

# Factors Affecting Malay Muslim Youth Life Skills Development in Islamic Private School

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### Abstract

This qualitative research aimed to study factors affecting life skills development for Malay Muslim in small-sized Islamic private school in Pattani Province. The subjects of this study included 16 school administrators, teachers, students' parents, religious teachers, community leaders, current students, and alumni, side by side with three experts. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The collected data were, then, categorized and connected for conclusions and interpretation. The reliability of the conclusions and interpretations were examined by experts of Malay Muslim's life skills development.

The result of the study was that there were two factors affecting life skills development for Malay Muslim in small-sized Islamic private schools-inner factors, and outer factors. There were six inner factors including the school's strict rules and regulations, good care for students, relative-liked organizational culture, teacher's model, peer relationship and learning, and schoolmate relationship and learning. There were four outer factors including outside-school friend relationship and learning, cooperation between the school and the students' parents, cooperation between the school and the community, and networks with outer organizations.

The conclusions brought about the following suggestions. Firstly, since teachers were a major model for students, Islamic private schools in the area should praise and give compliments to teachers and school officers who were good models for the students; also, the students should be inspired to adapt these teachers and school officers' characteristics

into their lifestyles in order to develop their life skills. Secondly, good care for students was also an essential factor developing the students' life skills. Therefore, schools should create or provide a mechanism, or an evaluation system concerning Malay Muslim students in their schools' life skills development concretely with the cooperation from every agent related to the students.

**Keywords:** Life skill, Malay Muslim youth, Islamic private school

## Introduction

Life skills development trains youth to understand how to live their lives and live their lives skillfully. Life skills development can be done by every adult perceiving the importance of youth problems. The adults can provide youth experiences to help them learn how to live based on the youth's lifestyles. It is a way to reinforce youth to learn to feel complete by themselves. The feelings of completion were; for example, having a good life, being happy, having good education, and having a warm family. Learning by themselves is emphasized in order to help youth achieve their true life goals in different levels. No doubt, life skills development is like life vaccination for children and youth living in the changing society. It prepares them to live well in the future.

Even though, there had been many activities organized to improve Muslim youth in the three southern border provinces' life skills, the activities mostly focused on a particular skill such as communication skill, adjustment skill, drug use protection skill, and adolescent pregnancy protection skill. Moreover, these activities emphasized only on youth. There were not any integration with other dimensions, such as friends, families, religious organizations, communities, and social media.

However, Malay Muslim' culture is different from Muslims in other regions' culture. It shapes people in this area to have a different life skills development process. That is, the life skills development is conducted under the tradition, idea, and belief of Malay culture, Islam, and Thainess. Such unique culture is pushed by three factors (Nurman, J. 2012, p. 35) including requirement for children and youth to carry on local culture and identity, requirement for children and youth to live in the true Islamic path, and expectation for children and youth to realize their roles and duties in the society as citizens. With these factors, the process of life skills development for children and youth in the three southern border provinces is complicated, and has ties with social systems and social institutions in many levels.

It is well-known that social institutions which are related to life skills development process for children and youth in the three southern border provinces are various and complex. In other words, family is the first institution for children to learn the Malay Muslim way of life, as foundation of their lives. They grow up and learn to live in the society well. Then, children experience and learn in their traditionally rigorous community from local religious institution and educational institution, because in Islam, every Muslim must study the religious teachings. Consequently, seeking for knowledge is an individual duty, and providing

education to children and youth is parents' duty. Most parents trust local educational institutions and consign to the institutions to take care of and develop their children through the Islamic private school system. Furthermore, parents were prescribed to educate their children to be educated and able to practice religious activities correctly. If the parents are not capable for teaching their children, they must provide knowledgeable teachers for the children.

Regarding the life skills development for Malay Muslim youth, there had been many life skills development activities focusing on different life skills, organized by many social institutions. However, there were limitations in such activities, as. **Malay Muslim youth's life skills development through family institution:** It was found that Muslim youth's life skills development in families was quite incomplete, due to the family context and structure. At present, families are becoming more complex and various. For example, there are single parent families, families with problematic family members, children raised up by grandparents, and generation gaps in extended families. Another important factor was that there was increasing tendency of violence uses towards children and women in families. The causes were mostly the father's irresponsibility to the family, the use of strength and emotion to solve problems, and the use of drugs. These factors were surely the obstacles for life skills development via family institution for Muslim youth (Kasetchai et al., 2010).

When considering **Malay Muslim youth's life skills development through religious institution:** Nowadays, there were less youth performing religious activities at mosques. Usually, adults and elderly were seen in the mosques. This made religious scholars, socialists, and local leaders worried about the youth who were careless to, or gave less precedence to religious activities. In addition, most of the religious leaders, or the Imams, were old people; so, there were generation gaps between the religious leaders and youth to communicate, make youth understand religious teachings, and develop youth in their communities. There were four problems causing the religious leaders unable to take care of youth in Islamic ways (Kasetchai & Abdullahmalik, 2014, pp. 80-81). First, religious leaders did not understand their roles to youth. Second, religious leaders were unaware of, and did not place importance on caretaking for youth. Third, religious leaders lacked of skills and experiences in taking care of youth. Last, religious leaders did not have any relations to youth. Additionally, many mosques had facility management problems, and had insufficient resources to support operations.

Apart from the fact that **Malay Muslim youth's life skills development through local and outer development organizations**: There were many development organizations, local and outer, that helps encouraging youth development via projects, such as Youth Volunteer Project, and Strengthening Youth Network in the Deep South Project. An example of the development organizations was the Asian Resource Foundation that worked on community learning centers, education, and peace studies learning. These development projects and organizations encountered the same major problem-the lack of budget. They had inadequate budget and uncontinued financial support which caused them unable to organize potential development activities for youth continually. Moreover, the flagging economy caused a great reduction of financial supports, as there was less number of donators, and many international investment organizations moved out from the area to the neighboring countries which made the budget provision decreased.

It is known that **Malay Muslim youth's life skills development through non-formal and informal education**: The Non-formal and Informal Education Centers had arranged many activities encouraging life skills development for youth, such as the Morality Development Project, the Traffic Regulations Enforcement Project, the Democracy Learning Project, the Sex Education and AIDS Protection Project, the Drug Protection Project, the Environment Preservation and Thai Ways of Life Project, the Morality and Religious Studies Project, the Human and Citizen Rights Project, the Language Learning Project, the Self and Community Health Care Project, and so on (The Non-formal and Informal Center, 2010). And **Malay Muslim youth's life skills development through public education institution**: A public education institution referred to a public school provided by the government that integrated life skills in the eight subjects-Thai language, Mathematics, social, religious and cultural studies, health and physical education, arts, vocational and technological skills, sciences, and foreign languages (Ministry of Education, 2012). In Thailand, a life skill education program had been adapted in schools and universities in order to extend the students' self-development ability, and the ability to live in the society happily. It was useful for changing human behaviors and solving social problems. Finally, **Malay Muslim youth's life skills development through public and private organizations**: It was found that there were many organizations working on youth development. They utilize life skills in solving various social problems, especially the ones related to youth's quality of life development. For example, the 4-H Life Skill

(Targeting Life Skills: TLS Model) was used for drug protection by the Narcotics Control Technology Center (Ministry of Education, 2012).

The projects mentioned above could practice local youth many life skills, such as understandable communication, sympathy, decision making for a solution, self-adjustment and encountering the society, attitude re-adjustment, acceptance of social trend, analytical thinking, creative thinking, effective communication, human relations, self-awareness, coping with different emotions, coping with stress makers, learning skills for careers, making friends, managing emotions, and leadership.

Normally, Islamic private schools are important institutions developing Malay Muslim youth's life skills in the Islamic way. The schools emphasize on developing Malay Muslim youth's quality of life in Islamic way, making the youth good members of the society and the nation, educating them, supporting them to do good deeds and stop doing bad as good Islamic believers, encouraging them to be good citizens and models for others, and enabling them to adapt the life skills they learned from the Islamic private schools in their daily lives, as they were expected by the southern border provinces society. As a result, it is the schools' duty to provide process for life skills development for Malay Muslim youth who are at risk, as there are many problems in this age of materialism and globalization and the problems are merging into societies where religion is clung on very tightly like the three southern border provinces of Thailand.

Hence, this research aimed to study factors affecting life skills development for Muslim youth in Islamic private school in Pattani Province. Pattani Province was chosen because it is the province where there are highest numbers of Islamic private schools, students in the schools, and teachers in the schools, among the three southern border provinces (Regional Education Office 12, 2012). The researcher chose one small-sized Islamic private school in Pattani Province- Santitham Witya School. It was selected because the school was accepted by the locals and related organizations as a school providing good life skills development to the students. Besides, the school was rewarded for life skills development for the students by many local, provincial, and national organizations. The students in the school, surely, have appropriate life skills. No doubt, the Santitham Witya School was selected to study factors affecting life skills development for Muslim youth in small-sized Islamic private schools, because it could provide satisfactory life skills development to the students.

This was a qualitative research focusing on a case study. Data were collected from documents and in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The accuracy and reliability were examined by experts. The analyzed data were presented descriptively. However, the researcher purposively selected a school to study. It was Santitham Witya School. It was a small-sized Islamic school. The school was selected through three criteria. First, it was an Islamic private school accepted by the locals and related organizations. Second, it was rewarded for life skills development for Muslim youth. Third, it was evaluated to be in the “good” level of students’ life skills development by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment. The researcher collected data from 16 persons who were related to Muslim youth’s life skills development through Islamic private schools. They were school administrator, head of students’ discipline office, head of guidance office, head of general education office, head of religious education office, students’ parents, religious leaders, community leader, current student, and alumna.

### **Malay Muslim youth in three southern border provinces**

The Malay Muslim youth in three southern border provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat) has experienced some issues that do not associate with their religion (Islam). They hardly ever realize what the future will hold. In the same vein, they rarely obey their parents and teacher, they do not even realize what their duties are. In addition to these issues, they are likely to ignore their religious teachings, and they live their lives according to their desire (Maslan, 2008). Furthermore, due to some trends, a study has revealed that they strive to conduct themselves and emulate the trends which give rise to some inappropriate behaviors that they may not know if the trends abide by their religious teachings or not. Some of the notable examples regarding the behaviors are that the Muslim youth do not dare to reveal that they are Muslims. Also, they tend to consume non-Halal foods (Amatayakul, 2009).

In accordance with the Malay Muslim youth in the three southern border provinces (Laeheem & Baka, 2010), do not live their lives according to what the societies in the provinces have expected and they seem not to practice according to their religious teachings. To illustrate, the youth tends to have relationship between men and women freely; their relationship can be compared with those of westerners in which they can premarital holding hands between a man and a woman, kissing, or even sexual intercourse. The youth also ignores their religious practice and tends to avoid doing community service. These findings

synthesize with a study which aimed to investigate the issues regarding the Muslim youth in the three provinces suggested that the problems concerning the Muslim youth in the three provinces have mounted such as, drug addiction, gambling, and quarrel, violent behaviour (Nakonthap et al., 2007).

In association with the violence, it can be stated the Malay Muslim youth is in the state of war or terrorism that distract them from socialization and common humanity. As a consequence, these distractions have an effect on their mentality and positivity. Also, they automatically accept the violence and are inclined to solve problems in a violent way. These lead the violence to endlessly persisting. Correspondingly, the violence has an uncountable impact on their mentality. For one thing, amidst the so-called endless unrest, they cannot have normal lives that result in increasing depression and a surge of anxiety.

From the above findings, it can be reflected that the problems regarding the Malay Muslim youth in the three southern border provinces are the matters that need to be concerned about. Thus, the related agencies may need to create immunity to being aware of the problems. In addition, the Malay Muslim youth may need to be boosted life skills so that they bravely encounter the social problems. Consequently, this immunity can be a strong foundation for them to have the bright future. This is according to what (World Health Organization, 1994) has stated that life skills should be promoted as the skills are so important for youth to help them solve social problems since the youth is vulnerable to experience mental and physical problems such as, drug addiction, smoking, pregnancy, other illegal acts, etc.

### **Factors affecting Malay Muslim youth life skills development in Islamic private school**

It was found that there were **six inner factors** that affect the Malay Muslim youth's life skills development. They were the school's strict rules and regulations, good care for students, relative-liked organizational culture, teacher's model, peer relationship and learning, and schoolmate relationship and learning.

**The school's strict rules and regulations** were supportive for developing Malay Muslim youth in schools because it was easy to control the students to follow the school rules since it was a small-size school. In addition, the head of students' discipline office could work on this issue well as he knew the community and students' parents well. So, he was trusted by the parents to take care of their children. This facilitated the works of the students'

discipline office. Moreover, the teachers in the students' discipline office could recognize every student's faces and names, as well as their habits and behaviors.

**Good care for students** was a good point of this small-sized school. Furthermore, the students lived around the school, and their parents did go to the school when they were young. This made the teachers and the students feel close to and trust each other. When the students had a problem, they went to their homeroom teacher or the teacher whom they trust in for an advice. The teachers, also, could give advice friendly and help the students as best as they could. These characteristics were supportive and effective to developing the students' life skills.

**Relative-liked organizational culture** in this small-sized school made the schools administrators, the teachers, and the students have good relationship, feel free to ask for advice and suggestions, and do not hesitate to offer help. Among the students, they had a student council as a coordinator between the students and the school administrators, side by side with the teachers. This kind of organizational culture created the supportive atmosphere for developing the students' life skills.

**Teacher's model** was important. Teachers who were close to students were most likely to be influential to the students in many ways. Teachers with good personality and lifestyle could impress the students and be a model for them to imitate the teachers. In addition, for youth to imitate people they admire is an adolescent development process. Accordingly, the school had placed importance and emphasized on having good role model teachers for students.

**Peer relationship and learning** played a crucial role in developing the Malay Muslim youth's life skills, because the students in Islamic private schools were in teen age-the age when they are very close to their friends and more likely to believe their friends more than others as they in the same age and have the same experience. Therefore, having good friends could lead youth to good ways. The school endeavored to supervise the students' gathering so that they will not invite their friends to do bad activities.

**Schoolmate relationship and learning** were influential to the youth in this age as they were in the similar age, so there were behavior imitations among the students. In this small-sized school, many alumni visited the school regularly. The alumni shared their new experiences outside the school which were interesting for the current students. Easily, the successful alumni had become the current students' role model.

There were **three outer factors** affecting the Malay Muslim youth's life skills development including cooperation between the school and the students' parents, cooperation between the school and the community, and networks with outer organizations.

**Cooperation between the school and the students' parents** was a primary outer factor as the students spent most of their time at school and home. The school and home shared the same tasks-instilling, and practicing many life skills. Cares given by family members could definitely help youth who were encountering a problem.

**Cooperation between the school and the community** was essential as well. The community could help supervise the students. Moreover, the relationship between small-sized schools was usually good. There were many types of cooperation, such as helps through the school's activities. This was useful for improving and developing the students' life skills.

**Networks with outer organizations** such as government organizations and private organizations could support youth's life skills development. Small-sized schools did realize the importance of such networks in developing their students' life skills.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This study found out that an important factor affecting Malay Muslim youth's life skills development was the schoolmate relationship and learning, which was relevant to the result of a research about factors related to affecting stress and stress management for students of Islamic private schools in Hadyai District, Songkhla Province (Azan & Kasetchai, 2010). This research found that the most popular stress management way for the students was to ask for advices from their friends.

In addition, another factor affecting Malay Muslim youth's life skills development found from this study was to have good teacher role model. This outcome was consistent with a research on the relationships of selected variables and school effectiveness of private Islamic schools (Sarawut, 2007) which found that teachers' teaching behavior was one of the variables having pretty strong relationships with the effectiveness of Islamic private schools as a whole. Moreover, a research on model of Islamic school appropriations for Thai society (Thipwan & Thon, 2012) gave a suggestion to Islamic private school that school should give precedence to continual teacher and personnel educational orientation.

Regarding the outer factors affecting Malay Muslim youth's life skills development, the cooperation between the school and the students' parents and the cooperation between the

school and the community were crucial. This result was relevant to a suggestion proposed in a study of the risk factors related to Thai Muslim youth's aggressive behavior in the three southern border provinces of Thailand (Dolmanach & Kasetchai, 2008) which concluded that parents, community leaders, and religious leaders should be interested in and place importance on taking care of Muslim youth in terms of religious teachings. They should also seriously encourage and support the youth to learn Islamic studies, watch and follow the youth's frequency of doing religious performances so that they had good behaviors, and stayed away from violent behaviors. In addition, the research of youth supervision based on Islam provided by Muslim leaders in three southern border provinces of Thailand (Abdullohmalik, 2013) found that Muslim leaders played a major role in supervising youth in Islamic ways. They had different supervision ways depending on the environment and their skills.

Additionally, it was also consistent to the study of religious communities and the struggles in the new world (Suchat, 2011) which concluded that the task of creating a new generation of Muslim depended on families, schools (both religious and general ones), and mosques. These three elements were considered the main institutions in Muslim community. They transfer Islamic knowledge and Islamic way of life. Therefore, they were expected to bring continual security to Muslim societies in the mist of struggles in such changing societies and world where Muslim youth were living in.

However, this research also found that having networks with outer organizations was another interesting outer factor developing Malay Muslim youth's life skills development in Islamic private school. The outcome was consistent to a recommendation given in the research of model of Islamic school appropriations for Thai society (Thipwan & Thon, 2012) that Islamic schools should be given freedom to contact with organizations from foreign countries and receive financial supports from the organizations, because having networks with organizations, inside and outside the country, could strengthen schools.

Since teacher role model was the primary inner factor affecting Malay Muslim youth's life skills development, schools should regularly praise teachers or school personnel who have good personality and behaviors. There must not be awards. Only compliments and acceptance were enough to inspire and give them encouragement to keep being such good models for students to adapt into their daily lives, both while they were studying and after they were graduated.

It requires cooperation from every institution, particularly the major institutions-school, family, and community, to develop Muslim youth's life skills. These major institutions need cooperation among each other, and schools should play the key roles. These institutions may do different duties. For example, the family is in charge of supervising youth after school and during vacation, communities should pay close attention to the youth and build appropriate atmosphere in the community, and schools should instill good personalities into the youth and educate them when they were at school.

Furthermore, the school should create a mechanism, or an evaluation system to examine the Muslim youth's life skills development at schools with the consideration of cooperation from every institution. This mechanism or evaluation system will reflect success, as well as problems and limitations of life skills development in Muslim youth. It will provide useful information to people related to the youth's life skills development in schools to adjust and design better life skills development process for Malay Muslim youth in Islamic private schools in the future.

Moreover, Islamic private schools should encourage students to utilize and adopt religious teachings in their daily lives, at school, with their families, and in their communities and societies. The schools should emphasize on building good school, family, community, and society models. In addition, students should be reinforced to make better relationships, and understand their roles and duties to be good models in various life skills practices for other members in their schools, families, communities, and societies. Then, they can learn to live with others harmoniously, have acceptable life skills, and live happily now and forever.

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