



THE EMERGENCE, DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION, AND THE ACTIVITIES OF HIGHER RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract. *This article analyzes the spread of Islam in Malaysia and the historical trajectory of its Islamic education system, tracing its evolution from the traditional «pondok» schools of the Malacca Sultanate era (1414–1511) to modern international universities. The study examines the socio-political and historical context of Malaysia, colonial-era challenges, post-independence educational reforms under the Ministry of Education, and the intellectual contributions of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi concerning the «Islamization of knowledge» and the philosophy of «adab.» Furthermore, the institutional governance, campus infrastructure, and academic frameworks of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU) are comprehensively explored.*

Keywords: *Malaysia; Islamic education; pondok; madrasa; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas; Islamization of knowledge; adab; International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM); Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU).*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has played a significant role in shaping Malaysia's religious, cultural, and intellectual development. Originating from traditional pondok institutions during the Malacca Sultanate, it gradually evolved into organized madrasas and modern Islamic universities. This transformation was influenced by Islamic scholars, colonial educational policies, and post-independence reforms. Prominent thinkers, particularly Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, contributed to the philosophical foundations of Islamic education through the concepts of ta'dib and the Islamization of knowledge. This study examines the historical development, institutional transformation, and philosophical foundations of Islamic education in Malaysia, with particular attention to the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU).

MAIN PART

The Emergence of Islamic Education in Malaysia and Historical-Political Overview

Main Text. Historical records indicate that Islamic education in Malaysia first emerged during the era of the Malacca Sultanate (1414–1511) (Hashim, 1996:21–25). During the Malacca Sultanate period, the traditional institution of Islamic education was referred to as the «pondok.» The term pondok literally denotes a hut or shelter constructed from iron, tin, wood, and similar materials (Hashim, 1996:26). Geographically, Malaysia (Persekutuan Tanah Melayu) is a country in Southeast Asia whose territory is divided into two parts by the South China Sea: West Malaysia (Malaya), situated in the southern part of the Malay Peninsula, and East Malaysia, located in the northern part of the island of Kalimantan (Borneo). Covering an area of 332,800 sq. km, its population reached 22.2 million in 2001, with the city of Kuala Lumpur serving as its capital. Administratively, the country is divided into 13 states and 2 federal territories (National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan, 2003:442).

Malaysia is a federal state and a constitutional monarchy within the British-led Commonwealth of Nations. Its current constitution was adopted in 1963, based upon the 1957 Constitution of the Federation of Malaya with subsequent amendments (Andaya & Andaya, 2017:275–278). The head of state is the Paramount Ruler (Yang di-Pertuan Agong; from December 12, 2001, Sultan Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail), who is elected by the Conference of Rulers from among the nine Malay state rulers by secret ballot for a five-year term. The legislative body is a bicameral parliament, while executive authority is exercised by the Cabinet of Ministers led by the Prime Minister (National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan, 2003:442).

Trade and cultural relations between the inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula and India played a major role in the formation of early polities in the region. Such states emerged in the northern part of the Malay Peninsula, in urban settlements near river estuaries. Between the 3rd and 14th centuries, these city-states were subordinate to more powerful neighboring empires (Andaya & Andaya, 2017:32–55). In the 15th and early 16th centuries, the Malay Peninsula, the Riau Archipelago, and the eastern coast of Sumatra were unified under the authority of the Malacca Sultanate. In 1511,

the Malacca Sultanate was conquered by Portugal (Andaya & Andaya, 2017:60–63). Subsequently, several sultanates emerged in Western Malaysia (Malaya), the largest of which—Johor—sought between the 16th and 18th centuries to reunite all of Malaya under its rule. In 1641, Malacca was captured by the Dutch. From the late 18th century onward, British colonialists began to exert influence over the Malay states, occupying the majority of modern-day Malaysian territory between 1786 and 1888. This period witnessed numerous wars and uprisings against colonial rule (in 1791, 1831–1832, 1875–1876, 1891–1894, and others) (Andaya & Andaya, 2017:120–168).

During the Second World War, Malaysia was occupied by the Japanese army. In 1943, the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army was formed to resist the occupiers. On September 2, 1945, Japanese forces were defeated by the people's army, and democratic organs of power—people's committees—were established across the country. Shortly thereafter, British colonial authorities returned to Malaysia and sought to restore the former colonial order while attempting to undermine the national liberation movement through political maneuvers. Under the constitutional reforms of 1946 and 1948, Singapore was separated from Malaya; Malaya was designated the Malayan Union in 1946 and the Federation of Malaya in 1948, while Sarawak and Sabah became British Crown Colonies in 1946 (Andaya & Andaya, 2017:261–268). In June 1948, the British administration launched an offensive against the national liberation movement, prompting the formation of the Malayan National Liberation Army in February 1949. In the 1955 elections to the Federal Legislative Council of Malaya, the Alliance Party (a coalition of three parties advocating independence within the British Commonwealth) won a decisive victory. On August 31, 1957, the independence of the Federation of Malaya was proclaimed (Andaya & Andaya, 2017:276). On July 9, 1963, an agreement was signed in London between Great Britain, the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak establishing the Federation of Malaysia; however, due to political disagreements between the governments of Malaysia and Singapore, Singapore withdrew from the Federation in August 1965 (Andaya & Andaya, 2017:283–288). Malaysia has been a member of the United Nations since 1963, established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Uzbekistan on January 1, 1992, and celebrates its National Day on August 31 (1957) (National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan, 2003:443).

The national public education system consists of a 6-year primary school (for children aged 6 to 12), a 3-year lower secondary school, and a 2-year upper secondary school (which includes social science, natural science, technical, and vocational streams). Various trades are also taught in vocational schools, secondary technical colleges, and advanced technical colleges. Higher education is provided by the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur (1962), the National University of Malaysia (1970), the Technological University (1972), the Agricultural University (1973), and the University of Science in George Town. Major cultural and scientific institutions in Kuala Lumpur include the National Library (1971), the National Museum (1963, featuring archaeological, ethnographic, and zoological collections), the Rubber Research Institute, the Malaysian Scientific Research Institute, forestry and tropical fisheries research centers, the Institute for Medical Research, the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, the Institute of Language and Literature (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka), and the Tamil Language Society (National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan, 2003:444).

The Advent of Islam in Malaysia and the Philosophy of Islamic Education

Initial contact with Islam in this part of the world dates back to 674 CE (forty-two years after the passing of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him), during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph Mu'awiyah in Damascus (Al-Attas, 1969:11–14). Two hundred years later, in 878 CE, people along the coasts of the Malay Peninsula, including the prominent trading port of Klang (Kelang), began embracing Islam. Prior to the arrival of Islam, the indigenous Malays adhered to Hinduism and Buddhism alongside various animistic and indigenous beliefs. The life of the local population was structured and regulated in a manner reflecting the influence of multiple religions—a phenomenon observable not only in Malay cultural artifacts, but also in the conceptual structure of «authority» among state officials and local rulers (Al-Attas, 1969:4–10).

In the majority of communities across the Malay world, state rulers and political elites embraced Islam. The principles enshrined in the Qur'an and Hadith affirming that humanity should be organized on the basis of interpersonal equality left a profound impression on the populace and attracted them to the faith. Those who had long been regarded as belonging to lower social strata witnessed the Islamic concept of human equality and the equal rights of all members of society. Consequently, they were liberated from the rigid religious caste system and hierarchical «classes.» In Islam,

there was no discrimination or division based on skin color, class, tribal affiliation, race, homeland, or place of birth—all of which laid the foundation for the rapid spread of the religion (Al-Attas, 1969:26–30). The guarantee of equal rights appeared to the people as a just solution, signifying in practice the acceptance of rights and obligations as full members of the Islamic Community (Ummah). Through faith in Islam, the believer attained spiritual elevation and closeness to God, while the local population recognized that Islam could emancipate them from servitude and provide the means to eradicate social ills, helping the ordinary individual comprehend the intrinsic value of human dignity (Al-Attas, 1969:29–33).

The efforts of Islamic scholars (‘ulama’) in implementing Islamic teachings were gradually directed toward rulers, officials, community leaders, and the general public. Their endeavors left enduring marks in Banten (formerly Bantam), East Java, Makassar, Kalimantan, the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, Malacca, Terengganu, and other regions. The ‘ulama’ also participated in governance, and several powerful sultans strictly adhered to Islamic teachings (Hashim, 1996:28–33). Beginning in the 1920s, Malay students started pursuing higher studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Upon returning to Malaya, this new generation of Middle East-educated graduates made a substantial contribution to the development of Islamic education. They adopted an educational model that combined traditional Islamic instruction with Western-influenced pedagogy and organizational technologies, transforming traditional «pondoks» into structured madrasas (Hashim, 1996:42–49; Roff, 1967:56–67).

Recognizing the deep attachment of Malaysians to Islam, the British colonial administration introduced elements of Islamic religious instruction into Malay vernacular schools (Hashim, 1996:50–55). Following Malaysia’s independence from Great Britain, extensive educational reforms were enacted. The administration and curricula of all schools providing Islamic education were brought under the supervision of the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, accompanied by sustained efforts to bridge the dichotomy between Islamic religious sciences and secular sciences (Hashim, 1996:65–78). In 1973, the Religious Education Division (Bahagian Pelajaran Agama) was established within the Ministry of Education to coordinate Islamic education. In 1983, it was renamed the Islamic Education Division (Bahagian Pendidikan Islam), and in 1995 it was reorganized as the Islamic and Moral Education Division (Bahagian Pendidikan

Islam dan Moral). Today, it has reverted to the Islamic Education Division (Bahagian Pendidikan Islam) and is entrusted with key responsibilities, including formulating Islamic education policy, developing curricula, promoting the Arabic language, and recruiting and training qualified teachers (Hamid, 2010:45–52).

Despite Malaysia's geographical distance from the traditional heartlands of the Islamic world, its role in advancing religious scholarship is exceptional. Historically situated at the crossroads of Eastern and Western maritime trade routes, medieval «Malaysia»—a term used by scholars to describe the broader Nusantara or Malay-Indonesian archipelago encompassing modern Southeast Asia—experienced profound influences from Indian, Arab, and European civilizations. Early commercial interactions between indigenous Malaysians and Muslim merchants facilitated the gradual penetration of Islam, which by the 13th century had spread fully across the region. Since September 16, 1963, Malaysia has been recognized as one of the most pluralistic Muslim-majority nations in the world, having achieved independence on August 31, 1957 through the unification of the Malay Peninsula, followed by Singapore's separation from the Federation in August 1965 (Andaya & Andaya, 2017:276–288).

One of the scholars who has made a monumental global contribution to the philosophy of Islamic education is the prominent Malaysian thinker Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (born 1931), whose works and educational theories have exerted a profound influence across the Muslim world (Al-Attas, 1978:133–160; Wan Daud, 1998:1–15). In 1987, al-Attas became the founder-director of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), a research institute affiliated with the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) (Wan Daud, 1998:18–22). The conceptual foundations of this research center traced back to the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mecca in 1977 (Al-Attas, 1979:1–12). According to another internationally respected Malaysian scholar, Mohd Kamal Hassan (born 1942), who served as Rector of IIUM from 1999 to 2006, the outcomes of that conference represented a major milestone toward the intellectual «revival» of the entire Muslim Ummah (Hassan, 2009:243–250).

According to his dedicated circle of students and followers, al-Attas is the rightful intellectual pioneer of the «Islamization of Knowledge» framework, whereas the late Philadelphia-based scholar Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi subsequently adopted and further

elaborated the scheme (Wan Daud, 1998:291–305; Al-Faruqi, 1982:1–18). Broadly conceived, the «Islamization of knowledge» sought to systematically and methodically synthesize modern Western humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences with the vast body of knowledge within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Under its successive rectors, IIUM emerged internationally as a leading champion of the «Islamization of knowledge» agenda. This concept also served as the central motto of former IIUM Rector (1989–1999) AbdulHamid AbuSulayman (born 1936) (AbuSulayman, 1989:1–25), and remained a permanent theme in the scholarship of Professor Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi at the US-based International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) (Al-Faruqi, 1982:15–38).

Through his long-term philosophical inquiries, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas formulated a distinctive definition of «education.» In his view, «education is the instilling and inculcation of adab in man» (ta'dib)—a theory that gained widespread acceptance across the Muslim world (Al-Attas, 1980:13–28). Here, adab essentially encompasses the process of disciplining the mind and soul, acquiring noble qualities for the intellect and heart, performing right actions as opposed to erroneous ones, and thereby preserving humanity from disgrace (Al-Attas, 1980:22–27). Al-Attas emphasized his preference for the concept of adab (ta'dib) in understanding education because adab is a uniquely human attribute, rooted in the rational soul (nafs) and intellect ('aql), which are responsible for fulfilling or neglecting one's actions as part of man's primordial covenant with God. By contrast, he viewed the term tarbiyah as possessing more general, physical connotations—signifying «the process of teaching and learning,» «bringing out,» «developing,» «rearing,» «feeding,» and «nurturing» or «cherishing» things in one's possession (Al-Attas, 1980:28–34). Inspired by al-Attas's ethical worldview, Malaysian scholars began to approach the acquisition of Islamic knowledge as a holistic, integrative process (Wan Daud, 1998:131–165).

The Spread of Islam and the Network of Pondok and Madrasa Institutions

Following the initial introduction of Islam, the religion was disseminated from one district to another by local Muslim scholars ('ulama') and rulers. Their customary practice began with establishing a religious learning center known as a «pondok» (hut), consisting of small student dormitories built around the teacher's residence or mosque (Hashim, 1996:26–29). In addition to delivering lectures in homes, madrasas, or

mosques, these scholars engaged in working in paddy fields, horticulture, handicrafts, and other practical activities according to each individual's capacity. The role of these 'ulama' was not limited to teaching; they also served as trusted advisors to rural families and communities, exercising broad influence due to their experience and competence across multiple spheres of human activity. Upon completing their studies, students returned to their homelands—often in remote corners of the country—after having studied successively under one scholar after another (Hashim, 1996:30–34).

Muslims in the Malay Archipelago in general, and in Malaysia in particular, predominantly follow the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence (madhhab). However, there are also Muslims in Malaysia who do not adhere strictly to a single legal school. In the state of Perlis, the State Constitution stipulates that Perlis follows the Qur'an and Sunnah directly rather than a specific madhhab; consequently, many Muslims in Perlis do not follow a particular school of law, similar to the followers and members of the Muhammadiyah organization in Indonesia (Hamid, 2010:18–22).

One of the most notable aspects of traditional religious education was the close relationship among pondok schools, teachers, and students, even when separated by vast geographical distances—such as between Kubang Pasu or Kedah and Aceh, Java, Kalimantan, or Kelantan. The unifying factor that forged strong bonds among them was the uniformity of the educational system: not only were the same Sacred Scripture and scholarly language (Arabic and Jawi) utilized, but they also shared common socio-political challenges—even though the Dutch were the colonial power in Indonesia while the British ruled Malaysia (Malaya). Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonialists attempted in various ways, particularly through their respective educational systems, to promote Christianization and Western cultural hegemony (Hashim, 1996:45–52).

Nevertheless, a group of reformist Muslims recognized that traditional pondok schools could not adequately compete with colonial educational institutions. To overcome these limitations, Madrasah al-Mashoor al-Islamiyyah was established in Pulau Pinang (Penang) in 1916, utilizing Arabic as the medium of instruction (Roff, 1967:75–78; Hashim, 1996:46). In such madrasahs, secular sciences were taught alongside Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). This educational institution catered not only to Muslims in Penang and northern Malaya, but also to Muslim students from across Southeast Asia. The school was named in honor of Sayyid Ahmad al-Mashoor, a charismatic scholar widely revered throughout the region as Ayid Mashoor.

After Malaya achieved independence on August 31, 1957, the expansion of religious instruction within state-subsidized schools resulted from the persistent efforts of the Malay public—a development clearly reflected in the establishment of the Muslim College (Kolej Islam Malaya) and the National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) (Hashim, 1996:60–68). Meanwhile, the most renowned and oldest pondok in Malaysia was that of Tok Guru Haji Muhammad Yusof, famously known as Tok Kenali (1868–1933), which he founded in Kota Bharu, Kelantan (Roff, 1974:87–102). Having received his early education in Kelantan, he continued his advanced studies at al-Masjid al-Haram (the Grand Mosque in Mecca), as was customary for leading pondok teachers. Tok Kenali's pondok evolved into a celebrated center of learning, attracting numerous students from various states who subsequently opened their own pondok schools and emerged as community leaders. This teacher-student-teacher network expanded into Southern Thailand and Indonesia, and several Malaysian scholars even rose to become teachers at al-Masjid al-Haram in Mecca (Roff, 1974:95–106).

4. Higher Religious Educational Institutions in Malaysia: IIUM and MEDIU

In examining contemporary higher Islamic education in Malaysia, two prominent institutions warrant detailed analysis: the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU). Both universities hold a distinct status not only within Malaysia, but across the wider Islamic world.

The International Islamic University Malaysia (Malay: Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia, abbreviated as IIUM) is a premier public university in Malaysia. Headquartered at its main campus in Gombak, Selangor, IIUM operates six additional campuses across the country: two health-focused campuses and a Centre for Foundation Studies in Pahang (Kuantan and Gambang), two city campuses in Kuala Lumpur, and a language and tourism campus in Pagoh, Johor (IIUM, 2020:1–5). The university is sponsored by eight national governments and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and is distinct from the International Islamic University Islamabad in Pakistan and the International Islamic University Chittagong in Bangladesh. Established on May 23, 1983, IIUM is founded upon Islamic principles, integrating Islamic values across all academic disciplines. Offering undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs across 14 faculties, IIUM has produced more than 70,000 graduates and students from over 100 countries since 1987, the majority of whom are from Malaysia (Hassan, 2009: 245–252).

The idea of establishing an international Islamic educational institution was conceived by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in 1982 during a meeting with OIC leaders. He shared this vision with the then Minister of Education, Dr. Sulaiman Daud, the Director-General of Education, Murad Mohamed Noor, and two other scholars. Dr. Mohd Kamal Hassan, then of the National University of Malaysia, together with a senior academic official who attended the meeting, drafted the initial working paper outlining the concept of the university (Hassan, 2009:246–248). Because English and Arabic—rather than Malay—were designated as the languages of instruction (which was initially restricted under Malaysian public university legislation), IIUM was first incorporated under the Companies Act of 1965 as a private entity. However, on May 23, 1983, IIUM was officially declared a public university under Section 5A(2) of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 following an establishment order issued by the King, Sultan Ahmad Shah of Pahang, after diplomatic exchanges and co-sponsorship agreements between the Government of Malaysia, seven other governments, and the OIC. An inaugural cohort of 153 students from Malaysia and abroad enrolled in the first academic session, which commenced on July 8, 1983. Courses were conducted in the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Laws, the Centre for Fundamental Knowledge, and the Centre for Languages. Members of this pioneer cohort received their degrees and diplomas during the First Convocation on October 10, 1987, comprising 68 Bachelor of Economics graduates, 56 Bachelor of Laws graduates, and 29 graduates in Qadi Judiciary and Administration (IIUM, 2020:3–6).

As a public university, IIUM is headed by a Constitutional Head (Ketua Perlembagaan), who presides over convocations and serves as the highest authority on constitutional matters, appointed by the King on the recommendation of the federal government for a seven-year term. Sultan Ahmad Shah of Pahang served as the founding Constitutional Head from July 1, 1983. Prior to his passing, he was succeeded by his daughter-in-law, Queen Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah of Johor, who was appointed on April 12, 2019 for a five-year term (officially receiving her instrument of appointment on June 17, 2019), concluding her father-in-law's 36-year tenure. As a federal statutory body, IIUM operates under the supervision of a Board of Governors chaired by the President, who is appointed for a five-year term. Traditionally, the Deputy Chairman is the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Education, alongside 15 board members

including the OIC Secretary-General and diplomatic heads of sponsoring member states (Bangladesh, Egypt, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey). Renowned Islamic finance scholar Datuk Dr. Mohd Daud Bakar assumed office as the eighth President on July 1, 2019, while the Senate and Management Committee are led by the Rector (Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak), appointed for a three-year term (IIUM, 2020:7–10).

IIUM comprises 14 faculties, each designated by the Arabic term «Kulliyyah» (IIUM, 2020:12–15):

- Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyyah of Laws (AIKOL) – Gombak;
- Kulliyyah of Allied Health Sciences (KAHS) – Kuantan;
- Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED) – Gombak;
- Kulliyyah of Dentistry (KOD) – Kuantan;
- Kulliyyah of Economics and Management Sciences (KENMS) – Gombak;
- Kulliyyah of Education (KOED) – Gombak;
- Kulliyyah of Engineering (KOE) – Gombak;
- Kulliyyah of Information and Communication Technology (KICT) – Gombak;
- Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS) – Gombak;
- Kulliyyah of Languages and Management (KLM) – Pagoh;
- Kulliyyah of Medicine (KOM) – Kuantan;
- Kulliyyah of Nursing (KON) – Kuantan;
- Kulliyyah of Pharmacy (KOP) – Kuantan;
- Kulliyyah of Science (KOS) – Kuantan.

In addition, IIUM houses specialized academic centers and institutes offering pre-university, undergraduate, and postgraduate programs: the Academy of Graduate and Professional Studies (ACADEMY); the Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS) in Gambang; the Centre for Languages and Pre-University Academic Development (CELPAD); the IIUM Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance (IIiBF); the International Institute for Halal Research and Training (INHART); and the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) in Kuala Lumpur (IIUM, 2020:16–18).

Campus facilities include the IIUM Cultural Centre (ICC), the multipurpose Azman Hashim Complex, four sports complexes across Gombak, Kuantan, and Gambang, and

autonomous student residential colleges known as «Mahallah» (plural: Mahallat), named after prominent Companions of the Prophet, mujahidin, and female martyrs (shuhada'). Since 2016, IIUM has operated its teaching hospital, the IIUM Medical Centre (Sultan Ahmad Shah Medical Centre) in Kuantan, alongside specialized clinics. At the heart of the Gombak campus stands the Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Mosque, accommodating 9,000 worshippers and organizing programs in tilawah, tahfiz al-Qur'an, qiyamullail, and spiritual tarbiyah. Today, IIUM hosts approximately 27,000 students from over 40 Muslim-majority nations as well as non-Muslim-majority countries (including Germany, Finland, China, South Korea, Japan, India, the United States, Russia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines), with 60,785 graduates recorded between 1987 and 2012 (53,241 Malaysian and 7,530 international) and alumni chapters worldwide (IIUM, 2020:19–24).

Uniquely among Malaysian public universities, IIUM requires all foundation and undergraduate students to attend weekly Islamic study circles known as «Usrah» for social, spiritual, and intellectual development as a graduation requirement. In competitive arenas, IIUM has achieved international acclaim in parliamentary debating and public speaking across Malay, English, and Arabic (ranking 10th out of 440 teams at the 35th World Universities Debating Championship in 2014, winning the United Asian Debating Championship, Australasian Intervarsity Debating Championship, and Asian British Parliamentary Championship in 2016, and placing second at the World Arabic Universities Debating Championship in 2017). In scientific research, IIUM has won gold, silver, and bronze medals at PENCIPTA, INPEX, ITEX Geneva, and KIPA exhibitions, won the inaugural Proton Green Mobility Challenge 2012 (PGMC) with its electric «Smart Mobility» Proton Saga BLM, and collaborated with JAKIM and YADIM to develop the Malaysian Syariah Index—officially launched by the Prime Minister on February 10, 2015—measuring compliance with maqasid al-shari'ah across eight national sectors. Recognized by ISESCO as the «Premier International University of Islamic Studies,» IIUM ranks among the top five Islamic universities globally (IIUM, 2020:25–30).

Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU; Malay: Universiti Antarabangsa Al-Madinah) is an independent higher educational institution in Malaysia established in 2006 upon Islamic principles and values, named after Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah,

the capital of the early Islamic state and a beacon for seekers of Islamic knowledge (MEDIU, 2018:1–4). Officially approved by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) on December 26, 2006, and registered on May 20 / June 20, 2007 under the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 (Act 555), MEDIU's academic programs are accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Led by its Chief Executive Officer (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fadlan Mohd Othman), MEDIU offers both on-campus and advanced online learning programs (MEDIU, 2018:5–8).

MEDIU enrolled its first cohort of students in 2008 across faculties of Islamic Sciences, Languages, Finance and Administrative Sciences, and Computer and Information Technology, supported by nine overseas service centers across Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. In September 2010, the first full-time on-campus students enrolled, followed by the inaugural postgraduate convocation in 2011. Subsequent milestones included signing an educational memorandum with Granada International College (GIC) in 2012, securing MARA Study Loan Scheme sponsorship approval for Islamic Sciences and Arabic Language degrees in 2013, enrolling 2,265 students and launching an official French website in 2014, and achieving recognition from the Ministries of Higher Education of Yemen, Nigeria, Syria, Sudan, and Palestine by 2015. Publishing the peer-reviewed journals *Majma'* and *Al-Rasikhun*, MEDIU has trained 2,384 active students from 84 nationalities and 1,982 graduates from 70 nationalities across 48 fully MQA-accredited programs and 35 postgraduate research specializations, while maintaining active memoranda of understanding with 21 global universities across the United States, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Netherlands across its seven faculties: Islamic Sciences, Languages, Computer and Information Technology, Finance and Administrative Sciences, Education, Engineering, and Preparatory Studies and Languages (MEDIU, 2018:9–18).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the historical trajectory of Islamic education in Malaysia demonstrates a remarkable institutional continuity and adaptability—evolving from community-based pondok shelters during the Malacca Sultanate into modern reformist madrasas in the early twentieth century, and culminating in globally recognized universities such as

IIUM and MEDIU. Grounded in the philosophical synthesis of the «Islamization of knowledge» and the inculcation of adab pioneered by thinkers like Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Malaysia's educational model successfully harmonizes classical Islamic scholarship with modern scientific, technological, and administrative disciplines.

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