

Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice

By Rosnani Hashim, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996, 204 pp.

Since World War II, Malaysia has undergone numerous reviews and changes in its educational policy at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Reports by Barnes, Fenn-Wu, Razak, Rahman Talib, and the Malaysian cabinet as well as the formulation of a national educational philosophy have inspired Malaysians and non-Malaysians to conduct research and thus produce several theses. Some are concerned with educational reform and ethnic responses, others with national development; some are concerned with national identity and national integration, others with a national educational policy and teacher education; and still others are concerned with the New Economic Policy (NEP) and equality of educational opportunity.

The book under review is one of a series of studies in the form of a doctoral dissertation on education. It seeks to investigate the problems of educational dualism in Malaysia, particularly as it affects the Muslim. Its aim is to arrive at a viable solution through a genuine synthesis of the two systems so that Muslims overcome their educational dilemma without alienating the non-Muslims.

In the first chapter, it is stated that this study hopes to contribute to the resolution of long-standing educational and social problems in Malaysia. It also hopes to demonstrate the compatibility of faith and reason.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 trace the history of the educational systems in Malaysia, i.e., the traditional or Islamic educational system and the colonial education in the nineteenth century in the Straits Settlement followed by the establishment of vernacular education in the Malay states following the Pangkor Treaty of 1874. The period from the early twentieth century up to the World War II has witnessed the increase of English and Malay vernacular schools, both in Strait Settlements and Federated States.

The year 1956 marked a milestone in the evolution of a national system of education. That year an education committee was set up. It was led by Dato Abdul Razak bin Hussein, who recommended the introduction of common content syllabus and the compulsory study of national and English languages in all primary and secondary schools in order to orient pupils with a Malayan outlook, to inculcate national consciousness, and to foster mutual understanding among citizen of various races and religions.

Chapter 4 describes the creation of the Rahman Talib report and the impact of the NEP on the decline of enrollment in religious schools to the transformation

of the curriculum of the Madrasah and the shortage of teachers in them. This is followed by the creation of the NEP after the May 13 crisis which had a two-pronged objective, namely, the eradication of poverty and the restructuring of Malaysian society.

Chapter 5 describes the Islamic philosophy of education. Based on the conception formulated in the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah in 1977, it is taken mainly from a paper presented by Muhammad al-Naqib al-Attas on the aims and objectives of Muslim education. This is probably the core of the study. It is also the basis for all reforms of education after 1977, i.e., the Cabinet report, the New Curriculum of Primary School (KBSR), the Integrated Curriculum of Secondary School (KBSM), and the formulation of the National Education Philosophy in 1987. The rest of the book is a review and analysis of contemporary education in Malaysia with two systems running parallel to be amalgamated and integrated into a single educational system to bring all Malaysians irrespective of race and creed to study together and achieve the dream of a truly united, progressive, and prosperous Malaysia.

So much for the dream. Now let us look at the early statements and generalizations made by the author on the Islamic philosophy of education. She says:

For this purpose the Western philosophy of education will be used as a basis for comparison and as a guideline since *there is insufficient original thought and work on philosophy of education in the Islamic intellectual tradition although it is rich with work of pedagogy.* (p. 77) (emphasis added)

The quotation is taken from Khalil A. Totah's *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1926). She could have qualified under which conditions and circumstances Totah's work was published because after Totah there were generations of philosophers pioneered by Mustafa Abdel Razeq, a professor of philosophy at Cairo University before the World War II and then Sheikh Abdul Halim Mahmud (Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar), Muhammad al-Bahiy, Abdullah Darraz, Mahmud Qasim, and many others. The most influential probably is Ali Sami El-Nashshar, who headed The Alexandrian School of Philosophy. The only disadvantage is that their works were not available in English as they were graduates of either French or German universities. The translations, however, are available in Arabic. The only work cited in this book, apart from Totah's, is Ahmad Shalabi's—since he graduated from Cambridge University it is available in English. The translation is also available in Arabic as well as in Malay. It is unfair to judge the original thought and work on the philosophy of education in the Islamic intellectual tradition based solely on Totah's work because a generation of contemporary philosophers have refuted Totah's claims.

There were typographical errors. The most salient one is the absence of Arabic transliteration for the Arabic names and subjects. One also notices that *'ulum 'aqliyah* is written *'ilm al-aqliyah* which should be written either *al-'Ulūm al-'Aqliyah* or *'ulūm 'aqliyah*; that *'ilm aqliyah* should be *'ilm aqliy* (p. 83); and that *al-Ikhwan al-Safa* should be *Ikhwan al-Safa*.

If the book is reprinted a separate chapter comparing the colonial legacy and Islamic legacy should be added so that the excellent exposition of dualism in Malaysian education does not give the impression that it was an isolated phe-

