

The Background and Methodology (Manhaj) of Education in Pondok Darussalam in Kuala Ibai, Terengganu, Malaysia

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Abstract

Pondok Darussalam in Kuala Ibai, Terengganu was founded in 1999 by Almarhum Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Rahman bin Ahmed, or better known as Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Rahman Pombeng. This Pondok had continued to expand rapidly although its founder had passed in 2008. Nevertheless, this Pondok is not widely known by many. It is perceived that the approach and methodology or manhaj (Arabic: *والمناهج*, refers to the methodology of receiving, analysing and applying knowledge) of Pondok education here, and in general, are too rigid and solely focuses on the Syafie sect. This perception can lead to slander (fitnah), which affects the credibility of the Pondok in its effort to provide continuous traditional Islamic education. Hence, this study reviewed the background of Pondok Darussalam and the education methodology (Manhaj) practiced as well as make a brief evaluation of it. Document analysis and interview methods were used to collect data, which were then analysed using the content and comparative analysis methods. Findings show that Pondok Darussalam has a well-designed education methodology (Manhaj), which involves a comprehensive learning module. The overall sources of reference are authoritative, thus, indicating the credibility of the Pondok education system. The methodology (Manhaj) conforms with the Ahli al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah's aqidah as well as the Syafie sect's fiqh approach, while its teaching staff possess a flexible approach when implementing teaching and learning methods. Findings of this study can help elaborate and subdue the suspicions adduced in an academic and critical manner. It can be concluded that the delivery of an integrated education system aimed at the target group through prepared modules has always been the priority of Pondok Darussalam. It is envisioned that the system should be consistently reviewed, improved and empowered for the benefit of all interested parties.

Keywords: Pondok Darussalam, background of the Pondok, Methodology (Manhaj) of education

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Introduction

Pondok Darussalam in Kuala Ibai, Terengganu was founded in 1999 by Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Rahman bin Ahmed, or better known as Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Rahman Pombeng. It is the continuation of the Pondok education system passed down over centuries in the Malay world,

including in the state of Terengganu Darul Iman (Hasanulddin, 2014). Pondok Darussalam continued to expand rapidly even after the demise of its founder in 2008 although it was not very famous. Some presumptions state that the approach and methodology (Manhaj) (*in Arabic: والمنهاج*, refers to the methodology of receiving, analysing and applying knowledge) of Pondok education here, and in general, is too rigid and solely lends priority to the Syafie sect (Mohd Bakhir, 2017). These presumptions can lead to slander (*fitnah*) concerning the credibility of the Pondok in its effort to provide continues traditional Islamic education. Hence, this study will provide the background of Pondok Darussalam and the education methodology (Manhaj) used as well as a brief review of it.

Background of Pondok Darussalam

Founding, Vision, Mission and Mott

Pondok Darussalam is a Community Religious School (Sekolah Agama Rakyat) registered under the Registration Methods and Monitoring of Islamic Religious School 1998 No. 4/99 dated 2 March 1999.

Pondok Darussalam's vision is to develop an ummah who are pious (*taqwa*) and responsible by implementing an excellent education system and learning process. This can be achieved by initiatives to consolidate the traditional Pondok education system by producing a continuous generation or successors in the field of dakwah who are talented, responsible, humble and blessed by Allah s.w.t. Pondok Darussalam's motto is "Tarbiyyah Islamiah Towards the Creation of an Excellent Ummah".

The Founder and the Legacy of His Leadership

Pondok Darussalam was founded by Tuan Guru Hj Abdul Rahman Ahmed, who intended to continue with the Pondok education system as an alternative to religious education, which possesses its own specialities.

Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Rahman had founded Pondok Darussalam in 1999 and before that he founded the Darul Hanan Fardhu Ain Class, which is still functioning until today. This famous ulama was born in 1930 in Pombeng, in Pattani Province, Thailand. He once served as a lecturer in Kolej Agama Sultan Zainal Abidin (KUSZA), before it was upgraded to Universiti Darul Iman Malaysia (UDM), and presently named UniSZA. Besides actively teaching in mosques and becoming an independent preacher, he was a member of the Terengganu Fatwa Council and a member of the Malaysian Council of Ulama. He was awarded the Maal Hijrah Personality Award by the government of Terengganu and he passed away on 4 March 2008 (Ahmad Fathy, 2011).

Pondok Darussalam was taken over by Ustaz Khalid Ab Rahman, who is the third child of Allayarham Tuan Guru Haji Ab Rahman, soon after the death of his father. He had graduated from Universiti Al-Azhar in Egypt, majoring in Syariah and also obtained a Diploma (Pre-Graduate) from Universiti Zamalek in Cairo, Egypt. He is currently serving full time and

continuing the efforts of his late father, the Tuan Guru, in safeguarding and continuing the excellence and prosperity of Pondok Darussalam.

The Administrative, Teaching and Student Information Committees

Pondok Darussalam is administered by a Main Committee comprising 6 members. Its role is to monitor the management of the Pondok and its activities. There is also a Supporting Committee consisting of the Administrative and Management Committee.

Following is the list of the current Main Committee members.

No.	Name	Original Vocation	Position in The Committee
1	Khalid bin Ab Rahman	Mudir at the Darussalam Pondok	Chairperson
2	Khiral Anuar bin Daud	UniSZA Lecturer	Deputy Chairperson
3	Mohd Ali bin Muda	Retiree	Secretary
4	Ahmad Nazeri bin Mohd Shafie	Businessman	Treasurer
5	Haji Embong bin Sulong	Self-employed	Committee Members
6	Mohd Zulkarnain bin Embong	Self-employed	Committee Members

Based on this list, members of the Main Committee are from various backgrounds and expertise. This has a positive impact by contributing to the progress of Pondok Darussalam until today and also for the future.

Pondok Darussalam has 12 teachers, comprising local and overseas graduates. They play a huge role in structuring the direction of education in Pondok Darussalam. There are also some retired teachers who are teaching on a voluntary basis. A complete list of teachers in Pondok Darussalam is shown in Attachment A.

Currently, Pondok Darussalam has 80 students from various areas, either from within or outside the state. They are from various age group, with the youngest being 12 years old and the eldest being 22 years old. Many former students have succeeded in furthering their studies to Egypt, Yemen and Libya, besides local institutions of higher education.

Physical Facilities

The sincerity and fighting spirit shown by Pondok Darussalam's founder, the Administrative Committee and all interested parties until today has managed to secure various facilities for the Pondok. The list of facilities is listed below.

No.	Facilities	Unit/Location
1	Administrative Office	1 unit in a three-storey building
2	Surau	1 unit with the capacity of 150 jemaah
3	Maktabah	1 unit in a three-storey building
4	Teacher's Quarters	4 unit
5	Male Hostel (new)	3 units of 2-storey dormitory
6	Male Hostel (old)	7 units of used and modified containers
7	Female Hostel (new)	3 units of 2-storey dormitory
8	Classroom	10 unit
9	General Lecture Room	2 unit
10	Student's Cooperative	1 unit

All these basic infrastructures were developed on Lot 1604 and 1605 measuring 1.649 acres, which was originally paddy land owned by Tuan Guru himself and he had assigned it as a special endowment (*waqf*).

Financial Resources

All physical facilities, including the furniture, were built from materials and resources contributed by the local community, individuals and organisations from various places and levels over the course of time. Until today, the assets and amount received and spent totals approximately RM3 million (Khalid, 2019). Pondok Darussalam also receives funds from the Terengganu State and federal governments, however, the amount is not fixed and depends on several factors, such as the current remainder amount of funds (Abdul Hakim et.al., 2019).

The Education Methodology (*Manhaj*) Practiced in Pondok Darussalam

Core Elements of Education

All educational activities in Pondok Darussalam are centred on the Ahlu Sunnah wa al-Jamaah's aqedah, which applies the al-Asya'irah and al-Maturidiyyah approaches. The dominating fiqh element is the Imam al-Shafi'i rahimahullah sect, whereas the tassawuf element is based on the believes of Syeikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani. These three core elements form a strong and systematic education methodology (*Manhaj*) (Khalid, 2019). It is believed that this methodology (*Manhaj*) can eradicate the negative effects of contemporary ideologies, especially those that affect adolescents and youths (Mohamad, M.Z., et al, 2014).

The Level and Class of Study

One element that is usually emphasised in any education system is the level or class of study offered. Pondok Darussalam offers three main levels of studies, namely *Fusul I'dadi* (beginner's class), *Fusul Thanawi* (intermediate class) and general halaqah (community). *Fusul I'dadi* and *Fusul Thanawi* each comprise three levels of studies. Each class of study uses a study syllabus that could be similar or different. In terms of location, the *I'dadi* and *Thanawi* classes use a specific classroom or general lecture room, meanwhile, the general halaqah class operates in the *musolla* or surau, which is open to the public and the local community.

Field of Study and Syllabus

Pondok Darussalam offers a systematic and attractive syllabus, which combines the Turath and contemporary approaches. The Pondok or Islamic Turath syllabus dominates the studies with approximately 80% of the scriptures or references being in Arabic. The fields of Islamic knowledge are given priority, including aqidah, fiqh, tassawuf, tafsir (interpretation), hadith, principles of Islamic jurisprudence, and sirah. It can be said that most of the Pondok in Terengganu had previously used syllabuses like this (Omar, S.H.S., et al, 2014). Arabic is also emphasised, either in terms of grammar, sorf, balaghah or other linguistic elements. Academic fields are also included, mostly focusing on studies at the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) level. A complete list of various fields of study in Pondok Darussalam with the name of the scriptures and its mapping or position at specific levels of study are shown in Attachment B.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Generally, the Pondok education system adopts several teaching and learning methods synonymous with education, such as lecturers, reading, memorising and practical learning. During teaching sessions, the teacher sits cross-legged on the floor or sits normally on a chair while reading scriptures, followed by long explanations (*syarh*). This method is a continuation of the teaching method practiced in Pondok in the past, including in Masjidil Haram in Mekah (Abdul Hakim et.al., 2019).

These methods are also practiced in Pondok Darussalam, especially the teaching method that uses lecturers. Since Pondok Darussalam also emphasises on hafazan al-Quran, involving juzuk 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 28, 29 and 30, hence, reciting according to the tajwid and other elements in hafazan are also widely practiced. In addition, the practical learning method is also widely used involving social activities, such as funeral prayers, terawih prayers, al-hajat prayers, reciting the al-Quran and tahlil prayers. More interestingly, Student Centred Learning (SCL) is also implemented in Pondok Darussalam, which involves giving assignments to students. For example, students are requested to describe or elaborate on certain meanings in the syllabus, mainly that involving religious scriptures (Khalid, 2019).

Discussions

Pondok Darussalam has succeeded in accentuating the identity of Islamic education based on the Ahlu al-Sunnah wa al-Jemaah aqedah by using the al-Asya'irah wal Maturidiyyah approach. It is a form of aqedah that is believed and practiced by most Muslims around the world. However, when the Pondok was first founded, its founder did not object to studying several scriptures related to aqedah based on 'salafiyah', which was introduced by Syeikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, such as al-Tawhid, Usul Thalatha and Fath al-Majid Syarh Kitab al-Tawhid scriptures. This is consistent with the Pondok's founder who had attended Universiti Umm al-Qura in Mekah. His studies were limited to specific students and involved the seeking of truth related to certain issues. However, the reading of these scriptures was halted as the Pondok management today did not see the need to do so.

The Shafi'i sect's commitment to fiqh education is proof of the respect and practices of Pondok Darussalam towards the sect that has dominated the Malay world since the coming of Islam to this region although there have been attempts to weaken the influence of this sect amongst the community today. However, this policy does not stop the harmonisation of views and opinions among the various sects (*taqrib al-mazahib*) if there is a need, besides avoiding slander (*fitnah*) that could arise by accepting or discussing these rather differing views and opinions.

As for the classes and level of education offered, Pondok Darussalam has extended its level of education based on the level of maturity and depth of the knowledge being pursued. Besides supplying specific knowledge to the torrent of students from various demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, the Pondok also offers open education to the local community in the form of general halaqah. This is one method of bridging the Pondok and the community as well as create opportunities for a strong cooperation between both parties.

In reference to the curriculum adopted, Pondok Darussalam is seen as being progressive as it has integrated *Turath* with modern knowledge. The syllabus provided is extensive and inclusive as it covers various fields of Islamic knowledge, besides several academic syllabuses. In the field of *Turath*, approaches that combine Arabic references with local references, which is also known as the yellow scripture, shows the capability of the local ulama to solve problems that develop around them today.

Lastly, the teaching and learning method practiced also strengthens the view that Pondok Darussalam still practices the same method practiced by previous Pondok institutions. Although these methods are basically still relevant, it should be improved and made compatible with current needs, especially nearing the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era. Hence, the Pondok's initiative in creating variety as well as empowering the methodology, such as giving specific tasks to students in effort to improve their understanding of any particular knowledge should be appreciated and emphasised.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that Pondok Darussalam applies a structured education methodology (*Manhaj*), which is offered through its definitive education policies, systematic and inclusive education levels, comprehensive learning curriculum and modules as well as a systematic, relevant and practical teaching method. All the scriptures or references used are authoritative, which reflects the credibility of the Pondok's education system. The methodology (*Manhaj*) is consistent with the approach practiced by the al-Shafie sect ulama, besides its teachers also practice a flexible approach when implementing the teaching and learning methodology. Hence, it can be concluded that the delivery of an integrated education methodology (*Manhaj*), in the form of curriculum and syllabuses, to the target group is always the priority of Pondok Darussalam. It is the hope this study that the education methodology (*Manhaj*) is constantly reviewed, improved and empowered for the benefit of all interested parties.

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