



Strengthening the Professionalism of Civil Servants in Shari'ah-Based Indigenous Community Governance in Islamic Agencies of Malaysia

Madihatun Zainuddin^{1*}, Sharifah Hayaati
Ismail al Qudsy², Hasliza Mohamad Ali³
and Norazmi Anas⁴

¹ Centre for Islamic, General and Language Studies, Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia
56100 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

² Department of Syariah, Economy and Governance,
Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya
50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

³ Institute of Graduate Studies, Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia
56100 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

⁴ Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA
Perak Branch, Tapah Campus, 35400 Tapah Road, Perak, Malaysia
madihatun@uptm.edu.my

Abstract. The issue of misrepresentation in the aspect of marginalisation of the indigenous, who are often seen as backward compared to those outside, has also often been debated and discussed in past studies. In addition, the neglect of professional governance by the organisational staff towards them is also an issue that contributes to the neglect of this group. This study aims to find out the true meaning of professional governance from a Shari'ah perspective and understand its importance, and identify methods of strengthening it for civil servants in the Islamic agencies. This article also discusses approaches and methods of strengthening professionalism among civil servants who are directly involved in the development of the indigenous community. The results of this study were obtained using a fully qualitative study, namely library methods and semi-structured interviews. The findings in this study found various training strategies, courses, field monitoring, and empowerment of *dakwah* and education modules, as well as scheduled approaches used to ensure that civil servants operate professionally and Shari'ah-compliant, for the development of indigenous. The results of the study also found that modular approaches, periodic training, and practical adaptation based on field realities with the indigenous community are key foundations in strengthening inclusive and sustainable governance, in line with the vision of the Madani government and the principles of Islamic governance. The emphasis on shari'ah-based professional governance not only ensures the sustainability of the institution but also contributes to the balanced development of the ummah from a spiritual and material point of view.

Keywords: Professionalism, Shari'ah Governance, Civil Servants

1 Introduction

The word professionalism comes from the root word, which is a profession, which means a job that requires special training and high skills (Dewan Dictionary Third Edition, 1997). While professionalism means the qualities of ability, skill, and how things are carried out by a professional (Dewan Dictionary Third Edition, 1997). Professional refers to an individual's profession as a permanent job and generates its main income. Professionalism is the level of competence, accountability, and responsibility that a professional should support (Graham Parr, 2004).

Professionalism among civil servants is crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of government policies and services, especially when it involves marginalised communities such as the Indigenous Community. In this context, civil servants need to act not only as administrators but also as educators, facilitators, and agents of *dakwah*. Therefore, the approach used should combine the principles of modern governance with Shari'ah values, as well as take into account cultural sensitivities and local realities. This article focuses on the strategies and practices implemented by Islamic agencies in managing and developing the Indigenous Community, based on two main trusts: governance and professionalism by Shari'ah, and methods of strengthening it among civil servants.

2 Literature Review

Various studies have been conducted on the professionalism of civil servants in the Islamic context. Previous studies have shown that the governance of professionalism in the context of Muslim civil servants needs to be based not only on the efficiency of the bureaucracy, but also on the moral values and Shari'ah legislation. The emphasis on *maqasid shari'ah* in public administration has been studied by al-Qudsy et al. (2016), who proposed applying the principle of *wasatiyyah*, or moderation, as the basis for innovation in government services. They suggest that a balanced approach between professional responsibility and religious values can avoid administrative extremism and promote multicultural harmony, especially when it comes to minority communities such as the indigenous. Indigenous communities in Malaysia face significant challenges in participating in the governance of Islamic agencies, primarily due to systemic barriers, cultural marginalization, and legal constraints. These obstacles hinder their ability to influence decision-making processes that affect their rights and livelihoods (Subramaniam, 2015). Syed Hussin (2009) identifies primary internal problems and obstacles that impede *dakwah* (missionary) efforts among the indigenous in Malaysia, including problems related to *dakwah* institutions and preachers. These could include, but are not limited to, organizational inefficiencies, lack of resources, insufficient training for preachers, or methodological shortcomings.

In addition, Basir (n.d.) examines the quality of public service from an Islamic perspective and emphasizes the need for civil servants to act based on high moral values, *courtesy*, and *trust*. The study emphasizes that integrity is fundamental in achieving the objectives of Islamic administration, where compliance with the law cannot be separated from compliance with Shari'ah law. This is in line with the responsibility of civil servants as "*ulil amri*" at the implementation level. When this

study involves the defence of minorities such as the indigenous, then in governance that involves professionalism, it is necessary to emphasize the nature of responsibility that thickens among administrators and needs to be maintained, or it is necessary to be *istiqamah* to produce better quality services and outcomes and achieve their objectives.

In a study by Hasan (2014), aspects of Islamic education and women's rights were applied through governance practices in teacher education institutions. This study emphasizes the importance of the courage of civil servants in upholding religious values even in an administrative system dominated by a secular approach. The value of Islamic professionalism is shown through patience, transparency, and the ability to convey religious knowledge in an inclusive form to various community backgrounds. This includes the indigenous community, where the courage that comes with the value of professionalism by civil servants should be highlighted even when faced with those who are not Muslims, including Tok Batin, among those who are mostly non-Muslims.

In general, the framework of professionalism in the Islamic public sector emphasizes aspects of integrity, competence, and values. Ismail et al. (2009) explained that strengthening values and professionalism among civil servants is important for effective and ethical governance. In this context, an excellent work culture, as discussed by al Qudsy (2008) from an Islamic perspective, also emphasizes the importance of sincere intentions, honesty, responsibility, and fairness in the performance of duties.

Contemporary studies have also shown an increase in awareness of the role of professionalism in the governance of minority communities. Ugong (2024) in his study in Sarawak pointed out that the sustainable management of cultural heritage requires civil servants who are professional, ethical, and possess communication skills and cultural sensitivity. This is in line with the principles of *fiqh dakwah* and *maqasid syariah* which emphasize wisdom and justice in conveying Islamic values to the Orang Asli community. Meanwhile, Kong (2023) examined the involvement of teachers and civil servants in early childhood education in rural Orang Asli areas and found that an inclusive and culturally sensitive pedagogical approach has succeeded in forming a solid foundation for community empowerment. These two studies reinforce the argument that professionalism among Muslim civil servants involves not only technical competence but also cultural understanding and spiritual integrity.

Studies related to the indigenous community in Malaysia show the need for a more sensitive, integrated, and value-based approach to administration and development, especially among civil servants in Islamic agencies. This highlights details the findings of previous studies that touched on aspects of agency roles, program effectiveness, leadership, *dakwah* communication, as well as the value of professionalism in the context of the administration of the indigenous community.

A study by Manaf and Abdullah (2021) examined the role of agencies in implementing social development programmes among the indigenous community, particularly in Kampung Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu. This study emphasises the need for agencies to implement a more local approach, based on the real needs of the community, as well as to establish collaboration between various parties. Meanwhile, Khir et al. (2019) found that indigenous participants' attitudes towards income-enhancing programmes were an important factor influencing the success of their programmes and socio-economic changes. Both studies show that effective policy implementation requires professionalism in the form of understanding of the local context as well as community involvement.

A study by Khalid et al. (2022) highlights issues and challenges related to indigenous community health rights, which are often marginalized due to weaknesses in administrative structures and access to services. This is also reinforced by Abdullah (2020), who assesses indigenous community poverty through a multidimensional model, emphasizing that the social, educational, and welfare dimensions need to be managed professionally and inclusively. The role of Islamic institutions such as MAIK was also discussed by Abd Razak (2023), who showed that a welfare and humanitarian approach can strengthen the relationship between religious institutions and the indigenous community if implemented transparently and ethically.

From the point of view of education governance, the study of Zakaria and Ahmad (2022) emphasizes the importance of distributive leadership in building self-efficacy and collective efficacy among indigenous school administrators. It shows that an effective and inclusive leadership style has a direct impact on the development of the organization. Meanwhile, Abdullah et al. (n.d.) highlighted the surau management model in the indigenous community in Selangor, emphasizing the management aspect based on collaboration, empowerment, and community trust as an important component of the professionalism of religious administration. The study by Febrianita and Hardjati (2019) recognized the significant power of interpersonal communication skills and interpersonal relationships with the indigenous community in enhancing service provision. These skills have led to improvements in service delivery within the work unit.

The communication aspect is also a critical factor in the effective delivery of Islamic messages to the indigenous community. The study of Aini et al. (2019) shows that persuasion strategies that are appropriate to the indigenous cultural background are very important in building religious relationships and understanding. Professional preachers need to have wisdom-based communication skills as well as empathy for the local cultures. While Aini and Don (2020) highlight that effective communication, encompassing clear message delivery, active listening, and appropriate presentation styles, is vital for Muslim preachers engaging with the indigenous community.

A study by Zainuddin et al. (2024a) on the Development of Education for Indigenous Converts in Rembau, Negeri Sembilan focuses on the development of education for the indigenous community converts as the basis for knowledge empowerment. This study shows that access to systematic Islamic education has a direct impact on religious understanding, spiritual practices and social involvement of converts in the community. In this context, civil servants play an important role as facilitators of education in the form of special modules for converts, which have been shown to progressively improve religious understanding.

A follow-up study by the same research group Zainuddin et al. (2024b) in the book *Community Approaches to Poverty Alleviation in Malaysia* examined cases in Kg Pabai, Rembau. They emphasised that the empowerment of knowledge among the indigenous community is not only limited to religious aspects, but also includes basic education, life skills and rights awareness. Experiences built through community learning approaches show that the effectiveness of interventions depends on the level of professionalism of civil servants as well as their ability to adapt the approach to the local cultural context.

These studies reinforce the argument that the professionalism of civil servants in the context of the indigenous community needs to go beyond routine bureaucratic

responsibilities and serve as an agent of comprehensive change, based on Shari'ah principles and deep intercultural understanding.

Overall, the findings from the literature show that there is an urgent need to incorporate the principles of *fiqh dakwah*, *maqasid shari'ah*, and local cultural approaches within the framework of civil servant governance, especially in the context of the indigenous community, which has a unique socio-cultural background. Civil servants should not only function as policy presenters but also as facilitators, educators, and moral leaders to the communities they support.

Findings from previous studies also show that strengthening the professionalism of civil servants in indigenous community governance needs to be centred on a comprehensive and Shari'ah-based approach. This includes understanding the cultural context, strengthening Islamic ethical values, implementing programs based on community needs, and effective leadership and communication. Therefore, the combination of elements of professionalism and Islamic principles in the governance of marginalized communities such as the indigenous community is very important in guaranteeing social justice and holistic well-being.

3 Research Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative approach through a semi-structured interview method with three main respondents who are Religious Agency Officers as Coordinators, especially to the indigenous community located in the *Dakwah* Division, as well as the Indigenous Community Mobilizer at the Islamic agencies. The three of them consist of;

- 1) Respondent 1, Senior Assistant Director, *Dakwah* Division.
- 2) Respondent 2, Indigenous Community State Coordinator.
- 3) Respondent 3, Indigenous Community District Mobilizer.

Interviews are analyzed inductively and reinforced with the support of current documents and literature to form themes and categories of Islamic governance and professionalism.

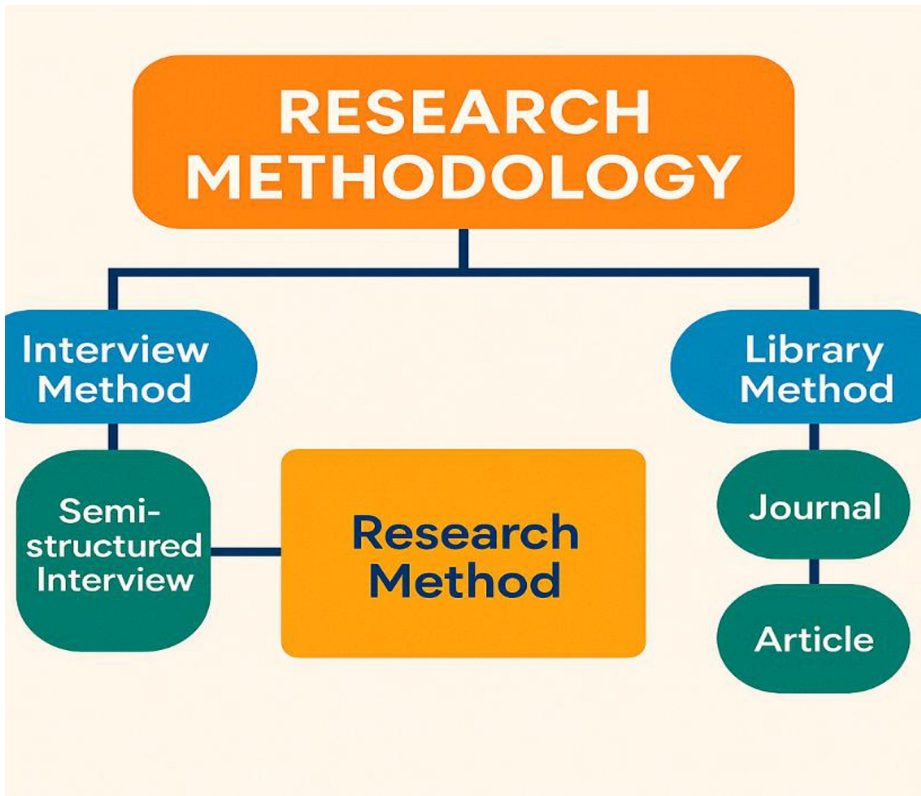


Fig. 1. Study Methodology

Source based on the suitability of the overall study

4 Theoretical Framework

This framework is based on the Qur'anic verse (An-Nisa': 59) which emphasizes obedience to Allah, the Prophet, and *Ulil Amri* as the core of obedience in the governance system. The theory of *maqasid shari'ah* is also used as a basis to evaluate the impact of a policy or service from the point of view of safeguarding religion (*din*), intellect (*'aql*), property (*mal*), and heredity (*nasl*). The *fiqh dakwah* approach is also combined in interpreting strategies to approach the non-Muslim community's wisdom (*al-hikmah*).



Fig. 2. Theoretical Framework of Shari'ah Governance
 Source based on the suitability of the overall study

5 Findings and Discussion

The results of the interviews found that civil servants practice the principles of Islamic governance through compliance with existing regulations and enactments, regular training, implementation of *dakwah* and education modules, as well as scheduled monitoring. The use of field methods, such as going to the field to meet with the community, as well as community involvement, such as visiting, surau construction, and entrepreneurship programmes, proved the effectiveness of practical approaches in strengthening governance. The Indigenous Community Mobilizer also acts as a facilitator in all social affairs of the indigenous community, including non-Muslims, building a reputation and good relationship to bring them closer to Islam.

5.1 Concept of Governance of Professionalism According to Shari'ah

The governance of professionalism according to Shari'ah in the context of civil servants includes the principle of obedience to Allah, the Messenger, and the ruler. The Qur'an states in Surah An-Nisa', verse 59:

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

This verse underlines the importance of obedience to legitimate authority, provided that such governance does not contradict Islamic principles. According to Respondent 1, the profession of a civil servant itself is a form of worship when its implementation complies with Shari'ah and follows the instructions of *Ulil Amri*.

In terms of financial management, the use of zakat funds to the indigenous converts community is based on a fatwa which stipulates that assistance to converts can only be channelled within the first five years after Islamization. Those who have passed this period are categorized as *mukalaf* and receive assistance through other *asnaf* administered by the Religious Council. This shows that Islamic governance attaches great importance to categorical accuracy and fairness in the distribution of resources.

In the implementation stage, various operational aspects, including programme management, selection of surau supervisors, as well as village development assistance, are coordinated based on the government's regular procedures and combined with the principles of *fiqh dakwah* and *maqasid shari'ah*, such as justice, welfare, and religious preservation.

Governance of Professionalism According to Shari'ah: A Conceptual Review Based on a Practical Perspective.

In addition, Respondent 2 stated that the governance of professionalism based on Shari'ah is when an organisation or administration is implemented in a transparent, responsible, fair, and integrity manner. Shari'ah-compliant professional governance refers to the implementation of an organizational administrative and management system based on Islamic principles that emphasize transparency, accountability, justice, and integrity. It not only encompasses aspects of formal structures and procedures in an organization, but also encompasses high ethical and moral values that must be used as the main guide in every action and decision taken.

According to the views expressed in this interview, governance according to Shari'ah should be seen in a practical and comprehensive implementation framework. Among the important elements emphasized is the need to make decisions based on the real needs of the community. This means that the decision-making process should not be purely top-down, but rather involves the voice and direct participation of the community, particularly those affected by the policies or actions taken. This approach expresses the value of social justice as well as the principle of *shura* (deliberation), which is at the core of the Islamic system of administration.

From the point of view of professionalism, emphasis is given to the aspects of competence and efficiency of an individual in carrying out the mandate entrusted to them. Islamic professionalism demands that every assignment be carried out based on knowledge, expertise, as well as high moral and moral values. Integrity is not only seen as not deviating, but includes the determination to carry out one's duties with honesty, dedication, and manners.

In conclusion, the governance of professionalism according to Shari'ah is not just about meeting the requirements of administrative procedures, but more importantly, is ensuring that the entire management system runs in line with the demands of religion.

It demands the appreciation of Islamic spiritual values and ethics in every aspect of management, thus giving birth to an organization that not only functions efficiently, but is also blessed and blessed by Allah SWT.

5.2 Methods of Strengthening the Professionalism of Civil Servants

The strategy to strengthen the professionalism of civil servants involved with the indigenous community includes regular training, streamlining the work of civil servants through a modular approach, scheduled visits, field monitoring, and compliance with existing legal enactments. For example, the staff of the Indigenous Community Mobilizer are given regular courses or training by Islamic Agencies, and they also attend hands-on training through field activities such as Islamic education classes, imam courses, and group visits. The basic module of conversion is also used to educate the new Muslim community consistently. At the same time, civil servants also act as facilitators to the community, assisting in various matters, including the welfare and education of indigenous children.

In addition, in other governance areas such as financial matters, the treasury is governed by the stipulations that have been set by the top management, such as the department, Islamic Agency, the management division, and also in accordance with certain legal enactments (Respondent 1). The obedient nature of the civil servants in this organisation in the aspect of implementing governance, especially towards the indigenous, clearly exhibits a high level of professionalism in carrying out their services and responsibilities.

Implementation of Shari'ah in Field Practice.

Staff are given training to strengthen their professionalism through field methods. According to Respondent 1, this method is preferred over giving courses or training using a purely theoretical approach. Going to the field to meet with the community in person is more impactful from the point of view of work progress, strengthening planning and finding problems more quickly, and finding solutions. The field activities carried out by the Indigenous Community Mobilizer for the indigenous community include English language education, surau maintenance, and entrepreneurship programmes are all considered part of the dakwah approach that is in line with Shari'ah. Even activities such as visiting, community classes, and surau monitoring are designed so as not to go against Islamic principles. The implementation also takes into account the sensitivities of the non-Muslim community with an inclusive approach, but based on Islamic values.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the field approach practiced by this Islamic agency on civil servants such as PMOA is to strengthen more professional governance of the indigenous through the field method where this method is also included in the training or courses they follow as well as the method of streamlining the organisational work and compliance with existing legal enactments.

5.3 Challenges and Contextual Adaptations through Field Strategy Elasticity in Community Context-Based Work Management

One of the main challenges in ensuring that managed governance is truly heading towards professionalism is adapting the official Desk File to the realities of the field. The Desk File is a compilation of alerts that are already in the documentation. The role of the Indigenous Community Mobilizer as a mobilizer in indigenous villages is not only as a preacher but also as a liaison between various agencies and communities. This requires high professionalism in managing conflicts, understanding the local culture, and involving the community in decision-making. The approach used is responsive and based on real needs in the field.

Therefore, through this field method, it is possible to find out the real cause of the problem faster, find solutions quickly, as well as ensure the fate of the community is more protected, more awake, and more knowledgeable to all parties involved.

In the implementation of organizational duties and responsibilities, the ability to adapt strategies at the field level is an important element in ensuring effective governance and service delivery. Based on the findings of the interviews, one of the approaches that is often used in streamlining the implementation of work targets is through the strengthening of fieldwork that is flexible and adaptive to the reality of the local community.

Even if a task has been formally outlined through documents such as Desk Files or to-do lists, the fact is that on-the-ground execution often requires significant adjustments. This is due to differences in cultural backgrounds, community needs, and unique social dynamics between one community group and another. For example, an effective approach among the Malay community may not be suitable to be applied directly to the indigenous community, given their differences in communication styles, belief systems, and social structures.

Therefore, elasticity in rearranging the form of work, whether by adding, modifying, or subtracting certain components, is essential for service delivery to remain relevant and effective. This approach reflects a form of governance that is responsive and oriented towards the real needs of the community, not just guided by purely documental planning.

In the context of professionalism, according to Shari’ah, adaptation to the needs of the field also coincides with the principle of *maslahah* (common good) and *hikmah* (wisdom) in delivering services to the community. It shows that administrative and *dakwah* tasks not only require an understanding of formal procedures, but also require sensitivity to local realities and sensitivities.

In conclusion, flexible field work management guided by the real needs of the community is a very important approach in ensuring the survival and effectiveness of an organisational movement. It also reflects a form of Islamic professionalism that not only emphasizes systematic in assignments, but also prioritizes the values of justice, wisdom, and contextuality as the basis for implementation at the grassroots level.

Table 1. Methods of Strengthening the Professionalism of Civil Servants in the Governance of Indigenous Communities According to Shari’ah

Method	Involvement	Benefits For Indigenous Communities	Shari’ah Perspective
Giving training/courses	Mobilizers of the indigenous community	To get better quality educational resources from programmes produced by indigenous community mobilizers	<i>Maqasid shari’ah</i> (religion, life, reason, dignity/descent, wealth)
	Indigenous community	Polishing the abilities of the indigenous community: supervisors, priests, mentors, and others	
Streamlining organizational work (Field Method)	All Civil Servants	All problems can be detected and studied down to the grassroots	<i>Shura</i> <i>Fiqh Dakwah</i> <i>Maslahah</i> <i>Ammah</i> (Common Good) <i>Wisdom</i>
Compliance with existing legal enactments	Department Division in the <i>Dakwah</i> Unit; 1. Jakim 2. Top Management	Transparent and fair distribution of zakat	Obedience to Allah, the Messenger, and <i>Ulil Amri</i>

Source: Results of the overall study discussion

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

Strengthening of the value of professionalism in governance should always be emphasized, especially to a leader or manager. The professionalism of civil servants based on Shari'ah, which follows the standards of *Maqasid* aspects of Shari'ah, *Maslahah Ammah*, meets the elements of *Shura* and is followed by the practice of *Dakwah*, is the main focus of this study on the Indigenous Community. This writing also clearly shows that the combination of Shari'ah principles and field professionalism practices can strengthen governance in the indigenous community. training, educational modules, scheduled visits, and management with integrity are important foundations. Future studies include improving technology-based monitoring systems, expanding *dakwah* modules to various levels of society, and empowering young indigenous communities as layers of Islamic leadership.

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