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## Challenges for the Hearing Impaired in Religious Development in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Religious development is an important aspect in producing quality human capital, which is one of the main assets to national development. Individuals who adhere to Islamic teaching tend to have systematic lifestyle and culture, high work motivation and great enthusiasm for life development. The need to follow the Islamic path must be fostered in every individual including those with disabilities. The hearing impaired refer to a community with a specific incapacity of hearing. They are identified as one of the communities with disability who are most left out in spiritual development. Achievement of students with hearing disability in the subject of Islamic Studies is reported to be poor. Moreover, their perception on the subject is worrying for their claim of *fardhu ain* (obligatory acts) education being tedious and dull. This study will examine the problems and challenges faced by the hearing impaired in their religious development. The research done uses qualitative method analyzing non-numerical data from related agencies and influential individuals. It is important for associated parties to pay attention to this matter so that the religious development for the hearing impaired can be ensured. Whatever the excuse and difficulty faced in educating the deaf, the matter has to be overcome because they are the asset of the country, and who also have the right to education. This study is expected to submit a proposal paper to the authorities aimed at urging them to take appropriate action in overcoming the difficulties faced by deaf Muslims today.

**Keywords:** Hearing Impaired, Challenges, Religious Development, *Fardhu Ain* (Obligatory Acts)

## Introduction

Since the proclamation of The International Year of Disabled Persons 1981 and the launch of The World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons 1982, Malaysia has introduced several policies and programs on bettering the life quality of people with disabilities. Participation and cooperation of the society started when the national community took part in the effort of integrating for the welfare of people with disabilities. The government also started on its part by introducing a policy with the propaganda of "Welfare as a Collective Responsibility". *Dasar Kebajikan Masyarakat Negara* (DKMN), or the National Welfare Policy, was implemented in 1990 to improve the well-being and stability of the society for national development. Policies and programs that are formulated in Malaysia are grounded on the strategies and goals contained in the National Welfare Policy to achieve self-respect and equal opportunities while building the spirit of mutual help and caring culture among the society.

Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 which came into force on July 7, 2008 becomes the foundation for equality of rights and opportunities for people with disabilities, with the purpose of securing their interest and well-being. However, notwithstanding the act, the disabled community today is still marginalized especially in the educational aspect. This phenomenon urged the government to introduce *Dasar Sifar Penolakan*, or the Zero Rejection Policy, in 2019 to guarantee this community's right to appropriate and relevant education. This is in line with the fifth strategy in Persons with Disabilities Policy which focuses on the improvement of people with disabilities' access to education at all levels, including lifelong education. This is also in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which places the quality of education as the fourth goal. Until now, numerous issues concerning people with disabilities, including those with hearing disability, are raised especially in the aspect of spiritual development.

## Problem Statement

The definition of persons with disabilities is those who have long-term physical, mental or intellectual disabilities that may hinder them to give full and effective participation within a society (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2008). The hearing impaired, specifically the deaf, are one of them with a specific incapacity of hearing. They can be categorized into two, ones with the hearing sense that does not work and ones with it that can work with a hearing aid (Report of the Hoc to Define and Hard of Hearing, 1975). They whose hearings are impaired since birth might also have speech problems and are considered mute (Omar et.al, 2021).

Persons with hearing disability are given specific definitions as below:

### 1. From educational perspective

A deaf person is someone who is not capable of processing linguistic information with or without hearing aids. Meanwhile, a half-deaf person is someone with enough residual hearing capability to process linguistic information with or without hearing aids (Sulaiman, 2002).

### 2. From medical perspective

Deafness is a situation of hearing loss and a physiological condition of incapability to receive or process hearing stimulation such as sound. The deaf refer to the people with hearing loss of

above 90 dB (units for hearing measurement) that at this level they would need hearing aids or a mastery in sign language (Ariffin, 2006).

### 3. From cultural perspective

The deaf are defined as individuals who consider themselves as part of the deaf community. The word deaf is often culturally misused making it misinterpreted by many people (Razali, 2009). Not all people with hearing disability are considered deaf since not all of them lose their hearing ability completely. There are people who are hearing impaired that can hear, just not as clearly and might need hearing aids.

Some people categorize the definition of hearing impairment into two, deaf and half-deaf. Deaf are for those whose hearing sense does not function at all, while half-deaf refer to those with hearing impairment but can function to some extent with or without particular help (Udin, 1988).

Physically, the deaf look no different from others. Their hidden disability is what makes them isolated in terms of interaction and communication that often get diverted from them (Sulaiman, 2002). They depend solely on their sight (visual ability) beside the sign language to receive information. This gives them difficulty in interacting with the community outside theirs. According to Yusof (2002) and Isa (2010), the deaf are a group of people who are not capable of verbal communication due to their inability in hearing sound which makes them left out in terms of education which consequently impacts their spiritual development.

### Research Methodology

In general, this research uses the methodology of library research with qualitative approach of both exploratory and descriptive. Exploratory research uses the formula of investigative focus to give a clue on necessary identified results (Marican, 2005). This research applies the content analysis technique in examining the data, taken from journals, seminar proceedings, scientific magazines, printed media, electronic media, internet and the like. Data are then processed, organized and analyzed until conclusion is reached.

### Literature Riview

There are several studies that have been conducted which are related to the religious development of the hearing impaired. The research conducted by the WHO (World Health Organization) discovered that one in every four children is born with hearing loss or are deaf (Duthey, 2013; and WHO, 2016). In Malaysia, apart from physical disability, there are approximately 2,000 deaf babies born every year (Hakim, 2018). Isa (2007) identified via her study that the deaf can also be seen as those who are unsuccessful in developing their spirituality. This is supported by Mohad et.al (2018) reveals that the hearing impaired are among those who are spiritually behind. Another study was by Awang et.al (2010), whose study shows that knowledge on *fardhu ain* (obligatory acts) among the students with hearing impairment is very poor. The research conducted by Mansor (2007) found that deaf individuals who have high religious knowledge will possess a way or life which is more orderly, more committed in practice

and religious activity, possess awareness, and high motivation at work are responsible towards the family and more energized to improve his or her life (Mansor, 2007).

This study will utilize previous studies in an attempt to examine the problems and challenges faced by the hearing impaired in their religious development. The issue related to religious development of the hearing impaired in Malaysia needs to be given serious and reasonable attention by all parties, including parents, teachers, the community, and the authorities, particularly the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The deaf are a special group that requires the support from all in conducting their daily life, including their religious obligations.

### **Finding and Research Discussion**

Following are the detailed accounts of several challenges that are faced by the hearing impaired in their religious development.

#### **Communication Problems**

The reality that has to be faced by the hearing impaired is the ineffective communication with the community outside theirs. As a result, they prefer to isolate themselves and abstain from participating in social activities including religious ones (Omar et.al, 2021). A small part of them can understand normal conversation but their focus might not be total. Confusion too might happen involving words with similar phonemes or syllables (Abdullah and Che Rabiaah, 2002). This may make them less spirited to keep engaging in social activities, particularly religious ones.

#### **Academic Performance of Deaf Students**

Academically, the performance of the deaf students is poor compared to other students. The statistics for the general examinations of *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (Primary School Achievement Test), *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (Lower Secondary Assessment) and *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education) show that the achievement of the deaf students does not reach the intended target. Their academic performance in 2013 suggests that the criticality of their education is real. An integrated deaf school in Terengganu, for instance, records a 100 percent of failure in the subject of Islamic Studies in the examination of *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* that year (Omar et.al, 2021; Hassan, 2010).

Despite the implementation of programmes like *Pembelajaran dan Pengajaran Formal* (Formal Learning and Teaching), *Program Pendidikan Inklusif* (Inclusive Education Programme), *Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi* (Integrated Special Education Programme) and *Sekolah Pendidikan Khas* (Special Education Schools), the process of learning and teaching for students with special needs especially in the subject of Islamic Studies still seems ineffective and needs to be amended and paid more attention to by the parties involved (Norakyairee, 2019). Uninteresting learning methods are what drive these students away from the *fardhu ain* (obligatory acts) classes. This then makes them fail to comprehend the subject, hence the obligatory acts, and consequently drift away from the religion itself (Muhibah, 2017).

Additionally, the infrastructures provided for the students are mostly not disabled-accessible. Reading and learning materials are not commonly of easy access for the disabled students, plus the systems and regulations run by the schools are frequently non-practicable to them (Malek, 2019).

### **Social Misconduct and Involvement in Crime**

Another issue that is alarming today is the involvement of people with hearing disability in social and criminal problems. There are numerous cases of moral misconduct, marital and divorce problems, incest and similar others involving the hearing impaired (Effendi N.A., 2010). According to the commissioner of Terengganu State Religious Affairs Department, Salleh (2012), the Religious Department has identified a silent movement run by a particular party that aims Muslims, including the disabled especially the hearing impaired, to get them apostatize. There are also criminal cases involving them such as motorcycle theft. This issue happens as a result of lack of religious knowledge as well as negative peer influence (Mansor, 2007). It was heard once of a case where a deaf person hit his mother and break her hand just because he could not stand her nagging (Abdullah, 2002).

A seminar on issues and needs of Malaysian deaf community held at Blue Wave, Shah Alam on September 10, 2014 that was organized by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and Malaysian Federation of the Deaf (MFD) mainly discussed moral problems involving the hearing impaired such as indecency, adultery and incest (Mansor, 2007). Their involvement in social and criminal conduct is seen to be rooted from tenuous social relations between the hearing impaired and local communities causing them to live in their own world and create their own rules without basing on the religion. As a result, they become astray from the religion and perform prohibited actions instinctively. There have also been alarming cases of the hearing impaired involved in drugs which rise from issues of financial problems and family strain (Effendi, 2010).

### **Educational Problems**

The hearing impaired are the hardest to receive and process information compared to people with other disabilities since they need the medium of sign language to communicate. Thus, the effectiveness of religious programmes depends largely on the educators' proficiency of sign language. Unfortunately, there are not many people with religious background who can use sign language efficiently, and this stunts the process of spreading Islamic teaching (Nurul Asma, 2010). On top of that, we also lack of trained interpreters who can accurately explain the religious teaching as it involves Islamic terms that should be understood and grasped beforehand to get translated to sign language (Mansor, 2011).

A research done by Ismail (2009) on spreading religious knowledge to the hearing impaired suggests the need to increase the number of trained educators for the deaf community. This is supported by a reseach by Hassan (2010) titled 'Implementation of *Da'wah* to the Deaf in Terengganu' which emphasizes the lack of trained educators as the major factor to the failure of *da'wah* to this community. Moreover, religious teaching materials provided for the hearing

impaired in Malaysia are very limited. Though some of them are able to read, they still need further explanation of what they read through the sign language (Omae, et.al, 2021).

Another factor of effective teaching and learning is the presence of visual support. A teaching method that includes visual elements is proven to facilitate the educators in conveying the information intended as well as attract the hearing impaired students to join and participate in the classes especially among the teenagers. However, this is rarely carried through and most of current classes involving deaf students still use the traditional method of teaching without utilizing any learning aid (Shaari, 2011).

Hence, the Cabinet Committee Report 1979 concerning the education among people with disabilities, though it may be considered old, must be re-studied as it is still relevant to current situation. Parts of the report are as follows (Awang, 2010):

Article 437 – Current education for the hearing and visually impaired children is almost all managed by the government...

Article 438 – Since the education of children with disabilities is important and the responsibility for it is now heavier, it is felt that the government itself should bear the full responsibility. In addition, participation from voluntary organizations must still be encouraged.

Article 438.1 – With the awareness that the education of children with disabilities is under the government's authority, it is acknowledged that any part of the education that is run by non-governmental organizations should be taken over by the government at the present moment. In addition, participation from voluntary organizations in the development of the education of children with disabilities must still be encouraged.

Article 440 – The reality is education for children with hearing disability requires large expenditure on equipment and special facilities. Notwithstanding enough financial allocation, most schools still do not have enough equipment and aid...

Article 441 – It is also discovered that most rooms that are used by students with hearing disability are not apt. Education of children with hearing disability does not only demand special equipment and approaches but specific rooms as well.

## **Conclusion**

Whatever reasons and difficulties encountered in promoting religious development of the hearing impaired, they need to be overcome as they are part of the national asset who possess the right to grow and develop. Religious and spiritual development acts as a foundation to form an identity thus must be taken seriously, since the deaf Muslim community seems to keep growing every year in parallel with the social and criminal involvement among them. Religious approach as well as spiritual education are proven to improve their personalities to enhance human capital quality while at the same time weaken their participation in immoral acts.

Summing up, obstacles and challenges that are present in promoting religious and spiritual development of the hearing impaired must be paid due attention by all parties involved.

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