

# MIB in Brunei D.

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## **Malay, Islam, Beraja and Its Impact on The Philosophical Dimension of Learning in Brunei Darussalam**

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### **Abstract**

*The ideology of state as well as the socio-cultural conditions contributes in shaping the Islamic Education system, one of which is Brunei Darussalam. Politically, Brunei applies the concept of Malay, Islam, Beraja (MIB) as an ideological and philosophical basis. This research is oriented to two main discussions, namely, **first**, the historical trajectory of MIB in Brunei and its relation to the education system. **Second**, the dimension of educational philosophy and philosophy of Islamic education in Brunei by drawing its relation to the MIB. This research uses a qualitative-naturalistic approach. This research was conducted in Brunei, October 2019. Collecting the data through interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), observation, document, and literature studies. In data collection, this research involved academics from Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU) and Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). The findings show that the MIB is related to the model perennialism and progressivism. However, from Islamic education*

*philosophy, MIB gives a traditionalist style to the mazhabi and modernist education system*

**Keywords:** Malay; Islam Beraja; educational philosophy, Brunei Darussalam

### Abstrak

Ideologi politik negara dan keadaan sosial – budaya berkontribusi dalam membentuk sistem Pendidikan Islam, salah satunya adalah Brunei Darussalam. Secara politik, Brunei menerapkan konsep Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) sebagai dasar ideologis dan filosofis. Penelitian ini berorientasi pada dua lokus pembahasan utama, yaitu pertama, trajektori secara kesejarahan dan ideologi MIB di Brunei dalam relasinya pada sistem Pendidikan. Kedua, corak filsafat pendidikan dan filsafat pendidikan Islam di Brunei dengan menarik relasinya pada ideologi MIB. Pendekatan penelitian ini berbasis kualitatif-naturalistik. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di Brunei pada bulan Oktober 2019. Adapun teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, *focus group discussion* (FGD), studi kajian dan literatur. Dalam pengumpulan data, penelitian ini melibatkan akademisi dari berbagai perguruan tinggi di Brunei, yaitu Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU) dan Universitas Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA). Terutama dalam penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa ideologi MIB berkaitan dengan aliran filsafat Pendidikan perenialisme dan progressivism. Selain itu, dalam tinjauan filsafat Pendidikan Islam, ideologi MIB memberikan corak pada sistem pendidikan secara tradisional mazhabi dan modernis.

**Kata kunci:** Melayu Islam Beraja; Filsafat Pendidikan; Filsafat Pendidikan Islam

### A. Introduction

The discourse on Islamic education in Southeast Asia is unique from its historical dynamics (Hefner, 2009), the style of implementation and the curriculum model it applies (Park & Niyozov, 2008). In addition, the state's political ideology and socio-cultural conditions also contribute to shaping the Islamic education system in Southeast Asian countries (Bustamam-Ahmad & Jory, 2011). The landscape of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia began to be an interesting study for academics starting in the 1980's. Academic reviews of Islamic education in Southeast Asia have a variety of country territories, for



example Islamic Education in Indonesia (Hamayotsu, 2002; Lukens-Bull, 2001), Malaysia (Hamayotsu, 2002), Brunei Darussalam (Rabasa, 2005), Thailand (Sumarni, 2018), Vietnam (Park & Niyozov, 2008), Cambodia (Bustamam-Ahmad & Jory, 2011) and Singapore (Kadir, 2004; Tan, 2007).

In an academic review, literature about Brunei Darussalam and its details, be it politically, socially, economically, militarily, there are limited studies that are easily accessible to academics (Tsui & Tollefson, 2017). So, research that tries to discuss life in Brunei Darussalam is an interesting topic to be discussed. This research is more directed in the territory of Brunei Darussalam and the Malay, Islamic and Beraja ideology (abbreviated as MIB) in a review of the philosophy of education and the philosophy of Islamic education.

Politically, Brunei applies the MIB concept as an ideological and philosophical basis that colors every style of policy and life. The concept of MIB is built on two bases, namely Islam as the guiding principle and Islam as a form of fortification (Haqqi, 2017). These two foundations of national and state life gave birth to the internalization of Islamic and state values in the form of three concepts, namely preserving the Malay state; maintain an Islamic state (*madzab Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah* from the side of the faith and Islamic law with the madzab Imam Syafii) (Sahari, 2018).

One of the efforts to implement the MIB concept is to integrate and disseminate this ideology into the learning system in Brunei. Therefore, this research will target the ideological relation of MIB in the scope of education. This research will discuss the dynamics of educational philosophy and Islamic education philosophy in Brunei Darussalam by reviewing the historical and ideological relational aspects of the state, namely Malay Islam Beraja (MIB).

This research is qualitative by implementing a naturalistic approach, where the researchers are involved in the academic and non-

academic ecosystems. This research was carried out by taking place in Brunei Darussalam in October 2019. The series of stages in this study include description, reduction, selection, discussion, analysis and formulation of conclusions. This study involved several respondents who have very adequate scientific backgrounds in their respective fields. Some of the respondents in this study included academics from the <sup>4</sup> Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU) and Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) and several other figures.

This research is oriented towards two main discussion loci, namely *first*, the historical trajectory and ideology of MIB in Brunei Darussalam in relation to the education system. Second, the style of education philosophy and Islamic education philosophy in Brunei Darussalam by drawing its relation to the MIB ideology. This research is an initial study with a narrative-elaborative pattern on the concept of Malay Islam Beraja (MIB) and the philosophical features of Islamic education and its manifestations in Brunei Darussalam (Mansurnoor, 2008). The distinction from this this study among previous studies is the focus of its discussion which draws the bridging point between the MIB ideology adhered to by Brunei Darussalam and the influence on the <sup>3</sup> philosophy of education and the philosophy of Islamic Education.

## **B. Findings and Discussion**

In the sub-theme of the discussion, the researchers will divide the elaboration and presentation of the data and its interpretation into three parts. *First*, historical trajectories of Malay, Islamic, Beraja (MIB) ideology in Brunei; *second*, the articulation of the MIB ideology in the Education Philosophy review; and *third*, the articulation of the MIB ideology in the perspective of Islamic education philosophy.

### **1. Malay Islam Beraja (MIB): A Historical Trajectory**

In discussing this session, socio-historical analysis used to process data comprehensively. Quantitatively and qualitatively, Brunei Darussalam is a country who dominated by the Malay-Muslim ethnic community. In 2020, the population of Brunei is approximately 436,550 people, as data comes from *worldometers*. The population is approximately 90% of the total population are ethnic Malay Muslims and one-fifth are



ethnic Chinese and the rest are ethnic Indians. Geographically, Brunei Darussalam has an area smaller than its neighboring countries (Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore). However, despite its limited area (5,765 km<sup>2</sup>), Brunei Darussalam has the fifth largest level of welfare and economic prosperity in the world (Saunders, 2013). One of the implications is that Brunei is a country that eliminates taxes for its residents and provides free facilities in terms of education, health, water and others. This is supported by a surplus in state finances which is supported by several natural resources, one of which and the most importantly oil and natural gas.

From the perspective of political studies, Brunei is a country that is unique in the way of governance. Brunei can be said to be a monarchy, where the Sultan of Brunei has held several strategic positions in the government. It is noted that Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah represented himself as the head of state, head of government, religious leader, as well as the minister of defense and finance minister (Salleh, 2016). Like *trias politica*, Brunei implements an executive, legislative and judicial system. However, the Brunei legislative council appointed by the Sultan carries out its role and function, only as a consultative team for the policies to be set by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah (Low, 2018).

Since the establishment of the Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam in 1402 AD, the sultanate has taken turns and moved to several figures. One of them is Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izaddin Waddaulah, or who is popular with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. He is a figure who introduced and began to officially implement the MIB concept in 1991 as the state ideology (Low, 2018). It aims to integrate the Brunei concept of statehood which is based on three concepts, namely Malay, Islam and Monarchy (Beraja). *First*, the concept of "Malay" in the sense that the language, characteristics and characteristics of the nation must refer to the ethnic Malay. *Second*, the concept of "Islam" means that the guidelines for social and state life must be rooted in Islamic values and laws, especially the *madzab ahl sunnah wal jamaah*. *Third*, the concept of "Beraja" or kingdom is the ideological and juridical basis for the community to be loyal and obedient to the king (sultan) who is the *ulil amri* (Sahari, 2018; Saunders, 2013).

The MIB concept was introduced in the 15th century AD by the first Sultan of Brunei, Awang Alak Betatar. Then, this was formalized in the positive law contained in the Brunei State Institution in 1959. The Sultan's order Hassanal Bolkiah in 1984 was the culmination of the standardization of MIB ideology in Brunei society (bin Muhd Sahari, 2019; Muriadi et al., 2018; Sahari, 2018).



In the MIB concept, Islam is placed between the Malay and Beraja concepts, this is because Islam is able to become a basis for changing and correcting the negative elements contained in the tradition of Malay society and the royal system (Haqqi, 2017). The concept of Islam is the key to implementing the Malay and royal elements in Brunei. To popularize the MIB ideology among the people of Brunei, the Sultan used political instruments through the formation of a special institution called the <sup>16</sup>Majelis Tertinggi Kebangsaan Melayu Islam Beraja (MTKMIB). This institution is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, which has a concrete duty to formulate the MIB concept in every aspect of the life of the people of Brunei. To support this achievement, the MTKMIB Institute collaborated with several elements from academia. One of the efforts to disseminate and formulate the MIB concept is the opening of the Faculty of Brunei Studies (Brunei Studies) at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (Ghofur, 2016; Mansurnoor, 2008; Saunders, 2013)

## 2. Malay Islam Beraja (MIB) and Its Relation to Educational Philosophy

The foundation, system and management of education in Brunei cannot be separated from the process of entering and developing Islam in the country. There are various data and information regarding the periodization and process of spreading Islam in Brunei. A certain sourced from some historical literature of Brunei, it is estimated that Islam has developed from 977 AD through the east-southeast Asia route. However, other theories say that Islam is thought to have entered Brunei around the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD (Kershaw, 2018). The design and development direction of the educational model in a country is closely related to its educational ideology and philosophy (Johns, 1975). No exception when discussing the philosophy of education and its relationship in determining the education model when it is linked to the MIB ideology.

Education experts do not have a single consensus in formulating a definition of education philosophy. This is evidenced by the various definitions of the philosophy of education. One of the arguments regarding the philosophy of Education was conveyed by Muhaiman, namely the activity exploring and formulating designs and thinking frameworks critically, analytically and radically in the scope of Education (Yunus, 2016).

From the above discussion, if it is related to the development of the MIB ideology and its relationship with the typology of education philosophy, then there are interesting things to discuss. At every level of education in Brunei, learning about the values contained in MIB is a necessity. Even at the tertiary level, mainstreaming the MIB ideology is an obligation that must be fulfilled by university stakeholders. The concrete forms are Islamic and Malay values. Although in the MIB ideology there is an illustration of Malay in the learning process in Brunei, universities, upper, secondary



and basic educational institutions also introduce and use foreign languages (Warnk, 2009). One of the foreign languages used is English and Arabic. Malay language is the official language of Brunei, but its open attitude towards the development of foreign languages is one proof that Bruneians have the access and opportunity to be involved as a global citizen.

In the discourse on the philosophy of education, there are several schools of education philosophy related to the review of the MIB ideology in Brunei Darussalam. There are at least two major poles regarding the schools of education philosophy, namely the traditional and contemporary school (Mustafa, 2018b, 2018a; Nurdin et al., 2019). The traditional school is represented by various philosophies of education perennialism and essentialism. Meanwhile, the contemporary pole is represented by a variety of educational philosophies, progressivism, reconstructionism and existentialism.

The researcher sets out the style of education philosophy in Brunei by taking its benchmarks on the implementation of the MIB ideology. As the explanation about MIB above, there are at least two types of educational philosophies related to the MIB ideology and its implementation, namely perennialism and progressivism. As observed by researchers regarding the Brunei education system, there are interesting findings to be studied and analyzed according to the typology of education philosophy as a manifestation of the application of the MIB ideology in the realm of education. Education in Brunei requires that learning be delivered in Malay at every level (Kershaw, 2018). Starting from basic education to higher education, the learning process cannot be separated from the use of Malay. This is an embodiment of aspects of the MIB, especially in terms of "Malay" as the official language of Brunei (bin Haji Mail, 2018). The use of Malay language, when examined from the perspective of the philosophy of education, can be categorized as a typology of perennialism education philosophy.

Perennialism's educational philosophy sees that the values of life in the past are sacred and must be held in living life in the present (Mustafa, 2018b; Yunus, 2016). The purpose of education brought by the perennialism philosophy is to foster individuals who are aware of normative values in all aspects of life. This is reinforced by the "Islamic" value of the MIB concept which further strengthens the normative value construction that is held in the education system in Brunei. Islamic values are the most fundamental foundation in the formulation of the education system in Brunei. Based on



observations in the field, researchers found that students at the higher education level (University) are also required to wear attributes that symbolize the values of "Malay" and "Islam". This attribute begins with the use of a brackets for women and a *kopyah* (caps) for men.

However, the use of modernity-leaning attributes also appears in the education system in Brunei. One of them is the clothing attribute of the lecturer when teaching, who is required to wear a coat. Like the "Malay" value applied by lecturers in terms of dress, the use of a coat is common in higher education. Therefore, even though they apply the Education model that adheres to classical values, they also open themselves up to the times and modernity. The openness and adaptive nature of technology is one of the characteristics of the progressivism education philosophy (Priyanto, 2017; Salim, 2017).

As the influential school in the 20<sup>th</sup> century until today, the progressivism philosophy of education is one of the typologies of education philosophy that is widespread in the world of education (Umam, 2019; Yunus, 2016). This school has a tolerant, open minded view of life and emphasizes the desire to study something new. In the progressivism view, education is closely related to human life and is an ongoing process. Therefore, the learning experience of students is central in education that adheres to progressivism.

This was evidenced by the division of levels in the education system in Brunei, namely primary, secondary, upper and higher education. The purpose of such education is a form of essentialism education philosophy, which is to form happy individuals in the world and in the hereafter. The curriculum that is applied to essentialism philosophy is oriented towards mastery of learning material as the central point (subject centered). The implication of the subject-centered curriculum model in the education system in Brunei is that there is a division of focus at each level of education, for example basic education is more directed at reading, writing and numeracy skills; whereas in secondary schools, it focuses more on skills regarding arithmetic, social sciences, language and literature, and science.

### 3. Malay Islam Beraja (MIB) as the Base for Islamic Education Philosophy

Al Quran and Hadith are sources of Islamic education philosophy as the basis for the formulation of learning designs in Islam (Nurdin et al., 2019; Salim, 2017). Abdul Rahman Salih stated that the philosophy of Islamic Education can be classified into two schools, namely: *first*, an inclusive attitude and second, an exclusive attitude (Haqqi, 2017). *First*, an inclusive attitude is characterized by a willingness and openness to knowledge that comes from non-Muslims, but these insights are adopted and integrated into a frame of mind to formulate the design of Islamic Education. Non-Islamic



knowledge and thoughts are integrated by promoting the concept of *Al-Muhafadzah ala al-Qodim al-Shaleh wa al-Akhdzu bi al-Jadid al-Ashlah* (*Al-Muhafadzah* is an effort to maintain the traditions of the past which are still considered relevant, while *al-Akhdzu* is an endeavor to open spaces for renewal).

*Second*, an exclusive attitude is characterized by taking sources of thought that are dominated only from Islam, namely the Quran and Hadith. This denies the existence of other sources of knowledge and crystallizes thinking in a form that tends to be rigid. Islamic education design in an exclusive manner tends to close itself to modernity and the dynamics of the time.

In his book entitled, *Ushul Al-Fikr Al-Tarbawi Fi Al-Islam*, Abbas Mahjub explains that the relational location of education and philosophy, namely education is a community activity that is believed to be part of philosophy in general, so that education is part of philosophy itself. Also, as the basis for the formation of an educational practice in society. Furthermore, education is a practical and empirical application of philosophy, its role as a form of transformation of philosophy from the theoretical and idealistic realms to the realm of human reality in the practice of life.

This study adopted a classification of Islamic education philosophy elaborated by Muhaimin. As one part of Islamic thought, namely the philosophy of Islamic education, is the result of, at least two things, namely the view of life (ideology) and the Islamic thought model (Hashim & Langgulung, 2008). In connection with these assumptions, M. Amin Abdullah puts out four models in Islamic thought, namely first, *salafi* textualism; second, *mazhabi* traditionalists; third, modernist; and fourth, neo-modernists. The four styles of Islamic thought influence the typology in Islamic education philosophical thought, so that the relation of the two things can be grouped into four typologies of Islamic Education philosophy.

*First*, in relation to the philosophical discourse of Islamic Education, the *salafi* textualist style tends to lead to a typology of perennial education philosophy and essentialism. This is based on the characteristics of perennialism, which expects individuals to embrace the values that have existed in the past and perceive them as the best values. Furthermore, the characteristics of essentialism also require education that comes from traditional values that have a noble position in culture. Therefore, perennialism and essentialism have common ground in defining the task of education, namely as a vehicle to perpetuate the heritage of values, culture and human morals in the practice of social life.

In the context of Islamic education, the *salaf* community is a portrait of an ideal society that is coveted by some Muslims. *Salaf* communities in the sense of past societies that have a structure of social, cultural and emotional relations as in the prophetic era of Muhammad and his friends (Blanchard, 2007).

Al Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet became the main references for the philosophy of perennialism and essentialism, which also became the basic foundation of his educational philosophy design. The Educational Philosophy was designed with due observance to the practice of Islamic education in the prophetic era and the *salaf* period, then the design was transmitted from generation to generation so that it became a sustainable educational building for future generations. *Salafi* textual education philosophy has at least two core parameters, namely first, its regressive characteristics that want to "reminisce" back to the life of the *salaf* period as a symbol of the ideal society. Second, its conservative characteristics, which are marked by a zeal to defend divine and insaniya values that have been exemplified by the companions in the *salaf* (prophetic and companionship) period. The two parameters above are closely related to the spirit of philosophy of perennialism and essentialism as two building blocks in the philosophy of Islamic Education, the *salafi* textual model.

The implication of the *salafi* intellectualist style in the philosophy of Islamic education is that there is a gap between contemporary situations and dynamics in society and the values that developed in the *salaf* period. The learning method applied in this model emphasizes increasing mental discipline and intellectual training through rote memorization. The curriculum format used is more material-centered (content-based subject-centered) with mainstreaming in the disciplines of literature, language, mathematics

**Second**, *mazhabi* traditionalist education is related to the *salafi* textual style. However, this model emphasizes the results of the thoughts of previous Ulama which he considers to be definitely correct even without considering the historical and social context. The portrait of the Muslim community in the classical era is still an ideal symbol in compiling and formulating everything, one of which is related to Islamic education. The concept of Islamic Education which includes the objective structure, curriculum, evaluation system, management, and other matters related to Islamic Education is taken from the thoughts of Muslim figures in the classical era and trying to apply them in the present context.

**Third**, the philosophy of education that has a close relationship with the modernist style is progressivism and reconstructionism, both types of philosophy direct education as an organic instrument that always adapts to all the demands in society. The relation with Islamic Education, namely the implementation of Islamic Education which prioritizes the dimensions of modernism with a progressive, dynamic and flexible



character in the modification of the implementation of learning both technically and non-technically (Azra, 2005). The curriculum and framework of modernist Islamic Education requires an attitude of openness and responsiveness in accommodating everything that is considered good (science, insight and technology), regardless of the source, whether from Muslim or non-Muslim. Both attitudes are carried out in order to catch up and achieve progress in the Islamic education system itself.

However, at the level of implementation, the modernist style of Islamic education often faces challenges, one of which is being trapped in pragmatics. The attitude of pragmatism in Islamic Education, of course, tends to contradict the Islamic spirit. Islam, is a religion that puts forward the human side and combines the spiritual and physical dimensions. Meanwhile, in the philosophy of pragmatism, the measuring point for progress in the learning process is anything that can be sensed by humans (physically) and negates anything metaphysical. Another weakness in the nature of pragmatism in Islamic Education is the presence of a slit of personality, which is the splitting of the student's personality into partial components. The aim of Islamic education, of course, is not only oriented towards cognitive abilities, but also psychomotor and affective abilities. Therefore, Islamic Education offers an integrality concept between multi-dimensional and multi-perspective learning components.

**Fourth**, Amin Abdullah explained, as quoted by Muhaimin, the neo-modernist style seeks to combine the Quran, the Sunnah, classical intellectual thought treasures and contemporary approaches emerged in the contemporary era. The neo modernist style wants to build is based on jargon that is often discussed in the world of Islamic Education, namely maintaining the good things that already exist and developing new, better things, "*al-muhafazah 'ala al qadim al- shalih wa al-akhzd bi al-jadid al-ashlah*".

The jargon above, is actually composed of two interesting phrases to study. The first phrase emphasizes elements of perennialism and essentialism which tend to be regressive and conservative attitudes derived from previous thoughts, but these attitudes emerge after contextualization of classical treasures that fit the context. While the second phrase, shows a dynamic and progressive and reconstructive spirit so that it tends to progressivism and reconstructionism.

The four philosophical features of Islamic Education above, the ideology of the MIB and its implications for the learning system in Brunei can be categorized as Islamic traditionalist and modernist forms of education. As stated in the commandment of the



Sultan of Brunei, that Brunei is subject to *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah* from the side of the faith and Islamic law with Imam Syafii from his jurisprudence. Both identities are directly or indirectly in the learning system in Brunei which puts forward these two things (Lubis et al., 2009).

The education system in Brunei not only emphasizes the attainment of worldly competencies, but also *ukhrawi* competencies (Mohamad et al., 2018). One of the researcher's findings was the discovery of several Imam Syafi'i research centers at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). The Royal support for Imam Syafi'i *madzab* not only in financial terms but also in the form of legislation also using Imam Syafi'i as the basis for legal formulation (Waghid, 2011). The relationship between the *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah* madzab is also evident at the level of implementation in society, where the people of Brunei also carry out religious activities as in Indonesia which also mostly adhere to the *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah madzab*.

Islamic education in Brunei also emphasizes its modernity side, especially in terms of managing Islamic learning through technology optimization (Minnis, 1999). Openness to the times and modernity is a sign that Brunei adheres to a modernist Islamic education philosophy. This is evidenced also by Islamic Education in Brunei which reflects religious moderation in its education system (Shamsul, 2005). Religious moderation is one of the identities of modernity in the education system in Brunei Darussalam

### C. Conclusion

Brunei Darussalam has its own distinction regarding the ideological relations of the kingdom and the philosophical features of Islamic Education that it applies. The ideology of Malay, Islam and Beraja (MIB) has cultural, social and religious roots which are closely related and have implications for the learning system in Brunei. In a constitutional review, the MIB ideology was confirmed by the Sultan's order and preserved through various policies.

In the view of the philosophy of education, the ideology of the MIB is related to the educational philosophies of perennialism and progressivism. The two schools are like two sides of a coin side by side, but they are still harmonious in their implementation. The harmony of the philosophical schools above is represented by the use of the concepts of "Malay" and "Islam" as the basic basis for the implementation of education in Brunei. But on the other hand, the education system in Brunei also prioritizes modernity and accommodates the times, through the use of clothing attributes and mastery of foreign languages (English or Arabic).

In addition, in a review of the philosophy of Islamic Education, the ideology of the MIB gives a style to the modernist and traditionalist educational system. These two



types of education are represented by the Sultan's decree which explains the mazhab adopted by Brunei, this is reinforced by the opening of the Imam Syafi'i research center at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). In addition, a modernist style can also be seen in the implementation of Islamic education using contemporary technology and learning media. The attitude of openness to the use of technology reflects the characteristics of moderatism adopted by the Education system in Brunei Darussalam.

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