

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES AMONG MALAYSIAN ABORIGINES: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Abstract: *The indigenous people residing in the state of Pahang possess great potential for advancement in religious knowledge and practice. However, limited studies have been conducted to assess the mastery of Fardhu Ain (basic religious obligations) and Al-Quran recitation among this population. This quantitative study aims to identify the level of mastery of Fardhu Ain and recitation of the Qur'an within the indigenous community. A questionnaire and a Fardhu Ain practice test, as well as an Al-Quran recitation test, developed by educators, were utilized as research instruments. The study involved 250 participants. The findings reveal that a majority of the indigenous community demonstrate mastery of Fardhu Ain, but the level of proficiency in reciting the Qur'an remains low. These results shed light on the existing gaps and emphasize the importance of targeted interventions to enhance Qur'an recitation skills among the indigenous population in Pahang.*

Keywords: *indigenous people, mastery of Fardhu Ain, mastery of Al-Quran recitation, descriptives statistics*

Introduction

Religious education constitutes a pivotal component in the progress of civilization, as demonstrated by historical evidence. It is widely acknowledged that an advanced civilization is one that embraces both scientific knowledge and religious teachings.

In light of the documented dearth of religious knowledge and appreciation within indigenous communities, as evidenced by the findings of the study conducted by Aini & Suyurno (2019), it is imperative to undertake rigorous empirical research to accurately measure and evaluate the depth of religious understanding among these marginalized populations.

The research gap in this area highlights the need for further scholarly exploration and empirical investigation into the religious knowledge levels within indigenous populations. Such studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of the religious practices, beliefs, and educational needs of indigenous communities, ultimately aiding in the development of tailored interventions and educational strategies to enhance religious knowledge among these populations. A study of this nature holds significant importance as it provides crucial information to authorities regarding the level of religious knowledge mastery within the indigenous community. Acquiring such data enables authorities to develop informed strategies aimed at enhancing religious knowledge and proficiency among the indigenous population. This study's findings would serve as a valuable resource, empowering decision-makers with data-driven insights to devise effective interventions, educational programs, and policies tailored to meet the specific needs of the indigenous community.

In order to assess the level of mastery within a specific field of knowledge within a society, it is necessary to conduct an empirical study. This study aims to determine the extent to which individuals have attained proficiency in the aforementioned field of knowledge. By employing rigorous research methods, data can be collected and analyzed to provide valuable insights into the degree of mastery achieved within the specified field.

Literature review

Orang Asli community in Peninsular Malaysia

The indigenous people in Peninsular Malaysia lead a distinct and fascinating lifestyle, characterized by their unique language. The authorities in Malaysia are actively working towards providing equal access to facilities for the indigenous community, striving to improve their quality of life and education to match that of other Malaysians. Despite their efforts, the authorities in Malaysia encounter various challenges in enhancing the lifestyle and education of the indigenous community. One of the significant hurdles they face is the sheer size of the population, which adds complexity to the task. According to Mokhtar (2020), in Peninsular Malaysia, the Orang Asli community is divided into three main groups, namely Negrito/Semang, Senoi, Proto Malayu. The Negrito group consists of six sub-tribes namely Kensiu, Kintak, Lanoh, Jahai, Mendriq and Bateq. The Senoi group consists of six sub-tribes namely Temiar, Semai, Semaq Beri, Jahut, Mahmeri and Che Wong. While the Proto Malay group consists of Orang Kuala, Orang Kanaq, Orang Seletar, Jakun, Semelai and Temuan.

Previous studies

Numerous studies have investigated various aspects concerning indigenous communities, including the notable work conducted by Nor et al. (2018). The objective of Nor's research is to explore the attitudes of indigenous students towards educational opportunities and their interests in various career paths. Additionally, the study aims to gather insights from parents or guardians regarding their involvement in the educational process and their perspectives on their children's career choices.

However, it is important to note that Nor's study does not specifically address the mastery of Fardhu Ain and Quranic recitation among the indigenous population. Therefore, this present study contributes to the existing literature by examining these particular dimensions within the indigenous community, filling an important research gap.

Another study by Adam & Yusop (2020) only aimed to provide a descriptive analysis of the culture and sub-culture of the Jahut community residing in Kampung Kuala Krau, located in the state of Pahang. Adam & Yusop (2020) successfully documented the beliefs, customs, medicinal practices, and taboos prevalent within the Jahut community residing in the study area. There are numerous studies conducted on various aspects related to the indigenous community in Malaysia. However, some of these studies do not specifically concentrate on the indigenous community's knowledge and religious practices. For instance, Murtaza et al. (2019) examine sociodemographic, nutritional, and environmental factors and their correlation with the cognitive abilities of the indigenous community. SF & VC (2019) explore the position of indigenous people as stakeholders in protected area management. M. N. L. Y. Abdullah & Primus (2021) investigate the role of institutional support and student engagement in educational outcomes. Omar et al. (2019) analyze the status of visual impairment among indigenous (Orang Asli) school children in Malaysia. Sawalludin et al. (2020) study the challenges faced by the Orang Asli in education, particularly the quality of education. Adnan et al. (2020) delve into entrepreneurship education and the learning experience of the Orang Asli. Aini et al. (2019) explore persuasive strategies used by Muslim preachers in delivering Islamic messages to the Orang Asli community in Selangor. ORANG (2019) focus on dakwah communication practices during Fardhu Ain guidance classes. Rahman & Mustapha (2020) discuss the challenges of dakwah implementation towards the Orang Asli community by the Pahang Council of Islamic Religion and Malay Customs. Ubaidah (n.d.) conducted a study on the Orang Asli in the Alor Gajah District. I. N. Abdullah & Don (2019) emphasize the importance of knowledge and skill aspects in da'wah towards the Orang Asli community. Aini & Fauzi (2020) examine the messages of Akidah and Syariah in da'wah communication to the Muslim Orang Asli in Selangor. Aini & Don (2020) explore the practice of communication skills among Muslim preachers to the Orang Asli community in Malaysia. Hassan & Ramli (2020) investigate the socio-cultural isolation of indigenous peoples and its impact on the interpretation of Islamic law. Abd Zamani et al. (2021) study the dakwah approach to new brothers in Malaysia. Don et al. (2019) discuss the mobilization of the PMOA indigenous community. Lastly, Aini & Suyurno (2019) focus on religious knowledge but do not provide information about the extent of dominance within the native community.

The aforementioned studies provide evidence that no empirical study has been conducted to assess the level of mastery in Fardhu Ain and recitation of the Qur'an among the indigenous community.

Methodology

In order to assess the level of religious knowledge and appreciation within indigenous communities, a rigorous empirical investigation was conducted. The population consisted of indigenous individuals residing in various regions. Employing the renowned Krejcie and Morgan table, a minimum sample size of 234 participants was determined from the total population of 78,615 individuals. Remarkably, we managed to surpass this minimum requirement and obtained an impressive sample size of 250 participants. Questionnaires were distributed to all participants, resulting in a response rate of 100% with 250 received questionnaires.

The study design adopted a descriptive quantitative approach with the aim of gathering data on Fardhu Ain (basic religious obligations) and Al-Quran reading proficiency among the indigenous population. To collect the necessary data, questionnaire instruments and practice tests were developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire focused on assessing

participants' knowledge of Fardhu Ain, covering various aspects of religious obligations, while the practice tests were designed to evaluate their proficiency in reading the Al-Quran. Prior permission was obtained from JAKOA (Department of Orang Asli Development) to conduct the study, ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines and respecting the rights of the indigenous community. Strict measures were taken to protect participant confidentiality, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. The data collection process occurred in selected locations within Pahang, chosen for their convenience and to ensure participant comfort. Descriptive statistical analysis, including frequency and percentage, was employed to summarize and interpret the collected data, providing insights into the participants' level of Fardhu Ain and Al-Quran reading proficiency.

Data Analysis

The dataset in this study comprises a total sample size of 250 individuals. Within this sample, the gender distribution is as follows: 66 individuals, or 26.4% of the total, are male, while 184 individuals, or 73.6% of the total, are female. These figures suggest a higher representation of females in the sample (see table 1)

Table 1: Frequency of gender

| Gender | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|--------|--------|------------|--------------|
| Male | 66 | 26.4 % | 26.4 % |
| Female | 184 | 73.6 % | 100.0 % |

Among the sample population, the most prevalent tribe is Temuan, accounting for 24.4% of the total. Semaq Beri represents 2.0% of the sample, followed by Jakun at 8.0%. Mahmeri, Semai, and Bateq make up smaller proportions at 0.4%, 28.8%, and 1.6%, respectively. Furthermore, Semelai constitutes 12.0% of the sample, while Jahut represents 22.0%. Lastly, Che Wong comprises 0.8% of the sample, completing the cumulative distribution.

Table 2: Frequency of tribe

| Tribe | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|------------|--------|------------|--------------|
| Temuan | 61 | 24.4 % | 24.4 % |
| Semaq Beri | 5 | 2.0 % | 26.4 % |
| Jakun | 20 | 8.0 % | 34.4 % |
| Mahmeri | 1 | 0.4 % | 34.8 % |
| Semai | 72 | 28.8 % | 63.6 % |
| Bateq | 4 | 1.6 % | 65.2 % |
| Semelai | 30 | 12.0 % | 77.2 % |
| Jahut | 55 | 22.0 % | 99.2 % |
| Che Wong | 2 | 0.8 % | 100.0 % |

In this study, twelve elements that evaluate one's mastery of Fardhu Ain, which refers to the individual obligations in Islam. These assessment criteria gauge proficiency in various aspects of religious practice. Firstly, the proper execution of ablution is examined, ensuring adherence to the prescribed ritual cleansing. Secondly, the recitation of intention is evaluated, emphasizing the clarity of one's intention to perform the specific religious act. Thirdly, the accurate recitation of Takbiratul Ihram, the opening proclamation of prayer, is assessed. Additionally, the recitation of Iftitah prayer and the essential Al-Fatihah chapter of the Quran are examined, scrutinizing correct pronunciation and understanding.

Furthermore, the evaluation includes the recitation of selected Surahs (chapters) from the Quran, assessing the proficiency in reciting these passages with proper Tajweed (Quranic recitation rules). The recitation during bowing, Iktidal (standing upright after bowing), prostration, and the sitting position between two prostrations are evaluated to ensure adherence to the prescribed actions and recitations at each stage of prayer.

Moreover, the accurate recitation of the final Tahiyat, which includes blessings and salutations, is assessed. Additionally, the correct performance of Salam, the concluding greetings, serves as a criterion for evaluating the overall mastery of Fardhu Ain. Finally, the practice of Qunut prayer, a specific supplication, is also considered as part of the assessment process.

Overall, these twelve items collectively measure an individual's proficiency in Fardhu Ain, encompassing various aspects of ablution, recitations, postures, and supplications performed within the framework of prayer in Islam.

Table 3: Respondent's mastery in aspects of Fardhu Ain

| Fardhu Ain | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Not proficient | 26 | 10.4 % | 10.4 % |
| Proficient with guidance | 47 | 18.8 % | 29.2 % |
| Proficient at an intermediate level | 57 | 22.8 % | 52.0 % |
| Proficient excellently | 120 | 48.0 % | 100.0 % |

The statistical analysis revealed the distribution of proficiency levels among the participants in Fardhu Ain education. Among the participants, 26 individuals (10.4% of the total) demonstrated a lack of proficiency in Fardhu Ain education, falling into the category of "not proficient." This indicates a need for further support and guidance to help them master the subject matter. 47 participants (18.8% of the total) showed a moderate level of proficiency with the assistance of guidance, placing them in the category of "proficient with guidance." These individuals require additional support to enhance their understanding and application of FardhuAin principles. 57 participants (22.8% of the total) displayed proficiency at an intermediate level, indicating a satisfactory level of knowledge and skills in FardhuAin education.

They possess a solid foundation in the subject matter and fall into the category of "proficient at an intermediate level." The majority of participants, 120 individuals (48.0% of the total), demonstrated an excellent level of proficiency in FardhuAin education, qualifying them as "proficient excellently." These individuals exhibit a comprehensive understanding and application of FardhuAin principles, reflecting their mastery of the subject matter.

Table 4: Level of Al-Quran

| AlQuran | Gender | Counts | % of Total |
|-----------------|--------|--------|------------|
| Iqra' 1 | Male | 29 | 11.6 % |
| | Female | 77 | 30.8 % |
| Iqra' 2 | Male | 12 | 4.8 % |
| | Female | 29 | 11.6 % |
| Iqra' 3 | Male | 12 | 4.8 % |
| | Female | 19 | 7.6 % |
| Iqra' 4 | Male | 3 | 1.2 % |
| | Female | 12 | 4.8 % |
| Iqra' 5 | Male | 3 | 1.2 % |
| | Female | 8 | 3.2 % |
| Iqra' 6 | Male | 2 | 0.8 % |
| | Female | 7 | 2.8 % |
| Al-Quran | Male | 4 | 1.6 % |
| | Female | 25 | 10.0 % |
| Khatam Al-Quran | Male | 1 | 0.4 % |
| | Female | 7 | 2.8 % |

Table presents the gender distribution among individuals at different levels of Quranic study. The analysis reveals interesting patterns and trends regarding the participation of males and females in Quranic education. In the first level, Iqra' 1, females represent a higher percentage (30.8%) compared to males (11.6%). This indicates a greater initial interest and enrollment of females in Quranic education. This trend continues in Iqra' 2, where females also constitute a higher percentage (11.6%) than males (4.8%). As the levels progress, there is a gradual decrease in the percentage of females, suggesting a declining participation rate. In Iqra' 3, females account for 7.6% compared to males at 4.8%. The trend continues in Iqra' 4 (females: 4.8%, males: 1.2%) and Iqra' 5 (females: 3.2%, males: 1.2%). In the advanced levels, Iqra' 6 shows a similar trend, with females comprising 2.8% and males 0.8%. Interestingly, in Al-Quran, the percentage of females increases to 10.0%, while males represent 1.6%. This indicates a notable participation of females in studying the entire Quran. Lastly, in the final level, Khatam Al-Quran, females continue to maintain a higher percentage (2.8%) compared to males (0.4%), signifying their active involvement in reaching the milestone of completing the recitation of the entire Quran. Overall, the data highlights a higher initial enrollment and participation of females in Quranic education, which gradually declines as the levels progress. However, females still demonstrate significant engagement, particularly in advanced stages such as Al-Quran and Khatam Al-Quran. These findings suggest the importance of fostering and encouraging female participation in Quranic education throughout all levels.

Discussion

The implementation of da'wah activities often encounters various challenges; nevertheless, the dedication and perseverance of the preachers in reaching out to the indigenous community have yielded significant successes. This study serves as a valuable identification of the achievements resulting from the sincere efforts invested in preaching to the indigenous community. This study has successfully gathered significant data pertaining to the religious practices of the indigenous community, filling a gap that was previously unaddressed by similar studies.

Overall, the findings suggest that a significant portion of the indigenous community demonstrates proficiency in practicing Fardhu Ain as part of their daily lives. This observation potentially sheds light on the effectiveness of the preaching endeavors undertaken by the Pahang State religious authorities, specifically the Pahang State Islamic Religious Council (MUIP). Despite the accomplishments in preaching to the indigenous community, the percentage of individuals who have completed the Qur'an remains relatively low. Consequently, there is a need to formulate strategies that can effectively enhance the number of indigenous individuals completing the Qur'an over time.

Limitation of the study and future research

This study possesses several limitations, including a small sample size of respondents, which restricts the ability to generalize findings to the entire population. As a result, future researchers should strive to obtain a representative sample of respondents that encompasses the entire indigenous population in the state of Pahang. This would enhance the generalizability and reliability of findings for a more comprehensive understanding of the indigenous community's religious practices.

Conclusion

This study aims to assess the proficiency level of the indigenous population in the state of Pahang regarding their knowledge of Fardhu Ain (individual obligations in Islam) and their proficiency in Quranic recitation. The research findings demonstrate that a significant majority of the indigenous population have achieved mastery in the aspect of Fardhu Ain. However, in terms of Quranic recitation, the number of individuals who have successfully completed the recitation of the Quran remains relatively low.

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