

The Perception of Teachers and Adults Students on Religious Classes for Adults in Negara Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract

The study into “The Perception of Teachers and Adult Students on Religious Classes for Adults (RCA) in Negara Brunei Darussalam” aims at finding out the extent of teachers’ and students’ insights on the establishment of the class -RCA itself, its curriculum, the teaching and learning approach. This study has yielded many promising research findings that can help clarify the significance of the RCA in providing the society with invaluable opportunities as well as a place for them to gain religious knowledge. Both teachers and students in the study believe that it would be more effective for the RCA to be promulgated to the society by means of the mass media. Moreover, the study shows that the majority of the respondents (especially the students) agree that the subjects, the curriculum and the textbooks, which are currently taught and used by the teachers, are pertinent to the respondents’ basic needs. Further, both students and teachers in the study also believe that the primary focus of the teaching and learning process in the RCA is on the understanding and mastery of fundamental religious matters. The respondents in this study comprise of 26 teachers from Brunei and Muara, Tutong and Belait Districts, and 140 adult students from Brunei and Muara District. This study is conducted by means of a questionnaire and interviews to all the concerned respondents. The collected data are analysed in two ways: by applying qualitative analysis on the recorded interview data and quantitative analysis for the questionnaire.

Keywords : Religious Classes for Adults (RCA), Brunei Darussalam, curriculum, qualitative, teachers

1. Introduction

The existence of Religious Classes for Adults (RCA) in Brunei Darussalam has a long history, in line when Islam first came to Brunei and the establishment of the Sultanate of Brunei in the 13th Century. The teaching and learning process of the Religious Adult Education System was firstly initiated by the villagers and the religious teachers where classes were held in mosques and prayer halls scattered throughout the villages. Before, classes were taught by untrained religious teachers and were held in a very moderate and informal condition without having to have a specialized curriculum, non-evaluative procedures on the topics and subjects taught (Abdul Hamid, 2001). At that time, some of the objectives of the Religious Adult Education System were to:

1. inculcate the spirit of religious awareness amongst the adults who never had a chance to study Islam;
2. raise awareness amongst the adults so that they could be part of the community who served the religion of Islam, the people and their own country;
3. produce active citizens with good conduct and uphold the order of Allah (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1980).

Today, the scopes and emphasis given on the Religious Classes for Adults are mainly heading towards the complete obligation of basic principles (*Fardhu ‘Ain*) and *Fardhu Kifayah*, basic knowledge of *Tauhid* and the recitation of Al-Quran.

Since 1956, implementation of Religious Classes for Adults were well organized and well-planned by the Unit of Religious Knowledge at the Department of Islamic Studies, Ministry of Religious Affairs. Today the Religious Classes are managed systematically with clear directions and effects based on the usage of well-planned syllabus and taught by a more qualified teachers having Islamic Religious Knowledge (IRK) background. Assessment is also done in order to know the level of students’ knowledge, performance, understandings and practical are also given at the end of every term.

Today, some of the objectives of Religious Classes for Adults (Department of Islamic Studies, 1996) are to:

1. ensure that every students know how to recite Al-Quran fluently;
2. ensure that all students must perfectly know the theories and practices of basic principles (*Fardhu ‘Ain*), *Fardhu Kifayah* and recommendable (*sunat*) matters;
3. inculcate the feeling of loyalty and obedient towards the orders of Allah, his prophets and the Sultans;
4. inculcate the feelings and spirits to be actively involved in enlivening the mosques and to propagate the

teachings of Islam;

5. shape the personality of the people in accordance to the Islamic teachings;
6. act as a channel in understanding the teachings of Islam as a complete way of life

Since 1980, the Religious Classes for Adults were divided into two categories, namely the basic/beginning and the advanced Religious Adult Education System. For the basic level, subjects taught are : *Ibadah (Taharah, Solat, Fasting, Zakat, Haj & Umrah)*, practical, basic *tauhid, tasauf, fiqh, muamalat, munakahat & Al-Quran* where else in the advanced level, subjects taught are similar but being taught in a more detailed and advanced manner.

2. Background of the study

Religious Classes for Adults in Brunei Darussalam is a unique area to be studied on. One may asked, why these classes are able to survive until today and still has a place in the hearts of the community in Brunei Darussalam. Since 1958, the Religious Classes for Adults had undergone some hurdles and obstacles. Therefore, the sustainability of these classes may be caused by 3 factors, namely:

1. continuous support given by the government in terms of providing venues to study such as in the building of government ministries, schools, mosques and private premises. Government too, provides guidance on the implementation of the classes in the form of syllabuses, text books and guidance from the inspectorates aside from giving some incentives (allowance) for the teaching staff.
2. High motivation and devotion shown by the religious teachers, without expecting any honorarium in return but to achieve the goals of providing lifelong education. The teachers are willing to sacrifice their time and energy to conduct classes every Fridays and Sundays, which are the public holidays in Brunei Darussalam.
3. Positive response from the community in addition to their participation in attending these classes in order to enhance and empower their understandings and practices on the Islamic teachings, specifically in the aspect of *fardhu 'Ain* and recitation of Al-Quran. They are willing to attend classes which are held during public holidays.

3. Research questions

Some of the research questions of this study are:

1. What are the perception of the students and teachers regarding the Religious Classes for Adults?
2. What are the teaching-learning approach and methods used in the Religious Classes for Adults?

4. Literature review

Adult education is one form of informal lifelong education. Informal education comprises of any educational activities which are well organized and done systematically outside the scheme of work of the formal education. These activities are given to a group of individuals in a community for both adults and children and are also aimed to increase awareness, experience and knowledge.

Continuous learning is a changing phenomena which progresses rapidly and has become the main needs in the contemporary lifestyle today. These continuous changes need continuous learning which is usually related to the adult learning and repeated learning. Lifelong learning does not occur spontaneously, or from day to day but it happens intentionally and is a slow process (Grace, 2004).

One of the main aims of the adult education is to bring social changes and self-development. It also gives opportunities to the adults who lack education at the secondary level so that they are equipped with effective skills required in the community and profession, reading skills, writing and numeracy skills at the basic level, at least.

Approach and methodology are two important aspects in the process of teaching-learning and both of them do play crucial roles. The results and effectiveness of the teaching-learning process rely heavily on the approach and methodology used by teachers. According to Anthony (1963), approach can be defined as a set of hypothesis which is related to the process of teaching-learning and has the characteristics of being axiomatic. In summary, approach in teaching-learning has to be based on models and principles of learning, namely :

1. From construct to abstract;
2. From easy to difficult;

3. From holistic to segmented;
4. From general to specific;
5. From specific to general;
6. From near to afar;
7. From known to the unknown.

The approach and methodology of teaching adults are obviously different than those for children. Normally, the approach used in teaching-learning process of the adults is combination of pedagogy and andragogy (Al-Nahlawi, 2002). It is an approach whereby learning is done in groups with teachers' guidance and students' initiatives, unlike other approaches. The group of students will work as a team in order to develop their self-confidence and produce good quality work. Sharing of experience and knowledge amongst the members will enable them to achieve the objectives set and in problem solving. Acceptance of information will occur through the interactions among the members and self-direction. Md Azhar (2004) clarified that self-direction is a process where every individuals would take their own initiatives to know the needs, available resources and to make decisions especially related to learning.

5. Methodology

This study used both the qualitative and quantitative approaches through interviews and questionnaires. 18 classes out of 36 were selected randomly from all the districts in Brunei Darussalam. Questionnaires were given to 26 teachers and 140 students who enrolled in this system. 5 Likert scale questions were used in the questionnaires constructed. To support the data obtained from the questionnaires, interviews were done involving 10 teachers and 10 students. Analysis of data was done descriptively and interpretatively.

6. Research findings and Discussions

Research Question 1 :

What are the perceptions of the students and teachers about the Religious Classes for Adults?

From the students' perceptions, data shows that 97.1% of them agreed that the Religious Classes for Adults should be continuously operated and be increased in number, 95.7% agreed that it is importantly required to have these classes in the system of education in Brunei Darussalam because through these classes, it will give people more opportunities to study and this was agreed by 94.3% of the students. Most of these responses were strongly agreed by the teachers who are involved in teaching these classes (96.1%). Apart from that, 96.1% of the teachers too agreed that the existence of these classes should be made known to public.

Table 1 : Students' perception on the Religious Classes for Adults

	SD	A	NS	A	SA
1.I need the Religious Classes for Adults.	-	2	4	40	94
	1.4%			2.9%	134 (95.7%)
2.These classes give me opportunities to study about my religion (Islam).	1	-	7	41	91
	0.7%			5.0%	132(94.3%)
3. To enrol as a student in this class is easy.	1	1	14	59	65
	2 (1.4%)			10.0%	124 (88.5%)
4.These classes give me a chance to study matters which I never had a chance to study on in school.	3	3	10	51	73
	6 (4.2%)			7.1%	124 (88.5%)
5.The existence of these classes have to be made	-	3	12	48	77

known to public.	2.1%		8.6%	125 (89.3%)	
6.The Religious Classes for Adults must be continously organised and increase in number.	-	1	3	22	114
	0.7%		2.1%	136 (97.1%)	

SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree NS = Not Sure A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

Table 2: Teachers' Perceptions on the Religious Classes for Adults

	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1.Public should know the existence of the Religious Classes for Adults in this country.	-	2	8	14	2
	7.7		30.8%	16(61.5%)	
2.The community needs the Religious Classes for Adults.	-	-	1	7	18
	-		3.8%	25 (96.1%)	
3.The Religious Clases for Adults can provide chances for adults to study.	-	-	1	5	20
	-		3.8%	25 (96.1%)	
4.It is easy for adults to enrol in these classes.	-	2	1	7	16
	7.7		3.8%	23 (88.4%)	
5.The existence of these classes must be made known to public.	-	-	1	7	18
	-		3.8%	25 (96.1%)	
6. The Religious Classes for Adults must continously organised and increased in numbers.	-	-	1	4	21
			3.8%		

SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree NS = Not Sure

Research Question 2 :

What are the teaching-learning approach and methods used in the Religious Classes for Adults?

In relation to the strategies applied in the teaching-learning of the Religious Classes for Adults, 99.3% of the students agreed that the teachers can easily adapt and able to build good rapport with their students, more than 96% agreed that the teachers' voice is clear in delivering the lessons, language used is simple and clear, teachers are knowledgeable and always give chances to students to ask any questions if they have any doubts.

In addition, 93.5% (N=131) of the students agreed that teachers are able to give examples in enhancing the students' understandings, always give chances for the students to share their experiences, 91.4% agreed that most of the teachers manage to use various methods of teaching and able to make the students cheerful and happy during lesson, 92.1% stated that teachers like to emphasise on basic knowledge in order to make students have a better understanding on the topics taught and more than 82% of the respondents stated that the teachers used various types of teaching aids, always give exercises on the lesson and used lecture as their teaching mode (see Table 3) Besides students, this study also involved 26 teachers as the respondents. Data analysed shows that all teachers (100%) used clear and simple language during their classes, emphasized on basic knowledge so that students will understand more and easily, allow students to ask questions and share their experiences, can adapt themselves with the students, always encourage the students to practice what they learnt to outside classroom setting and be knowledgeable. It is also found that 96.1% of the teachers admitted the importance of giving lots

of examples, deliver the lesson with clear voice and easily understood by students, 96.2% like to read books and update their knowledge with the current issues especially relating to the topics taught, 88.5% always give exercises in order to assess the students' understandings and 88.4% like to use teaching aids in their classes.

Table 3 : Students' Perceptions on the Teaching-Learning of the Religious Classes For Adults (RCA)

	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1. Teachers always emphasise on the basic topics so that students can easily understand the lesson.	-	5	6	65	64
	3.6%		4.3%	129 (92.1%)	
2. Teachers always give examples in the lessons.	-	1	8	52	79
	0.7%		5.7%	131 (93.5%)	
3. Teachers have a clear voice and easily heard by the students.	-	2	3	47	88
	1.4%		2.1%	135 (96.5%)	
4. Language used during lesson is clear.	-	1	2	56	81
	0.7%		1.4%	137 (97.9%)	
5. Teachers teaching the adult classes should be equipped with Islamic Religious Knowledge and general Knowledge.	-	-	5	43	92
			3.6%	135 (96.4%)	
6. Teachers use teaching aids in their lessons	-	1	20	60	59
	0.7%		14.3%	119 (85.0%)	
7. Teachers know various teaching methods and approaches.	-	4	20	68	48
	2.9%		14.3%	116 (82.9%)	
8. Teachers give chance to students to ask questions.	-	2	10	49	79
	1.4%		7.1%	128 (91.4%)	
9. Teachers always give exercises to the students in order to assess their understandings in the topics taught	1	1	3	66	69
	2 (1.4%)		2.1%	135 (96.4%)	
10. Teachers give chances to students to share their experience and knowledge	-	1	23	63	53
	0.7%		16.4%	116 (82.9%)	
11. Teacher can easily adapt with the students	-	2	7	73	58
	1.4%		5.0%	131 (93.5%)	
12. A teacher who uses various teaching methods may	-	-	1	65	74

attract the students' interests			0.7%	139 (99.3%)	
13. Teachers' teaching style may attract students' interests	-	1	13	52	74
	0.7%		9.3%	126 (90.0%)	

SD= Strongly Disagree D = Disagree NS = Not Sure SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree

Another aspect which was analysed is students' learning phenomena in the Religious Classes for Adults. Most of the responses given are positive in nature whereby 93.6% of the teachers said that their students do not want to miss the lessons and would try to catch up with the lesson which had been missed, 90% of the teachers agreed that the classes are able to aid towards the betterment of students' knowledge on basic principles of worship, 88.6% of the teachers said that their students always take the opportunity to ask questions, 87.2% agreed that by giving examples of the current issues would increase the students' interests towards the lesson, 84.3% agreed that by giving short notes would help the students to understand and remember easily the topics taught and 83.6% believed that lesson could be made interesting through the use of teaching aids.

Table 4 : Teachers' Perceptions on the Students' Learning Phenomena in the Religious Classes For Adults

	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1. The Religious Classes for Adults do help alot in the aspect of worship.	-	3	11	51	75
	2.1%		7.9%	126 (90.0%)	
2. Students can understand and remember better through short notes given	1	5	16	70	48
	6 (4.3%)		11.4%	118 (84.3%)	
3 Through practical given may enhance students' understandings	-	1	14	65	60
	0.7%		10.0%	125 (89.3%)	
4. Activities through learning may give chances to students to give their opinion and share their experience	1	1	16	62	60
	2 (1.4%)		1.4%	122 (87.1%)	
5. I like to be the model for lessons which involve demonstrations	1	9	43	55	32
	10 (7.1%)		30.7%	87 (62.2%)	
6. Students always make use of the chances given to ask questions	-	1	15	75	49
	0.7%		10.7%	124 (88.6%)	
7. Teaching aids are used by teachers to enhance students' understandings	-	-	23	67	50
	-		16.4%	117 (83.6%)	
8. Students may become more interested in their lesson through examples given by the teachers in relation to current issues and the topics taught	1	1	16	55	67
	2 (1.4%)		11.4%	122 (87.2%)	

9.I like to share experience and knowledge on what is being taught	-	1	14	70	55
	0.7%		10.0%	125 (89.3%)	
10.Students do not want to miss out any of the lessons	1	2	6	53	78
	3 (2.1%)		4.3%	131(93.6%)	

SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree NS = Not Sure A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

From the interviews done on 10 religious teachers who are currently the teaching staff of the Religious Classes for Adults and 10 students who are enrolled in that classes, it was found that :

1. students find the lessons are interesting through the teaching aids used, practical's done in classes and exercises given because all these allow the students to see issues in a more realistic way.
2. Through these classes, students take the opportunities to ask questions in relation to the current issues and the problems they face in their daily life especially those related to Islamic teachings such as *ibadat* (worship).
3. The Religious Classes for Adults provide channels for students to gather and obtain more religious knowledge especially by sharing experiences with their classmates.
4. Learning can be enhanced through the use of models and demonstrations.
5. Resources used are adequate such as textbooks and notes.
6. These classes can help in improving the practices of Islamic teachings in the students' daily life such as in worship, fasting and recitation of al-Quran
7. Curriculum used is suitable and can fulfill the students' needs in learning.
8. It is crucial to make these classes known to people through media such as t.v, radio, newspapers or mosques.
9. Most of the problems faced by the students are in memorizing the recitations in prayers, reciting al-Quran and these problems can be remedied through the classes given.
10. Learning can be improved through group work and discussions.

7.Conclusion

To conclude, today, the Religious Classes for Adults in Brunei Darussalam is relevant and has a place in the hearts of the community. Advancement of ICT does not prevent and reduce the people's interest to study Islamic Religious Knowledge and Al-Quran. The encouraging and continuous acceptance from the people is one factor that contributes to the survival of the Religious Classes for Adults. Today, these classes have become the channel especially for those who would want to have a more understanding on the basic knowledge of Islam and Al-Quran. The management of the classes is now well- organized, relevant to the current needs and able to attract more people.

Three conclusions can be made in this study, namely :

1. From the teachers' and students' point of view, the existence of the Religious Classes for Adults are much needed by people and provides an alternative to education especially for those who hadn't a chance to study in a formal class in the religious school.
2. According to the students, the religious teachers teaching the adult classes are very knowledgeable especially in areas relating to Islamic teachings and Al-Quran. Therefore, these teachers are able to answer the queries made by students in a very well manner.
3. Approach and methodology used are suitable for the adults. Teachers use various methods and approaches in their teachings such as usage of various examples, contextual approach according to the current issues, sharing experiences with the students, use of hands-on activities and the usage of various teaching aids.

In order to intensify and increase the quality of these classes, improvements need to be made such as the curriculum and the textbooks used. Aside from these, the readiness of the teachers must also be enhanced, their pedagogical knowledge and more advanced teaching aids supplied relevant to the topics taught. All of these would help in promoting the students' interests and their understandings

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