

Religious Perceptions of Sport: The Role of Policy Maker in Addressing Common Misunderstandings among Muslims

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Abstract

Introduction: The interpretation of sports among Muslims is often misrepresented by various narrow-minded and inaccurate views, which has led to the emergence of Muslims who reject participation in sports activities. **Objective:** Accordingly, this paper attempts to investigate the concept of sports in Islam, drawing upon the perspectives of policy maker and authorities in Malaysia. **Methods:** The research using policy research method and data was obtained through the analysis of two sports policy documents in Malaysia. Firstly, the Sports Guidelines of Terengganu State, Malaysia, and secondly, the Sports Guidelines According to the Islamic Perspective. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with 1 state policymaker in Malaysia, 2 state officers of policy implementer and 2 federal religious authority officers. **Results:** The results of this study indicate that, from the perspective of policymakers and the Federal Islamic religious authorities, the Islamic teaching does not prohibit participation in sporting activities. Instead, it encourages appreciation and active engagement in sports among Muslims. **Conclusion:** In order to address the potential for misunderstandings about sports within the Muslim community, it is essential that the authorities take a proactive approach to clarifying these misconceptions. It is thus incumbent upon policymakers to formulate comprehensive and efficacious policies pertaining to sports activities.

Keywords: Sport, Misunderstanding, Policy Maker, Muslim

Introduction

When talking about the topic of religion, humans tend to associate religion with human spirituality. In the teachings of Islam, the religion is not only about spiritual development, but Islam also requires its adherents to develop the physical aspect. We can see this demand of Islam through the encouragement or upbringing of the Quran and Sunnah on the development of the physical aspect. For example, the Qur'an encourages people to go out to fight to defend a country that needs human physical strength (surah al-Anfal: 60), in addition, there is also the recommendation of the Prophet which means "A strong believer is better and preferred by Allah SWT than a weak believer" (Muslim, Kitab al-Qadr, no. 2664), also the

Prophet PBUH demanded skills in horseback riding, archery, sword, swimming, wrestling and so on.

Today there is a paradox that is happening to the process of self-development among Muslims. Where, Muslims seem to be active in developing spiritual aspects through spiritual activities, such as Sufism, dhikr, motivation and so on, but less prominent in developing physical activities such as sports. In the opinion of the researcher, this paradox occurs due to the lack of expertise of Islamic scholars who are renowned in the field of human physical development compared to the very prominent aspects of spiritual development. This phenomenon can be known as the research gap among Muslim scholars. This tension has caused a long-lasting problem in the Muslims thoughts. There has been a misunderstanding towards the development of sports. As a result of this misunderstanding, a bigger problem has emerged, where some Muslims have begun to possess and hold a negative perspective on sports activities, some say that sports activities are rooted in western history and culture and can dilute cultural and religious identities (Sofyan et. al. 2021). Some even reject sports activities carried out (Malchrowicz-Moscow, 2021; Maesam. T. Abdul Razak, Mohd Sofian, Omar Fauzee, Rozita Abd. Latif, 2012). This situation occurs due to considerations based on narrow and heavy thinking.

On the other hand, they have organized sports activities in an outrageous manner and violate the teachings of Islam, for example, there are elements of gambling (Muralee Das, 2021), drugs and fraud (Al-Dafrawi, 2020), alcohol (Subhrajit & Nishant 2021) and exposing aurah (Muhammad Syahir & Mohamad Saifudin, 2019) in sports activities (ISN Today, Vol. 3 June 2013; Utusan Malaysia 10/7/2013). This situation occurs due to views based on simple and light arguments, which tend to make something halal. Both parties mentioned are unfair towards sports activities. In fact, these two opposing states become more and more vague and demand enlightenment. Sports activities are becoming more complex and complicated with the emergence of various types of sports that are new and widespread, and even sports methods and equipment have also changed as a result of innovations from members involved in sports.

This issue is of particular concern due to its significant implications for the well-being and holistic development of Muslims. Additionally, it has ramifications for various aspects of society, including national sports participation, public health, youth development, and social integration in Muslim-majority societies. Continued perpetuation of these misrepresentations may result in Muslim communities forgoing the numerous advantages that sports can provide, including the cultivation of discipline, teamwork, leadership, and physical well-being. These benefits are in alignment with Islamic principles when exercised in an appropriate manner. Therefore, it is imperative to elucidate the religious perspective on sports to ensure that Muslim individuals and societies can engage in sports with confidence and safety, without compromising their religious principles.

In this context, the present paper seeks to explore how religious perceptions of sport are shaped among Muslims, with specific reference to Malaysia as a case study. This research aims to contribute to a clearer, more constructive understanding of sports in Islam by examining the perspectives of policymakers and religious authorities, as well as by analyzing selected policy documents. The study underscores the significance of informed policy-making

in orienting the Muslim community towards a balanced and healthy engagement with sports, in accordance with both religious teachings and contemporary societal needs.

Objective

Based on the complex background as mentioned above, this research paper will seek to study the concept of sports according to Islam. Furthermore, the discussion in this paper will touch on the views of policy makers and authorities in Malaysia regarding sports activities in Malaysia.

Method

To obtain data in the field, this study conducted face-to-face focus interviews with experts involved in sports activities as well as policymakers related to sports. The interviews were carried out in a semi-structured manner. All interviews conducted were recorded, this voice recording obtained permission from the informant. Before the interview begins, all informants will be informed and agree that all information shared is for research purposes only. The estimated time duration for the interview procedure ranges from 1 to 2 hours depending on the saturation of the data obtained. The interview questions are structured according to specific themes related to sports from an Islamic perspective. The main theme is concept and objectives of sports, athletes, coaching and sports organizing. After the interview procedure is carried out, the details of the interview data are transcribed in the form of writing. After that, the data is reviewed and verified by experts in the relevant field and followed by an analysis process of the interview data.

Interview data analysis involves recording interviews that are then transcribed after going through a repetitive rehearsing process. After that, the transcripts will be categorized according to specific themes related to sports practice according to the Islamic perspective, as built into the FGD. These categories were then used to construct a general and comprehensive picture of the data. After that, the resulting data related to the general picture of sports practices according to the Islamic perspective, the researcher build sub-sub themes that become smaller and more detailed units, representing each main theme which is the concept and objectives of sports, athletes, coaching and sports organizing. This smaller unit of analysis is built up of words, phrases, answers and opinions from interviews. Then, the sub-unit will produce certain patterns related to sports practices according to the Islamic perspective. All data resulting from the interview analysis will be examined, assessed, compared and interpreted with existing theories.

Literature Review

Scientific research on sports and leisure among Islamic scholars has existed since the time of Ibn Sina (1970) who lived around 980-1037 AD. His research touched on the health aspects of the human body, starting with the general principles of body health, the elements of disease, care and medicine needed by the human body. This study has made a great contribution to the development of knowledge in the field of sports and leisure. Furthermore, the study of sports and leisure was continued by the Islamic sociologist Ibn Khaldun (2005) who lived around 1332-1406 AD, his study in the book *Muqaddimah* describes the close relationship between human physical strength and human ability to perform the reasoning process. This study was conducted according to historical methodology, the results of his

study showed that the elements of human strength and physical health are important to enable a person to receive the educational process optimally.

The study of sports and leisure in the next era was carried out by Miskawayh (1961), in his study, he touched on the importance of getting a healthy body is to get a basic source of energy, namely from daily food, which is selected based on the criteria of food that will be healthy for the body and not based on the deliciousness of food alone. In addition, there are also researchers in the field of sports and leisure who came from among the Islamic preachers, namely Hassan al-Banna (1992). He touched on the importance of having a healthy body to develop oneself. He concluded that a human development effort must have ten domains of human development, namely a healthy body, noble character, high knowledge, independence, having an authentic faith, performing worship correctly, being able to control oneself, managing time, being disciplined in carrying out affairs and contributing to the community. Through the ten domains, he emphasized that the main elements that need to be fulfilled first are the elements of a healthy body, in order to enable the other domains to be fulfilled. This healthy element of the body requires a person to play sports and exercise consistently.

Meanwhile, Muhammad Uqlah (1990) from the University of Jordan explained in his study that the important of physical education in the process of children's education. He also stated that the Islamic educational framework on children's education involves physical education. In the study, he also analyzed the physical education process of children as organized by Islam. The same is true of the views expressed by Wan Zahidi Wan Teh (1995) on the identity and content of Islamic education. He also emphasized that the element of physical education cannot be separated in the Islamic education system, because physical education is one of the demands of Islam, hence Muslims need to make the element of physical education a success, especially the educational authorities in Muslim countries, so that Muslims will live in a healthy, prosperous and balanced state. This element of physical education, he called *Riyadah Badaniyah*. The importance of sports to have a healthy body from Islamic perspective was also debated by Khan, Wasim et. Al (2020) with the addition of aspects of eating foods that are good for oneself and staying away from foods that can be harmful to the human body.

An equal tone was also expressed by Abdul Jalil Borham (2008), who emphasized that to produce a balanced and harmonious human being, it is necessary to have health, fitness and physical strength, besides that it also involves the knowledge, morals and intellect. Thus, neglecting of the physical development efforts of the human body will allow a person to live in an unbalanced and disharmonious state. Sports can not only build a healthy body and shape human self-balance, more than that, sports activities can also create strategic values in a Muslim self, including economic values, security, social relations, justice, noble morals and development (Mohammad Golchin et. al. 2021).

Recently, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2005) also conducted a study on entertainment and recreation according to the Islamic view. Al-Qaradawi studies and analyzes the disputes of Muslims about the halal and haram of entertainment and recreational activities against Muslims. In the study, al-Qaradawi conducted an analysis using the approach of Islamic fiqh methods called *al-Mashaqqah tajlib al-taysir, Idha daqa al-amru ittasa'* and *al-darurat tubiha*

al-Mahdhurat. In terms of sports and leisure, he concluded that sports and leisure in Islam are divided into two categories, namely those that are permissible and the second category is those that are forbidden. The determination of this category should refer to *maqasid shariah* as explained in his study.

From the perspective of the Muslim scholar above, it is clear that Islam encourages its adherents to play sports and leisure, sports also have a strong foundation and bond with the source of Islamic teachings (Mohibullah Khan Marwat et. al. 2014). But today there are misunderstandings and mistakes when Muslims practice sports activities. Among these misunderstandings are the mistakes of Muslims who hold a negative perspective on sports, and even some reject sports activities (Malchrowicz-Moscow, 2021; Nida, 2020). The rejection of sports activities among Muslims will restrict and hinder the potential of sports abilities among Muslims. The talents and sports abilities that Muslims possess will be hidden and then submerged and not utilized. From the opposite angle, there are also Muslims who take it for granted to organise sports activities in an outrageous and un-Islamic manner, for example, there are elements of gambling (Muralee Das, 2021), drugs and fraud (Al-Dafrawi, 2020), alcohol (Subhrajit & Nishant, 2021) and exposing aurah (Muhammad Syahir & Mohamad Saifudin (2019) in sports activities. Both of the above misconceptions require concrete and progressive enlightenment on sports activities.

Study Findings and Discussion

From the interviews conducted with informants consisting of policymakers and sports policy implementers, it was found that there are four (4) basic elements that are emphasized related to the concept of sports according to Islam as follows:

1. Concept and objectives of sports
2. Athletes
3. Coaching
4. Organisation of sports activities

Elements of the Concept and Objectives of Sports

The informant stated that sports are part of religious teachings and demands, it is a physical activity that is closely related to the spiritual aspect of human beings. Physical activity involving human health and physical strength was taught by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). Physical strength activities or sports should be practiced to ensure that human self-development is balanced and complementary between the physical and spiritual aspects of human beings. Here are the findings from the informants:

Informant 1:

- "Take the hadith of the Prophet PBUH which is basically a sport shown from the hadith of the Prophet..... عَلِّمُوا أَبْنَاءَكُمْ السَّبَّاحَةَ وَالرَّيِّ "Meaning: "Teach your child to swim and archery"
- "All kinds of sports that we think are good for physical development, health and entertainment does not violate sharia and there is no damage to the faith, so for us, that is the guide in sports, the need to appreciate Islam."
- "Let's go back to the hadith, the Prophet PBUH was brestling, among others..... « لَيْسَ الشَّدِيدُ بِالصُّرْعَةِ، إِنَّمَا الشَّدِيدُ الَّذِي يَمْلِكُ نَفْسَهُ عِنْدَ الْغَضَبِ » A strong person is not a strong person, but a strong person is a person who can restrain himself when he is angry."

Informant 4:

- "Playing sports is training.... involve physical"
- "Physical Leisure jogging, walking, cycling, gymnastics"
- "Sports involve tasauf if I'm not mistaken"
- "*Riadah* not limited to physical only for the soul as well"
- "Believers are stronger, more loved by God"
- "Healthy body, sports build children's character so that they are not affected by a generation that is weak and unhealthy, although knowledgeable but his judgment became abnormal "
- "Finally, *mardhatillah* includes aurah, mixed, *akidah*, worship when it is time to pray."

Informant 5:

- "As important as these two are in the sirah of the Prophet it is recommended to be strong both in Islam to hone their talents. Recommended in Islam "
- "In Islam, we encourage the people to be physically and spiritually strong"
- "A strong individual, worshiper, sports direction in Islam gives strength, worship, and obedience"

Based on the above findings, the informant is of the view that the concept of sports is based on the main sources in Islam and is also promoted by the Prophet Puh. The concept of sports also involves physical activity, which demands the improvement of one's performance and development, from one level to the next. Although sports activities seem like physical development, the concept of sports needs to involve aspects other than physical, namely the spiritual aspect of human beings, human physical strengths or weaknesses, can have an impact on human spiritual strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, based on the concept of sports in Islam, human physical development through sports activities must be developed in balance with spiritual development. From the perspective of community development, sports activities are carried out not only for the benefit of individuals, but also involve the collective efforts of the community, to ensure that the generation born in the future is a healthy generation with better quality than the current generation. In terms of goals, the sports activities carried out must have a clear goal to obtain the pleasure of Allah swt or *mardhatillah*, not just to obtain the benefits of one's physical strength and health.

Elements Athlete

Through the interviews conducted, this study found that the athlete element plays an important role in measuring a sports activity that is carried out in line with the teachings of Islam or vice versa. The following are the results of interviews from study informants.

Informant 1:

- "are not allowed to participate in gymnastics.... the biggest factor I mentioned earlier is Shariah-compliant with Shariah-friendly"
- "For example, we use it tightly, it is still attached to the skin, but we say the *aurat* cover, it has been closed with the aurat, but it doesn't comply anymore because it sticks to the body..... for starters, we can accept this"
- "Women's gymnastics events, that attach clothes to the body like that are still eye-catching and do not comply with the sharia ... We don't allow Muslim female athletes, but if non-Muslims want to enter, we can't stop them"

Informant 2:

- "Olympics, it's okay, it's wearing tight inside, the hijab is all allowed"

- "We provide everything.... Shariah-compliant clothes ... For example, for hockey shirts, if you want to wear a skirt, we allow it, for a skirt but it must be with tight pants."
Informant 4:
- "Even though the target Victory... which is basically covering the *aurah*"
- "It is obligatory to cover the *aurah*, you should take care of the *aurah*, the *aurah* of prayer is the same"
Informant 5:
- "Athletes ... Don't accept the culture of eye-catching clothing"
- "Girls with loose shirts, men with over-the-knee pants"
- "For example, steroid use, bodybuilding... food must be halal ... not necessarily halal haram, dietary supplements, doping tests"

From the interview data above, the informant is of the view that the main thing from the view of the informants is that athletes need to cover *aurat* when playing sports at the same time does not expose the *aurah* to spectators or other people. Athletes' clothes, suits and costumes during sports must cover the *aurat*, do not cause harm and cause slander against athletes or the sports industry itself. Athletes' compliance with this element of *aurat* includes clothing that covers the *aurah* and does not show the shape of the body. Compliance with the aspect of covering the *aurah* covers both male and female athletes. Compliance makes an athlete respected, reduces slander and obtains blessings from Allah SWT. Another aspect emphasized by the informant when giving his opinion on athletes is the aspect of safety and personal health of athletes that must be preserved. Covers the safety of life, as well as the health of the body. All sports activities must prioritise the personal safety of athletes, anything that can cause harm to athletes should be avoided and abandoned.

Elements of Coaching

Sports activities also involve a coaching element, which plays an important role in shaping athletes who succeed ahead of other athletes, usually this coaching element plays a big role in training athletes who participate in competitions or matches for a sporting event. Among the findings of the interview related to the coaching element are as follows:

Informant 1:

- "If we want to avoid coaches and athletes having problems ... that's why we want to take care of them"
- " indeed we reject damage worse, than we let it mix freely, so that is the purpose for us to maintain Shariah compliance."

Informant 2:

- "We are also in the process of appointing female instructors to help female athletes whose coaches are men... female athletes, female instructors"

Informant 5:

- "Similarly, gender coaching must be equal in Islam between Muslims and non-Muslims, the *aurat* must be taken into account. Muslim and non-Muslim women"

The point emphasized by the informant when expressing his views on the coaching element is to avoid promiscuity between men and women. The socializing between athletes and coaches needs to be controlled to maintain the boundaries of socialization, especially free socialization between male and female coaches. These social limitations also play a role in maintaining the safety and well-being of athletes and coaches. The control of this coaching

element also helps to cover the risk of disruption and damage to athletes or coaches. Athletes' and coaches' adherence to the proposed controls leads to a clean and safe atmosphere during training.

Elements of Sports Organizing

In order to organise a sports event involving many events and many athletes, a sports carnival must be organised, in the opinion of the study informant, the organisation of sports must also run in line with the teachings of Islam. The following is a study from the interview with the informant:

Informant 1:

- "Includes the risk of conflict of faith and sharia compliance."
- "It is obligatory to cover the *aurah*, you should take care of the *aurah*, the *aurah* of prayer is the same"
- "The main issue is the punch in the face, so we want to deal with this thing."
- "No violation of sharia and no damage to faith"
- "It does not violate the sharia and there is no damage to the faith, so for us, that is the guide in sports, the need to appreciate Islam"

Informant 4:

- " Finally, *mardhatillah* includes *aurah*, mixed, *akidah*, worship when it is time to pray "

Informant 5:

- "Time for women only, time for men only"
- "There are already clothing products, different pools, alternatives still exist"
- "How sports violate the sharia ... the law of the torch run in the SEA sports run, ... the running of the torch is *makruh* except for the use of LED lights regarding the exchange of fire torches using an ASEAN spirit for Muslims, if they cannot afford, the conditions for using the fire torch is; i) does not regard fire as the worship of the object of God to glorify religion, ii) It is purely symbolic of unity not religion, iii) it is not to glorify fire and not to worship fire"
- "The threat of faith is given attention to sports involving Muslim athletes,"

Based on the findings of the interview above, it was found that the informant explained that the organization of sports events based on an Islamic perspective should avoid promiscuity between men and women. The social boundaries between men and women include athletes, coaches, referees, spectators and all parties involved in the organisation of the sport. In addition, a sports organisation must maintain the purity of Islamic beliefs, things that can lead to damage to faith cannot occur in a sporting event. In addition to the creed, the informant also emphasized the aspect of shariah, where any sports activity cannot happen that violates Islamic law. The informant also emphasised specifically on the practice of Islamic teachings, Muslims who are involved in organising sports, need to take care of the demands of performing the obligatory prayer by performing the prayer in time. The organization of sports must also be carried out in a correct, good and safe way for all parties involved.

This finding is of critical importance to a wide range of stakeholders within the Muslim community and beyond. For religious scholars and Islamic jurists, this research offers an evidence-based perspective that can assist them in issuing more balanced and informed religious rulings related to sports activities. For policymakers and government bodies,

particularly those responsible for formulating sports and youth policies, the findings provide valuable insights into how religious concerns can be addressed while promoting physical activities in society. Educators, coaches, and sports practitioners stand to benefit from a more nuanced understanding of how to design sports programs that are both religiously appropriate and socially inclusive. Moreover, the insights derived from this study can serve as a valuable guide for Muslim families and individuals grappling with discordant perspectives on sports participation, aiding them in making informed decisions that are in alignment with both their faith and their personal well-being. On a global scale, this research has the potential to foster interfaith and intercultural dialogues concerning the intersection of religion and modern sports. It does so by illustrating Islam's comprehensive approach to human development.

The present study contributes beyond the purely academic domain, offering practical solutions to a pressing social issue of contemporary relevance. By addressing misconceptions and offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding the compatibility between Islam and sports, this research can contribute to the reduction of unnecessary conflicts, anxieties, and prohibitions that may discourage participation in sports by Muslims. The effective implementation of its findings has the potential to promote healthier lifestyles, improve mental and physical well-being, and strengthen social cohesion within Muslim societies. Moreover, these findings have the potential to contribute to the prevention of the misuse of religious arguments, whether to unjustly restrict or carelessly permit harmful practices in sports, by providing balanced and contextually sound guidelines. The study also serves as a valuable reference for the development of future policies that integrate Islamic values into national sports agendas, thereby enhancing both religious integrity and public policy effectiveness.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, the understanding of sports according to Islam from the perspective of policymakers and policy implementers involves four (4) main elements, namely the elements of sports concepts and objectives, the elements of athletes, the elements of coaching, and the elements of organizing sports activities. All of these elements are intertwined with each other. Therefore, the implementation of any sports activity must be well planned and ordered, so that it is successfully implemented in line with the teachings of Islam. Starting with the right and clear goals or objectives, followed by good involvement of athletes and coaches and ending with the management of organizing sports activities in line with Islamic teachings.

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