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Challenges & Prospects

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Introduction

Education is one of the most important aspects in human development and perhaps the most influential social institution in any societies. In general, education is to transmit a common set of beliefs, values, norms, and understanding from the adult generation to its youths. Islam looks at education as a form of worship (*ibadah*) where Muslims share a common set of values based on the Quran (the fundamental and most reliable source for many fields of knowledge) and Sunnah. M.Kamal Hassan (1989) describes education from Islamic perspective, as a long life process of preparing an individual to actualize his role as a vicegerent (Khalifah) of Allah on earth and thereby contribute fully to the reconstruction and development of his society in order to achieve well-being in this world and hereafter. The writers strongly believe that the function of Islamic schools should endeavor to teach and help students acquire different aspects of knowledge within the parameters of Islam through the use of a well designed curriculum. This paper is an attempt to investigate the development of curriculum of religious education in Muslim countries with emphasis on South-East Asia especially Indonesia and Malaysia.

Curricular Reforms of Religious Education

Islamic religious curricular has gone through four distinct periods in Islamic history. The following explanations will highlight educational focuses in these four periods. The first period is the period of development which started with the resurgence of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) in Makkah until the end of Umayyad period. The main characteristics of this period are:

Purely Arabic in Nature

- Strengthening the basis of Islamic religion and spreading its teaching.
- The entire curriculum is based on religious sciences and Arabic.
- The study of Hadith.
- The study of jurisprudence.
- The study of the Arabic grammar.
- The study of Arabic literature.
- The initial study of foreign languages.
- The mosque is the centre of activities of the Islamic society and education is the important part of those activities.

(b) The second period is the flourishing period of education starting in the East with the emergence of Abbasid dynasty until the downfall by Tartar in 659H/1258M in which the important centre of the Western part of Islamic Empire especially under the rules of Umayyad Khaliphate is Andalusia. The curriculum was expanded to include the non -religious sciences. The centre also expanded to