

## The Development Of A Mosque-Based Islamic Lifelong Learning For Muslimahs In Brunei Darussalam.

Nurul Atiqah binti Haji Abd Latif  
Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University,  
Brunei Darussalam  
[19MR114@siswa.unissa.edu.bn](mailto:19MR114@siswa.unissa.edu.bn)

Lilly Suzanna Shamsu  
Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University,  
Brunei Darussalam  
[lilly.shamsu@unissa.edu.bn](mailto:lilly.shamsu@unissa.edu.bn)

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### KEYWORDS

mosque; lifelong learning;  
Islamic studies; Muslimah;  
Brunei Darussalam.

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine the development of Islamic Lifelong Learning for Muslimahs that has been conducted in mosques across Brunei Darussalam. It will explore briefly on the background of the establishment of mosques in Brunei Darussalam and other Islamic education for women as well as the administration and management of Muslimahs religious classes. The data used in this study is gathered through interviews with officers from the relevant authorities and documents provided by them. Findings have shown that there is significant progress on Islamic Lifelong Learning held in mosques since the 1980s. This includes progress in the learning space, administration, and management of classes. Moreover, the Brunei Government has made mosques as a designated centre to conduct religious classes for women as part of their programmes for lifelong learning.

### Introduction

Lifelong learning is a continuous learning process in which adults obtain and seek information, skills, and knowledge. It covers formal, non-formal, and informal learning systems.<sup>1</sup> It is designated particularly for mature learners who have not graduated from formal religious education and have no basic Islamic knowledge, or who wish to gain more knowledge regarding Islam. This is because they will abide and understand the Islamic ruling or commandments of Islam in order to live a pleasant life on earth and in the hereafter (Ismail et al., 2015). In Islamic Lifelong Learning, al-Quran is the main reference of derivation taught. Therefore, al-Quran classes are the principal classes in all Islamic Lifelong Learning sessions, whereas other lessons comprise 'ilmu tawhīd, 'ilmu fiqh and 'ilmu taṣawwuf. These three lessons contain general principles and fundamental rules in Islamic teaching. Learning 'ilmu tawhīd is to know and believe in the existence of Allah, while 'ilmu fiqh is to perform the pillars of

Islam. Learning about Allah's existence, obeying His commands and avoiding His restriction will not be intimately accomplished until they are accompanied<sup>1</sup> by a pure heart with the intention of Allah, which can be discovered in 'ilmu taṣawwuf (Al-Sufri, 2017). These are predominantly an introduction to understanding and appreciating the beauty of Islam and to urge learners to gain more knowledge about the religion.

Islamic Lifelong Learning in this paper is based on three main concepts. Firstly, the learning system can be non-formal and informal. Secondly, Islamic modules consist

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<sup>1</sup> Formal learning system is a structured learning officially by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affair, whereas learners will be awarded with certification upon completion and recognised by educational institutions and employers. However, with non-formal learning, the certification may not be recognised rather it is considered as an additional expertise. Meanwhile, informal learning does not result in certification nor formal qualification, but it can be obtained through experiences related to profession, family and leisure time.

of al-Quran recitations, 'ilmu tawhīd, 'ilmu fiqh and 'ilmu taṣawwuf. And lastly, Islamic Lifelong Learning comprise mature learners. This study claims that Islamic Lifelong Learning is a continuous knowledge for mature learners in learning al-Quran recitations, 'ilmu tawhīd, 'ilmu fiqh and 'ilmu taṣawwuf that occur through classes informally or non-formally to improve a person's well-being with blessings from Allah (The Most Glorious and The Most High) on earth and the hereafter (Haji Abd Latif & Shamsu, 2021).

This study examines the development of Muslimah classes in mosques across the country, which includes the development of local infrastructure used for the classes as well as improvements of the administrative and management systems. Moreover, other educational based locations such as *balai* and private homes will also be examined, as these places have played a major role in disseminating Islamic teachings, especially during the early emergence of Islam in Brunei Darussalam (Mail et al., 2020).

### Research Methodology

Data collection for this study was made using the qualitative method, which involved a series of interviews and document analyses. Primary and secondary data were gathered from books, journals, and official websites that are available in the library and from authorised online database. Meanwhile, data regarding classes for Muslimahs were collected from the Muslimah Affairs Division and the Mosque Affairs Department at the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA).

### Results and Discussion

#### Definition of Mosque in Brunei Darussalam

According to the Religious Council and Kadis Court *Chapter 77*, a mosque is "a building erected or used for the purpose of holding prayers, services and other ceremonies connected with the Islamic religion, and includes a *surau*" (Attorney General's Chamber, 1984, p 14). Haqqi (2004) defines the mosque as a structure established or utilised for the purpose of prayers, worship or other Islamic ceremonies. This also includes *surau* and *balai-balai ibadat*. Aside from mosques, this paper also clarifies that certain areas are considered as a place for worshipping Allah and where Islamic religious activities are held concurrently, such as praying, al-Quran recitation, *tawshīh*, khatam al-Quran Ceremony and *tadarus* al-Quran. Mosques, *balai*, and private homes have played significant roles in the transmission and dissemination of Islamic teachings. *Balai* and *balai ibadat* are two different terms; the former was used in the early days, while the latter is used presently and holds a similar meaning as a *surau*. *Balai* was a place used to study Islamic teachings, mass prayers and any Islamic activities, such as al-Quran recitation and are owned by religious officials, imams, *bilal* and *Pengiran* (Mail et al., 2020). Mosques that are recognised by the Brunei Government will be explained later in this paper.

Mosque in Brunei Darussalam are divided into three categories. Firstly, the national mosques which

are the Masjid Omar Ali Saifuddin and Masjid Jame' 'Asr Hassanal Bolkiah. Secondly, the main mosques or *mukim* mosques, such as Masjid Setia Ali, Pekan Muara; Masjid Mohammad Jamalul Alam, Belait; Masjid Utama Mohammad Salleh, Temburong; and Masjid Hassanal Bolkiah, Tutong. The last category are village mosques, such as Masjid Mohammad Bolkiah, Kampung Serusop; and Masjid Sultan Sharif Ali, Kampung Sengkurong (Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama, 2012). The main mosque is situated in each district and town and can accommodate more than 2000 people. Meanwhile, a village mosque is situated in village and has the capacity of 1000 congregates (Syaraiah Affairs Department, 1991).

### The Development of Islamic Lifelong Learning

This section will discuss further on the progress and the development of Islamic Lifelong Learning in administration and management, as well as the facilities provided for students. Moreover, it will discuss on mosques and also on *balai* and private homes. This is because these places have traditionally acted as a medium for Islamic teachings. However, the term *balai* was established only in the early days and has now become extinct since the formation of formal religious education.

#### Infrastructural Development on Mosques and *Balai*

Infrastructure in this context refers to facilities provided by any hosts to perform classes or lessons for Muslimahs. Proper and adequate infrastructural facilities will greatly improve learning outcomes. In the 15th century, the construction of mosques was done by villagers with materials that were available at the time. Since then, manufacturing has progressively changed from wood to brick.

According to Sweney (1968), the first mosque was built by Sultan Sharif Ali (1425-1432), "*Paduka Seri Sultan Berkat dan ialah mengeraskan Shariat Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wassalam dan berbuat masjid dan segala rakyat Cina berbuat Kota Batu*" (Sweeney, 1968, p 11). "Paduka Seri Sultan Berkat" was the name given to Sultan Sharif Ali (1425-1432) at the time, and Kota Batu was the Brunei town centre located in Kampong Ayer.

During De Sande's attack on Brunei in 1578, where there was a beautiful and large mosque built in the early history, Nicholl said, "That city contained a very sumptuous mosque, a very large and interesting building, quite covered with half relief and gilded" (Nicholl, 1975, p 54). Pengiran Badarudin (2004) believed the aforementioned mosque that was built by Sultan Saiful Rijal (1533-1581) as the statement was written during the year of his rule. Moreover, Pengiran Badarudin further described that the mosque was built from woods with high hip-tiered roofing that are either pyramidal or shaped like an elongated pyramid, a building design which was influenced by Malay architecture. The pillars were half the height of the wall, which allows fresh air to move into the interior room and out the side walls while still providing enough light. The mosque had a *bulian* wood tower pillar which was

black, hard, and sturdy. There was also a *bedok*, a drum that was kept on top of the tower to alert people of prayer times or vital announcements. The walls were crafted with verses from al-Quran and Islamic carvings. The mosque had an open prayer space inside as well as an outdoor space called *pantaran* (Pengiran Badarudin, 2004). However, in 1578, this mosque was destroyed by the Spaniards (Nicholl, 1975). Mosque and *balai* had been built in Berakas, Subok and Melabau since the 18th century. However, the architecture of this era continued to use long-lasting timber materials, such as a roof made of *nibong* leaves and shaped like a *tungkup* (Pengiran Badarudin, 2004).

The construction of mosques in Kampong Ayer continued. Pengiran Badarudin (2004) described in detail that during Sultan Muhammad Jamalul Alam's reign (1906-1924), the first mosque built on land was called Masjid Marbut (Pak) Tunggal which stood on the current Masjid Omar Ali Saifuddin site. Half of the building was made from wood, while the other half was made from bricks. Moreover, during the reign of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (1924-1950), Masjid Kajang was built on the site of the *Bangunan Bandaran* (now the TAIB Building). The mosque was shaped oblong and made almost entirely of wood and *nibong* leaves, as if it was a factory. This mosque was able to accommodate up to 500 people.

The construction of mosques outside of Bandar Brunei began in the 1930s, such as the mosques in Jalan Gadong (near Gadong Bridge) and in Kampung Lambak, Jalan Berakas, but both were destroyed during World War II (Baki, 1993). On the other hand, small mosques were built in villages in the early 20th century from 1950 to 1960s, as private endowments of the people constructed by the villagers themselves and later supported by the government (Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama, 2012).

In 1914, when formal school education was first established, mosques were used as a school that provided classrooms for students. As the enrolment of students rapidly developed, the government then built schools to accommodate these students, and mosques were no longer used as a formal school (Awang Othman, 2003).

Before World War II, a mosque was built in Kampung Sultan Lama but was destroyed by the Japanese occupation in from 1941 to 1945 (Angas et al., 1992). Nonetheless, the mosque's construction was not halted but continued to expand over the years. Thus, the Brunei Government has allocated funds for the construction of mosques even until now, where it has been included in the *Rancangan Kemajuan Negara* (National Development Plan) (Mail & Suwirta, 2018; Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama, 2012; Pengiran Badarudin, 2004; Baki 1993). A mosque is not just a place for worship, but also a place for Islamic propagation in teaching and learning, and for Islamic activities such as *dikir*, *tawshih*, reciting al-Quran and Islamic lecture. Overall, a mosque is a place where one can do any beneficial activities that are related to Islam.

The *balai* architectural structure was identical to the construction of the mosque. The design was also influenced by traditional Malay architecture. The *balai* were often built and placed in front of nobles' homes. It was a venue for entertaining visitors as well as for religious activities and customs. Pengiran Badarudin (2004) claimed that the construction of *balai* was distinct from the *indung rumah* (main house), but that there was a parallel. According to Serudin (1998), Kampung Burung Pingai was the best location for a *Balai* Education System centre. This was because most of the area was home to numerous scholars of Brunei Darussalam.

In the early 19th century, teaching was conducted by sitting in a circle, where the teacher would sit at the edge and the students sat around the teacher like a crescent moon shape (Abd Rahman, 2001). This method is called the *halāqah* teaching system, and it has been practiced since the reign of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), where he prepared and dedicated one corner known as *Şuffah*. Furthermore, this *halāqah* teaching system was used during the early propagation of Islam in Brunei.

As the construction of formal schools started in 1914, and due to the influence of the British, students would sit on chairs and use tables in the classrooms. The mosque, on the other hand, did not adopt this method and still followed the traditional *halāqah* teaching system. However, since the mosque's construction guidelines have introduced a multipurpose room as part of the construction, this room has since been used for meeting, seminars, classes, and other activities related to Islamic culture (Syariah Affairs Department, 1991). As a result, some mosques have Muslimah classes placed in the multipurpose room, where menstruating women are allowed to join the class. In this multipurpose room, the students would either sit on the floor or use chairs and tables in a parallel line or encircle the teacher.

#### Administrative and Management Development

Eric (2008) defined administration as a process whereby school administrators organise and coordinate educational resources to achieve the system's goals, while management is a process whereby authorised individuals create, maintain and operate an organisation in the selection and accomplishment of its objectives. Both terms are used since every educational institution will serve as both management and administration. For example, the school will be referred to as the educational administration's machinery because it carries out the Department of Education's order; however, it will be referred to as management if it is responsible for the actions of planning, organising, directing and controlling of school activities (Idris, 2016).

Islamic education is the first learning system taught as the propagation of Islam occurred in Brunei Darussalam. Moreover, the Muslim community were comfortable in learning Islam traditionally in mosques,

*balai*, and private homes. They enrolled in classes voluntarily and this has continued until today.

#### i. Balai Education System

The *Balai* Education System has been practised long before the establishment of the first mosque by Sultan Sharif Ali (1426-1433). It was run by private individuals, whereby every teacher or scholar who established the *balai* will be under their administration. For example, Pehin Datu Imam Awang Haji Abdul Mokti bin Haji Nasar had a *balai* in Kampung Burung Pingai Ayer, and Begawan Pehin Siraja Khatib Dato Seri Setia Haji Awang Mohd. Yusof bin Pehin Orang Kaya Perdana Wangsa Haji Awang Mohammad had one in Kampung Tamoi (Baki, 1993).

Sweeney (1968) mentioned this situation during the early days:

*Adap kepada penjuru kiblat, segala Datu' Imam khatib mengepalakan serta mudim dan segala anak raja-raja muda-muda mana yang anak muridnya...*

*...dan yang mengerjakan balai itu, imam dan siraja khatib dan udana khatib dan khatib dan mudim itulah mengerjakan balai dengan segala muridnya. (Sweeney, 1968, p 29)*

According to Abd. Rahman (2007), the word *murid* (student) denotes the existence of a *guru* (teacher). The presence of a teacher and student interacting in a place such as a *balai* or a mosque indicates that religious study activities were already underway at the time. Therefore, the *Balai* Education System has been applied since or before the 17th century. The person in charge of the *balai* was the *imam*, *siraja khatib* and *udana khatib*; these are titles given by His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam to those who are assigned to be responsible for Islamic matters in Brunei Darussalam.

Initially, Islamic teaching was centred in the private residencies of scholars. As the number of individuals who joined Islamic teaching substantially increased, learning was then held in *balai* or mosques (Mail & Suwirta, 2018). For example, the home of Dato Haji Ahmad bin Haji Abdul Latif<sup>2</sup> in Kampung Burung Pingai Ayer was where Islamic knowledge such as prayers, al-Quran recitation and tawhīd were taught. The majority of his students were from this area, such as Kampung Buang Tekuruk and Kampung Lorong Dalam (Angas et al., 1992). When the homes of scholars were no longer convenient for teaching due to overcrowding, steps were taken to build a special place known as *balai*. *Balai* was often built close or linked to their homes (Mail & Suwirta, 2018).

Despite the increase in the number of students and the construction of *balai*, women were still not allowed to join the classes; the classes conducted by scholars were open only to male students. This was probably due to restriction from parents, who considered their daughters as precious possessions and who should not to be exposed to the outside world. Parents were concerned that allowing their daughters to leave the

house and interact with male students would result in undesirable things. Fortunately, there were female teachers who specifically taught female students the al-Quran recitation in Kampong Ayer, but it was only on a home learning basis. For example, Pengiran Rokam taught al-Quran recitation to female students from home-to-home, while Dayang Hamidah did the same for female students but she only focused on the Kampung Burong Pingai and Kampung Lorong Dalam areas. Meanwhile, Dayang Fatimah focused her teaching in the Kampung Saba area only. Both teaching and learning were conducted either at the teacher's home or the student's home (Mail & Suwirta, 2018). It is probable that the wives of scholars had taught Islamic teaching to female students and it occurred privately. Moreover, their names were not stated in any documents. Since the majority of classes were open only to male students, they were the ones who delivered, shared and taught the knowledge that they received to their families.

The age of enrolment was open to all ages. It was assumed that in the early days, home-to-home learning only applied to children aged seven years and above (Mail & Suwirta, 2018), while female students aged below seven were only taught by their family at home.

The role of *Balai* Education System as part of Islamic teaching waned over time, and it eventually stopped for the next generation, particularly among *balai* owners whose heirs passed away. The establishment of formal religious schools in 1956 could be credited with to the waning of the *Balai* Education System. In the 1960s, the *Balai* Education System was said to have become extinct (Mail & Suwirta, 2018). Moreover, the establishment of adult religious classes in 1963 was also another reason for the closure of the *Balai* Education System, as it was more organised and structured and conducted by the Brunei Government (Mail et al., 2020). Furthermore, the term *balai ibadat* is still in use as it refers to the location where prayers are held, as well as other Islamic activities. On the other hand, Islamic teaching through the home-to-home basis has continued, either at the student's or the teacher's home.

#### ii. Islamic Teaching in Mosques

Abd. Rahman (2007) cited from Sweeney (1968) that Sultan Sharif Ali's aim in propagating Islam in Brunei was to improve Muslims' faith in adhering to the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of Iman. Thus, the main purpose of early Islamic propagation in Brunei Darussalam was to introduce, develop, preserve, and improve the local people's beliefs in Islam.

The strategy was visible in the early history of Islamic propagation in Brunei Darussalam. It began through economic activity developed indirectly by traders from the Arab regions, where Islam originated. Marriage was one of the ways Islam was spread. For instance, Sultan Sharif Ali married the daughter of Sultan Ahmad (Angas et al., 1992), which resulted in Brunei's population being easily accepting and attracted towards Islamic teachings. Thus, building mosques and *balai*, as well as holding Islamic teaching activities, became relatively genuine and simple. Furthermore, the

appointment of Sultan Sharif Ali as the third sultan strengthened Islam's position in Brunei Darussalam; he constructed a mosque as a centre for Islamic teaching for the Muslim community.<sup>2</sup>

The first mosque was established by Sultan Sharif Ali himself, as well as the centre of Brunei's administration, and he himself became the *imam* and *khatib* of the mosque (Angas et al., 1992). Following the construction of the first mosque, the growth of mosques has since expanded, and has been administered and managed by the Brunei government itself, either by the sultan or by an officer appointed by the sultan such as a *mudim* or a *kadi*.

Apart from Sultan Sharif Ali, other Islamic preachers also helped to propagate Islam in Brunei, such as Syarif Mu' Faqih, Sheikh Adam and Syarif Hud (Angas et al., 1992). These Islamic preachers play a significant role as teachers who impart Islamic education to locals. The students were converts who were in the process of acknowledging and deepening their faith in Islam. Furthermore, it was also possible that there were Muslim students who had been converted – when Islam first arrived in Brunei Darussalam during the reign of the first sultan in the mid 13th century or before, and they had joined the teachings conducted by these Islamic preachers.

Nevertheless, the number of the students was not stated, including the total number of male and female attendees. Previous books only explained the history of Islamic propagation in Brunei Darussalam briefly, and statistics were not included. This might be due to the locals' low literacy in writing and information was mostly conveyed orally.

This scenario is similar to Sultan Saiful Rijal's reign (1533-1581) whereby Nicholl (1975) mentioned Islamic teaching was taught by people who previously learned from Arab missionaries. This means that Arab missionaries who came to Brunei propagated Islamic teaching and then their students continued their teaching. Thus, the people responsible for Islamic teaching were students of Arab missionaries, who were called as *catip* or *khati* (khatib).

Nicholl elaborated:

Being asked where he had learned the worship of Mahoma (Muhammad), and who declared it to him, he said that the ancestors of the Borneans were natives of Meca, as he, the present witness had heard; for the natives of Balayan, Manila, Mindoro, Bonbon, and that region did not have any knowledge of the said worship until the Borneans had explained it to them; they have done so with the natives of their islands, and therefore

all these are Moros (Muslims) now, because their ancestors learned it from the said Moros of Bornei. Their language, both spoken and written is derived from Meca, and the said Borneans and the natives of Siam and Patan possess and observe their Alcorans – the law and worship of Mahoma. He said that the book of the Alcoran, which the present witness has seen and has heard preached, they say and assert that they are enemies of the Christians. Likewise in other books they say that the Borneans have always desired to make Moros of the Christians, a thing that he has also heard declared by the catip (kathi), whom the said Borneans regard as a priest, and who preaches the said doctrine of Mahoma. The said catip and others with like expressions preach the said doctrine of Mahoma, so that the said natives observe it. (Nicholl, 1975, p 45)

On the other hand, the students were those who lived near the city, such as citizens who lived in Kampong Ayer. Moreover, the students were mostly male; if female students were present, teachings were only conducted privately by relatives or female teachers and not in the mosque. Thus, Islamic teaching from the 15th to 18th centuries are impossible to track and conclude due to lack of references. As explained by Angas et al. (1992) the remains of scholars are only stated either on tombstones, inscription stones or oral stories. This is according to the tradition of early Bruneians, that whenever a person passed away, not all of his remains were kept, and some were burnt.

An Islamic law known as "Law No. 1, 1912" demonstrated that with its existence, the Brunei Government placed a high value on Islamic education where every class was supervised. Therefore, everyone who preached false Islamic beliefs without a permit from the government will be sued for \$25 (Mail et al., 2020).

On 20 February 1987, the Kadi Court and Haj Affairs Division at the Department of Syariah Affairs under the MoRA held al-Quran and *Muqaddam* classes in mosques across the country. However, the classes were only open to students aged from 6 to 11 years (Mosque Affairs Department, n.d.).

In 1993, the Mosque Affairs Department was formed and assigned to be responsible for mosque affairs in Brunei Darussalam, starting from 16 July of that year. It was initiated by His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam during the opening ceremony of Masjid Kampung Bunut. His Majesty consented that the mosque should not only be used for prayers or to commemorate Islamic events, but the department should also provide classes on Islamic teachings. This includes *fardu 'ain* classes as guidance for people who wish to get married, as well as a place for counselling youths and others in regards to Islam. His Majesty also hoped that by establishing the Mosque Affairs Department, qualified personnel in the administrative and academic fields could allow the mosques' activities to be organised and carried out more effectively. Thus, the Mosque Affairs Department has since established functions and responsibilities in mosques' administration and management, such as

<sup>2</sup> Dato Haji Ahmad bin Haji Abdul Latif was a proponent of Islam during Sultan Abdul Momin's reign. He was called Haji Ahmad Banjar which was derived from the name of his birthplace in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. During his lifetime, he was appointed as kadi and supervisor of Pengawas Perkembangan Agama Islam (the Islamic Religious Development) (Angas et al., 1992).

mosque construction guidelines, sermon planning, department's library, and information system (Mosque Affairs Department, n.d.).

The Mosque Affairs Department has seven divisions, which are the Idarah Division, 'Imarah Division, Ri'ayah Division, Coaching and Training Division, Research and Development Division, Library and Information Technology Division, and Muslimah Affairs Division.<sup>3</sup>

The divisions responsible for conducting classes, especially in Islamic Lifelong Learning, are the 'Imarah Division and Muslimah Affairs Division. The 'Imarah Division has been tasked with managing the administration of adult classes through the creation of a unit called the Seminar, Adult Class and Report Unit.

The adult al-Quran classes conducted in mosques were then open but only to male students. This began in 1982 as mosque *ta'mir* activities were placed under the responsibility of the Court and Mosque Affairs Division (Abdul Rahman, 2019). Despite this, other places such as schools and institutions were open to female students. Thus, female students who wished to seek Islamic knowledge were recommended to join adult religious classes organised by the Islamic Studies Department, MoRA. This session were conducted in schools, institutions and government departments, but not in mosques or *balai*, and the students who attended the classes were a mixture of male and female students.

### iii. Muslimah Classes

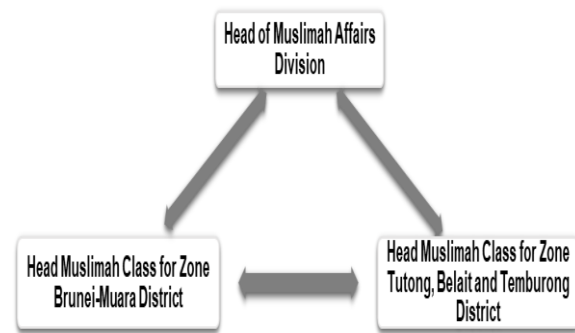
The Brunei Government has organised Islamic Lifelong Learning classes in response to an increase in women's interest in learning about Islam, as well as an increase in the construction of mosque in rural areas. Therefore, Muslimah Classes were established and conducted at certain mosques.

On 1 October 2007, the Muslimah Affairs Division was established as an Islamic knowledge programme that caters to women aged from 20 years and above. This programme was known as the Muslimah Classes, and its aim was to improve Muslimahs' Islamic knowledge, to prosper the mosque, and to enable them to participate in the mosque's *ta'mir* activities. In order to conduct the Muslimah Classes in mosques, the Muslimah Affairs Division had to collaborate with 'Imarah Division. Thus, mosque officers or imam who wished to open a Muslimah Class must first submit a written application to the Muslimah Affairs Division, detailing the proposed teacher's name. The class would only be allowed to open if there were at least 15 students registered to attend (Muslimah Affairs Division, n.d.)

<sup>3</sup> In the early days, mosque affairs and court affairs were merged called as the Court and Mosque Affairs Division under the Religious Affair Department. After being upgraded to MoRA on 21 October 1986, the Mosque Affairs was then absorbed under Syariah Affairs Division, which has then been separated into one department called Mosque Affairs Department in 1993 (Abdul Rahman, 2019; Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama, 2012)

The Muslimah Affairs Division is led by a female officer together with the head of every zone in each district. All appointed heads from each zone are also female. The duties and responsibilities of the Muslimah Affairs Division are to plan and organise activities, and to develop and prepare lessons for teaching and learning in the classes. They are also responsible for any matters related to mosque maintenance, specifically mosques that conduct the Muslimah Classes which needs to be informed to the director of Mosque Affairs, as well as to monitor the travel, execution, and growth of Muslimah Classes in mosques, surau, and *balai-balai ibadat* across the country (Muslimah Affairs Division, n.d.).

While the Muslimah Affairs Division is led by its head, she will also be receiving orders from the director of the Department of Mosque Affairs on matters concerning the classes on a regular basis. Thus, the head has to ensure that the programmes and activities in the Muslimah Classes are conducted with well-organised lessons that are planned accordingly and that the classes at each mosque are monitored (Muslimah Affairs Division, n.d.).



**Figure 1:** The organisational structure of the Muslimah Affairs Division, Department of Mosque Affairs.

In 2007, 10 mosques conducted Muslimah Classes in all four districts: eight in Brunei-Muara, three in Tutong; and one each in Belait and Temburong. All the classes opened simultaneously on 1 October 2007, except Masjid Kampung Kapok, which opened on 5 November 2007.

**Table 1:** A list of Muslimah Classes that opened in 2007 in Brunei Darussalam

No	District	Mosque	Date Class Started	Total No of Classes	Total No of Teachers	Total No of Students
1	Brunei-Muara	Masjid Jame' 'Asr Hassanil Bolkiah	1/10/2007	8	8	130
2		Masjid Sultan Sharif Ali				
3		Masjid Perpindahan Mata-Mata				

		Gadong				
4		Masjid Perpindahan Lambak Kanan				
5		Masjid Kampung Bunut				
6		Masjid Kampung Kapok	5/11/2007			
7	Tutong	Masjid Hassana Bolkia	1/10/2007	3	3	36
8		Masjid Kampung Penanjung				
9	Belait	Masjid Mohamad Jamalul Alam	1/10/2007	1	2	20
10	Temburong	Masjid Utama Md Salleh	1/10/2007	1	2	10
			Total	13	15	196

From Table 1 the number of students who enrolled when the classes were first established was encouraging, with a minimum of 15 students in one class (Muslimah Affairs Division, n.d.). In Brunei-Muara, eight classes opened with approximately 15 to 20 students in each class; in Temburong less than 15 students attended the class; in Tutong, there were three classes with three teachers that had approximately 12 students each. In Belait, even though only one class was opened, the total of students was more than 15; therefore, two teachers were appointed and the class was divided into two. Even though some classes had less than 15 students during the first establishment, they were still allowed to continue. This shows that the Brunei Government continued to support the conduct of the Muslimah Classes to encourage more women to join. The rapid increase in the number of mosques and Muslimah Classes throughout Brunei Darussalam are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** The total number of mosques and Muslimah Classes from 2007-2020 in Brunei Darussalam

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
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No of Mosques	10	24	35	38	45	45	56	58	61	66	78	86	88	88
No of Classes	13	30	49	55	63	68	80	82	86	84	92	99	102	102

Since its establishment, the number of mosques that have actively conducted Muslimah classes has increased from 10 to 88, following the increase in the number of classes from 13 to 102. Table 3 further illustrates the total number of mosques and Muslimah Classes in each district.

**Table 3:** Total number of mosques and Muslimah Classes from 2007-2020 according to districts in Brunei Darussalam.

Year	Brunei-Muara		Tutong		Belait		Temburong	
	No of Mosques	No of Classes	No of Mosques	No of Classes	No of Mosques	No of Classes	No of Mosques	No of Classes
2007	6	8	2	3	1	1	1	1
2008	14	20	5	7	4	2	1	1
2009	19	29	9	13	6	6	1	1
2010	21	32	10	14	6	8	1	1
2011	24	38	12	14	6	8	3	3
2012	25	40	12	16	6	9	3	3
2013	28	45	15	20	7	9	6	6
2014	30	48	15	19	7	9	6	6
2015	32	49	15	20	7	9	7	7
2016	37	50	14	19	7	8	7	7
2017	45	55	16	20	8	9	7	7
2018	50	59	20	24	8	9	7	7
2019	53	62	20	24	8	9	7	7
2020	53	62	20	24	8	9	7	7

As shown in Table 3, the number of mosques and classes has been highly encouraging year after year. Moreover, the number of classes are more than the number of mosques. This means that some mosques conducted two or more classes. This is due to the overwhelming number of students, so multiple classes have been conducted simultaneously. In order to entice Muslimahs to study Islam at the mosque, the Brunei Government has increased the establishment of Muslimah Classes at certain village mosques. This enables those who live near the mosques to participate in the classes.

On the contrary the number of mosques and classes are the same in Temburong. After a few years, it started to increase evenly however, no development has been seen in the last six years. According to a Muslimah Affairs Division officer, if a class in that district has less than 15 students, they will be relocated to another

nearby class (The officer of Muslimah Affairs Division, April 20th, 2021. Personal interview). Nonetheless, the numbers have not developed, and no growth was stated in 2019 and 2020 in all four districts. This was because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which affected Brunei Darussalam since 11 March 2020. As a result, learning and teaching were conducted virtually. The Muslimah Classes were closed temporarily at first, but it was later re-opened on 7 July 2020 (RTB News, 2020). However, no new mosques have since conducted the Muslimah Classes.

There are some procedures that need to be adhered to become a Muslimah Class teacher. Abdul Rahman, et al. (2021) and Borham, et al. (2018) state that the selection of teachers is crucial in Islamic teaching. During the early establishment of the classes, there were no proper recruitment of teachers. The Muslimah Affairs Division appointed female teachers under the Department of Islamic Studies, MoRA. Some were teachers of formal religious schools, while others were retirees with vast experience in formal Islamic teaching. This study believes that this only occurred during the first year of the classes' establishment.

Over the years, formal teacher recruitment procedures for Muslimah Classes developed. It is essential for a teacher of Islamic education to have a background in Islamic knowledge, which can be evidenced by their qualification degree or through a teaching certificate from relevant authorities (Borham et al. 2018). The Muslimah Affairs Division has defined new rules of selection, whereby they will only appoint teachers who are religious officers (*pegawai agama*), religious education officer (*pegawai pelajaran agama*) or trained religious teacher (*guru agama terlatih*), whether they are still working or returning to work after retirement, or individuals with a teaching certification from the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (*Majlis Ugama Islam Brunei – MUIB*) (Muslimah Affairs Division, n.d.). The retired teachers must also obtain a teaching certification from MUIB, which needs to be renewed every two years.

Teachers are first required to complete the application form from the Muslimah Affairs Division, where they will then be summoned before a MUIB officer for an interview. If she succeeds, the Muslimah Affairs Division will issue a letter of appointment to the teacher. The same procedure applies in Malaysia, where those who wish to teach Islamic education are required to possess a certificate that proves their teaching licence from State Religious Department. They also emphasised on a teacher's physical healthiness (Abdul Rahman et al., 2021; Borham et al., 2018). This is so that the problem of changing teachers can be avoided. For example, if the previous teacher suffers from health problems, the students will be affected by a new teacher. According to a study by Abdul Rahman et al. (2021), if more teachers are replaced, it affects the quality of the class, regardless of how skilled the teachers are. This study agrees with this observation by Abdul Rahman et al. (2021), whereby young and healthy female teachers should be appointed so that they could gain expertise in teaching in the long run without disruptions.

For the purpose of maintaining the standard of teaching in mosques, observation will be made by appointed officers. They will make random visits to monitor teaching and learning closely. Furthermore, teachers are also required to submit a lesson report to the Muslimah Affairs Division once a month (The officer of Muslimah Affairs Division, April 20th, 2021. Personal interview). The Muslimah Affairs Division can also monitor the teachers' methods in class by asking the students. In order to enhance the Muslimahs Class teachers' method of teachings, briefings and workshops on learning and teaching techniques are organised.

According to Table 4, the total number of teachers for Muslimah Classes has rapidly increased, particularly in the first and second years of their establishment, and this continued to increase in the following years. However, there has been no increase or developments in the number of teachers for the past three years, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the number of teachers is reflected on the number of enrolled students. In Brunei-Muara, there are more teachers than other districts. This is because the number of mosques and Muslimah Classes have increased. When compared to the numbers of Muslimah Classes in Table 2 and Table 3, the total number of teachers is noticeably fewer than the total number of classes. This indicates that some teachers have more than one class. These changes in the number of teachers in Muslimah Class across the country are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Total number of teachers in Muslimah Class in Brunei Darussalam 2007-2020

Year	Brunei-Muara	Tutong	Belait	Temburong	Total
2007	8	3	2	2	15
2008	20	7	6	3	36
2009	26	11	7	1	45
2010	32	12	7	1	52
2011	36	14	7	3	60
2012	37	16	7	3	63
2013	40	16	7	6	69
2014	43	15	6	6	71
2015	44	14	6	6	71
2016	40	15	6	7	69
2017	44	13	8	6	71
2018	47	18	8	6	79
2019	48	17	8	6	79
2020	48	17	8	6	79



In terms of the student enrolment, it is open to women aged 20 years and above, and there is no specific requirement to join the classes (Muslimah Affairs Division, n.d.). This is when they sought knowledge without coercion from anyone, as prioritise on improving their relationship with Allah (The Most Glorious and The Most High) (Kadir et al., 2016). Moreover, there is no registration or tuition fee required to attend the Muslimah Classes. However, any Muslimah who wishes to attend the class must complete and send a form to the teacher or coordinator of the mosque where they have applied. The registration form is available at the Muslimah Affairs Division office and the *imam* of the mosque where she is applying to, and registration is open all year around.

**Table 5:** Total number of students in Muslimah Class in Brunei Darussalam 2007-2020

Year	Brunei-Muara	Tutong	Belait	Temburong	Total
2007	130	36	20	10	196
2008	455	130	90	10	685
2009	603	241	119	10	973
2010	702	244	137	12	1023
2011	889	285	178	67	1419
2012	958	317	154	90	1519
2013	970	380	192	105	1750
2014	1030	421	178	136	1765
2015	1053	464	176	116	1809
2016	1161	429	187	138	1915
2017	1346	486	145	209	2186
2018	1534	571	131	205	2441
2019	1630	601	124	227	2582
2020	1630	601	124	227	2582

As shown in Table 5, the total number of students in Belait has slightly decreased over the past four years, unlike the other districts, which have shown a steady increase. According to an interview with an officer, this may due to health problems as well as personal commitments. Nevertheless, the total number of Muslimahs taking part in classes continue to increase every year, despite the decreasing number in Belait. This is because women are aware of the significance of Islam and have seized the opportunity to participate in the classes, more so since they don't need to pay a fee to participate. The Muslimah Affairs Division officer stated that the necessity to set up a class depends on the number of students enrolled in the class (The officer of Muslimah Affairs Division, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Personal interview). For example, if the class has 40 students, the Muslimah Affairs Division will divide the students into two classes. This is to make it easier for teachers and to lessen classroom congestion. If the number of students in a class decreases, the Muslimah Affairs Division will combine it with another class.

## Conclusion

Mosques, *balai* and private homes have been used as centres of Islamic teaching. Moreover, architectural structure, administration and management of Islamic teaching have developed over the years. Mosques also provide a multipurpose room to accommodate classes for Muslimahs.

In the early years, although classes were only available for male students, there were some female teachers who taught female students in private; these sessions were specifically conducted at the homes of the teachers. When the mosques were officially administered by the Brunei Government, all affairs related to the mosques have been improved and organised systematically, especially since the establishment of the Mosque Affairs Department under MoRA. In order to prosper the activities in mosques, classes for children and adults were formed, such as al-Quran and *Muqaddam* classes for children and al-Quran classes for adults. The establishment of Muslimah Classes in 2007 was designed particularly for Muslimahs who wish to improve or deepen their understanding and faith in Islam. Hence, the development of Islamic education through Islamic Lifelong Learning has made significant contribution in spreading and enhancing the understanding of Islam in Brunei Darussalam. This study has provided the basis for future research and study into Islamic Lifelong Learning for Muslimahs in Brunei Darussalam.

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