

Challenges of Performing Prayer in the Research Field for Muslim Researchers at Public Universities

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Abstract

Every Muslim is required to perform the five daily prayers regardless of time and place because it is a highly demanded act of worship in Islam. At the higher education level in Malaysia, numerous Muslim researchers are engaged in various fields of study, including the sea, forests, mangroves, and similar areas. They encounter difficulties when it comes to performing their five daily prayers, particularly when it comes to the specific procedures involved in these fields. The purpose of this study is to identify the issues and challenges researchers face in praying while conducting research. This study is qualitative in nature, employing structured interview methods, and its respondents are researchers and postgraduate students from public universities, including Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT). We used Atlas.ti to thematically analyze the data from this interview, obtaining accurate findings based on specific themes. The study findings indicate that there are various challenges faced by researchers in performing the prayer ritual while in the field. This study recommends publishing a guideline on the procedures for conducting prayers in the field as a reference for the involved researchers.

Keywords: Worship; Prayer; *Fiqh*; Research; Higher education; Jurisprudence

Introduction

Islam is a comprehensive religion and way of life, encompassing issues of faith, worship, and morality, as well as extending

to social and state affairs such as economic, educational, political, and social aspects. The Quran and Sunnah, which are the revelations of Allah SWT, serve as the best sources of law for humans, providing legal explanations for every question in daily life.

However, current conditions and situations subject the rulings of *fiqh* to changes, leading to the issuance of fatwas to guide the Muslim community as a whole. According to Mohamad (2019), *fiqh* means knowledge related to practical laws, derived or extracted from detailed evidence, and studying *fiqh* on basic issues that every Muslim must know, such as performing prayers, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage, is a *fardhu ain*, which means obligatory. Mohamad (2016) recommends that contemporary Islamic scholars take into account social change factors when analyzing a *fiqh* ruling in the current context, ensuring it conforms to Sharia and is adaptable for social application. Moreover, modern technology has exposed society to a variety of new worship issues, necessitating clear answers to emerge from the cocoon of ignorance or confusion.

Every Muslim, regardless of their location or circumstances, must fulfill the requirement of worship. The most immediate and obligatory act of worship that every Muslim must perform in any circumstance is prayer (*solat*). This prayer ritual encompasses unique procedures that require adherence to conditions and pillars. However, depending on the individual's situation and the surrounding conditions, certain circumstances grant a concession to this worship. In other words, in certain

contexts, there are changes to the legal rulings of *fiqh* related to prayer and matters associated with it.

Researchers conducting field research encountered various issues related to *fiqh* rulings during their field research, as revealed by an initial survey. (Minit Mesyuarat Pasukan Penyelidik Pembinaan Garis Panduan Ibadat di Lapangan UMT, Oktober 2020). Among the fields involved are forest, sea, mangrove swamp, island, lake, and the like. The *fiqh* issues that often arise are related to prayer in terms of its performance itself, such as in the case of wet clothes when in water, muddy clothes in mangroves, determining the direction of the qibla, performing ablution in the absence of water in the forest, and other related rulings.

Muslim researchers face significant challenges in completing research tasks due to the lack of specific guidelines regarding *fiqh* rulings. Furthermore, Muslim individuals sometimes adopt various understandings or practices that are merely imitations, without knowing whether their acts of worship are valid or not. Because there is no single guideline for *Fiqh Ibadat* in the field, researchers perform rituals based solely on their individual understanding. This situation has also raised various questions and doubts among those involved.

Modern Islamic Jurisprudence (Contemporary Fiqh)

Man (n.d.) says that modern *fiqh*, also known as *al-fiqh al-mu'asir* or *al-fiqh al-waqi'*, is the current understanding of Islamic law. It deals with new issues that need new *ijtihad* and haven't been dealt with in the five sources of sharia or in previous *ijtihad* by the *fuqaha*. Al-Qaradawi (1999) characterized *fiqh al-waqi'* as the fullest possible comprehension

of reality, rather than perceiving it as merely a shadow, as this could lead to falsehood and misguidance for others.

Therefore, we can conclude that contemporary *fiqh*, rather than being based on speculation (*iftiradi*), is based on reality, informed by the assessment of benefit and harm. Therefore, a faqih or jurist must comprehend and engage with the prevailing reality in their *ijtihad* on a given issue. Their *ijtihad* discussion should concentrate on the balance between *maslahah* (benefit) and *mudarat* (harm), informed by Sharia texts, and subsequently align with the current reality.

Malaysian society has increasingly recognized the concept of contemporary *fiqh*, as noted by Rahim et al. (2010) and Salleh (2012). Some groups continue to question the adequacy of medieval *fiqh* in addressing the demands of the modern era, characterized by significant advancements in science and technology (Rahman, 2011). This modernist group upholds the supremacy of reason and dismisses perspectives that fail to withstand rational scrutiny (Salleh, 2012). Scientific quantification cannot quantify Islamic values such as sin and virtue, *halal* and *haram*, and blessings, despite their essential role in nurturing the body's spirituality. Experts view this issue as lacking empirical feasibility, especially when implementing explicit guidelines.

Jurisprudence of Worship and Prayer.

Islamic law requires that all believers engage in acts of worship. We can categorize worship into two types: general worship and specific worship. The concept of Islamic Work Ethics, grounded in Sharia, perceives work as a manifestation of worship. We will regard every good deed as an act of worship and reward it with merit (Nasir & Ahmad, 2018; Dahlan et al.,

2024). Specific worship comprises obligatory and voluntary forms of worship. Khin et al. (2006) assert that the execution of specific worship necessitates compliance with particular pillars, validity conditions, and additional factors for acceptance by Allah S.W.T.

Baharudin (2021) conducted a study to demonstrate the impact of weather and climate on worship practices. The examination of legal rulings pertaining to worship encompasses prayer, purification, and fasting. The study of *Usul al-Fiqh* provides a foundational framework for understanding worship law. This study indicates that weather and climate affect the implementation of worship laws, with scholars taking these factors into account to safeguard human welfare, including health and life considerations.

According to Mahmud (1981), prayer is considered the fundamental pillar of Islam; its establishment equates to the establishment of the religion, while its neglect equates to the dismantling of the religion. The analogy of prayer in a Muslim's life resembles a river with a continuous flow of water, allowing for purification five times daily.

Masyhur (1987) asserts that the role of prayer in Islam parallels that of the human body. It serves as a foundational practice, a symbol of strength, and an emblem of Islam. The role of the Guardian and Preserver of Faith establishes a significant connection between the servant and the Creator, serving as a source of comfort and peace for the soul and thereby differentiating believers from non-believers. Islam provides its adherents with concessions, referred to as *rukhsah*, especially concerning the practice of prayer. These concessions encompass scenarios such as praying during illness, praying while traveling, praying in outdoor

settings, and various other circumstances not explicitly detailed in religious texts.

Abas et al. (2023) conducted a study to ascertain prayer and fasting times in the Burj Khalifa, a skyscraper with identical coordinates but varying height. This research identified three time zone variations corresponding to different altitudes. A study examining the comprehension and application of travel prayer among Community College students in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, indicated a significant level of knowledge among the students, yet a minimal level of practice. This indicates that lecturers and relevant parties must intensify efforts to ensure that the implementation of prayer rituals during travel among students meets satisfactory standards. Isa and Jusoh (2013).

Hamzah and Ismail (2017) conducted a study on *rukhsah* in prayer, specifically examining patients and caregivers in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. This study demonstrates that hospital staff, particularly nurses, play a crucial role in aiding patients to perform prayers during illness, in accordance with Islamic concessions and established protocols.

Islamic law allows for concessions in the performance of worship when Muslims encounter difficulties or legitimate excuses that hinder their ability to fulfill it as prescribed. Subri and Rohmanan (2022) conducted research on the Sharia-compliant worship practices of *masyaqqah* and *rukhsah*, analyzing the evidence that allows individuals with Sharia-justified reasons to sit during prayer. We analyzed the evidence from the Quran, Hadith, and consensus, incorporating the perspectives of all four schools of thought. Relevant evidence supports the justification of allowing individuals to pray while seated.

Bidin et al. (2020) conducted a study on the

practice of prayer among students at Gelang Patah Community College and Bandar Penawar. The findings indicate that while students possess knowledge and understanding of the obligation of prayer, there remains a deficiency in their awareness and appreciation of this act of worship and their role as servants to their Creator. Despite demonstrating mastery of specific knowledge and being considered knowledgeable, individuals may find it challenging to apply it effectively. Various factors, including physical and sociocultural constraints, influence this situation.

Numerous studies have investigated issues related to the implementation of worship, as evidenced by the works of Baharudin (2021), Niri et al. (2019), Nizam et al. (2019), and Abas et al. (2023). Ikhsan et al. (2019) conducted a study that evaluates the methodologies developed by previous scholars. The ideas of *masyaqqah* and *rukhsah* as allowed by *syarak* have been studied by Subri and Rohmanan (2022), Rahman et al. (2022), Effendi (2019), Azahari and Harun (2019), Akbar (2022), and Fathurrahman et al. (2022). These writings address only issues related to worship practices and concessions on land, excluding the implementation of specific worship practices in the ocean.

Field Research

Fauzi et al. (2016) examined the compliance of the Muslim population on Pangkor Island. The researchers conducted the assessment by selecting 19 indicators related to the pillars of Islam, Sunnah, responsibilities, community, leadership, morality, and personal character. This study's findings indicate that the adherence of Muslims to various practices requires emphasis and attention. Specifically, the first finding reveals that 15 respondents aged 21-30 do not fully engage in the five

daily prayers. Furthermore, 75% of respondents noted that the problem of alcohol and drug abuse necessitates attention. Researchers have examined the topics of Quran reading, mosque visits, pilgrimage preparation, and premarital courses, highlighting the importance of these issues for the community.

Khalilieh (1998) performed extensive research on Islamic law as it pertains to maritime contexts. This study examines the contemporary application of Islamic law in maritime contexts, including aspects such as ship ownership, crew conditions, Islamic contracts at sea, maritime business practices, and religious traditions associated with maritime activities. Instead of discussing the broader topic of worship, the study primarily examines Islamic law in the context of maritime activities and shipping.

Simultaneously, the research conducted by Mufid (2018) examines the *fiqh* pertaining to marine conservation, focusing on the fishing regulations established for fishermen to engage in environmentally sustainable practices that align with Islamic principles. Thobroni's (2017) study on maritime jurisprudence examines the ethical considerations of ocean management for Muslim rulers. In contrast to al-Sumaiti's (2004) study, which sought to explore the application of Islamic law to maritime law in Europe across multiple dimensions, it ultimately remains theoretical.

Lawi (1991) conducted a study on Muslims at sea, examining the performance of the five daily prayers among the residents of Pekan Kecil Meludam, Sri Aman, in Sarawak. The study found that many residents in the area, especially adult fishermen, failed to perform their obligatory prayers due to insufficient knowledge regarding the correct method of

praying while on a boat. Dahalan et al. (2012) conducted a study on a community of 234 Muslim fishermen in Selangor. The study indicated that, despite fulfilling religious obligations like prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, most fishermen continued to rely on shamans or spiritual healers for maritime safety and utilized talismans during their time at sea. Despite the serious transgression of associating partners with Allah SWT in faith, ignorance continues to prevail in its practice.

The research conducted by Shebani (2016) examines individuals engaging in religious practices under challenging circumstances, specifically aboard large vessels and submarines where worship is impeded. In such circumstances, every *mukallaf* is required to perform prayers, even when under duress. Al-Syamrani (1999) and Al-Samarrai (2019) have examined the topic of worship at sea. They concentrated on the mandatory acts of worship conducted on ships at sea, specifically focusing their research on maritime worship practices.

The review of prior studies indicates a deficiency in specific guidelines regarding the jurisprudence of worship, especially for university researchers engaged in fieldwork. Consequently, undertaking this study is essential for a Muslim researcher to fully meet their spiritual obligations. Therefore, we conducted this study to identify the issues and challenges in the implementation of prayer rituals in the field and to find solutions to these problems, enabling researchers to fulfill their religious obligations and fulfill their research responsibilities simultaneously.

Methodology

This research employs qualitative methods, utilizing data collection through interviews and observations. Lebar (2017) states that the interview method seeks to acquire

information that is inaccessible via direct observation. The objective is to collect respondents' perspectives within a specific domain. Researchers and graduate students conducting field research on oceans, forests, and mangroves were among the respondents in this study.

The interview included 20 respondents: 12 from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 5 from Universiti Putra Malaysia, and 3 from Universiti Sains Malaysia. Eight of the 20 individuals are involved in ocean-related activities, eight in forest-related activities, and the remaining four in mangrove swamp research.

This research employs the observation method to gather the necessary data. Jasmi (2021) categorizes the observation method into two types: direct observation and participant observation. Participant observation. This study employed the observation method, wherein researchers actively participated in the fieldwork. This included being on a boat during the expedition to Redang Island aboard the UMT-owned RV Discovery ship, as well as conducting surveys in the Bukit Kor Forest alongside UMT researchers.

We conducted analysis using ATLAS.ti 23 software after collecting interview and observation data. ATLAS.ti offers multiple functions that enhance the analysis of qualitative research, such as data categorization, code or theme formation, and systematic data analysis. This study analyzed data based on specific themes concerning the issues and challenges associated with the implementation of prayer rituals in the research field.

Results and Discussion

Respondent Profile

This research included survey and

interview sessions with 20 participants, consisting of researchers and postgraduate students from three public universities in Malaysia: Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). In terms of age demographics, six respondents were aged 21 to 30 years, three respondents were aged 31 to 40 years, eight respondents

were aged 41 to 50 years, and the remaining three respondents were 51 years or older.

Age characteristics may also affect the challenges individuals encounter while performing field research. Figure 1, illustrates the age demographics of the respondents included in this study.

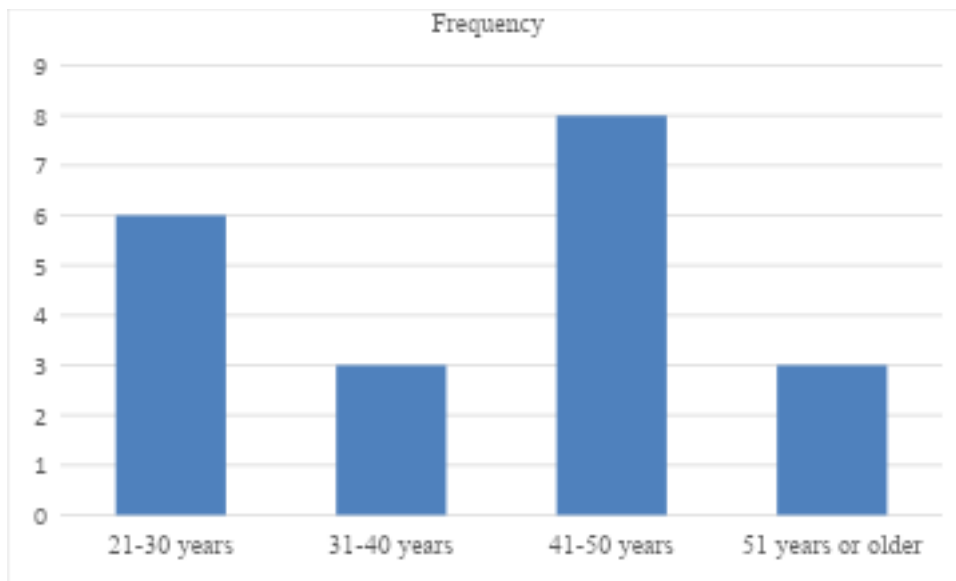


Figure 1: Frequency of respondent age

The study's participants were 8 men and 12 women, including three researchers and postgraduate students from USM, five researchers from UPM, and 12 researchers and postgraduate students from UMT. All UPM respondents engage in forest research; USM respondents focus on mangrove research, whereas 8 UMT respondents participate in ocean research, 3 specialize in forest research, and 1 UMT

respondent concentrates on mangrove research.

Subsequently, we asked the respondents the duration of their work in each respective field. This could potentially impact their prayer practices during the field study. Table 1, provides detailed information regarding the respondent's profile.

Table 1: Respondent's profile

No.	Age	Gender	University	Field Involved	The longest duration in the field
1	51 and above	Female	UPM	Forest	2 weeks
2	51 and above	Male	UPM	Forest	2 weeks
3	41 - 50	Female	UPM	Forest	1 week
4	31 - 40	Female	UPM	Forest	2 weeks
5	41 - 50	Female	UPM	Forest	2 weeks
6	41 - 50	Female	USM	Mangrove	5 days
7	21 - 30	Male	USM	Mangrove	5 days
8	21 - 30	Female	USM	Mangrove	5 days

9	51 and above	Male	UMT	Forest	5 days
10	41 – 50	Male	UMT	Ocean	2 weeks
11	41 – 50	Male	UMT	Ocean	1 week
12	31 – 40	Female	UMT	Ocean	3 days
13	41 – 50	Female	UMT	Mangrove	3 days
14	41 – 50	Female	UMT	Forest	4 days
15	21 – 30	Female	UMT	Forest	1 week
16	21 – 30	Male	UMT	Ocean	5 days
17	21 – 30	Male	UMT	Ocean	5 days
18	31 – 40	Female	UMT	Ocean	1 week
19	21 – 30	Female	UMT	Ocean	1 week
20	41 - 50	Male	UMT	Ocean	4 days

Issues and Challenges in the Implementation of Prayer Worship at the Ocean

According to Figure 2, the respondents most commonly encounter problems and difficulties with the practices or performance of prayers while at sea, whether on a ship, boat, or island. Respondents encounter the difficulty of

doing prayers on a confined boat and in proximity to members of the opposing sex. Moreover, respondents often face challenges in ascertaining the Qibla's orientation when the vessel is in motion. The responders also offered insights regarding the practice of offering prayers during stormy sea conditions or inclement weather.

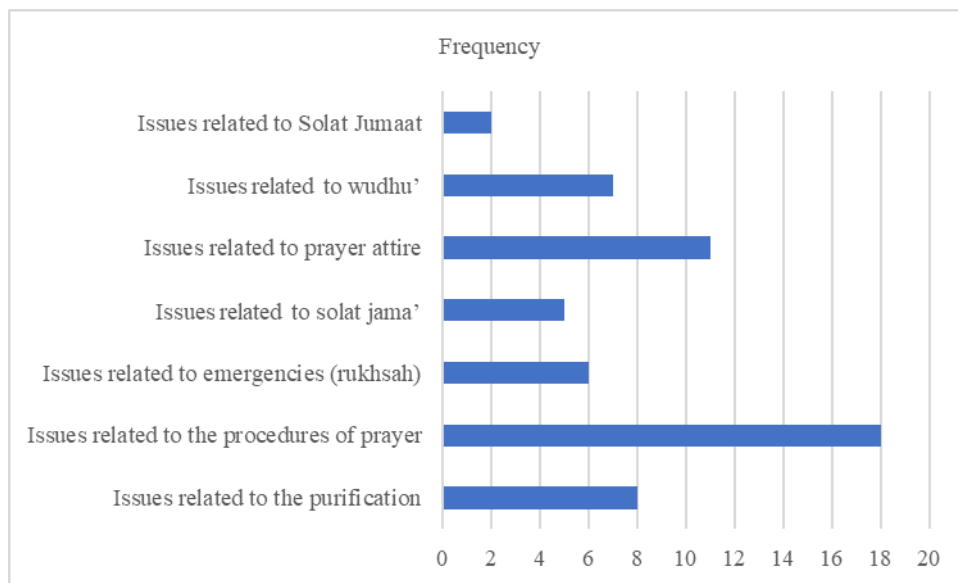


Figure 2: Frequency of issues and challenges in the implementation of prayer worship at the ocean

The texts *Is'af Ahl al-'Asr bi Ahkam al-Bahr* (al-Syamrani, 1999) and *Ahkam al-Bahr fi al-Fiqh al-Islami* (Ahmad, 2000) assert that *ijma* universally acknowledges the execution of prayer aboard a vessel as acceptable and valid (Agadirun et al., 2024). This religious practice is pragmatic,

as ships are vital maritime vessels for human daily endeavors. The utilization of ships generally involves protracted voyages and requires considerable time; yet, every Muslim is obligated to perform their prayers.

Participants frequently encounter challenges with appropriate prayer clothes while at sea. The majority of clothing concerns revolve around the cleanliness of garments at sea and their suitability for direct prayer attire. Furthermore, the matter of attire pertains to the utilization of damp and constrictive garments during prayer.

Subsequently, we tackle the purification concern, as responders often inquire about the legitimacy of utilizing seawater for purification or ablution. The book *Ahkam al-Bahr fi al-Fiqh al-Islami* (Ahmad, 2000) asserts that seawater can purify both small and big pollutants and eliminate pollution that has contaminated garments, bodies, or sacred sites. Consequently, seawater is effective for eliminating pollutants, and it is permissible to do ablution with it. *Tayammum* is unnecessary when pure water is accessible.

Concerns also exist over whether vomiting from seasickness is considered impure and whether garments soiled with vomit are acceptable for prayer. Challenges pertaining to ablution: Participants frequently encounter difficulties about the proper methodology for ablution with water. Furthermore, several individuals find it challenging to maintain their ablution in confined spaces and mixed-gender environments, which may lead to interactions between men and women.

Respondents also addressed the matter of conducting Friday prayers while aboard a ship, namely at sea. According to the book

Is'af Ahl al-'Asr bi Ahkam al-Bahr (al-Syamrani, 1999), it is permissible to conduct Friday prayers aboard a ship, as it is valid to perform both required prayers and congregational prayers on a ship. *Al-Fiqh Al-Manhaji* (Khin et al., 2006) asserts that staying at the location of the Friday prayers is a mandatory requirement for their observance. A traveler who is not undertaking a journey for sinful reasons, concludes their journey before dawn, and does not hear the dawn call to prayer at their location on that Friday is exempt from performing the Friday prayer.

Issues and Challenges in the Implementation of Prayer Worship in Forest/Mangrove

Figure 3 illustrates the concerns and challenges frequently encountered by researchers during forest and mangrove fieldwork studies. The predominant concern they encounter pertains to prayer attire, with a response frequency of 14. The primary concern regarding prayer attire is the cleanliness of the garments, especially in forested areas where frequent insect bites can cause bloodstains on the clothing. Mohamad (2019) translated the *Kitab al-Fiqh al-Manhaji: Ibadah Dalam Fiqh al-Syafii*, which excuses a small amount of mosquito blood accidentally getting on prayer clothes. This implies that wearing prayer clothes stained with a small amount of mosquito blood while in the forest or similar environments is permissible during prayer.

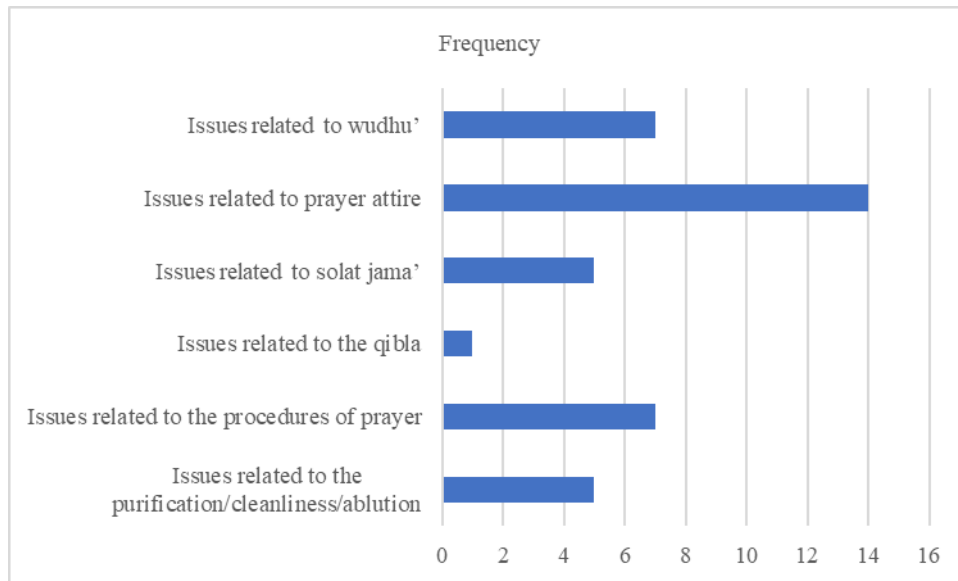


Figure 3: Frequency of issues and challenges in the implementation of prayer worship in forest/mangrove areas

Furthermore, when in the mangrove jungle, the attire becomes soiled and comparable. This circumstance induces uncertainty over the cleanliness of their garments for prayer. Based on our observations during our fieldwork in the Bukit Kor Forest with researchers from UMT, we found that similar situations often arise in the forest, particularly when traversing muddy areas caused by rain. Soil or mud, if not contaminated, is pure, and one can use mud-soiled clothes for prayer.

In addition, responders encounter difficulties when their garments become damp and exhibit a constricted appearance upon contact with rainwater. In the context of apparel, some respondents encounter challenges when their garments become contaminated, such as with mud from pig pens or other forms of garbage. This will pose a problem if a water shortage occurs at that time.

Another concern pertains to ablution (*wudhu*), wherein respondents encounter difficulties when distanced from a clean water source and occasionally face a scarcity of water for ablution. The process of ablution also presents challenges for

those who wear boots that are difficult to remove and reapply.

Conclusion

The study identified multiple concerns and challenges faced by researchers at higher education institutions when conducting the prayer ritual in the field, especially concerning the procedural elements in resource-constrained environments. The lack of reference resources, including brochures, booklets, or guidebooks, compels researchers to depend on internet sources, personal experiences, or their basic knowledge, which may prove inadequate. The study recommends the provision of either a concise or detailed guide to enable Muslim researchers to conduct their prayers in compliance with Islamic Sharia rules in any circumstance. The majority of participants agreed that formulating these standards is necessary to help researchers and students effectively address worship-related concerns in the field. Future study is advised to refine these recommendations and evaluate their efficacy across diverse contexts and user requirements, aiding the Muslim research community in more effectively meeting their academic

responsibilities.

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