Challenges of Educational Waqf Management in Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) in Kedah

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Abstract

People's Religious School or Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) is an Islamic educational institution with the role of producing Islamic intellectuals in Malaysia. SAR's flourished all over Malaysia, proving that it received acceptance among Malaysian including in Kedah, signaling SAR as one of the contributors to Islamic educational development in Malaysia. However, there is nonuniformity in the management of SAR educational waqf in all Malaysian states, causing an imbalance in SAR educational waqf management. This study on identifying the challenges in managing SAR educational waqf was due to the said problem, particularly in Kedah. It uses the document resource analyses and in-depth interviews of selected SAR educational waqf in Kedah as its study method. Data obtained was analyzed using the content analysis method. The main issue in obstructing the development and management of SAR educational waqf in Kedah is the absence in the coordination of educational waqf of SAR throughout Malaysia. The coordination needs to be given attention so that balance happens in SAR's development. The study also discovered existence on challenges in managing SAR educational waqf, especially in financial resources aspect, shortage of skilled staff, unproductive waqf asset, and incomplete infrastructure.

1. Introduction

People's Religious School or Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR), an Islamic educational institution that does not only function as a place for disseminating Islamic knowledge but also in human development. SAR educational institution started as "pondok" institution or hut institution, founded and operated since the past by Islamic scholars or Tok Guru with the local community assistance. SAR continues to thrive and expanded according to the mainstream, and is managed by the community or committee on behalf of the community or inherited by the founder's descendent (Nor Raudah Siren, Abdul Jalil & Ab. Majid, 2018.)

The rapid growth of SAR in the country signifies the encouraging acceptance of it among the Malaysian community, including in Kedah, and becomes a necessity to expand Islamic education in Malaysia. The existence of nonuniformity of SAR management in every state due to certain reasons ignites an imbalance in SAR development in Malaysia. However, the rapid growth of SAR has opened up the eyes of many sides, including the central government, state government, non-government organizations (NGO), private parties, and many other

parties to manage and administer the SAR. This situation leads to the issue of the clash of authority between several parties for the administering and managing of SAR. This becomes part of the obstacle faced by the administrators of SARS in their quest to expand the SAR educational institution including in Kedah.

Financial constraint is another great challenge faced by SAR in Malaysia. One of the solutions to this problem is through the waqf instrument. According to Alin@ Nordin and Abd Rahman (2018), donations, including in the form of waqf, able to reduce the burden of students and the SAR's administrators. This makes waqf (known as educational waqf) as one of the financing methods practiced in most of the SAR in Malaysia. However, the SAR administrators encountered many challenges in managing the waqf asset for educational purposes entrusted to them. Based on this phenomenon, this study was conducted to identify the issues and challenges currently encountered by SAR's administrators in managing the educational waqf asset at their SAR. Meanwhile, this study only focused on SAR in Kedah.

2.   Methodology

This study used the qualitative method involving two phase of data collection. The first phase involved the collection of data from secondary sources such as thesis, journals, paper work, magazine, and other works related to educational waqf and SAR. The second phase involved collection of data from primary sources. It was acquired from in-depth interview session with four administrators from selected SAR in Kedah. The selection of SAR administrators as the study informants were based on their achievement in managing and administering the SAR. In this research paper, the informants were referred as PSAR 01 (Madrasah Zubaidiyah, Merbok; PSAR 02 (Pusat Pendidikan Al-Islah, Pokok Asam, Sungai Petani); PSAR 03 (Maahad Derang, Pokok Sena) and PSAR 04 (Sekolah Rendah Islam Darul Ulum @ SRIDU, Tandop) to maintain information secrecy as stated in the interview request letter. Apart from that, the study were also done by referring to the main sources in Islam like the Quran and hadith, and also other relevant sources encompassing Islamic books of interpretation, books of hadith, books of prophet's biography or sirah, and other authoritative studies published.

Data collected were uploaded into Atlas t.i version 8 (AV8) for data arranging purpose, according to category and determinate theme. The qualitative content analysis was used as method of analysing collected data. For this purpose, the researchers read the texts and interpret them according to the study's theme. The qualitative content analysis are most accurate for this study because the researchers analysed data related to SAR's concept, SAR's administration concept, issues, and challenges faced by the administrators in managing SAR, particularly in Kedah.

3.   Analysis and Discussion

Development of SAR Administration in the state of Kedah

People's Religious School or SAR is among the five types of religious schools in Malaysia. It started with the "pondok" school system with the inception of "pondok" or hut institution operated by religious scholars and with assistance from the local community. According to Awang (2006), the "pondok" school in Kedah started with the arrival of Islam brought by the Arab traders who built their settlement along the coastline. This settlement became temporary home and also became focal place for the local community to learn about Islam because the scholars who came to preach were also traders. The settlement expanded into Islamic education center due to high demand from the local community. Among the well-known religious school in Kedah is Maktab Mahmud (Salleh & Abdul Rahman, 2014).

Maktab Mahmud are among the earliest and renowned SAR in Kedah. It was established by Al-Marhum DYMM Tunku Mahmud Ibn Al-Amrhum Tunku Ahmad Tajuddin al-Mukarram Shah on 16th June 1936 with the intention of it to be the center for disseminating Islam, arabic language and to produce religious leaders. The school was built using zakat collection, and waqf from the community, and the whole waqf land was fully utilised for the building of the school infrastrudture, and also in generating income for financing students who furthered their study in the Middle East. The school also received financing from the state government and from the federal government through the education ministry, and also from waqf proceeds of personal contribution in the form of 122 relong or approximately 180 acres of rice field in seven different location in Kubang Pasu district. This school has branches in Langkawi and Yan (Salleh & Abdul Rahman, 2014; Abd Latif, Mohd Daud & Ismail, 2008)

Apart from Maktab Mahmud, there are SAR that has changed into State Religious School (SAN) and Religious National Secondary School (SMKA). Nevertheless there are still active SAR in Kedah comprising of religious primary school (SRAR) and religious secondary school (SMAR). There are 17 SMAR and 14 SRAR schools in Kedah. People's Religious School or SAR in Malaysia is managed according to concepts interpreted by each own states. This is due to them being under the state's authority. However, the federal government still play its role in taking care of the welfare of SAR in order to empower religious school in Malaysia (Nor Raudah Siren, Azmi, Abdul Jalil & Ab. Majid, 2018)**.**

All SAR in Kedah is totally administered by the School Administration Board selected and appointed by the Kedah State Religious Schools Administration. The Board is responsible for managing schools according to the Rule on Maintenance of Kedah State People's Religious School guidelines. The Kedah State Islamic

Religious Affairs Department (JHEAIK) involvement begins to intensify, especially in controlling the registration of schools, curriculum, co-curricular, examinations, textbooks, supervision, payment of allowances, and other matters after the state government provides assistance in the form of teaching personnel. However, other parties also provide assistance in developing SAR in Kedah, including the federal and state government, and also the non-government organization (NGO). Two of the government agencies involved are the Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) and the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. At the state level, it involves the Kedah State Islamic Religious Affairs Department (JHEAIK). Kedah State Education Department (JPN), Kedah State Islamic Religious Council (MAIK), Yayasan Gerak Fikir or Think Movement Foundation (YGF), non-government organizations (NGO) represented by Religious Schools Affairs or HESA (Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Kedah, 2018; Umar & Hussin, 2012).

Implementation of Educational Waqf in SAR in the state of Kedah

The implementation of waqf for educational purposes is known by Malaysians. It is evident with the mushrooming establishment of madrasah in the northern states of Malaysia such as in the state of Kedah, Penang, and Perak, mostly focusing on the primary and secondary level. The development is significant because the educational financing through waqf instruments could reduce the school drop-outs problems among the young citizens that could not continue their education due to poverty (Mustaffa & Muda, 2014). Besides accepting educational waqf in the form of land and building, SAR also accepts educational waqf in cash, books, and furniture as the teaching and learning aids. The implementation of modern waqf is one of the ventures done in expanding the waqf asset so that it could yield benefits in continuously.

The sustainability of the educational waqf needs to be ascertained by developing the waqf asset received so that it could generate fund. According to Mahamood and Abd Rahman (2015), waqf fund means a pool of money gathered for waqf for charity purposes, either general or specific in form according to the syarak rule. Generating is defined as the production of something as a way to multiply or to acquire something of better quality and quantity. For the purpose of this study, fund generation refers to the action to produce better and more benefits in order to improve on the cash savings (waqf fund) so that the benefit of the educational waqf fund asset could be continued and added (Shaikh, Ismail & Mohd Shafiai, 2017).

Based on the results of the interview with the SAR administrator (PSAR 01, PSAR 02 & PSAR 03), the form or type of educational waqf received by the SAR are land, buildings, furniture, books, and cash. The educational waqf in landform, for example, was developed through the offering of land lots, for the purpose of raising funds for the construction of school buildings and student hostels. This method is widely accepted as it offers as low as RM50 per square foot for the public to ease the public to contribute to the waqf (PSAR 01). In addition, the educational waqf was also developed through the implementation of a rental or lease method of the land or educational buildings. For example, pondok or lodges are rented to those seeking services in SAR (PSAR 01 & PSAR 02). A summary of these findings is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Educational Waqf Fund Generating Instrument in SAR

Form of Educational Waqf	SEKOLAH AGAMA RAKYAT (SAR) IN KEDAH			
	PSAR 01	PSAR 02	PSAR 03	PSAR 04
Land	✓	✓	✓	✓
Building	✓	✓	✓	✓
Furniture	✓	✓	✓	✓
Books	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cash	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Field Work (2018)

Table 1 shows the form of educational waqf received by SAR in the state of Kedah. Based on the table, there are five educational waqf received, they are land, building, furniture, books, and cash. However, the SAR administrators seem not quite pro-active in expanding the assets so that it could create sustainable benefits. This situation is due to certain matters that obstruct initiatives to expand the educational waqf asset. This matter is discussed deeper in the following sub-topic.

Challenges in Administration of SAR in the state of Kedah

Based on the findings of interviews with four SAR administrators in the state of Kedah, there are four challenges faced in managing SAR, namely lack of resources and funds, lack of skilled staff, unproductive waqf assets and inadequate infrastructure.

a) Shortage of resources and financial fund

Limited financial resources and scarcity of existing funds are the major challenges faced by SAR administrators in developing SAR waqf assets. According to PSAR 01 and PSAR 04 the resources and funding available for a SAR is very low and very few. This is because SAR is a people-run Islamic educational institution that is largely made up of local people who do not have a lot of resources or financial funds. They added that most of the funds were received through public donations and student fees. This is because the SAR is set up not on a

commercial basis which is difficult to obtain financial resources.

According to PSAR 02 and PSAR 03, they are forced to find other initiative to increase the amount of the financial fund, such as through preparing hall for rental to the local community for organizing specific event or for wedding ceremony, lectures, and etc. Apart from the local community, the hall is also rented to organizations or institutions to hold courses, briefings, seminars and suchlike.

This financial problem causes the inability to offer the teachers' salaries according to current income rate or based on mainstream school teacher's salary, and also the inability to provide other kind of welfare for teachers such as medical allowance, insurance (takaful), death benefits, pension allowance, and others. Welfare of teachers and staff should not be neglected in ensuring effectiveness of education in SAR. Therefore the administrators need to be more competent and efficient as well as being competitive in planning and implementing strategies to increase the financial fund. Resources and financial fund are important elements in administration of a SAR. Finance enables a SAR to a guarantee of its quality and development. Mahamood and Abd Rahman (2015) described waqf as important financing resources in giving financial aid and strengthening academic quality. Apart from that, morals and ethics had influenced waqf givers, which normally were the founder themselves, who donated their wealth and property for developing and defending the educational institution. Moreover, they stated that lot of benefits could be enjoyed with an effective implementation of educational waqf. Therefore, SAR administrators need to govern the waqf asset as best as they could so that it could become a sustainable source of funding for SAR.

b) Shortage of skilled staff

Apart from the financial challenges the SAR administrators have to face, they also faced the challenge in getting credible staff and highly skillful in managing waqf asset. Most of the staff
is made up of the SAR's teachers themselves. They lack the skill to manage the educational waqf asset productively. The low salary pays or allowance to the teachers and staff is also another challenge faced by SAR administrators (PSAR 01, PSAR 02, PSAR 03, PSAR 04). The low salary often sees teachers leaving the schools as early as just one month after working because they want to secure a job that has a better future. Most of them used the SAR as stepping stone to get a much better job. Frequent exchange of teachers gave a lot of implication on the learning process in SAR, and other matters related to the educational waqf administration. This normally happened among young teachers who own a degree and diploma.

However, according to PSAR 02, there are among the SAR teachers who possess a high sacrificial value because they are willing to sacrifice their energy in the name of the group even though with unworthy salary. To an extent, some are willing to take out personal loans from banks solely for SAR use. This is in line with the views of Mohamed, Ab. Ghani and Basir (2013) which described the holistic Islamic management system as having to lay the basic principles as the perfect guide for improving the quality management system. The basic principles in question are such as the value of humility, the qualities of goodwill based on monotheistic values, syura-based management, and the culture of commitment in every action. Such a principle should be established among SAR administrators so that the waqf asset can be developed to the maximum extent possible.

c) Unproductive Waqf Asset

The next challenge is the difficulty to expand the waqf asset received productively. There is some asset that could not be developed especially in the form of land and building. It's due to insufficient fund, unstrategic land, dilapidated building, and others (PSAR 01 & PSAR 03). In addition, the cash waqf is not to being made productive through investment or stocks, leaving the fund accumulated in saving and used for institution's maintenance and other matters. This made the asset unproductive because there is no addition of the money value itself.

Hence, the study proposed that the administrators be more creative and proactive in developing the entrusted educational waqf fund. For example, involvement in entrepreneurship program that could generate income. Apart from that, with the availability of a new technology known as platform crowdfunding, eventually the waqf could be implemented in the daily life's, especially in implementing the Muslim's educational waqf. The rise of the waqf element itself helps in eradicating poverty and provides equal opportunity in a fair participation in economics (Mohd Zain, Mahadi & Mohd Noor, 2019; Mar Iman & Muhammad, 2017). This method could be used as an opportunity of, and applicated by the waqf administrators in developing the educational waqf productively.

d) Incomplete Infrastructure

The study found that there are SAR insufficiently equipped with the basic necessity such as water supply, forcing them to use water supply with unguaranteed cleanliness. Moreover, the school resource centre is also with inadequate supply of infrastructure and reference materials, uncomfortable classrooms, and the hostels safety level does not reach the required building standards specification (PSAR 02 & PSAR 04). This requires the administrators to sought other alternative to add or acquire financial resources besides the student fees as a way to provide good and complete infrastructure for the students, teachers, and the staff. Incomplete infrastructure

obstructed the holistic development on the waqf asset so that it could provide continuous waqf advantage.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, SAR is an Islamic educational institution with the potential to produce religious literate generation. The encouraging response among the community proved that SAR is still accepted by the community as a place to learn about Islam which is still intact and still hold to its true purpose of establishment. Every existed issue and challenges must be handled and faced as best as possible so that there won't be any drop-outs among the student. The administrators need to be more open in receiving all sorts of assistance and also opinion that could lead towards the betterment of the students and also the staff in SAR. At the same time, they need to be wise in administering and efficient in implementing everything that has been planned.

Acknowledgement

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