

https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.29.2026.361			
Received:	15 October 2025	Accepted:	29 January 2026
Revised:	14 December 2025	Published:	15 June 2026
Volume:	29 (June)	Pages:	182-195
To cite:			
Muhamad Faisal Ashaari, Nor Azlina Ibrahim, Mohamad Zulkifli Abdul Ghani & Kamarudin Salleh 2026. Validating a contextual dakwah framework for multi-ethnic societies: A fuzzy delphi study in Sarawak. <i>International Journal of Islamic Thought</i> . Vol. 29 (June): 182-195.			

Validating a Contextual Dakwah Framework for Multi-Ethnic Societies: A Fuzzy Delphi Study in Sarawak

MUHAMAD FAISAL ASHAARI*¹, NOR AZLINA IBRAHIM², MOHAMAD ZULKIFLI ABDUL GHANI³ & KAMARUDIN SALLEH⁴

ABSTRACT

Dakwah (Islamic Preaching) in multi-ethnic societies presents distinct challenges due to cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. Sarawak, a Malaysian state with over forty ethnic groups and a minority Muslim population, requires dakwah approaches that are locally embedded, culturally sensitive, and of intercommunal dynamics. Scholarship on Islamic dakwah in plural contexts often falls within two paradigms: one advocating inclusive coexistence, and another stressing doctrinal exclusivity rooted in Islam as the sole absolute truth. Within Malaysia's policy framework that leans towards the latter, it is vital to identify dakwah elements most relevant to multi-ethnic contexts such as Sarawak. This study employs the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) to synthesise and validate elements of a contextual dakwah model. Sixteen experts—religious officers, dakwah activists, and academicians—participated in a consensus process. The analysis confirmed five validated elements: integration of indigenous customs, promotion of social harmony, community participation, embodiment of Islamic values through ethical action (dakwah bil hal), and use of local languages. All components met FDM thresholds with consensus above 75%. Findings highlight the need for a dialogic and inclusive dakwah model that strengthens trust and interethnic relationships. This study advances Islamic communication theory by providing an empirically validated model of dakwah tailored for plural societies.

Keywords:

Contextual dakwah, Fuzzy Delphi method, Islamic communication, multi-ethnic society, Sarawak

¹MUHAMAD FAISAL ASHAARI, (*Corresponding Author), Ph. D., Assoc. Prof. at Research Centre for Da'wah and Leadership, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, MALAYSIA. Email: faisal@ukm.edu.my. [ORCID iD: 0000-0003-0525-2891].

²NOR AZLINA IBRAHIM, M. A. Student at Research Centre for Da'wah and Leadership, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, MALAYSIA. Email: p138014@siswa.ukm.edu.my. [ORCID iD: 0009-0008-6242-9562]

³MOHAMAD ZULKIFLI ABDUL GHANI, Ph. D., Senior Lecturer at Research Centre for Da'wah and Leadership, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, MALAYSIA. Email: zulghani@ukm.edu.my. [ORCID iD: 0009-0001-7083-1534]

⁴KAMARUDIN SALLEH, Ph. D. Assoc. Prof. at Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA. Email: dins@ukm.edu.my. [ORCID iD: 0009-0006-8271-6847]

Introduction

Sarawak, located in East Malaysia, presents a unique sociocultural environment characterized by religious and cultural diversity. The state is home to more than 40 ethnic groups, including the Iban, Bidayuh, Orang Ulu, Melanau, and Chinese, marking a stark contrast to Peninsular Malaysia. Muslims comprise approximately 30% of the population, while the majority profess Christianity. This demographic reality necessitates a more culturally sensitive and gentle approach to Islamic *dakwah* (Islamic Preaching) to ensure greater receptivity among the local communities. In many rural areas, traditional beliefs and native languages remain deeply embedded in daily life. Therefore, *dakwah* efforts must consider local values, foster trust-building, uphold ethical conduct, and engage directly with community life. Such an approach emphasizes interreligious harmony and social integration, with *dakwah* positioned to achieve these broader goals. In this context, *dakwah* gains deeper meaning when it is driven by an open heart, sincere service, and a shared commitment to nurturing a peaceful, harmonious, and mutually respectful society.

Recent scholarships have underscored the significance of cultural sensitivity, ethical conduct, and community engagement in *dakwah*, particularly within multi-ethnic and religiously diverse societies (Aini et al. 2019; Ab Latif et al. 2022; Ali et al. 2024; Fakri Yusuf et al.). The discourse on *dakwah* theory, however, reveals two divergent tendencies. The first embraces religious pluralism and advocates for an inclusive, values-based approach grounded in *ta'ayush silmi* (peaceful coexistence), without prioritizing conversion to Islam as the primary objective (Madjid 2019; Azra 2000; Wahid 2000). In contrast, the second upholds a doctrinally exclusive orientation centered on the principle of *tawhid* (divine oneness), emphasizing the obligation to convey Islam as the sole divinely sanctioned path (al-Bayanuni 1995; al-Buti 2001). In the Malaysian context, the latter position forms the basis of official religious policy, as reflected in guidelines issued by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM, 2005), which reject theological pluralism and prohibit Muslim participation in non-Islamic religious rituals. Nonetheless, this doctrinal commitment poses a complex challenge in pluralistic settings such as Sarawak, where Muslims constitute a minority and intercommunal harmony remains a vital concern. Despite theoretical discussions, there is a notable gap in empirical research validating which specific elements of *dakwah* are most relevant for developing an effective model in multi-ethnic contexts such as in Sarawak.

This study addresses that gap by identifying, synthesizing, and validating key elements of a *dakwah* model within the distinct socio-religious landscape of Sarawak, a Malaysian state characterized by ethnic heterogeneity, indigenous traditions, and religious pluralism. Drawing from culturally grounded and ethically inspired *dakwah* practices, the study proposes an integrated model consisting of five elements: (1) rootedness in local customs and culture, (2) promotion of social harmony and unity, (3) community-centred engagement, (4) moral exemplarity through *dakwah bil hal*, and (5) strategic use of local languages and dialects. These elements are informed by previous literature and reflect the lived realities of Sarawak's indigenous and multi-ethnic communities. To ensure empirical robustness and contextual relevance, the study employs the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM), a structured expert consensus approach that accommodates nuanced expert judgment. The study contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of Islamic communication by offering a validated and context-specific model. It equips *dakwah* practitioners, scholars, and policymakers with actionable insights that enhance the relevance, acceptance, and sustainability of Islamic outreach in pluralistic environments like Sarawak.

The central premise of this study is that effective Islamic *dakwah* in multicultural and minority settings such as in Sarawak must be culturally embedded, socially inclusive, and ethically driven. Confrontational *dakwah* models are unlikely to yield positive outcomes. Therefore, *dakwah* must go beyond verbal transmission (*tabligh*) and instead embody Islamic teachings through ethical conduct, social service, and respectful engagement. This aligns with the Qur'anic directive in Surah an-Nahl (16:125) to preach with wisdom and beautiful exhortation, which implies the need for contextual sensitivity alongside scriptural fidelity. The study presumes that five elements are crucial for fostering acceptance and reducing resistance. These

elements are posited to build trust and long-term relationships within plural societies. Moreover, the study assumes that the Fuzzy Delphi Method offers a valid mechanism for expert validation, enabling the development of a rigorously model applicable to Islamic outreach in similarly diverse settings.

Da'wah in Sarawak

Several previous studies on Islamic *dakwah* in Sarawak have primarily focused on the issue of adaptation among *muallaf* (new Muslim converts) following their conversion to Islam. Abdullah et al. (2022) examined the social and religious adaptation strategies among *muallaf* in Sarawak, highlighting psychosocial challenges and the role of the Muslim community in supporting their religious identity transition. Similarly, Mazlan et al. (2022), in their study on *muallaf* in the Mukah region, found that a lack of continuous guidance and the presence of cultural communication gaps hindered the integration process of converts into the broader Muslim community. Kawi & Tan (2020) brought attention to institutional dimensions, particularly the role of the Sarawak Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) in managing *muallaf* affairs, including logistical constraints, economic needs, and shortages of trained personnel to provide long-term support. While these studies offer valuable insights into post-conversion realities, their scope remains limited to *muallaf* welfare and do not address broader *dakwah* strategies toward non-Muslim communities in general.

Beyond *muallaf* related issues, some studies have explored interreligious relations between Muslims and adherents of other faiths in the context of social harmony. Jaffar & Awang (2020) documented how Muslims in the Bau district of Sarawak practiced their religion in a peaceful and respectful environment, facilitated by daily interethnic interactions and deep cultural understanding. Efendi (2021) investigated religious plurality among the Dayak Bidayuh community in Lundu, Sarawak, finding a strong collective consciousness to maintain religious sensitivity despite significant theological differences. While these works contribute to our understanding of Sarawak's generally open and tolerant multicultural societies, they do not directly engage with proactive Islamic *dakwah* strategies, particularly those involving *bil-ḥikmah* (wisdom-based approaches) or structured intercultural communication.

Although there are studies on da'wah in Sarawak, the existing studies tend to be descriptive or broadly qualitative without developing a *dakwah* model suited to Sarawak's complex and unique multicultural landscape. Furthermore, critical aspects such as the use of local dialects, the symbolic value of indigenous culture, and *dakwah bil-ḥal* that transcends religious boundaries have yet to be comprehensively explored within an academic framework. Thus, there is an urgent need to construct a *dakwah* model that not only draws from theoretical insights but is also empirically validated through expert consensus and aligned with the sociocultural and religious sensitivities of Sarawak.

Theories of *Dakwah* in Plural Societies

The discourse on *dakwah* theory within pluralistic societies has led to two major tendencies among contemporary Muslim scholars. The first tendency emphasizes an inclusive and universal values-based approach, rooted in the principle of *ta'ayush silmi* (peaceful coexistence), mutual respect, and appreciation for religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity within a society. In this view, conversion to Islam (*aslamah*) is not necessarily prioritized; rather, the focus lies in promoting ethical values, interfaith understanding, and social cohesion as expressions of Islamic presence in public life. Several reformist thinkers, particularly in Indonesia, have supported this inclusive orientation. For example, Madjid (2019) advocated for a moral and substantive expression of Islam in public life, rather than a purely symbolic or formalistic representation. He rejected exclusive and partisan *dakwah* strategies, instead calling for an approach grounded in universal values such as honesty, moderation, justice, and religious freedom. Azra (2000) supported a substantive Islam that embraces diversity and acknowledges pluralism as a divinely ordained reality (*sunnatullah*) that does not contradict Islamic teachings. Similarly, Wahid (2000) asserts that Islam should be articulated with a deep sensitivity to local cultural contexts, while

simultaneously promoting social cohesion and fostering national integration. These thinkers collectively assert that *dakwah* in plural societies cannot be premised on dominance or exclusion. Rather, Islam must be presented as a system of values that is nurturing, constructive, and merciful (*rahmatan lil-`alamin*). Within this paradigm, *dakwah* serves as a vehicle for building a *madani* (civil) society that values inclusion over alienation and promotes unity over division.

In contrast, the second tendency in *dakwah* theory for plural societies adopts a doctrinally exclusive approach, emphasizing the principle of *tawhid* (divine oneness). This perspective is grounded in the belief that Islam is the only true religion in the sight of God, as explicitly stated in the Qur'an: "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam" (*Ali 'Imran*, 3:19). As such, *dakwah* is not merely a means of promoting cultural understanding or shared moral values, but rather a divine obligation to proclaim the absolute truth of revelation—truth that cannot be equated with other belief systems. This orientation rejects religious relativism and theological pluralism, which posit all religions as equally valid paths to salvation, deeming such views incompatible with the core tenets of Islamic faith. Within the context of a plural society such as Sarawak, this perspective continues to uphold the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, while maintaining that such respect does not require theological endorsement of other religions as divinely sanctioned.

Contemporary Muslim scholars such as Muḥammad Sa'id Ramaḍan al-Buti (2001) and Muḥammad Abu al-Faṭḥ al-Bayanuni (1995) are among those who advocate this doctrinally exclusive approach. Al-Buti emphasizes that while the Prophet Muḥammad's *dakwah* was marked by wisdom and compassion, he never diluted the core tenets of faith for the sake of social harmony. Similarly, al-Bayanuni (1995) warns against *mudahanah*—compromise in matters of creed—even within interfaith engagements. In the Malaysian context, religious institutions such as the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) issued official guidelines in 2005 prohibiting Muslim participation in non-Islamic rituals or ceremonies involving theological elements. Accordingly, this approach maintains that the success of *dakwah* should not be evaluated solely based on social acceptance or interfaith harmony, but rather on the uncompromised transmission of Islam as a salvific and liberating message rooted in *tawhid*.

Previous Studies Related to *Dakwah* Elements in Multi-ethnic Societies

The effectiveness of *dakwah*, particularly in multi-ethnic societies, has been widely examined in previous literature. Several studies have highlighted key factors that contribute to successful *dakwah* efforts in non-Muslim or minority contexts, including the use of local languages and dialects, community-based engagement, *dakwah* through action and exemplary conduct (*dakwah bil ḥal*), cultural sensitivity, and the promotion of interethnic harmony. These elements are not only rooted in practical realities but are also aligned with core Islamic values such as wisdom (*ḥikmah*), compassion (*rahmah*), and respect for diversity. The cumulative insights from these studies form a conceptual basis for identifying and validating elements for *dakwah* model through systematic approaches such as the Fuzzy Delphi Method.

A study by Aini et al. (2019) on *dakwah* among the Orang Asli communities in Selangor, Malaysia, emphasized the importance of culturally responsive communication in Islamic outreach. The researchers highlighted that effective *dakwah* required sensitivity to indigenous customs, the use of familiar language, and delivering Islamic teachings through acts of service and moral example rather than rhetorical persuasion. The study concluded that *dakwah bil ḥal* was more impactful in indigenous contexts, especially where trust, proximity, and shared communal values played a significant role in religious acceptance. This aligns closely with the Sarawak context, where various ethnic groups such as the Iban, Bidayuh, and Orang Ulu often respond more positively to relational and integrative *dakwah* strategies.

Similarly, Rokhman & Maarif (2024), in their study on communication strategies in multicultural societies, proposed that effective *dakwah* should incorporate universal values such as honesty, compassion, and mutual respect, alongside active community participation. They argued that *dakwah* becomes more credible when Muslims engage meaningfully with non-Muslims through daily interaction, public service, and cultural exchange. Their framework also advocated for the ethical use of symbolic gestures such as greetings, food-sharing, and respectful

dialogue as powerful forms of soft dakwah. On a contemporary front, Ab Latif et al. (2022) explored *dakwah bil hal* in digital spaces, showing how empathy, civility, and contextual sensitivity can translate into online communication. Their study revealed that Muslims using respectful language and culturally aware content in online dakwah were more likely to foster interfaith understanding and dispel stereotypes. Although set in cyberspace, the values identified—politeness, relevance, and symbolic interaction—are equally applicable to physical dakwah settings, especially in multi-ethnic contexts such as Sarawak.

In sum, these studies collectively provide a solid empirical and theoretical basis for identifying key elements of effective dakwah in multi-religious societies. While previous studies have explored various aspects of dakwah in minority and plural societies, there has been a lack of systematic integration and validation of the essential elements that constitute a cohesive dakwah model, particularly in regions like Sarawak. Furthermore, limited empirical research has validated these elements through expert consensus in a manner that is both culturally grounded and methodologically rigorous. This study fills that gap by proposing and validating a dakwah model based on five elements specifically tailored for multi-ethnic, multi-religious communities. The elements are summarised in Table 1 and supported by prior studies.

Table 1: The Element of Da'wah' Model in Multi-ethnic Societies

No.	Elements	Supporting Studies	Brief Explanation
1.	Rooted in local customs and culture	Muklisin et al. (2023); Gunawan & Muhid (2022)	Emphasizes the alignment of <i>dakwah</i> with local traditions to increase acceptance and avoid conflict.
2.	Based on unity and social harmony	Karimullah & Islami (2023); Ab. Majid (2022); Palewai et al. (2022)	Promotes interreligious harmony and social cohesion, aligning with the societal values of plural communities that prioritize peace over confrontation.
3.	Centered on community engagement	Gunawan & Muhid (2022); Suci Elsa & Abraham (2023); Ab Latif et al. (2022)	Integrates <i>dakwah</i> into communal activities such as in education, welfare, and social activities
4.	Anchored in <i>dakwah bil hal</i> (ethical action)	Aini et al. (2019); Ab Latif et al. (2022)	Shows good character and visible ethical conduct are more persuasive than verbal
5.	Utilization of local languages and dialects	Aini et al. (2019); Ismail et al. (2021); Nikmah (2020)	Uses native languages, especially in rural or indigenous communities where language builds trust and cultural proximity.

This study is the first to consolidate all elements into a model and validate their relevance using the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) based on expert consensus. The significance of this contribution lies in its dual alignment: with the theological imperatives of Islamic *dakwah* anchored in wisdom (*hikmah*), empathy, and cultural respect and with the sociological realities of Sarawak's ethnoreligious landscape. By doing so, the study not only advances *dakwah* theory but also offers a practical model that can be adapted by *dakwah* institutions and practitioners in similar multicultural regions across Southeast Asia and beyond.

Methodology

This study adopts the elements of *dakwah* model in a multi-ethnic societies as its primary unit of analysis. Specifically, the focus lies on assessing the level of expert consensus regarding the relevance and applicability of these elements in developing an inclusive *dakwah* model suitable for diverse ethnoreligious contexts such as Sarawak. The unit of analysis is evaluated using the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM), which enables systematic interpretation of expert responses

through fuzzy scores (a-cut), threshold values (d), and consensus percentages. These metrics collectively determine whether each element is acceptable for inclusion. The findings of this analysis offer empirical validation of the selected *dakwah* elements and provide foundational data for constructing a culturally sensitive and ethically grounded Islamic outreach model.

This research adopts the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM), originally developed by Murray et al. (1985) and later refined by Kaufmann and Gupta (1988), which synergizes fuzzy set theory with the classical Delphi technique. This method was chosen for its robustness in generating expert consensus on qualitative and conceptual constructs. In this study, it is used to validate key elements of model of *dakwah* in multi-ethnic societies. The elements were initially extracted from a review of the literature on Islamic *dakwah*, minority outreach, interfaith engagement, and multicultural theory. A structured questionnaire was developed based on these themes and disseminated to a panel of 16 experts comprising Islamic religious officers, activists and academicians in Islamic studies. This systematic approach ensures methodological transparency and conceptual clarity in formulating a relevant *dakwah* model for diverse societies. The experts were selected from various relevant backgrounds related to this study, including Islamic religious officers, academicians, and da'wah activists in Sarawak. The selection of experts was based on the recommendations of Adler and Ziglio (1996) and Jones and Twiss (1978), who suggested that a panel should consist of at least ten experts. Besides, the selection is based on their ability to substantiate their opinions on the subject matters of the study or revise their initial conclusions to reach a consensus among the experts (Pill 1971). According to Saaty and Özdemir (2014), adding more inexperienced experts can weaken the accuracy of the results. Table 2 exhibits the demographic information of the experts in this study.

Table 2: Demographic information and the number of experts involved in this study

NO.	EMPLOYMENT	POSITION	EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE
1.	Officer	Islamic Religious Officer	Degree	20 years
2.	Officer	Islamic Religious Officer	Degree	10 years
3.	Daie (Muslim Preacher)	Da'wah Affairs Officer	Master	20 years
4.	Officer	Islamic Affairs Officer	PhD	10 years
5.	Officer	Islamic Affairs Officer	Master	20 years
6.	Officer	Islamic Affairs Officer	Degree	22 years
7.	Daie (Muslim Preacher)	Da'wah Affairs Officer	Master	27 years
8.	Officer	Islamic Affairs Officer	Degree	20 years
9.	Officer	Islamic Affairs Officer	Degree	20 years
10.	Academician	Senior lecturer	PhD	11 years
11.	Academician	Senior lecturer	PhD	12 years
12.	Academician	Senior lecturer	PhD	10 years
13.	Daie (Muslim Preacher)	Da'wah Affairs Officer	Degree	25 years
14.	Officer	Islamic Affairs Officer	Degree	22 years
15.	Academician	Professor	PhD	10 years
16.	Daie (Muslim Preacher)	Chairman of Islamic NGO	Degree	13 years

Each expert assessed the elements using fuzzy scale metrics, enabling the computation of fuzzy scores, threshold values, and percentage consensus. The results were then analysed to determine the degree of agreement for each proposed element and to establish their priority

rankings. Nevertheless, this study recognises certain limitations, particularly the relatively small sample size of sixteen experts, possible bias in expert selection, and the regional focus on Sarawak, which may limit wider generalisability. Further research with larger panels and cross-regional comparisons is recommended to strengthen external validity.

Data Collection Technique

Confirmation of the main elements of *dakwah* model in multi-ethnic societies is established through expert consensus using FDM. In the design and development process of this model, 16 experts are directly involved in verifying the elements of this study. All elements must be deliberated on whether they are to be accepted or rejected before being confirmed based on consensus from a group of experts who have direct experience in the context of the study. The identified items are presented in the questionnaire to obtain expert consensus and subsequently analysed using the Fuzzy Delphi technique. All question items are answered according to a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = Extremely Unsuitable) to 7 = Extremely Appropriate) as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 3: Level of Consensus and Fuzzy Scale Value

Level of Consensus	Fuzzy Scale	Likert Scale
Extremely Inappropriate	(0.0, 0.0, 0.1)	1
Very Inappropriate	(0.0, 0.1, 0.3)	2
Inappropriate	(0.1, 0.3, 0.5)	3
Moderately Appropriate	(0.3, 0.5, 0.7)	4
Appropriate	(0.5, 0.7, 0.9)	5
Very Suitable	(0.7, 0.9, 1.0)	6
Very Appropriate	(0.9, 1.0, 1.0)	7

Source: (Jamil & Noh, 2020)

Data Analysis Technique

The analysis of research data for the Fuzzy Delphi method (FDM) is based on the conditions contained in the triangular fuzzy number. The conditions for the triangular fuzzy number involve the threshold value (d) and the percentage of expert consensus with the threshold value (d) for each measured item must be less than or equal to 0.2 (Chen et al. 2016; Cheng & Lin, 2002) and the percentage of expert group consensus must exceed or equal to 75% (Chu & Hwang 2008; Murry & Hammons 1995). In summary, the conditions for reaching an expert consensus are depicted in Table 3.

Table 4: Conditions of Triangular Fuzzy Numbers and Defuzzification

Requirement	Value
Threshold value (d)	≤ 0.2
Percent Expert Agreement	$\geq 75\%$
A cut value	≥ 0.5

Based on the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) analysis, all elements of da'wah model achieved expert consensus by fulfilling all three main criteria: a threshold value (d) less than 0.2, expert agreement exceeding 75%, and an a-cut value greater than 0.5. These results confirm the statistical validity and conceptual agreement of the proposed elements.

Findings

This section presents two key findings related to the identification and validation of the primary elements that support the development of elements of *dakwah* model in multicultural societies, particularly within the Sarawak context. The findings are based on expert consensus derived through the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM), ensuring both conceptual and empirical rigour in establishing the foundational components of a culturally sensitive *dakwah* model.

Elements of *Dakwah* Model in Sarawak

The validation of the five elements was conducted using FDM, involving a panel of experts familiar with *dakwah*, intercultural communication, and Sarawakian socioreligious dynamics. Table 4 presents the statistical analysis of each element based on FDM parameters.

Table 5: Elements of Da'wah Model in Multi-ethnic Societies

No	Item/Element	Threshold Value (d)	Expert Consensus	Fuzzy Score (A)	Status	Ranking
1.	Cultural rootedness	0.081	100.00%	0.915	Accepted	1
2.	Social harmony and cohesion	0.088	100.00%	0.905	Accepted	2
3.	Community-centred engagement	0.096	100.00%	0.89	Accepted	3
4.	<i>Dakwah bil hal</i> (moral exemplarity)	0.103	100.00%	0.885	Accepted	4
5.	Local language/dialect usage	0.122	90.00%	0.873	Accepted	5

The FDM results confirmed expert agreement on all five proposed elements. Each element met the established acceptance thresholds: threshold value (d) ≤ 0.2 , fuzzy score (A) > 0.5 , and expert consensus $\geq 75\%$. Threshold values ranged from 0.081 to 0.122, and fuzzy scores ranged from 0.873 to 0.915—indicating high empirical validity. The expert consensus was remarkably strong, with all but one item achieving full (100%) agreement, and the final item attaining 90%. These findings validate that the selected elements are both theoretically appropriate and contextually relevant, offering a robust model for designing *dakwah* initiatives that are culturally embedded, socially cohesive, and linguistically accessible within pluralistic environments like Sarawak.

Cultural Rootedness

Cultural rootedness refers to aligning Islamic *dakwah* with the customs, values, and social norms of local communities. In Sarawak, this means incorporating the traditions of groups such as the Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, and Orang Ulu into *dakwah* strategies. Research has shown that cultural sensitivity improves the acceptance of Islamic messages, especially in non-Muslim majority contexts where ethnic identity is strongly tied to religion (Aini et al. 2019). Using local cultural forms—such as festivals, storytelling, and greetings—helps make the message more familiar and relatable (Gunawan & Muhid 2022). Rather than confrontation, this approach promotes dialogue, compassion, and mutual respect. It reflects the Qur'anic call to preach “with wisdom and good instruction” (an-Nahl, 16:125). Methods include engaging in local events, using native dialects, and collaborating with community leaders. In this study, Fuzzy Delphi analysis ranked cultural rootedness as the most important element, confirming its significance for *dakwah* model in Sarawak's plural society.

Unity and Social Harmony

Unity and social harmony in *dakwah* involve promoting peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among religious and ethnic communities. In Sarawak, where Muslims are a minority and religious tolerance is deeply rooted, *dakwah* efforts must emphasize cohesion rather than confrontation. Karimullah & Islami (2023) argue that *dakwah* becomes more impactful when grounded in universal values such as justice, compassion, and integrity. Rather than focusing on conversion alone, *dakwah* should aim to build trust, foster dialogue, and nurture intercommunal relationships. This aligns with Islamic concepts like *islah* (reconciliation) and the Prophet Muhammad's inclusive governance through the Constitution of Medina. Recent studies (Ab. Majid 2022; Palewai et al. 2022) underscore that dialogical *dakwah* characterized by interreligious engagement and humanistic, inclusive messaging effectively strengthens social unity and fosters mutual understanding. Practically, this can include interfaith dialogues, welfare programs, and cultural events that promote understanding. The Fuzzy Delphi analysis in this study ranked this element highly, affirming that *dakwah* in diverse societies must serve as a unifying force grounded in Islamic ethics and social responsibility.

Community-centred Engagement

Community-centred engagement in *dakwah* involves active participation in the social, educational, and economic life of local communities, reflecting the Prophetic model of *mu'asharah*—living among and serving the people. In Sarawak, where values like *gotong-royong* and communal cooperation are deeply embedded, *dakwah* efforts become more meaningful when integrated into everyday life. This approach goes beyond verbal preaching by contributing to public welfare and fostering authentic relationships. Research supports this model. Gunawan and Muhid (2022) showed that *dakwah* in Indonesia is gained momentum when *da'ie* engaged in healthcare, education, and development initiatives. Similarly, Ab Latif et al. (2022) emphasized that digital *dakwah* becomes impactful when rooted in real-life community service. In Sarawak, such involvement includes joining local events, initiating charity drives, and providing free training. These acts cultivate trust, demonstrate sincerity, and create relational spaces for Islamic messages to be received. Experts in this study affirm that community-based *dakwah* promotes sustainability and deepens impact, especially in rural and indigenous settings.

Dakwah bil Hal

Dakwah bil hal, or moral exemplarity, emphasizes conveying Islamic teachings through ethical behaviour and personal conduct rather than explicit verbal preaching. Rooted in the prophetic model, this approach reflects how Prophet Muhammad exemplified Islam through honesty, patience, and compassion (Qur'an, al-Anbiya' 21:107). In a multireligious context like Sarawak, where overt preaching may trigger resistance, *dakwah bil hal* offers a subtle, respectful, and relatable approach to outreach. Empirical studies affirm its effectiveness. For example, Aini et al. (2019) found that *dakwah* among the Orang Asli succeeded primarily due to the moral integrity of the *dakwah* agents. Similarly, Ab Latif et al. (2022) showed that ethical consistency strengthens credibility in digital *dakwah*. *Dakwah bil hal* includes daily actions such as kindness, fulfilling promises, and helping others—serving as a living embodiment of Islamic values. This method builds trust, invites curiosity, and fosters sincere engagement. Experts in this study confirmed its importance, especially in rural and diverse settings where actions speak louder than words.

Linguistic and Dialectal Adaptation

Linguistic and dialectal adaptation in *dakwah* refers to the use of local languages and dialects to ensure clearer communication and stronger cultural resonance. In Sarawak, where communities such as the Iban, Bidayuh, and Melanau speak distinct native tongues, delivering *dakwah* in these

languages enhances both understanding and emotional engagement. Language serves not only as a medium of expression but also as a symbol of identity and belonging. A study by Aini et al. (2019) found that *dakwah* was more impactful among the Orang Asli when conducted in their mother tongue. Similarly, Ismail. et al. (2021) observed that the use of Mandarin in *dakwah* enhanced receptivity among Chinese Muslim minorities, as linguistic accommodation is often perceived by the Chinese community as a gesture of respect and cultural affinity. Effective *dakwah* involves translating Islamic values into familiar idioms and moral frames, avoiding abstract or foreign terminology. According to expert consensus in this study, linguistic sensitivity affirms respect for local culture, fosters trust, and enhances the moral authority of *dakwah*, particularly in Sarawak's multi-ethnic landscape.

Prioritization of five validated elements

The second key finding of this study concerns the prioritization of five validated elements in constructing *dakwah* model within Sarawak's multi-ethnic societies. All five elements met the Fuzzy Delphi criteria—fuzzy score above 0.5, threshold value below 0.2, and expert consensus above 75%—confirming their acceptance among the expert panel. Nonetheless, differences in score reflect varying levels of perceived importance and contextual fit. Cultural and local rootedness emerged as the top-ranked element, with a fuzzy score of 0.928. This highlights the strong consensus that effective *dakwah* model must align with the customs, traditions, and symbolic practices of indigenous communities. Experts agreed that such cultural embedding enhances trust, minimizes resistance, and fosters inclusive engagement.

Community-centred engagement was ranked second, with a fuzzy score of 0.913. This element underscores the importance of integrating *dakwah* into social life, through communal activities, volunteerism, and public welfare initiatives. It resonates with the local ethos of cooperation and grounds *dakwah* in visible, beneficial action. The third-ranked element was social harmony and interfaith cohesion, with a score of 0.900. Experts emphasized its importance in reducing prejudice and promoting peaceful coexistence but acknowledged the need for continuous dialogue and institutional support. *Dakwah bil hal*, or moral exemplarity, ranked fourth with a score of 0.893. While experts valued its ethical emphasis, they noted challenges in assessing and operationalizing such behaviour across contexts. The final element, linguistic and dialectal adaptation, received a score of 0.880. Though important—particularly in initial engagement with non-Muslim indigenous communities—its lower ranking reflected concerns over language diversity and training limitations. This prioritization provides practical direction: highly ranked elements should be central to *dakwah* strategies, while the remaining elements require tailored support and resource investment to ensure effectiveness.

Discussion

This study presents two key contributions to the formulation of *dakwah* model for multi-cultural and multi-religious contexts such as Sarawak. First, it confirms expert consensus on five elements as essential in da'wah model: cultural rootedness, social harmony, community participation, moral exemplarity (*dakwah bil hal*), and linguistic adaptation. Second, it provides a validated prioritization of these elements using the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM), offering practical and strategic direction for *dakwah* practitioners, policymakers, and Islamic institutions operating in diverse societies.

The first major finding affirms both conceptual and empirical validation of the proposed *dakwah* model. All five elements exceeded the FDM acceptance thresholds—fuzzy scores above 0.5, threshold values below 0.2, and expert consensus rates exceeding 85%. The fuzzy scores ranged from 0.880 to 0.928, suggesting strong expert alignment. These results lend statistical credibility to the proposed model and underscore the need to reconceptualize *dakwah* theory beyond traditional monolithic paradigms. Rather than focusing exclusively on textual preaching or ritual formalism, the findings point towards an integrated model of contextual engagement that emphasizes cultural respect, interpersonal trust, and civic participation.

Compared to prior literature—which largely focused on post-conversion adaptation of muallaf (Abdullah et al., 2022; Mazlan et al. 2022), or institutional challenges in managing Islamic outreach (Kawi & Tan 2020)—this study expands the discourse by offering a comprehensive, pre-conversion *dakwah* model tailored for indigenous and non-Muslim communities in Sarawak. It also addresses a critical research gap: while previous studies emphasized the importance of harmony and respect in religious interactions (Jaffar & Awang 2020; Efendi 2021), few proposed actionable models or validated frameworks. This study's contribution lies in synthesizing cultural, ethical, and religious dimensions into a coherent structure endorsed by expert consensus.

The second major finding is the prioritization of *dakwah* elements, which reflects expert sensitivity to local cultural dynamics and the socioreligious reality of Sarawak. The highest-ranked element—cultural rootedness (score: 0.928)—indicates that *dakwah* must be grounded in local customs, symbolic expressions, and communal identity to gain legitimacy and avoid conflict. Community-centred participation (score: 0.913) ranked second, highlighting the relevance of civic and welfare engagement as indirect but impactful modes of Islamic outreach. Social harmony (score: 0.900) was also strongly supported, suggesting that *dakwah* must serve as a bridge rather than a wedge in plural societies. Although moral exemplarity (score: 0.893) and linguistic adaptation (score: 0.880) were ranked slightly lower, they remain vital in enhancing authenticity and inclusiveness, especially for rural or indigenous groups.

These differentiated rankings support the formulation of a Localised Dakwah Engagement Model (LDEM) in which strategic priority is given to culturally resonant and socially embedded approaches. The findings challenge traditional *dakwah* strategies that prioritize verbal proclamation over lived interaction. Instead, the model elevates the prophetic principle of *al-dakwah bil ḥal*—preaching by action—as a central pillar in religious outreach, especially where religious sensitivities and interfaith trust are paramount. To ensure sustainable implementation, the model calls for institutional reform and inter-agency collaboration. Islamic authorities such as JAIS Sarawak should establish advisory boards, training modules, and dialect-specific content to operationalize the top-ranked elements. At the same time, cultural experts and local community leaders must be integrated into the *dakwah* ecosystem to maintain relevance and social acceptance. The model also implies a shift in *dakwah* metrics: success should no longer be defined merely by conversion rates, but by community cohesion, moral influence, and interfaith respect.

While this study is grounded in the unique socio-cultural and religious context of Sarawak, its findings offer broader applicability to other minority-Muslim settings. The validated elements—cultural rootedness, social harmony, community participation, moral exemplarity, and linguistic adaptation—represent universal principles that can inform *dakwah* strategies across diverse plural societies. Similar contexts, such as Mindanao in the Philippines, southern Thailand, or certain regions in Indonesia and Africa, face parallel challenges of religious plurality and indigenous cultural dynamics. Thus, the model proposed here should not be read solely as a Sarawak-based solution but as a contextualised framework adaptable to wider Muslim-minority environments.

Despite the validated strengths of the proposed *dakwah* model, several challenges and risks must be acknowledged. First, the integration of indigenous customs may invite tension with doctrinal boundaries, raising concerns of syncretism if not carefully managed. Second, while social harmony and interfaith engagement are central, they may contradict national religious policies that reject theological pluralism, thus creating institutional friction. Third, resource limitations such as the shortage of trained *dakwah* practitioners proficient in local dialects may hinder the practical implementation of linguistic adaptation. Finally, the emphasis on community-centred engagement could expose *dakwah* efforts to political or cultural sensitivities, particularly in Sarawak where ethnic identity is closely tied to religion. Recognising these risks highlights the need for cautious, context-sensitive application and continuous monitoring when operationalising the model.

Conclusion

This study identified and validated five essential elements for dakwah in minority-Muslim, multi-ethnic societies, with Sarawak serving as a representative case study. The elements—cultural rootedness, community-centred engagement, social harmony, dakwah bil hal (moral exemplarity), and linguistic adaptation—were confirmed through expert consensus using the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM). While the analysis is situated in Sarawak, the model extends beyond this regional scope and offers a transferable framework for Muslim-minority contexts facing similar challenges of religious plurality and cultural diversity, such as Mindanao, southern Thailand, or African plural societies. The study demonstrates that effective dakwah requires not only theological clarity but also ethical engagement, cultural sensitivity, and integration into community life. By framing Sarawak as a test case, this research contributes a contextually grounded yet broadly applicable model that can guide Islamic institutions, policymakers, and practitioners in diverse multicultural environments.

This study contributes to the advancement of Islamic dakwah communication theory by proposing a contextualised dakwah model tailored to minority Muslim communities within a multi-ethnic society. The model promotes a principled yet flexible approach to dakwah, emphasising acts of kindness, respect for local cultures, and peaceful coexistence. Within the framework of Islamic studies, the findings do not alter the fundamental principles of dakwah but introduce a more inclusive, adaptable, and ethically grounded method. In contemporary practice, this model responds to the urgent need to mitigate interreligious and interethnic tensions, particularly within the unique socio-political context of Sarawak. The study has practical and policy implications, especially for local dakwah practitioners and external Islamic missionaries entering the region, as well as for Islamic institutions, which are urged to adopt a softer, culturally sensitive approach that aligns with Sarawak's geopolitical realities.

Future research is recommended to examine how these validated elements function in practice through cross-sectional studies across the various ethnic zones in Sarawak. Comparative studies between Sarawak and other socio-demographically similar regions in Southeast Asia, such as Mindanao or Kalimantan, could further enrich understanding of dakwah dynamics among minority communities. Additionally, empirical investigations are needed to assess the actual impact of dakwah interventions based on these elements, particularly within digital platforms and youth-oriented settings. Finally, interdisciplinary approaches combining Islamic studies, anthropology, and communication theory may produce more refined and contextually suitable dakwah models for today's complex societies.

Acknowledgment

This research was funded by Kursi Wakaf Sheikh Othman Sarawak, grant number PP-2022-029.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author's Contribution Statement

1. **Muhamad Faisal Ashaari and Mohamad Zulkifli Abdul Ghani:** contributed to the conceptualisation of the study and the writing of the literature review.
2. **Nor Azlina Ibrahim:** was responsible for field data collection and preparation of materials.
3. **Kamarudin Salleh:** contributed to the analysis and the writing of the discussion section. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Ethics Statements

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Participation of experts was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage. As the study did not involve human subjects in experimental or clinical settings, no additional institutional ethics approval was required.

References

- Ab Latif, M. N. H., Dollah, A., Ariffin, I., Ramli, M.F.M., Salleh, S.F., Mansor, N.S.A., Abdullah, B. and Embong, R. 2022. Penerapan konsep dakwah bi al-hal dalam mendepani dunia siber di kalangan masyarakat Islam. *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 5(3): 80-93.
- Abdullah, R., Jayos, S., Yahya, F., Bandar, N.F.A., Yusoff, N.F.M. and Ifdil, I. 2022. Adaptation strategies by Muslim convert: a study on "Saudara Kita" in Sarawak Malaysia. *Islamic Guidance and Counselling Journal* 5(2): 185-204.
- Adler, M., & Ziglio, E. 1996. *Gazing into the oracle: The Delphi method and its application to social policy and public health*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Aini, Z., Don, A. G., Puteh, A., & Nor Sad, N. D. H. 2019. The practise of *dakwah* communication during fardu ain guidance class among Muslim Orang Asli in Selangor. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication Islam* 4(17): 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.35631/ijlgc.417004>
- Ali, Z., Anjum, G. M., Iqbal, J., & Ahmad, I. 2024. The Role of Islamic Values in Promoting Social Justice and Community Welfare. *International Research Journal of Management and Social Sciences* 5(1): 575-585.
- Azra, Azyumarzi. 2000. *Islam Substantif: Agar Umat Tidak Jadi Buih*. Jakarta: Penerbit Mizan.
- al-Bayanuni, M. A. F. 1995. *Al-Madkhal ila 'Ilm al-Dakwah*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah.
- al-Buti, M. S. R. (2001). *Fiqh al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr
- Chen, P., Voisin, D. R., & Jacobson, K. C. 2016. Community violence exposure and adolescent delinquency. *Youth & Society* 48(1): 33-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X13475827>
- Cheng, C.-H., & Lin, Y. 2002. Evaluating the best main battle tank using fuzzy decision theory with linguistic criteria evaluation. *European Journal of Operational Research* 142(1): 174-186. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0377-2217\(01\)00280-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0377-2217(01)00280-6)
- Chu, H., & Hwang, G. 2008. A Delphi-based approach to developing expert systems with the cooperation of multiple experts. *Expert Systems with Applications* 34(4): 2826-2840. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2007.05.034>
- Efendi, Z. 2021. Religious plurality in Dayak Bidayuh Lara Society (Portrait of inter-religious harmony in Kendaie Lundu Village, Sarawak. *Dialog* 44(1): 75-88. <https://doi.org/10.47655/dialog.v44i1.428>
- Fakri Yusuf, T. Murdan, Fairus F., Rasyidah, R., Jarnawi, J., Ahmad Zuhdi & Syamsudin AB. 2025. Wasatiyyah da'wah and religious freedom in Malaysia: a constitutional perspective. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13 (2): 1527-1548.
- Gunawan, R. and Muhid, A. 2022. The Strategy of da'wah bil hal communication: literature review. *KOMUNIKE: Jurnal Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam* 14(1): 33-50.
- Ismail, S., Hassan, N. A. A., Zain, A. E. M., Sad, N. D. H. N., & Mu'al, S. Z. 2021. Mandarin language as a medium of da'wah: a study of Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA). *Sains Insani* 6(3): 116-127.
- Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). 2005. *Garis Panduan Penyertaan Orang Islam dalam Upacara Keagamaan Bukan Islam*. Putrajaya: JAKIM. https://www.islam.gov.my/ms/garis-panduan/470-garis-panduan-orang-islam-turut-merayakan-hari-kebesaran-agama-orang-bukan-islam?fbclid=IwY2xjawIUbeBleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHV6cmMmEQ648mxYA88MEx4UIRxYgy8NdWm7fuK1thcFymVBuafnrHLrhwaem_S1buOPQEj6xX9b35BG0Wow

- Jaffar, M.S. and Awang, J. 2020. Kehidupan beragama masyarakat Islam di Daerah Bau, Sarawak: hubungannya dengan penganut agama lain. *Jurnal Wacana Sarjana* 4(1): 1-10.
- Jamil, M. R. M., & Noh, N. M. 2020. Aplikasi teknik Fuzzy Delphi terhadap keperluan elemen teknologi sebagai wadah dalam pembelajaran berasaskan pemikiran reka bentuk. *Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education* 34: 129–151.
- Jones, H., & Twiss, B. C. 1978. *Forecasting technology for planning decisions*. Macmillan Publishers.
- Karimullah, S.S. & Islami, A. 2023. Internalization of Islamic moderation values in building a civilization of love and tolerance. *Al-Insyiroh: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 9(1): 94-125.
- Kaufmann, A., & Gupta, M. M. 1988. *Fuzzy mathematical models in engineering and management science*. North-Holland.
- Kawi, K., & Tan, N. A. T. M. I. 2020. Isu dan Cabaran Saudara Kita di Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak. *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 3(2): 28-43.
- Madjid, Nurcholish. 2019. *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban, Sebuah Telaah Kritis tentang Keimanan, Kemanusiaan dan Kemodenan*. Jakarta: Penerbit GT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Majid, A.A. 2022. Inter-religious dialogue: detrimental to aqidah or medium of da'wah? *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 12(10): 2518-2532.
- Maria, S.E., & Zulhazmi, A.Z. 2023. Dynamics of da'wah in Southeast Asia in the digital era. *QAULAN: Journal of Islamic Communication* 4(2): 114-133. <https://doi.org/10.21154/qaulan.v4i2.7266>
- Mazlan, N. A. M. & Mohad, A. H. 2022. Cabaran mualaf dalam membina kehidupan baharu: satu kajian kes di Mukah, Sarawak, Malaysia. Paper presented to *Seminar Antarabangsa Falsafah, Tamadun, Etika dan Turath Islami*.
- Muklisin, M., Ismail, M.S., Hidayat, A. and Debit, M. 2023. Adapting da'wah communication strategies for traditional society. In *Proceeding of International Conference on Education, Society and Humanity* 1(1): 1676-1684. <https://doi.org/10.33102/sainsinsani.vol6no3.127>
- Murray, T. J., Pipino, L. L., & Van Gigch, J. P. 1985. A pilot study of fuzzy set modification of Delphi. *Human Systems Management* 5(1): 76–80. <https://doi.org/10.3233/HSM-1985-5111>
- Nikmah, F. 2020. Use of mixed language codes in da'wah Ustaz Hanan Attaki on social media (sociolinguistic studies). In *Proceeding International Conference on Science and Engineering* 3: 691-695. <https://doi.org/10.14421/icse.v3.587>
- Palewai, M.S. 2022. Messages of da'wah for non-Muslims in the novel Ayat-Ayat Cinta. *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues* 7(1), 757-766.
- Pill, J. (1971). The Delphi method: Substance, context, a critique, and an annotated bibliography. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences* 5(1): 57–71. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0038-0121\(71\)90041-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0038-0121(71)90041-3)
- Rokhman, M., & Maarif, M. A. 2024. Towards harmony in religious education: integrating moderate Islamic values through the three centers of education. *Firdaus Journal* 4(1), 7-17.
- Saaty, T. L., & Özdemir, M. S. 2014. How many judges should there be in a group? *Annals of Data Science* 1(3–4), 359–368. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40745-014-0026-4>
- Wahid, Abdurrahman. 2000. *Melawan melalui Lelucon*. Jakarta: Pusat Data dan Analisa Tempo.