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Program at Imtiaz Schools in Malaysia**

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DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ULUL ALBAB TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM AT IMTIAZ SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Ulul Albab education is an education that offers in selected secondary schools in Malaysia. In the context of the teachers at the Ulul Albab schools, the in-service program is essential as the existing pre-service programs do not directly focus on the concept of Ulul Albab education. This qualitative study aims to examine the design and implementation of the Ulul Albab teacher training program at Imtiaz secondary schools. This qualitative study employed the case study method by interviewing six participants using a purposive sampling technique consisting of Ulul Albab program coordinators, Imtiaz secondary school principal, and four teachers at Imtiaz secondary schools who performed Ulul Albab programs. The findings showed that there are several designs of teacher training programs such as Quranic culture, explanation of school mission, benchmarking visits to excellent schools, and the emphasis on holistic education concept. The findings of the study also indicate that the implementation of teacher training programs should be carried out periodically, and consistently by the school and relevant departments. This study has important implications for professional development programs for Ulul Albab teachers during their services, especially on the aspects that have been highlighted in the study findings.

Keywords: *In-service Training; Ulul Albab Teachers; Teacher Training Program.*



A. Introduction

Quality education requires quality teachers as the capital to produce quality students. Teachers are an essential asset in every country because the quality of education depends on their efforts. Therefore, teachers play a vital role in ensuring that any curriculum or educational program is implemented successfully (Mensah, 2016). In the context of Ulul Albab education, the role of teachers is even more emphasized in achieving the high goal of producing a new generation of Ulul Albab.

This Ulul Albab program is familiar and well known in Malaysia. The program offers religious secondary education focused on the Quranic component which comprises recitation, memorization, and *Tafseer*. Besides the Quranic component, the program also stresses the acquired knowledge specifically science components. This kind of program is also widely offered in Indonesia to produce students with a holistic perspective of knowledge or known as ulul albab generation. The Ulul Albab program was first offered in Malaysia's formal education system in 2005 with the establishment of Imtiaz Besut Secondary School, Terengganu. There are currently eight Imtiaz schools being developed in almost every district in Terengganu, namely, Dungun, Kuala Berang, Kuala Terengganu, Kemaman, Kuala Nerus, Setiu, Marang and including Besut (Mohd Zainudin, Yamin & Tengku Mahmud, 2019).

In particular, Imtiaz Secondary School was established to produce a generation of "albab" who can master a wide range of disciplines of knowledge, language, and skills (Mohd Zainudin et al., 2019). In addition, to the aim of the program which focused on the generation of "albab" that dominated science and other languages, Imtiaz Secondary School also applied three main components: Quranic, Encyclopedic, and *Ijtihadik*. The Quranic focuses on the several important aspects of the Quran which is the process known as BIFFAS, which is read, remember, understand, think, practice, and disseminate. It means that the Quranic component aims to strengthen the knowledge of the Quran, including reading, understanding, practice, and dissemination. Encyclopedic refers to the mastery of knowledge and skills that can serve as a reference to the community. This

component aims to make Ulul Albab students highly knowledgeable and highly skillful students who can become community consultants. *Ijtihadik* component is rooted in the term *ijtihad* that refers to the ability to provide insight into issues. Normally this component is related to the issues of the community using critical and creative thinking skills explicitly developed through co-curricular activities in schools. This component generally aims to enable students to solve problems using their thinking ability (Ahmad Razimi & Sidek, 2013).

It is proven that the goal or mission could not have been achieved without the role of teachers in the Ulul Albab program. Teachers, as an important factor in the implementation of any program or curriculum, need to be examined in terms of their specific roles and criteria. Therefore, research on teacher training programs should be undertaken to ensure that teachers, especially Ulul Albab teachers, can play their role effectively.

Quality teachers are professional teachers who achieved *riadhah ruhiyyah* values as presented by Al-Ghazali which comprises of quality relationship with Allah, with oneself, colleagues, and students (Haji Musa & Mohd Yusoff, 2019). Besides that, teachers' instructional aspects should also be emphasized. Based on that, teachers need education and training programs that cover significant elements such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs they hold. There are two types of training programs for teachers, pre-service training and in-service training. Pre-service training or program is provided before a teacher is permitted legally to teach in the school. At the same time, in-service programs or training refer to ongoing training provided to teachers during their service period to ensure that knowledge and skills can be improved over time (Rahman et al., 2011). This type of training or teachers' professional development could be considered as teachers' learning and how they apply the knowledge in their teaching. Teachers' learning is described by Postholm (2012) as participation in teachers in short courses in schools; reflection on their teaching; observation and reflection on others' teaching practice. Besides that, teachers' learning could also occur in meetings between teachers and unplanned conversations among teachers (Postholm, 2012).



In-service teacher education programs generally refer to training offered on weekends or afternoons after school sessions that aimed to improve teachers' professionalism (Manduku, Edward & Cheruiyot, 2017). Mensah (2016) believes that in-service training programs are important because knowledge is not static but evolves. Teachers can also improve their teaching skills according to current changes through the in-service training program. This is supported by data obtained from Mensah's (2016) study, which shows that in-service teacher professional development programs contribute to the effectiveness of teacher teaching practices in the classroom in Ghana. A subsequent study by Lopes and Cunha (2017) suggested that professional development should be provided to teachers to improve the quality of teachers' teaching and thus improve students' achievement. The importance of training programs for in-service teachers is also addressed explicitly by Ono and Ferreira (2010), which is to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills. Besides, the program is also to prepare teachers with new roles and further to disseminate relevant curriculum. The aspects that are emphasized in the training program are aspects of knowledge, skills, and teaching commitment. More specifically, teachers need to be exposed to an enhanced aspects of pedagogical knowledge, pedagogy, technology, learning theory, motivation, and assessment (Manduku et al., 2017).

Examples of training programs for teachers are short-term courses, conferences, seminars, visits to specific educational institutions, reading of materials, and projects that need to be implemented (Rahman et al., 2011). The same findings with Ono & Ferreira (2010), which are seminars, workshops, and short courses can be provided to teachers as a form of an in-service training program. Lee (2004) emphasizes the nature of a successful training program for teachers, which is ample time to attend the training program. Ample time is essential to ensure that teachers fully master the issues, knowledge, and skills presented during the training. Meanwhile, Manduku et al. (2017) and Mensah (2016) emphasize the role of school administrators in ensuring teacher competency in the areas of knowledge and skills. Also, Mensah (2016) does not deny the part of



authorities such as departments or ministries to support and implement training programs to improve the quality of professionalism of teachers in schools.

The above description clearly shows that training programs for teachers in service are not to be neglected as they help improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and commitment. Although teachers in the school have undergone pre-service training programs, it is not sufficient to ensure the teachers' competency is updated. The training program should be provided with a variety of options and approaches to meet the desired goals. In the context of the teachers at the Ulul Albab school, the in-service program is essential as the existing pre-service programs do not directly focus on the concept of Ulul Albab education as they are required to form Ulul Albab students. Recent studies by Baba, Salleh, Zayed & Harris (2015) showed that not all teachers in the "albab" system master the concept of "albab". Failure to master the concept of "albab" can cause teachers to misunderstand the theory of integrated knowledge that needs to be implemented to produce "albab" students. It has long been noted by Kinnany (1990) that education or training for teachers is crucial to ensuring that teachers have clear Islamic teaching to pass on knowledge to their students. Drastic changes in education, the necessities of 21st-century learning skills, and the development of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 required teachers to adapt to a variety of challenges (Mensah, 2016). Therefore, in-service teacher training programs are essential to keep teachers in line with current educational trends and demands.

Therefore, a study on the design of programs for Ulul Albab teachers and the implementation of such teacher training programs is essential. Lacking an effective in-service training program for teachers in schools that implement Ulul Albab program is crucial. This problematic situation should be taken into account to ensure the teachers are carrying out their roles effectively to build Ulul Albab generation.

B. Method

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach with a case study method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study



aimed to examine and analyze the design of the Ulul Albab teacher training program and how the program is implemented at Imtiaz schools based on real experiences. The objectives of the study were to investigate both aspects of the design and implementation of teacher training programs based on the knowledge and experience of the study participants who have been selected clearly and in detail (Creswell, 2003).

The case study method is used because this study focuses on understanding one specific case Petty, Thompson & Stew (2012), that refers to the teacher training program at Imtiaz secondary school that implemented the Ulul Albab program. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling to ensure in-depth data is obtained Petty et al. (2012). The study participants consisted of administrators who conducted and managed the Imtiaz secondary schools, and teachers who are directly involved in the study as they were able to provide clear and in-depth data to describe the design of the teachers' training program and its implementation in the school. Specifically, the participants of the study comprised the coordinator of the Ulul Albab program, the principal of the Imtiaz secondary schools, and four teachers teaching at the Imtiaz secondary schools.

The method of data collection is in-depth interviews conducted individually with selected participants. Interviews are based on two essential aspects: the design of the teacher training program and the implementation. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview protocols that were structured in the form of questions. Still, the researcher was able to ask any questions especially probes that related to the research questions formulated earlier Dudley (2005). Aspects of validity are also considered by members' checking and peer examination (Moleong, 2000). Members' check is performed by asking the study participants to confirm the transcribed interview data. While peer examination is done by asking other researchers in this study to review the data obtained. The data analysis process begins after the interview is transcribed. The researchers will use thematic analysis to identify the themes and categories contained in the interview transcriptions (Bengtsson, 2016).



C. Result and Discussion

1. Result

a. The organizer of the program

There are four main themes of the interview data with two administrators, namely the coordinator and principal and four Ulul Albab teachers. The themes include Quranic culture, explanations of school visions, holistic education, and benchmarking visits to outstanding schools. These four themes indicate that the design of the Ulul Albab teacher training program refers to four main aspects, namely aspects of Quranic culture, explanation of school visions, explanation of holistic education concept, and benchmarking visits programs.

1) Quranic culture

Quranic culture is a training program for Ulul Albab teachers mentioned by almost all participants. The Quranic culture here refers to the culture of reading the Quran, reading translations, and memorizing several verses among the Ulul Albab teachers every morning. Administrator B, principal at Imtiaz School, stated that "8.00-8.30 must be in the lecture hall, we will read the Quran, will translate." Teacher A also acknowledged that "...and teachers are involved in the Quranic program in the meeting room." Teacher A also described the program of cultivating the Quran among the teachers in the school to "...build the Quran, the atmosphere of the Quran."

Meanwhile, Teacher C explains that they "read a page and then read its interpretation." Teacher B agreed on this by saying, "...call all teachers, staff, gardeners and all staff as we have been working together until now." Another teacher shared the same experiences she had at school:

But, it's nice that at Imtiaz, every morning we have a Quranic class, an interpretation class. Quranic classes and interpretive classes. Praises for Allah for the class, I'm not sure from what year we started, but we managed to finish reading the Quran twice although we read it a page daily. (Teacher D)



2) Explanation on school's mission

In addition to the Quranic culture as one form of training program design among teachers and all staff at the Ulul Albab School, an explanation about the school mission was also implemented. Sharing the school's mission was implemented as one form of a training program for existing teachers at the Ulul Albab School. It is to ensure that teachers understand the concept and goals of the Ulul Albab program. Coordinator (Administrator A) of the Ulul Albab program emphasized the importance of the school's principals first to understand the idea of the Ulul Albab program to translate it in schools with their teachers. Administrator A put it this way "But most importantly every meeting I had with the school principals I would introduce this proposal ("albab" concept) and translate it at school..."

What the Coordinator said has implications for principals in translating the school's mission by providing understanding to the teachers in their respective schools through the program. Administrator B briefly stated that he "told me a little about what the school's mission was, so if he didn't understand it wasn't Intiaz, that's why I tried to apply it to them."

Although Teacher A did not comment directly on the training program on school mission sharing, he did mention that "the program is organized at the school level to have a better understanding of the mission of the school, which is the concept of Ulul Albab that you want to implement." Besides, Teacher B also agreed that exposure or training should be given to teachers at the Ulul Albab school, which is "spiritual exposure, how do we teach." The spiritual aspect touched by Teacher B refers to the context of the Ulul Albab concept related to the school mission. Finally, Teacher D shared his view "We know what the concept of the school itself is, we understand this school's target ..."

Explaining the mission of the school, the concept of Ulul Albab is one of the significant training programs to help teachers effectively play their roles in schools.

3) Emphasis on holistic education

The findings showed that the emphasis on holistic education is among the design programs for Ulul Albab teachers. Almost all participants shared



this form of the training program. Administrator A explains that the concept of holistic education is among the main emphasis on the Ulub Albab teachers. He explained:

....We use IHES, Integrated Holistic Education System, Prof. Dr. Hasni. We took him to train the heart of the teacher; we want teachers to reach out to the level of *murabbi*, not at the level of *muallim* or *muaddib* but up to the level of *murabbi*. So, this is what Professor Hasni has in mind. (Administrator A).

Administrator B, the school principal, also agrees with the holistic education concept shared by Mr. Hasni. He said, "I had fun with Mr. Hasni ... when he said the education must come from the heart." Teacher B and Teacher C shared a training program on holistic education handled by Mr. Hasni that focuses on the heart. Teacher B stated:

He gives us the kind of exposure to *qalbu*, how we want to teach our heart (*qalbu*), passionate and patient. Ha, that's what he gave us as teachers. Because he is the teacher, we want to become a *murabbi* and *muaddib*, and this is not an easy thing, right? (Teacher B).

Teacher C agrees with what Teacher B says about the holistic education delivered through teacher training and he talked about IGCSE as an integrated curriculum.

4) Benchmarking visit

Finally, the design of the Ulul Albab teacher training program is a benchmarking visit. Visits to excellent schools are one of the training programs for teachers to help them succeed in the Ulul Albab program. This was clearly stated by Administrator B in which he brought his school teachers to a cluster school or a high-performing school. He told:

....then, when they talk about cluster school, we bring our teachers to achieve that recognition of the cluster school of excellence. So, our teachers, we brought them there. I brought my teachers in a van to research that high-performance school. (Teacher C).



Teacher B recounted his experience during his early days at the beginning of Imtiaz's school. He explained that he went to Maahad Hajah Zaitun to better understand the roles of Ulul Albab teachers. He said, "During the first batch of founders (Imtiaz), I went to visit the Maahad Hajah Zaitun in Indonesia."

Benchmarking visits to outstanding schools are also among the training programs for Ulul Albab teachers, but not many are involved. This is likely due to the high cost of having to bring all the teachers regularly.

b. Implementation of the training program

The Ulul Albab teachers training program described above has been implemented in several ways, in terms of how often it is implemented and which party implements the program. The teachers' training programs are implemented daily, weekly, and several times a year. The implementation of the Ulul Albab teachers' training program is also carried out by the school itself, the state Islamic Foundation, and the Ministry or State Education Department.

1) Daily program

Administrator B addressed the implementation of the daily training program, as well as Teacher C and Teacher D mentioned the same issue. Administrator B stated, "So I took it to the meeting room or hall to read the Quran together. The academic teacher will start at 9.30." Teacher C explains, "Read one page and then read the interpretation (every morning)." Similarly, Teacher D confirmed the matter by saying, "...every morning, we have Quranic class, *Tafseer* class."

2) Weekly program

A weekly training program was also conducted for the Ulul Albab teachers. This was confirmed by Administrator B, who shared the school mission with the entire school staff after the Quranic reading session. He shares what he does:

On Thursday ...we gathered at the college hall. Everyone is participating in this from security, cleaner, canteen's cook, 8.00- 8.30 must be in



the lecture hall. We will read the Quran; we will translate, at least as much as I will tell you the vision of the school. (Teacher D).

3) Several times a year

In addition to the daily and once a week training programs, 5 times a year program is also organized. Administrator B made this clear:

So, to train these teachers to achieve the goals and objectives of the school, we run courses regularly. We target at least five courses to be carried out each year. Five courses in a year, at least. (Administrator B).

c. Design of training program

Aside from the regularity of the implementation of the training program, the implementation of the program also revolves around the organizer. There are Ulul Albab teacher training programs conducted by schools, the state Islamic Foundation, and the Ministry of Education Malaysia or the State Education Department. The implementation of the program organized by the school includes Quranic culture such as Administrator B, "I oblige all teachers and staff when Quranic teachers are busy with children (Quranic reading)." Teacher A said the same thing, "For example, in the morning, whenever students are involved in the Quranic program in prayers room and teachers are involved in the Quranic program in the meeting room." Teacher D also mentioned the school-sponsored program of Quranic culture by saying, "Every morning we have Quranic class, interpretation class." Likewise, the initiative of Administrator B organizes at least five courses a year at his school. He made it clear, "Five courses a year at least, and the rest is assisted by the Terengganu Islamic Foundation."

The implementation of the Ulul Albab teachers' training program by other parties than schools has been addressed by Administrator A, Administrator B, Teacher B, and Teacher D. Administrator A mentioned the training program provided by the state Islamic Foundation known as School Enrichment Model (SEM). Administrator A said, "So, these teachers are our trainers... we added them with SEM, School Enrichment Model, we got into multi-skills... "



Administrator B explained that the training program followed by Ulul Albab teachers was not only organized by the school but also by other agencies. He stated:

Whatever the curriculum-related training, curriculum change, and so on, we join JPN (State Education Department) and PPD (District Education Department). If at MRSM, we ask the state Islamic Foundation to continue (training program). (Administrator B)

Furthermore, Teacher C shared about the involvement of Ulul Albab teachers with a program organized by JPN saying, "... so we have a lot of slots with JPN (State Education Department). Mr. Hasni has just been absorbed into JPN." Teacher D spoke about the implementation of training programs by various parties, notably when Imtiaz schools were registered as the Government Aided Religious School (SABK) under the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Teacher D said "So, sometimes this week's program just focusing on KPM's program. Next week is the state Islamic Foundation) program."

2. Discussion

Therefore, based on the above description, the design of the training program for the Ulul Albab teachers includes four types of programs, namely Quranic culture, explanation of school mission, description on holistic education, and benchmarking visits to excellent schools. All four programs aimed to help teachers implement the Ulul Albab program properly, effectively, and to achieve the program's goals. The importance of teacher training programs is beyond dispute. All four programs implemented at the Imtiaz School serve to ensure that the program and curriculum are understood and implemented successfully (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). The program is beneficial in improving the quality of teacher teaching, as emphasized by Rahman et al. (2011). Quranic culture, holistic education, and sharing of the school mission are programs designed to prepare teachers with teaching skills in line with the concept of the Ulul Albab program. Benchmarking visits to excellent schools is a form of the program mentioned by Rahman et al. (2011) to help teachers improve

their knowledge, skills, and teaching commitment. Similarly, seminars and workshops suggested by previous researchers such as Ono and Ferreira (2010) are in line with what has been done at Imtiaz secondary schools, especially concerning workshops on holistic education.

Implementation of the Ulul Albab teachers' training program includes daily, weekly, and several times a year. The execution of the program was also organized by the school and other parties or agencies such as the State Islamic Foundation, the State Education Department, and the Ministry of Education Malaysia. It has been addressed by Mensah (2016) on the need of the authorities such as the education department to implement a program of teacher professionalism. Rahman et al. (2011) and Ono and Ferreira (2010) list examples of training programs for teachers such as short-term courses, seminars, workshops, and seminars, and reading of specific materials. Postholm (2012) further described that training programs or teachers' professional development should cover a reflection on teachers' teaching and observed other teachers' teaching. So, what is being done for the Ulul Albab teachers at Imtiaz secondary schools is in line with what previous researchers have suggested but could be expanded to more alternatives as proposed by Postholm (2012). However, the Ulul Albab administrators and teachers did not specify an appropriate time frame to ensure the effectiveness of the training program in improving the efficiency of the teacher's role.

D. Conclusion

Training programs for in-service teachers are not supposed to be underestimated. The role of the teachers can best be realized with the support of a training program, whether organized by the school or the ministry and the education department. In the context of Ulul Albab program in Imtiaz secondary schools in Malaysia, teachers who are known to have completed pre-service education programs are still insufficient to ensure that they play an optimal and active role in the Ulul Albab program at their schools.

The programs implemented in Imtiaz secondary schools need to be continued and supported with other programs. The implementation of the



training program should be carried out consistently be it daily, weekly or monthly to ensure the effectiveness of the training programs. The training programs for the teachers could be implemented by various parties. However, the school itself plays more significant roles than other departments or parties on the training program with the initiative of the school administrators or principals themselves. This finding has important implications for schools and the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the State Department of Education. They could emphasize the design of teachers' training programs and implement them consistently to ensure that Ulul Albab teachers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and commitment to educating the Ulul Albab generation. In summary, this finding led to significant implications for future research and policymaking.

Future research should emphasize the theory related to training programs for Ulul Albab teachers or any teachers who implement such specific programs for specific objectives. Policymakers should give more emphasis on Ulul Albab teachers related to their preservice and in-service training for the teachers to effectively play their roles according to the program objectives and missions.

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