



جامعة السلطان الشريف علي الإسلامية  
UNIVERSITI ISLAM SULTAN SHARIF ALI

# THE 3<sup>rd</sup> BORNEO ISLAMIC RESEARCH FORUM

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN BORNEO

### THEMES

*Religious Diversity and Development in Borneo*

*Sub-themes:*

*Interfaith Dialogue and Community Building in Borneo | Impact of Religious Diversity on Social Development in Borneo | Religious Pluralism and Governance in Borneo | Religion, Culture, and Environmental Conservation in Borneo | Historical Evolution of Religious Diversity in Borneo | Economic Development and Religious Practices in Borneo | Challenges and Opportunities of Religious Diversity for Youth Development in Borneo | Religious Education and its Role in Promoting Tolerance in Borneo | Religion and Indigenous Communities in Borneo: Conflicts and Collaborations | Media and Representation of Religious Diversity in Borneo*



**October 28 – 30, 2024**



Kampus UIN Antasari  
Banjarmasin

**Keynote Speaker**

**Prof. Dr. H. Mujiburrahman, MA**  
Rector UIN Antasari Banjarmasin

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### IMPORTANT DATE

**Paper Submission Deadline**

**October 6, 2024**

**Announcement for Paper**

**Approval**

**October 14, 2024**

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**Free Submission**



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### HOSTED BY:

- UIN Antasari Banjarmasin
- UIN Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda
- IAIN Pontianak
- IAIN Palangkaraya

### PUBLICATION:

- e-Proceedings
- Jurnal UIN Antasari

## **Religious Diversity and Development in Sarawak: A Linguistic Perspective**

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**Abstract:** This study explores the intricate relationship between linguistic diversity and religious development in Sarawak, Malaysia, a region renowned for its rich tapestry of ethnic and religious identities. With a population comprising predominantly Bumiputera (75.7%) and Chinese (23.8%), and a variety of religions - Christianity (50.1%), Islam (34.2%), and Buddhism (12.8%)—the research employs qualitative methods to analyse secondary data and field observations. It focuses on how language shapes religious practices and interfaith dialogue. The findings reveal that language significantly influences religious expression and identity formation. Indigenous languages such as Iban and Bidayuh, alongside Malay and English, serve as bridge languages for communication. The study emphasises the role of translations in fostering understanding and illustrates cultural richness through code-switching during religious ceremonies. Ultimately, this research underscores the vital interplay between language and religion in promoting social development and cultural continuity. It suggests that preserving indigenous languages and enhancing interfaith dialogue are essential for maintaining Sarawak's multicultural heritage.

**Keyword:** *Religious Diversity; Linguistic Diversity; Sarawak; Interfaith Dialogue; Indigenous Languages*

### **Introduction**

Sarawak, Malaysia's largest state, is renowned for its remarkable religious and linguistic diversity. According to the Population and Housing Census of Malaysia 2020 (MyCensus 2020), Sarawak's population of 2,453,677 comprises a mix of ethnic groups, predominantly Bumiputera (75.7%) and Chinese (23.8%), with a small percentage of other communities. This ethnic diversity is mirrored in the state's religious composition, where Christianity is the most widely practised religion (50.1%), followed by Islam (34.2%) and Buddhism (12.8%). In addition to its religious diversity, Sarawak is home to approximately 40 languages (Asmah, 2004), spoken across the state. Indigenous languages such as Iban and Bidayuh are widely used, while Sarawak Malay and Iban function as lingua francas (Mohammed Azlan Mis, 2010). English remains an official language, and Malay serves as the national language. This linguistic and religious diversity plays a pivotal role in shaping Sarawak's socio-cultural landscape.

The relationship between language and religion in Sarawak is fundamental to understanding the state's development. Language acts as a medium for religious expression and identity formation, while also fostering interfaith dialogue and social cohesion. Despite its significance, the role of language in Sarawak's religious diversity remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by examining how linguistic diversity supports religious practices and facilitates interfaith communication. The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to analyse how different languages are used in religious practices across Sarawak's diverse communities, (2) to explore the role of language in promoting interfaith dialogue, and (3) to assess the impact of linguistic diversity on religious identity and social development in the state.

This research contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and religious development. It provides valuable insights into how language and religion intersect to create a harmonious, multicultural society, offering a unique perspective on Sarawak's socio-cultural development.

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