

The Influence of Hadiths and Islamic Scholars' Opinions on Current Miswak Practice

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ABSTRACT

Miswak has been used as a tooth cleaning tool for thousands of years throughout the world. Following the introduction of the toothbrush, the usage of miswak is reducing but still exist especially among Muslims. Muslims are still using it as it is part of sunnah and is highly recommended by the Prophet P.B.U.H. Although there are numerous hadiths on the importance of miswak use, there are limited authentic resources on the methods of its usage. The technique of using miswak nowadays might be different from the method recommended in those authentic resources. To investigate the practice of miswak among current users and the miswak practice according to hadiths and Islamic scholars. A cross-sectional descriptive study among miswak users in Sri Petaling, Selangor using purposive sampling. Questionnaires on various aspects of miswak practice as oral hygiene tools were distributed among consented participants. The results were analysed descriptively and compared with miswak practice mentioned in hadiths and scholar's recommendation. There were 37 subjects participated in the study. Several routines and practices explained in hadiths and Islamic scholars' recommendations were practised by the participants. The use of miswak prior to ablution and prayer was highly recommended by the Prophet P.B.U.H and was practised by all participants (100%). Half of the participants used miswak upon waking up from sleep (59%) and 76% of them clean their tongue with miswak. All participants use miswak that is not too dry or too wet as suggested by an Islamic scholar. Majority of them (83.8%) cut the miswak stick before they use it and 35% of them soaked the miswak stick before use. Most of the current miswak users are practising the miswak as oral hygiene tool following the guidelines mentioned in hadiths and recommendations by Islamic scholars although there are some parts of miswak practice mentioned in hadiths and scholars' recommendations were found not to be practised by the subjects and vice versa

.Keywords: miswak, hadiths, Islamic scholars' opinion, current practice

INTRODUCTION

Miswak or also known as a chewing stick which can be made from twigs, stems and roots of various plants has been used as a tooth cleaning tool throughout the world especially in Asia, Africa, Middle East and South America (Al Sadhan & Almas, 1999) for thousands of years (More, 2008). It was found to be used by the ancient Babylonians, Greeks, Romans (Wu, Darout, & Skaug, 2001), and pre-Islamic Arabs (Rings, 1985). Despite being known as "miswak" or "arak" in Arabic, it is also known with various other names such as "koyoji" in Japanese, "mastic" in Latin, "qesam" in Hebrew, "qisa" in Aramaic (Bos, 1993), "peelu" in Urdu (Husain & Khan, 2015), and "kayu sugi" in Malaysia and Indonesia. Following the introduction of the toothbrush in the late fifteenth century (Fischman, 1997), the usage of miswak is reducing but still exist, especially among Muslims. Muslims are still using it as it is part of sunnah and is highly recommended by the Prophet Peace Be Upon Him (P.B.U.H.)

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many authentic hadiths regarding miswak mentioned in six authentic books of hadiths collection (Nordin, Mohsain, Tamizi, & Abdul Razzak, 2012), 36 of it were mentioned in Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim alone (Nordin, Mohsain, Tamizi, & Abdul Razzak, 2013). Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H. highly recommends the use of miswak based on a hadith narrated in Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, "But for my fear that it would be hard for my followers I would have ordered them to clean their teeth with miswak on every performance of ablution" (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith No. 887 & 7240 and Sahih Muslim, Hadith



No. 589). Miswak is also one of common sunnah of the previous prophets as mentioned in a hadith by At-Tirmizi, “Four things are from the sunnah of the prophets: Shy, well perfumed, use miswak and married” (Alias, Mohamed Ibrahim, & Mokhtar, 2016).

Prophet P.B.U.H. has mentioned his preference on miswak use as explained in several authentic hadiths, “Ten are the acts according to fitrah; clipping the mustache, letting the beard grow, using the miswak, snuffing up water in the nose, cutting the nails, washing the finger joints, plucking the hair under the armpits, shaving the pubes, and cleaning one’s private parts with water. The narrator said: I have forgotten the tenth, but it may have been rinsing the mouth” (Sahih Muslim, Book of Purification, Characteristics of Fitra, Hadith No. 502), and “The Prophet P.B.U.H. said, it (miswak) is a purification for the mouth, and it is a way of seeking Allah’s pleasures” (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith No. 154).

Ibnu Qayyim said that miswak is useful for various reasons which include refreshing the breath, strengthening the gum, clearing the phlegm and the sight, and preventing tooth cavities. He also said that miswak could maintain the health of stomach, assist in the process of digestion, clears the voice, makes speaking fluent, and motivate people to read Quran, remember Allah and pray. It also fights drowsiness and tiredness, pleases Allah, gratifies the angles and improves the good deeds action. (Ibnu Qayyim, 2003)

Although there are numerous hadiths on the importance of miswak use, there are limited authentic resources on the methods of its usage. Some of those hadiths mentioned the specific times on which the Prophet P.B.U.H. has used the miswak, such as before every prayer or ablution, when he woke up at night, when he entered his house, after he woke up from sleep, and when reading Quran (Ar-Rasyhid, 2014; Nordin et al., 2012; Wan Ahmad, Nik Saleh, & Wan Ismail, 2015).

There is a hadith explained about method of using miswak by the prophet P.B.U.H. which was narrated in Sahih Bukhari and Sunan Abu Daud, “I came to the Prophet P.B.U.H. and I saw him carrying a miswak in his hand and cleaning his teeth, saying, ‘u’ u’, as if he was retching while the miswak was in his mouth” (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith No. 245 and Sunan Abu Daud, Hadith No. 49).

Some Islamic scholars have given their opinion to clarify further the method to use miswak, including Ibnu Hajar Asqalani who has suggested to brush teeth from upper to lower side of the teeth to prevent gum bleeding (Nordin et al., 2012). Alternatively, Imam Nawawi has recommended that the best method of cleaning teeth is to use brush horizontally, starting from the right side of the mouth (Al-Nawawi, 1996, 2001). The technique of using miswak nowadays might be different from the method recommended in those authentic resources. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the practice of miswak among current users and the miswak practice according to hadiths and Islamic scholars.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional descriptive study among miswak users in Sri Petaling, Selangor. Location selected based on a high number of Muslim miswak users available, especially in one particular mosque where Muslims from all over the country would gather for religious activities. Subjects for this study were using purposive sampling after ethical approval was obtained.

Questionnaires on various aspects of miswak practice as oral hygiene tools were distributed among consented participants. The questionnaires were pretested before this study. The results were analysed descriptively and compared with miswak practice mentioned in the hadiths and scholar’s recommendation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were 37 subjects participated in the study. Sociodemographic data of the participants are available in Table 1. Participants were all males comprise of age groups of 18 to 25 years old (24.3%), 26 to 35 years old (32.4%), 36 to 45 years old (18.9%) and 46 to 60 years old (24.3%). Almost all of them were Malays except a Bidayuh participant. They came from a various education background, mostly tertiary education (45.9%) and secondary school (32.4%).



Table 1: The Sociodemographic Data of The Participants

Sociodemographic	No of participants, N =37	
	n	Percentage, %
Age		
18-25	9	24.3
26-35	12	32.4
36-45	7	18.9
46-60	9	24.3
Ethnicity		
Malay	36	97.3
Bidayuh	1	2.7
Gender		
Male	37	100
Female	n/a	n/a
Education level		
Primary school	3	8.1
Secondary school	12	32.4
Tertiary education	17	45.9
Informal education	5	13.5

Comparison between various aspects of miswak practice among current users and the miswak practice as in hadiths and Islamic scholar’s recommendations were tabulated in Table 2. Several routines and practices explained in those hadiths and recommendations were practised by the participants.

All the participants (100%) use miswak before ablution or prayer. The use of miswak before ablution and prayer were highly recommended by the Prophet P.B.U.H. and were explained in the authentic hadiths as listed in Table 2. Half of the participants used miswak upon waking up from sleep (59%) which was done by the Prophet P.B.U.H based on the hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad, Abu Ya’la and Tabrani (Ar-Rasyhid, 2014).

On the contrary, none of the participants has practised using miswak when they enter houses and during qiamullai (night prayer). These two specific times were mentioned in hadiths narrated in Sahih Muslim and Sahih Bukhari, respectively.

Table 2: Comparison Between Current Miswak Practice And The Practice As In Hadith And Islamic Scholar’s Recommendations

Miswak practice among current users	Miswak practice according to hadiths or Islamic scholars’ recommendation	No of participants, N = 37	
		n	%
Specific time to use miswak:			
Every prayer /ablution	<p><i>“But for my fear that it would be hard for my followers, I would have ordered them to use miswak before every prayer”</i> (Muslim no.589)</p> <p><i>“But for my fear that it would be hard for my followers I would have ordered them to clean their teeth with miswak on every performance of ablution”</i> (Al-Bukhari no.887, 7240, Muslim no. 589)</p>	37	100
After waking up from sleep	<p><i>“The Prophet P.B.U.H never sleep except there is miswak with Him, whenever He wakes up, He would use miswak”</i> (Ahmad no.5979, Abu Ya’la no.5661, Tabrani no. 13598)</p>	22	59.4



Before reciting Quran	<i>"So purify your mouth by using miswak because it is a way(attitude) of reading Quran" (Al-Baihaqi)</i>	4	10.8
Before bed	n/a	18	48.6
Before eating	n/a	7	18.9
After eating	n/a	12	32.4
During Qiamullail	<i>"Whenever the prophet would wake up at night, he would clean his mouth with miswak" (Al-Bukhari no. 237, 246)</i>	n/a	n/a
When entering house	<i>"I asked Aisyah: what the Prophet P.B.U.H did first when He entered His house? Aisyah replied He used miswak (first of all)" (Muslim no. 488, 489)</i>	n/a	n/a
Routine before using miswak:			
Wet/wash miswak	<i>"Prophet P.B.U.H use miswak, then gave it to me to wash it, then I gave it back to the prophet, then he used the miswak again, then I washed it and gave it back to him again" (Sunan Abu Daud)</i> <i>"miswak should not be too dry as it can hurt the gum and not too wet as it might not be effective to remove the impurities."</i> (Al-'Allamah As-San'ani) <i>"should be cleaned and rinsed as uncleaned miswak is full with dirt" (Syeikh Utsaimin)</i>	37	100
Cut	<i>"miswak must be cut and soak in water in order for the bristles to be soft and suitable for use in oral cavity" (Aishah R.A. and Ibn Qayyim Jawziyyah)</i>	31	83.8
Soak		13	35.1
Remove outer layer of miswak	n/a	34	91.9
Cleaning tongue	<i>"I have met the Prophet P.B.U.H while He was using a wet miswak to clean His teeth. End of the miswak was on His tongue, and the Prophet P.B.U.H said 'uh', 'uh', while the miswak still in His mouth, as if He was retching." (Al-Bukhari no. 245, Muslim no.254)</i>	28	75.7

Other than that, all participants will wash the miswak stick prior use (100%), 83.8% of them cut the of miswak bristle, and 91.9% of participants remove the outer layer of miswak before they use it. It was recommended by Aishah R.A. and Ibnu Qayyim Jawziyah to cut and soak miswak prior use in order for it to become soft and appropriate (Al-Asqalani, 1993; Ibnu Qayyim, 2003) and this notion might be suggested because a dry miswak may damage the gum (Almas & Al-Lafi, 1995). In this



study, majority of the participants (83.8%) cut the miswak stick before they use it and only 35% who soaked the miswak before use.

In addition, it was found that, apart from cleaning teeth, 75.5% of the participants clean their tongue with miswak. Prophet P.B.U.H. was seen by the companion to clean his tongue using miswak, and this sunnah was followed by more than two-thirds of the miswak users in this study. He also recommended cleaning teeth using miswak before reciting Al-Quran as a way of respect for the Holy book (Wan Ahmad et al., 2015). Nevertheless, there were only 4 of the participants who use miswak before Quran recitation.

The use of miswak as an oral hygiene tool among the participants was also influenced by recommendation from several Islamic scholars. All participants use miswak that is not too dry or too wet by washing or wetting it before use as mentioned in the hadith by Abu Daud (Alias et al., 2016) and as suggested by Al-‘Allamah As-San’ani and Syeikh Utsaimin (Ar-Rasyhid 2014).

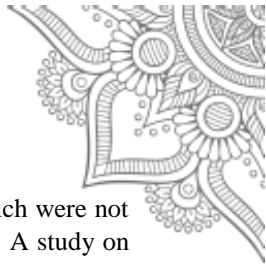
Almas and Al-Lafi (1995), have suggested soaking miswak in freshwater for twenty-four hours to make the natural fibres soft but a period longer than that can result in loss of active ingredients and reduce its therapeutic effect. However, it should be noted that there are various types of miswak available in the market nowadays. Some vacuum-packed miswak is usually soft hence can be directly used without the need to soak it.

Several aspects of the practice of miswak among current users were not available in hadiths and recommendations from the Islamic scholars. Some of the participants use miswak prior to sleep (48.6%), before (18.9%) and after eating (32.4%) which may be influenced by their daily routine of oral hygiene with the modern toothbrush.

Miswak was stored in many different ways by the participants, as shown in Table 3. Most of them store miswak inside their clothes pocket (86.5%) after they use it. During storage, miswak was mostly placed vertically with the end facing upward (89.2%). As shown in Table 3, there are various sizes of miswak which have been used among the participants but most commonly used were 15 to 20 cm in length (65%), and 1.5cm (43.2%) in diameter. In order to have a miswak that can be held properly and controlled easily, miswak with 20 cm in length was recommended to be used while to obtained an adequately flexible and firm miswak, the best diameter should be chosen is 1 cm (Almas & Al-Lafi, 1995). In spite of that, there were only 32.4% of the participants who use miswak with 1 cm in diameter in this study.

Table 3: Storage Methods And Size of Miswak

Miswak practice among current users	No of participants, N = 37	
	n	%
Storage place:		
Pocket	32	86.5
Bag	12	32.4
Special case/container	14	37.8
Glass/cup	3	8.1
Storing position:		
Vertically with miswak end upward	33	89.2
Vertically with miswak end downward	5	13.5
Horizontally	5	13.5
Length:		
Less than 10 cm	1	2.7
10 to 15 cm	9	24.3
15 to 20 cm	24	64.9
More than 20 cm	3	8.1
Diameter:		
0.4 cm	1	2.7
0.7 cm	8	21.6
1.0 cm	12	32.4
1.5 cm	16	43.2



Guidelines for the holding technique, the movement and the starting side of miswak during brushing, which were not assessed in this study were mentioned in hadiths and recommendations by Islamic scholars, as shown in Table 4. A study on miswak practice has found that there are two most common methods of holding miswak. 78.4% of miswak users in the study held miswak with two fingers on the lower side of miswak while the other fingers on the upper side of it (Baharin, Ibrahim, Asa & Ramli, 2016). This method is the same with the holding technique described in the hadith narrated by Abdullah Ibnu Mas'ud (Abidin, 1992) but this hadith was considered as 'gharib' or strange (Al-Dubyan, 2005). This holding method also has several variations where the number and positions of fingers on the upper and lower side of miswak were interchanged. Only 13.5% in the study used the other five-finger grip method.

Table 4: Miswak Practice According To Hadiths or Islamic Scholars' Recommendations Not Being Assessed In This Study

Holding method	“And the sunnah in the method of using it is to hold the miswak in the right hand so that the small finger is below the miswak and the thumb is below the tip, and the other fingers are on top of the miswak”. narrated by Abdullah Ibnu Mas'ud. (Abidin, 1992)
Movement of miswak	“Brush from the right side of the mouth and horizontally.” (Al-Nawawi) “Used from the upper side to the downside of the teeth to prevent gum bleeding” (Ibnu Hajar Asqalani)
Start miswak from the right side	From ‘Aishah R.A.:’ The Prophet P.B.U.H used to like to start from the right side when he wears shoes, combs his hair, and cleans or washes himself and when he does anything else.” (Al- Bukhari & Muslim)

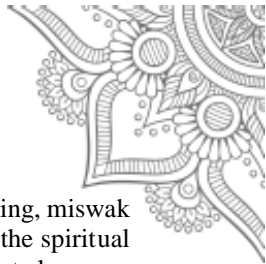
There are two recommendations by Islamic scholars available for miswak movement during brushing. Imam Al-Nawawi (2003) has suggested to use it horizontally (side to side) while Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani (1993) has suggested to use it vertically (up and down) to prevent gum injury. In the same study by Baharin et al. (2016), more than half of miswak users moved miswak vertically during brushing while only one-quarter used horizontal movement. A randomised control trial has found that toothbrushing with vertical movement is better in cleaning teeth and less traumatic to gum compared to horizontal movement (Mastroberardino et al., 2014) although previous studies have found no correlation between the movement and gum abrasion (Terézhalmy, Biesbrock, Walters, Grender, & Bartizek, 2008; Danser et al., 1998). However, it should be noted that modern toothbrush was used in those studies.

Prophet P.B.U.H would always start from the right side when he was wearing shoes, combing hair and washing himself as narrated by ‘Aisyah R.A (Alias et al., 2016; Wan Ahmad et al., 2015). Miswak users may also be inspired with this sunnah of the Prophet P.B.U.H and adopted it in their practice of miswak. This notion is supported by the previous study, where 64.9% of miswak users were found to start brushing using miswak from the right side (Baharin et al., 2016).

We acknowledge the limitations in this study, where the non-randomized purposive sampling used may allow a particular bias in this study such as the domination of male gender over female and Malay ethnicity over others among the participants. Some aspects in miswak practice such as the movements of miswak and the starting side during brushing were not assessed in this study although it was mentioned in hadiths and recommendations by Islamic scholars, and these practices may also influence the practice of miswak among current user. The small sample size in this study is not indicative of the whole population of current miswak users in Malaysia. However, the descriptions of miswak practice in oral hygiene care and the Islamic influence in the miswak practice may be useful for developing confidence in the practice of miswak according to sunnah and Islamic scholars among Muslims.

CONCLUSION

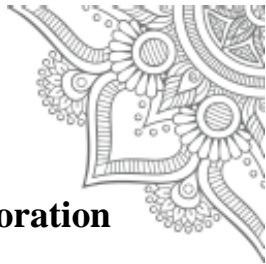
Most of the current miswak users are practising the miswak as oral hygiene tool following the guidelines mentioned in hadiths and recommendations by Islamic scholars although there are some parts of miswak practice mentioned in hadiths and scholars' recommendations were found not to be practised by the subjects and vice versa. However, as long as the practice of using miswak



is not totally different from the Sunnah, not inflicting any injuries and achieve the objective of teeth and mouth cleaning, miswak use as an oral hygiene tool can help in prevention of oral diseases and maintenance of oral health while obtaining the spiritual benefits mentioned by the Prophet P.B.U.H. The use of miswak should not be limited for spiritual purposes only, but also as an alternative to modern toothbrush.

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Design Consideration for Inter-Religious Dialogue in Malaysia: The Incorporation of Contact Theory

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ABSTRACT

Inter-religious dialogue has been implemented in Malaysia by various organizations, be it Muslim's or Non-Muslim's organizations as early as 1950s. Often being carried out in the format of intellectual discourse and forum, its accessibility to the non-academician, non-scholars and non-elite is uncertain. If the inter-religious dialogue programs could not reach the grassroots, its effectiveness in addressing inter-religious issues that affected the grassroots is also doubtful. International dialogue practitioners has begun to include number of theories in their dialogue designs to reach out broader range of community. One of the theories is Contact Theory proposed by Gordon Allport (1959) aims at addressing in-group/out-group bias. Therefore, this study attempts to examine the application of Contact Theory in two models of inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia (i.e. Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM) and Inter-faith Spiritual Fellowship (INSaF)). Case study research design was employed in order to identify the design of interreligious dialogue and the presence of Contact Theory within the two models. Data obtained through interviews and document analysis were than analysed using within-case and cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The finding suggest that IKIM's and INSaF's inter-religious dialogue models did not include any special session that allowed a real dialogue or cooperative interaction (one of important elements in Contact Theory) to take place among the participants. Without cooperative interaction among the participants, it would be difficult for these two models to reap the benefit of Contact Theory. Future research should focus on developing inter-religious dialogue design that is more appropriate for the grassroots with the inclusion of Contact Theory.

Keywords: Inter-religious dialogue, grassroots, Contact Theory, interaction

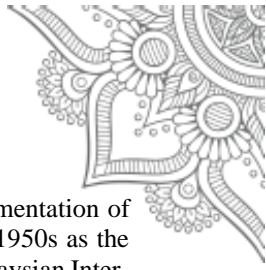
INTRODUCTION

A number of researchers have identified few forms of inter-religious dialogue that have taken place in Malaysia with most of them acknowledging that Malaysian society is more synonymous with the 'dialogue of life' and social action instead of dialogue in the form of intellectual discourse.

According to Rahimin Affandi Rahimin Affandi, Mohd. Anuar, Paizah and Nor Hayati (2011), dialogue of life occurs whenever members of a community live together in a neighbourly and friendly spirit without the restrictions created by religious, cultural and ethnic differences. Shahrom TM Sulaiman (2004) likewise, identifies the everyday contact among people of different religions and ethnicities as part of dialogue. Dialogue of life occurs whenever people of different religious backgrounds come into contact and interaction takes place in residential areas, hospitals, schools, markets or workplaces. This dialogue is not limited to daily activities but can also be observed during festive seasons when this multi-religious and multi-ethnic society invites members of other faiths to their 'open houses' (Patricia Martinez, 2008).

Dialogue of social action refers to co-operative interaction among members of different religious groups such as when working on a project together, collaborating in charity programs and so on (Shahrom TM Sulaiman, 2004). Dialogue of social action or also known as dialogue of collective action (Rahimin Affandi et al., 2011) can also be seen in the efforts of some NGOs, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, in their fight for universal humanitarian issues (e.g. environment, consumerism, poverty, education, drug addiction, AIDS, globalization and democracy (Ahmad Sunawari, 2003)).

Inter-religious dialogue in the form of intellectual discourse has been practiced in Malaysia for quite some time. Ahmad Sunawari (2003) classified inter-religious dialogue in the form of intellectual discourse into the categories of bilateral, for example, Muslim-Christian dialogue, trilateral, for example, Muslim, Christian and Jewish dialogue, and multi-lateral, for example, dialogue among the Abrahamic faith.



A study by Khairulnizam Mat Karim and Suzy Aziziyana Saili (2008) explored the history of the implementation of inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia. It was found that inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia began as early as the 1950s as the World Council for Inter-Faith Co-operation was established in 1958. In 1963 it operated under the banner of the Malaysian Inter-Religious Organisation and was officially known as INSaF since 1986.

The actual implementation of inter-religious dialogue programs can be traced back in the early 1980s. It stemmed from disenchantment among the non-Muslim community towards the government's plan to inculcate more Islamic values in the public sphere. This idea was originally proposed by the fourth Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, as a response to the growth of Islamic resurgence movements in Malaysia (Hussin Mutalib, 1990). This Islamic program supposedly championed the notion that moderate Islam in the context of the multi-cultural setting of Malaysia was the way to go (Yeoh, 2007). However, due to lack of information about the program, its content and implementation gave rise to adverse effects such as misunderstanding and protest among non-Muslims and this eventually led to dialogue (Khairulnizam Mat Karim & Suzy Aziziyana Saili, 2008).

Most of the earliest inter-religious dialogue efforts were conducted and dominated by non-Muslim organizations and leaders while some Muslim organizations were involved only as participants. For example, in October 1980, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) (Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement) sent its members for an inter-religious seminar organized by the Young Men's Christian Organization (YMCA) with the Partners of People of Other Faiths. The Consumer Association of Penang (CAP) and ALIRAN were other Muslim organizations that were involved in inter-religious dialogue (Ghazali Basri, 2005). During the 1990s a real breakthrough for the practice of inter-religious dialogue took place when the University of Malaya, as a representative of Muslim organizations, made the bold move of initiating the "International Seminar on Islam and Confucianism" in March 1995. This dialogue program was very well received by the non-Muslims especially the Chinese community of Malaysia and this led to growing interest and a more positive perception of Islam from this community (Osman Bakar, 2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Reality Of The Implementation Of Inter-Religious Dialogue In Malaysia

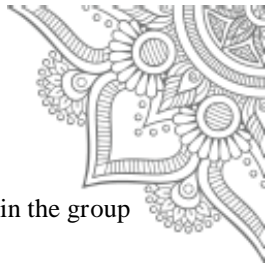
Although inter-religious dialogue in the form of 'dialogue of life' and 'dialogue of social action' are believed to have deep historical roots in Malaysia and synonymous with Malaysian society, inter-religious dialogue in the form of intellectual discourse on the other hand is still in its initial stage and in reality it does not reflect the ideal model for inter-religious dialogue. Poor participation from the Muslim community in general, and Islamic organizations in particular, when compared to non-Muslim organizations, does not reflect the same spirit as demonstrated in 'dialogue of life' and 'dialogue of social action.' For this reason, Ghazali Basri (2005) asserts that 'dialogue of life' or 'dialogue of social action' such as the 'open house' concept during festive seasons, is mostly superficial in nature. Therefore, he underscores that inter-religious dialogue in its real sense is still new to Malaysian society.

Although many inter-religious dialogues have been conducted by NGOs, they were nothing more than a regular encounter of minds among diverse groups which consequently produced no concrete results. It can be concluded that real inter-religious dialogue has not yet begun (Rohaini, Ayu, Horazilah & Norazlina, 2011). The less than encouraging participation and passive implementation of inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia is supposedly influenced by the nature of the dialogue itself which is considered highly intellectual. Ghazali Basri (2005) for instance describes inter-religious dialogue as an intellectual discourse that involves the meeting of religious representatives which is not suitable for the masses due to its content which revolves around philosophical and theological issues.

According to Rahimin Affandi et al. (2011), the implementation of dialogue in the form of intellectual discourse is still limited in this country given that, this type of dialogue is only organized at higher education institutions or religious institutions like Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM) (Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia). This limitation is due to the nature of the dialogue itself which requires the participants to fulfil certain conditions such as the fact that they must be knowledgeable and well-versed in religious and textual study regarding the sacred scriptures of other religions.

Contact Theory: The Guide For Diversity Programs And Inter-Group Dialogue

In implementing diversity or multi-cultural programs including dialogue, most of college campuses in the United States are guided by a theory known as inter-group contact theory proposed by Gordon Allport (1954). This theory suggests that inter-



group contact will result in positive effects with the presence of four key conditions namely equal group status within the group encounter, common goals, co-operative interactions and support from those with social influence and power.

The efficacy of inter-group contact in reducing prejudice has been proven by numerous researches conducted to assess its impact. Gaertner, Dovidio and Bachman (1996: 27) for instance reveal that inter-group contact that fosters opportunities for “self-revealing interactions” has been shown to facilitate superordinate identity formation and reduce bias. The influence of inter-group contact in reducing inter-group prejudice has also been proven by a meta-analytic test that producing effects from 696 samples. The meta-analysis reveals that greater inter-group contact is generally associated with a lower level of prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

In 2008, Nagda, Gurin and Zúñiga had conducted an experiment on the application of Contact Theory in inter-group dialogue. This multi-university study examined the outcomes of race and gender inter-group dialogues for student populations. In this study, inter-group dialogues were purposely designed to create the conditions that Allport outlined for positive inter-group contact. The enrolment of an equal number of students from each identity group reflects the equal status condition. Co-operation and personal interaction are guaranteed by exercises and assignments that require students to work together and to get to know each other in non-superficial ways. Since these courses are made compulsory for earning college credit, it becomes an evident for support from authorities. Inter-group dialogue therefore, is a platform for structured and facilitated contact to occur. This consequently will lead to a reduction of prejudice among the participants.

Students involved in inter-group dialogue were reported to have more positive views of conflict and declared greater support for multi-cultural and affirmative action policies compared to the other students that did not participate (Gurin, Peng, Lopez, & Nagda, 1999). Among the results from dialogues in community and international settings are breakdown of stereotyping, facilitation of personal relationships, establishment of trust and consensus building leading to critical social policy development, and commitment to social change (Alvarez & Cabbil, 2001).

Based on the aforementioned discussion, inter-group dialogue that applied contact theory has more potential to achieve the most desired outcomes of dialogue namely reducing prejudice and improving impaired inter-group relations. This practice is totally different with the practice of inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia that is considered as intellectual in nature. If this is the nature of inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia, its accessibility to the grassroots especially those who are non-academician, non-scholars and non-elite is questionable. If the dialogue cannot be accessed by the grassroots, how is it possible for the dialogue to address inter-religious issues that affect that group? This study therefore attempts to explore the existing design of inter-religious dialogue models that had been implemented in Malaysia and examining the application of contact theory in those models.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the design of inter-religious dialogue models including the presence of contact theory, case study which involved interview and document analysis was carried out. Among the organizations purposively selected for this research were Institut Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (IKIM) and Inter-faith Spiritual Fellowship (INSaF). This qualitative data then was analysed using within-case analysis and cross-case analysis as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Within-case analysis compares the data against the theory applied (in this case inter-group dialogue design and Contact Theory), while cross-case analysis compares data in one case to data in the other case (which means data on design in one organization will be compared with data in the other organization).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Design Of Inter-Religious Dialogue Models: Institut Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (Ikim) And Inter-Faith Spiritual Fellowship (Insaf).

Institut Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (IKIM)

“Religion and Pluralistic Coexistence: The Muhibah (Affability) Perspective” was an example of IKIM’s critical-dialogic education dialogue with an intellectual discourse format. This intellectual discourse was held on November 2, 2010 (Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia [IKIM], 2010). This program focused on enhancing inter-religious understanding and harmonious living in a pluralistic society. This one day program comprised a presentation session by an invited speaker (i.e. Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman), and a discussion session participated by three discussants (i.e. Thomas Philips the President of MCCBCHST; Prematilaka KD Sarisena the Hon. Secretary-General of MCCBCHST; and Mohd Sani Badron the Director of Centre for



Economics and Social Studies, IKIM). The moderator for the program was the late Ilani Isahak. It began at 10 am after welcoming remarks by Nik Mustapha bin Haji Nik Hassan, IKIM’s Director-General and ended at 12.40 pm. Most of IKIM’s dialogue programs including this one normally adopted themes that are related to universal values instead of theological and philosophical themes. A summary of the above analysis on IKIM’s dialogue design can be found in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. IKIM’s Dialogue Design

Design	
Theme/topic	Universal values e.g. “Religion and Pluralistic Coexistence: The <i>Muhibah</i> Perspective”
Setting	NA
Participant	Experts and leaders
Moderator/speaker	1 moderator, 1 speaker and 3 three discussants
Format	Intellectual discourse
Duration	Half day (9.30 a.m. to 12.40 p.m. on November 2, 2010)
Ground rules	NA
Evaluation	NA
Activities	None

Note. NA= Not available

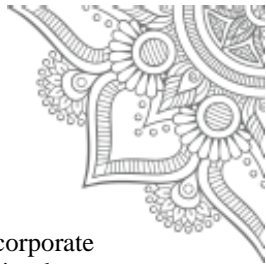
Inter-Faith Spiritual Fellowship (INSaF)

In 2006, INSaF organized inter-religious dialogue entitled “Karma, Faith and Divinity.” This dialogue took place at the multi-purpose hall of the Pure Life Society. The public who interested to participate in this dialogue were encouraged to register themselves in advance so as to arrange for light high-tea at the end of the program. This special session was arranged to foster more meaningful engagement among participants. The program that took the format of a forum invited three speakers to present their ideas on the given topic. The presentation was followed by a dialogue session with the audience. The three speakers invited representing different religions for example B.K. Letchumanan representing Hinduism, Rufus Bruno Pereira representing Christianity and Shah Kirit Kalkulal Govindji representing Islam. This one day program was chaired by Goh Chooi Chin (The Pure Life Society [PLS], 2006). Table 1.2 is the summary for INSaF dialogue design.

Table 1.2 INSaF’s Dialogue Design

Design	
Theme/topic	Theological/general (e.g., Karma, Faith and Divinity)
Setting	Multi-purpose hall at the Pure Life Society
Participant	Public (mostly non-Muslim)
Moderator/speaker	2-3 speakers with 1 moderator
Format	Seminar
Duration	1 day
Ground rules	NA
Evaluation	NA
Activities	Hi-tea to encourage interaction

Note. NA= Not available



The Insertion Of Inter-Group Contact Theory In Inter-Religious Dialogue

Based on the analysis of the inter-religious dialogue design, it was found that current models of dialogue did not incorporate any special session that allowed a dialogue or other activities to take place among the participants in general. This simply means, current models of dialogue did not fulfil one important element in Contact Theory (i.e. cooperative interaction). Even though these three organizations without doubt had met the other three contact conditions such as equal status, common goals and authority sanction, however lack one condition renders its ineffectiveness since all four conditions must co-exist in order for it to demonstrate the positive effect (Gaertner, Dovidio, Rust, Nier, Banker & Ward, 1999). Equal status is guaranteed by IKIM and INSaF with the selection of speakers and participants with comparable status in terms of expertise, knowledge, position and so on for inter-religious dialogue programs conducted by organizations. IKIM for instance invited experts, academicians and religious leaders for its program entitled “Religion and Pluralistic Coexistence: The Muhibah Perspective.” This dialogue invited a speaker (Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman from International Islamic University Malaysia) and three discussants (Thomas Philips, the President of MCCBCHST, Prematilaka KD Sarisena, the Hon. Secretary-General of MCCBCHST and Mohd Sani Badron, the Director of Centre for Economic and Social Studies, IKIM). Most participants who attended inter-religious dialogues with the critical-dialogic education type such as those organized by IKIM and INSaF were keen on gaining knowledge about different religious perspectives on certain religious issues. For example, they wanted more information on the issue of “Karma, Faith and Divinity” as addressed by INSaF in 2006. This reflect the ‘common goals’ contact condition. The freedom to implement inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia is consistent with the condition of ‘authority sanction’ in which most organizations did not confront any constraints posed by the authorities.

CONCLUSION

Even though the organizations involved in this study successfully met the other three contact conditions namely, equal status, common goals and support from authority, the missing component (i.e. co-operation), will affect the effectiveness of the contact theory. According to Chu and Griffey (1985) one factor will become less important when it is isolated from the other. For instance, common goals are one of the valuable factors, but it becomes less effective if it is detached from cooperative interaction and other factors (Gaertner, Dovidio, Rust, Nier, Banker, Ward, et al., 1999). In order to ensure that all four contact conditions being achieved, current models of inter-religious dialogue should develop a design that is more conducive for cooperative interaction to occur and not only depending on the format of seminar, forum or public lecture.

The inter-group dialogue framework offers a few examples of activities that reflect the key conditions of the inter-group contact theory especially co-operative interaction such as group-building activities, cultural chest activities, terminology activities (to generate meaning about key terms) and many more that require the participants to work together and get to know each other better (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). The new design of inter-religious dialogue therefore, need some variation and creativity in the format adopted, not simply relying on the seminar, forum or public lecture formats. INSaF inter-religious dialogue program (“Karma, Faith and Divinity”) however had shown some effort in encouraging more interaction among the participants by arranging a high-tea session at the end of the dialogue program. Even though this kind of activity might not lead to co-operation, at least this could be a good example of non-typical dialogue program.

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