

Malaysian Youth Awareness Towards Spiritual Program

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the awareness on spirituality programs among youth in Malaysia. In Islam, spirituality is defined as the presence of a relationship with Allah that affects the individual's self-worth, sense of meaning, and connectedness with others and nature. It has significant effect for health, positive development of a person's sense of self and for enabling identity to frame the individual's pursuit of a life path eventuating in idealized adulthood. The lack of spirituality may leads to social problems such as loitering, racers, bohsia, bohjan, club servers (GRO), alcohol consumption, and drug abuse. To minimize these problems, the government as well as the private sectors manage to setup various programs and activities in order to develop and improve spirituality among youth. Hence, awareness on these programs is imperative. Use of press media, incorporation in mainstream education (basic, secondary and tertiary), celebrities' participation in spirituality programs are some of the ways by which spirituality programs and activities can be heralded. Using a survey of 4703 youth in Malaysia, this study aims to examine the awareness of youth in Malaysia towards the existence of spirituality program for youth. The paper concluded with recommendations of ways of sensitizing youth on the need to be spirituality conscious.

Keywords: Awareness; Spirituality; Spiritual Program; Youth.



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1. Introduction

Malaysia is a developing country towards developing nation ahead of the year 2020. The development achieved nowadays is a result of development planning and sustainable economic growth, unity and prosperity of the country continued on the nature of the cooperation between the various races, the integrity of cooperation and mutual respect. The government's concern with the development of this country as a result of the planning and implementation of government programs and policies that positively such as Look East Policy (*Dasar Pandang Ke Timur*), Malaysian New Economic Policy (NEP), (*Dasar Ekonomi Baru*) and National Education Policy (*Dasar Pendidikan Kebangsaan*).

As a developing country was moving towards a developed country, it all starts with the continuation of the excellent leadership of the country. In general, teenagers are the future generation who will replace the existing leaders. According to that teenagers are the future generation who will replace the adults, take over the country affair of political, social, economic and national security. Some of them will be the leaders of the country, working in the professional field, and they also become a skilled workforce in the country and abroad. It is estimated that 41% of the State population is now made up of people aged between 15 and 40 years. In 2020, the percent decline to 29%, but their number will increase from 6.9 million to 7.9 million. This means that young people should be given priority in all aspects of the planning and development of the country because they are the future generation who will inherit the leadership and vision to support the country.

Some countries in West Asia such as Palestine, challenges of teenager are an effort to defend sovereignty a homeland from colonized by the Israel. Political instability, social economy in Palestine's land is the trigger sacrifice

of youth in teen ages by forced to train and fight using weapons in order to defend the rights and dignity and homeland. They need to accept that a fact in teen's growth real life they should be used for the education. The effect would be negative to teenagers live such as personality characteristics that have a violent, hostile and fight each other.

Nevertheless, in our country, the challenges related to teenager's issues are different with the teenager from abroad country. The Prime Minister launched the program of action '*one family, one counselor*' on 4th February 2007 through the Ministry of Women Development, Family and Society reflect the severity of the social problem harassing today's teenagers. Among the problem is '*Mat Rempit*', drug addiction, school truancy and loitering. Similar concerns were voiced against the social problem influencing the teenagers and youths in a few years ago such as loitering, racers, *bohsia*, *bohjan*, club servers (GRO), alcohol consumption, and drug abuse. In addition, there are some teenagers who also have low morals and character as rude and disrespectful to teach, parent and guardian.

The government as well as private sectors manages to setup various activities in order to develop and improve spirituality among youth. There are three categories of activities: education, training and program offered or managed by government and private sector. In terms of education, government under the Ministry of Education has developed SMKA, Integrated School, *MRSM Ulul Albab*, etc. While, private sector was offered are various Religious Education Institutions by NGO such as ABIM, IKRAM, and also *Pondok Education*. In term of training, government has provided PLKN, BTN for nation building beside moral rehabilitation center like *Pusat Serenti*, *Pusat Pemulihan Akhlak* etc. Private sector also involve in this rehabilitation program such as *Pusat Pemulihan Akhlak Nur Kasih*, *Rumah Penyayang* etc. Meanwhile, in term of program, government policy implemented through Ministry of Youth and Sport such as *Rakan Muda*, *Rakan Masjid* etc. Private sectors also play their role in offering various programs through media such as *Imam Muda*, *Ustazah Pilihan*, etc. Question arises whether youth in Malaysia are aware of spirituality programs offered by many types of organizer Hence, this paper aims to examine the awareness on spirituality programs among youth in Malaysia and recommends ways by which spirituality programs and activities can be heralded.

2. Review of Literature

The word "spiritual" comes from the Latin root 'spiritus' that originally meant "breath" and is one of many words like psyche (Greek), atman (Sanskrit) and ruach (Hebrew) associating breath with life. In Islam, everything is spiritual because all actions must be in accordance with God's pleasure. Spirituality is defined as the presence of a relationship with Allah that affects the individual's self-worth, sense of meaning, and connectedness with others and nature. The relational quality of spirituality is understood to be a core theme of Islamic religion that comprises beliefs, rituals, daily-living behaviors, and knowledge. Hence, central beliefs of the Islamic religion are lived out daily in spirituality, ways of relating to Allah, others, nature, and the self. While in other religion such as Christian, spirituality is attachment to things of the spirit rather than of the world (Merriam-Webster, 1974).

The terms spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably. Religion is the term used for formal or ritualized belief practices that are shared with a group of others. Hiatt (1986), for instance, stated that a distinction between spirituality and religion was important and that the definition of spirituality should stand independent of any specific belief system. Spirituality, which for some individuals may be nurtured by, related to, or expressed through organized religion, for others is not connected with religious beliefs or affiliation (Elkins *et al.*, 1988).

Studies on the effect of spirituality on human life have been carried out extensively. Spirituality encompasses all aspects of human being including health eg. (Beuscher and Grando, 2009; Narayanasamy and Narayanasamy, 2008; Rippentrop *et al.*, 2005), business/entrepreneurship (eg. (Kamil al-Kahtani and Sulaiman, 2011; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Mohd Sarif *et al.*, 2013), leadership (eg. (Burack, 1999; Fry, 2003; Pratt, 2000), education and training (eg. (Buchanan, 2009; Campbell, 2010; Daniliuk *et al.*, 2010; Thompson, 2000; Walker and Dixon, 2002).

In relation to youth development, spirituality is significant for the healthy, positive development of a person's sense of self and for enabling identity to frame the individual's pursuit of a life path eventuating in idealized adulthood, that is, an adulthood involving mutually beneficial relations between the individual and his or her social world (Lerner *et al.*, 2005). In the model proposed by Benson (1997), there are 40 developmental assets in adolescent development, where life meaning and positive beliefs are important internal assets that influence adolescent development. Dowling *et al.* (2004), proposed a model in which spirituality was hypothesized to influence thriving with religiosity as a mediating factor. In a review of 77 positive youth development programs in the United States, Catalano *et al.* (2002) concluded that positive youth development constructs are intrinsic to the successful programs, with spirituality as one of the constructs identified which is defined as the development of purpose and meaning in life, hope, or beliefs in a higher power. There are many recent publications highlighting the relationship between positive youth development and spirituality (Lerner *et al.*, 2008; Roehlkepartain *et al.*, 2006; Warren *et al.*, 2011).

Furthermore, there are research studies showing that spiritual and religious involvement is an important dimension in youth development. For example, Gallup and Bezilla reported that 95% of American adolescents believed in God (Gallup and Bezilla, 1992). Based on the data collected from "The Project Teen Canada", Bibby found that 75% of the respondents regarded themselves as members of a religion, 60% viewed spirituality as important, and 48% indicated that they had spiritual needs (Bibby, 2006). In a study based on 112,232 freshmen in 236 colleges and universities in the United States, (Astin *et al.*, 2005) reported that 77% of the students agreed that they were "spiritual beings" and roughly four-fifth of them indicated that they had interest in spirituality and they believed in the sacredness (Astin *et al.*, 2005). These findings are consistent with the view of Benson and

Roehlkepartain (2008) that most young people view spiritual development as an important part of their lives. King and Boyatzis (2004), similarly commented that adolescence may be a particularly important time period in which to study spiritual and religious development.

A research on the Muslim students in Indonesia, showed that the involvement in religious and spirituality activity could be related to several variables, which include the academic achievement of the students, attitude of the students and also self-esteem of the students. Surprisingly, in term of implementing the spirituality activities, it not only benefits the participants (students), it also contributes to the educators and also teachers in one way or another. As being stated by Buchanan (2009), the implementation of elements of spirituality in curriculum could help teachers to handle the anxiety, and stress that could lead to managing their career more effectively. Spirituality is not always being the activities that involve in religion. This is because, by saying practicing spirituality, we refer to variety of behaviors and activities that students engage in as part of their spiritual searches.

In Malaysian case, Krauss *et al.* (2006) noted that, unlike other Muslim countries, particularly those in the Middle East, Malaysia has arguably experienced a smoother transition to modernization, and has tried to balance between proponents of strict secularization and Islamic factions within the country. Keeping this perspective in mind, it is therefore essential to investigate the spiritual among Malaysian youth. To date, there is a dearth study carried out on awareness of spiritual program and activities. Hence, this study tries to fill in the gap on the awareness among Muslims youth in Malaysia towards spiritual programs.

3. Methodology

This study relies mainly on the primary data collected through a developed questionnaire distributed to youth throughout Malaysia (aged 18-40). The questionnaire is designed adapting from and been distributed using a stratified random sampling technique. 4703 questionnaires were successfully collected from the survey done. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, namely the demographic profile, level of spirituality and awareness on spirituality programs (using a Likert scale of 1-10). However, in this paper, only the results of awareness on spirituality programs are discussed.

4. Findings

4.1. Background of the Respondents

Table 1, shows the descriptive statistics of the respondents involved in this study. According to Table 1, it is shown that most of the respondents are male (55.6%), aged between 20-25 years (30%), Malay (71.6%) and Single (58%). This analysis is reflected by the real situation of Malaysian youth population. Most of them are Muslims (77.6%) and started learning about religion since childhood (1-5 years old) (51.6%). Most of the respondents were having their secondary school education at the national school (87.7%) and involved actively in co-curriculum activities during schools (70.1%). The highest education level for most of the respondents at higher education level is Diploma (87.7%).

Table-1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Item	Sub-item	Valid Percent
Sex	Male	55.6
	Female	44.4
Age	15 – 20 years old	21.3
	21 – 25 years old	30.0
	26 – 30 years old	19.5
	31 – 35 years old	13.7
	36 – 40 years old	15.4
Religion	Islam	77.6
	Buddhism	10.3
	Hinduism	6.1
	Christianity	5.4
	Others	0.7
Age started learning about religion	1 - 5 years old	51.6
	6 - 10 years old	37.1
	11 - 15 years old	3.3
	16 - 20 years old	0.6
	More than 20 years old	0.2
Ethnic	Malay	71.6
	Chinese	12.1
	Indian	7.0
	Others	9.4
Marital Status	Single	58.0

	Married	39.8
	Divorced	1.6
	Widow/Widower	0.6
Secondary School	National School	87.7
	Chinese Private School	2.7
	Religious School	5.8
	Others	3.8
Actively involved in co-curriculum activities	Yes	70.1
	No	29.9
Highest Education Level at IPT	Diploma	87.7
	Bachelor	2.7
	Master	5.8
	PhD	3.8

4.2. Mean of Awareness Towards Spirituality Programs

Table 2 shows the mean score of the level of awareness towards spirituality program among youth. Based on the results in this table, it can be highlighted that most respondents are aware with the existence of spiritual activities around them (Mean: 8.03). Unfortunately, the mean of involvement in spirituality trainings and activities (7.35) is less than their awareness on the existence of spirituality trainings and activities around them. With a mean score of 8.01, it is also worth notable from this table that youth are in needs towards more religious program in order to increase their spirituality level.

Table-2. Level of Awareness towards Spirituality Program

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am aware there are a lot of spiritual activities to be participated	8.03	1.763
I always involve in spiritual activities (religious talk, congregational prayer, performing prayer in temple etc.)	7.35	1.903
I still need more religious program to increase my spirituality level.	8.01	1.818
Overall	7.73	1.346
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.703		
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.802		

4.3. Significant Difference Between Demographic Profile and Level of Awareness

Table 3 depicts the significant difference between demographic profile and level of awareness towards spirituality program among youth. The results show that there are significant different between demographic factors (including gender, ethnic, type of secondary school, highest education level at IPT, religion, age started learning about religion and age started pray or *solat*) and level of awareness towards spirituality programs among youth in Malaysia.

Table-3. Significant Difference between Demographic Profile and Level of Awareness

Item	Sub-item	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Gender	Male	7.6628	1.36528		
	Female	7.8215	1.31536		
Ethnic	Malay	7.8651	1.24824	63.17	0.000
	Chinese	7.1148	1.52909		
	Indian	7.3315	1.50881		
	Others	7.8038	1.41299		
Type of Secondary School	National School	7.7414	1.32382	10.49	0.000
	Chinese Private School	7.6494	1.64176		
	Religious School	7.9481	1.29490		
	Others	7.2444	1.57462		
Highest Education Level at IPT	Diploma	7.7686	1.32904	4.39	0.004
	Bachelor	7.6397	1.28053		
	Master	7.9169	1.12092		
	PhD	8.1935	1.38826		
Religion	Islam	7.8705	1.25500	56.69	0.000
	Buddhist	7.0487	1.51981		

	Hindu	7.2731	1.53689		
	Kristian	7.6911	1.36088		
	Others	6.6883	2.02518		
Age started learn about religion	1 - 5 years old	7.8875	1.26678	29.41	0.000
	6 - 10 years old	7.6230	1.36545		
	11 - 15 years old	6.8841	1.24981		
	16 - 20 years old	6.2449	1.34567		
	More than 20 years old	6.8857	1.62017		
Age started pray (solat)	1 - 5 years old	7.8655	1.27799	20.40	0.000
	6 - 10 years old	7.7793	1.31264		
	11 - 15 years old	7.2387	1.34039		
	16 - 20 years old	6.9433	1.44405		
	More than 20 years old	6.6364	1.46267		

Table 3 displays the significant difference between demographic profile and the level of awareness among youth towards spiritual program. The results show that 5 variables are highly significantly different between groups. In terms of ethnic, Malays score higher in terms of awareness towards spiritual program compared to other ethnics. In terms of type of secondary school, as expected, religious school students are more aware of the spiritual programs compare to others. Similarly, religion is also found to highly significantly different between groups. Muslims are more aware of the spiritual programs compare to others. In terms of the age the respondents started learning about religion, it is found that those who started learning about religion earlier (between 1 to 5 years old) are more aware of the spiritual programs. The similar results were found for the variable age started praying. The results show that those who are exposed with religion are more likely to more aware of the spiritual programs. Hence, it is recommended that parents should expose their children to religion and religious activities at earlier age. This may help to increase their spiritual development which may help to reduce possibilities to get involved in such social problems in future.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This paper aims to examine the awareness on spirituality programs among youth in Malaysia. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that youth in Malaysia are moderately aware with the existence of spirituality program and trainings around them. However, the results also show that youth are still in need to join the spirituality training in order to increase their spirituality level. Previous studies have unanimously found that spirituality has positive effect in almost all aspect of individual life. The government as well as the private sector should take proactive actions in providing effective and suitable trainings in ensuring that youth in Malaysia is well taken care. The press media is recommended to highlight the existence of spirituality programs and trainings regularly. Since youth are mostly influenced by idols and celebrities, celebrities' participation in spirituality programs are some of the ways by which spirituality programs and activities can be heralded. With the government support, spirituality trainings can be spread out widely which in turn may help to increase spirituality level among youth in Malaysia.

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