



THE DEAF COMMUNITY'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Abd Hakim Mohad and Ros Aiza Mohd Mokhtar

Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

Nizaita Omar

Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

Zulkifly Muda

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia

Based on the review of past PMR results (the lower secondary school examinations) of the deaf community on Islamic Education in Malaysia, their achievement in the subject is relatively poor, which lends a general observation that the deaf community is lagging behind when it comes to religious development. Thus, this study aims to explore the attitude of the deaf community towards religious education. A self-administrated questionnaire was distributed to 80 respondents from the Special Education School (Deaf), Kota Kinabalu and the Centre for Deaf Activity, the Deaf Welfare Association of Terengganu. The findings of this study reveal that the deaf community's attitude towards religious education is positive. However, their results are not on par with the non-deaf in the same examination. The findings provide information to the government agencies to improve the existing education system for the deaf. At the same time, the deaf association, other NGOs and the Malaysian society can benefit from the findings of this study to enhance their programmes and activities for the deaf.

Keywords: Attitude, Deaf, Islamic Education, Malaysia.

Introduction

In Malaysia, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) can be defined as an individual with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment that may restrict their full and effective participation in society (Disabled Persons Act 2008). The deaf is described as a disabled person with disabilities to detect frequencies needed for listening. There are two types of deafness: the first is the condition in which an individual is partially unable to hear and requires a hearing aid; the second type refers to a condition where the individual is completely unable to hear (Ad Hoc Report to Define Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 1975). Generally, those born with hearing impairment simultaneously experiences speech difficulties, with some individuals unable to speak. Physically though, the deaf look just like non-deaf individuals.

Whether or not their hidden defects actually cause the deaf to become marginalized in terms of communication, there are insufficient resources on this matter. However, they are more disadvantaged than other groups of disabled people in terms of their inability to communicate with the outside world. The use of sign language is therefore the only medium for them to communicate with the outside world. Unfortunately, there are not many individuals who are able to use or understand sign language, thus causing the deaf to become marginalised in many aspects. In short, the deaf significantly impacts the communication, educational achievement, and social interactions for these individuals, and restricts access to employment with significant unemployment and underemployment (Robin E. Perkins-Dock, 2015).

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted in the past to help the deaf in various facets of their lives. This includes in their procurement of religious education. Mohd Huzairi Awang @ Husain, in his research entitled 'Perception of Students with Hearing Problems on Islamic Studies (*Fardhu ain*): Challenges for Teachers', found that deaf students' interest on this subject is average. They also have the similar opinion on the standard of teaching and the learning environment that needs major improvement. The research found that the deaf students are interested in learning *fardhu ain* as it is important to their life, but they also felt that the teaching and learning process are not meaningful. Consequently, the students are unable to focus in the class, which eventually led to their ignorance.

To solve this issue, Mohd Huzairi (2010) suggests that teachers should strive to motivate the students in the *fardhu ain* subject by making teaching and learning interesting through the teacher's creativity. He suggests incorporating a variety of methods such as student-centred learning, practical learning techniques, demonstrations, problem-solving techniques and mosque-based activities.

A study by Abdul Munir Haji Ismail (2009) is related the missionary efforts made to the deaf community. In his study of the deaf in Kuala Lumpur, he focused on understanding the deaf in terms of their attitude, character, taboos and interests. The study also discussed previous missionary efforts that were conducted and the problems they faced. A similar study was also conducted by Juwairiah Hasan (2009) in her work entitled 'Implementation of Dakwah to the Deaf People in Terengganu.'

Nur Hj. Salimah (2007) conducted a study on the deaf community's understanding of religion. Among the objectives of the study was to measure the level of their religiosity and its connection with their religious practice and attitude. The study found that religious knowledge is heavily connected to their daily life: those with more religious knowledge lived more confidently and peacefully. Their daily life was more structured; they had higher motivations to work and committed to religious activities. They were also more responsible towards their family and more eager to progress further in life.

The aforementioned studies have, therefore, shed light on how important religious education is to the deaf community. One of the reasons for this is that religious education provides strong, emotional support to their lives. Through religion, the deaf appeared to be more inclined to practice healthier lifestyle and were empowered to improve themselves. However, the importance of religion is not reflected in the examination results, especially in PMR, which is the focus of this study, among the deaf pupils. One of the factors that have contributed to the poor results is perhaps their attitude. If this is not the case, then authorities and relevant parties need to resolve the situation by addressing the core matter.

Methodology

This study on the deaf community was conducted at the Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas Kota Kinabalu and the Centre for Deaf Activity, the Deaf Welfare Association of Terengganu. The school, located at Kilometre 28 Jalan Tuaran, Kota Kinabalu, was chosen because it is the only government school in the state for children with hearing problems. Deaf Welfare Association of Terengganu, located

in Kuala Terengganu, Peninsular Malaysia. The association was formed in 2009 to serve as a service centre for the deaf and to plan, co-ordinate their development programmes.

This study is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Prior to the fieldwork, the researchers conducted library research. Then the field study was conducted with the deaf at the two locations whereby one hundred deaf persons participated. They were given a set of questionnaires to complete with the assistance of an interpreter. For questions regarding their attitude towards learning religion, they were allowed to give more than one opinion. This helped the researchers to create and prioritise a list of opinions they had on the subject. The quantitative data were then analysed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

In addition, interviews with key informants on the teaching and learning of deaf citizens were also conducted. This helped ensure that the data collected were accurate, reliable and can become a source of reference. They comprised education officials, religious officials, social workers, academics, religious leaders, community activists and individuals with extensive experience with the deaf.

Furthermore, observations were made at the research locations, in order to look at the religious programmes that were being carried out, their pedagogical approaches, and the equipment and facilities provided. This research utilised the model results, an approach that is appropriate to understand how a programme / activities are conducted and how a particular issue or problem are addressed by all stakeholders. It also reviews the effectiveness of the target groups.

Findings

Table 1. Attitude towards Islamic Education

No	Question	Scale (%)		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
1	Islamic education subject interests me the most.	40.3	51.9	7.8
2	I feel disappointed when my teacher does not turn up to teach.	24.7	67.5	7.8
3	Learning Islamic education is important to me.	35.1	62.3	2.6
4	I watch religious programmes and read religious books.	18.2	68.8	13.0
5	I like to make friends with pious individuals.	28.6	48.1	23.4
6	I will grab the opportunity to attend a religious programme when it is available.	44.2	44.2	11.7
7	I always try to improve my understanding on my religion.	41.6	44.2	14.3
8	I will ask my teacher if I do not understand any religious matters.	42.9	40.3	16.9
9	I will attempt to practice religious obligations that were taught to me.	40.3	55.8	3.9
10	I feel guilty and sinful if I fail to observe my religious obligations.	31.2	50.6	18.2
11	If given the chance, I will continue to study in depth on Islam.	41.6	49.4	9.1
12	I am willing (choose one) to help my friends understand Islam.	45.5	46.8	7.8
13	Since childhood, my parents help me to study Islam.	45.5	48.1	6.5

14	My parents would counsel me whenever I miss my religious obligations.	36.4	55.8	7.8
15	My parents often praised me whenever I fulfil my religious obligations.	32.5	61.0	6.5
16	My teachers always guide me to better understand my religion.	55.3	42.1	2.6
17	My teachers attempt to use many approaches to help me understand Islam.	51.9	45.5	2.6
18	My friends and I like our religious teacher very much.	63.3	35.4	1.3
19	The <i>Imam</i> at my residence often greets me with hello.	13.9	39.2	46.8
20	I am often invited to participate in mosque activities at my residence.	23.4	31.2	45.5
21	I have a close relationship with the <i>Imam</i> at my residence.	16.9	37.7	45.5
22	I find that not many religious programmes provide sign language interpreters	64.6	21.5	13.9
23	Books used for Islamic education are difficult to understand.	65.8	22.8	11.4
24	I find that there are not many suitable and interesting teaching aids for Islamic education.	67.1	21.5	11.4

Source: Questionnaires on the deaf community's attitudes towards Islamic education, February-May, 2013.

Based on Table 1, the overall respondents have a positive attitude towards religious learning. For example, in terms of attitude towards the subject itself, 92.2% of respondents agree that this is a subject that they like most; 92.2% of the respondents felt disappointed when religious classes are cancelled, and 97.4% of respondents consider religious subject important. Their attitude towards religious environment is also positive: 87% of the respondents watched and read on religion; 76.6% of the respondents enjoyed being friends with pious people; 88.3% of the respondents stated that they were interested in attending religious programmes; 83.7% of the respondents stated that they always sought programmes to improve their understanding of religion; 83.1% of respondents will ask their teacher about religion when they needed further information; 96.1% of respondents said they made consistent attempts at observing religious obligations; and 81.8% of the respondents said they felt guilty when they miss their religious obligations. Their attitude towards their friends is also positive where 92.2% of the respondents are willing to help their friends to understand religion. Their attitudes towards their parents is also positive where 93.5% of the respondents felt that their families assisted them in understanding religion; 92.2% of the respondents felt that they were counselled by their parents whenever they missed their religious obligations; and 93.5% of the respondents felt their parents praised them whenever they observe their religious obligations. Their attitude towards their teacher is also positive where 97.4% of the respondents felt their teachers guided them; 97.4% of the respondents felt that their teachers used various teaching approaches to help them understand religion; 98.7% of the respondents like their teachers; 53.2% of the respondents felt that their local *Imam* often inquired after them; 54.5% of the respondents felt that they were often invited to participate in mosque activities; and 45.5% of the respondents felt they had a close relationship with their *Imam*.

However, there were also several challenges to the religious learning experience: 86.1% of the respondents felt that not many religious programmes provided sign language interpreters; 88.6 % of the respondents stated that the books used for religious learning were difficult to understand; and 88.6% of the respondents stated that there were limited teaching tools for them.

Discussion

This study found that the overall deaf community carried a positive attitude towards learning religion. They were positive towards the subject, the religious environment, and the people in their lives, such as their parents, friends and teachers. This is very positive while religious education develops at the intersection of many factors including family, representations of self in religious hierarchy, friends and peers, learned ideology through written and spoken doctrine, interactions with spiritual leaders for guidance, personal experiences, and the way a religious doctrine views and supports aspects of an individual's self (David A. Barclay, 2012). However, the deaf also felt some constraints concerning the expertise and teaching materials available for religious learning, as only a limited number of religious programmes provided sign language interpreters. In addition, they also faced problems with the texts used for religious learning, which were difficult to understand, whilst the teaching aids used were not interesting and sometimes did not suit them. In sum, the deaf community has demonstrated an overall positive attitude towards religious learning, and that the major problem lies with their religious instructor, poor facilities and teaching aids rather than their attitude. In addition, there are also environmental barriers that affected their attitude towards the religious education such as the relationship between the deaf community and *imam* or the mosque as a religious institution in the residence.

The major question that needs to be addressed is then, why are the examination results is low for Islamic Education subject in schools despite this positive attitude and the moral support of the community? (Refer to Table 2). Compared to results in other subjects in PMR (the lower secondary school examination), the results for Islamic education is very low: students with a pass in the year 2000 is 2 out of 158 (1.3%) candidates, while in 2001 only 2 out of 169 (1.2%) candidates passed, and in 2002 only 5 out of the 194 (2.6%) candidates passed.

Table 2. Islamic Education Results for the Deaf Students

Year	Subject	GRADE						Total
		A	B	C	D	A,B,C,D	E	
2000	Malay Language	0	1	7	34	42	248	290
	English	0	1	2	16	19	271	290
	History	2	1	16	182	201	89	290
	Geography	1	1	20	144	166	124	290
	Islamic Education	0	0	1	1	2	156	158
	Mathematics	3	6	18	132	159	132	291
	Science	0	2	5	224	231	59	290
	Life Skills	0	1	60	117	178	113	291
2001	Malay Language	0	4	4	26	34	210	244
	English	0	1	3	14	18	227	245
	History	1	3	14	140	158	87	245
	Geography	2	2	17	168	189	55	244
	Islamic Education	0	1	1	0	2	167	169
	Mathematics	2	7	19	97	125	120	245
	Science	2	1	8	176	187	58	245
	Life Skills	2	1	45	102	150	96	246
2002	Malay Language	0	2	4	81	87	200	287
	English	1	2	4	21	28	259	287

	History	0	1	18	164	183	101	284
	Geography	0	3	8	163	174	112	286
	Islamic Education	0	0	0	5	5	189	194
	Mathematics	2	5	21	128	156	129	285
	Science	0	0	7	216	223	63	286
	Life Skills	0	5	99	122	226	64	288

Source: Board of Examinations Malaysia, 2003.

Based on in-depth interviews with the teachers, it is found that among the causes is their low IQ level. Another important factor is that the religious teachers were not skilled in sign language (Suhana, 2012). According to Sazali (2011), the President of the Malaysian Federation of the Deaf, the special education teachers for the deaf need to be proficient in sign language to aid the learning process. Saiful (2012) also highlighted other problems like teachers who teach outside their areas of expertise.

The learning challenges for the deaf are also the teaching and learning methods. First is the serious matter of insufficient teaching aids and teaching mode for the deaf where the lecture mode of learning is used. This is not suitable at all for the deaf community (Noraini, 2012). In addition, learning theories without practice does not help the deaf to understand religious duties like the *fardhu ain*. It is important that students have proper amounts of exposure to an authentic environment such the mosque to help them appreciate and practice the theories learnt. It should be emphasised here that the deaf need more guidance and attention compared to normal students, with most still needing much guidance on essential tenants of the faith (Azim, 2012).

Conclusion

Because the deaf community carry an overall positive attitude towards religious education, this attitude must be equally met with proper efforts by authorities. As such, due attention must be given by the Ministry of Education to help resolve this matter. Challenges and difficulties encountered in educating the deaf need to be addressed because they too have the rights to education. With appropriate religious education, the deaf will be able to live better lives and have a better future.

Acknowledgement

This research is supported by Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia under Fundamental Research Grant Projects (FRGS). Special thanks to all the informants and respondents for their cooperation to ensure the successful of this research.

References

1. Abdul Munir Haji Ismail, "Dakwah Kepada Orang Pekak Di Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur," M.A. thesis, Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2009.
2. Akta Orang Kurang Upaya 2008 (Akta 685), Bahagian II, Majlis Kebangsaan bagi Orang Kurang Upaya, Laman Web Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Malaysia, Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat.
3. David A. Barclay, "Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health Among Deaf and Hard of Hearing People A review of the Literature," *Journal of the American Deafness & Rehabilitation Association (JADARA)* 46 (1), 2012, 399-415.

4. Juwairiah Hasan, "Pelaksanaan Dakwah Keon Orang Pekak Terengganu," M.A. thesis, Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2009.
5. Mohd. Huzairi bin Awang @ Husain et.al, "Persepsi Pelajar Bermasalah Pendengaran Terhadap Pembelajaran Fardu Ain: Cabaran Terhadap Guru," Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Teacher Education; Join Conference UPI & UPSI, Bandung, Indonesia, 8-10 November 2010.
6. Nina Wolters & Harry Knoors, "Social Adjustment of Deaf Early Adolescents at Start of Secondary School: The Divergent Role of Withdrawn Behavior in Peer Status," *Journal of the American Deafness & Rehabilitation Association (JADARA)* 80 (4), 2014, 438–453.
7. Nor Salimah Abu Mansor, "Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia (MySL) sebagai Wahana Dakwah: Kepentingannya Dalam penghayatan Agama Warga Pekak," Seminar MySL 2007: Memartabatkan Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia (BIM) sebagai Bahasa rasmi komuniti pekak Malaysia, Johor Bahru, 23-25 August 2007.
8. Portal Pendidikan Khas Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, Ad Hoc Report to Define Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 1975.
9. Robin E. Perkins-Dock, "A Survey of Barriers to Employment for individuals Who are Deaf," *Journal of the American Deafness & Rehabilitation Association (JADARA)* 49 (2), 2015, 66-85.
10. Sazali Shaari, "Menaruh Harapan: Memartabatkan Pendidikan Orang Pekak," <http://msazali.blogspot.com/2011/01/menaruh-harapan-memartabatkan.html>.

Informants

11. Azim, Ahli Jemaah Tabligh Sabah, Putatan, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, interview session on 26 July 2012.
12. Noraini, Guru Pendidikan Islam Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas (Pekak), Kota Kinabalu, Jalan Tuaran, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, interview session on 30 August 2012.
13. Saiful, Ahli Jemaah Tabligh Sabah, Putatan, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, interview session on 26 July 2012.
14. Suhana, Guru Pendidikan Islam Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas (Pekak), Kota Kinabalu, Jalan Tuaran, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, interview session on 30 August 2012.