CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter focuses on how the Concept of *Al-ta'āruf* is internalised in the Cultural Exchange Programme, how the concept shaped the experiences of the Japanese Muslim youth enrolled in the Cultural Exchange Programme and presents reasons for the impact of the Cultural Exchange Programme on the Japanese Muslim youth. Section 4.1 presents the experiences of eminent Japanese Muslims interacting with practising Muslims; Section 4.2 presents the mission of the Cultural Exchange Programme; Section 4.3 maps the Concept of *Al-ta'āruf* against the activities carried out during the Cultural Exchange Programme, by presenting the seven stages of *Al-ta'āruf* (*Tahāwur, Ta-'arūf* , *Ta-'āyush, Tasāmuh, Tabādul, Ta-'akhī*, and *Al-ta'ayush Al-Silmīyy*); and Section 4.4 maps the five domains of human connection (Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Cultural, and Spiritual) tied to *Al-ta'āruf* within the Cultural Exchange Programme.

4.1 Experiences of Eminent Japanese Muslims Interacting With Practising Muslims

Let us begin by looking at how personal experience interacting with practising Muslims in a majority Muslim country has influenced the understanding of Islam and *da'wah* commitment of Hajj Kyoichiro Sugimoto, the present Chairman of the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre. When he was 19 years old, Hajj Sugimoto accepted a personal invitation from a good friend of his to visit the latter's village in Bangladesh. Hajj Sugimoto stayed there for about a week. The villagers were so hospitable that by the

end of his short stay, the kindness and generosity of the entire Muslim neighbourhood had left an indelible impression on his heart:

> They were poor but so warm and welcoming. Everyone invited me to their homes and served me the best food they had, despite having so little (Personal Communication, 3 December, 2017)

Friday came. Hajj Sugimoto's friend disappeared for a few hours without any explanation. When Hajj Sugimoto enquired where he was, his friend said that he went for Friday prayers. Hajj Sugimoto asked if he could follow him the following Friday, to which his friend consented. During Friday prayers, Hajj Sugimoto followed the movements without understanding a word or action, but the warm brotherhood and the welcoming atmosphere he felt in the masjid interacting with other Muslims left a powerful, positive impression on him. He also became curious about the Qur'an:

> Later, I began to read a copy of the Qur'an. I read about Jannah (Paradise) and Jahannam (Hell) and I began to think: "What if these are true?" (Personal Communication, 3 December, 2017)

Thus, began Hajj Sugimoto's introduction to Islam. Consequently, the researcher discovered that Hajj Sugimoto was not the only notable Japanese Muslim who embraced Islam following the memorable experience of interactions with Muslim families. The story of how two other Japanese men - Sulaiman Akira Hamanaka and Umar Mita - reverted to Islam were comparable to that of Sugimoto's. Sulaiman Akira Hamanaka, an eminent ethnic Japanese Muslim revert became a Muslim at the age of 19. Like Sugimoto, Hamanaka's journey to Islam did not begin by attending a lecture about Islam. Hamanaka travelled to Indonesia as he was a big fan of Indonesian and Malaysian badminton players. In Indonesia, he stayed with an Indonesian Muslim family for a short time to learn more about their culture. Hamanaka observed that the

entire family would pray behind their father and dinner was a special time when the family would discuss all sorts of matters. The strong family bond captured Hamanaka's curiosity. The strong community spirit among Indonesian Muslims did not escape his attention either. Hamanaka also visited Singapore and observed similar practices in the Muslim family as well as the Muslim community which hosted him there (Japanese Muslims, 2013). Hamanaka later returned to Japan, remained a dedicated Muslim and built a mosque in Niihama prefecture.

Likewise, the late Umar Mita also embraced Islam after positive interactions with Muslims. According to Marimoto (1980), Umar Mita, an ethnic Japanese revert and the first Muslim to translate the Arabic Qur'an into Japanese, travelled to China at a young age. Umar Mita interacted with the Chinese Muslims in China and it was this change in environment and intense intercultural experience that left such a strong impression on him, leading him to become a committed Muslim later. However, unlike Hamanaka and Sugimoto, Umar Mita lived among the Chinese Muslims for a long period of time. For the record, Hamanaka and Umar Mita were not strangers. As a child, Hamanaka often visited Umar Mita who was then in his eighties in Tokyo. Back then, Mita San used to encourage Hamanaka to strive in the path of Allah, even though Hamanaka was still very young and yet to be a Muslim (Japanese Muslims, 2013). Thus, the documented reports of dynamic, eminent and committed Japanese Muslims, namely Umar Mita, Sulaiman Akira Hamanaka and Hajj Sugimoto showed that personal experience through intercultural interactions with practising Muslims has the potential to leave positive, lasting impressions on the *mad'u*.

4.2 The Mission of The Cultural Exchange Programme

According to the NPO homepage, the purpose of the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre as a corporation "is to contribute to the realization of international peace and security by carrying out projects to promote cultural exchange and friendship between Japan and Islamic countries, mainly for residents in Chiba Prefecture and its surrounding areas" (NPO homepage, 2020). Indeed, this is in line with the purpose of the Cultural Exchange Programme. When the researcher asked what his expectations were for the Cultural Exchange Programme before it started, Hajj Sugimoto's response was short but concise:

> (That the) youth will be self-motivated in learning [. . .]
> (Personal Communication, 3 December, 2017)

Co-organiser of the Cultural Exchange Programme from Malaysia, Haji Ahmad Fakhri Hamzah said:

> A major issue for the Japanese Muslims is a serious lack of resources for Islamic education, especially for the youth. We need a paradigm shift from the typical youth conferences in which participants sit and listen to the teacher with little or no interaction [. . .] (Personal Communication, 30 August, 2019)

To the researcher, the fact that Umar Mita, Hamanaka and Hajj Sugimoto all reverted to Islam and became committed to *da'wah* in Islam after 1) a change in environment and 2) direct exposure to practising Muslim families suggested that the intercultural interaction approach has a good chance to work. After all, Allah declares, "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. . ." (Al-Qur'an. Al-Hujurāt. 49:13). To the researcher, this verse proved that the intercultural approach was a worthwhile endeavour to pursue if only a roadmap, a structure to the *Al-ta'āruf*

Conceptcould be drawn up. Islam after all is a way of life and permeates every aspect of a Muslim's life. Such was the mission of The Cultural Exchange Programme: To touch the hearts and minds of the Japanese Muslim youth. The Japanese Muslim youth wouldobserve and experience what it means to be a practising Muslim in multicultural Malaysia. It would be an experiential programme through and through. After more discussions, an agreement was reached to run the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme in August 2019, with CICC as the official organiser representingJapan, and the researcher and her spouse of MyriadVentures Enterprise as co-organisersrepresenting Malaysia.

4.3 The Application of The Concept of *Al-ta'āruf* to The Cultural Exchange Programme

This section presents the analysis of the results relating to the experience of the Japanese Muslim youth enrolled in the Cultural Exchange Programme. To achieve this, the section is divided into subsections: section 4.3.1) *Tahāwur* (dialogue); section 4.3.2) *Ta-'arūf* (mutually knowing, mutually interacting); section 4.3.3) *Ta-'āyush* (to coexist); section 4.3.4) *Tasāmuh* (tolerate each other's differences; section 4.3.5) *Tabādul* (exchange of ideas); section 4.3.6) *Ta-'akhī* (to associate as brother); and section 4.3.7) *Al-Ta-'āyush Al-Silmīyy* (to coexist in peace and harmony).

4.3.1 *Tahāwur* (Dialogue)

The initial stage of the *Al-ta'āruf* process in the present study started in December2017 when the researcher and her spouse met Hajj Sugimoto of the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre at the Shizuoka Mosque in Japan. To counter Islamophobia (Takahashi,2018 & Ghazali, 2016), mosques in Japan were and still are used to voice

out support against terrorism (Yamagata, 2019) and the Shizuoka Mosque was no different. Traveling together with a group of Malaysian educators, the researcher and her spouse were keen to explore the Japanese way of raising children. Halfway through, the trip brought them to the mosque to do their noon prayers. In Malaysia, the word "mosque" conjures an image of a huge building where Muslims worship, but the Shizuoka Mosque, the researcher observed, was a small apartment, approximately measuring 700 square feet only. There was only one little toilet; everyone had to queue to take their *wudhu'* (ablution) when prayer time came. It was a tight squeeze for everyone present. After prayers, the researcher observed a tall man who stood up and introduced himself as Hajj Kyoichiro Sugimoto, Chairman of the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre or CICC for short. He wanted to brief the guests about the Muslim community in Japan. What he shared shocked the audience. He said, "Nine out of ten Japanese Muslim youth opt not to practice the Muslim faith as adults [. . .]" (Sugimoto, 2017). Although there is no statistic at present to support the "nine out of ten" claim made by Hajj Sugimoto, Mutiara (2017) stated that indeed many Japanese youth do not practice Islam due to a lack of proper education in Islamic subjects, strong peer influence and huge societal pressure to conform.

Following the initial meeting at Shizuoka Mosque, the researcher and her spouse visited the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre twice and on both occasions, they presented parenting talks to the Muslim community there. During these sessions, the researcher had the opportunity to meet other Japanese Muslim parents, who shared the enormous challenges they faced in raising their children as Muslims in Japan. What transpired next was a series of discussions between the researcher, her spouse and Hajj Sugimoto. Early in the discussions, Hajj Sugimoto expressed his openness for another approach to educate the Japanese Muslim youth. According to him, he had brought his own teenage

son to conferences abroad but the latter did not seem to learn anything. As a consequence, Hajj Sugimoto himself was not keen to try running a typical youth conference for the Japanese Muslim youth. The lessons from such conferences, based on his past experiences, had failed to stick, as far as his son was concerned.

As parents who had children living in minority Muslim communities in different parts of the world, the researcher and her spouse understood the concern. Like the Japanese Muslim parents, the researcher, too wanted her children and grandchildren to consciously choose to lead the Muslim way of life. As a student in America years ago, she had witnessed and heard of Godless lives gone awry. Drugs, substance abuse, sexual orgies, unwed pregnancies, alcoholism are just some of the issues some youth fall prey into without a solid grounding in religious values.

As highlighted by Kurucan & Erol (2012), *tahāwur,* having a dialogue, is a criticalcomponent in realising mutual cooperation and understanding as well as respect among all groups intent to achieve certain goals and objectives. Interactions through *tahāwur* (dialogue) lead to consultation before forming opinions; we seek to find ways to cooperate (Elius et. al., 2019). In other words, *tahāwur* opens the door to *ta-'arūf* . *Tahāwur* here refers to a friendly conversation to build rapport and trust, which makes all sides feel encouraged and supported, and to proactively avoid potential misunderstandings. Dialogue and negotiations must take place before sealing a clear understanding between two parties (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996); this was what happened next. So positive was the experience of the researcher and her spouse in dealing with Hajj Sugimoto of the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre that upon their return to Malaysia, the researcher and her spouse continued to communicate with him. The researcher vividly recalls the moment the idea for the Cultural Exchange Programme came up. It was midmorning in Kuala Lumpur. The researcher and her spouse listened carefully to

the faraway voice of Hajj Sugimoto from Chiba, Japan, as he explained the issues faced by the Muslim families in Japan, in particular, the challenge of providing an Islamic education for their children and youth. At first, the idea of conducting a youth conference in Malaysia came up, to which Sugimoto replied:

> I don't know if having a youth conference is a good idea . . . I brought my son to conferences in the past . . . even to New York. All he could recall were the food and games [. . .] (Personal Communication, 4 March, 2019)

To the researcher, the reference to "food and games" by Hajj Sugimoto implied that what Hajj Sugimoto's son appreciated most was the experiential, intercultural dimension, which suggested that what was worth considering was to design an intercultural programme in which Islamic education is infused in the cultural experiences - food, games and other cultural aspects included. The thought of delicious food and games combined gave the researcher the idea of organising a cultural exchange programme, in which the Japanese Muslim youth come to Malaysia for a period of time to stay with Muslim families. Essentially, it means taking these youth out from Japan, and immersing them in a different environment, to let them experience first-hand what living as a Muslim means here in Malaysia.

The idea of a cultural exchange programme was then raised by Hajj Sugimoto to the committee members of the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre and upon due deliberation, they agreed to take it up. An important issue was finance. Who would pay for the return flight, accommodation, food and beverages, and incidentals e.g. entrance tickets to places of interest? It was decided that the families of the Japanese Muslim youth would cover the flight and other costs incurred in Japan, while the host parents would be covering all costs incurred in Malaysia. In effect, no external sponsor was needed to cover costs. As shown, the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme

2019 began with purposeful discussions between the researcher, her spouse, and the Japanese side (CICC or Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre as official organiser) in March 2019. Were it not for the many detailed discussions between the researcher and the CICC, this programme would not have been designed as it had been.

4.3.2 *Ta-'arūf* (Mutually Knowing, Mutually Interacting)

To attain social cohesiveness, Mhd Sarif (2019) emphasised the importance of establishing *ta-'arūf* right from the start, since *ta-'arūf* is a key feature of *ukhuwwah,* a genuine concern and love for one Muslim to another, interpreted as strategic bonding between Muslims. As posited by Ahmad (2012), this kind of strategic bonding has nothing to do with lineage or ethnicity but is purely based on *`aqidah*. From this angle, since the Japanese youth and host parents had never met each other, it was important tostart with the right footing and make a first positive impression, which the host parents did.

Based on the researcher's observation, by the time she arrived at the airport on the morning the first Japanese Muslim youth were due to land at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), the host parents were already there ahead of schedule, an indication of their eagerness. A host parent was heard commenting that she was "nervous and excited at the same time." One by one the much-awaited Japanese youth appeared at the entrance. One of the Japanese youths was delayed at the immigration for about an hour, but nobody complained, everyone waited patiently. As the last Japanese youth appeared, everyone cheered and clapped, and the researcher saw the host parents stepping forward to welcome him. By this time, the interpreters from *salamnihon* were busy on hand to help out with the communication between host

parents and youth. Therewere smiles all round. Someone raised the welcoming banner, photos were taken and then the host parents brought the youth home.

During the Welcoming Dinner later in the evening, the researcher observed that at first the Japanese youth seemed to keep to themselves and were rather reserved. The host had set up a *char koay-teow* (Malaysian local dish of Chinese origin) stall with a chef who prepared the dish fresh. From their gestures and facial expressions, the Japanese youth seemed amused with the fire billowing under the pan and broke into what sounded like excited chatter. In no time, the researcher saw them queueing for the delicious dish, and sitting down and bantering with each other. By then, they looked quite relaxed and nobody kept to himself. The researcher saw that some of them went for seconds. Other dishes were also served to whet everyone's appetite. What the researcher saw confirmed the study done by Seki (2016), that with meticulous planning and execution, incoming youth would have minimum culture shock, thereby maximising the benefits and effectiveness of the cultural exchange programme.

Malaysia is a multiethnic, multireligious and multiracial country. The host parents and families in the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme 2019 originated from different ethnic backgrounds including Pakistani, mixed Chinese-Malay and Indian parentage. However, since these host parents were born and bred in Malaysia, they were uniquely Malaysian, to the delight of the Japanese youth. From the feedback given by the participants, it appeared that the host parents and families provided a sufficiently immersive intercultural experience for these youth. A sufficiently immersive intercultural experience, even short-term, can transform lives, and is not just about changing locations (Crawford, 2017). An example of an immersive, intercultural experience that took place in the present study is how the Malaysian

Muslim hosts treat participants with good food by serving different ethnic cuisines, a positive experience mentioned by participant Riku:

> I would like to be as friendly like Malaysians [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019).

Riku's host parents who came from Pakistani-Indian parentage feted the Japanese youth with Pakistani-Indian cuisines. Likewise, the host parents with Malay background served Malay foods. At meal times, the Malaysian hosts made sure the Japanese youth were feted well, they were not left alone by themselves, as evidenced from the photos that the host parents showed to the researcher.

As a minority in their home country, the Japanese youth's self-esteem has been affected (Hutnik, 1991), and eventually they might either assimilate or acculturate with the majority (Hutnik, 2003) but in Malaysia it was a fresh experience meant to raise the way they perceive themselves. The Cultural Exchange Programme was meant to increase their self-esteem as Muslims. They begin to see that life is much more than choosing between being Muslim and Japanese; one could be both, so long as Islam is observed. Direct, face-to-face interactions with their hosts exposed the Japanese youth to the hosts' culture. From the numerous photos and comments shared by the host parents in the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme *whatsapp* group, the researcher observed that the Japanese youth were accompanied by their host parents and family members, chauffeured at all times by their host family everywhere they went. All week, they communicated and interacted with their host parents and other family members and witnessed the lifestyle of the hosts; what it meant to live as Muslims. The Japanese youth saw that members of their host families were both Muslim and Malaysian. Just like the observant Muslim minority youth in Britain who discovered that having a strong Muslim identity strengthened their

commitment to be positive British citizens (Shazhadi et. al., 2017), participant Marisi found that the Cultural Exchange Experience had brought her closer to her Islamic roots:

> Liked experience of Islamic culture [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August,2019)

Several of the host parents also introduced some basic Malay words to the Japanese youth, to the delight of the youth. Participant Marisi said:

> [I] like Malay culture, country is unique, taught Malay language (Online Interview, 30 August 2019)

Likewise, at the final evening gathering which was attended by all Japanese youth and host families, participant Kawai declared in front of everyone:

> *Umur saya 17 tahun* (I am 17 years old) [. . .] (Farewell Dinner, 23 August, 2019)

Even though participant Kawai spoke only some words of Malay, the fact that he did utter these words appear to support findings by Kinginger et. al. (2016) that short- term homestays can leave a lasting impact in terms of language and culture learning, and that students can recognise and understand at least certain words within a short period of time (Reynolds-Case, 2013).

At the end of the programme, the personal touch, kindness and care shown by the host parents had left a lasting impression upon the young minds. Furthermore, the Japanese youth appreciated that their host families had children of the same age group. As participant Daiki put it:

> [Learnt] how to interact with Muslims of the same age [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Similar feedback was given by Tokuda, another male participant:

> There were many people of the same age and it was fun [. . .]
> (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The youth enjoyed such interactions and asked for more. Seeking interaction with peers is an indication of growing confidence, a positive consequence of an intercultural experience and exposure (Costas & Singco, 2016), which was also mentioned by participant Kawai:

> I wanted more opportunities for interaction [. . .]
> (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Despite a packed schedule, the Japanese youth found it engaging, as participant Tatsuki wrote:

> It was a lot of fun [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Halal food that was easily available, having Muslim friends of the same age, with whom they could talk to and get along with, were some of the everyday things Malaysian Muslim youth take for granted in Malaysia, but were new experiences to the Japanese Muslim youth. For many of them, they were the only Muslim in school. Culture, of course, is not just about foods, it is also about how the host family membersrelate to one another, how they dress, what time they wake up, how they talk to one another, how they respond to specific situations - these are all examples of Malaysian Muslim culture which were new to the Japanese Muslim youth. What the Japanese youth remembered most was the hospitality, the caring and kind treatments they received from their host parents and families.

4.3.3 *Ta-'āyush* (To Coexist)

Al-Tuwaijiri (1998, cited in Ramli et. al., 2018) propagates the Concept of *Ta-'āyush* specifically within the context of social communications between peoples of different religions, cultures and civilisations as fundamental to creating universal peace, something that was already practised by the Prophet SAW centuries ago. If *ta-'āyush* is the stance that Muslims are supposed to adopt when dealing with non-Muslims, certainly Muslims of different ethnic cultures and civilisations deserve to be treated with equal respect and consideration, if not better.

Based on the researcher's observation, during the present study, there was a tendency for the youth to keep to their own kind: Malaysians with Malaysians and Japanese with Japanese, especially in the mornings. The researcher observed that the host parents did what was necessary to break the ice to promote *ta-'āyush* among these two groups. For example, on day two of the Cultural Exchange Programme, upon arrival in Rawang, during the first quarter hour, the Malaysian youth kept to their own group and similarly, the Japanese youth kept to their own group. The researcher observed two host fathers taking action, splitting the youth into smaller groups with each group deliberately consisting of both Malaysians and Japanese, to create the opportunity for them to work together and communicate with one another better. Such an action is important as groups and relationships are particularly significant for the Japanese (Sugimura et. al., 2015). Thereafter, the Japanese and Malaysian youth spent an entire morning together to cook special Malaysian dishes. The four interpreters moved from group to group regularly to see if anyone needed interpreting. Each smaller group had a specific task e.g. slicing onions and vegetables. The researcher also observed that the host parents made sure that the tasks were rotated between these smaller groups so that everyone had the chance to do different tasks and not kept at one single task the

entire morning e.g. deep-frying chicken. The researcher saw that all the youth, Malaysian and Japanese, looked at ease slicing the ingredients, washing them clean, frying the chickenin a huge wok, preparing the curry and salad, and after all the cooking was done, puttingthe prepared foods into containers for the *asnaf*.

The researcher also observed that when the time came to deliver the food to the *asnaf*, who lived in several different locations in the area, all of the youth, Japanese and Malaysian, got off their host parents' vehicles and eagerly handed the gifts over themselves. From the researcher's observations, the youth liked this activity thoroughly; it was mentioned as one of the things that they enjoyed during the programme, as noted by participant Marisi:

> feelings of caring for people . . . experienced cooking for poor people and handing the food over [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Marisi was not the only one who commented on the experience of preparing and delivering food to the poor. The same sentiment was expressed by participant Haruto:

> cook and give [to] poor people (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Such feedback proved the importance of instilling positive human interactions in a cultural exchange programme, even if the participants did not state such an expectation up front when they signed up for the programme (Hommadova & Mita, 2016).

Because these Japanese Muslim youth were born and bred in Japan, they did not have the issue of language communication back home in Japan, unlike non-Japanese Muslims (Yuki, 2018), yet it must be said that most of the Japanese Muslim youth did not have Muslim friends there. It would be unfortunate if they feel they had to choose between being "Muslim" or "Japanese", having an identity crisis, pretending they are

not Muslim (Aaser, 2016), going through an emotional roller coaster (Mydin et. al, 2013) as they need to learn that it is possible to have dual identities i.e. Muslim and Japanese (Shazhadi et. al., 2017). Having parents who came from a different generation would naturally raise intergenerational issues, too (Lynch, 2013, Jacob, 2017 & Kalmijn, 2018). Thus, making friends with the Malaysian youth was a positive and encouraging experience for them.

The quality of human interactions can make or break an intercultural exchange programme (Hommadova & Mita, 2016). Throughout the Cultural Exchange Programme, as these youth made more Muslim friends, they gained insights on how to live as Muslims in future. The Japanese youth learnt that no matter who you are and where you live, respect and consideration are crucial elements for peace and harmony in yourself and within the community.

For the Japanese youth, opportunities existed for *Al-ta'āruf* related to three levelsof relationships; namely:

1. Japanese youth-Japanese youth
2. Japanese youth-host parent
3. Japanese youth-Malaysian youth (teenagers/young adults who were children of the host parents)

Diversity, the Japanese Muslim youth began to see, is a beautiful thing and could be a source of strength and unity for a community. Therefore, the Japanese Muslim youth realised that they being different from the majority in Japan has the potential of bringing much good to Japan, their birth country. Throughout the entire week, the Japanese Muslim youth learned to coexist with each other and their host parents and families, as well as observed how multiracial and multireligious Malaysians coexist

with one another; a crucial component of success in diversity. As participant Tatsuki remarked:

> Love and Respect is a very important key word in this country . . . and this is the secret to the successful realization of a multi-ethnic nation [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The Japanese Muslim youth saw peoples of multiracial and multireligious backgrounds working together for a common cause e.g. at the National Heart Institute, which sparked the comment from participant Riku:

> (Malaysian) diversity, living together . . . impressed with Malaysia (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

What enabled multicultural, multireligious Malaysia to thrive in a diverse society was, as participant Kawai put it:

> cooperation, cooperation (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

At the most basic level, although the Japanese youth were Muslims, they were born and raised in a different cultural environment, and naturally were used to different ways of doing things. Still, they sensed the warmth of the Malaysian hosts. The Japanese youth felt appreciated and respected, and they reciprocated by being fully cooperative throughout the programme. The Japanese youth learnt that to make things work, people have to transcend beyond their differences.

4.3.4 *Tasāmuh* (Tolerate Each Other's Differences)

The ability to accept and respect others who hail from different backgrounds, being lenient, kind and generous even to those perceived as different from us, is a key feature of *tasāmuh* (Khambali et. al., 2017, cited by Abdul Ghani & Awang, 2020).

Furthermore, the level of tolerance that is propagated in Islam is higher than anything that came before it ('Imarah, 2014). Such is the beauty of *tasāmuh* in Islam, which is a value that the Cultural Exchange Programme tried to emulate, considering that the participants and host parents/families came from different nations and cultures, although they were all Muslims.

By the end of the second day, the researcher observed that language was a notable difference and still a challenge, as the majority of the Japanese youth were fluent in Japanese only. Although the communication gap was expected, initially it was thought that having four fulltime interpreters would be sufficient. But it became quickly obvious that this was not the case. The researcher even heard a Malaysian youth saying, "The communication barrier was too tall." The Japanese Muslim youth still stayed away from the Malaysian Muslim youth, communicating among themselves while the Malaysian Muslim youth kept to themselves, too. Because of the language barrier, the researcher observed that two distinct groups had formed: Japanese Muslim youth and Malaysian Muslim youth. At times, the researcher saw a few of the Malaysian youth lingering awkwardly around the Japanese youth and vice-versa.

Hence, at the start of the guided visit to the Islamic Arts Museum on the third day, the Japanese Muslim youth and the Malaysian youth were asked by the researcher, her spouse and Hajj Sugimoto to stand in two separate lines, and each of them was assigned a partner. All of the youth were paired up - each Japanese Muslim youth with a Malaysian Muslim youth - and they were instructed to communicate with each other. Throughout the guided tour, the Malaysian youth began to introduce to the Japanese youth easy words in English, in hushed tones. The observer saw that this arrangement helped, from the way the Malaysian and Japanese youth gestured towards one another.

Instantly, they started communicating with one another, which indicated that they were warming up to each other.

Thus, the Japanese Muslim youth and host parents and other family members tolerated each other's daily habits. Despite not being proficient in English, the Japanese Muslim youth found their experiences with their host families positive. Participant Kawai said he learnt:

> Difference in culture [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Daiki made a comment along similar lines:

> (I) learn Malaysian habits. Malaysians made effort to talk to me. I didn't know much about English, but can relax [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

As can be seen, despite communication gaps, even though the Japanese youth and their Malaysian host families came from different nationalities, both were like-minded and motivated and such an attitude created a sense of accomplishment in the participants (Webeck et. al., 2019).

Participant Kaito noted that despite the differences between him and fellow Japanese Muslim youth, as well as between him and the host family, he learnt:

> importance of teamwork [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Throughout the present study, nothing untoward happened. The Japanese Muslim youth carried themselves well with respect and dignity, they made an equally positive impression on the Malaysian families. Both the Japanese youth and the Malaysian hosts worked towards creating a harmonious relationship, a requirement for a successful intercultural experience (Pranoto et. al., 2016). Both the Japanese youth and the

Malaysian hosts accepted that differences were unavoidable, since all parties came from different cultural backgrounds, but these differences did not become a show-stopper for them to build a good relationship with one another.

It must be remembered that it is common for Japanese Muslim children at an earlyage to start enquiring from their parents at what age or life stage they can become real Japanese (Takeshita, 2008), which implies they wish to abandon Islam in future. In some cases, this issue has led to clashes with elders especially parents (Liu et. al., 2019). Because of this concern, some parents made the decision to send their children to Islamic schools in the Middle-East (Vestre, 2011), but not everyone can afford to do this, or wish to live separately from their children for long periods of time. The Cultural Exchange Programme, therefore, provides another platform for these parents to introduce the beauty of Islam to their children.

4.3.5 *Tabādul* (Exchange of Ideas)

Just as in the Battle of *Ahzāb* (Trench) in the fifth Hijri year, when the Prophet SAW decided to adopt a new strategy introduced by Salman Al-Farisi by digging trenches to defend Madinah and the Muslims (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996), the mindset and habit of being open to exchanging ideas for the sake of *da'wah* and a better humanity is encouraged in the Cultural Exchange Programme. Such a mindset is illustrated by the willingness of responsible Muslim adults to listen to questions, no matter what they are, and respond to them in an appropriate way.

It was observed by the researcher that the Japanese youth raised a lot of questions during the visit to the *halal* chicken factory. The participants appeared excited from the way they communicated with each other, as it was not just about enlightening the Japanese youth about the *halal* concept from the theoretical perspective. All the

youth and host parents were offered the chance to enter a restricted area - the slaughtering area - to slaughter the chickens. They eagerly stepped into the space and were taught to recite a prayer to invoke Allah's blessings as they put the very sharp knife to the chicken's neck.

Earlier, the researcher observed the founder and Managing Director of *Ayam Dr Zainol* organic chicken factory, Dr Zainol Ahmad Haja himself greeting the participants, volunteers and host families of the Cultural Exchange Programme. Dr Zainol took the time to explain the basis for *halal* slaughtering, backed by Qur'an and Sunnah evidence. He stressed that *halal* meat is best not just for Muslims, but for everyone. At this juncture, the second generation Japanese Muslim students began to ask questions about the *halal* concept and its relation to Islam and the Muslim way of life. Before the guests left, Dr Zainol feted everyone to a hearty lunch of rice, fried chicken and mushroom chicken soup.

Islamic education is sorely missing in Japan. The Japanese Muslim youth hardly had any opportunities to discuss and exchange ideas related to Islam, which is critical to gaining a better understanding of Islam, the absence of which easily leads to identity confusion in adolescence (Aaser, 2019). Being "half" (one parent a non-Japanese) does not help (Kamada, 2009). All of the participants had one parent who was South-Asian. The Japanese in general view South-Asian foreigners as having a lower status. Besides, having migrant parents who were trying to raise them according to traditional methods would imply that these parents are less likely to listen to their concerns (Cook & Waite, 2015), thereby creating intergenerational issues which potentially may include parent- child miscommunication. During the Cultural Exchange Programme, for the first time they saw what the concept of Islam being a complete way of life meant on a daily basis.Participant Haruto noted that he saw:

> the importance of zakat, *halal* and creatures [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

A similar sentiment was expressed by participant Yuta:

> [I learnt] *halal* production methods (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The outcomes of an international cultural exchange programme are tied to the design and purpose of the programme (Stoeckel, 2016). The purpose of the present study is to instill self-confidence and love for Islam among all participating youth. It was apparent that the Japanese youth were not used to discussing Islamic matters and ideas openly. They realised from the Cultural Exchange Programme that it was important to grasp a clear understanding of Islam before one could be a true Muslim, as voiced by participant Kawai:

> I thought it was good because there were various ideas of Islam [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The Japanese Muslim youth were impressed with the seriousness of Malaysian Muslims to fulfil Islamic criteria, as expressed by participant Tokuda:

> Malaysians are [sic] intricate (procedures) such as *halal* certification [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

As Cates (2017) suggested, experiencing a cultural exchange programme would help participants grasp a better understanding of global issues. The feedback above proved that the Japanese youth have gained a better understanding and appreciation of global issues; in this case, the *halal* concept, which is significant for Muslims around the world. It was good that the *halal* concept, a culturally sensitive matter, was elaborated well and explained by an expert, failing which, the programme could have

been less effective. As Abdulai (2019) pointed out, cultural sensitivity is a priority for a cultural exchange programme to be successful.

The Japanese youth also learned that being Muslim does not mean being less loyal to your birth country. In fact, Islam requires us to be the best version of ourselves, so that we can serve the community in which we live. Interest in the cultures of others could mean benefiting from the positives of that culture, and this is an advantage of *tabādul* in place, as commented by participant Tatsuki:

> Malaysians are very interested in Japan. Everyone here likes Japan - anime, drama, character [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Thus, liking certain cultural aspects of a country does not make a person any less Muslim. Every day, the Japanese Muslim youth, despite language issues, communicated their thoughts and ideas to each other, and to their host parents and family members, and vice-versa with the help of interpreters. Some of them also used online resources e.g. Google Translate to ease communication to exchange ideas with one another.

4.3.6 *Ta-'akhī* (To Associate as Brother)

Allah says, "The Believers are but a single Brotherhood . . ." (Al-Qur'an. Al-Hujurat. 49:10); Muslims must be prepared to do what it takes to support one another, be there for each other. Just as the Prophet paired up Muslims from Makkah with Muslims from Madinah upon migrating to Madinah, the Japanese Muslim youth were assigned to host parents/families upon arrival in Malaysia. This is the creation of a bond that is aimed to last not only in this world, but in the Hereafter, God willing. As Dr Hammudah Abdalati (1975) pointed out, brotherhood in Islam is based upon a solid

belief in the Oneness of God. No race is superior than the other. No Malaysian is better than a Japanese, and vice-versa.

The host family/parents were entrusted with treating the Japanese youth like their own, to treat them with kindness that can be felt in the heart. Learning about Islam was and still is a major issue in Japan (Shiro, 2011), which has resulted in a conflicted identity amongst Japanese Muslim youth, not unlike minority Muslims elsewhere e.g. in America (Suleiman, 2017) to the extent that internally, these minority Muslim children and youth assume different personalities (Muslim or non-Muslim) depending on who they are with (Mydin et. al., 2013). Yet it was observed that the word "kindness" was mentioned more than a few times by the Japanese Muslim youth in their verbal feedback during the Farewell Dinner. The same word was also mentioned by the Japanese youth in the online interviews.

During the Farewell Dinner, the researcher observed Marisi, the only female Japanese Muslim overcome with emotion; tears rolled down her cheeks as she expressed gratitude for the Cultural Exchange Programme. The researcher assumed she felt sad everything was coming to an end. It is hoped that feeling accepted and loved by the host parents and family members would make her and all the other participants less prone to inferiority complex which is common among their South Asian parents (Vestre, 2011). The following day, the researcher saw more tears shed at the departure gate at the airport, even a few of the Japanese Muslim male youth were teary-eyed when they said their final goodbyes to their host parents and other family members. When a Malaysian host father hugged participant Tatsuki and asked when he wanted to come back to Malaysia, Tatsuki said:

> Tomorrow [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Likewise upon his return to Japan, participant Tokuda reported:

> I did not miss Japan when I was in Malaysia (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

At the KLIA departure hall, the researcher heard a host parent Sabariah saying, "The second generation Japanese Muslim youth found strength in each other [. . .]" It is common for the second generation Japanese Muslim youth, the researcher was told, to be the only Muslim student in their respective schools, but meeting other Japanese Muslim youth in the Cultural Exchange Programme, having deep conversations and exchanging notes with other Japanese Muslim youth made them feel they were no longer alone.

The love and care, the brotherhood *('ukhuwwah)*, that a Muslim feels for another is a deep, beautiful, unique emotion (Ahmad, 2012) that can only be understood by a person who has experienced it. The Malaysian host parents and other family members treated the Japanese Muslim youth with much kindness, respect and care. As a result, the Japanese Muslim youth felt at home, appreciated and treasured. Such a step is crucial to plant the seeds of a lifelong relationship of brotherhood ('*ukhuwwah*). The kindness and care the Malaysian host parents and other family members extended to the Japanese Muslim youth was something they had never seen and felt before. Hence, according to participant Haruto:

> Everyone was very kind [. . .]" (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Tatsuki felt so comfortable with his host parents such that:

> On the last day I was talking to my host parent until 3:00 am in the morning [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

In the present study, the researcher observed that a briefing was presented for each event. A speaker would enlighten the participants why a certain Islamic practice was done, the benefits and the wisdom behind the practice, followed by a Questions & Answers session, in which the Japanese youth were encouraged to ask anything they had in mind. As a result, the Japanese youth began to see Islam in a new light as commented by participant Daiki:

> I was able to learn more about Islamic culture [. . .]
> (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Marisi, who, prior to the trip never told anyone about her religious affiliation as Muslim, discovered a new perspective. At the end of the programme she commented:

> I hope in Japan the number of Muslims will increase in future [. . .]
> (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

All the feedback above, in particular multiple mentions of the warmth and kindness extended by the Malaysian hosts, suggest that the Cultural Exchange Programme had left a lasting positive impression on the young minds of the Japanese Muslim. At the end of the Farewell Dinner, when asked if they wished to participate in future Cultural Exchange Programmes, the researcher observed that all nine Japanese Muslim youth responded in the affirmative i.e. "Yes", which was verified by another affirmative "Yes" by all of them for the same question asked in the online interviews. Based on these responses, it is deduced that the Cultural Exchange Programme experience had been uplifting for the participants; it had indeed touched the hearts and minds of all nine Japanese Muslim youth.

4.3.7 *Al-ta'ayush Al-Silmīyy* (To Coexist in Peace and Harmony)

To coexist in peace and harmony, to achieve a state of *Al-ta'ayush Al-Silmīyy,* respect, consideration and acceptance must be in place. Recognising that Allah in His Wisdom created mankind in diverse ethnicities, races, languages and cultures means we must leverage these differences for the benefit of humanity. Diversity well-understood and well-handled will produce greater productivity for everyone involved (Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah, cited by Fadzil, 2018). Rather than viewing differences as an annoyance or irritation, we must welcome them as a source of potential strength, as differences are manifestations of Allah's power.

For the Japanese Muslim youth in the present study, joining an intercultural homestay programme have enabled them to immerse in another culture, consistent with the findings of Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart (2002). Besides, the unfamiliar experience of staying in a foreign country, in this case, Malaysia, has developed in them an appreciation of people they see as "others" (in the context of the present study, "others" refer to Malaysian Muslims) as suggested by Stephenson (1999). Living together peacefully with others begins with having peace and harmony within oneself. By the end of the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme 2019, based on the feedback given, the researcher surmised that the Japanese Muslim youth felt peace within themselves as Muslims. The researcher also believed that they have gained a keen sense of accomplishment through the varied activities conducted, which had helped deepen their personal connections and relationships with their host parents and families as well as with one another. Learning salient details of Islamic History made them motivated to want to know even more about the Islamic legacy they have inherited from their parents. Asked to list the important things he learnt during the Cultural Exchange Programme, participant Tokuda wrote:

> the greatness of old Muslims [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

To the same question, participant Tatsuki responded with:

> be proud of being Muslim (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

It would be safe to assume that the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme 2019 had broadened the participants' worldview, both as Muslims and as Japanese nationals. Most important, by the time they left, they felt more comfortable with their Muslim identity. As participant Kaito explained:

> I want to share what I got this time with my friends (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Tokuda discovered that in Malaysia:

> I did a lot of things that I could not experience in Japan (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

It is hoped that their new-found confidence as Muslims would continue to develop peace in their hearts, motivate them to practice as Muslims, and enable them to contribute positively in the Japanese community where they reside, just as the minority Muslim youth in Hong Kong (Yuen & Leung, 2019) and America (Corbett, 2016) did. Over the course of the Cultural Exchange Programme, as a result of their personal connections and positive interactions with their host parents and families, the Japanese Muslim youth felt at home in Malaysia and developed self-confidence as Muslims. After the programme, they realised it is alright to be different from the non-Muslim majority in Japan.

Furthermore, the Cultural Exchange Programme opened the eyes of the Japanese Muslim youth to the suitability of Islam in modern life as Islam celebrates intercultural differences. In Malaysia, they saw for the first time the benefits of diversity, Muslims and non-Muslims living and working side by side in harmony. As participant Haruto declared:

> I want to study cultural differences with other countries (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Asked what they would do differently now that they had returned to Japan, each of the nine Japanese Muslim youth responded in ways that showed their intentions to follow through on activities related to Islam, either in the form of personal worship or getting involved in the Muslim community. In terms of personal worship, participant Haruto said he would:

> Cherish worship [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Tokuda echoed the same sentiment by stating:

> I (will) worship (*solat*) everyday (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Other remarks indicated that they wanted to step out of their reservations as Muslims and reach out to the Muslim community in Japan, a sign of growing self-confidence as a Muslim youth. For example, participant Marisi wrote:

> I want to start by making more Muslim friends by participating more in the Muslim community in Japan (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Daiki expressed a similar sentiment:

> I want to participate more in the Muslim community in Japan [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Likewise, participant Yuta intended to:

> participate in exchanges with nearby Muslims (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Riku went a step further by expressing his desire to play a leading role sometime in the future:

> I want to take the lead in helping people [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Tatsuki, who loved to talk, learnt that being Muslim is a source of pride and strength, and Islam is a treasure to be cherished and shared with others, Muslims and non-Muslims. Therefore, he had decided to:

> live a little more dignified back home in Japan . . . (will) learn history and culture of Islam more and spread to others [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

All the above responses taken together implied that the Cultural Exchange Programme had strengthened the identities of the Japanese youth as Muslims. All nine of the second generation Japanese Muslim youth who participated in this research were total strangers to one another before coming to Malaysia. However, based on the researcher's observations of their facial expressions, gestures and body language, they quickly made friends with one another, although the researcher could not understand what they were saying, since they communicated with one another entirely in Japanese. It was interesting to note that they became much more at ease with one another during and after the visit to Janda Baik. The ratio of Japanese youth to Malaysian youth then was nearly 1:1. The researcher observed that the activities were well-organised, highly engaging, and the lead facilitator debriefed all the youth at the end of each

activity to put meaning into it. With such lively interactions, the Japanese Muslim youth's perception of living Islam as too rigid and too hard to adhere to (Fathil & Fathil 2011) was being subtly challenged.

Further, these outcomes bode well for the formation of long-term brotherhood between all three relationship levels: Japanese youth-Japanese youth, Japanese youth-host parent, and Japanese youth-Malaysian youth (mainly teenagers/young adults who were children of the host parents). The positive outcomes in this research supported the results of earlier studies done on cultural sensitivities (Martinsen, 2011 & Reynolds-Case, 2013) which suggested that direct interactions with locals contribute towards valuable consequences including establishment of local networks to the benefit of the participants ((Mhd Sarif, 2019, Castanēda & Zirger, 2011).

4.4 The Five Domains of Human Connection

This section illustrates how the Concept of *Al-ta'āruf* is internalised in the Cultural Exchange Programme in terms of the five domains of human connection tied to *Al-ta'āruf*: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Cultural, and Spiritual.

4.4.1 Physical Domain

The physical activities incorporated in the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme 2019 were meant to raise awareness among the Japanese Muslim youth that being a good practising Muslim, building a relationship with Allah, is possible no matter where you are and what you are doing, as stated by Allah: "Men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate (the wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth . . ." (Al-Qur'an. Al-'Imrān. 3:191).

The best example to prove that learning can take place while learners are in the middle of physical activity was provided by the Prophet SAW who used to impart lessons to his companions where appropriate when they were in the middle of physical activity. For instance, once the Prophet SAW was walking with his companions and saw a dead sheep. He asked them, "Who amongst you would buy this sheep for a dirham?" They replied, "None of us." The Prophet said, "Likewise is the value of this worldly life. It is worth as little as this dead sheep." (narrated by Muslim, cited by Beshir & Beshir, 2007). This proved that learning can take place anywhere and anytime, even during moments of physical activity. What the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept tried to achieve in the present study was to touch the Japanese Muslim youth's soul and awaken their conscience through various methods including physical activity.

Based on the researcher's observation, activities that required the Japanese youth to physically stretch themselves were set up in the early stages of the Cultural Exchange Programme to create a more conducive environment for them to get to know one another, as well as learn about the Muslim and Malaysian culture. Such activities were purposely set up to facilitate learning. As Deardoff (2016) highlighted, international student exchange such as the present study promotes mutual peace and understanding throughout the world. But such noble aims can only be achieved if the participants were given the opportunity to immerse themselves in the everyday culture of the host (Seki, 2016).

The researcher observed how the team-building games at Janda Baik included obstacles, archery, fishing and crazy golf which prompted all youth, Malaysian and Japanese to collaborate, communicate and interact as teams, as well as built rapport and trust with one another. Through the present study, the Japanese Muslim youth immersed themselves in physical activities as a means of intercultural learning. Intercultural

learning means acquiring knowledge and understanding about another person's or community's culture. In this case, the Japanese Muslim youth experienced first-hand some physical activities that are common among the Malaysian Muslim community. Learning about another culture is more meaningful if a person were to immerse himself or herself in activities that are part and parcel of that culture. Consequently, the robust outing at Radiant Retreat, Saujana Janda Baik, where they had outdoor games was commented upon, for example by participant Marisi:

> [liked] knowing Malaysian culture through nature [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Marginalisation of Muslim minority youth is a matter of concern (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2017). Government affiliated community programmes may require some kind of physical activity in order to heighten a sense of national belonging (Corbett, 2016); if the youth are comfortable with physical activity, back home in Japan they would be more likely to enrol in such activities and indirectly reduce marginalisation of Muslims and anti-Muslim sentiments.

The most typical way of learning anything is by sitting in a classroom and listening to the teacher, which was totally different from the experience introduced in the Cultural Exchange Programme. From the researcher's observations, none of the Japanese youth hesitated to involve themselves in the physical activities infused in the present study. In fact, they liked such activities as participant Riku remarked, because:

> everyone can participate [. . .] (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

In a cultural exchange programme, the cultural shock must be minimised to maximise effectiveness (Seki, 2016) and physical activity is one way to achieve this goal. Additionally, experiencing these activities may bring about greater appreciation

of another culture (Stephenson, 1999). Through physical activity, the youth come into contact with local networks (Castanēda & Zirger, 2011), making the present study a more immersive cultural experience (Crawford, 2017), influencing the quality of human interactions (Hommadova & Mita, 2016). Removing elements of syncretism (Ali, 2018) widespread in Japan is a gradual process. With no help from authorities, Muslim minorities have to work that much harder to educate their youth, as shown by the Hong Kong Muslim community (Yip-Ho, 2018). But the Prophet SAW himself has shown that it is possible for Muslim minorities to thrive in a pluralistic society (Siddiqi, 2006). The physical activities incorporated in the present study might be common for Malaysians, but might not be so for the Japanese Muslim youth. Absence of Islamic education for youth in Japan (Takeshita, 2008 & Vestre, 2011) implies responsible Muslims need to look into alternative avenues, including physical activities that appeal to the youth in order to engage them.

4.4.2 Intellectual Domain

The Intellectual Domain is all about thinking, reflecting upon, and internalising new knowledge. It was important for the Japanese youth to understand the higher purpose of all the things that they were doing in the Cultural Exchange Programme. Qur'an classes conducted in Japan such as the Tokyo Mosque (Siddiqi, 2016) and Otsuka Mosque (Japan Islamic Trust, 2020) are not accessible to many Japanese Muslim youth. It is possible that these youth do not realise the significance of the intellectual aspect of Islam. Besides, unbalanced reporting which neglected sources from Muslim countries and media (Ahmad & Matthes, 2016) might further influence these youth to perceive Islam in a negative light. Although the Muslim minority in Japan are not subject to persecution unlike Muslims in China (Basri & Ta'arif, 2018), the

inconsistency of home and school in terms of Islamic education (Shiro, 2011) implies that efforts must be made to ensure that these youth gain a good grasp of Islam intellectually.

The researcher observed that at the end of each day, a brief reflection (*tadabbur*) session was carried out, where the coordinators would talk about the day's activities and relating them to the purpose of life in Islam. Without these daily intellectual sessions, the activities would have been little more than events that were fun and tiring, without deeper and real meanings.

The researcher observed that the Japanese youth listened intently to the explanations given during the brief *tadabbur* sessions, an indication that they were processing the new knowledge in their minds. A Muslim is not a blind follower. Islam is against blind following of traditions and customs, no matter where these traditions came from. Allah says: "When it is said to them: 'Follow what Allah has revealed' they say: 'Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers.' What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?" (Al-Qur'an. Al-Baqarah. 2:170). Allah also says: "And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge; for every act of hearing, or of seeing or of (feeling in) the heart will be enquired into on the Day of Reckoning". (Al-Qur'an. Al-'Isra'. 17:36). Further, Allah says: "Those who give partners (to Allah) will say: 'If Allah had wished, we should not have given partners to Him, nor would our fathers; nor should we have had any taboos.'" (Al-Qur'an. Al-An'ām. 6:148).

Based on the researcher's observation, none of the participants seemed distracted or fidgety during the *tadabbur* sessions. As ideas were shared during the *tadabbur* sessions, the youth would be reflecting on how similar or different these ideas were compared to what they had assumed, heard or understood back home in Japan, prior to the Cultural Exchange Programme. At an intellectual level, the Japanese youth would

see that Islam is a religion that emphasises knowledge e.g. ". . . O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge." (Al-Qur'an. Tā Hā. 20:114), and knowledge requires thinking and rationality which leads to correct understanding. Some intellectual questions that the Japanese youth might have been thinking at this stage could have been: "What are some Japanese traditions that I have been following and why?", "Where do these traditions came from?", "Are they harmful or helpful to me?"

As Halstead (2004) pointed out, in Islam, "knowledge must be approached reverently and in humility, for there cannot be any 'true' knowledge that is in conflict with religion and divine revelation, only ignorance". Thus, the intellectual domain embedded into the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept in the Cultural Exchange Programme in the form of these *tadabbur* sessions created opportunities for the Japanese Muslim youth to question their own understanding and assumptions about the matters raised, particularly those related to Islam. If there were inaccuracies, these sessions gave them the chance to correct them, thereby creating clarity in their understanding of some basic principles of Islam, hence strengthening their faith in Islam. On the contrary, inaccurate knowledge would have led to confusion and a weakening of faith. The *tadabbur* sessions made them realise the values of life in Islam, for example, participant Daiki said that he learnt about:

preciousness of life (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The intellectual domain cannot be neglected in Islamic education as understanding higher order matters are naturally part of growing up in adolescence. Issues related to God, the universe, purpose of life linger in the minds of youth (Al-Talib et. al., 2013). It would not be wise for Islamic educators to limit discussions only to subjects like dress and food, and ignore more serious topics that are more

fundamental (Sahin, 2013). If such topics were avoided, over time the youth might develop more liberal views manifested in behaviours (Kalmijn, 2018) which is likely to weaken their relationship with their parents.

Throughout these *tadabbur* sessions, the Japanese youth were encouraged to ask questions. As Pranoto et. al. (2016) asserts, making real efforts to understand one another and creating harmonious relationships is a worthy aim of intercultural relations. Depending on the interactions that transpired, an intercultural exchange programme like the present study either enhances or weakens the participant's identity. It would seem that the interactions that took place during the present study enhanced the participants'identity as noted by participant Yuta, who reported that he had the opportunity to:

> listen & talk to them (host parents, presenters)
> (Online Interview, 30August, 2019)

In this way, the Cultural Exchange Programme helped create intellectual insights for the Japanese Muslim youth and assisted them to gain better understanding about specific matters in Islam that they were not clear about prior to the Cultural Exchange Programme. They learnt that Islam sets human beings apart from other creatures on earth, by virtue of the intellect that Allah has gifted upon mankind.

4.4.3 Emotional Domain

To succeed, the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme 2019 banked on the strength of the emotional connection between the Japanese youth and the host parents and families. The host parents were briefed well before the programme began, how crucial it was for them to be there for these youth, and build rapport to establish trust. The Malaysian host parents certainly did leave a strong positive

impression on the young minds of the Japanese, judging from the comments made by the Japanese youth. As noted by Kinginger et. al. (2016), meal times together with the host family are especially important, as it provides the chance for youth and hosts to share ideas on aesthetics of food and ideologies.

Based on the researcher's observation, from the photos and comments shared by the host parents in the specially created *whatsapp* group for the present study, throughout the programme, the host parents made sure that the youth they had been entrusted with felt welcome. For example, during the trip to Putrajaya, the researcher observed that the host parents ensured that the youth got their meal orders right, paid for these meals generously, and arranged the tables and chairs such that they were comfortable. Participant Kaito went so far as to comment that:

> People in Japan are cold. People in Malaysia are warm. Malaysian kindness . . . keep asking to eat (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Other participants echoed similar sentiments, such as participant Yuta, who appreciated bonding with his host parents as well as host family members through simple daily activities:

> [liked] eating together . . . good memory
> (Online Interview, 30 August,2019)

Lack of understanding on how each party (youth and hosts) should treat one another can cause unnecessary confusion from either side, and may be perceived as lack of hospitality (Kobayashi & Viswat, 2015). Such negative consequences were not present throughout the present study, based on the researcher's observations and the Japanese youth's feedback. In fact, the participants attributed their positive experience to Malaysian Muslim culture and kindness, as participant Haruto pointed out:

> Everyone was very kind (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Being a minority can affect self-esteem (Hutnik, 1991), pushing the youth to either assimilate, disssociate or acculturate (Hutnik, 2003) or refusing to inform others of their Muslim identity (Aaser, 2016). A minority youth can undergo alienation or identity crisis (Lynch, 2013), see Islam as a burden, part of an identity struggle that might even lead them to act in negative ways to free themselves of the "shackles of Islam" (Suleiman, 2017). It does not help if the youth's parents are migrants with more traditional backgrounds (Cook & Waite, 2015), leading to intergenerational clashes (Liu et. al, 2019), resulting in an emotional roller coaster (Mydin et. al., 2013). Such concerns further validate and necessitate the emotional input that must be invested into the present study.

It must be emphasized that none of the Japanese youth knew their host parents and family members prior to the Cultural Exchange Programme, yet these youth had used words that implied how the programme had impacted their emotions. Participant Tokuda stated that he:

> learnt important things close to my heart
> (Online Interview, 30August, 2019)

It is possible for participants of a youth cultural exchange programme to gain more than what they had hoped for as reported by Costas & Singco (2016). It would seem such was the case for the present study, as the Japanese youth felt respected and accepted despite their poor command of English. The majority of the Malaysian parents were hosting Japanese youth whose English was weak, but it did not stop them from emotionally bonding with these youth, and the youth appreciated this attitude, as participant Haruto noted:

> I didn't know English, but I can relax due to kindness of Malaysians (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

In any human-to-human relationship, the emotional connection is key. If the Japanese youth felt connected to their host parents and family, they would respect them and would be more likely to be inspired by the beliefs and actions of their host family members as Muslims. In other words, the Japanese youth would look up to their host parents as role models, whose words and actions are worthy to follow. This was what seemed to have taken place throughout the Cultural Exchange Programme.

In the Qur'an Allah mentions myriad kinds of emotions, thus proving how important the emotional domain is in human lives. Examples include: ". . . and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy. . ." (Al-Qur'an. Al-Hadīd. 57:27); "Verily the Companions of the Garden shall that day have joy in all that they do." (Al-Qur'an. Yā Sīn. 36:55); ". . . No fear shall be on you that Day, nor shall you grieve . . ." (Al-Qur'an. Al-Zukhruf. 43:68); ". . . He has put affection into their hearts . . ." (Al-Qur'an. Al-Anfāl. 8:63); "And if (at any time), an incitement to discord is made to you by the Evil One, seek refuge in Allah." (Al-Qur'an. Fussilat. 41:36); and "Praise be to Allah, Who has removed from us (all) sorrow . . ." (Al-Qur'an. Fātir. 35:33-35).

The *Al-Ta'āruf Concept* is about learning through the intercultural approach; a particular activity might evoke different emotions to culturally different groups of people. To make the present study successful, the researcher had to be mindful of how each of the activities in the programme would affect the emotions of both Malaysian hosts and Japanese youth. This is because, activities that are too intense or too boring or made them uncomfortable may spark negative emotions and therefore are not likely to optimise the learning experience. Thus, it was important to structure the Cultural

Exchange Programme in a way that was emotionally appealing to both the Malaysian hosts and Japanese Muslim youth, so that each of the activities planned create emotions that appeal to both groups.

Emotions make us human. If we were to neglect the emotional domain, we would have ignored the fact that the Prophet SAW applied a lot of emotions in his everyday dealings to engage with people. The Prophet knew it was never a matter of simply telling people what to do, what is right and what is wrong, telling them the rules and regulations of Islam to win them over. The Prophet was highly attuned to the various emotional states of his followers as Allah says: "It is part of the Mercy of Allah that you deal gently with them. Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away.. ." (Al-Qur'an. Al-'Imrān. 3:159). Similarly, the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept in the present study required the researcher to be in tune to the emotions of Malaysian hosts and Japanese Muslim youths.

Hence, based on the researcher's observation, for example, there were times when activities had to be adjusted in terms of timing and content so that the participants did not feel overwhelmed. In addition, to make sense of their experiences, the Japanese Muslim youth would have reflected on their feelings as they participated in the activities daily. *Da'wah* cannot be a totally rational approach devoid of the emotional domain. Byextension, the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept infused in the present study could not have been executed without encompassing the emotional domain.

4.4.4 Cultural Domain

The cultural domain covers many aspects including but not limited to dress,food and language. Through the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept in the present study, the researcher observed how participants had the opportunity to witness that differences in culture can

enrich humanity and does not have to be a divisive factor. In Malaysia, people from different ethnic backgrounds work together in harmony. Malaysian Muslims belong to different ethnic groups including Malay, Chinese, Indian and more. For the Japanese Muslim youth, this is an important discovery because in Japan, they were looked down upon since they do not look Japanese, even though they were born and raised in Japan, and speak fluent Japanese. The Malaysian host parents and families treated the Japanese Muslim youth with much respect and kindness because they were honoured guests.

Based on the researcher's observations, the host parents and Malaysian youth wore different outfits on different days which reflected Malaysia's diverse cultural backgrounds. The ladies especially were seen wearing *baju kurung* or long dress or kurta-like blouses along with colourful *tudungs*. Likewise the males on Friday wore *baju Melayu* or *jubah* or a simple modern shirt.

The concept of multiculturalism was applied by the Prophet Muhammad SAW when he migrated to Madinah, whereby he paired up the Muslims arriving from Makkah (*Muhajirin*) with the Muslims in Madinah (*Ansār*), so that the *Ansār* may assist the *Muhajirin* as best they could as brothers and sisters in Islam. Although both the *Ansār* and the *Muhajirin* were Arabs, they came from different locations and therefore, had their own cultures; they had different ways of perceiving and doing things. Respecting peoples of different cultures is a landmark of Islam. Multiculturalism is to be celebrated, not shunned. This practice by the Prophet SAW underlined the importance of working together to achieve harmony between peoples of different cultural backgrounds. Equally important, becoming Muslim does not mean that a person has to denounce his or her ethnic culture. Just as an *Ansār* is both Muslim and belonging to the Madinan culture and a *Muhajirin* is both Muslim and belonging to the Makkan culture, a person

can be both Malaysian and Muslim, or Japanese and Muslim. Thus, the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept aimed to raise the awareness of the Japanese Muslim youth that being Muslim does not reduce their inherent cultural value.

It was important for the Japanese youth to learn that being Muslim does not mean one has to denounce one's ethnic ties and cultural heritage, so long as these are not contrary to Islamic values. If a person is Malay, being Muslim does not mean he must wear Arabic clothes and eat Arabic food. On the contrary, it is perfectly alright to wear the clothes and consume the food that is common in his ethnic group, as long as they are *halal*. It shows the diversity and richness of Muslim culture. Thus, within a short visit, the Japanese youth got to savour Malaysian dishes that are popular within the diverse Muslim community. For example, participant Tatsuki enjoyed:

> living with delicious rice (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Within one week, Kawai's host parents and family taught him some basic Malay words which he presented during the Farewell Dinner. As a result, Kawai said that he:

> liked Malay culture . . . country is unique
> (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The present study is meant to broaden the worldview of the participants, so they would be less likely to be pressured into conformity (Kamada, 2009) specifically back home in Japan. Adolescence is the ideal time for educators to focus on identity building (Samian, 2008); numerous interactions with others in their groups shape the identities of youth (Mead, 1940, cited in Sugimura et. al., 2015). In certain peoples, collectivism in the form of groups and relationships are more important (Sugimura et. al., 2015), a fact that needs to be accounted for when dealing with the Japanese. Through face-to-

face interactions with Malaysians and thereby, experiencing Malaysian Muslim ways of living, the Japanese youth observed new habits, as mentioned by participant Marisi:

> learn habits of Malaysians (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

In addition, the exposure has allowed them to benefit in terms of appreciating a foreign culture as well as Islam, as participant Yuta noted:

> deepen (understanding of) Malaysian culture and Islam (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Considering the inferiority complex common among their South Asian parents (commonly the mother) married to the Japanese (Vestre, 2011), efforts must be made so that the Japanese Muslim youth do not inherit such a legacy. The negative perception that Islam is too rigid (Fathil & Fathil, 2011) and therefore impractical to adopt must be continually challenged. The participants must be encouraged to develop multicultural symbiotic ties (Sultana, 2019) with non-Muslims not at the expense of their Muslim identity. The cultural dimension must be addressed and cultural sensitivity (Abdulai, 2019) accounted for. Along these lines, the participants of the present study realised that for a country to do well, its citizens can come from different cultures, and do not have to be homogeneous like Japan. As participant Daiki commented:

> Tun Dr Mahathir a great leader for Chinese, Malay & Indians living together (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The Japanese youth learned that, just as in Japan, the culture amongst peoples in Malaysia is to work hard in order to be successful and happy, as participant Tatsuki wrote:

> Really learned a lot, impressed with Malaysia, work hard host family (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The week-long visit had piqued the Japanese youth's interest to explore beyond Japan, and to look into the possibility of furthering their studies in Malaysia, as participant Haruto stated:

> [. . . doing a personal] survey to study in Malaysia, know more about culture (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Hence, the Japanese youth learned it's alright to admire certain aspects of another country, but this is all in the spirit of getting to know one another, and to continue learning from each other. Indeed, the aim of the interactions with the host parents/family as well as other Malaysians was to provide a starting point so that the Japanese youth want to return to Malaysia, perhaps to further their studies and develop themselves further, especially as Muslims.

4.4.5 Spiritual Domain

Adolescence opens a suitable window of opportunity when responsible adults must discuss true concepts of *tawhīd* (Oneness of God), the world of the unseen (*al-ghayb)* and more abstract concepts including society development and metaphysics (Al-Talib et. al., 2013). When it comes to providing Islamic education for Muslim youth and instilling *tawhīd*, a comprehensive approach must be considered, and discussions need to go beyond issues related to common topics such as dress and food (Sahin, 2013). As well, adolescence is the time for identity search. The extent to which identities are impacted or enhanced during an intercultural exchange programme is dependent on the quality of the interactions that the participants experienced throughout such a programme (Stoeckel, 2016). However, the context of the study by Stoeckel (2016) was

on an Erasmus programme in which the participants were Europeans, while the study by Cates (2017) was conducted among participants of an Asian Youth Forum. Nonetheless, the potential impact of quality interactions still applies in the present study.

A brief homestay can be transformative and is a platform to broaden one's horizon(Cates, 2017). Just as the three eminent Japanese highlighted in this study i.e. SulaimanAkira Hamanaka, Umar Mita, and Hajj Sugimoto had experienced living with practising Muslims, for the first time in their lives the Japanese Muslim youth experienced what it was like to live in an environment where they were surrounded by people who lived by the tenets of Islam. Allah says: ". . . for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction" (Al-Qur'an. Al-Ra'd. 13:28). Seeing mosques everywhere, being reminded of prayer five times a day was something new and refreshing. Not only that, a mosque is a place to find serenity, as noted by participant Tokuda:

Mosque is big - can chill at back (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Since the Japanese youth came from different backgrounds, and from the fact that Islamic education was not easily available in Japan, it was deemed appropriate to have practical basic lessons on prayer, although this was done subtly at the masjid. At the mosque, the researcher observed that the host mother of the only female Japanese Muslim youth would deliberately take *wudhu'* in front of her and pray together with her, to encourage her to pray. One of the host fathers did a demonstration for *wudhu'* and the prayers were always done together. Consequently, the participants expressed interest to do better as a Muslim, as stated by participant Kawai:

> learnt to pray and take *wudhu'* (ablution). I knew the stuff before, but now doing it properly (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Participant Tokuda agreed, stating that:

> At USIM, I learnt how to pray and perform ablution . . . and learnt how to take *wudhu'* to do better (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The researcher observed that there were other interesting specifics that were explained to the Japanese youth, for example, why the *mimbar* in a masjid is hollow, as explained by the guide at the Islamic Arts Museum. They realised that Islamic practices that are true to Islam have a strong reason to be such, and are not the result of whimsical desires of the Muslim community. In Japan, finding a mosque within close proximity of one's dwelling is a luxury. Participant Haruto noted that in Malaysia:

> (You) hear *azan* anywhere you go. In Japan, perform *solat* only when I remember (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Research has proven that it is possible for Muslim minority youth from a cross-cultural background to be proud of being Muslim and simultaneously have a sense of belonging and connectedness to their home country (Yuen & Leung, 2019 & Shazhadi et. al., 2017) whereby Islam is a stabilising factor in their growth and development. Such Muslim minority youth do not view Islam as a threat (Morgan & Poynting, 2016) and despite contradictory circumstances, these youth are motivated to do religious acts e.g. praying. However, to reach this level, the youth must have acquired a certain amount of knowledge and understanding about Islam. For the participants in the present study, although they had learned some basic Islamic principles back home in Japan, their understanding back then was much to be desired. Thus, all of their parents were

genuinely concerned that these youth would choose not to practice Islam once they become adults due to lack of proper understanding of Islam. Participant Tatsuki said:

> Before this, I learnt Islam via internet . . . thought it was enough but here . . . understand more detail (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

The majority of these Japanese Muslim youth were a product of mixed marriages between born Muslims (in many cases, the father) and born Japanese non-Muslim (commonly the mother). Hence, through the Cultural Exchange Programme, they experienced Islam at a deeper practical level. Participant Tatsuki, who admitted to having doubts about Islam and was on the brink of leaving Islam prior to joining the Cultural Exchange Programme, discovered something unexpected from the spiritual aspect:

> I feel proud being Muslim here, I am free to integrate *MashaAllah*. I will learn history and culture of Islam more and spread to others (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

Because of the very small number of Japanese Muslims in Japan, a school in Japan might have only one Japanese Muslim student. As participant Tatsuki declared:

> We were the only Muslims at school in Japan . . . I was relieved to hear that they (the other participants) were having the same experience, the same circumstances. I'm not alone (Online Interview, 30 August, 2019)

This is a clear declaration that these Japanese Muslim youth found strength in each other's presence. Being the only Muslim in school makes it all the more difficult for these minority Muslim youth to practice Islam. As a result of the Cultural Exchange Programme, they discovered other Japanese Muslim youth who were in the

same predicament. It is hoped that they would continue to be in touch with, and support one another once they returned to Japan.

4.5 Conclusion

In line with the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept in the Cultural Exchange Programme, the Japanese Muslim youth were removed for a period of time from an environment in Japan where religiosity and spirituality was not the norm in society. They were then introduced to an environment in Malaysia where religiosity and therefore, spirituality, could be seen, heard and felt consistently by the common presence and practices of Muslims. This was deliberately done so that the Japanese Muslim youth could experience for themselves the difference between these two environments, and what it would mean to them as Muslims.

By and large, the Japanese are indifferent towards religion. Even if a Japanese believes in a particular faith, it is something that he or she would not discuss or mention in the open, as religion is considered too personal to be shared with others. For Japanese students, any kind of lesson or activity related to religion is prohibited by law from being carried out in school. The environment is such that religion is not seen, heard or felt whether one is in school or out on the street. For a Japanese child, the exposure for religious education he or she gets will be at home, if the parents are able to teach. Or, if there is a Muslim community where he or she lives, they might pool their resources together to organise classes at the local mosque or at an Islamic Centre. However, many Japanese Muslim families live nowhere near a mosque or Islamic Centre. For many Japanese Muslim youth, an environment connected to spirituality is absent. In comparison, when the Japanese Muslim youth were in Malaysia, they could see, hear and feel the presence of spirituality several times a day. They heard the *azan* each time

it was time to pray. They prayed together in congregation during the prayer break a fewtimes each day throughout the Cultural Exchange Programme.

From an environment almost devoid of remembrance of God, they were exposed to one where they were reminded of God every single day. Further, every activity they did throughout the Cultural Exchange Programme was linked back to Islam and their purpose of life as Muslims. As Allah says, ". . . without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction." (Al-Qur'an. Al-Ra'd. 13:28). In this way, the spirituality element was infused into the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept in this programme.

In this chapter, the researcher presented the results of data analysis relating to theexperiences of the Japanese Muslim youth who enrolled in the Cultural Exchange Programme. These results helped the researcher to conceptualise the experiences in relation to the seven elements of *Al-ta'āruf* : *Tahāwur* (dialogue); *Ta-'arūf* (mutually knowing, mutually interacting); *Ta-'āyush* (to coexist); *Tasāmuh* (tolerate each other's differences); *Tabādul* (exchange of ideas); *Ta-'akhī* (to associate as brother); and *Al-ta-'āyush Al-Silmīyy* (to co-exist peacefully and in harmony) and explained how each of these have contributed to heighten the Muslim identity of the Japanese Muslim youth. In other words, these seven elements of the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept were the factors that came into play to strengthen the Muslim identity of the Japanese Muslim youth.

Throughout the Cultural Exchange Programme, the Japanese Muslim youth had experienced positive human interactions especially with the host family and other Malaysians in general. They felt valued, respected and treasured as human beings. After a full eight days, the Cultural Exchange Programme finally came to a close. It took six months of detailed preparations by the researcher - convincing the official organiser, the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre (CICC) to be the official partner who would coordinate matters in Japan especially in promoting the programme to the youth and

their parents, and handling their enquiries and application process. In Malaysia, the researcher searched for and identified host parents/families, drew up the detailed itinerary, contacted organisations which were willing to support the programme and sought support from other community leaders who could sponsor activities and events in their different locations. By the grace of Allah, nothing untoward happened to any of the visiting Japanese students and they safely returned to Japan on the final day of the programme.

In the next chapter, the researcher will reflect on whether or not the findings have answered the research questions and achieved the objectives of the study. Also, the researcher will state if this study has contributed to the current studies of cultural exchange programmes and studies of the Concept of *Al-ta'āruf* . Comments and suggestions for future studies will also be presented.