

## The Role of *Ulama* in Reconstructing of Religious Education in Malaysia during Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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**Abstract:** Religious education across the world has developed in multi structures which reflect to the diversity of religious practices. In Malaysia, Muslim religious education has developed in two forms, traditional and modern systems. *Ulama* play a vital role to produce human capital for the nation. Close collaboration between *ulama* and the ruler (*sultan* / king) produced an outstanding achievement in making sure traditional religious education is able to be transformed into integrated modern system. This is especially evident in Madrasah Idrisiah since its establishment in the year 1917 with the support by then the ruler, Sultan of Perak.

**Key words:** Madrasah Idrisiah % *Ulama* % Muslim Scholars % Religious education % Malaysia

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### INTRODUCTION

Many madrasahs in Muslim world began with the influenced of Middle Eastern experiences. Singapore, a state that was under Muslim dominant before its independence from Malaysia in 1965, has this experience when it comes to madrasah establishment [1]. In some Muslim countries such as Pakistan, madrasah has been associated with radical and militancy training based [2], especially for Taliban which is totally in contrast when it comes to Malaysia [3].

Malaysia is a multicultural state consists of three main races, Malay, Chinese and Indian. It also has people of multi-ethnic background among indigenous people especially those who live in the west part of Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The country has announced in its constitution that Islam is its official religion but other religions are free to be practiced by their followers. The status of Islam and other religion in Malaysia is stated in Federal Constitution, article 3, 11 and 12. According to Aziz Bari, these articles “seem to have put Islam above other religions without affecting the right to freedom of religion” [4]. Historically, Malaysia was known as Malaya until its independence day on 31 August 1957. There were 11 states including Perak formed what was known as Federation of Malaya (*Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*) and they joined Malaya’s independence from

British. In 1963, Sabah and Sarawak officially joined the Federation of Malaya and the name then become Malaysia [5, 6].

The history of Islam in Malaya before independence was always associated with the relation between *ulama* (Muslim scholars) and *sultan* (king/ruler) [7]. The emergence of *ulama* is a great blessing in the history of Islam in Malaya. *Ulama* was the most influential group in the community and with deep understanding of the revealed knowledge, they applied the knowledge and spread among Muslim community. Specifically they include *ulama* of *al-kalam* (theology), *al-fiqh* (legal system), *al-tafsir* (exegesis) and *tasawwuf* (spiritual). They were normally highly educated in the revealed knowledge and wise in clarifying questions and issues of the current society [8].

In the history of Islam in Malaya, the *ulama* had been highly respected by the king or formally known as sultan. There were also sultans who took *ulama* as advisors and they were free to carry out religious activities. In the history of Perak Sultanate, there were a number of significantly influential *ulama*. In Perak, the roles of sultan and *ulama* were important in the effort of upholding the Islamic educational institution in the state.

The establishment and development of Madrasah Idrisiah Bukit Chandan, Perak, for instance, was closely associated with the institution of *sultan* and *ulama*.

The custom and culture of the Malays who had always honour and protect the Malay Sultanate institution became the crucial mission in the establishment of Madrasah Idrisiah. Since its establishment until today, it has been a *madrasah* with its own strengths in enhancing the Muslim community. Here lies the fort of the *ummah*'s strength which has reached out to the mainstream education after the traditional *pondok* era and eventually spread the love of knowledge throughout the country. Its existence prior to the Second World War was so outstanding that it became the talk of the society of that time.

Madrasah Idrisiah also succeeded in bringing together a number of highly respected *ulama* who also advised the ruler to love his people and religion. The Ubudiah Mosque, the landmark of religious supremacy within Madrasah Idrisiah vicinity, recorded a great historical event when the late Paduka Seri Sultan Iskandar Qaddasallah consented to deliver lectures to *Qadi* (judge) and *Mufti* once a [9]. His Royal Highness attention to Islamic education was an influential source in the people's appreciation of Islam in addition to the *ulama* who often advised the king on matters regarding Islam. The aim of this paper is to present the role of *ulama* in reconstructing religious education with a special reference to Madrasah Idrisiah.

#### **A Brief Historical Establishment of Madrasah Idrisiah:**

The main figure in the history of Madrasah Idrisiah was His Royal Highness Paduka Seri Sultan Idris Mursyidul Adzam Shah who ruled from the year 1887-1916. He was the son of the late Raja Bendahara Alang Iskandar Ibni Raja Kechil Tengah Ahmad Ibni almarhum Sultan Abdul Malik Mansur Shah [10]. He was born in Kuala Keboi, Kampar Perak in the year 1849 and was the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Perak according to the Perak Darul Ridzuan sultanate line [10, 11, 12]. He became the *sultan* and resided at the Iskandariah Bukit Chandan Kuala Kangsar palace in July 1887 at the age of 38 and Sir Hugh Low was then the British Resident of Perak.

During his reign, the education in Perak experienced rapid growth and he was much concerned with normal education as well as religious education of the state. In terms of governance, he was the major driving force in strengthening the institution and power of Malay *sultan*. On July the first, 1896, Conference for Council of Malay Rulers of four states which were Perak, Selangor, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan was held at the Iskandariah Palace, chaired by Sir Charles Mitchell, the High Commissioner for the Federation of Malaya during that time [10, 13].

Since Sultan Idris realized the importance of knowledge for his people, he advocated the establishment of schools in Perak, such as Malay College Kuala Kangsar (1905), King Edward VII School, Taiping (1906) and Malay Teachers College, Matang.

While actively encouraging Malay children to get proper education, Sultan Idris was also well-known for his concern for Islam. Besides mosques, constructions for religious schools were also carried out under his direction. Madrasah Idrisiah was established in 1917 and began its operation on April 1922, 1342 Hijrah [14, 15]. It was the first religious school in the state of Perak Darul Ridzuan and was the only school at that time to implement the modern school system as well as the one with a boarding school system. Its establishment was carried out under the decree of His Royal Highness Sultan Idris I Mursyidul Adzam Shah, the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan Perak and it was located at Bukit Chandan, Kuala Kangsar, opposite of Ubudiah Mosque, the earliest mosque built and was the symbol of glory and civilization of Perak. The name Idrisiah was given based on the name of Sultan Idris as the founder of the school. Most importantly, it reflected the importance of court's role in the establishment of a systematic religious school of that time.

The establishment of Idrisiah was closely related to the role of *ulama* such as Sheikh Haji Nawawi bin Haji Tahir (Pak Wi) who steered the sultan's institution during that time. Before the *madrasah* was given a name, it was mostly known as Madrasah Mariah, which was an institution providing early childhood education to orphaned girls in Perak. This *madrasah* became the driving force to the development of a more prestigious school and eventually both Madrasah Mariah and Madrasah Idrisiah were placed under separate administrations. It was built on a *waqf* (endowment) land endowed by the queen of Sultan Idris, Permaisuri (Queen) Uti Mariah. However, due to the increasingly strong demand of the local community for a school for boys, His Royal Highness decided to open a Madrasah Idrisiah as a learning centre for them.

Initially, with a sense of responsibility, His Royal Highness had endowed (*waqf*) three acres of his land for the construction of the *madrasah* and five blocks were set up which included three teachers' houses, an office (Rumah Bulat) and the main building (hostel and class). His Royal Highness also gave (through *waqf*) 23 stores in the town of Kuala Kangsar as the economic sources for the school, to ensure funding and the administration of the *madrasah* is carried out smoothly. The property that was part of the *waqf* was also divided with Ridzwaniah

Mosque and the royal tomb of Al-Ghufran at Bukit Chandan. However it was unfortunate that His Royal Highness Sultan was not able to witness the development of Madrasah Idrisiah and the progress of religious education to the Malay children of Perak during that time; he passed away in the year 1918. During his life he loved religious knowledge and honoured the *ulama*. Among the prominent *ulama* of his time were Sheikh Haji Nawawi, Sheikh Yunus Malim Nawar and Sheikh Haji Wan Muhammad who was the unofficial first *mufti* of Perak [16].

After the death of the late Sultan Idris, all his tasks and roles to ensure that the construction of the school will be completed were taken over by his son, Sultan Iskandar Qaddasallah Shah. He was responsible in monitoring the movement and construction of the madrasah until August 1921. Finally in August 1922 Madrasah Idrisiah was complete and started its programme through the intake of 23 orphaned males as its first students [14, 15, 16].

Madrasah Idrisiah was constructed due to a number of reasons, including executing the will of the late Sultan Idris that his property is given as *waqf* to finance the administration and management of religious institutions in Perak. The initial intention of the late sultan in giving his property as *waqf* was to protect, preserve and enhance the notion of Islam and its teaching in the state of Perak. The property was entirely used for residential construction and school facilities. Apart from its short distance to Iskandariah Palace, all matters and problems related to the school can be referred directly to the palace and his highness was also informed of its development from time to time.

Subsequently, the reason for Madrasah Idrisiah establishment also complied with the desire of the society of that time, which was to see their children have extensive knowledge in the religious field. Through the establishment, the will of the late Sultan Idris Mursyidul 'Adzam Shah and the wish of the people became a reality. Without the *waqf* property from the late Sultan, Madrasah Idrisiah will not exist today. In other words, the main reason for the establishment of the school was to execute the will of the late sultan.

**The Role of Ulama in Reconstruction Religious Education:** The role of *ulama* in reconstruction Religious Education and intellectual redevelopment at Madrasah Idrisiah can be viewed from the following two points:

**Religious Educated Group and the Involvement of *Kaum Muda* at Madrasah Idrisiah:** *Kaum Muda* relatively means Younger Generation who was opposed to the conservative ways of the *Kaum Tua* (Older Generation). *Kaum Muda* always associated as reformers especially in religious matters in contrast to *Kaum Tua* who were satisfied with moderate life they were in [17, 18, 19]. In course of Malaysia's history, it is not too much to say that the development of a positive intellectual thinking that was able to bring awareness and generate a positive modern development was a result of external influences [20]. In turn, the effectiveness of external influences depends on the openness and willingness of the local people to adopt and adapt them with the local characteristics. In Malaysia's context the influence can be traced back to the advent of Islam itself into this area [21]. It can be seen from the start of Islamization process of the Malay World [21], where the conversion of the king into Islam was the main factor behind the acceleration of Islamization in the Malay Archipelago. Much has been said of the conversion of the king and his role as the main factor in Islamization process as well as the speed of its spread [22]. In addition, there were rapid progress of Islamic education institution which generate the Malay people intellectual development [23].

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there emerged a new movement triggered by those educated in the Islamic education, especially those educated in Egypt. This movement was known as the *islah* movement (also known as renewal or reformation). It refers to the religious movement to eliminate the elements of polytheism, superstition and heresy among the Muslims and restore the teachings of Islam based on Quranic and *Hadith* [24]. Dissemination of ideas from Egypt started when the newspaper *al-Imam* was published in 1906 and its existence was influenced by the *al-Manar* newspaper published in Egypt. Its publication seemed to display the polemic on the clash of the *islah* thought, which previously occurred in Egypt, spread to Malaya with the existence the streams of *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Muda*. *Kaum Muda* wanted reformation while the *Kaum Tua* was more comfortable with the traditional practice of Islam in Malaya.

It is therefore not surprising that when we look at the history of Islamic intellectualism in Malaya, triggered by the thoughts of *Kaum Muda* under the leadership of Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin [25] and Syed Sheikh al-Hadi [26, 27] has resulted in changes in the history of socio-culture, politic and economy of the Malays [28].

The year 1900 until the 1940s had witnessed the great contradiction between two main approaches in preparing the Malays on the best way as to how Islam can be utilized to face the modernization brought by the British [29].

The development of thoughts of the *Kaum Muda* in Middle East also influenced its development towards Malay Archipelago in general and in Malaysia specifically. Literature and literacy were the platform for the shaping of Malay thought and also played an important role in the changes of attitude among the *Kaum Muda*. Opposition came from the *Kaum Tua* who defended the values of old thoughts [28].

For the *Kaum Tua* who were mainly the traditional *ulama*, in order to maintain the well-being of the Malays and Islam itself, consider that modernization is a dangerous process and it was necessary to preserve the old way of life. In other words, *Kaum Tua* wanted the Muslims community to return to the classic way of life and to reject forms of modernization [29]. This is in contrast with the *Kaum Muda* who had shaped a progressive thought since the 20<sup>th</sup> century and which had influenced the intellectualism stream in Malaysia [28]. Understanding towards elements of colonialism and globalization had shaped their minds in dealing with the challenges for race and religion. The thoughts of *Kaum Muda* spread through print media which triggered the motion for a number of societies, NGOs and prominent Malay thinkers in Malaysia. Consequently, the notion of *Kaum Muda* had influenced the modern political thought and gave birth to the awareness towards a progressive religious process for the cultural, social and political institutions [28].

The Malay students who studied in Middle East during the last 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were those with high level of initiative. This was demonstrated through active participation in activities of organizations as well as publication of newspapers and their own publication company in order to spread ideas of awareness in the Malay community effectively. The role played by the al-Azhar University graduates and those who studied in Mecca was essential in creating awareness among the Malays before the Second World War. Apart from being the centre of Malay education, it also became the centre of Malay intellectual development.

Indeed, we can specify a number of factors that led to the *islah* movement of the Malay students of that time. Firstly, the existence of publication centres which published books in Arabic and Malay for the use of the Malay community in *Hijaz* (Saudi) and the whole of Malay Archipelago. The existence of the publication

centres played a vital role since books that have been published gave them exposure to knowledge. Secondly, contact with environment of knowledge also affected the development of the mind of Malay students who were studying in Mecca [30].

This can be seen from their reactions towards issues presented in the Malay newspapers during that time such as *Tunas Melayu*, *Neracha*, *Idaran Zaman*, *Bahtera Malaya* and others. The students who studied there were not just loyal readers and subscribers of the newspapers but they also contributed ideas and valid opinions to the readers. The availability of newspapers and magazines that illustrated the current issues that were taking place in Malay Archipelago had given an impact on the students' development of thought.

It is then clear that the influence from the source of Middle East had also brought social change in the society when those who received their education there - categorized as *ulama*- had pioneered the development of Malay community education. Apart from the Middle East education pattern serving as intellectual culture, it was also the early source of Malay political awareness. For example, among the earliest influence that cultivated the seed of national consciousness among the Malays was the idea of Pan-Islamism which grew rapidly in the Middle East at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As a result of that, there were a number of Islamic movements which brought awareness of Islam in Malaya, such as the one by alumni of Madrasah Idrisiah, who was Abu Bakar al-Baqir, the one who formed *Hizbul Muslimin* on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1948. Abu Bakar al-Baqir was also a student of Sheikh Abdullah Fahim [31, 32], the grand father of Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the former fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia. However, even before it was able to step in Malaya, *Hizbul Muslimin* was banned as it was claimed to be a party of religious extremists. The fact is that the British did not want the group to gain support of the people which can lead to independence and creation of an Islamic state.

**The Ulama Who Involved in Reconstruction of Religious Education at Madrasah Idrisiah Before Malaysia Independence:** Among the well-known *ulama* who succeeded in religious education's reconstruction of Madrasah Idrisiah before independence were:

- C Tuan Haji Muhammad bin Haji Salleh (1922-1928).
- C Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi (1928-1932).
- C Sheikh Abdullah Fahim Haji Ibrahim (1932-1948).
- C Sheikh az-Zubair Haji Ahmad (1948-1976)s.

**Tuan Haji Muhammad Bin Haji Salleh (1922-1928):**

Shortly after Madrasah Idrisiah was successfully and officially established, His Royal Highness Sultan Iskandar commanded Tuan Haji Muhammad bin Haji Salleh to become the first principal of Madrasah Idrisiah in 1922-1928 [30]. He came from Kelantan and a majority of his life and education was spent in Mecca. He was invited by Sultan Iskandar Shah to plan for a *madrasah* and all the administration work was submitted to him to be managed properly and effectively. During his administration, he was assisted by two teachers, Tuan Habib bin Abdullah and Haji Othman Yaakub [33]. These three teachers were the ones who educated the students until they successfully graduated from the school. The first students of Madrasah Idrisiah in 1922 were 23 orphans and all of them were boys. Those who registered during that time were not charged any fees. During the first three years Madrasah Idrisiah only accepted orphans and only after that changes were made.

The early change made by the first principal was to increase the intake of students that were initially limited to orphans but now opened to public and the entry was solely for males. This was due to the overwhelming demand from the communities of Bukit Chandan and Kuala Kangsar to send their children to study religion, as well as the rising awareness of the importance of knowledge. Haji Muhammad bin Haji Salleh served as the principal for six years before he died in 1928. Although it was for a short term, Madrasah Idrisiah tremendously experienced the challenges in enhancing its potential and excellence as the first religious school in the state of Perak. Haji Muhammad bin Haji Salleh was a principal who was very committed to his duty and did his best in developing the *madrasah*. His dedication was the starting point in producing respected and prominent scholars and leaders.

**Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi (1928-1932):** The second principal of Madrasah Idrisiah was Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi who replaced Tuan Haji Muhammad bin Haji Salleh starting from 1928 until 1932 [34]. He came from Arab Mecca and owned a high level of qualification in religious studies as well as a diploma in education. Before teaching at Madrasah Idrisiah, he was a teacher at Madrasah Al-Mashor Penang. During his time in office, the *madrasah* became increasingly popular and it was during this time that the first students were produced.

Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi was most concerned about the quality of his students' performance. He would insist that his students perform the prayer with the congregation at Ubudiah Mosque, which was situated right in front of the *madrasah*. During his time, the society began to see the credibility of the students as a majority of these early students were offered the positions of *Qadi* (judge), religious officers and teachers of other new *madrasah*. For the first time in its history, Madrasah Idrisiah had offered the chance for the entire local Muslim community to study there. After the basic construction was assigned to Sheikh Haji Nawawi and the teaching foundation built by Tuan Haji Muhammad bin Haji Salleh, Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi revealed the results.

The presence of Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi at the *madrasah* had brought the idea of '*Islah Islamiah*' (Islamic Reform), which was the group of *Kaum Muda*. The *Islah Islamiah* movement was an effort aimed at enhancing the return to Islam that had been misinterpreted by the traditional scholars [35]. This movement was trying to restore the teachings of Islam as *al-Din al-Shamil* (comprehensive religion) that covers the whole aspect of life.

During that time, the number of students increased until 150 students. Due the growth, the teaching staff was also increased in order to provide for the students. Among the newly appointed teacher were Sheikh Ali Maqsur, Ustaz Abdul Razak and Ustaz Muhammad Fadzil, all of whom were from Penang with the exception of Ustaz Muhammad Nor Faiz who was from Perak itself [33]. However, the administration of Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi ended in 1932 when he had to return to Mecca for a number of reasons. It was said that he resigned because his efforts were not accepted by the school administration. This was due to his firm attitude in rejecting all the *bid'ah* (innovation in ritual) matters done by the Malay community there and he was also accused as a member of *Kaum Muda* who wanted to spread his doctrine at the *madrasah* [36].

**Sheikh Abdullah Fahim (1932-1948):** Between the years 1932-1948, Madrasah Idrisiah was under the charge of Sheikh Abdullah Fahim, or better known as Pak Him. He was the son of Tuan Haji Ibrahim, a famous religious teacher in Mecca and grandfather of Tun Abdullah Badawi, the former fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia. Since young, he was taken to Mecca by his father and received religious education there. Sheikh Abdullah Fahim

was well-known *ulama* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Malaysia, similar to Tok Kenali in Kelantan [33]. They were also best friends who frequently corresponded. Before serving at the madrasah, he was teaching in Arabic School Limbongan Kapal, Kedah and Dairatul Maarif Watanian in Kepala Batas, Penang.

He was a learned scholar that fully understanding the thoughts' clashed of *Kaum Muda* and *Kaum Tua*. According to him, what were important were not controversies, corrections or blames. What was more crucial was to extend Islamic religious education either personally or through establishment of more *madrasah* [31]. He served for 16 years at the *madrasah* and for the period of time, the *madrasah* had produced a number of well-known figures of Perak, such as Tuan Haji As'aya, the fourth Mufti of Perak, Abu Hassan bin Abd. Majid the fifth Mufti of Perak as well as Ustaz Haji Abu Bakar Al-Baqir, the independence figure with Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and founder of Maahad Ehya II as-Syarif, Perak.

If during the previous year the number of students was 150, when he was the principal the number rose to 250 and with seven newly appointed teachers. He doubled the effort of previous principals and made the *madrasah* known in Malaya. It was said that his method of teaching was through memorization. Sheikh Abdullah Fahim was an *ulama* with a clear education principle and was always monitoring his students. For example, he always did a surprise spot-check on his students to make sure they perform the dawn (*fajr*) prayer. He was firm in the matter of students' education and gave priority to discipline in his teaching. There were nine education principles that he adhered to, among them are;

- C Set the *umumi* (general curriculum) test to run alongside religious syllabus in the school.
- C Practiced the views of the *Sunni* and *Shafi'i Madhhab*.
- C Used spiritual related practice in upbringing the students.
- C Introduced Arabic books in all of *Umumi* and religious school subjects.

As such, he was respected because of his low profile attitude. His role also left mark not only in Perak but in Penang as well. Due to his concern for his students' excellence, the relationship with the sultan of Perak became the lifeline in improving the education quality of the *madrasah*. Unfortunately, the development of the *madrasah* as a renowned education centre was affected

by the Second World War. Madrasah Idrisiah experienced decline and its education system that was once running smoothly was no more.

**Sheikh Haji Az-Zubair Haji Ahmad (1948-1976):** As a result of Sheikh Abdullah Fahim retirement, Madrasah Idrisiah lost a great *ulama* who brought an era of excellence to the *madrasah*. For a few months Madrasah Idrisiah was without its navigator. Eventually, a young *ulama* who had finished his studies in Mecca was discovered. The administration committee of Madrasah Idrisiah, with the approval of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Sultan of Perak, Sultan Yusof Izzudin Shah (1948-1963), agreed to appoint Sheikh Az-Zubair as the fourth principal beginning in the year 1948. With experience in opening an educational institution in Mecca, it was commendable that he succeeded in bringing Madrasah Idrisiah to an exceptional level, all the more with the protection of the *sultan* [34].

Sheikh Az-Zubair carried on the legacy of Sheikh Abdullah Fahim during Madrasah Idrisiah glorious period. He was the longest serving principal at Madrasah Idrisiah, with a record of nearly 28 years. His love for Madrasah Idrisiah was decidedly immense when he bade his family to contribute a part of his house revenue in Teluk Intan to help the orphans at Madrasah Idrisiah. His usual character was gentle, though he can be strict and fearless when necessary. He was very active in another *madrasah* known as Maahad I Ihyia during the year 1947-1948, about ten years before independence [37]. Like other principals before him, he was very strict in the matter of full and total religious comprehension, especially in regard of congregational prayers at Ubudiah Mosque.

His firm approach towards his students so that they perform their prayers with the congregation was one of the driving factors for parents to send their children to Madrasah Idrisiah. Parents' response to the *madrasah* was most encouraging. In 1966, there were around 385 students. Well-known for his strictness towards students, Sultan Yusof Izzudin Shah decreed Sheikh Az-Zubair to come and explain himself due to the complain that the principal beat his students for missing the congregational prayer. However, after listening to the explanation given by Sheikh Az-Zubair, Sultan Yusof declared that his salary was to be increased [14]. Because of his firmness, the name of Madrasah Idrisiah became more prominent in Malaya at that time.

During the reign of Sultan Yusuf, he was most concerned with the performance of Madrasah Idrisiah. He would always give donations for the development of

the *madrasah* each time he celebrated his birthday. He would definitely invite the students of the *madrasah* to the feast at the palace. During 1960s, Sheikh Az-Zubair and Madrasah Idrisiah made history when he introduced all kinds of co-curriculum programmes. These programmes include sports and outdoor activities. Training for lecture and public speaking was introduced in order to hone students' leadership skill. A majority of subjects at Madrasah Idrisiah were in Arabic, but the study of English Language was also stressed. To increase the use of English, he carried out programme such as language week with activities like lecture, speech and so on. The contributions and roles performed by Sheikh Az-Zubair were indeed significant in developing students with multi-lingual ability.

It was during this time that discussions in regard of academic classes for students such as in schools administered by the government took place. Lengthy debates were conducted in order to ensure that the academic subjects are implemented. The topic was discussed after it received demands from the students [38]. Due to these demands, a paper work was prepared to propose for academic subjects to be taught alongside Arabic and religious subjects. In order to implement this vision, the *madrasah's* committee applied for an allocation of RM3000 (Ringgit Malaysia: Thirty Thousand only) from the Religious Trustee and Foundation of the late Sultan Idris for the programme implementation. This is another landmark for the *madrasah*. The academic education programme was carried out in order to fulfill the aspirations of its students to follow the nations' mainstream education.

In this context, the role of *sultan* and *ulama* was very important in viewing the development of Madrasah Idrisiah. Every time the 'graduation' ceremony took place, the ruling *sultan* will be there to present the awards. This tradition continued until the rule of Sultan Yusuf Izzudin Shah (1948-1963). This proves that the role of *sultan* and *ulama* was very important in the growth of the *madrasah*, in particular the Madrasah Idrisiah in Perak. Sheikh Az-Zubair resigned as the principal in 1976, due to his illness.

## CONCLUSION

The role of *ulama* as leaders of the society should not be taken lightly. They did their utmost best in helping the society in various times and situations, including reconstructing of religious education to the public with the help of *sultan* as a ruler. The development of the

Madrasah Idrisiah from the year 1922 until independence showed how *ulama* were responsible in building religious education centre for the benefit of all. Competent *ulama* as well as the understanding of *sultan* in supporting the progress of religious education were the main focus in the development of this oldest *madrasah* in the state of Perak.

Moreover, the serious attention from *sultan* and *ulama* towards Madrasah Idrisiah had successfully produced significant public figures in the society. Due to the dedication and hard work of the *ulama* who administered and educated the students prior to the independence, they became successful new generation of *ulama* and public leaders. This clearly displayed how close relationship between *ulama* and *sultan* signify in enhancing the public education through the religious education system, as introduced at the *madrasah*. In short, it can be concluded that the *ulama* of Perak worked tirelessly in building the future generation through religious education. Although a few of them had been accused of opposing the rule of Western colonizers as in the case of Abu Bakar al-Baqir, it had not affected their passion in delivering knowledge. Their love for knowledge had given positive impact to the development of *madrasah*, especially Madrasah Idrisiah which has remained popular until today.

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