

## **Modernizing Education System in Pondok Sungai Durian, Kuala Krai, Kelantan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Pondok is the earliest traditional Islamic education institution established in Malaysia in the 19th century. Kelantan is one of the states in Malaysia with many pondoks until it's known as "Serambi Mekah" (the veranda of Mecca). However, the pondok system has experienced a drastic decline since the 20th century and some were closed. Among the factors that led to the fall of this institution are the challenges from modern educational institutions such as the schools and madrasah, the death of teachers and the dependence on the traditional system of studies. So, the pondok system needs to be modernised with the purpose to spread Islamic education and knowledge to the Muslim community in Malaysia today. Hence, the objective of this study is to review the development of Pondok Sungai Durian and to study the modernisation of the education system practiced by this pondok. To achieve this objective, this study used qualitative method of study, which were the library research and field studies based on document analysis, interviews and observations at Pondok Sungai Durian to obtain research data. The findings show that the transformation of Pondok Sungai Durian has created harmonisation between traditional learning system based on the halaqah, talaqqi and the use of turath kitab with the modern system based on a classroom system with a more contemporary syllabus. In addition, this system encourages and enhances students' knowledge as they are exposed to the traditional and modern studies at the same time, and this is important in generating the culture of knowledge and producing authoritative 'ulama' in this era of globalisation. Hence, the survival of Pondok Sungai Durian as a centre of Islamic education that retains the elements of traditional and modern studies is very relevant today. The development of the pondok system, especially Pondok Sungai Durian, has contributed to the development of charismatic characters among the 'ulama' (Islamic scholars), the intellectual development, da'wah and the growth of Islamic knowledge among Muslim community.*

**Keywords:** *Modernisation, Education System, Pondok of Sungai Durian, halaqah, class, Information Technology*

## INTRODUCTION

The method of teaching and spreading knowledge has become a method of connecting the educators and students who are always interacting among themselves. Students get more knowledge and skill, develop attitude, gain interest and other values when teachers choose the right method. Method is a mean to reach the aim of teaching, yet there is no one size fits all teaching method (Abdullah, 1995).

Interesting teaching and learning attract students to have more understanding and appreciate the teaching of Islam. There are many studies conducted by researchers which have contributed to the development of teaching methods in Islamic Education. Methodology or methods used throughout the teaching and learning process are essential to develop interest, mastery and continuous practice among students towards the knowledge they have learned. For reason, Islamic Education nowadays is less likely to become a favourite subject for students to learn and deeply understand. The practice of this method helps students to become a dynamic, holistic, ethical, and skilful person (Tengku Sarida Aini and Faridah Che Husain, 2008).

Pondok as an educational institution was developed during the expansion of Islam and the emergence of Malay-Islam states in the Malay world (Abdullah, 1995). However, nowadays this institution is struggling to compete with modern education institutions such as the school and universities, they are even being labelled as outdated and conservative (Salmiah, Zainab, and Salasiah Hanim, 2014 ; Rahimin Affandi, 2010). Changes have been made to make pondok as a recognised institution and these changes are not designed to jeopardise the ultimate aim of establishing a pondok, which is to deliver ideal Islamic Education and to become a centre of *da'wah*. However, enhancements are still needed. Among them are improvising materials and subject content through the inclusion of general subjects and skill, upgrading system and educational methodology, as well as expanding the function of the pondok as a centre for socioeconomic development besides being an educational centre (Gamal Abd. Nasir, 2010).

Moreover, studies should be done to identify the improvement needed by the pondok, including the approach, technique, material and technology. The enhancement made by pondok should be hand in hand with the present system by making technology as an added value without diminishing its practiced traditional identity (Solahuddin, 2016). Contemporary teaching and learning pattern should be embedded, however, the originality and legacy of the knowledge and method used should be preserved. Meanwhile, the element of modernity must be applied throughout the pondok management to make it up-to-date and to push the status of pondok to the next the level (Solahuddin and Zaheruddin, 2015).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This method has applied the qualitative method of study based on document analysis, observation and interview. Documents including books, journals, theses, and proceedings were analysed with the aim to collect more information about the intended study. Furthermore, observation of the location of study helped the researchers to gain in-depth and detail knowledge about the community or particular group of people. The method of observation also freely and openly draws the researcher close to the target group and helps to emphasis on the important matters of study (Sulaiman, 2005). Participant observation was chosen in this study to help the researchers identify the central point of this study. Researchers have joined the group of informants and the informants were informed of the attendance of the researchers to observe the real situation (Ghazali and Sufean, 2016). Meanwhile, interviews were conducted to collect information on facts, believe, feelings, and desire needed to achieve the objective of the study (Mohd Majid, 2000). The interviews were semi-structured. Using the interviews protocol developed before the interview, researchers, however, were given freedom to ask and to explore the answer given by the participants. The questions can be expanded, reduced, altered and arranged based on intended sequences to help the participants understand the questions given (Chua, 2011).

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF PONDOK INSTITUTION IN KELANTAN

Pondok is increasingly gaining support from the society, local and abroad, even around Indonesia, witnessing its strong role as a centre of education and *da'wah* (Mohd Roslan, 2015). Parts of the society still believe that pondok is the right institution to develop Islamic values and to strengthen soft skills among its students (Solahuddin, 2016). Furthermore, the number of pondok established keeps on increasing from time to time. Now, there are approximately 100 institutions of pondok around Malaysia, consists of 39 in Kelantan, 30 in Kedah, Perlis and Pulau Pinang, plus 12 in Terengganu (Mohd Izzuddin and Mohamad Zaini, 2015). Pondok has played an important role of spreading knowledge and the centre of the society, as well as a place to preserve the traditional teaching of Islam. This development has brought changes and improvement in the life of the community as a whole (Ali, 2008).

The establishment of pondok education system at first was known in Kelantan. It was initiated by the *ulama'* in the era of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah. The aim of establishing pondok was to educate the locals to understand the principles of Islam and the ways of performing *'ibadah* (Rosnani, Saheed, and Mohd Roslan, 2011; Mohd Roslan et al., 2012). The pondok system was rapidly expanding in Kelantan as more pondok were built to meet the need of pursuing knowledge among the locals in Kelantan or the visitors from outside Kelantan at the time (Nur Azuki and Nik Kamaliah, 2007). The development of pondok in Kelantan was supported by the expansion of Islam and the Islamic environment occurred in Kelantan as the centre of knowledge from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It had become the most influential institution during the moment (Ezad Azraai Jamsari et al., 2011). Pondok has also become a prominent institution with its own speciality (Rosnani et.al., 2011).

The first pondok established in Kelantan was Pondok Pulai Condong initiated by Haji Ab. Samad Abdullah or known as Tok Pulai Chondong (1792-1874) around the year of 1820 (Mohammad Ridzuan, 2001; Ramli, Khairi, & Ishak, 2016). The increase of charismatic Muslim scholars has made the pondok an increasingly popular institution in Kelantan. With this development, students from local and abroad have come to Kelantan to acquire religious understanding (Arba'iyah, 2008). The development also led to the rapid development of Islamic education in Kelantan during that era. Pondok has expanded and built to spread the knowledge of Islam and became popular not only in Malaysia Peninsular, also around the Southeast Asia. Among well-known pondok between the era of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Century were Pondok Kenali (1910), Pondok Terusan (1954), Pondok Kubang Pasu (1850) and Pondok Bunut Payung (1931) in Kota Bharu, Pondok Selehor (1912) and Pondok Sungai Pinang (1907) in Tumpat, Pondok Padang Jelapang (1925), Pondok Kubang Bemban (1937) and Pondok Lubok Tapah (1932) in Pasir Mas as well as Pondok Sungai Durian (1958) in Kuala Krai.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF PONDOK SUNGAI DURIAN, KUALA KRAI, KELANTAN

Pondok Sungai Durian (PSD) is the oldest pondok in Hulu Kelantan well-known as centre of knowledge and the widespread of Islamic knowledge particularly in Kelantan and Malaysia in general. PSD is known as Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Rahman, or its full name is Madrasah Muhammadiyah Pondok Sungai Durian. It is located in the district of Kuala Krai, Kelantan. PSD is registered under *Majlis Agama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu Kelantan* (MAIK) (The Council of the Religion of Islam and Malay Custom), 365/68 (MAIK Paper). The distance from this pondok to Kuala Krai is about 4 kilometres, whereas its distance with the capital city of Kelantan, which is Kota Bharu, is 66 kilometres.

This pondok was established on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1958 in Kampung Sungai Durian by al-Marhum Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Rahman Bin Sulaiman (1923-1988). In the beginning, it was operated in Guchil, Kuala Krai in 1957. As the number of children kept on increasing and the location was not suitable for pondok education, PSD was moved to Sungai Durian, which was built on the 4-acre land of Tuan Guru Haji

Abdul Rahman. At present, the area has been expanded to 12 acres with the effort from the neighbours of this pondok who have spent on the land. PSD keeps on developing and now the number of the buildings built for this pondok has reached 700.

The expenditure to manage and to build the infrastructure of the PSD is funded by the learning fee, donations from individuals, the society, and particular people. It has received the award of the Best Pondok (first place) from *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Agama Islam Negeri Kelantan* (Kelantan Department of Islamic Affairs) in conjunction with the celebration of *Ma'al Hijrah* at the national level of Kelantan in the year of 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2008 (<http://www.pondoksgdurian.com>). The total number of the PSD students recorded in 2018 is illustrated in the following Table 1.

**Table 1. Number of PSD Students in 2018**

Types of Students	No of students
Pondok	300
Tahfiz	40
Total	340

Source: PSD Administration Office

### **Modernising the Educational System in Pondok Sungai Durian (PSD)**

The endurance and survival of the institution of pondok nowadays is depending on the effective management as well as the role played by the teachers who determine the steadiness of the pondok educational system (Lokman, 2011). Excellent and impeccable management support the durability of pondok throughout cotemporary development. Efficient organisational management, healthy environment, and relevant curriculum help pondok to continuously involve in Malaysia Islamic educational streamline. Sharing sources, interactive learning method as well as the acceptance of contemporary knowledge such as the information technology give students more benefits in major streamline (Mashitah, 2013). Therefore, PSD has taken initiatives through changes made in the aspect of education as follow:

### **Bridging Traditional and Modern Learning System**

The learning approach applied in PSD is divided into modern (*nizami*) and traditional system (*'umumi*). The spark of this idea came from al-Marhum Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Rahman himself to improvise and develop pondok education. PSD has transformed the education system through the practice of modern education system, yet the traditional identity of pondok has not been neglected. As Tuan Guru Dato' Dr. Ab. Basit Haji Abdul Rahman (2009), the *Musyrif* of PSD mentioned:

"Even though modern education has entered pondok, it cannot violate its tradition, which is the pondok style. On the other hand, the presence of formal educational institutions is intended to reinforce existing tradition, known as pondok modern education. Change is an *islah* without losing the special features of the pondok. "

In Pondok Sungai Durian (PSD), the method of *halaqah* (circle) is applied only during *'umumi* learning as the *nizami* learning has been changed to classroom method. As mentioned in the following transcription:

"For your information, PSD has practiced two types of teaching approaches which are the method of *halaqah* and the classroom. The *halaqah* method is opened to all

students and the public, meanwhile, the classroom method is prepared only for students who have registered as pondok students.”

(inf2/G1/Tbl/Kh.PSD/19/7/2017)

The traditional learning system in pondok is known as the *'umumi*, where learning through the method of *halaqah* is guided by a teacher based on the syllabus and a particular *kitaab* is referred to. Through this method, students form a *halaqah* led by a teacher or the students follow the teaching in general with the guidance of a teacher who teaches based on particular *kitaab*. The administrator of PSD has prioritised this kind of traditional method because this system is found to have successfully produced brilliant new generations. The students learn from the work written by past scholars of the Archipelago and the Middle East. The learning session starts after the daily prayers in the mosque of PSD based on the scheduled timetable (Hasliza, 2008). It is open to the public and made compulsory to all *nizami* and *tahfiz* students of PSD. The class begins after the *rawatib* prayer every day except after Zuhur because it is allocated as recess time. The learning style of *'umumi* is through reading of the *kitaab* from the beginning to the ending of the class. All students need to memorise the *mataan* and they must let the teacher listen to the memorisation. The *kulliyah* after the *Isya'* prayer is attended only by higher-level students, around 30 of them (Yahya Yaacob, Interview, 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2017). The syllabus is determined by the pondok administrator. Priority is given to the study of classical *kitaab* produced by great scholars either in the language of Malay-Jawi or the Arabic Language. Among them are *Safwah al-Tafsir*, *Tafsir al-Nasafi*, *Tafsir al-Baidhawi (Tafseer)*, *Iqna'*, *Mahalli*, *Sullam al-Mubtadi*, *Bughyah al-Tullab*, *Matla' al-Badrain wa Majma'a al-Bahrain*, *Munniyat al-Musalli (Fiqh)*, *Sirah al-Nabawiyah Ibnu Hisyam (Seerah)*, *Ihya' 'Ulumiddin*, *Kitab Hikam*, *Sair al-Salikin (Tasawwuf)* and *al-Duur al-Thamin (Aqidah)*.

The modern system or *nizami* has specific schedule and syllabus which follows the syllabus of the Islamic primary school of the *Yayasan Islam Kelantan (YIK)*. It is an opportunity for the pondok students to further studies in other recognised institution such as the universities in Middle East. The syllabus bridges the syllabus of PSD and the Islamic schools managed by the YIK. There are three types of subjects which are the Arabic Language, religion and general studies. Students learn in a classroom like other classrooms with tables and chairs, and the class is conducted for 40 minutes for every subject (Yahya Yaacob, Interview, 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2017). The students will also sit for the examination three times a year, as the pondok will issue certificates to students who succeed in the final examination (*Syahadah Thanawiyah*). The form four students will sit for the examination of *Sijil Menengah Agama* (Islamic Secondary School Certificate) held by the YIK (Hasliza, 2008). Among the subjects to learn are *Tauhid*, *Fiqh*, *Hadith*, Arabic Language, the Foundation of *Jawi*, the History of Islam, al-Quran and *Tajweed*, *Qawaid al-Arabiah*, *Akhlaq*, *Mutala'ah*, *Tarikh Tasyri'*, *Faraid*, *Balaghah*, *Tarikh Adab wa al-Nusus*, Malay Language, English Language as well as *Nahu* and *Saraf*. This learning system is parallel to the system of other *Sekolah Agama Rakyat* (People's Islamic School) located in Malaysia Peninsular including Kelantan.

## The Tahfiz Study

In the year of 2016, PSD has taken an initiative to establish a *tahfiz* centre as one of its effort to diversify scholarly activities as well as keeping abreast of Islamic education current development. The *Tahfiz* centre, named as Maahad Tahfiz Ar-Rahman, has the aim of getting the students to memorise the 30 *juzu'* of the Quran and attending the *Tafaquh* class based on the *'umumi* teaching system based on the traditional system in the PSD. The *tahfiz* students need to attend the *halaqah* of studying *kitaab* in the mosque along with the *nizami* students at the designated times. The classes of *tahfiz* studies usually begin after the *halaqah* session which starts from 10.30 am to 12.30 pm. This class is later resumed at 3.00 pm

after the break when the congregational prayer of Zohor has finished (Yahya Yaacob, Interview, July 19, 2017).

### The Development of Website and Video Conference

Today, the benefits of technology have been used to disseminate the knowledge contained in the *turath kitaab* to the public over the internet. The villagers are also able to download lectures, *kulliyah*, discussions and much more. This development is very important to let the people know about the pondok system, its uniqueness and effort in spreading knowledge. The *da'wah* of Islam will become expanded and can be reached by everyone in the society who want to know more about this traditional education system (Solahuddin Ismail & Zaheruddin Othman, 2015).

The development of PSD website can be considered as an effort in linking the society with the information they need about this institution. The website contains all information about PSD. Other than that, PSD also has Facebook page which provides information, development and activities of the PSD. Recorded *kuliyah* given by the *Musyrif* of PSD, Tuan Guru Dato' Dr. Ab. Basit Ab. Rahman, are also uploaded on Facebook. A new shift has also been given in utilising the technology, the *kuliyah* given by the *Musyrif* of PSD, Tuan Guru Dato' Dr. Ab. Basit Ab. Rahman is broadcasted on Facebook. Moreover, recorded videos of the *kuliyah* can be watched on YouTube. All these effort in modernising pondok through technology will help spread knowledge and *da'wah* among students and the society as not everyone can attend the *halaqah* sessions. This matter is supported by the following interview transcription:

“For me, with the aid from the technology such as the application of Whatsapp and Facebook actually gives impact on students’ learning.”

(inf4/G2/Tbl/Kh.PSD/16/5/2017)

### The Use of the Latest Kitaab

From the observation, the *halaqah* study has gone through several transformations. One of it is that the study of *fiqh* does not only focus on the use of the *turaath kitaab* like other pondok, yet PSD also uses current and contemporary *kitaab* as the main reference in the *halaqah* of ‘*umumi*’ study, for example the *kitaab* of *Fiqh al-Mu'tamad* by Prof. Dr. Muhammad al-Zuhaili. This transformation shows the openness of the pondok curriculum towards the spark of ideas based on current knowledge. The following interview has clarified this:

“Regarding to the use of modern *kitaab* other than the *turaath*, I would say I agree because the study in pondok also needs modern *kitaab*... just like Pondok Sungai Durian which has combined the use of the *turaath* and the modern *kitaab*.”

(inf4/G2/Tbl/Kh.PSD/7/8/2018)

The pondok teachers also has translated and *tahqiq* (verify) the classical *kitaab* and have improvised the content through the aspects of grammar, explanation of the content, the effort of *takhrij hadith* (the extraction and authentication of Hadith), and the commentary of the scholars based on different sources. Among them are the *kitaab* of *Munyatul Musalli (Fiqh)* and *Penawar Bagi Hati* (translation: The Remedy for The Heart) (*Tasawwuf*) which were *tahqiq* by Tuan Guru Dato' Dr. Ab. Basit Ab. Rahman, the *Musyrif* of Pondok Sungai Durian, Kuala Krai, Kelantan. All these efforts have demonstrated that this pondok is putting efforts to compete with the current development and needs.

Furthermore, with the emergence of problems pertaining to the matters of *'aqidah* (Islamic creed) and *hukm* (Islamic law), Islamic scholars and students of religious studies particularly the pondok students need to look for solutions through critical thinking and brainstorming ideas through the sources of Islam. The institution of pondok through the method of *halaqah* plays vital role in providing explanation and information based on current issues so that a peaceful Islam can be guaranteed, for example, in the matter of *bid'ah* (heresy), *'aqidah* such as the matter of *Syi'ah*, and other ambiguities in the fiqh law pertaining to the concept of *mu'amalah*, such as the banking system.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the institution of pondok is still relevant as a centre for education for the society at this present time. In line with the development along the period of time, a number of transformations have been made by the administration to ensure that this pondok is important like other institutions which strive to spread *da'wah*, understanding and development of the knowledge of Islam. Madrasah Muhammadiyah, known as Pondok Sungai Durian (PSD), Kuala Krai, Kelantan has become a traditional institution for Islamic studies which have taken a few steps to modernize its learning system. Yet, the modernisation does not ignore the traditional system such as the *halaqah* and *talaqqi* for the study of the *turaath kitaab*. These methods of study have remained in the system for generations and become the signature of the institution of pondok. Meanwhile, modernisation is still considered as an important aspect to dignify this institution as a dominant centre for Islamic studies at this present time.

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