

**THE APPRECIATION OF AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION
CURRICULUM: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ISLAMIC
PRIVATE SCHOOLS OF WEST KALIMANTAN,
INDONESIA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses research findings on students' practice and appreciation of the Islamic education curriculum in the Islamic Private schools in Kalimantan, Indonesia. This study advocates the idea of a balanced personality, Al-insan Assoleh and taqwa as the main ingredients for the development of an Islamic education curriculum (Al-Attas, 1977). It demonstrates that researching the practice and appreciation of an Islamic education curriculum is vital in realising the vision and mission of the Islamic educational institutions. This study employs semi-structured interviews with six students from selected Islamic schools in Pontianak. The interview data reveal that most of the students believe that the teaching of Islamic subjects is meaningful. It indicates that the dimension of practical worship or 'Ibadah' is more appreciated and valued than the dimension of Islamic belief or 'aqidah'. The interview data reveal that a lack of motivation and laziness are the problems which negatively influence students' appreciation and value of the Islamic education curriculum. The study also finds that the various parties and factors influencing students' perspectives on the teaching of the Islamic education include teachers, parents, Islamic school policy and facilities that help to improve students' appreciation and practice. The process of curriculum reform in Islamic education should be integrated with a student-centred approach and practical classroom activities that will enhance students' appreciation of the Islamic education curriculum.

Keywords: *Islamic education, morality, curriculum, Islamic religiosity*

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INTRODUCTION

While Muslims continue to develop the education systems which are aligned to Islamic teachings and principles, it is also critically important for them to evaluate these systems and their impact on education in this era of globalisation. Muslim educators and policy makers in this era face an enormous challenge to reform the educational system into one that can fulfill the needs of a country's development efforts and its Islamic education. Harding (2008) says that social economic change, modernization and globalization have led young Muslims to be increasingly hedonist and liberal in their thoughts and attitudes. This phenomenon, thus, presents a set of new challenges for the Muslim teachers and policy makers. The free flow of information in this era of a borderless world, for instance, has expedited students' exposure to negative values, deviated teachings and pornography. It has also influenced the process of inculcating good values among the Muslim students. The clash of negative western values with Islamic values will impede the process of educating, enriching and appreciating good moral values.

In recent years, enormous research has been done concerning the study of the Islamic worldview either in the Muslim community or outside of it. It cannot be denied that research in the Islamic education field, especially within the Southeast Asian Muslim countries has drawn a lot of interest (Bustaman & Jory, 2011). Most Muslim countries in Southeast Asia have revised their curriculum in order to cope with globalization. In Brunei, the concept of a comprehensive and integrated education has been discussed by scholars and leaders (Mansurnoor, 2011). Similarly, the integrated educational approach in Malaysia has been the main agenda in which knowledge should be incorporated with skills and moral values (Hashim & Lenggulung, 2008). These trends of an Islamic education are also reflected in the Indonesian educational system. According to Act no. 20/2003 of the National Education System of Indonesia, the national objective is to develop the potential of students to become people who are faithful and obedient to Almighty God, who will promote good deeds, health, knowledge, intelligence, creativity and independence; and to encourage them to become democratic and responsible citizens (Depdiknas, 2004).

Furthermore, there is very little research on students' perspective towards the value of learning from an Islamic education curriculum in Kalimantan. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the students' perspectives on Islamic Education and the factors that influence students' appreciation and the practices for the Islamic Education Curriculum in several secondary schools in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia.

The National Education System in Indonesia

Based on the National education law Act no. 20/2003, the structure of the Indonesian national education system includes the pre-school as well as the primary, secondary and higher education schools. Pre-school provides early childhood education for children 4 to 6 years old. The attendance for this school program is not compulsory. Some of the institutions that manage the pre-education include kindergartens, play groups, children day-care centres and integrated health service centres also known as '*Posyandu*'.

Next, the Indonesian education system constitutes nine years of compulsory basic education or in the Indonesian language i.e. '*Wajib belajar 9 tahun*' which includes 6 years of primary education or '*Sekolah Dasar*' (SD) and 3 years of lower secondary education '*Sekolah Menengah Pertama*' or SMP. Primary education starts at the age of 7 as the first grade while the lower secondary education begins at the age of 13 or the seventh grade. Students sit for their national examination at the end of the primary school education and they must pass it in order to move on to the lower secondary school.

After spending 3 years in the lower secondary school, students will have to sit for another national standard examination to enter the upper secondary education. There are 3 types of upper secondary education offered and these include the general upper secondary or the '*Sekolah Menengah Atas*' (SMA), the secondary technical schools also known as '*Sekolah Menengah Teknik*' (SMT) and secondary vocational schools or '*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan*' (SMK). The duration of study for the upper secondary school is 3 years, and then the students must sit for a national examination as one of the requirements before pursuing higher learning in colleges or universities.

The Ministry of National Education (MONE), as the central management, is responsible for managing and implementing educational services and acts as the top management to provincial and district representatives

for each of 34 provinces and 483 districts in Indonesia. One of MONE's responsibilities is to provide guidelines for curriculum development and to manage educational services from the central to provincial or local authority. An example is in supervising the syllabus guidelines in every district authority. The major task of the provincial and district authorities is to serve and support the development, evaluation and refinement of syllabuses for schools in their territories with respect to each of their distinctive features, local and environmental needs (Raihani, 2007). This is in accordance with the decentralization policy which has, since the fall of the new order regime in 1998, made an impact on the educational management and the curriculum. In a similar way, the decentralization of education as stipulated by the education law Act no. 25 has enabled districts to develop policies based on the local conditions and preferences (Amirrachman, 2009).

The development of a national curriculum has been the main function of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) under the MONE National Institute for Educational Research and Development. The CDC formulates the curricula for the primary and secondary schools which consist of the national and local content. National content is designed by CDC which is at the central government level while the local content is developed at the provincial level. The content of the curriculum is specifically for the primary and secondary education which includes religious education, civic education, language, mathematics, science, social science, art and culture, physics and sports, vocational skills as well as local content (Article 37) (UNESCO, 2011). The curriculum content and graduate competence should follow the standards which are formulated by the National Board of Educational Standard or '*Badan Nasional Standar Pendidikan*' (BNSP).

Religious education includes five official religions in Indonesia: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. These religions are taught at all levels from elementary up to the university level with the allocation of 2 hours per week. However, for the public religious schools and private schools, especially those which are categorized as religious schools, more hours are allocated for religious teachings.

The belief in One God is the first pillar of belief for the Indonesian nation which is popularly known as '*Pancasila*'. This belief has given an impact on the religious education in Indonesia (Uddin, 1993). There are three types of religious education known as '*pesantren*', '*Madrasah*' and '*Sekolah Islam*'. '*Pesantren*' and private '*Madrasah*' are supervised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs or MORA, while the public '*Madrasah*' and '*Sekolah Islam*' are under the Ministry of National Education or MONE. However, based on the three ministers' joint decree '*Surat Keputusan Bersama /SKB tiga Menteri*', the Islamic religious schools must have at least 30 percent allocation for religious instructions.

The Aims and Appreciation of An Islamic Education

Definition of Appreciation

In relation to the learning context, Brophy's study on the appreciation towards learning defines appreciation as the value that students have derived from the learning activities, including the content and the experience of learning (Brophy, 2008). Other researchers who have studied the appreciation towards learning are Faircloth and Miller who note that appreciation can be understood as the "self-sustaining" reason towards learning (Faircloth and Miller, 2011).

Covington asserts that appreciation is a value-oriented attainment towards learning (Covington, 1999). This means that the students may appreciate learning when they are fully involved in the learning activity because they have already gained a positive reason why they need to learn. It is found that the enthusiasm toward learning could be maintained regardless of the external factors. This is on condition that teachers play their role in facilitating students' enthusiasm in learning through scaffolding appreciation (Brophy, 2008).

Aims of An Islamic Education

Appreciation towards learning from the Islamic perspective recognizes that learning is part of worship which comes from the faith which is derived from the basic incentive for all human behaviours (Alawneh, 1998). As '*ibadah*', Al Ghazali views that every Muslim is responsible to learn; hence it is right to position it as the highest priority because the essence of knowledge is to be closer to the Creator (Al Kanderi, 2001). This also requires policy makers and educational leaders to understand the position of religious knowledge in Islam. Tauhidi (2001) argues that the basic aim of Islamic education is basically not only about the teaching of Islam but how to be a

good Muslim. This is in line with the goal of an Islamic education curriculum to develop cognitive skills and to promote Islamic moral behaviours or “Adab”. This is also aligned with the philosophical view of the Islamic education of Al-Attas that is the inculcation of ‘*adab*’ is the essential goal for the Islamic education (Depdiknas, 2006).

One of the proponents for an integrated education system is Syed Naquib Al-Attas, whose idea was presented at the Makkah 1st World Conference on Islamic Education in Makkah, 1977 (al-Attas, 1977). One of the most important resolutions is that in an integrated education system, Islamic values must be made a priority by every Muslim nation. This historical event marks the beginning of a new perspective on the education system of Muslim countries where a majority have been engulfed with Western values and capitalist objectives. Mohd Kamal Hassan (2010) claims that a return to the Quranic paradigm of development and integrated knowledge must be achieved. The concept of *Ulul al Bab* or holistic knowledge is essential in creating an Islamic society and mind.

In addition, Al-Attas (1977) asserts that all knowledge, both of Divine source and of human intellect, enables Man to fulfil His purpose. Guided by values and the teachings from the Quran and *Sunnah*, Man learns to utilise scientific knowledge for the betterment of others and the world with a heightened sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, the process of reforming the Islamic education curriculum and religious schools has not automatically brought positive change particularly in this era of globalisation and information technology where educators and policy makers are facing many challenges. Taking these challenges into account, Hassan (2010) argues that Muslims educators have attempted to bridge the two education systems and their efforts are manifested in the following education systems:

1. the completely secular system where only academic subjects are taught
2. the predominantly religious educational system where few academic subjects are taught
3. the predominantly worldly educational system where few Islamic subjects are taught
4. the system that offers a balance of Islamic and academic subjects
5. the system where the two streams, Islamic and academic, are brought into a meaningful and dynamic interaction with one another

The fifth system is the most popular in Malaysia and Indonesia. This modern model concept of an Islamic school system has been implemented in the *Pondok Modern and Integrated Schools* in Malaysia and Indonesia. In short, the government and educators in these Muslim countries should play an active role in reforming the Islamic religious curriculum and dualism should be replaced with the integration of the religious curriculum with the social sciences and pure sciences. Isolating the two streams from each other will exacerbate the problems related to the teaching of an Islamic education.

Islamic Religiosity

Western scholars have made a set of religious criteria which is called a religious commitment (Asa, 1995; Hasan, 2007); also known as religious dimensions (Stark & Glock, 1968). The criteria of religiosity from the various scholars can be classified into belief, knowledge, practice and experience (Salleh, 2012). Similarly, the dimensions of religiosity employ believing, affecting and acting (Duke, Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham, and Pitcher, 1998). This can be found in the works of Stark and Glock which draw on five dimensions of religiosity: ideological, ritualistic, experiential, intellectual and consequential. The ideological dimension relates to the foundation of the faith of a believer. Next, ritualistic is the manifestation of the faith through the acts of worship. The next dimension is experiential which connotes religious consciousness that emerge from the personal spiritual experiences. The intellectual dimension radiates through the understanding towards the knowledge of faith and the last dimension is called consequential which means the consequences of the believer towards his/her religious duties.

Although the classification of religiosity comes from western scholars where the majority are derived from the religious standard behaviour of Christian believers (Asa, 1995), the general components also measure religiosity in Islam, with the exception of a particular set of Islamic dimension which could not be explained by the other religions (Duke et al., 1998). Muslim researchers have released the Muslim religiosity measurement model to

measure the religious commitment of Muslim youths in Malaysia yielding two primary dimensions that include the Islamic worldview and religious personality (Eric, 2005). The Islamic worldview component is constructed based on Islamic '*aqidah*' while the religious personality construction assesses *ibadah* and *akhlaq*. This is supported by a study done by Sahin and Francis where the scale of the attitude towards Islam has been identified by most Muslim scholars as Islamic creed, religious duties, social engagement and morality as the dimensions of religiosity (Sahin & Francis, 2002).

With regards to the school climate, the Islamic school environment should provide the most conducive nuances for the development of an Islamic personality among adolescents. (Sultan, 1992). Examples of such nuances that are present in the school programs are collective worship policy: Quranic recitation; Ramadhan program; daily ritual prayer; social activities and others. Islamic programs such as these will foster the students' Islamic identity and character. In a similar way, the school type and environment can contribute greatly to the development of religiosity among the adolescents (Hamzah, 2002).

One of the critical factors in the formation of the Islamic school is the role of teachers. It is necessary that teachers practice Islamic values by inculcating those values as a way of life in order to realize the superiority of Islamic education. Similarly, teachers also need to know how to guide their students using effective teaching methods. The requirements of effective teaching include meaningful content for learning and allowing students to think creatively and critically (Tauhidi, 2012).

The presence of friends is central to adolescents (Woolfolk, 2007) and thus, peer group is another significant factor that influences students' development of religiosity. It is reported that peer groups can contribute to an adolescent's attitude both positively and negatively, depending on how adolescents choose their friends (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). An adolescent's character influences how he/she copes with friends who have the same traits and interests. With regards to peer group influence, adolescents need to pay attention to the type of friends they prefer since adolescents tend to follow their peers' norms from their everyday interaction (Santrock, 2009). As for the learning context, Al Zarnuji's thinks that the methods to learn are those which emphasize interactions with friends who are committed to religious matters and duties. Henceforth adolescents will need to select friends of good character (Afandi, 1993).

The Islamic Education Curriculum

The curriculum practiced from primary to secondary education for religious study in the state or government schools in Indonesia includes four elements; beliefs, manners, religious duties and reciting the Qur'an (Boland, 1982). It is adapted to suit the private Islamic schools. The curriculum model for religious teaching referred to in this study is the 2004 curriculum that has been approved by the Standard Committee for National Education (BNSP). It is based on the Education Act no. 20, 2003 and the government regulation no. 19, 2005 (Depdiknas, 2006).

The aims of the Islamic Religious Education in schools are based on the National curriculum designed to develop the potentials in students to become persons who are faithful and obedient to Almighty God, and who promote good deeds, health, knowledge, intelligence, creativity and independence; and to encourage students to become democratic and responsible citizens (Depdiknas, 2003). In regard to the curriculum's aims and objectives, it can be concluded that morality plays a pivotal role. Religious study in Islamic schools mentioned in this study is not as intensive as in the '*pesantren*'. However, these schools have religious education programs and facilities that emphasize communal daily prayers, an Islamic dress code and Islamic extracurricular activities.

The curriculum components include the '*Al Quran*', '*Aqidah*', '*Shari'ah/Ibadah*', '*Akhlaq*', as well as history and Islamic culture for grades 1 to 3 (X-XII) ?? for the semesters 1 and 2 secondary school students.

1. The '*Al Quran*'

The topics include understanding the Quranic verses about man and his duties as caliph on earth, sincerity in worship, democracy, competition for goodness, charity, preserving the environment, tolerance, hard work and science and technology.

2. *Aqidah*
The aspects of *aqidah* contain the belief in God, the angels, the books of God, the Messengers, the Hereafter and *qada'* and *qadr*. These are referred as the six pillars of faith in Islam or '*Rukun Iman*'.
3. *Akhlaq*
The inculcation of good habits and characteristics such as positive thinking (*husnuzhan*), obeying and practicing the Islamic dress code, Islamic '*adab*' in daily life, avoiding major sins, manners while speaking and tolerance.
4. *Shari'ah / Ibadah*
This is the source of Islamic law, the value of *ibadah*, *shalat*, *zakat*, *Hajj* and *wakaf*, economic transactions in Islam, Islamic wedding, the management of death, *dakwah* and inheritance in Islam.
5. History and Islamic culture
History refers to the history of the prophets (*sirah nabi*) during the Makkah and Medina periods, the Islamic civilization in the middle ages and modern era, the development of Islam in Indonesia and the rest of the world.

Besides the implementation of the Islamic curriculum during class hours through formal teaching and learning, the curriculum is also applied in some programs to support Islamic behaviors and the environment such as congregational daily and '*jumah*' prayer, reciting the Quran, Islamic mentoring, Islamic music group or '*nasyid*', Islamic camp, as well as Islamic speech.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the qualitative semi-structured interviews with 6 students, the interview sessions are recorded and transcribed. The selection of informants is based on two criteria; 1) These students are final year students aged 16 to 18 years old. 2) with a good academic achievement record. The researchers also use the students' record books which describe their behaviours and activities in the extracurricular programs in schools. The participants are taken from three upper secondary Islamic private schools in West Kalimantan. The three schools are school X, Y and Z. The students from these schools are chosen because the schools share similarities regarding their status, location, school environment and their Islamic curriculum. Furthermore, the three schools are located in the populous capital city Pontianak in West Kalimantan in which governmental, economic and educational activities take place. These schools are the Islamic private schools established and run by Islamic foundations. In addition, the three schools are using the Islamic curriculum which is derived from the Ministry of National Education of Indonesia. The curriculum content consists of the Al Quran, *Aqidah*, *Ibadah*, *Akhlaq* Islamic history and Islamic culture.

Data Analysis

The research uses a basic qualitative design which is the most common type of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009) that applies the thematic analyses. These analyses are the coding procedures for qualitative data in the form of themes (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the coding process involves searching for a pattern; categorizing the pattern into a list of categories and then sorting the categories. Firstly, the researcher will transcribe the data from the recordings and this is followed by reading through all the written transcriptions to obtain the general idea of the document. Boyatzis (1998) formulates five steps in applying the thematic analyses and these include sensing the themes; reducing the data; identifying potential answers for the research questions and listing them into themes and lastly, examining related patterns found in the themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Patterns found from the information can be identified through direct quotes or paraphrasing common ideas (Aronson, 1995).

RESULTS

Students' perspectives on the Islamic Education Curriculum

Most of the students agree that the Islamic education curriculum is necessary for their lives. There are three major themes identified i.e. (1) the value of the Islamic education curriculum, (2) motivation to learn Islamic

teachings, and (3) the aspects of Islamic education. In the first theme, one student believes that Islamic education is important because Islam is a form of guidance for him. The study of Islamic education is not merely a subject learnt at school but it is the study of religion (Islam) in the larger context of a Muslim's life. He responds:

In my opinion, religious education is important because our life is based on religion and religion is our guidance in life. Someone who lives without religion will be lost.

A similar sense of the importance of the Islamic education is expressed by another student who indicates that Islamic education is necessary for the formation of *akhlaq*. She perceives that Islamic education has an effect on the development of students' morality through the understanding and the implementation of its value in life. This view is in line with the ultimate goal of the Islamic education curriculum that is the promotion of noble manners of the individual student. She says:

Islamic education is important because the students are able to understand its value in their life. The Islamic education curriculum influences students to have Islamic morality.

Another important aspect of Islamic education is to carry on with the Islamic teachings. The next generation of Muslims will inherit the role of the older generation of Muslims in propagating the teachings of Islam. Thus, one student cites that Islamic education should be correlated with the spread of Islamic teachings in the future for it should be run by the younger Muslim generation. So, as a Muslim student, he/she is obliged to take up Islamic studies as he explains:

In my opinion, Islamic education is important and since we are Muslims, why don't we want to learn about our own religion. Well, we study Islamic education for our future. When our teachers or the elderly have passed away, we are responsible to carry on the propagation of Islam. We will be the next generation to carry on the Islamic teachings.

The second theme deals with the motivation of students to appreciate the Islamic education curriculum. It is found that there is a relationship between sincerity and obligation for a Muslim to study the Islamic teachings. Students point out that it is their duty to comprehend and implement the value of Islamic education and it is important to internalize its worth into their daily life. One student mentions that:

We study Islamic education with sincerity and it is not good if we study it by force. Moreover, since we are Muslims, it is compulsory for us to study and comprehend Islamic education.

Students also show their interest in the subject of Islamic teachings. One student says that he is interested in the Islamic education curriculum especially in learning the *tajwid*. He ascertains that knowing *tajwid* would be very helpful in order to recite the Qur'an correctly and properly. In addition, not only the value of Islamic education is interesting in its practical learning context but it is also possible for it to be cultivated in a scientific manner as indicated by the student:

One interesting point from learning Islamic education is that our view is enriched not only with aqidah but also scientifically ... for example, about the benefits of physical movements in shalat. When the body is in position of sujud, our brain becomes active and it would also help our brain to function optimally. The best time to get this benefit is during tahajjud prayer.

The third theme is related to the various aspects of Islamic education: *aqidah*, *akhlaq* and *ibadah*. Students know and feel for the aspect of *aqidah* or faith as part of the Islamic education curriculum. They agree that the aspect of *aqidah* being taught at school enhances their faith (*iman*). However, most students could not define clearly the meaning of *aqidah*. They recognize it as the pillar of faith and the foundation of good deeds which are the intention of doing something because of Allah. One student describes *aqidah* based on the pillars of *iman*:

In the five pillars of faith, we are being taught to believe in Allah. It means that we believe in the existence of Allah, the Prophets and the books of Allah. We are also being taught to read the Al-Qur'an, to translate the meaning of the Al-Qur'an and that is our guidance in life.

In relation to the foundation of belief, another student talks about how the teaching about the Day of Judgement reminds her to be more appreciative of the act of worship to God. She says:

Of course, it gives influence, for instance, the Aqidah. There are still a lot of things that we don't know, for example about Judgement Day. Sometimes, we waste our life, living in hedonism and praying inconsistently. But after the teacher had explained about it, we began to be afraid of that day. Thus, we need to remember about the Hereafter. Therefore, try to be consistent in doing prayer and to spend time for the useful things.

In the discussion of *Akhlaq*, students give examples of attitude towards others, avoiding bad attitudes (*dzolim*) and attitude towards Allah, that is remembering Allah through *dzikr*. One student mentions:

In this school, we are taught to suit our akhlaq according to the Qur'an and Hadiths. Beginning with the spoken manner, we have to respect the elders by saying "Assalaamu'alaikum, Kak" ... and care for the younger ones, we say "Assalaamu'alaikum, Dek." Here, the speaking manner is set as well as dressing codes and attitude towards teachers.

In terms of the Islamic daily performance (*ibadah*), students describe their experiences of how the Islamic education values being practiced at school motivate them to apply those values in their daily activities. One student describes that she tried to be consistent in wearing the *hijab* after being taught the essentials of covering *'aurah*. It is compulsory for female students to observe the Islamic dress code in Islamic schools but this does not mean that they cover their *aurah* outside of school hours. However, wearing the *hijab* is a habit within or outside school. She mentions:

When I enrolled in this school, I did not wear the hijab. After being taught the importance of the hijab, I finally understood and now I am wearing it as my regular attire Alhamdulillah.

Other students propose that the practice of performing *dhuha* prayer and reading Qur'an in school encourages them to perform the acts at home. Some students say that reading the Qur'an is their routine both at school and at home. From the interview, it is known that students appreciate the value of the Islamic rituals not only because of the school program but also outside schools as their personal activities.

Factors Influencing Students to Appreciate and Practice Islamic Education

Five themes emerge as factors influencing students in appreciating and practicing Islamic education. They are personal, teacher's role, parents' role, Islamic school and peer group. Majority of the students agree that the personal factor such as self-awareness is the initial factor that drives students to appreciate the value of an Islamic education curriculum. Students define self-awareness as "trying to do what we can afford to, not for the praise but because of willingness from inside you to do a good thing. One student gives the following illustration:

The first is definitely self-awareness. Without self-awareness, other factors will have no effect, even if we're yelled at or beaten up. So, with self-awareness, we are aware of what is good or bad.

In transmitting the values of the Islamic education curriculum, the teacher is seen as a role model. The students express that the teachers have set good examples to them. According to one student, the teachers in her school are not only the transmitters of knowledge in the classroom, but they also have an exemplary attitude and practice the Islamic teachings.

The teachers have a great role, for instance in controlling and giving advice. Do the inspection on the students with inappropriate attire and attitudes. So the teachers are always role models in the way they dress and in doing Islamic worship such as keeping shalat, going to pray in Masjid, as well as joining the social activities. For example, teachers and students are involved in the fundraising for the fire victims.

Parents too have a role in transmitting the values of an Islamic education curriculum especially in shaping the students' personalities. Children's personalities depend very much on how the parents educate them. One student describes that his parents is consistently remind and guide him:

Parents are important inculcating the Islamic values. They are always reminding us to do the virtues, to pray, to be mindful of Allah. The roles of parents are prominent in shaping our personalities. Since we were children, parents always guided us.

Apart from the teachers and parents' roles, the Islamic schools also have a potential to contribute to students' appreciation and practices towards Islamic education. Students affirm that the Islamic schools have more worship practice sessions. The habitual programs at the Islamic schools which are part of the school policy include reciting Qur'an, performing *dhuha* prayer, congregational prayer, saying *du'a* and putting on the Muslimah attire. One student comments:

Every morning before class and after making du'a we read the Qur'an. For the first grade students, especially those who cannot read Qur'an, there is a special program called Annisa. Study to help them learn basic reading and writing. Those who are somewhat familiar but not proficient enough, can also improve their skills through this program.

Another positive factor that can influence students to appreciate and practice Islamic education is the peer group. This is due to the fact that majority of the students recognize their peers as good friends and they share information with friends more than with their parents. The positive influence of friends according to one student will affect how they spend their time meaningfully. She highlights that being equal makes her more comfortable to share her problems and to seek advice. She mentions:

Interaction or spending time with pious or devout friends could bring a positive influence. For example, a majority of my friends wear the hijab. We rarely do things that are "meaningless". Instead, we often study together.

Students' Difficulties and Dilemmas in Appreciating and Practicing Islamic Education

Most students perceive laziness and the negative influence of peer group as the difficulties and dilemmas in appreciating and practicing the Islamic education curriculum. Even though they are not really clear about the differences between difficulties and dilemmas, most of the students illustrate that both difficulty and dilemma are perceived as the negative factors that result from an inward weakness. Laziness is frequently quoted by the students as their weakness in practicing to the Islamic principles. so that the soul is devoted to delaying *ibadah*. One student cites an example:

When I get sleepy, I will delay the prayer and say to myself, "15 minutes more ..." Then continuously lie down on the bed. Therefore, I would end up missing my prayer.

The peer group is also seen as a negative influence on the sense of commitment among teenagers in demonstrating the Islamic practices. Students may consider the perception of their peers as a challenge. They may experience alienation and lack of acceptance. In the teenage years, the peer factor is very crucial for their personal development. It may influence their perception, belief and behaviour. One student describes:

The difficulty I am facing for example, if some friends who are skimpily dressed see us wearing the hijab, they will say how pious we are and that statement is meant to tease us. The same thing if they see us doing our work diligently and obey our teachers, they would mock us.

The statements indicate that all students appreciate the Islamic education curriculum when they come to know the value of Islam. Islamic education is more than just a subject matter being studied in the class, it provides guidance for Muslims to cope with their lives as well as to develop their character. Majority of the students also remark that sincerity and obligation are the intrinsic motivation to appreciate the value of the Islamic education curriculum. Thus, the students do not feel pressured to take up an Islamic education. Next, the findings of the present study reveal that the two types of students' appreciation toward Islamic education are in the dimensions of belief and practices. Students believe that they value the more practical subject of *Ibadah* rather than the Islamic subject of *Aqidah*. This could be attributed to the weakness in the teaching and understanding of the subject of *Aqidah*. Although all students agree that the concept of *aqidah* being taught at school has enhanced their faith, yet they do not think that there are profound implications in the concepts of faith. Most students agree that Islamic *aqidah* merely means the belief in the pillars of faith. In contrast, it is indicated that students are more appreciative in the dimension of practice as in ritual worship.

The research identifies six factors that may contribute to the students' appreciation and practice of the Islamic education curriculum. Firstly, the personal factor is reported to be the most significant for students to appreciate the value of the Islamic education curriculum in terms of the dimension of self-awareness. The teacher's role is another factor that has a positive impact on students' appreciation and practices toward the Islamic education curriculum. The students describe teachers as good exemplary models, who act as transmitters of Islamic values through their given explanations. The results also indicate that the parents' role is important in contributing to students' appreciation and practices toward Islamic education. The findings of this research suggest that the additional school programs in Islamic schools which encourage collective worshipping such as recitation of the Quran, performing the 'dhuha' prayer, and observing the Islamic Dress Code are essential to strengthen the values of the Islamic education curriculum in the aspect of 'Ibadah'. The last factor relates to the peer group. A majority of the students have a positive perception of their friends. Good friends will inspire and influence students to practice and appreciate the value of an Islamic education.

DISCUSSION

There is no doubt that the learning of a religion should be the cornerstone of a Muslim student as Islam is revealed directly through the Quran and *sunnah* to be a way of life. Thus, the subject of an Islamic education is the milestone of a philosophical basis that should be appreciated. This corresponds to the definition of appreciation according to Brophy that is the acquisition of what is learnt is worthy in life (Brophy, 2008). The findings are also in line with the study by Covington (1999) who comments on the value of learning and that students initiate the foundation of philosophy beyond the content as well as its implication toward their character improvement.

The findings are also consistent with the study of Al Khalifah who categorizes religiosity into two dimensions that include belief and conduct (Al-Khalifah, 1999). The first dimension is related to *tawheed* that is the total acceptance towards the unity of God (Mawdudi, 1977). The acceptance is displayed through the submission of the heart and mind to the power of God who creates, governs and sustains the universe and everything that takes place in this universe happens with the will of God (Badri, 2000). The conduct dimension includes the full obedience to God's commands through the acts of worship as the relationship between either the self and God or the self and others through ritualistic acts (Stark and Glock, 1968). This is also in line with the syllabus of the Islamic education curriculum especially on the aspect of '*aqidah*', '*akhlaq*' and '*Ibadah*'. According to the curriculum content, the aspect of '*aqidah*' deals with the articles of faith and attributes of Allah. In *akhlaq*, factors of Islamic attitudes are examined. Furthermore, '*fiqh*' or law is introduced in the aspect of *ibadah*. In fact, the teaching of Islamic *aqidah* has to persist from infant till adulthood. For teenagers, the teaching of *aqidah* should emphasize on the acknowledgment of the Oneness of Allah in relation to the creation and existence of the invisible and the real phenomena (Ulwan, 2002). However, few students' responses link the topic of the unity of

God to how they feel and its impact on their life. That is to say, students need to contemplate the concept of Islamic '*aqidah*' in order to appreciate the value of the Islamic faith.

Next, students are interested in the Islamic instruction to obtain practical learning experiences which are relevant to their present life. The reliability of the content to the authentic life as well as the enhancement of the "inner self" of students are the characteristics of a subject learnt that can be appreciated.⁷ Similarly, students believe that Islamic education directly impacts their self-improvement as it increases the '*ibadah*' and social engagement (Brophy, 2007). The finding is consistent with the research which states worship is the significant religious aspect of students' religious commitment (Ismail, 2009). It can be concluded that students appreciate the values that are more practical and relevant to their lives.

This research has identified six factors that contribute to the students' appreciation and practice of the Islamic education curriculum. The first factor is students' self-awareness. Self-awareness toward religious education is the deepening personal concerns that promote the growth of an individual's character and religiosity (Grimmitt, 1987). Students define self-awareness as the inward motivation to do good deeds. Self-awareness in students' responses also means the ability to differentiate which is good or bad in the frame of Islamic norms. Once an individual reaches puberty, he/she is considered responsible for the consequences of his/her action.

Another factor is the teachers' role. The findings in the study are in line with the current studies that find that teachers as role models are effective to develop attitude (Izfanna and Hisyam, 2012). The present study reveals that the teacher is the pivotal agent in the internalization of Islamic teaching in the classroom with regards to the method used in the teaching and learning process. It is known that the explanations given by the teacher in the class influence the students' appreciation. Teachers' creativity is needed to transform the content of the book by utilising various methods. Teaching through storytelling is reported as the method of teaching which students enjoy and which keeps them engaged with the learning. Besides that, the themes raised in the stories are effective to enhance students' appreciation when they are relevant to their life's experience. Brophy introduces "scaffolding students" where teachers are the mediators for students to appreciate the value of learning (Brophy, 2008). To explain this, teachers could mediate meaningful and relevant learning activities in and outside course hours. The study has also revealed that teachers have engaged the students in the social activity and practical sessions of the Islamic education curriculum.

Next, the study of Tamuri seems to be in line with the findings of the present study that the positive role of parents is highly correlated with students' positive behaviour (Tamuri, 2007). The results reveal that the parents are concerned with the matter of religiosity of their children. It can be said that parents have a set of rules or discipline for the implementation of Islamic values for the children in their daily life. Research has shown that discipline is effective on condition that they are "consistent, accomplished through clear, verbal explanation, just and fair, as well as democratic" (Rice and Dolgin, 2005).

The characteristics and policy of Islamic schools are other factors that contribute to students' appreciation and practices toward the curriculum. A previous study has demonstrated a high correlation between the Islamic school type with the attainment of Islamic moral values of adolescents (Hamzah, 2002). Another study also indicates that the collective worship policy fosters students' spirituality, morality and Islamic culture (Khir, 2000).

The last factor is the influence of the peer group. This study supports another study's finding that the types of behaviour adopted among peer groups may influence both positively or negatively (Tomé, Matos, Simões, Diniz, and Camacho, 2012). In addition, it is found that the students are most likely to share their problems and ideas with friends rather than with parents. This finding also agrees with a study that reveals there is a positive correlation between the perception of adolescents and that of their peers (Majzub and Noor, 2001).

CONCLUSION

It cannot be denied that religion remains a core aspect for the Muslims in countries such as Indonesia. The process of developing a curriculum for Islamic education in religious schools requires continuous and comprehensive engagement from all parties.

Islamic values in particular reflect the educational aspects that have been the soul of the national culture of the Indonesian Muslim society. Thus, the Islamic education curriculum cannot be segregated from the National Education System based on the law no. 20, 2003, article 37 (Lembaga Negara Republik Indonesia, 2007). Therefore, Islamic education which is outlined in the curriculum syllabus should be appreciated in a more meaningful way rather than as a compulsory subject being taught in the class. There is a need to reform the Islamic education curriculum to expose the younger generation to be appreciative of the values of the curriculum. This is in response to the challenges faced today that force educators in Muslim countries to scaffold Muslim youths to be more appreciative to study Islam so that they will be able to cope with the global cultural problems.

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