

# The Role of Education (*Tarbiyyah*) in the Religio-Political Organization

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**Abstract**—This paper presents the reinvention of the role of education (*tarbiyyah*) in the social influence of organizations focusing on the sustainability of a specific religio-political organization. The objective of the paper is to describe how the position secured by education could transform the organization while maintaining its objective and vision. The study employed the qualitative approach that involves data from conducted interviews. An analysis on the role political leaders play in educating the organization in the context of ideological struggle is also analyzed. The process description also evaluates how education could intellectualize its followers and members which inspires them to submit to their leaders and the organization. This extensive cultivation of religio-political doctrine could offer a new interpretation on politics.

**Keywords**—Religio-political organization. Malaysia, education (*tarbiyyah*), followers, political movement.

## I. INTRODUCTION

GENERALLY, political parties are closely related to power and governance but not much can be revealed on the relationship between political parties and education. For the purpose of anonymity, this political party will be referred to as TPP. TPP is a religio-political organization formed in 1951 by Islamic religious teachers and farmers in small towns or villages of Malaysia and the members were predominantly of the Malay ethnicity. Now, TPP is growing in the urban areas and have recruited the middle-class Malays. TPP is a phenomenon that mobilizes support from all levels of society, ethnic groups, religion and cultures which to advocate Islamic ideology. The organization has established many links in most of the constituencies in Malaysia.

An education program or *tarbiyyah* is one of the factors that had strengthened the ideology reverberating in TPP. It was used to rebuild the strength of TPP after it was defeated badly in the 1978 general elections. Most researchers had studied the formative history and the development of religio-political organizations such as the TPP. Work by Shafei Ibrahim (1981), *The Islamic Party of Malaysia: Its Formative Stages and Ideology*, Alias Muhammad (1986), *Platform PAS of Development and Change 1951-1986* and Zambry Abdul Kadir (1995), *Religion and Politics: The Search for Political Legitimacy of the Pan Islamic Party of Malaysia* is proof of this. Shafei Ibrahim's study provides an understanding of TPP's objectives, development, changes, and the political climate during TPP's emergence into the Malaysian political landscape. Alias Muhammad was aware that the Islamic

organization had experienced main changes. The stages of the changes led him to outline a framework. The study of Zambry Abdul Kadir focused on the history of TPP as it evolved in political scene, its maturing process and the concretization of its ideology.

Studies on the role of leadership in educating a political party's members and the society are few. In the attempt to fulfill the deficiency of studies which focuses on the role of education specifically in the transformation of TPP in Malaysia, this study was conducted.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To fully understand the role of education or *tarbiyyah* in the religio-political organization, this paper has three objectives: (1) to investigate the role of the education (*tarbiyyah*) program as an important aspect of transformation of TPP in order to achieve its objectives and vision, (2) to analyze how the political leader used political opportunities and how this strengthened TPP's ideological struggle through indoctrination of its followers and (3) to evaluate how the education program can intellectualize the followers [1].

## III. METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the period where Fadzil Mohd Noor (FMN) led RPO between 1989 and 2002. The religio-political organization studied is called the Pan Islamic Party of Malaysia. The rationale of the choice is during that period, TPP's political campaign approach had transformed in the attempt to gain support and keep its members committed. Hence, research on the relationship between TPP and its educational system is vague and subjective. This work is more a historical analysis, based on primary and secondary sources. Data was collected from different sources such as interviews, participant observation and published and unpublished documents including compact discs. Through this data collection, the description of the case will be accurately interpreted. The personal interviews have become the primary instrument of this research because special interviews with specific individuals helps in the search for a general perspective. Unstructured or open-ended interviewing is used to delve deep beneath the surface of superficial responses to obtain the true meaning that interviewees assign to their experiences and the complexities of their attitude and behavior. The advantages of unstructured interviews are that more complex issues can be examined, answers can be clarified, and an even more free research atmosphere can be created. The interview was conducted on Tun Dr. Mahathir Muhammad, one of the former Malaysian Prime Minister. This study uses an

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explanatory and context analysis. The explanatory approach is utilized to find out how FMN during his tenure as a TPP leader had used education to indoctrinate the members of the party.

#### IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN MALAYSIAN RELIGIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

*Tarbiyyah* is an education program and training system used to shape the personality of organization members and widen their understanding on Islamic movement. *Tarbiyyah* is also a system utilized by leaders and popularized by Ikhwan'ul Muslimin in Egypt and by several Islamic movements throughout the world. As stated by FMN, "the struggle needs more preparations and consistency in order to form an Islamic state. The preparations are more focused on the intellectual, soul and organization" [2]. He stressed that this form of education program is vital in the formulation of building their followers' understanding [3]. It is also to shape them as role models with exemplary personalities to a society who are knowledgeable and disciplined.

The following section of this paper will analyze how FMN had used political opportunities and how it strengthened the organization's ideology through indoctrination of his followers. The political doctrine guiding the members' judgment had been delivered via religious lectures and study circles formed by a number of small membered groups. In this way, members and followers would be given a vision that stimulates them to achieve the objectives outlined by their leader.

FMN had an experience of participating in the Ikhwan'ul Muslimin in Egypt. When he returned to his homeland, he was not active in the organization but was enthusiastic with *Persatuan Ulama Malaysia* (PUM) and *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM) [4]. The religio-political organization at that time was led by Mohd. Asri Hj. Muda and had made a coalition with the *Perikatan / BN*. FMN then ran the education program within the organization and ABIM members. However, Mohd. Asri Hj. Muda, the organization's president realized that this education program had a hidden aim of ousting him and this caused internal conflicts within the organization [5]. Nevertheless, the education program which was implemented in Kelantan without Mohd Asri Hj. Muda's knowledge received a favorable response from its members and followers.

FMN had first commanded the organization members to increase their knowledge and Islamic character by giving more attention to learning, discipline, unity, strengthening endurance, increasing personal sacrifice, preaching and protecting the organization from any impairment. He referred closely and intimately to the holy Quran and the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when he related global and local phenomenon with the TPP's responsibility towards an Islamic movement.

FMN had asked the Youth Council to legislate the syllabus of this education program to all levels of society. More on the movement of addressing various levels of society will be elaborated in this paper. To address the youth and the women population, the education program was used to prepare the Youth and Women Council to embrace an Islamic leadership. Although the organization's Religious Scholar Council was

given the responsibility of managing the education program, they were not able to do so. As a result, the Youth Council and Women Council continued to carry out the education program without an inscribed scheme. The Youth Council used the syllabus of the Bureau of *Education and Leadership* and had applied it to the entire nation's Youth Council [6]. The same was encountered by the Women Council.

During the coalition government, most of the Islamic organization youth joined the ABIM. They were free to support Islam through the ABIM. At that time, the ABIM took over the role of criticizing government policies which were not in favor towards Islam and Malay interests. In the meantime, TPP played a role in protecting Islam and Malay interests and while spreading Islam within the coalition government. Both organizations were united for the Islamic struggle. Mohd. Asri Hj. Muda had a good relationship with the ABIM leaders such as Razali Nawawi, Anwar Ibrahim and FMN. He had agreed that ABIM should train the organization cadres while TPP could focus on political activities. This understanding made ABIM a strong proxy with TPP and became a very influential tool in the Islamic movement with focused on higher education institutions.

Although TPP had suffered badly during the 1978 and 1982 general elections, the education program which had the ideology of 'unity of thought' and 'unity of act' had helped it to regain its original strength after the split with BN. The ideology of the educational program was leadership through *dakwah* and the program called for an Islamic political movement. TPP leaders repeated this statement at every organization Annual Congress and they affirmed the organization's two-function model of action in achieving its objectives. As part of the education program, members were encouraged by FMN to be highly determined, pro-active, committed, self-reflective and highly disciplined. The understanding of politics and national issues of each state was also considered absolutely necessary to protect TPP. These events demonstrate the significant power of the education program had towards TPP.

#### V. REINVENTING THE EDUCATION APPROACH OF THE RELIGIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Whilst the Malaysian political modus changed, with the implementation of the government's softer approach, TPP ruled Kelantan (1990) and Terengganu (1999). Since there was an increasing support towards TPP, FMN reinvented the education approach. These changes were although slow was carried out smoothly. During his leadership, he managed TPP effectively. TPP commands were delivered effectively through the education program. The program had become the mediator to the development of thinking and had increased the spirit of Islamic struggle among his followers. This established a strong bond between the organization members and leaders. The process of the education curriculum had increased the intellectual level of the members. The spirit and the concern on politics were aligned with religion, which demanded sacrifice in the struggle. Concern for the importance of education instilled understanding, obedience and sincerity of action. This

strength became the source of the legitimacy of FMN views and his subsequent actions as the TPP leader.

The importance of the education was stressed in the Annual Congress. In this perspective, weakness in the organization was caused by the weakness of the education curriculum. Therefore, the meaning of the education program had expanded under FMN's leadership. It depended on the level of understanding of his followers. The leader described the meaning of the education differently between the members who had wider religious knowledge and the members who had not been exposed to religious knowledge. In addition, he explained that the aspect of the education program was not only to increase the understanding of knowledge and learning through the religious lectures, workshops and study circles but also to work actively in politics [7]. FMN brought the concept of the education program to the members and to the society. This in turned created a close-knit relationship within various communities. It not only increased the understanding of religion but also enhanced the society's awareness on politics.

Realizing that the participation of professionals would dwindle if they were not taught the curriculum, FMN aligned the curriculum content to match the intellectual level of these professionals. The curriculum touched on grave issues on being members of TPP and the elections such as sackings, frozen salaries, the loss of accumulated wealth and status, and imprisonment granted under the Internal Security Act (1960). These events were referred to FMN as a significant sacrificial part of the learning embedded in the education program which every member needed to encounter [7, p.78].

The leader believed that if members were not involved in this form of education, it would be difficult to maintain the Islamic struggle which demanded sacrifices in an atmosphere that offered many promising and interesting opportunities outside the organization. Consequently, he reiterated that all members had to be involved in this education program to avoid them from being among those who will fail. The stability and the strength of the Islamic struggle depended on the members' understanding and concern towards the struggle. The TPP is a unique movement as it not only preaches, it also engages in politics. The organization uses politics to reach identified groups of people and uses preaching to build a powerful political movement.

With the mission to engage all levels of class and society, FMN implemented ridged and strict rules which new members found hard to adopt. The ridged education was believed to be the organization's strength and advantage to consolidate the organization members. Usually this form of education is imposed on all TPP leaders and the university students in which adhering to teachings such as the reading of the holy Quran with truthfulness, the memorizing of several *surah*, fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, congregational prayers, praying at midnight and dressing modestly. All these teachings proved difficult to adopt in the rural as well as in the urban areas. Some of the members who may not have had a steadfast religious upbringing developed inferiority complex as they tried to assimilate within the society and soon decided to abandon the party. In the early period of the establishment of the education

program, intrusive elements had penetrated into the TPP under FMN's leadership. However, these elements were no match for party's vigor. For example, Islamic Representative Council (IRC) had been accused of trying to influence the organization to galvanize those who were weak in several aspects, such as education and leadership.

The TPP under FMN's leadership did not want the issue of an 'organization within an organization' as it had disrupted the development of the TPP [7, p. 76]. This situation was caused by the failure of IRC's effort to take over the organization's education [8]. Finally, under his leadership a successfully stable and continuous education system was formed. Despite that, the TPP faced several radical assaults including one which was of militant character. There were various reasons which resulted in the formation of these assaults such as a new government policy, failure in the elections and external influences which had attempted to disrupt the Islamic militant movement. FMN employed the education program to reduce the effects of the radical assaults and began a more peaceful approach, based on the national constitution.

However, his approaches were affected by the current international political situation. The global political background of the late 80s and early 90s showed that the Islamic world faced massive pressure and attacks from various sides. The support and aid for Islamic movements such as from Patani, Kashmir, Palestine and Afghanistan encouraged TPP members to use militant and radical approaches to confront the Malaysian government. The emergence of radical and militant approaches in TPP were also managed through the education program which planted the concept of 'unity of thought' underlined with peace while incorporating a democratic system to initiate the spread of the organization's ideology and objectives. This approach allowed TPP to succeed in countering the government accusations on the alleged unconstitutional TPP's approaches. The ability of TPP to stay consistently clear from any militant and radical elements in politics has been proven by its active involvement in all Malaysian general elections.

Disciplinary action was considered by the leader as a part of learning process within the education program. For example, the members who were disciplined by the Organization Disciplinary Board for any reason, usually accepted it and this made them more committed to TPP's beliefs. Throughout TPP's history, no one was spared of the disciplinary action, including the President, Deputy Minister, Secretary and even the Chief Minister.

Disciplinary action was implemented to stabilize the organization. In some cases, the influence of external assaults gradually lessened and eventually were eliminated. FMN was successful at containing and eradicating these assaults. Also as a result of the education program, the members were able to accept the leader's radical approach and somewhat extremist actions. With the acceptance, his agenda ran smoothly. The conformity and submission of TPP's members on its policies and leader's decisions were also based on their conviction about the reputation of FMN's leadership. Members could criticize his political actions either in the organization Annual

Congress or in any of given forums. His usual respond would be to accept all the criticisms from the various levels and to provide feedback based on rational principles and Islamic political views.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

In the early stage, the education program was a process to build up understanding among the members through ideological approaches. At the same time, the process of eradicating of external assaults had resulted in the unification of beliefs among TPP members. The leader gave a broad meaning of the education program in TPP which was suited to the then current condition. The wave of reformation era attracted people to join the organization as members building strength in numbers. The education approach and political situation facilitated the leader to introduce radical political ideas deemed fitting for the democratic political arena. The exploration of the FMN new political ideas has brought his organization to a new paradigm in Malaysian politics. This includes the initiation of approaches which called for political cooperation with other secular organizations. FMN realized the importance of the education program as the key in the fostering and expansion of TPP when members from different backgrounds were united and their abilities were pooled in to achieve the objectives of TPP.

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