

MODERN EDUCATION AND PRAGMATISM IN MALAYSIA

Sakinah Munarwarrah Hashim ¹

¹ Student Development, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (E-mail: sakinah@unikl.edu.my)

Article history

Received date : 15-3-2023
Revised date : 20-3-2023
Accepted date : 1-7-2023
Published date : 20-7-2023

To cite this document:

Hashim, S. M. (2023). Modern Education And Pragmatism In Malaysia. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 8 (54), 11 - 17.

Abstract: *Since independence, Malaysia education system has undergone numbers of changes and modifications. As known to many, the British colonial authority left behind the former educational system. However, in 1961, there was a gradual transition from the British (English School) education system to a Malaysian school system focusing on unique Malaysian-oriented curriculum. In 1979, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammed, a former prime minister of Malaysia, introduced curriculum changes for the country's education system. He placed an emphasis on all levels of schooling on a holistic approach which includes intellectual, spiritual, physical, and emotional development for humans across all cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. As discussed above, Malaysia has already had a sound and stable educational system. However, in light of the current state of globalisation and recent insightful findings in relation to the world of education, it is necessary to implement pragmatism in Malaysia's education system in order to give students the best possible preparation for their futures. In particular, this study focuses on Malaysia's education system in light of the current state of the modern world, which is constantly changing and challenging. It is intriguing to see how pragmatism is applied and how things are going in Malaysian education landscape. The purpose of the study is to analyse and assess how pragmatism is applied in Malaysia's education system, specifically for Muslims. The elements and significance of pragmatism on education are further examined, and will interview people who have background of Islamic and non-Islamic background. And then followed by insightful discussion on pragmatism and Islamic education for Muslims.*

Keywords: *Education; Malaysian Education; Islamic Education; Issues of Pragmatism; Pragmatism in Education*

Introduction

As previously mentioned, despite the variety of its cultures, religions, and people, all Malaysians are constitutionally reserved the right for education, particularly when it comes to receiving Islamic education. Before exhaustively discussing the Islamic education and its connection to a pragmatic education system in Malaysia, it is best to firstly understand the public school system in Malaysia. Briefly, Malaysia has established six regulatory frameworks to develop people's potential in a holistic and integrated way. This is done in order to create people who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced based on a strong belief and devotion to God. These are the six regulatory frameworks according to Kamaruddin et al. (2005):

1. Education Act, 1996
2. Private Higher Educational Institutions Act, 1996
3. National Council on Higher Education Act, 1996
4. National Accreditation Board Act, 1996
5. Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Act, 1996
6. National Higher Education Fund Board Act, 1997.

Education System in Malaysia

This section will provide details on Malaysia's education system. As known to many, Malaysia offers a comprehensive curriculum or syllabus that corresponds to each student's degree of development. For instance, it offers early childhood education for children between the age of 4-6, known as kindergarten. The children will then attend primary school beginning at the age of 7 years old until they are 12 years old. This primary school has its own curriculum, Ahmad (1998). Although this approach to education can be said pragmatic, most education institutions, from my opinion, place more emphasis on theoretical knowledge mastery than practical application of the knowledge.

Pragmatically, the Malaysian government shoulders responsibility to ensure the relevancy and practicality of the education system in accordance to transformation as well as globalisation taking place in the modern world, and at the same time still focuses crucially on Islamic education policy as well (Se et al., 2021). This article demonstrates how, as globalisation policies have evolved, some aspects of educational philosophy have been applied. In general, pragmatism has not been completely abandoned, and other philosophical perspectives such as idealism, realism, and existentialism have also been considered. Now that we have come to this understanding, it should be noted that this country is genuinely revising its policy in a way that also takes Islamic principles into account.

In keeping with the argument given above, it should be noted that the Malaysia education system strikes a balance between revelation and reason as the curriculum or education system in Malaysia is inclusive and suited for all nationalities. This is due to the government's efforts to promote unity and harmony among Malaysia's various races through the platform of education. Below are the four concepts in education:

1. creativity
2. reflectivity
3. reciprocity
4. Responsibility. One of these four concepts, reflection, is a concept from John Dewey's 1993 book "How We Think," and it is one of the four. As a result, as we can see once more, some components of pragmatism are used in Malaysia's education system. In order to occasionally improve the work, it is necessary to apply

this notion to both students and teachers. Additionally, despite providing appropriate education for everyone in Malaysia, according to the majority of articles about the Malaysian education system, some of the education systems focused more on Islamic education as a reaction to globalisation. However, because Muslims make up the majority of the country's population, Islamic education plays a significant role in this context.

Islamic Education System in Malaysia

Muslims are constantly confronted with challenges in life, most recently the modern world and globalisation. Therefore, it is important to review the educational system in terms of the use of various pedagogical approaches, particularly with regard to the education of Muslim youth in, among them are pedagogy of philosophical inquiry and the pedagogy of Islamic philosophical inquiry as part of the Malaysian educational system today, apart from other aspects of education system.

From these angles, it is clear that there are some practical components to this discussion, and that we are employing the appropriate techniques to address any societal concerns that students may be experiencing today. A dialogue between two people will, for instance, take place in this method, and an instructor will undoubtedly serve as their guide. Hashim (2009) As a result, we can say that once the lecture or class is over, the students can apply the lesson, engage in peer discussion, and possibly come up with a solution to any problem while also making use of the Qur'an and Hadith. These papers suggest that this methodology can be used for all subjects, including Islamic Education, language, and science. I believe that we also need to use this strategy in all lower and higher education institutions to help students understand concepts better, as long as it does not go against the Islamic principles, especially for Muslims. This is due to the fact that some academic programmes offered by institutions in Malaysia still use outdated curricula from the colonial era, such as the secular curricula.

Pragmatic Issues and Challenges of Education in Malaysia

As we are all aware, several other nations, like Malaysia, are also struggling with the rise of social problems among the people. Education is thought to be an effective tool in combating this problem, notwithstanding the role that religion has in shaping good behaviour. The education system in Malaysia needs to be strengthened, as claimed by Nik Rosila. There are numbers of articles and studies emphasising on the importance of providing students with a pragmatic education in order to improve the education system. However, in order to assess whether or not all forms of pragmatic education are appropriate for Muslim students in particular, we as Muslims must also consider the following. Before getting into the specifics of this subject, it can be helpful to recap the importance of education in Islam and how it differs from the education system in Malaysia, as stated in the previous explanation.

Significance and Applications of Pragmatism in Malaysia Education

As everyone is aware, certain educational philosophy and practises are based on a pragmatic worldview. Additionally, the curriculum and teaching strategies used in Islamic education are where the majority of the issues with the system reside. In general, Prof. Rosnani mentioned that Islamic education has not been able to develop pupils who can think critically or come up with fresh and creative ideas. Hashim (2002). This can be clearly exemplify from the findings disussed in this study which show that the system has not been able to adequately educate Muslim young and prepare them to confront the challenges of their time. Additionally, as we cannot prevent the globalisation of information and communication technologies, we also

cannot stop the ideas and cultures of any nation in the world. The fact why Muslim youth and people today still prefer Western ideology or pragmatism is due to the fact that they do not think clearly or critically. Many Muslim youngsters or individuals believe in metaphysics which claims that change is the very foundation of reality and, as a result, there are no unchanging principles. As a result, all values are relative. Hashim (2004).

Therefore, the only way to get people to stand up for their own views and values is to teach them how to critically analyse, assess, and pick and choose the information they use. Muslim youth's ability for critical and creative thought may therefore be developed in this regard through pragmatic education. Additionally, there are evidences showing that Islam does not disagree with pragmatism's concepts in any way, according to its own epistemological framework. In fact, research has shown that the Islamic worldview contains many of the key components of pragmatism. The Islamic worldview is predicated on thinking and the ability to apply critical thought to problem-solving. Muslims should therefore not find it weird when Dewey or other pragmatists ask for critical or thinking intelligence. As we can see, we have already applied this pragmatism for better understanding in accordance with Islamic principles. A few Muslim scholars, including Al-Attas and al-Faruqi, claimed that the root cause of the division of Muslims is the dualistic educational system that includes both traditional, religious and liberal, secular educational systems. Al-Attas claimed that the loss of "adab" (discipline) caused by the confusion over knowledge is where the problem lies. Meanwhile, al-Faruqi linked the root cause to the liberal, secular educational system. The best solution that both have suggested includes an integrated educational system and the Islamization of modern knowledge. We all know from the explanation above that Islam does not reject pragmatism, but this time, the issue is the metaphysics of pragmatism and there are other civics on pragmatic by the West. Nevertheless, according to Prof. Rosanani Hashim, pragmatic education is necessary for the development of the Ummah.

Before analysing the details of pragmatic education, it is vital to look at the Ummah's educational growth in order to bolster the aforementioned statement. With regard to religious science, it was initiated in the late Umayyad period, and with regard to the natural and mathematical sciences, it was initiated throughout the Abbasid period, up until the initial attempts of reformation by Ibn Taymiyah against the corrupted system during his time. Additionally, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jamauddin al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmed Khan, and Muhammad Abduh made some attempts at reforming the educational system. If we looked at these three academicians from that era, they were practical. They implanted the notion that the ummah must be intelligent and educated.

Despite the reform movement, many Islamic institutions continue to use instructional strategies that lean toward moral prescription or unquestioned indoctrination. Prof. Rosnani again gave an example from one tragic incident: a number of schoolgirls in Saudi Arabia were burned to death during a school fire, and they were already at the front gate of the school running for their lives when they were stopped by this mutawwif who chased them back inside because they wore no head covers. They passed away since it was too late by the time they received their head coverings. From there, we can observe that the mutawwif acted wrongly in resolving the issue. Is wearing a hijab more significant than girls' lives? It is obvious that Islamic religious principles are being imposed in this situation without using logic.

In addition, she emphasised that the issue stems from the Malaysian education system itself because teachers are not inventive and creative in coming up with efficient ways to teach subjects that could be related to the Quran and Islamic history. In addition, some Islamic religious schools do not place a high priority on teaching mathematics and natural science in comparison to the teaching of religious sciences. From my personal standpoint, Malaysian education has placed a greater emphasis on cognitive syllabuses than on problem-based learning or the project approach, even though we are beginning to practise the practical approach to learning, like the fact that some subjects do not have final exams and all assessments are measured by projects or something similar. Prof. Rosnani argued that despite all of these observations, we can still recognise some aspects of pragmatism, particularly its concern with critical and creative intelligence, its support for the scientific process, and its encouragement of an inquisitive mentality. By establishing a religious curriculum that is sound in its metaphysics and Quranic ethics side by side, we need to check and balance things at the same time.

In addition, further analysis on the National Education Policy in Malaysia revealed that there is another article that highlights the Islamic Education Policy in Malaysia. Several elements, including social, political, economic, individual, and universalism, are mentioned in this article that affect that policy. According to what I've been led to believe, curricular integration is essential for all forms of education in this world, particularly Islamic education in Malaysia. Because of this, Malaysia's Islamic education policy is influenced by a number of issues. This study underlines the importance of adhering to the following four philosophies or characteristics for Islamic education policy in Malaysia: responsibility, reciprocity, contemplation, and innovation. Despite these four philosophies or characteristics, it was also claimed that teaching and learning must be combined in order to develop good students both internally and externally and to foster knowledge, critical, creative, and innovative thinking as well as good morals based on religion. So, as we can see, Prof. Rosnani's statement above really emphasises the value of being pragmatic.

Furthermore, Salma in his paper on the idea of thinking ability also underlined another relevance of pragmatism. She discussed the applicability of Lipman's pragmatism and the applicability of philosophy to kids in her paper. Ismail (2020) Once more, she claimed that Malaysia's education system is still majorly exam oriented. As a result, kids will only memorise what they learn and respond to questions to ace the exams. As a result, it is challenging to gain support for teaching philosophy to children from groups other than parents, teachers, and the community. Finding educators interested in incorporating philosophy into children's activities might be difficult. Teachers already have a lot on their plates, so it is unreasonable to expect them to take additional training classes in philosophy for kids and then expect them to implement "philosophical thinking" in their classrooms. Because of this, Prof. Rosnani Hashim argued that training the teachers is the simplest approach to introduce philosophy back into the classroom in Malaysia.

Both kids and adults can learn different perspectives on how to see and comprehend the world through philosophy. Instead of blindly accepting presumptions and preconceptions, philosophy teaches how to critically assess assertions made by others and how to think critically. Philosophy must be reintroduced to society, starting with schoolchildren, as it is highly relevant to Malaysian culture today. Thus, there is a need for the teaching of philosophy for children in the Malaysian context, but there is still a need to step back and re-examine some of the fundamental foundational aspects of philosophy for children and how it might be helpful to the

Malaysian education system, given the distinctive characteristics of Malaysia. Again, this demonstrates the significance or value of pragmatism in having the capacity for both creative and critical thought. However, according to another paper, the education philosophies highlighted do not complete the wholeness of human life as they do not pay attention to the spiritual aspects of human entity, Sultana (2014) and that is the reason, Prof Rosnani mentioned why we need to check and balance things at the same time as a Muslim. Another paper also mentioned that there are some proponents of pragmatism believing that knowledge is integrated between acquired and revealed knowledge, therefore claiming that Islamic philosophy of education is essentially pragmatism because it combines acquired knowledge and revealed knowledge, which cannot be separated.

Conclusion

As a whole, this topic has focused on the Malaysian education system and its emphasis on educating Muslims in particular. From these angles, it is clear that the Malaysian education system seeks to achieve the goals set forth by the Islamic education system, which is to establish a balanced education system. The Malaysian education system, however, is not fully capable of realising it due to the aforementioned problems. It is critical to remember that teachers play a vital role in educating children. According to the statistical data provided, there are students who continue to mix up some of the Western education philosophy with Islamic teachings or the Islamic root of education when it comes to "knowledge of pragmatism and Islamic perspective." In addition, this chapter discussed the goal of Islamic education from the viewpoint of a Muslim scholar and made comparisons to Western education. If we can properly comprehend from the foundation of Islamic teaching, the pragmatic term in education is actually quite plain. We do require Prof. Rosnani Hashim's explanation of the pragmatic phrase in terms of education, but we also need to be explicit and adhere to the law as Muslims. In other words, the government must understand how to educate and develop children who will be worthy representatives of the Muslim community or Ummah in the future and are not easily influenced by Western beliefs, particularly when it comes to education. This is the rationale behind Syed Naquib al-Attas' desire to Islamize secular concepts derived from any Western philosophies. It is desired that Muslim students and the Muslim community in Malaysia would be a well-balanced and moderate community, with a strong educational system that primarily highlights and appreciates the role of the teacher in education.

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