhar University or Yarmuk University (Teaching Arabic in Malaysia: <http://www.arabtimes.com/portal/article>). Among the most prominent of these private universities are those institutions that are of the college university status such as Selangor Islamic College University (KUIS), Johor Islamic College, International Islamic College of Kelantan (KIAS), Pahang Islamic College (IKIP).

International Islamic University Malaysia is considered at the most forefront among these institutions in terms of the status that it accorded to Arabic as it is its second medium of instruction after English. Arabic is made compulsory to all its students on the Bachelor level regardless of their majors and academic backgrounds. The Quranic Language Division at the Center for Languages and Pre-University Development. Arabic program is divided into teaching Arabic for specialists and non-specialists. The non-specialist program is divided into several categories: Arabic for academic purposes, Arabic for career purposes, Arabic for practical purposes for Medical Faculty and Arabic for Islamic studies.

Arabic for specialists is taught as bachelor, Master and Doctorate programs at three Department of Arabic at three different faculties. The first one is at the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge, the second one is at the Faculty of Education and the third one is at the Faculty of Language and Management. The rationale of having three different departments for Arabic in one institution is due to the different objective and orientation of the contents; for Islamic study purposes, educational purpose and management purposes.

Malaysian Universities through the Council of University Debating have also been promoting activities to promote Arabic as a medium for debating championship among local higher institutions of learning. Debating and public speaking competitions were organized to improve

the performance of Arabic among students. Arabic debating and public speaking competitions were organized on state and national levels involving participation even from schools. Since participating in debating and public speaking activities encourages students to speak and practically apply the language in various situations, Arabic debate and public speaking was officially made a compulsory subject for the students of Arabic language in one the faculties in IIUM.

Arabic in Malaysia News Media

The Media has undoubtedly a significant role in spreading language and contributing to its development. There are many programs that promote the learning of Arabic on the Malaysian broadcasting channels. The TV 9 channel has a program for teaching Arabic for children entitled (Gang Bahasa Arab) or Arabic Language Group broadcasted every Monday until Thursday every week. The program presented attractive lessons in Arabic using games, songs and short role plays.

Another television channel (TV Al-Hijrah) have Arabic Islamic programs with subtitles in Malay such as the programs ‘Lau kāna baynanā’ (If only the Prophet is between us), ‘fatab’ unī’ (Follow me), ‘Al-Qurān fajrun jadīd’ (Al-Quran: A New Dawn). Another channel (Astro Oasis) presents a program on The Wise Caliphs which highlight on the life of the first four Caliphs and their efforts to spread the message of Islam in Arabic.

Radio broadcasting channel such as IKIM.FM run by the Malaysian Institute for Islamic Understanding has some programs dedicated to learning Arabic such as ‘Durūs ‘Arabiyyah’ (Lessons in Arabic), ‘Dunyā al-aṭfāl’ (Kid’s World) and ‘Hayya bi al-‘arabiyyah’ (Lets speak Arabic) that present every day simple Arabic expressions and conversations.

There are two monthly Arabic newspapers currently in circulation in Malaysia: Ahlan Wa sahlān newspaper and ‘Al-Athīr’ which highlight on international and Malaysia local news for the information of Arab expatriates and tourists in Malaysia. The newspapers constantly depict information on tourist spots, hotels and restaurants. Another local newspaper the Utusan Malaysia had a weekly column written with the Jawi script for promoting and preserving the tradition.

Arabic in the Mosques and Prayer Places

Mosque in Islam is a place to declare servitude through forms of worshipping to the Creator. Since worshipping in Islam is comprehensive of any other form of activities in life to worship God and since knowledge is a prerequisite to perform worshipping in Islam correctly, the mosque plays an important center to spread this knowledge and become its beacon and center. The word mosque in Arabic has a synonym of the word that share its root with the word that carries the meaning of university in Arabic 'jāmi'ah'. In fact, the advent of universities in Islamic history began initially at the mosques.

'Umar al-Khattab, the second Caliph was the first who commanded the building of mosques outside the Arabian Peninsula when he instructed 'Utbah bin Ghazawan to build a mosque in Basrah in the 14th of Hijrah calendar. Not long after that, the mosques spread to all the lands of the Muslims. It was the center of education and teaching religious sciences including Arabic to children and adults was a part of it. Hence, mosques became one of the facilities in the Islamic world that plays to role of preserving the Muslim identity and improving the religious as well as the worldly life of the Muslims.

The mosques and Islamic prayer places in Malaysia, with their proper management structure and funding strive to become the beacon for spreading Islamic religious teachings and Arabic language. Teaching in mosques had begun as early as the arrival of Islam in the form of religious study groups or Quranic recitation groups to teach Muslims the recitation of Quran and understanding the rituals of Islam in addition to presenting some basic lessons in Arabic.

The Malaysian government and welfare organizations including good Samaritans from among the members of the public have been sponsoring and contributing in building mosques and prayer places in all corners of the country and equipping them with the necessary facilities. These mosques and prayer places had significantly contributed in preserving the identity of the Muslims in Malaysia against the background of its multi-ethnic and religious population.

Although the Arabic Islamic school system in Malaysia today has replaced the study circles in the mosques and prayer places to keep up with the modern education system, they nonetheless continued to

organize programs and various educational activities such as programs for memorization of Quran, Arabic learning classes together with classes in Islamic Fundamental Belief, Jurisprudence, Prophetic sayings to those who are interested in learning the religious knowledge. The method of teaching however remains traditionally oriented depending more on memorization, repetitive expressions, spontaneity in simplifying Arabic and selective in topics.

Most of the study circles at the mosques related to learning Arabic do not have any clear strategic objectives in teaching Arabic and Islamic education subjects. The teaching and learning processes do not have a mid or long term in the processes of teaching and learning. This is due to the mechanisms of managing these programs which are normally voluntary in nature. Some mosques and prayer places which fall under the jurisdiction of the State Religious Council are better managed than the others. They have specific allocation to employ specific management team and strategized the programs and activities. In such a conducive environment, some mosques even managed to properly collaborated with nearby or interested higher institutions of learning in providing certified courses in religious studies with an Arabic language subject included in the package.

Public and Private Organizations and Institutions

Arabic language and the Malaysian culture have always been interrelated and shared common ground since long time ago. Arabic had acquired a special position with the Muslims as it is incumbent upon them to study the language to at least understand the Quran, the prophetic sayings, the recitations they read in their prayers and other important sources of Islam.

On the other hand, due to the growing trade and diplomatic relation between Malaysia and the Arab countries, new needs for Arabic arises outside the traditionally religious realm. Government offices and private companies with interest in trades begun to offer Arabic language courses in for their employees. The government through its Public Service Department make it obligatory for all the junior officers in the foreign services to take a diploma course on international relations of which Arabic is one of the compulsory subjects for those who are interested to be assigned at the various Malaysian diplomatic, trade and educational offices in the Middle East. The Ministry of International Trade have an

Arabic course offered to its officers on a regular basis. Big companies with investment and projects in the Arab world regularly offer short courses on Arabic and Arab cultures to its employees to familiarize them with Arabic and Arab customs once they are assigned in those countries.

With the increase on Arabic part time classes in many institutions at the public and private levels, this has prompted the interest and acceptance of such programs from among the interested members of the public regardless of their age and social status. The time allocated for such classes normally is after the office hour or during the weekends.

Based on the above, the interest in learning Arabic among Malaysians has been strong and vibrant as Arabic is a religious language in addition to its importance in trade and diplomacy.

Conclusion

Arabic had left a long-lasting impact on Malay civilization and had become infused with it to extent that it has become a part of the Malay Islamic identity. Despite the current challenges that continuously to undermine the status of Arabic in the current globalization and cultural hegemony, the continuous pace and interest of the Malay in learning Arabic is a testimony that Arabic is a living language.

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In This Issue

Editorial

Articles

Abdul Rashid Moten

US Embassy in Jerusalem: Reasons, Implications and Consequences

Arshad Islam

Origin and Development of Unani Medicine: An Analytical Study

Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi

Epistemological Implication of al-Ghazzālī's Account of Causality

Muhammad Afif Bin Mohd Badrol, Abdul Bari Bin Awang, Sayed Sikandar Shah Haneef & Ani Amelia Zainuddin

The Gaps in Fatwā on Intersex Corrective Surgery: Some Reflections in the Context of Malaysia

Fethi B. Jomaa Ahmed

Corruption According to the Main Sources of Islam

Isiaka Abiodun Adams & Maryam Omolara Quadri

Nexus Between Social Media and Democratisation: Evidence From 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

Bouhedda Ghalia, Muhammad Amanullah, Luqman Zakariyah & Sayyed Mohamed Muhsin

Medical Ethics in the Light of Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah: A Case Study of Medical Confidentiality

Maszlee Malik & Syaza Farhana Mohamad Shukri

From Political Islam to Democratic Muslim: A Comparison between Rashid Ghannouchi and Anwar Ibrahim

Majdi Haji Ibrahim & Akmal Khuzairy Abd. Rahman

Teaching of Arabic in Malaysia

M. Moniruzzaman

The 14th General Election in Malaysia: End of an epoch and beginning of a new?

Hazizan Md. Noon, A.H.M. Zehadul Karim & Md. Sayed Uddin

Development and Modernization of OIC Member Countries: A Study Based on Selected Indicators

Research Note

Book Reviews

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