

## Issues and Challenges of The Minority Muslim Community in The Kadazandusun Ethnic Village Area in Sabah

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### Abstract

Sabah is as a peaceful and harmonious state with existence of family relationships that have various religious affiliations and communities living in the same area. However, the number of religious for each area in the state of Sabah is not same because there have areas with a Muslim majority and areas with a Christian's majority. The situation caused an imbalance between the number of Muslims and Christians in the Kadazandusun ethnic settlement area in Sabah. This also causes the minority community in an area to face various issues and challenges in daily life. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the issues arising among the minority Muslim community in Sabah and also analyze for the challenges of the Muslim minority in the settlement area of the Kadazandusun community in Sabah. The research method is qualitative and the research instrument is a questionnaire. The results of the study found that the issues arising in the Muslim minority areas in Sabah is about the influence of the religion and culture of the majority, the issue of oppression and others. While the challenges faced by Muslim's minority in Sabah involve a lack of reading material related to religion, constraints in carrying out da'wah and difficulties in obtaining allocations for the construction of surau.

**Keywords:** Muslim Minority, Ranau, Sabah, Kadazandusun Ethnicity, Religious Comparison.

### Introduction

A minority group is a small group in the population of the majority group in a society (Kinloch, 1979). According to Thing (1987), minorities can be interpreted as non-dominant and unique groups seen through physical, cultural, economic and behavioral characteristics. They are usually looked down upon, oppressed, discriminated and prejudiced by the dominant group.

While according to the definition by Azizi et.al (2015) also thinks that the majority group is superior to the minority group, he also believes that the minority group is naturally different and isolated, does not have the right to claim privileges, power and position. While according to Burns (1979) there is a strong view especially in the United States that black people (minority group) are inferior to white people (majority group).

This minority group also described as a small group that has similarities in term of descent, religion, culture, ethnicity and race that live in a place (country, region, villages) where the majority of the population is different descent, religion, race and so on (Dictionary Hall Fourth Edition). However, in this study researcher chose to conduct a study on the issues and challenges faced by the Muslim Minority group living in the Kadazandusun ethnic settlement area where the majority of the population is Christian in Sabah. Researchers also see it as important to conduct studies in field because studies conducted in neighboring countries have found that Muslim minority group experience oppression, discrimination, neglect of right and so on. Thus, the researcher chose to conduct this topic of Muslim Minority in Sabah because Sabah have Kadandusun settlement areas with Christian Majority such as Penampang, Tambunan, Ranau, Keningau and others (Department of Statistics Sabah, 2021).

In addition, this study also important to be carried out in order to maintain the good relation that have already formed among the Sabahan community by taking into account interests of all parties including the rights of minority groups. Considering that studied related to this topic of Muslim Minority are still not highlighted in the context of Sabah. Thus, with the existence discussion for this topic be able to provide the right things that Muslim minority can be obtained such as the right of religious education, place to worship such as *Surau*, the right to speak and others. Next, the researcher also sees this study is important to carry out, so the religious and racial leader in Sabahan know about this issues and challenges faced by the Muslim minority group in Sabah and the action can be taken to resolve this problem. This study also helpful in listening to the voices of the people that cannot be expressed, especially for the minority group in an area. It is hoped that this study can provide some exposure related to minority Muslim in Sabah and appropriate action can be given to helps them.

### **Background Research**

Sabah is the second largest state in Malaysia with a wide diversity of different cultures, ethnicities, tribes, customs, religions and beliefs. The composition shows that the state of Sabah has about 30 ethnicities that speak 50 languages and 80 dialects of different ethnicities (Sintang, 2013). The ethnic majority in the state of Sabah is ethnic Kadazandusun, Bajau and Murut. While the minorities ethnic was ethnic Bisaya, Orang Sungai, Iranun, Kedayan, Suluk and other ethnic groups (Katayya & Paul, 2012). However, the largest ethnic group in Sabah's indigenous community is the Kadandusun ethnic group (Sintang, 2003: 65) whose number is 660,777 (Sabah Statistic Yearbook, 2021). Therefore, the researcher chose to conduct a study on the Kadazandusun ethnic group because this ethnic composition recorded the largest ethnic composition in Sabah. Meanwhile, the district where the majority of the population is from kadazandusun ethnic group is only one district, namely Ranau district, where 78.6% are from Kadazandusun ethnic group and the rest are from other ethnic groups such as Chinese and Malays (Sabah Statistic Yearbook, 2021).

Based on the population statistic of the Ranau district, the number of Muslim is 45.3% while the number of Christian is 53.7% (Sabah Statistic Department 2021). These statistics show that the number of Christians is more than Muslims in Ranau, Sabah (Jabatan Perangkaan Sabah, 2021). In Ranau district, there are also several villages with a majority of

Christian population such as at Bundu Tuhan Village, Pahu Village, Matan Village, Kinarutan Village, Ulu Sugut Village and other area. While the Muslim majority areas such as Masilou Village, Cinta Mata Village, Kundasang Lama Village, Lohan Village and many other villages (Daud, 1993). Therefore, the researcher also focused the study on the Ranau district to see the issued happen by the minority Muslim groups in the village of Ranau areas.

### **Research Methodology**

Every research method and design are initial planning before starting the study. Inaccurate selection of research methods and designs will have a significant impact on the findings and also cause problems if the information is shared with other researchers either through reading or discussion (Munawar & Shahizan, 2017: 49). The design of this is a qualitative study that involves literature study data collection instruments and also uses interview methods. This method is important for researchers in identifying and understanding an issue or context of study in a timely manner in situations that require a direct interaction (Munawar & Shahizan, 2017: 71).

In data collection, researchers use library studies, a method requires researchers to analyze their writings and previous studies to obtain information (Piaw, 2014). Therefore, the researchers collected data from various writing sources either primary or secondary sources. The data are analyzed and researched by the researchers in detail to ensure the accuracy of the information. In fact, the researchers also conducted interviews on several religious and racial leaders who have experiences in handling the issues as well as experts in this field.

### **Result and Discussion**

In this section of findings and discussion will be discussed about several things such as: 1] Muslim's Minority Issues in Sabah; 2] Muslim Minority Issues in Ranau and 3] Muslim Minority Challenges in Sabah. The discussion is based on an interview session that has been conducted with several informants. The discussion is as follows

#### **Muslim's Minority Issues**

In living a community life, raising issues is a habit that needs to be well resolved because the can cause division in the community. In this section the researcher will analyze the issues arising in the Kadazandusun ethnic settlement area where the Muslim population is a minority. The information will be analyzed based on interview sessions with religious leaders based on their experience in work practices and expertise in the field. The following is a table of interview analysis results conducted by researchers on several informants

Table 1

*Issues in Minority Muslim Village Areas*

ISSUES	THEME	SUBJECT	INFORMANT
Issues in Muslim Minority	The Influence of Majority Religion	Culture can indeed guarantee harmony among religious believers. But there is an issue arising in a village located in Ranau, I will not mention the name of the village because this matter is sensitive. Where the village head in the area obliges everyone to be involved in activities organized by the church because the population in the area is the majority of Christians. This is one of the sensitive issues. In this village also happened other problem when there was a young person in the village who converted to Islam and wanted to get confirmation of his single status from the village head. The village head deliberately delayed giving his signature with the aim of complicating the matter.	M2
		For the areas located in the paddy area, there are still many non-Muslims. But if Islam or Christianity comes to claim they will tend to follow. Thus, the strongest influence will be followed by the people. The paddy area is indeed a Muslim minority area and they tend to follow the current situation. Not only that, in Muslim minority area it also difficult to get help, especially in the construction of mosques.	M1
	The Influence of Majority Culture	If in Ranau there are no serious issues happening among the Muslim minority, the only thing that exists is the culture of drinking alcohol that the minority population in one area sometimes follows that culture, especially among teenagers who lack the strength of faith, influenced by social cultures such as <i>YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram</i> .	M1
		Due to being influenced by the culture of the majority area there have been cases of apostasy. Not only among people who does not have knowledge about Islam, but it also happens among student from Islamic studies. Influence that is too strong in one area causes it to tend to follow the current environmental conditions.	M2

	Oppression	The issues arising for Muslim minority settlement area in Ranau are not very strong, this is the symbol of the uniqueness of the Ranau district. Although, in Ranau have Village with the population is Muslim Minority, but the bad issues do not occur. But in other areas there is a resurgence of these minority Muslim issues. Based on the survey that we conducted in several areas where the population is majority Christian such as Penampang, Tambunan, Tamparuli area there is a slight weakness. Where the Muslim minority population in those areas are quite marginalized, oppressed, looked down upon.	M2
	Apostasy	There are cases of apostasy involving children who have embraced Islam due to marriage. Also, the children do not receive support from their parents or the matter is over looked by the authorities until cases of apostasy occur among them, especially in areas where Muslims are a minority.	M2
		Apostasy also occurs, not only among Muslims who do not have religious knowledge. But sometimes there are students from pondok where there is a case in Sabah when living in an area where the Muslim minority will always follow the atmosphere and be influenced and eventually be deceived causing them to apostatize.	M2
		There is also a case of apostasy that occurs among couples who are engaged and the man is from a Christian-majority village in Ranau. When the woman does not have feelings with the man and asks for the engagement to be broken. So, the man's family asked for their son to return to his original religion. The case will be prolonged and cause a case of apostasy	M1
	No Preaching Situations	What we can see in Sabah especially for one area where the population is a Muslim minority, whatever activities are organized in that area they are forced to follow for the development of that area.	M2
		here is also a Christian majority village area in Ranau whose village head obliges all residents to participate in activities organized by the church even if they are Muslims. Even the atmosphere of Islamic preaching in the area is not very strong	M1

		There is also a Christian majority village area in Ranau whose village head obliges all residents to participate in activities organized by the church even if they are Muslims. Even the atmosphere of Islamic preaching in the area is not very strong	M3
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**Source: Interviews 2021 & 2023**

The table above is the result of the interview session conducted by the researcher with several respondents who are Muslim religious leaders in Sabah. Based on the results of the interviews above, the researcher will classify the discussion into two parts, namely: 1] Muslim's Minority Issues in Sabah and 2] Muslim's Minority Issues in Ranau, Sabah.

#### **a. Muslim's Minority Issues in Sabah**

Based on the table above, there are 4 issues arising among Muslim Minority for the Kadazandusun ethnic settlements area in Sabah. These issues are presented by informants based on their experiences in handling the problems. Among issues that arising among the Muslim Minority community in the settlements area of Kadazandusun ethnic involve the issue of religious influence. Based on the statements presented by the informants, the influence of religion in one settlements area in Sabah greatly affects the way of their life. When the population of the area is majority Christian, then the minority population in the area has to follow all the activities organized in the area. In fact, the informants also said that the Muslim minority population experienced problems in obtaining funds to develop a prayer hall (surau).

Besides, issue of repression. The rise of the issue due to repression by the majority community against the minority community in that area. According to the informants, this situation seen in several Kadazandusun ethnice settlements area where the majority of the community are Christian, such as in Penampang, Tambunan, Tamparul and several area in Sabah where the Muslim community is somewhat marginalized, looked down upon and repressed due to their relatively small population in the area.

Subsequently, the issue of apostate (murtad). This issue seen through the statements from informants regarding interfaith marriage that occurs in Muslim minority area that doesn't receive the support from their family especially from their parents, affectly at the children who have already being a Muslim need having back to their original religion. In fact, cases of apostasy in Muslim minority areas also occur among *pondok* students who study Islam when they return to their hometown and influenced by the atmosphere of community life in the area where they live.

Meanwhile, there is also the issue of the absence of atmosphere for preaching in Muslim minority areas. This is seen through the informant's statement regarding the lack of preaching atmosphere among the minority Muslim population in Sabah, causing them to be forced to follow whatever activities are organized in the settlement area for the sake of the development and smooth administration of the area where they live. In fact, the lack of preaching atmosphere among minority Muslim communities in the areas of Sabah also causes them to lack a strong foundation of religious knowledge so that they experience problems in reciting al-Fatihah with the correct pronunciation.

Overall, the researcher saw that all the informants agreed that there was a rise in issues in the Kadazandusun ethnic settlement area where the Muslim population is a minority in Sabah. However, the issues presented by each informant are different according to their experience when working and when handling the problem. However, the researcher saw that



all the informants tend to choose the issue lack of preaching atmosphere for settlement areas where the Muslim population is a minority. The researcher also observed that all the informants agreed that the issue of apostasy is the main issue for settlement areas with minority Muslim populations.

#### **b. Muslim's Minority Issues in Ranau**

Based on the table above, there are four issues arising in the Muslim Minority village area in Ranau. Among them, the issue of the influence of the majority religion. This is seen through a case brought by an informant regarding a village whose population is majority Christian in the Ranau district which obliges all residents in the village to follow a program organized by the church. The influence of the majority religion is also seen through the attitude of the village head in the Muslim minority area who deliberately delays the affairs of children who have converted to Islam when dealing with them.

In addition, the influence of the majority culture. According to the informant, this issue is also seen to occur in the Muslim minority village area in Ranau regarding the attitude of teenagers who lack faith and are easily influenced by the culture of drinking alcohol practiced by the community in the area. In fact, the strong influence among minority Muslim youth stems from social interaction and the influence of the mass media.

Next, there is a lack of preaching atmosphere for the Muslim minority villages in Ranau. Menrut Informan due to the lack of a preaching atmosphere in the village area where the Muslim population is a minority in Ranau caused the Muslim population in the area to experience difficulty in pronouncing the Arabic letters leading to errors in reciting al-Fatihah. In fact, the Muslim community in the village also has little knowledge of the fundamentals of the Ain obligation.

Overall, the researcher saw that all the informants agreed that there was no rise of bad issues among Muslim minorities in Ranau district unlike other districts. Indeed, there are several villages in the Ranau district where the Muslim population is a minority, but oppression among them does not occur due to the existence of family relationships and good interactions among them (Suraya Sintang 2003: Budi Anto & Saidatul Nornis 2018; Nur Adira 2018). The issue that occurs only involves the attitude of individuals who are self-important and easily influenced by others. In fact, all the informants also agreed that there was no rise of major issues among the Muslim minority in Ranau as one of the uniqueness of the Ranau district that can live in harmony and accept each other even though the Christian population is more than the Muslim population.

#### **The Challenges of Muslim's Minority**

Living as a minority in one area is a huge challenge. This is because, the environment and behavior of a person's life will affect a huge impact in their life. In general, the challenges of minority Muslim's life include two types of challenges, namely internal challenges and external challenges. Thus, in this section the researchers will examine the challenges faced by the Sabahans living in villages where the Muslim population is minority. The research is based on interviews that have been conducted. The table below shows the results of interviews that have been obtain by the researchers

Table 2

*The Challenges of Muslim's Minority*

ISSUES	THEME	SUBJECT	INFORMANT
Challenges of Muslim's Minority	Individual attitude	Teenagers and youth are easily influenced by environmental conditions, especially involving the greatest influence in the area. The biggest challenge in the Ranau district for the village area where the population is a Muslim minority is involving teenagers who tend to be influenced by the alcohol drinking culture practiced by the Christian majority community. Muslim teenagers who lack faith and religious knowledge will easily follow drinking alcohol together with non-Muslims.	M2
		A hard-hearted individual who does not want to accept other people's opinions. Usually, hard-hearted people is very hard to manage because they don't want to accept all opinions, until one person said "If Christianity is hard to deal, if Islam is hard to deal with, better be a pagan".	M1
	Difficulty obtaining allocations	There are few constraints for Muslim minority areas where they experience difficulties when applying for allocations to obtain funds for the construction of suraus and also matters involving the development of Muslims in the area.	M2
	Constraints in carrying out Islamic preaching	The atmosphere in one village, when the people in a village are all non-Muslims need to take care of their hearts, take care of their feelings because sometimes it also affects us to continue preaching more effectively. Causing a little problem in intensifying preaching	M2
	Lack of reading material	Difficulty in obtaining learning materials for religious knowledge, especially in relation to the Quran, dhikr books, worship guides and so on.	M3
	Influence of social media	Can damage the mind and change a person's point of view causing them to express their point of view even if they don't know about the truth of a thing. Even they are too attached to what is shared through whatsapp groups without researching the truth of a matter.	M1



		Today's, society is tied to gadgets and easily believes anything that is shared on social media. What's more, now everyone likes to share information from Whatsapp groups and sometimes it's not even right. But they believe easily and continue to punish. It's even more dangerous if people in that area are minorities, they have to be careful because their actions are always watched.	M2
		Social media is one of the biggest challenges and becomes worse when there are irresponsible groups sharing bad information related to Islam. This causes concern especially for settlement areas where the Muslim population is a minority will be oppressed or ostracized. Now all kinds of people can share.	M3

Sources: Interview 2021 & 2023

Some of the internal challenges are the self-influenced by environmental life and the influence of the mass media. A person who lives in a strong environment of smoking for example, will be influenced to smoke. Similarly, in the practice of religion, especially young generation who still lack in knowledge of Islam, then living in an environment that practices other religions, they will tend to be affected by the practice of other religions. This matter basically related to a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W:

مَثَلُ الْجَلِيسِ الصَّالِحِ وَالسَّوِّءِ، كَحَامِلِ الْمِسْكِ وَذَافِخِ الْكَبِيرِ، فَحَامِلُ الْمِسْكِ: إِمَّا أَنْ يُحْذِيكَ، وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَبْتَاعَ مِنْهُ، وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَجِدَ مِنْهُ رِيحًا طَيِّبَةً، وَذَافِخُ الْكَبِيرِ: إِمَّا أَنْ يُحْرِقَ ثِيَابَكَ، وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَجِدَ رِيحًا خَبِيثَةً

Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: I heard the Prophet (ﷺ) saying, "The similitude of good company and that of bad company is that of the owner of musk and of the one blowing the bellows. The owner of musk would either offer you some free of charge, or you would buy it from him, or you smell its pleasant fragrance; and as for the one who blows the bellows (i.e., the blacksmith), he either burns your clothes or you smell a repugnant smell". [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]. (Riyad as-Salihin 363)

*Meaning: "The simile of a good friend and a bad friend is like a perfume seller and a blacksmith. As for it, the perfume seller will give you (the perfume), or you buy from it, or you get a good smell from it. As for the blacksmith, you'll burn your clothes and you get a bad smell".*

In addition, the hard-hearted and stubborn attitude of individuals from accepting other views are also a challenge. Some individuals cannot accept the views of others even if the person is well versed in his field. This will lead to the knowledge of one's own religion as because of unacceptable attitude. There are also challenges influenced by the mass media. Nowadays, the mass media has a great influence. Most of people has their own gadgets and it's easy to get information from the outside without filtering the information. The

consequences will have an influence on the non-Muslim community and the minority Muslim community itself. Sharing in the mass media that aggravates Islam, fake news and many more will lead to a bad perception towards the minority Muslims in Sabah. This will put their situation in danger. Similar to this unrefined information will lead to a wrong understanding of Islam especially for the minority Muslims themselves. This is due to the lack of understanding of religion which makes them easily affected by the things they share on social media.

Other than that, there are also external challenges which include the lack of provision for the Islamic religion, the constraint in order to carry out *dakwah* and lack of reading materials about Islamic religion. Difficulty in obtaining allocation for Islamic religious development projects will affect the Muslims. The provision is difficult maybe because of the minority factor, certainly will reduce the allocation for minorities especially in Sabah. Minority Muslims in Sabah also have problems in spreading *dakwah*. This is because the minority Muslims need to take care of the hearts of other religious communities in their area. Every movement for *dakwah* must be taken to be more cautious with fear of causing displeasure among other communities. For addition, minority Muslims in Sabah also have problems getting religious book and literature. This is because, the sale of religious books are very limited especially in the rural areas. Therefore, the Muslim Minority community in Sabah have a problem such as lack of reading resources especially for the Islamic books.

In conclusion, the researchers saw that the internal challenges are the significant challenge for the lives of minority Muslims, while the external challenges make it worse and further undermines the lives of minority Muslims in Sabah. Internal challenges will lead to the personal formation or behavior, if it is bad, it will affect on the person. External challenges as result will further the distance of the Muslim community from the religion itself and will increase the difficulty in practicing the religion for themselves.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, researchers saw the existence of issues among the people living in the Kadazandusun village in Ranau are not so bad. It can even be said that the Ranau is a peaceful district because the issue among minority and minorities in a village area is not so significant that it can affect the relationships formed in their community. This is because the people in the Ranau district are mostly family ties that allow them to accept each other. But there is no denying that in other areas that have been rising in the rise of issues that are severe among the Muslim minority community in the area. In fact, the challenges also about all areas where the Muslim population is minority. Therefore, the importance of further studies on this matter so that the welfare of all parties is maintained.

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