

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE IN MALAYSIA: A CASE STUDY OF 4TH YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF FIQH AND FATWA AT UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

In Islam, freedom of religion means respecting an individual's choice to follow their preferred faith. This study focuses on how Muslim youth, particularly 4th-year Fiqh and Fatwa students at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), understand religious freedom. Cultural influences often limit the true understanding of Islam, which makes this topic important. The research used a quantitative approach, including surveys and questionnaires, with 131 respondents out of 201 students. The results, analyzed using SPSS, show a strong understanding of religious freedom among the students, measured through three aspects: understanding the concept of religious freedom (96.86%), awareness of the law (97.25%), and knowledge of religious discrimination (91.29%). Overall, the comprehension level was high at 95.15%, reflecting a positive view of religious freedom. The findings suggest that Islamic principles of justice and societal harmony support religious freedom in Malaysia. This research also highlights the need for policy discussions and legal reforms to align laws with Islamic values while ensuring religious freedom. Balancing these elements is essential for maintaining both religious rights and Islamic principles.

Keywords: Freedom of religion, Islamic perspective, Muslim youth, Malaysia, Fiqh and Fatwa.

1. INTRODUCTION

The basis for religious freedom in the context of Islam frequently found in Qur'anic verses and hadith. Both internal and external freedom are included. A person's freedom to accept or reject a religion known as external freedom. Internal freedom has two definitions: the freedom to adhere to religious teachings and the freedom to select a religion's sects, mazhab, and classes. (Umi Sumbulah, 2017).

Muslim society dominated by the younger generation, better known as 'Muslim youth'. Meriam Webster (2023) defines youth as the early period of existence, growth, or development where they have an understanding and perspective about Islam and religious freedom. As most Malaysians are Muslim, Muslim youth have a strong belief in Islam. They believe Islam is a perfect religion that is a guide and guide in life. As stated in Surah Ali-Imran, 3:19, which means:

“Truly, the Religion with Allah is Islam (religion of submission). Those to whom the Book had been given differed, out of mutual envy, after knowledge had come to them. And whoever hinders (disbelieves) the Verses of Allah, then surely Allah is Swift in reckoning”.

(Surah Ali-Imran, 3:19)

The verse above shows that the religion in the eyes of God is Islam. This shows that only the Islamic way of life accepted even from the word Islam it has the meaning of devoting oneself to Allah by obeying all His instructions. In this context, Muslim youth's understanding of religious freedom based on the teachings of Islam itself.

Additionally, Malaysia has been declared as an Islamic country as stated in the Federal Constitution. Based on the Federal Constitution (2009), according to Article 3, Islam certified as the Federal religion; however, other religions can practice their religion in peace and harmony without interfering with Islam. Through the information, we can relate that Muslim youth's understanding of religious freedom influenced by the legal context such as the legal system in Malaysia. Malaysia has a legal system based on Islamic principles that reflect its identity as an Islamic country. For this reason, the understanding of Muslim youth often interpreted by considering the Islamic view prevailing in Malaysia, especially in the issue of religious freedom.

However, the issue of religious freedom is an increasingly serious issue in Malaysia lately. Most of the Muslim youth or better known as the Gen-Z generation nowadays are starting to be caught up with the outside world, which is increasingly free and limited by the approach of the Islamic religion.

Starting with the controversy surrounding the movie 'Mentega Terbang', which is a hot topic since it touches on the comprehension and purity of the Islamic faith. Most of the characters that portrayed are young people and teenagers, and the creation of screenplays that also somewhat incorporate Muslims has affected the religious sensibility of Muslims in Malaysia. (Hasif Idris, 2023). The lack of knowledge and instruction among Muslim youth on the authentic teachings of Islam regarding religious freedom and the boundaries that observed as Muslims is the cause of this.

Moreover, discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) has been a debate in some LGBT communities in Malaysia, which also includes youth and teenagers. They are active in defending the rights of LGBT people, which said to be a fundamental right for an individual to prevent from freedom of religion. However, the Malaysian government cannot defend the request because it is more about extreme human rights and far deviates from the boundaries of the Islamic religion. This also shows that most Muslim youth influenced by external culture that contradicts Islamic teachings, which can cause confusion in the formation and understanding of religious freedom. (Mohd Nasaruddin Parzi, 2022). Therefore, the background in the problem of religious freedom is one of the most important and important issues debated in Malaysia.

On the other hand, controversy regarding a 'Jom Ziarah Gereja' program which is now a concern for Muslims, especially among Muslim youth today. This is because the program can cause confusion about the equality of all religions. Although the program aims to open the minds of Malaysian youth about the culture and beliefs of various races, but according to it, it is contradictory to the principles of Islam. This activity can lead to equality or equivalence between religions, which is one of the characteristics of pluralism in religion. This will cause Muslim youth to be easily confused in understanding religious freedom in Malaysia. (Mohamed Rashid Ab Razak, 2023). Therefore, the exposure of understanding in religious freedom needs to be applied among Muslim youth is very important to preserve the benefits of Islam.

Therefore, the Muslim youth's understanding of religious freedom in Malaysia based on an Islamic perspective can reflect developments that go hand in hand with social, cultural and legal developments in this country. Muslim youth need to play an important role to find a way to respect each other and develop together a broader understanding of religious freedom if it does not conflict with Islamic Sharia. Through this study, it was possible to see and evaluate the understanding of Muslim youth towards freedom of religion according to the Islamic perspective among students of the 4th Year Undergraduate of Fiqh and Fatwa to find out the extent of their understanding of the matter.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing research and academic debate on religious freedom are examined, indicating needs for future research and laying the groundwork for the proposed study. The study can be analysed through four themes, as listed below:

2.1 *Concept of Religious Freedom in Islam*

Based on Ahmad Munawar et al., (2020), the author relates the principle of religious freedom through an Islamic perspective. Freedom of religion in Islam is respect for the freedom to choose a religion and practice one's religion if it does not interfere with the teachings of Islam. The author also explained the principles and rights of religious freedom in Western civilization where they put religion on par with the relative nature that changes with the passage of time. The policy of religious freedom in the Federal Constitution is also focused on in this writing. For example, the right to freedom of religion is subject to the Federal Constitution. This is also a hot issue when there are a few parties who think that the provisions given give flexibility in religious freedom such as the right to convert to another religion. Therefore, the author debates those issues in this writing to overcome them from continuing to happen in this country.

The statement effectively encapsulates Ahmad Munawar et al (2020) exploration of religious freedom, particularly from an Islamic standpoint. The distinction between Islamic principles and Western civilization's perspective on religious freedom is clear, highlighting the Islamic emphasis on respecting the freedom to choose and practice religion within the bounds of Islamic teachings. The mention of the Federal Constitution's role in shaping religious freedom policies adds depth to the discussion. However, there's room for improvement in terms of providing specific examples or cases that illustrate the debated issues regarding religious flexibility, especially concerning the right to convert to another religion. Additionally, the writing could benefit from a more explicit connection between the debated issues and their potential impact on the country. Ensuring a more detailed exploration of specific instances and potential consequences would enhance the overall depth and clarity of the argument.

2.2 *Concept Comparison with International Law*

Badri (2018) contends that religious freedom is a fundamental human right based on universal, equal, and individualistic principles. The purpose of the writing is to amplify Muslim voices on Islam and religious freedom under

Sharia, seeking to reconstruct a more comprehensive understanding. This involves revealing the Islamic genealogy of religious freedom through alternative interpretations aligned with human rights principles. However, it is different from the concept based on international law as per the U.S. Embassy in Malaysia (2022). The Federal Constitution guarantees individuals the right to practice their religion. However, both federal and state governments have authority to control and prevent activities aiming to convert Islam, emphasizing protection of Islamic rights. The Constitution permits organizations to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom. Moreover, religious freedom intertwined with human rights, with the author highlighting that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guarantees the right to freedom of religion by Nur Afifah Mohd Najib and Ahmad Munawar Ismail (2018). The author further explores the right to freedom in different dimensions, including provisions in the Federal Constitution such as Article 3, 8, 11, and 12. Additionally, the author presents a Western perspective on religious freedom, emphasizing an individual's right to choose their religion. The evaluation extends to community perceptions regarding the right to religious freedom.

Badri (2018) lays the foundation by positing that religious freedom is an inherent human right grounded in universal principles. The focus on amplifying Muslim voices and reconstructing a comprehensive understanding brings a unique perspective. However, to enhance clarity, it would be beneficial to explicitly detail how the Islamic genealogy of religious freedom is revealed through alternative interpretations. The juxtaposition with international law, as presented by the U.S. Embassy in Malaysia (2022), introduces a crucial contrast. The statement highlights the dichotomy between the Islamic perspective, emphasizing protection of Islamic rights within the Malaysian Federal Constitution, and international law, which seemingly differs in its approach. To improve, consider specifying instances or clauses in international law that diverge from the Islamic framework, providing a more nuanced comparison. The connection with Nur Afifah Mohd Najib and Ahmad Munawar Ismail (2018) further expands the discourse by emphasizing the intertwining of religious freedom and human rights. The exploration of the UDHR's guarantees adds a valuable international dimension. However, to enhance this section, consider offering specific examples or cases that illustrate the intersection between the UDHR and the Malaysian context, providing a more concrete understanding of how international principles may clash or align with local practices. The introduction of a Western perspective on religious freedom adds richness to the discussion. Still, to strengthen this aspect, consider delving deeper into specific Western legal frameworks or cases that underscore the emphasis on an individual's right to choose their religion. This would offer a more nuanced comparison with the Malaysian context.

2.3 Religious Freedom and Religious Radicalism

Based on Earnie Elmie Helmi et al.'s (2022) interpretation and endorsement of religious freedom, the authors contend that it can result in diverse religious beliefs from an Islamic standpoint. The concept of pluralism, as discussed in this review, encompasses two definitions—either a broad acknowledgment of all religions or an acceptance of religious diversity. This review explores the implications of such understandings, particularly among students and youth. It becomes evident that religious freedom has a significant impact on Muslim youth, leading to a state of confusion regarding these varying perspectives. According to Shahirah Abdul Rahim and Mohd Safri Ali (2018), religious freedom is associated with liberalism, an ideology that disregards religious influence and employs rational thinking to address religious matters. This perspective has resulted in unfavourable opinions toward the Muslim community, as it operates independently of Islamic perspectives, challenges Sharia laws, attempts to reinterpret Islam, and rejects Malaysian laws. Consequently, it is evident that the Malaysian community, particularly Muslims, must devise a strategic plan to counter the spread of liberalism, which poses a risk of influencing the beliefs and ideologies of future generations. Therefore, Abu Bakar (2015) explores the connection between freedom of religion and the concept of tolerance. The term "tolerance," signifying patience towards various beliefs, is advocated by Abu Bakar as a crucial aspect in societies for the practice of religious freedom. Tolerance is viewed as a human action and demeanour that values the conduct of others, promoting religious freedom while preventing discrimination across religions. The association of tolerance with religious freedom often prompts criticism of Islam for being perceived as extreme and discriminatory. Contrary to this perception, Islam, according to Abu Bakar, respects diverse perspectives from a human standpoint but places significant emphasis on ensuring that Muslims uphold Islamic teachings faithfully.

Earnie Elmie Helmi et al. (2022) provide valuable insights by asserting that religious freedom, when endorsed and interpreted in specific ways, can lead to diverse religious beliefs within an Islamic context. The concept of pluralism, discussed in their review, is particularly noteworthy, offering two definitions—either a broad acknowledgment of all religions or an acceptance of religious diversity. However, the statement could benefit from more specific examples or case studies to illustrate the practical implications of these understandings among students and youth. Shahirah Abdul Rahim and Mohd Safri Ali (2018) contribute by linking religious freedom with liberalism, emphasizing the potential negative impact on the Muslim community. This insight adds depth to the discussion, highlighting the clash between liberal ideologies and Islamic

perspectives. To enhance this section, providing specific instances or cases where liberalism challenges Islamic principles could strengthen the argument and offer a more concrete understanding of the potential repercussions. Abu Bakar's (2013) exploration of the connection between freedom of religion and tolerance is crucial, emphasizing patience toward diverse beliefs as fundamental for religious freedom. The emphasis on tolerance as a human action that values others' conduct contributes positively to the discourse. However, a deeper exploration of specific instances where tolerance challenged or upheld within an Islamic context could enhance the narrative, providing a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved.

2.4 Religious Freedom and Contemporary Issues

Mohd Faizal Musa (2022) has suggested that religious factors may contribute to issues related to religious freedom. An example includes discrepancies in authentic Islamic beliefs, such as the emergence of distorted teachings. While most Malaysia's Islamic followers adhere to Sunni beliefs, variations such as, "Millah Ibrahim," and "Tuhan Harun" exist, contradicting true Islamic teachings. According to Nazneen Ismail et al. (2022), a research study indicates that students, also referred to as youth, exhibit a strong grasp of the comparative aspects of religion, closely linked to the concept of religious freedom. The study also highlights the crucial role of religious freedom in fostering positive inter-racial relations. The study underscores the significance of religious freedom in achieving the objectives of religion, encompassing humanitarian missions and fostering freedom of thought for the advancement of a better future that safeguards everyone's well-being. Moreover, Muhamad Faisal et al. (2019) concerns related to ethnic relations are intertwined with the challenges surrounding freedom of religion. Specifically, issues such as apostasy and the restriction on disseminating non-Islamic religious teachings to Muslims have surfaced. These challenges have originated from public perceptions and interpretations of the Federal Constitution concerning religious freedom. For instance, non-Muslims perceive these issues as connected to the dominance of the Malay race in the national government, leading to feelings of threat and unfairness regarding religious freedom.

Mohd Faizal Musa (2022) raises awareness of potential challenges stemming from religious factors, specifically the presence of distorted teachings within Islamic beliefs. The mention of specific variations like "Millah Ibrahim" and "Tuhan Harun" adds depth to the discussion, emphasizing discrepancies within Islamic practices. To enhance clarity, it would be beneficial to provide more context on the nature of these variations and their implications. The research study by Nazneen Ismail et al. (2022) sheds light on the perspective of students or youth regarding religious freedom, connecting it intricately with

the comparative aspects of religion. The emphasis on the role of religious freedom in fostering positive inter-racial relations is noteworthy, providing a holistic view of its societal impact. However, it would be beneficial to offer specific findings or examples from the study to strengthen the argument and provide a more concrete understanding of how students perceive and engage with religious freedom. Muhamad Faisal et al. (2019) contribute to the discussion by highlighting the intersection of ethnic relations and challenges in freedom of religion. The statement effectively captures the issues of apostasy and restrictions on disseminating non-Islamic teachings to Muslims, rooted in public perceptions of the Federal Constitution. To enhance this section, it could be valuable to delve deeper into the specific instances or cases that exemplify these challenges, providing a clearer understanding of the complexities involved.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative methodology, which, as described by Apuke (2017), involves the quantification and analysis of variables using statistical techniques to address research questions. This approach enables a detailed explanation of an issue or phenomenon through data collection and mathematical analysis, primarily utilizing statistics. Such a method aligns well with the research's objective to discuss the study population, sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Moreover, this methodology serves as a structured framework that ensures a thorough understanding of the research process and its applications.

3.1 *Study Population and Sampling*

The study population refers to the group of individuals or elements that the researcher wants to study and draw conclusions. It represents the larger target population from which the sample is selected. The research objectives necessitate a clear and pertinent definition of the study population. The sampling method serves as the approach for selecting a subset of individuals or elements from this study population to form a sample that mirrors the characteristics of the overall study population.

Based on Hair et al. (2018), previous literature has offered guidelines regarding the minimum sample size necessary for conducting specific analyses. Typically, simple regression analysis requires a minimum of 100 samples in most research scenarios, but for the present study, an absolute minimum of 200 samples is deemed necessary. Hence, it is crucial to align the chosen sample size with the characteristics of the target population. For instance, a sample of 100 can be considered large in a research project about an organization with 200

employees in total as the target population (Mumtaz Ali Memon et al., 2020). Therefore, based on the explanation above, researcher focused on the group of 4th Year Undergraduate Student of Fiqh and Fatwa. There were 131 respondents (65%) from 201 respondents of 4th Year Undergraduate Student of Fiqh and Fatwa among the samples which are suitable to analyze the level in understanding of religious freedom related to Muslim youth in Malaysia. The results indicate that, based on SPSS data analysis, 54% of the respondents were female while 46% were male (FSU, 2023). This is supported by Kline (2005) provided recommendations for sample sizes in the analysis of structural equation models, proposing that a sample size of 100 is categorized as small, 100 to 200 as medium, and over 200 as large.

Based on the percentage of 131 respondents (65%), there is an error in data sampling of 5%. This is because of the effects of various mistakes made in handling data entry or the researcher himself when doing sampling. However, the percentage of this sample can be taken and determined by using a certain calculation procedure through an agreed sampling error count of 5%. The significance level and confidence level are often chosen using a 5% sampling error with a 95% confidence level. (Muhamad Faisal Ashaari & Muhammad A'riff Khushairi, 2019).

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection method refers to the approach or technique used to gather information or data for a research study. It involves systematically collecting relevant data to address the research objectives or answer research questions. The choice of data collection method depends on various factors such as the nature of the research, the type of data needed, resources available and ethical considerations (Quantilope, 2018). The researcher wants to collect data from a large sample of users to assess their understanding and opinions. One of possible data collection methods for this scenario is a survey.

The survey methodology is regarded as a systematic approach for collecting data in extensive research endeavours. The primary objective of survey research is to gather information from every individual in the sample, aiming to extrapolate the findings to a broader context (Gall, 1996).

For instance, the researcher administered the survey through various means such as online survey. The researcher distributed the survey link to a targeted sample of application users that are focused on 4th Year Undergraduate Student of Fiqh and Fatwa through email invitations, social media platforms or app notifications. The researcher also considered incorporating open-ended questions in the survey to allow participants to provide more detailed feedback

or suggestions.

Based on the book titled "Essential of knowledge management" by Bergeron (2003), data refers to numbers related to quantitative numbers resulting from experiments, calculations and so on. Therefore, various data have been collected through a data set that includes thousands of observations and descriptions. These data are also divided into two categories namely primary data and secondary data (Bruning & Kintz, 1987).

In this study, two types of data were gathered: primary data and secondary data. The primary data is gathered by the researchers from first-hand sources, whereas the secondary data is derived from previously conducted studies.

3.2.1 Primary Data

According to Yusof (2003), primary data originates from natural sources collected to answer research questions through field research processes such as questionnaires, observations and so on.

Most data in quantitative research can be obtained by the questionnaire (Smith, 1994). Moreover, based on Borg and Gall (1989), it is important to consider the data analysis methods that will be used in analyzing the returned questionnaires designing them. Although questionnaires are usually mailed, they can also be personally administered. In addition, the advantage of mailed questionnaire is its lower cost and the speed of dissemination and collection (Gay, 1987).

In this study, questionnaires were created using Google Forms and distributed to respondents by via email, WhatsApp, Instagram, and others. The questionnaires in this topic were divided into 4 sections which is Section A, B, C and D. Section A contains the respondent's profile, section B contains questions regarding awareness of religious freedom, section C contains respondent's understanding the concept of religious freedom and section D discusses about religious discrimination. As a result, all the data was gathered to understand what the respondents think about religious freedom.

3.2.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data is a reference to data collected by other researchers. For example, past data was collected for research purposes. Information or published materials collected by other researchers can be used as a reference to create new information to solve problems that arise in the present or the future (Marican, 2005). Examples of secondary data are formal reports, magazines,

and journals and so on.

Therefore, journals were reviewed to create the literature metrics and many more journals were used as supporting journals for this study. The journals were obtained from ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Google Scholar and other sources. Online news and productivity also support this study.

3.3 Data Analysis

Based on Apuke (2017), data analysis involves a methodical procedure for gathering and assessing measurable and verifiable data. It encompasses a statistical approach to examine or analyze quantitative data. The selection of data analysis methods depends on the research's nature, the type of data collected, the study's objectives, and the available resources.

For example, the researcher collected data on 4th Year Undergraduate Student of Fiqh and Fatwa and analysed objectives using this method with data from SPSS. By analysing the results, the researcher determined the significance of each variable.

4.0 RESULT AND FINDINGS

4.1 Level of Understanding Religious Freedom

The research used a quantitative approach to analyze the level of understanding religious freedom. By using the nonprobability sampling method in addition to the purposive sampling technique, as many as 3 variables were focused and responses from 4th Year Undergraduate Students of Fiqh and Fatwa were analyzed. From the analysis, 131 respondents were obtained from the survey. Participants are asked to give their opinion by their degree of agreement. The stages of this scale are 1= Agree, 2= Neutral, 3= Disagree.

4.1.1 Findings

a) Respondent Profile

This section is divided by gender, age and status. Overall, the profile of the respondents involved in this study based on gender showed 131 people. 71 people (54%) are female respondents (students) and 60 people (46%) are male respondents (students).

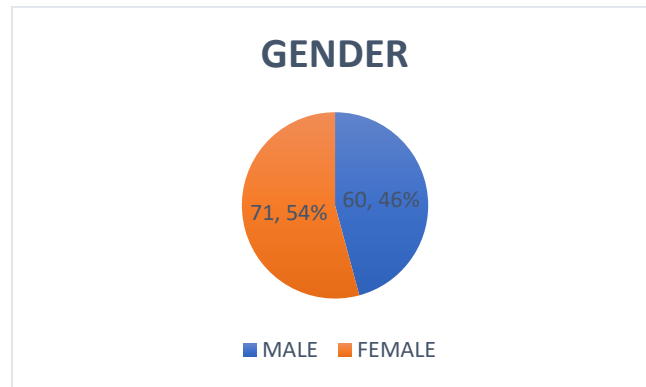


Figure 1 Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Source: Survey 2023

For the profile of respondents according to age, respondents in the age range of 21 to 23 are the highest in number, which is 126 respondents (96%). While the number of respondents in the age range of 24 to 26 is as many as 4 respondents (3%), which is the second highest. Next, the number of respondents in the age range of 20 and under only got 1 respondent (1%).

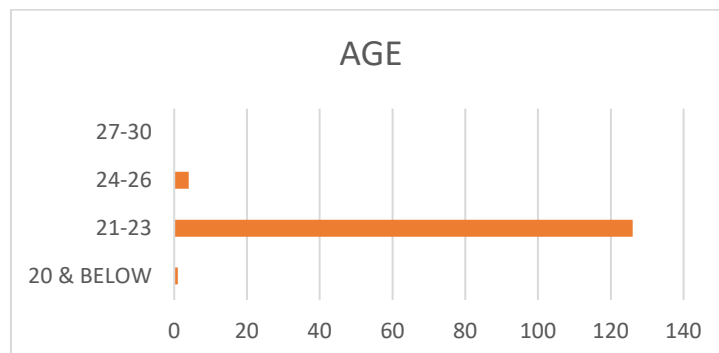


Figure 2 Distribution of Respondents by Age

Source: Survey 2023

Respondent profile according to status, as many as 129 respondents (98%) who are single are the largest number between respondent's 4th Year Undergraduate Student of Fiqh and Fatwa. This can be compared with the small number of those who are married, which is only two respondents (2%).

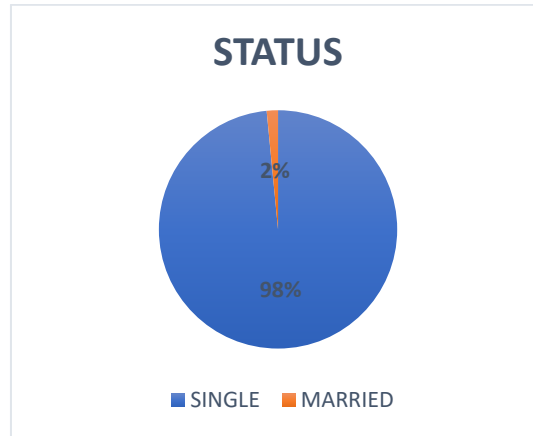


Figure 3 Distribution of Respondents According to Status

Source: Survey 2023

4.1.2 Understanding About Religious Freedom

In this finding, the researcher will focus on three variables in the survey:

- i. Respondents' understanding of the concept of religious freedom.
- ii. Respondents' awareness of the law in religious freedom.
- iii. Respondents' understanding of religious discrimination.

Table 1 below shows the analysis found to examine the respondents' understanding of the concept of religious freedom.

No	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Q1	Free is to get out of the religious cage	126	96%
Q2	Everyone has the right and freedom to follow any religion	129	98%
Q3	A person who is deprived of his right to freedom of belief (Iktiqad) means that his human rights are deprived	111	85%
Q4	Everyone is free to interpret religion, or God	121	92%
Q5	Freedom of religion is individual	110	84%
Q6	Freedom has its own value system	127	97%
Q7	Independent is free in making decisions using reason and logical arguments	114	87%

Source: Survey 2023

Table 2 below shows the responses given by the respondents for each item that tests the awareness of the respondents regarding the law in religious freedom. The values obtained from this analysis are:

Table 2 Respondents' Awareness of The Law in Religious Freedom.

No	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Q1	Every individual is given the freedom to embrace Islam	131	100%
Q2	The Federal Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion	127	96%
Q3	There is no compulsion for followers of other religions to convert to Islam	131	100%
Q4	Other religions can be practiced peacefully	131	100%
Q5	Every individual has the right to follow and practice his religion	131	100%
Q6	The spread of any religion should not be able to threaten public order	129	98%
Q7	The Islamic legal system does not create a separation between law and religious principles	114	87%

Source: Survey 2023

Table 3 below shows the analysis found to examine the respondents' understanding of religious discrimination.

Table 3 Respondents' Understanding of Religious Discrimination

No	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Q1	The principle of freedom is to reject religious values in human social life	127	96%
Q2	Freedom is being tolerant, broad-minded and not restricted to a single trend and includes all aspects of life	128	98%
Q3	All religions are acceptable and true, because the goal is the same, only the path is different.	122	93%
Q4	Religion and God have no power over community affairs	129	98%
Q5	Society will continue to be backward if it still strongly adheres to religion	127	96%
Q6	Freedom of religion is to protect human rights even in small matters.	127	96%
Q7	It is forbidden to criticize other people's religion.	131	100%

Source: Survey 2023

Based on the overall findings, the researcher discovered that the respondents' degree of comprehension of religious freedom was high. This result shows that the respondents have a good perception and understanding of religious freedom. With a variety of mediums to obtain information, this survey has helped in the formation of a positive understanding of religious freedom. Based

on this finding, students who are Muslim youth need to play a role in being the closest and most important medium to develop the understanding of true religious freedom to the community.

4.2 Challenges In Understanding the Religious Freedom

4.2.1 Diverse Interpretations

The variety of interpretations can be a challenge in understanding the meaning of religious freedom in an Islamic perspective. This diversity includes various understandings, interpretations and approaches to Islam. This challenge can affect the implementation and protection of religious freedom in the Muslim community.

Although the main sources of Islam are the Qur'an and hadith, there are differences in the understanding of verses and hadith due to factors such as cultural background, historical context and differences in interpretation methodology.

For example, the existence of a non-Muslim organization by a group of professional women who supposedly fight for women's rights in Islam also shows the concern of Muslims. Their group known as Sister in Islam (SIS), which emphasizes the reinterpretation of the Quran and Hadith according to history and culture. The organization proven to have deviated far from the true understanding of Islamic law and can cause confusion for Muslims. (Ali Nufael & Hadi Azmi, 2019). This shows that many Muslim youth today face problems in the misinterpretation and misuse of Islamic teachings related to religious freedom, which can lead to a perverse understanding of the true teachings of Islam.

The variety of interpretations can produce tension and conflict between followers of different religions, even within Muslims themselves. This difference in interpretation can cause disputes such as the rights of religious minorities, the development of places of worship or certain religious practices. It can be seen based on the analysis found from respondent's understanding of the concept of religious freedom. Therefore, it refers to the fact that this view can cause diverse interpretations from various parties.

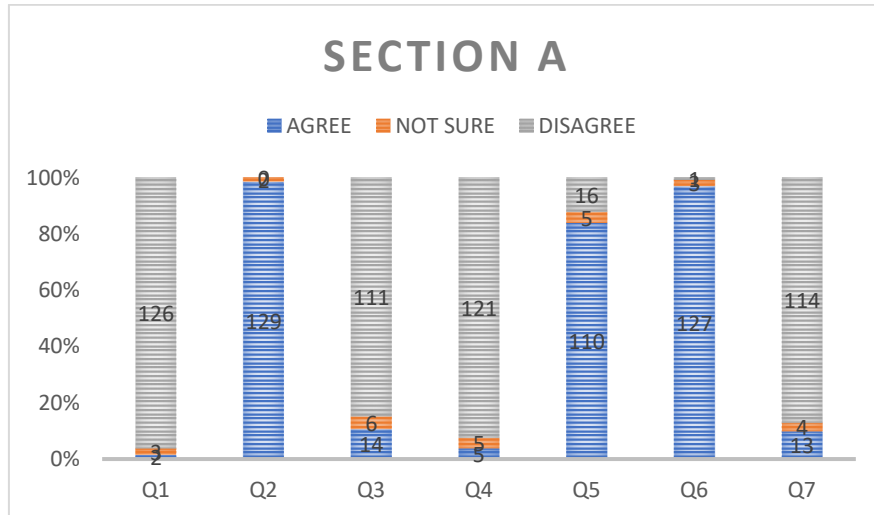


Figure 4 Respondents' Understanding of The Concept of Religious Freedom

Source: Survey 2023

Based on the analysis of the items in the questionnaire, the level of understanding of Year 4th Undergraduate Students of Fiqh and Fatwa are high regarding the understanding of the concept of religious freedom. For example, the fifth Item which is 'Freedom of religion is individual' recorded a moderately high percentage value of 84%. There are 16 respondents (12%) who did not agree with the statement that religious freedom is an individual right. This percentage records that there are still a few respondents who have not yet understood the concept of religious freedom in Islam. (Abdul Hamid, 2014) stated that freedom of religion is an individual right however the concept needs to be taken seriously from an Islamic perspective.

In the face of diversity of interpretations, certain principles need to be prioritized such as unity, goodwill and cooperation in developing a society that values religious freedom. Society can overcome this challenge by respecting each other and finding a common understanding of religious freedom in an Islamic perspective.

4.2.2 Lack of Awareness and Education

The challenge in understanding religious freedom also stems from a lack of awareness and education in maintaining and promoting religious freedom from an Islamic perspective. This is related to the lack of understanding of individual rights in the context of religion, the limitations of religious knowledge and so on.

The lack of effort in the provision of formal and informal education in introducing the principles of religious freedom in an Islamic perspective is the

main challenge in this matter. This can cause misunderstanding and insensitivity to religious freedom issues. Therefore, a good and comprehensive education about Islamic values underpin religious freedom can help the community understand and appreciate each other's rights.

Most people do not have a deep understanding of Islamic principles related to religious freedom, including the understanding of tolerance, respect and goodwill between various communities. Limited religious knowledge causes a narrow or wrong interpretation of Islam and religious freedom. Society can respect religious rights and protect religious freedom as a fundamental value in society by increasing awareness and education in religion. It can be seen from the finding of respondent's awareness of the law in religious freedom:

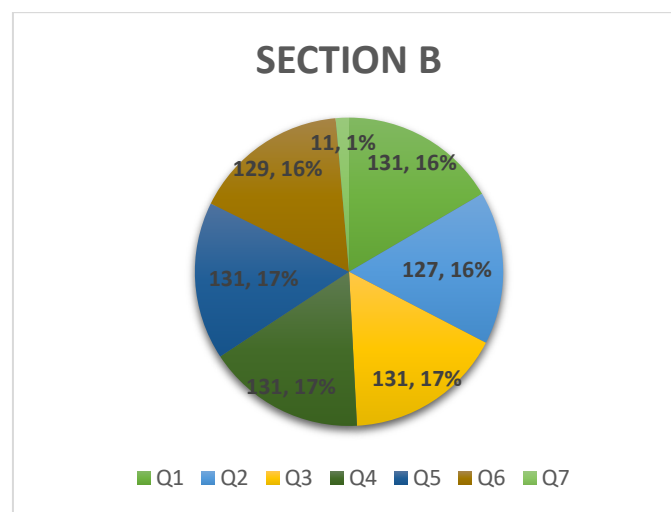


Figure 5 Respondents' Awareness of The Law in Religious Freedom

Source: Survey 2023

In the total of seven items contained in Section B, there is only one item which is the seventh item on 'The Islamic legal system does not create a separation between law and religious principles' has recorded a moderately high percentage reading of 87% compared to the items that others that reach a percentage of 98% -100%. Based on the diagram above, most respondents agreed with the number of 11 respondents (8%) while 6 respondents (5%) were not sure about the statement. This shows that they still do not understand the awareness of the law in religious freedom. Understanding the awareness of the law in religious freedom is very important for every individual, especially the laws that have been gazetted in our respective country. This is because they can distinguish between Islamic law and civil law related to religious freedom.

4.2.3 Interfaith Tension

The tension between religions is also a challenge in understanding religious freedom. This is due to differences in beliefs, understanding and religious practices between different individuals or groups. This tension between religions can affect the exercise of religious freedom and cause disputes.

Tensions between religions also occur due to competition over religion. Every religion has a strong belief in its truth and superiority. This can cause conflict and tension between followers of different religions.

Values such as tolerance, justice and peace need to be emphasized as principles that encourage fraternity and maintain relationships between communities. Overcome inter-religious tensions through open dialogue and promoting religious freedom in respecting rights and maintaining community harmony. For instance, this can be seen from Figure 6:

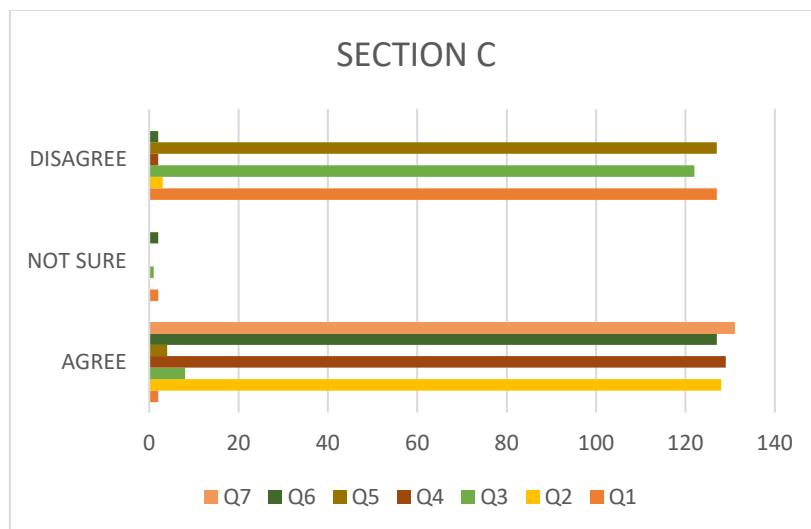


Figure 6 Respondents' Understanding of Religious Discrimination

Source: Survey 2023

Based on this study through section C, the level of understanding about religious discrimination is satisfactory. Through item 3; 'All religions are acceptable and true, because the goal is the same, only path is different', a total of 122 respondents (93%) disagreed with the statement. However, as many as 8 respondents (6%) agreed with the statement. This shows that their understanding has not yet reached a high level in understanding the statement. In this context, we can see that Islam is not like other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. (Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan,

2019). But Islam is a religion that monotheisms Allah which is very different from other religions. This can be seen through Surah Ali-Imran verse 67, which means:

"And Ibrahim is neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he is a hanif and a Muslim and he is not one of the polytheists".

(Surah Ali-Imran, 3: 67)

This verse clearly shows that we cannot equate the belief and worship of other religions with the belief in Islam even though Islam celebrates religious freedom in life.

4.3 Resolution in Understanding the Religious Freedom

4.3.1 Increased Dialogue Between Islam and State

One of the important factors in promoting religious freedom in an Islamic perspective is increasing the dialogue between Islam and the state. The government needs to hold an open dialogue between religious leaders, scholars and the government to gain a better understanding of religious freedom and find a solution that is in line with Islamic values.

This dialogue can be done at various levels from local to national. For example, at the local level, dialogue between religious leaders, scholars, and community figures with the local government can discuss issues related to religious freedom in the state. This can create wisdom in considering the needs and religious rights that respected in Islam. At the national level, dialogue can be done in debating the broader issue of religious freedom. They can discuss a fair legal framework, appropriate guidelines and promote religious rights within the national framework.

Dialogue between Islam and the country can also involve cooperation in the field of education, research and the development of wisdom. For example, putting together an education curriculum that introduces a balanced understanding of religious freedom from an Islamic perspective. The involvement of scholars in this compilation is also important to research about religious freedom in the context of Islam.

Dialogue between Islam and the state also needs to be applied to achieve common goals in safeguarding religious freedom and promoting justice and harmony in society. Through constructive dialogue, a better understanding of religious freedom in an Islamic perspective can be established and increase

harmonious cooperation between religion and the state.

4.3.2 Education and Awareness

Education and awareness in religious freedom are among the most important aspects in the Islamic perspective. Islam encourages and helps its people to have a deep understanding of religion and respect the right of everyone to embrace and practice the religion that suits his or her wishes. Education also plays an important role in forming a true understanding of religion and religious freedom. Through education, individuals can learn the importance of respecting religious differences, promoting tolerance and encouraging interfaith dialogue. Every individual needs to be aware of religious freedom for personal and social life. This awareness really helps them to appreciate the rights and freedom of others in choosing and practicing religion.

Education and awareness about religious freedom also needs to be done through the appreciation of Islamic values in everyday life. For example, applying learning about Islamic literature that discusses religious freedom, attending lectures or religious studies and engaging in any interfaith discussion and dialogue.

Education and awareness about religious freedom also plays a role in dealing with contemporary problems related to religious freedom such as religious discrimination, extremism and so on. Therefore, a good understanding and a high awareness of religion and Islamic values can create a society that respects each other.

4.3.3 Development of Comprehensive Islamic Studies

The comprehensive development of Islamic studies in understanding religious freedom can solve the problem of religious freedom in Malaysia. This approach involves in-depth learning about Islamic teachings including the Al-Quran, Hadith, Islamic history as well as the thoughts and understanding of leading scholars.

The development of Islamic studies also aims to understand Islamic views and laws related to religious freedom as well as analyse the interpretation and application of this concept in the context of today. Islamic scholars study the basic principles that contain Islamic teachings such as justice, individual freedom and the relationship between religion and the state.

A deep understanding of religious provisions and historical context helps in interpreting the concept of religious freedom in accordance with the broader principles of Islam. Through this approach, the development of Islamic studies can help Muslims understand comprehensively about freedom of religion according to the perspective of Islam. Islamic scholars can also contribute to developing a balanced and inclusive vision of religious freedom in Islam.

5. CONCLUSION

This study found that the level of understanding of religious freedom for the 4th Year Undergraduate Students of Fiqh and Fatwa about the three variables is high which is 95.15%. It shows that Muslim youth are not influenced by any agenda that spreads wrong understanding related to religious freedom. The concept of religious freedom in an Islamic perspective can be understood through Islam's respect for the right of individuals to embrace and practice their religion according to their wishes. Freedom of religion also emphasized in Islam as an important aspect in maintaining justice, tolerance and peace between communities.

Furthermore, the level of understanding about religious freedom in the Islamic perspective has different variations among individuals and communities. Some individuals may understand religious freedom as an absolute right that needs to be guaranteed while other opinions may understand religious freedom has certain limitations in maintaining the peace and harmony of society. For example, religious freedom may become a complex and debatable issue if it comes to defining limits and considerations with other societal values. Questions may arise about the extent to which religious beliefs can influence public policy, especially when they potentially conflict with the rights and well-being of others. Overall, the understanding of religious freedom extended to the public depends on the legal, cultural, and political context of a particular society.

The challenge in understanding religious freedom from an Islamic perspective can be seen through the conflict of interpretation of verses of the Qur'an and hadith related to religious freedom. Cultural, political and social influences can also cause the understanding and implementation of religious freedom to be affected. This can lead to understanding and interpretation that contradicts the Islamic perspective. There are several resolutions that can be taken to spread the understanding of religious freedom according to the Islamic perspective, namely:

a. Government:

To overcome the challenges in understanding religious freedom, a

contextual approach is very important in understanding this religious freedom, especially from an Islamic perspective. Resolution can be achieved by our government through dialogue, education and appreciation of Islamic values that emphasize the appreciation of religious freedom.

b. Individual:

An attitude of openness and tolerance is one of the good resolutions to harmonize individual rights. Islam also teaches Muslims about freedom of religion and that there is no coercion in religion if it does not violate Islamic law. Social media can also be a powerful platform to curb misconceptions. Every individual needs to be responsible for spreading information about religious freedom based on an Islamic perspective.

Therefore, it is very important for every individual to take care in this study, especially Muslim youth. They need to play a role in being the closest medium and become the world's hope for the future in spreading this true understanding of religious freedom to the public. The explanations debated in this study are also done to create a true perception of religious freedom because it is important to maintain love for religion and country. (Nur Afifah Mohd Najib & Ahmad Munawar Ismail, 2018).

c. Society: The community also plays a role in respecting the laws of the country and following the rules that have been set in relation to religious freedom, especially the Muslim community. They need to practice true Islamic values to maintain well-being for the sake of the religion and the country.

However, some parts of the right to religious freedom need to be given attention because there is confusion among Muslim youth. This explanation aims to ensure that the Muslim youth get a proper understanding of religious freedom according to the Islamic perspective. An understanding of rights and responsibilities in matters related to religious freedom will result in a harmonious and mutually respectful life in society. It can reduce the tension in the practice of the religious way of life in Malaysia, which is based on the life of a diversity of religions, races and traditions.

Ultimately, the understanding of religious freedom is very important, and it emphasized that religious freedom does not conflict with Islamic values that are based on the principles of justice, harmony and community well-being.

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