

Factors Attracting Interest in Attending Religious Studies: A Case Study in Kubang Pasu, Kedah

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Citation: Mahmad, M. A., Zain, A. Md., Rahman, M. N. A., Dahlan, M. A. D. D., Mohamad, M. Z., Salamun, H., Muin, M. A. A., Amar, M. A. M., Rahman, Z. Ab. and Tajuddin, M. S. (2025). Factors Attracting Interest in Attending Religious Studies: A Case Study in Kubang Pasu, Kedah, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 3222-3226. <https://doi.org/10.1064753/jcasc.v10i2.2085>

Published: November 19, 2025

ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, mosques serve as central venues for worship and religious engagement within the Muslim community. Kedah is believed to be among the earliest states in the Malay Peninsula to embrace Islam, with historical records indicating its arrival as early as the ninth century CE, particularly with the establishment of the Perlak Islamic government in 840 CE. This study aims to identify the key factors that attract interest in attending religious studies conducted in several mosques across Kubang Pasu, Kedah. Utilizing a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews, the study reveals that the primary factors influencing attendance include the mosque's location, the reputation and charisma of the speaker, the relevance and depth of the knowledge content, the availability of adequate facilities, and effective mosque management. The findings offer a comprehensive understanding of these contributing elements and provide valuable insights for stakeholders to formulate strategic initiatives aimed at increasing participation in mosque-based religious education.

Keywords: Mosque, Religious Studies, Kubang Pasu, Qualitative Study, Interest Factors

INTRODUCTION

Kedah is believed to be among the earliest states in the Malay Peninsula to embrace Islam. Historical records indicate that the Islamization of Kedah in 531H (1136 AD) preceded that of Kelantan (1181 AD), Melaka (1262 AD), Samudera-Pasai (1267 AD), Terengganu (1303 AD), and Champa (1360 AD). Following the establishment of the Islamic government in Perlak in 840 AD, the northern regions of the Malay Peninsula gradually adopted Islam, eventually leading to the formation of Islamic states and the implementation of Sharia law (Jusoh, 2020).

Islam is believed to have entered Kedah as early as the 9th century AD, coinciding with the founding of the Islamic state of Perlak in 840 AD. However, it was not until the arrival of missionaries and traders from Arabia and Persia in the 12th century that the Islamization process became more pronounced, particularly with the conversion of Sultan Mudzaffar Shah in 1136 AD. Since then, Kedah has been recognized as an Islamic state, adopting the title *Darul Aman* (Nik Hassan, 2011).

In line with this Islamic heritage, mosques were constructed to provide a conducive space for worship and community engagement. These mosques have also played a pivotal role in offering various religious programs, including lectures and educational sessions, designed to meet the spiritual and intellectual needs of their congregants. Despite the availability of these activities, mosque administrators frequently face challenges in ensuring successful participation. One of the most pressing issues is the generally low turnout and limited engagement from the surrounding community (Nor Rosmawati, 2016).

Syamsinar (2019) suggests that while mosque congregants do show an interest in the religious programs organized, they often struggle with low self-motivation, which prevents them from actively attending. This lack of attendance contributes to the perceived stagnation of religious programs, not due to any deficiency on the part of the mosque, but rather due to the unwillingness of some congregants to make the effort to attend.

Furthermore, the issue does not solely stem from a lack of interest among congregants. Mohamad Tajuddin (2018) notes that the nature and titles of the lectures and programs offered by mosque administrators may fail to capture the community's interest. This indicates that the challenge lies not only in congregant engagement but also in the mosque's capacity to curate and deliver quality programs that resonate with the local population.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the factors that attract interest in attending religious studies organized by mosques, with a particular focus on several mosques in the district of Kubang Pasu, Kedah.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fakhrul Adabi (2017) demonstrated that religious classes held in mosques within the Hulu Langat District have significantly contributed to strengthening the faith and enhancing the quality of worship among the local Muslim community. These classes have successfully increased religious knowledge among participants, particularly in the cultivation of good moral values. Additionally, congregants reported a deeper understanding of daily responsibilities, including parenting, the importance of learning, da'wah (Islamic propagation), and the dangers of moral decline among youth. The classes also aimed to raise awareness regarding Islamic financial management, the prohibition of usury (riba), and the obligation to pay zakat on wealth and business income. The study further indicated an improvement in social ethics, including practices such as greeting fellow Muslims, visiting one another, maintaining neighborly ties, and fostering spousal intimacy.

Rosnita, Imilia, and Valentino (2011) examined the effectiveness of mosque institutions in Sarawak in disseminating religious knowledge and information. They emphasized the necessity for mosques to establish clear plans, systems, and methods for disseminating information to ensure community-wide access. In the modern era, mosques can utilize diverse channels for knowledge dissemination, thus promoting a culture of reading and continuous learning within the Muslim community.

Mohd Rushdan et al. (2016) focused on identifying the sources of mosque funding, analyzing fund distribution, and evaluating the stakeholders responsible for fund management. Their findings corroborated earlier research, highlighting that mosque funding primarily relies on public donations and contributions. These funds are utilized optimally for both operational and developmental expenses, and most mosques studied encountered minimal difficulties in securing continuous financial support from the public.

Rosmawati (2016) explored the factors influencing community preference for specific mosques. Her study emphasized three key factors: facility management, diversity of da'wah activities, and financial management. She reported a significant relationship between these aspects and the community's inclination to favor particular mosques, underscoring the importance of efficient administrative and programmatic strategies.

Muhamad Faisal and Firdaus (2018) investigated the perspectives of imams and mosque administrators concerning community attendance. Their observations revealed a low rate of participation in the five daily congregational prayers, particularly in rural areas. Contributing factors included limited mosque functions, personal issues, inadequate facilities, non-strategic locations, administrative weaknesses, financial constraints, and the personalities of imams and mosque officials.

Azlan and Rashidi (2018) studied community perceptions regarding mosque expansion programs in Pahang. The study found that religious classes, mosque management, and the credibility of invited speakers were positively received. The mosque management had effectively scheduled religious classes, disseminating information through digital platforms and physical notice boards. The study also identified a strong correlation between mosque attendance and the personality and delivery style of the speakers, suggesting that speaker charisma and content quality significantly influence program success.

Saharizah and Abdul Munir (2018) analyzed youth engagement in mosques across Selangor. Their findings indicated weak mosque management, limited expertise, and an inability to address community issues—particularly those affecting Muslim youth. They recommended that mosque administrators empower youth by including them in mosque committees and providing autonomy to organize programs aligned with their interests. Activities integrating skills development, Islamic teachings, and moral guidance based on the Qur'an and Sunnah were suggested as effective in attracting youth, thereby nurturing future Muslim leaders.

Nuryaqazah, Hanis Etasa, Nurhaziqah, and Wan Nur Suhaida (2019) conducted a study on the conservation and revitalization of old mosques and suraus in Kuala Terengganu. They emphasized the role of mosques as centers for knowledge dissemination, spiritual development, and moral enhancement. The researchers advocated for religious talks, Quranic classes, and seminars as essential tools to raise community awareness, promote unity, and foster social bonds through communal participation in mosque-based activities.

Mohd Fairuz, Azalina, and Naeem Siddiqi (2019) examined the role and involvement of students in enhancing mosque institutions. They argued that the mosque should not be viewed merely as a space for worship, but as a multifaceted institution capable of hosting religious, social, and economic programs. Their findings highlighted the need for collaboration among religious authorities, mosque committees, and the Muslim community—especially youth—to diversify mosque activities and align them with contemporary societal needs. Students, in particular, demonstrated a high capacity to innovate and lead activities that revitalized mosque functions in line with modern expectations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. The main objective of employing a qualitative approach is to gain an in-depth and detailed understanding of the phenomena being studied, particularly the factors that influence interest in attending religious studies at mosques.

Three mosques were selected as case study sites within the district of Kubang Pasu, Kedah: Al-Muttaqin Mosque, Tanjung Pauh Mosque, and Lubok Kawah Mosque. These mosques were chosen based on their active engagement in community programs and accessibility to diverse groups of congregants. Interviews were conducted with mosque committee members and selected congregants to explore their perspectives and experiences related to religious class attendance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mosque is a vital institution within the Muslim community. It serves not only as a place for worship—such as prayers, Quran recitation, and remembrance of God—but also as a center for holistic Muslim community development. It functions as a bridge between individuals and their Creator, while also fostering social cohesion, knowledge dissemination, and community well-being.

Therefore, it is essential for mosque institutions to strategically create appeal that encourages congregational involvement in various programs. Based on the findings, each mosque studied demonstrated distinct strengths in attracting interest and participation from local congregants. The analysis identified five key factors: location, speaker quality, content of religious instruction, facilities, and mosque management.

Location

The proximity of the mosque to residential areas was frequently cited as a primary factor influencing attendance. Accessibility, ease of travel, and availability of inclusive infrastructure (e.g., disabled access) enhanced the likelihood of participation.

“... One of the reasons people come is because the mosque is close to their homes, the route is easy, and there is no traffic congestion.”

“... The mosque is easily accessible, with routes suitable for the disabled, and there are no traffic issues.”

Speaker Quality

The choice of speaker significantly influenced the level of engagement and interest in religious programs. Congregants appreciated speakers who were knowledgeable, approachable, and used a local dialect. Humor, clarity, brevity, and avoidance of political content were also highlighted as desirable traits.

“... If the mosque invites a well-known speaker, many people attend. People prefer speakers who are humorous, use simple language, keep lectures short, and speak in the local dialect.”

“... Speakers should avoid political topics.”

“... Good speakers address current issues, allow time for Q&A, and are invited regularly for Friday talks.”

Content of Knowledge

The content and delivery of religious knowledge were equally crucial. Lectures based on daily worship practices, such as *fiqh*, were more appealing. Simpler, concise reference texts were preferred, as they were perceived as more practical and easier to complete.

“... Avoid books that are too complex or lengthy. Fiqh lectures are useful because they relate to everyday practice. Books that can be completed quickly also motivate learners.”

Facilities

Well-maintained and user-friendly facilities were another key factor. Facilities such as air conditioning, clear sound systems, screens for visibility, clean washrooms, spacious parking, and even food offerings after lectures played a role in enhancing comfort and encouraging attendance.

“... Facilities include clear speakers, air-conditioning, a TV screen for those far from the speaker, clean toilets, ample parking, and a pantry. After morning lectures on Fridays and Saturdays, breakfast is served.”

“... Lecture chairs, information dissemination via WhatsApp and Facebook Live, reading corners, and glasses for attendees are provided.”

“... Coffee corners and breakfast at local eateries after morning sessions are also offered.”

Mosque Management

The efficiency, transparency, and friendliness of mosque management were found to strongly influence congregants’ perceptions and participation. Positive impressions were linked to imams with good recitation, approachable committee members, proper child supervision during events, and active feedback mechanisms.

“... The imam must be respected by the congregation. His recitation should be clear, and the management should be approachable. Children should be monitored, and feedback from congregants should be welcomed. Donations should be used transparently for programs, and mosque committee members should be active participants themselves.”

“... Suggestion forms are available to gather input from the congregation.”

As a summary of factors attracting interest in attending religious studies in mosques, among the factors identified are In summary, this study identified five critical factors that contribute to attracting interest in attending religious studies at mosques in Kubang Pasu, Kedah

SUMMARY

Improvement is a necessary and strategic step in the effort to attract greater congregational interest in religious studies at mosques. This study has emphasized the importance of enhancing four key elements that were identified as constraints affecting participation: mosque management, speaker quality, available facilities, and the content of religious instruction.

The mosque, as an institution, must broaden its function beyond serving as a place of worship to becoming a central force in the social and intellectual development of the Muslim community. This entails positioning the mosque as a hub for community engagement and empowerment. To achieve this, mosque management must demonstrate a clear and sustained commitment to socializing the mosque institution—meaning, making it an inclusive and interactive space for community activities. These programs should not be confined to ritual worship spaces alone but must encompass the broader aspects of community life and development.

In light of rapid societal transformation, mosque management must adopt a proactive and adaptive approach to remain relevant amidst changing times. Mosque committees are expected to operate with high levels of professionalism, accountability, and dedication, continuously striving to improve institutional performance. Similarly, the wider Muslim community has a shared responsibility in contributing to the growth and success of the mosque institution.

The findings of this study also indicate that da‘wah (Islamic outreach) programs in mosques must go beyond the dissemination of religious knowledge. These programs should incorporate the development of personal and life skills among congregants, particularly targeting youth and teenagers. This demographic group represents the future of the Muslim ummah and, as such, requires focused attention. Da‘wah initiatives must aim to foster harmonious relationships between mosque leadership and the community, instilling a strong sense of responsibility and leadership among younger generations. In this regard, the development of Islamic human capital, grounded in religious knowledge and values, is essential in preparing them for future leadership roles.

Furthermore, mosque management must acknowledge the realities of globalization and the evolving expectations of today’s congregants. Management practices that remain stagnant or outdated will likely struggle

to engage the modern generation. The involvement and concern of stakeholders, particularly those entrusted with mosque operations, are crucial to ensure that mosques transform into dynamic centers of innovation, education, and social development across all sectors of community life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank you to the School of Languages, Civilization and Philosophy (SLCP), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), and the Research and Innovation Management Centre (RIMC) UUM, for their financial support through the University Research Grant Scheme (S/O Code: 21596).

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