Issues and Challenges of Understanding Obligatory Prayers among Primary School Students

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ABSTRACT

The understanding of obligatory prayers has become a focal point in the initiative to enhance the character development of students within schools, particularly in response to the rising social issues observed among primary school students. This concern necessitates urgent attention, as many students exhibit disinterest in Islamic Education and neglect their prayer obligations. A comprehensive analysis of over 50 scholarly studies published from 2010 to 2024 reveals a growing emphasis on the importance of understanding obligatory prayers. Despite this, significant challenges remain, including a lack of awareness regarding the significance of prayer and deficiencies in comprehending its proper execution. This article seeks to critically examine these issues and the hurdles faced in promoting a deeper understanding of obligatory prayers among students. Employing methodologies such as observation and documentation, the study highlights the pressing need for an integrated educational approach that combines both religious instruction and character education. The findings suggest that merely teaching the mechanics of prayer is insufficient; instead, a structured framework for early education is essential to foster an appreciation for prayer and its moral implications. Ultimately, the research concludes that addressing these challenges requires innovative and comprehensive strategies tailored to instill a meaningful understanding of obligatory prayers among primary school students. By doing so, educators can significantly contribute to character building and mitigate social issues prevalent in this demographic. Further research is encouraged to explore effective methods for enhancing engagement with obligatory prayers, ensuring that students not only perform them but also appreciate their spiritual significance.

Keywords: Understanding, obligatory prayers, students, character

INTRODUCTION

The decline of moral values among primary school students today is increasingly concerning. This issue is closely related to the crisis of character weakness. The issue of students' character weaknesses is strongly associated with the practice of prayer (salah). A student who diligently observes their prayer is often linked to possessing noble character. Conversely, the failure of students to fully appreciate the practice of prayer contributes to the deterioration of their character and morals. This article discusses the aspects of the performance of obligatory prayers from the perspective of the issues and challenges faced by primary school students in Malaysia.

Objective

This study emphasizes the crucial role of prayer in strengthening character, shaping morals, fostering virtuous behaviour, and developing a sense of identity among primary school students. The author aims to identify the various challenges these students encounter and highlight the urgent need to cultivate a profound appreciation for prayer within this demographic. This initiative calls for the engagement of parents, educators, the community, and relevant authorities, as fostering a prayerful environment can act as a preventive measure against the rising social issues affecting the Islamic community.

METHODOLOGY

This study applies observational methods and documentation. The observation method is a research technique that involves the systematic collection of data through direct observation of behaviors, events, or phenomena. After conducting observations at three schools where the author works, an analysis was performed to identify the level of appreciation for prayer based on their prayer practices and habits. Additionally, a survey was conducted involving 297 students from different three schools in the Hulu Terengganu district to support the author's findings. Meanwhile, the documentation method was used when refering to official documents such as program reports, press releases, and official websites, as well as academic materials including journals, articles, and theses.

Issues

Disinterest in Islamic Education Subjects

Islamic Education has been recognized as a fundamental subject in schools, reflecting the Malaysian Ministry of Education's commitment to instilling its significance from an early age. However, it is concerning that the impact of Islamic education on students' daily lives, particularly regarding worship practices like prayer, is not as profound as anticipated. Many students show a lack of interest in Islamic Education, which hampers their ability to apply the knowledge they gain in this field (Seri Kartini Juraimi & Fariza Md Sham, 2013). This disinterest adversely affects their understanding of essential prayer practices, leading to the neglect of obligatory prayers (Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al., 2017). Based on author's experience teaching primary students in various schools, some students give more attention and efforts on other subjects compared to Islamic Education subject. It is proven by the result of questionnaire provided by author related to this study. It involved 297 primary students from three different school. The data indicates that 6.06% of respondents are less interested, 0.34% are not interested, 2.02% are uncertain, and 91.26% are interested..

Therefore, the apathy towards Islamic Education among primary school students is a significant and urgent issue that demands immediate attention. As Muslims, it is essential for students to acquire and master the foundational knowledge of their faith, particularly regarding the practice of prayer, to effectively fulfill their roles as responsible representative of Allah. In Surah Al-Baqarah, Allah SWT emphasizes this duty: "Guard your prayers, especially the middle prayer, and stand before Allah in devotion" (Al-Baqarah: 238). This verse underscores the critical importance of safeguarding prayer as a pillar of faith. Engaging in prayer with sincerity necessitates a thorough understanding of its principles and proper execution. However, if students do not make an effort to deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings and fail to integrate these principles into their daily lives, their moral character may deteriorate, leaving them vulnerable to the social issues prevalent in society. Research by Hasbullah Mat Daud et al. (2020) highlights that education plays a fundamental role in cultivating noble character among students, suggesting that comprehensive learning fosters individuals with strong moral values and ethics.

According to Tengku Sarina Aini Tengku Kasim and Faridah Che Husain (2008) in their study titled "Individual Approaches in Teaching Islamic Education as a Means of Producing Civilized Human Capital," the lack of interest in Islamic Education among students is not a new concern. This issue has long been a challenge for curriculum developers at both primary and secondary levels. Despite frequent revisions to the Islamic Education curriculum, the teaching methods employed by educators also warrant scrutiny. A study by Ibrahim and Mohd Isa (2020) found that a primary reason for students' disinterest in this subject stems from their struggle to see the practical relevance of the material taught in their lives. Additionally, overly teacher-centered instructional methods that lack interactive elements can contribute to student disengagement. Findings from Amirul Ridzuan Mohd Shafie and Muhammad Zulazizi Mohd Nawi (2022) indicate that while students' interest in Islamic Education is moderately high, with an overall mean score of 3.48 and a standard deviation of 0.42, there remains a need for enhanced efforts to engage them more effectively with the subject matter.

As noted by Siti Aishah Hassan et al. (2023), teacher-led instruction focused on creative teaching methods in schools, particularly in the classroom, can develop students' potential and promote more dynamic, refreshing, and effective learning, which forms the foundation for academic and moral excellence. Research by Asrori

(2020) further asserts that students' comprehension of lessons depends on their attitudes in school. However, based on the author's observations in several schools, the attitudes displayed by students towards Islamic Education are concerning. Only a handful of them show interest and take responsibility for their understanding and mastery of the knowledge presented in this subject. This reflects a weakness in discipline stemming from their disinterest during the teaching and learning process of Islamic Education (PDP). Such a situation is particularly alarming for educators and parents, especially regarding their daily practices. This is because appreciation is a long-term learning process that necessitates persistent efforts (Sapie Sabilan, 2018).

Moreover, students educated through the Islamic Education subject are expected to possess comprehensive knowledge, good practices, and robust moral character. However, the reality is that the two modes of learning, direct and indirect, will not yield effective results if students lack curiosity and interest in the subject. This situation worsens if Islamic Education teachers do not strive to captivate students' interest in the subject through serious and varied approaches (Taat et al., 2014)

Neglect of Prayer

The neglect of prayer referred to here encompasses several behaviours, including failing to perform the five daily prayers, praying only when prompted, not completing the ablution properly, not adhering to the required number of units (rakaat) and essential components (rukun) of prayer, praying at the last moment or deliberately delaying prayer, being inconsistent in performing prayers, and approaching prayer merely as a technical obligation. Each form of neglect requires a specific educational approach to raise awareness about the importance of prayer and to help students develop discipline in its practice. The significance of performing obligatory prayers is emphasized in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah An-Nisaa, verse 103, which states: "And when you have completed the prayer, remember Allah while standing or sitting or lying on your sides. But when you become secure, establish prayer. Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times. "The obligatory prayer (solat fardu) is one of the pillars of Islam that must be performed by all sane, mature Muslims. Prayer serves as a fundamental spiritual necessity that every Muslim must uphold (Ibn Qudamah, 1968).

Establishing prayer symbolizes submission to Allah S.W.T (Al-Khatib, 1998). However, ensuring that students perform their prayers correctly five times a day is not an easy task (Pejabat Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan, 2019). Teaching children how to pray takes considerable time and must be done consistently and continuously (M. Fathi & Ros Izanuri, 2013; Johari, 2010; Hazrisum, 2013). Research on the neglect of prayer among students has garnered attention from several scholars who discuss the factors contributing to this issue and its effects on their morals and behaviour. For instance, a study by Siti Fauziah Mohd Amin, Sabariah Sharif, and Mad Nor Madjapuni (2019) highlights that factors such as peer influence, lack of religious awareness, and the role of mass media contribute to the neglect of prayer, ultimately increasing social issues among students. This finding is supported by research from Sharifah Nur (2012) and Shukri Ahmad et al. (2014), which indicates that the appreciation for prayer remains low and that performing prayer is not considered important or prioritized among teenagers. Additionally, there are few students willing to perform prayers in congregation (Utusan Malaysia, 2022).

According to Zakaria (2018), the failure to instill religious awareness from a young age is one of the primary reasons some students frequently neglect their prayer obligations, including Friday prayers. The inadequacy in performing prayers stems from a lack of knowledge and understanding of the practice, insufficient awareness and motivation regarding prayer, and a diminished sense of responsibility to fulfill this obligation (Hasna et al., 2015). Furthermore, when these adolescents neglect their prayers, they become vulnerable to moral decline, which may lead to involvement in social issues. Therefore, serious attention must be given to the issue of prayer neglect starting from primary school, as the moral decline among teenagers often originates from the habitual neglect of obligatory prayers without feelings of guilt (Siti Fauziah Mohd Amin et al., 2019).

Focus on the Technical Aspects of Prayer

Issues related to character development often stem from a lack of Islamic spiritual values within individuals (Abu Bakar & Ahmad, 2019). This is because they engage in spiritual practices without truly understanding or

appreciating them, which can lead them to social problems (Nurjihah Ismail, Syed Hadzrullathfi Syed Omar, 2017). According to Asmawati Suhid (2006), this phenomenon is linked to the elements of secularism that have infiltrated Muslim society. Secularism is a process that separates religion from human life, leading individuals to believe they do not need to rely on their Creator (Lailatus Sa'adah, 2015). When religion begins to be separated from daily life, the balance between the spiritual and the physical becomes disrupted. This imbalance can significantly affect students' thoughts and behaviors, ultimately impacting their character and morals.

Consequently, the practice of prayer, as a primary spiritual act, is often performed with a focus solely on its technical aspects, neglecting the spiritual significance embedded within it.Moreover, the education system in schools faces challenges in effectively instilling an appreciation for prayer. Although there are efforts to incorporate prayer education through Islamic Education subjects, there tends to be a greater emphasis on theoretical aspects rather than practical application (Ahmad & Hassan, 2020). Schools that lack the infrastructure to provide comfortable prayer spaces or do not allocate sufficient time for students to perform their prayers also contribute to the diminished appreciation for prayer (Ismail N. A. & Rahman, S. A., 2021).

Table 1 Analysis of the Level of Prayer Understanding

	Level of Prayer Understanding	PERCENT %					MEAN SCORE
		SD	D	U	A	SA	
B8	I pray at the beginning of the prayer time.	0	5.7	33.3	44.1	16.8	3.7205
B10	I perform my prayers with the correct actions.	1.0	1.0	10.8	52.9	34.3	4.1852
B11	I perform my prayers with the correct recitation.	1.0	1.0	13.1	54.5	69.7	4.12
B12	I understand the meanings of the recitations in my prayers.	0	8.8	49.8	33.7	7.7	3.40
B13	I am aware that Allah is watching my movements during my prayer.	0.3	0	2.4	25.9	71.4	4.68
B14	I perform my prayers to be loved by Allah.	0.7	0	1.3	24.6	73.4	4.70

Scale: SD = Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, U= Unsure, A= Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

This table shows the analysis of the prayer understanding levels among secondary school students in three selected schools by author. It shows varied results. According to the data, the percentage of respondents who strongly agree with the understanding of the meanings of prayer recitations is the lowest at 7.7%, with a mean score of 3.40. In contrast, the highest percentage and mean score are found in item B14, which states, "I perform prayers to be loved by Allah," at 73.4% and a mean of 4.70. Item B13 also records a high mean score, being the second highest in terms of prayer comprehension. However, the lowest mean score of 3.40 comes from item B12, which pertains to understanding the meanings of the prayer recitations. Only 7.7% of respondents strongly agree with this item, indicating that many students recite prayers during each movement without grasping their meanings, thus lacking true engagement with the prayers. This suggests a significant need for guidance from responsible parties, such as parents and teachers, to enhance their understanding and appreciation of prayer.

Performing Prayer Merely as a Ritual

The issue of students performing prayer merely as a ritual is a significant concern, particularly given that prayer is one of the most fundamental acts of worship in a Muslim's life. Prayer (*salah*) is one of the five pillars of Islam and is obligatory for all accountable Muslims. However, many school students tend to

approach prayer as a routine activity, lacking an understanding of its deeper meaning and significance (Zakaria & Nor, 2019). This phenomenon arises from several underlying factors that deserve thorough exploration.One primary factor contributing to this issue is the absence of genuine religious appreciation among individuals. Many students view prayer solely as a duty to fulfill, without comprehending its importance and significance (Rahman, 2020). This lack of understanding can often be traced back to insufficient instillation of religious values during their formative years. Additionally, religious education in schools tends to emphasize memorization and theoretical knowledge over the practical appreciation of worship practices (Mohd Nor, 2018). As noted by Mohd Nor, the curriculum often focuses on teaching facts and the pillars of religion while neglecting the spiritual depth and appreciation required for meaningful worship. Consequently, students may prioritize memorization over understanding and internalizing the values associated with prayer. Research by Azmil (2017) indicates that while many students perform their prayers regularly, they often fail to fully appreciate the act due to inadequate emphasis on its meaning and philosophy.

Furthermore, students frequently feel pressured to pray due to expectations from parents or teachers (Shafie and Ibrahim, 2020). This external pressure can lead them to perform prayers insincerely, merely to avoid reprimand or punishment. Such situations result in prayer being treated as a ritual rather than a heartfelt act of devotion that fosters closeness to Allah. Abu Bakar and Zulkifli (2019) highlight that this pressure can diminish students' interest in prayer, with some performing it solely to meet external expectations. The influence of technology and modern lifestyles also plays a role in this issue (Abdullah and Hassan, 2019). Some students are more inclined to engage in entertainment activities rather than dedicate time for prayer. Research by Salleh et al. (2020) shows that students who are heavily exposed to social media and online gaming often postpone or hastily perform their prayers without understanding the true purpose behind them.

Moreover, today's primary school students often lack positive role models in their daily lives (Zainuddin and Yusof, 2020). The absence of positive examples among parents and teachers significantly impacts students' ability to discern right from wrong. Busy parents and teachers who provide little attention or fail to embody virtuous values contribute to students losing their sense of direction in developing their identities. At this developmental stage, children are highly reliant on observing and imitating adult behavior, especially that of parents and teachers. Ahmad's research (2019) indicates that children form their behaviors based on their surroundings; without good role models, their moral development can be adversely affected. Therefore, the role of parents and teachers as exemplars in performing prayer is crucial. If they do not demonstrate proper practices themselves, students will be less motivated to perform their prayers correctly. A study by Rahman (2018) found that students with parents and teachers who engage in prayer with full appreciation are more likely to perform their prayers better and view them as meaningful acts rather than mere rituals.

In summary, addressing the issue of prayer being treated as a ritual requires a multifaceted approach that includes enhancing religious education, providing positive role models, and fostering an environment where prayer is appreciated for its spiritual significance rather than merely performed out of obligation.

Challenges

Lack of Awareness to Improve the Quality of Prayers

The failure to understand the wisdom behind the obligation of prayer leads to a mindset where individuals feel satisfied with merely performing prayers as a routine. Research indicates that a weak understanding of the philosophy of prayer results in the practice becoming a soulless ritual (Abdullah et al., 2022). Consequently, students are often unaware that the quality of their prayers needs to be improved over time to achieve a state of concentration (*khusyu'*) during prayer. Without this state, prayer fails to serve as a deterrent against immoral actions. A deep understanding of the essential components and valid conditions of prayer is crucial for enhancing the quality of this worship. Findings by Mohd Asril Hafiz Che Hashim (2023) highlight the need to strengthen community education and awareness regarding the importance of quality prayer. Many students perform prayers merely as part of their daily routine, often compelled by parents or teachers, without grasping the spiritual significance and wisdom behind this act (Nur Faridah, 2016). Studies show that this occurs because the instruction on prayer received by students often focuses more on the physical or practical aspects,

such as movements and recitations, rather than emphasizing the profound meanings and spiritual purposes of this worship.

According to research by Hasna Bidin (2016), one major reason students pray mechanically is due to a lack of awareness from home and society about the holistic importance of prayer, which encompasses spiritual appreciation. This statement is supported by Mohamad Saiful's study (2018), which asserts that achieving truly meaningful and quality prayer requires prioritizing elements such as concentration and a deep understanding of prayer. This includes educating students on how prayer can prevent them from engaging in wrongful acts and promote better moral development.

Insufficient Guidance from Home

The issue of students not appreciating prayer can be linked to inadequate guidance provided by parents. Studies indicate that early guidance on prayer from parents plays a vital role in shaping awareness and appreciation for prayer among students (Zainudin & Abdullah, 2019). Key factors include a lack of exposure, positive role models, and parental monitoring regarding the obligation of prayer. Family upbringing is crucial in determining the level of appreciation for prayer among students. In families that do not prioritize religious practices or fail to provide good examples, children may struggle to develop a sense of responsibility toward prayer. This is often seen in families lacking a strong religious support structure or where parents themselves do not practice prayer regularly.

The absence of continuous guidance at home can lead students to fail to recognize prayer as an important obligation in their daily lives. Ishak and Daud (2020), in their study titled "The Influence of Parental Prayer Education on Student Character Formation," found a positive correlation between consistent parental education on prayer and the moral development and understanding of prayer among primary school students.

Peer Influence

Students must be discerning in their choice of friends, as the character of their peers can reflect on themselves (Anuar, 2012). This is echoed in Allah's command in Surah Al-Kahfi (18:28), which advises believers to associate closely with those who worship their Lord during the morning and evening, seeking only His pleasure. The verse warns against turning away from such individuals for worldly pleasures and not following those whose hearts are heedless of divine teachings. This guidance emphasizes the importance of surrounding oneself with those who engage in worship and strive for goodness. Another challenge affecting students' engagement in prayer is peer influence (Shukri Ahmad et al., 2014). According to Nur Faridah Abdullah @ Zakaria (2016), students often emulate peers who consistently perform their prayers. From the findings of Nur Faridah (2016) and Shukri Ahmad et al. (2014), it can be concluded that peer pressure can either encourage or discourage students from fulfilling their prayer obligations. Students with low self-esteem and weak moral character are particularly susceptible to negative influences if they choose the wrong friends. To ensure that children select good companions, parents and educators play a critical role in guiding them (Abdullah Nasih Ulwan, 1988). When peers exhibit a casual attitude towards prayer, students are likely to adopt similar behaviors. This social pressure can hinder students from consistently performing their prayers, especially if they feel embarrassed or reluctant to stand out from their peers.

Technology Abuse

The challenges associated with modern technology and contemporary lifestyles cannot be overlooked. Internet addiction leads to behavioral changes, social isolation, and decreased motivation for learning. A study by Mohd Rusdin and Ali (2019) found that excessive use of technology can result in negative behavioral changes among students, such as increased aggression and reduced interaction with peers. Consequently, excessive use of gadgets and social media diverts students' attention from their religious duties and responsibilities towards entertainment and distracting online activities.

Moreover, technology abuse contributes to exposure to inappropriate content for primary school students. Research by Livingstone et al. (2017) indicates that younger students are more vulnerable to online content

that is unsuitable because they lack the maturity to differentiate between right and wrong. Without parental or adult supervision, students may encounter materials containing violence, pornography, or deviations from faith. Early exposure to such inappropriate content can disrupt their mental and emotional development, leading them to neglect their prayer practices. Additionally, one form of technology abuse among primary school students is video game addiction. Children often spend excessive amounts of time playing online games, neglecting their responsibilities towards studies and social activities.

According to research by Kuss et al. (2013), interactive and competitive online games have the potential to cause addiction, making it difficult for children to balance gaming time with other daily activities.

CONCLUSION

This article summarizes that the cultivation of appreciation for obligatory prayer among primary school students in Malaysia requires special attention. This is because neglect or inadequacy in appreciating obligatory prayer not only leads to moral degradation but also contributes to increasingly concerning social issues among students. This study finds that issues such as a lack of interest in Islamic Education, inadequacies in understanding the fullness of prayer, and insufficient awareness regarding the significance of prayer constitute the primary challenges in this endeavor. Therefore, a more structured and integrative prayer education is essential to strengthen students' moral character. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of the school curriculum in influencing students' character. A reassessment of the lower curriculum for Islamic Education subjects, particularly concerning topics related to obligatory prayer, is necessary to incorporate elements of understanding the real philosophy of performing prayers.

Solution

Continuous early education from parents and the community is also required to educate children about the significance of prayer from a young age. The role of parents in this effort is paramount, as children are a trust from Allah, for which they will be held accountable in the hereafter. Therefore, parents and teachers must first pay attention to the quality of their own prayers, continuously enhancing their knowledge and understanding over time. This will have a positive impact on the process of embedding elements of appreciation in the prayers of children at home or students at school.

Consequently, follow-up actions to this study are both necessary and warranted. Programs such as lectures, camps, and intensive workshops can be promptly organized by schools, communities, society, and the government to enhance students' and the community's understanding of the significance and methods of appreciating prayer in daily life. Research related to the appreciation of prayer needs to innovate and expand by focusing on other unaddressed aspects, such as causes and effects. This is crucial for fostering awareness among the community regarding the importance of performing and appreciating prayer in life.

Among the solutions that can be implemented by teachers at school is to optimize integrated teaching and learning techniques, which encompass cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Teachers should not merely teach the theory of prayer implementation but also instill its values by explaining the meaning of each recitation, elucidating the wisdom behind each action, They can integrate technology by utilizing digital tools. This can make learning more interactive and accessible. For example, teachers can use educational apps or online platforms that provide interactive lessons on prayer. Videos, animations, and virtual reality experiences can help illustrate the significance of prayer in a relatable way.

Besides, gamified learning is a very attractive way to motivate students and make learning enjoyable. By creating quizzes, challenges, or reward systems related to prayer, teachers can encourage participation and retention of information. For instance, a points-based system for completing tasks or participating in discussions can foster a fun and competitive learning environment.

Another effective strategy for teachers in guiding students towards understanding obligatory prayers is. interactive workshops. Organizing hands-on workshops allows students to practice what they learn in a supportive setting. These workshops could include role-playing scenarios, group discussions, or creative

activities like art projects that relate to prayer. This experiential approach helps reinforce concepts and fosters a sense of community among students. By integrating these innovative strategies, teachers can create a dynamic learning environment that not only teaches the fundamentals of prayer but also engages students in meaningful ways.

In conclusion, a comprehensive and consistent education is essential to ensure that students can deepen their understanding towards obligatory prayers. This endeavor requires collaboration among parents, educators, the community, and authorities to cultivate a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also possesses robust moral character resulting from the understanding of prayer.

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