



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
MODERN EDUCATION  
(IJMoe)  
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## IMPLEMENTATION OF DA'WAH FOR BUGIS COMMUNITY IN SABAH: A REVIEW

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### Article Info:

#### Article history:

Received date: 24.03.2025

Revised date: 15.04.2025

Accepted date: 22.05.2025

Published date: 26.06.2025

#### To cite this document:

Mokhtar, S., Thia, K., Othman, I. W., Ahmad, M. K. L., & Ibrahim, M. A. (2025). Implementation Of Da'wah For Bugis Community In Sabah: A Review. *International Journal of Modern Education*, 7 (25), 883-894.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMoe.725058

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### Abstract:

Distributing Islamic pamphlets is a demand and trust that has been entrusted to every Muslim. A Muslim who carries out da'wah means that they have continued the call of the Prophet PBUH to spread Islam in the eyes of the world. Even so, there are still preachers who fail in their preaching calls because they do not understand the ins and outs of the struggle for the Prophet PBUH. This study aims to see the implementation of da'wah that is suitable for the Bugis community in Sabah who still adhere to the customs and rituals of their ancestors before. This study uses qualitative methods and participates in the landscape of life of the Bugis community. The findings of this study found several methods of da'wah implementation that are suitable to be applied to the Bugis community in Sabah such as using the approach of al-hikmah, mujadalah, taaruf, da'wah bi al-hal, the attraction of preachers, da'wah bi al-lisan and preachers as counsellors. The appropriate da'wah approach used according to the wishes of the da'wah recipients is undoubtedly the main indicator and determinant of success in Islamic da'wah activities.

### Keywords:

Bugis Community, Da'wah, Implementation, Sabah

## Introduction

The Bugis community is one of the ethnic groups in the Malay family in Malaysia. Most of these people follow Islam. According to Sintang (2007), the Bugis ethnic group has various sub-ethnicities such as Bone, Pinrang, Makassar and others. The Bugis ethnic group is more concentrated in the East Coast of Sabah and the South Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. In Peninsular Malaysia, the Benut sub-district located in the Pontian district, Johor is the main settlement area of the Bugis community. While in Sabah, the arrival of the Bugis began around the 1920s and the Tawau district became the focus of the Bugis community because it is the closest district to the border of Indonesia in the eastern part such as Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Timor. In addition, the Bugis community is scattered in several other districts in the east coast of Sabah such as Sandakan, Lahad Datu, Semporna and Kunak. This ethnic group from the Sulawesi Islands in Indonesia had migrated to Malaya before the country achieved independence again. The Bugis were the first people to come and settle in Malaya. They migrated to Malaya later, settled and established family institutions and gave birth to descendants and heirs until the present generation.

The Bugis ethnic group is one of the ethnic groups that is still strong in defending the customs, beliefs, writings and mother tongue inherited from their ancestors. For example, the Bugis language has its own writing and script known as *Lontarak* (Muhammad Yusuf 2012). The tradition of writing *Lontarak* has been practiced since the 16th century, therefore most of the ancestors of the Bugis ethnic group consider it as a tradition that must be maintained and should not be forgotten. In fact, customs in marriage such as the mastery of the principle of "*Siri*" and death rituals such as the slaughter of chickens are still practiced today by some people in the Bugis ethnic group (Mahali 2010). Generally, there is no offence to practice the traditions and beliefs as well as customs of an ethnicity. However, most of the Bugis ethnic communities practice their traditions without considering other aspects such as religious precepts. Therefore, for the Muslim community, the practice of beliefs and customs must be done more carefully to ensure that it does not violate religious law. Therefore, the Bugis community needs to be given a more complete and deeper awareness so that they do not violate religious laws.

Although various mediums have been used to advise and correct beliefs and customs that contradict Islamic teachings, traditional practices among the Bugis community continue to be widely observed. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and others has yet to significantly alter the deeply rooted beliefs and cultural practices within their daily lives. Furthermore, the emergence of many preachers today has not had a significant impact on this community. This is because the approaches used in dakwah (Islamic preaching) are generally universal in nature and do not consider the unique cultural background of the Bugis people. Most preachers, especially those based in Peninsular Malaysia, lack a deep understanding of the reality of Bugis customs and way of life, as they have not experienced living within the community themselves. As a result of this lack of contextual understanding, the dakwah efforts carried out often fail to achieve their intended objectives. Therefore, a more targeted, inclusive approach grounded in a thorough understanding of the Bugis community's socio-cultural background is essential. Such an approach can bring the community closer to the true values of Islam and strengthen the Islamic identity among its members.

## Literature Review

Before conducting this study, the researcher first conducted a study highlight on the topic of the study to be carried out, namely *the Implementation of Da'wah on the Bugis Community in Sabah: A Survey*. In the study, Mokhtar et al. (2021a) aimed to look at the engineering of da'wah among students at University Malaysia Sabah through the university's general course, namely Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization (PEDP) from the perspective of receiving da'wah and their comfort in receiving reprimands and advice. The study by Hajimin et al. (2021) aims to examine the process of da'wah and its impact on the change in the composition of Muslims in Sabah, while the study by Mokhtar et al. (2022a) aims to highlight the importance of da'wah knowledge for today's preachers according to the perspective of Muhammad al-Ghazali in Kitab Fiqh al-Sirah.

In terms of da'wah methods, the study by Mokhtar et al. (2023a) aims to see the priority of da'wah *bi al-Nafs* as a catalyst for the spread of the *mazmumah* virus in one's own leadership. As for the da'wah *bil akhlak*, the study by Mokhtar et al. (2021b) aims to see if the da'wah of the contemporary *bil akhlak* of an entrepreneur can meet the concept of Islamic entrepreneurship as well as the forms of morality required by Islam for an entrepreneur. There is also a da'wah study conducted on poetry and films. The study by Mokhtar et al. (2021c) aims to look at the moral value in the poem "*Ke Makam Bonda*" in terms of language, value and structure through relevance theory. In addition, the researcher also saw that the relationship between language, values and structure in the verses of the poem was associated with the elements of da'wah so that it brought awareness to the listeners. In addition, da'wah through films was also studied by Gunaish et al. (2024) which aimed to find out the role of documentary films produced by the Malaya Film Unit (MFU) and the National Film of Malaysia (FNM) as a medium of da'wah in Malaysia and abroad from 1957 to 1970. The study by Mokhtar et al. (2023b) aims to look at the role of digital media in uniting communities of various races to accept each other's views and thoughts on matters. In addition, this study also looks at the factors that constrain contemporary media in forming national cohesion in Malaysia.

A study related to the da'wah approach was also conducted by Mokhtar et al. (2019) which aimed to identify the approach to the implementation of da'wah by JHEAINS in Sandakan Prison. In addition, a study of da'wah literature on ethnicity was also conducted by Mokhtar et al. (2021d) with the aim of looking at the landscape of Sungai ethnic life, the reaction of Sungai ethnicity to Islamic teachings, the factors of Sungai ethnicity embracing Islam and the appropriate implementation of da'wah towards Sungai ethnicity in Sabah. A study by Mokhtar et al. (2021e) looked at the influence of the leadership of the Suluk customary practitioners in the practice of death rituals as well as the taboo and influence of the leadership of the Suluk tribal customary practitioners in the community during the occurrence of a death. In addition, a study related to the Customs and Rituals of Death of the Suluk Community in Sandakan According to the Shariah Opinion was also conducted by Mokhtar et al. (2022b) which aimed to identify the customs and rituals during and after death practiced by the Suluk community in Sandakan and to look at the practice of these customs and rituals of death from an Islamic perspective.

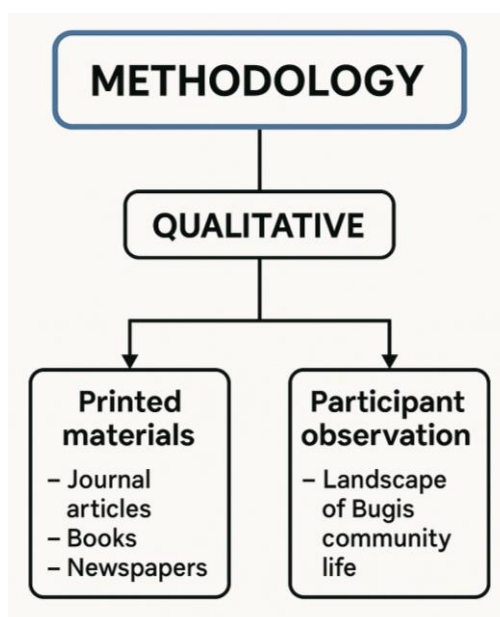
Studies related to marriage customs in the community in Sabah have also been studied by scholars. The study of Ramlie et al. (2022) aims to present a general narrative about the Suluk ethnic image and the marriage customs practiced by them. Meanwhile, the study by Azman et al. (2024) analyses the pre-marriage customs of the Suluk community according to the Islamic perspective. The study by Hajimin et al. (2022) debates the impact of religious migration on

changes in the customs and culture of the Muslim community in Sabah. Furthermore, the study by Pullong et al. (2023) aims to examine the forms of belief and practice of the Bajau community in facing the two months that are considered unlucky, namely the months of *Muharam* and *Safar*. A study on the prospects and challenges of da'wah implementation was also conducted by Mokhtar et al. (2021f) which aims to analyse the prospects and challenges of da'wah implementation through contemporary media as a yardstick for the success of da'wah today. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher has not found a detailed study related to the implementation of da'wah on the Bugis community in Sabah and it is very relevant to be studied.

## Methodology

This study uses a qualitative method by referring to printed materials such as journal articles, books, newspapers and so on. In addition, researchers also use the method of participating in the landscape of Bugis community life to see for themselves the customs and rituals in their lives. This approach is seen as more relevant to be used to get closer to the Bugis community. As a result of observations, participation and brief interviews, the researcher conducted an analysis and found a form of da'wah engineering that suits the needs of *Mad'u*, the Bugis community in Sabah. In summary, the methodology used in this study is as shown in figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Methodology**



Source: Research Study 2025

## Discussion

### *Population of the Bugis Community in Sabah*

When recalled in the folds of history that have been documented in writing by several scholars, the formation of the Bugis community is said to have entered the state of Sabah in the 18th century. They began to enter the Tawau district before migrating to other areas, especially on the east coast of Sabah. The early development of the Bugis community and other ethnicities at that time led to the emergence of the earliest village in old Tawau with only 20 houses near the mouth of the river known as "Bugis town" around 1905 (Sintang, 2007). *Puado* was

appointed as the village head, and it became the starting point for the Bugis community in Tawau and the involvement of this community in the local political leadership. Bugis community figures who were born in Tawau lead to the perception that Bugis are only the majority and are based in Tawau and do not realize that the number of Bugis people in Tawau is low compared to Bugis in Kalabakan. This is based on the history of the Bugis community in Sabah which is often associated with the Tawau district as a "genesis" before expanding to other districts. Even so, a relatively large number and appearing as a majority group, are still rarely highlighted to be discussed in the political space.

The breakdown of elections by tribe in Sabah released by various political parties and agencies ahead of GE-14 shows in more detail other districts in Sabah dominated by the Bugis tribe as the largest voters. The number of Bugis communities as registered voters in the Silam, Kalabakan and all other districts in Sabah is much larger and not as recorded. There is a phenomenon that is shackling that the Bugis community itself is sometimes confused in registering as voters. The confusion stems from the question of survival and the lack of historical awareness and understanding of the idea of the country.

In the context of Sabah in general, the debate that took place involved the Bugis community which was dominated by several main issues including citizenship status, land ownership status and economic opportunities. These issues are often used as the main capital that is often talked about by politicians, stakeholders and the Bumiputera community. The Bugis people indeed play a considerable role in determining political dominance in the country. In addition, the content of ethnic sentiments related to rights and Bumiputera has become a major issue in the debate, causing issues in the Bugis community. The changes that led to the transition of power after GE14 relieved the Bugis community as they succeeded in changing the leadership of the special state government and the Kalabakan Parliament. The openness of Parti Warisan under the leadership of DSSA which is now more open considers the voices of the community in the government and it is a huge opportunity for the Bugis community to come forward in the economic and political sectors.

Although the Bugis community has been appointed to the top leadership in political parties and the state government, important positions involving the Government Link Company (GLC) are still not filled even though some of them are qualified. This statement can be proven when the former president of PKBS, Dato Osman Jamal (2007) in a seminar on the Bugis Community in his presentation entitled "Issues, Challenges and the Future of Sabah Bugis" emphasized that in upholding the Bugis community, economic dominance alone is not enough. This political platform is very important because it is the main channel to convey the wishes of the Bugis community and subsequently highlight the existence of the Bugis ethnic group in Sabah.

### ***Implementation of Da'wah for the Bugis Community in Sabah***

The implementation of da'wah that can be used to preach to the Bugis community is through *the al-hikmah approach*. According to Mokhtar (2014), *wisdom* in Arabic means wisdom, cleverness, fairness, gentleness, prophethood, something that prevents ignorance and corruption, right and correct things, knowledge and forgiveness. What is meant by wisdom is that a preacher must be wise and discerning in all fields of knowledge, both religious and academic knowledge with psychology, sociology and so on. According to Shaykh Abdurrahman (1996), this implementation was applied by the Prophet PBUH to his people and succeeded in changing the thinking of the people who misunderstood Islam, the *wisdom*



approach is also defined as a conversation that is small but gives a deep meaning to the recipient of da'wah. A preacher also needs to convey da'wah with the commands of the Qur'an in a good way, manners, patience, and gentleness unless there is a party that shows tyranny (Shaykh Abdurrahman, 1996). Therefore, the approach to da'wah to the Bugis community should be done according to the needs and not pressure them to approach da'wah.

In addition, *the Mujadalah* approach can also be used to preach the Bugis community. *Mujadalah* is a discussion with a person or other party on a matter by expressing their respective opinions, either opposing or supporting based on evidence until it can be accepted by the community (Mohd Yunus & Don, 2011). This is said because the Bugis community, especially those aged 40 years and above, are still adamant with their practices despite being advised many times. This happens because preachers do not use *the Mujadalah approach* or do not know the customs and traditions of the Bugis people (Mohd Yunus & Don, 2011). The *Mujadalah* approach can move the hearts of the Bugis people to stop any of their practices or beliefs such as the practice of feeding the sea by slaughtering buffaloes to revive the spirit of the sea and avoid natural disasters (Mohd Yunus & Don, 2011). Preachers must give evidence confidently and clearly so that they are not confused by the arguments presented and open a question-and-answer session to them if there is any suspicion of what they are doing and strongly oppose their practices and beliefs that are contrary to Islam as much as possible. According to Mokhtar (2014), the *Mujadalah approach* should use *uslub* that is easy to understand, accompanied by rational reasons, act *tawaduk*, show love, talk about worries and fears from being tortured by Allah SWT, answer with the best answer, apologize and the last method is to separate or migrate to avoid continuing to find points of difference and fighting. This method is seen to be applicable in the current context because there is a gentle and wise da'wah mechanism that can be applied to non-Muslim parents.

The next approach to da'wah to the Bugis community is to use *the al-Taaruf* approach, which is to get acquainted with each other between cultures and help to reduce the points of difference. This is because the Bugis community is also divided into several types of races, and each has different practices and beliefs. Thus, using *the al-Taaruf* approach can bring da'wah closer to the Bugis community by holding a harmonious dialogue, advising each other in good cases and giving warnings and enlightenment. Da'wah involving interculturalism needs to be done carefully so as not to offend any party and arouse disharmonious feelings.

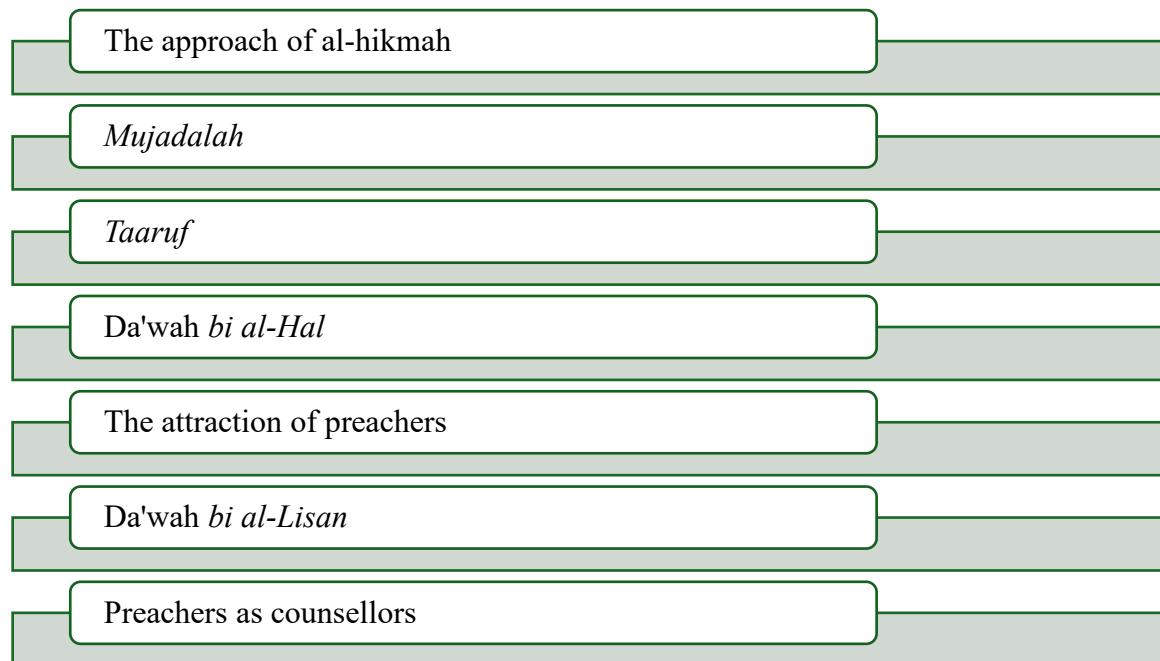
In addition, the approach, da'wah *bi al-Hal* or the factor that attracts the community to approach da'wah is also very important so that the community does not get bored and remembers the message conveyed by the preacher. One of the important attraction factors is the preacher's ability to attract people of various races and different minds (Abdul Rani, 2002). An example of a well-known preacher among the Bugis community is Ustaz Das'ad Abdul Latif who is also a Bugis, he is very famous in Indonesia because the da'wah delivered by him contains a deep message and is related to the life of the Bugis people and he understands their way of life and traditions. He also spreads his da'wah through social media sites such as *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Thus, the Bugis community living in Malaysia, especially in the state of Sabah, can also accept his preaching and practice it.

The status of the attraction of preachers or good role models can also be used as one of the approaches to da'wah to the Bugis community. Status such as a person's status or position can

attract attention and influence the target. A good position and status can contribute to good da'wah such as Ustaz Das'ad Latif who is a lecturer at a well-known university in Indonesia. Through his good position, he was able to influence the target because the human habit is to be more attracted to preachers who have high academic qualifications, good economics and high positions in the community. This can be seen in every video of his da'wah, there are many people from various districts to attend his lectures so that they can increase their knowledge and be able to convey the message they heard to other families. According to Mokhtar (2014), a successful preacher is one who always shows the right policy and is proven by his practices and deeds because he is an example of a moving picture of life based on the principles adhered to.

Furthermore, the *bi al-Lisan da'wah method* is one of the mediums often used by preachers to influence the target group of da'wah to understand the message conveyed (Zaydan, 2000). Simple and clear language can control human emotions such as sadness, anger, laughter and so on. The use of language should be emphasised among preachers for fear of causing misunderstanding because the use of the same word does not necessarily mean the same meaning among people of different cultures. Errors in using words make da'wah less effective. Preachers need to learn the language of a community if they want to preach abroad or in the region. This is because the Bugis community, especially the elderly, do not understand the Malay language because they mostly communicate in their own dialect or use Indonesian when communicating with different races. A preacher needs to convey da'wah gently so that it can touch the soul of the target without offending the listener. This is because, there are a handful of Bugis people who do acts of magic or black magic to get rich quickly. This approach can avoid any more acts of heresy and shirk among the Bugis community and will not create a negative perception for them.

Preachers as counsellors can bring the Bugis community closer to da'wah (Zaydan, 2000). This is said to be because preachers who have convincing knowledge and charisma can approach the target group of da'wah to facilitate their understanding and confidence towards true Islam. The advantage of preachers as counsellors is to guide the younger generation because they can reduce practices and beliefs that are contrary to the teachings of Islam from happening continuously. Preachers also need to engage with young people to channel knowledge about what is illegal so that they can convey the message to their parents or grandparents who are seen to still believe in nonsense. Apart from the younger generation, preachers as counsellors also contribute to the good of the Bugis community, because preachers need to interact with all levels of society so that they are not too quick to issue a law on a matter and need to learn the background of a culture and be able to provide solutions to every question and problem (Zaydan, 2000). The summary of the implementation of da'wah among the Bugis community in Sabah is as shown in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2: Summary of the Implementation of Da'wah for the Bugis Community in Sabah**

Source: Research Study 2025

### **The Impact and Results of Da'wah on the Bugis Community in Sabah**

Da'wah is an act of calling and educating us to be obedient to the commands of Allah SWT. Da'wah comes when people turn away from Allah's commands by calling them back to the Quran and hadith. Among the effects and results of da'wah on the Bugis in Sabah is that it can further strengthen their understanding of Islam. The Bugis community in Sabah is still practicing *pemmali*. The meaning of *pemmali* is the prohibition of doing something or saying something (Tanra et al., 2019). The practice of *pemmali* has been divided into two things, the first is about the temperament of the individual and the second is about social rules that can control and limit the behaviour of a human being, especially the rules that explain good and bad things. However, there are negatives in the practice of *consumerism*. Although they are Muslims, elements of the Bugis teachings such as the prohibition of sweeping the house at night are very irrelevant today because if they sweep the house at night, it will cause the sustenance for the family to disappear (Solomon, 1984). So, with the da'wah carried out against the Bugis, it can make them aware of the danger that such superstitious things will cause the faith of an individual to be distorted. This is because by preaching, preachers will be able to explain and add more knowledge about matters related to Islam.

In addition, Muslims and Muslims will obey the true teachings of Islam. There is no other privilege as a Muslim compared to followers of other religions if one does not comply with religious and moral responsibilities as a true follower of Islam (Yap Yun Hin, 2019). The Bugis community will be more exposed to the true teachings of Islam. An example of a practice that is contrary to the teachings of Islam is the use of a catheter on a newborn baby. The purpose of using a catheter is to protect the baby from the distractions of spirit creatures. Islamic teachings should be practiced from a young age so that they are easier to practice in their daily lives. We should be able to distinguish between the cultural rituals of a race and the beliefs of a religion. The Bugis will be able to strengthen Islamic teachings in terms of faith, sharia and morals.



Furthermore, the effect of da'wah on the Bugis is that it can change the attitude of the Bugis towards a noble personality. Not all *pemmali* practiced by the Bugis community in Sabah is contrary to Islam. *Pemmali* can also be used as a guideline for an individual's behaviour in maintaining politeness and self-discipline to form a good character (Rohidi Tjetjep, 2000). The implementation of da'wah with prudence can influence the personality of the Bugis for the better. For example, in terms of manners, preachers should show noble personalities such as being polite, wise in conveying knowledge and brave in arguing when delivering da'wah to the Bugis community. With such a personality, it will be easier to attract attention in preaching, especially among adults. This is because they need high attention because they are easily offended when they are reprimanded for things that they have been practicing for a long time in their lives. By giving good reprimands, especially to this group, they will realize that the practices of the Bugis community practiced by them are contrary to the teachings of Islam.

In addition, it can educate and teach the children of the Bugis community so that they do not deviate from the teachings of Islam. The Bugis people are proud and highly praise their culture (Amat, 2013). To prevent this culture from being eroded, they applied it to the younger generation. However, young children should be taught more about Islam. By exposing the lessons from an early age, indirectly, parents can easily apply things related to religion in their little ones. Children will be more easily able to distinguish the customs of the Bugis people that are contrary to the teachings of Islam. Children are easier to teach because they are receptive to information or things they have just learned. It is the responsibility of parents to provide the best and strongest basic education to their children. But what is sad is customs.

Therefore, it is possible to apply Islamic values in the context of unity in Malaysia. There are many Islamic values that can be applied by the country in ensuring that the country can live in peace and peace without any issues involving religion. However, Islamic values must be applied or practiced by all people in Malaysia. Among the Islamic values is al-Adalah. The meaning of al-Is is to put something right and right in place (Akaha, 2008). Every ummah should practice trust in themselves because their faith is not perfect if there is no trust value in them.

In addition, we can apply Islamic values such as *Ta'awun* which means cooperation. Abdurrahman Nashir al-Sa'di (2007), every command of Allah SWT must be carried out and every prohibition of Him must be avoided. To carry out the demands, help from people around you such as relatives must be involved through useful advice or physical assistance and so on. In Islam, cooperation means helping people in need in the element of goodness only. Cooperative activities that lead to harm and destruction for individuals, society, the environment and so on are prohibited in Islam. Cooperation between diverse communities will have a positive impact on the country. The actions of some irresponsible parties in carrying out cooperation on illegal matters will threaten the unity that has been established. If these Islamic values are successfully implemented, then there will be a country that is free from selfishness. Activities for unification should be diversified with clear roots related to the rulings of hakam, tolerance, open-mindedness and good opinion among themselves. This can appeal to a good exemplary display for the entire Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Finally, the relationship between religions will be good and when da'wah is running, it can be carried out and empowered.

Next, it can apply Islamic values such as *al-Amanah*. The difference between the nature of trust in Islam and the value of integrity is in the chapter on an individual's faith in God. By practicing the value of trust in oneself, it will better reflect the identity in the life of the nation (Mazlan & Wan Khairuldin, 2019). People who do not have the value of trust in themselves will be considered as those who are not perfect in their faith in the sight of Allah. This trust value, if applied by all communities and communities, will be able to avoid the occurrence of breach of trust. The application of universal values in every society can form a whole society in a country.

## Conclusion

As we know, today practices and beliefs are still integrated into the lives of the community, especially the Bugis community in Sabah. In the meantime, other communities also still hold the ancestral role models and teachings to this day. This is not something that we can avoid because there is a rationale for the beliefs that are still practiced. The practice of customs and traditions is closely related to Islamic teachings, some of which are not contrary to Islamic teachings, and some are considered wrong on the side of Islam. As a believer in Islam, we have a big role to play in ensuring that customs and traditions that are clearly contrary to Islam must be stopped. We need to correct the way of life of the people around us with useful knowledge. Of course, we cannot change society overnight, but we can bring change to society slowly by applying the true teachings of Islam in our daily lives, especially in the context of today's customs and practices. We hope that everyone, especially traditional communities who are still practicing the teachings of their ancestors, can change their way of life which is considered inappropriate with the teachings of Islam. Therefore, we need to use a da'wah approach that is suitable for the Bugis community so that the da'wah we carry out can be fully accepted and give birth to a civilized Bugis society.

## Appreciation

Sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks are extended to the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning (PPIB), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Global Academic Excellence (GAE) for their invaluable support and contribution toward the publication of this article. Their encouragement and facilitation have been instrumental in making this scholarly work possible.

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