

2024

Maligay: An Iconic Tausug Traditional Token for *Pagtammat* in the Sulu Archipelago

Eddie M. Ladja & Cherry Mae L. Ladja

Date received: March 15, 2024

Date revised: May 27, 2024

Date accepted: September 9, 2024

Similarity index: 9%



Abstract

The Tausug reside in Lupah Sug (Sulu) and even in Northeastern Borneo, including parts of Indonesia and Malaysia. Historically, they were governed under the Sulu Sultanate. Today, the Tausug maintain a strong connection to their heritage, including the tradition of *Pagtammat*, using *Maligay* as an example of a valued cultural practice in rural communities in Sulu, Philippines. *Maligay Pagtammat* symbolizes the completion of Quranic studies by children, reflecting a strong attachment to traditional learning methods and the importance of Islamic education. It is largely unknown outside the Tausug community, particularly in Luzon and Visayas, due to limited available literature. Hence, this study explores *Maligay Pagtammat* among Tausug families in the municipalities of Parang, Panglima Estino, and Panamao in Sulu. Through participant observation and interviews with eight participants, all residents of the three localities with first-hand experience of the practice, descriptive thematic analysis of the data revealed the cultural significance, educational practices, and community values linked to *Maligay Pagtammat* among Tausug families. Despite challenges such as poverty and pastoral lifestyles, parents value Islamic education and express appreciation through this tradition. The ceremony involves extensive preparations, a procession, epic narratives, and a communal meal. Findings highlight the cultural and educational practices of Tausug families in rural Sulu, showcasing their resilience in preserving traditions amidst modernization. This study contributes to understanding Tausug identity and community cohesion through cultural practices.

Author Information:

¹Eddie M. Ladja

edladja25@gmail.com

orcid.org/0009-0006-3563-2990

²Cherry Mae L. Ladja

cmladja28@gmail.com

orcid.org/0009-0002-6140-2495

¹Department Chair

College of Asian and Islamic Studies,

Western Mindanao State University

Zamboanga City, Philippines

²Instructor

College of Social Work and Community

Development,

Western Mindanao State University

Zamboanga City, Philippines

<https://doi.org/10.53899/spjrd.v29i2.462>

Keywords: Sulu studies, *Maligay Pagtammat*, Tausug families, Quranic studies

The Tausug, one of the 13 Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines, are living in the Sulu Archipelago and northeastern Borneo, including Indonesian and Malaysian provinces. Their dynamic lifestyle is deeply rooted in their cultural legacy, with the Bahasa Sug widely understood beyond their native region. Historically, the Sulu Sultanate held significant influence, extending its power to Mindanao, Palawan, and even the Malaysian state of Sabah (Ingilan, 2018a, p. 37).

The Tausug communities in rural areas of Sulu are renowned for their rich cultural heritage, especially in the domain of education and religious practices. The Tausug group is one of the Moro groups in Mindanao known for their distinct customs. One enduring practice that they still observe is the *Maligay Pagtammam*, a ceremony where parents present a token of appreciation to their children upon completing Quranic studies. This tradition holds significant cultural and religious importance among the Tausug, reflecting their deep-rooted values and beliefs that are evident in their rural community life.

In terms of education, traditional Tausug families prefer the concept of *Magpangadji* (homeschooling) due to its accessibility and convenience, resembling the *Guru's* (teacher's) approach to serving learners in the countryside. Lippincott (2020) stated that the versatility and freedom that homeschooling offers allow parents to tailor their children's education to their individual needs, interests, and learning styles, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment at home. Epstein, et al. (2018) argued that when schools, families, and communities work together, they create a supportive environment that enhances student learning, improves school programs, and strengthens the community as a whole.

Maligay Pagtammam can also be described as a unique cultural education practice that represents a distinct aspect of heritage from the past. It advances the importance of rural learning methods from where traditional Tausug families acquire their source of inspiration when faced with literacy challenges. To some people, *Maligay Pagtammam* is a product of craftsmanship showcasing a specific form of artistic creativity with aesthetic significance. It is a practice unique to a specific group of people, reflecting an exclusive background of local ingenuity. The Tausug traditionally display *Maligay Pagtammam* as a symbol of pride for their rich cultural legacy and for the children who have completed their studies of the Holy Qur'an. Stefano (2022) commented that folklife, with its roots in advancing cultural equity, is increasingly taking a broader notion of social equity, through which the ethics and politics of cultural work are being more explicit.

On the other hand, the practice of *Maligay Pagtammam* is not only scoped out as a cultural practice rather a reflection of the Tausug people's commitment to Islamic education. Despite facing challenges such as poverty and limited access to formal schooling, many Tausug families prioritize Quranic studies for their children. This attitude towards the practice carries significant price for every family, emphasizing the breadth of its benefits is indeed a matter of responsibility among parents over their children's learning. Schaff and Jackson (2010), however, emphasized the challenges and opportunities facing rural education in the 21st century. Various issues they mention like access to quality education, poverty, and inequality with reference to rural educational setting. Both believe that the solution, reformer like Cubberley conducted, was to make rural schools look like urban schools: larger, bureaucratized, run by educational professionals rather than locals, and informed by the latest pedagogical knowledge. While the Tausug traditional method of education lacks a defined goal or formal institutionalization, it focuses on teaching children to read, write, and eventually understand the message of the Holy Qur'an. This approach is considered sufficient to cultivate them into peaceful and law-abiding citizens.

Thus, homeschooling highlights the community's confidence in the importance of religious erudition affecting their children, particularly among marginalized families, as they thrive to uphold

their communal identity. For them, reading the Holy Qur'an is seen as a demonstration of good conduct, implying piety, honesty, and being a well-mannered individual member of their community. Kaufeld (2020) believed that perhaps family values, traditions, or religious beliefs lessening as a child spends more and more time in an institutional setting, and this bothers parents. Children function best from strong foundation, which is hard to build when they spend six to eight hours per day outside a parent's care while they are still young. That is why the Tausug at times opt for homeschooling, often due to moral concerns.

Al-Attar (2010) noted that in some Muslim countries, where the Islamic education syllabus is taught in primary and middle schools, divine rules are considered rules that are reasonably justified. Rules of conduct and moral values derived from the Holy Qur'an and Hadith are interpreted as serving individual and community interests. It is not surprising that Tausug families in rural areas lean towards homeschooling focused on the study of the Holy Qur'an and afterwards offer a celebration for their children who may finish. Undoubtedly, the Tausug believe that the Qur'an is a comprehensive guide for humanity, as they put confidence in its supernatural nature that transcends all aspects of life.

Understanding the significance of *Maligay Pagtammam* and its impact on Tausug communities is essential for preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. By studying this tradition, we can gain insights into the values, beliefs, and educational practices of the traditional Tausug families. Moreover, this study can contribute to the broader discourse on the role of traditional education in edging cultural identity and community cohesion in rural areas at the time when the *Pagtammam* (graduation) involves gathering of people to witness the event. Kirabaev and Pochta (2002) asserted that speaking of the values of Islamic Culture, it is important to treat the general perception of concrete-historical types in relation to the aims and norms of their behaviour. These are embodied in the historical experience and meaning of Islamic civilization, as well of humanity in general. True, concepts like these are reflected in the historical context and significance of Islamic civilization. The traditional communities in Sulu cast its connection in the broader scope of human history. At which point, their cultural identity is nurtured by Islamic culture, which establishes a distinct set of norms within the Muslim community, as exemplified by the Tausug tradition of homeschooling, then a pretext to *Maligay Pagtammam* as token.

Materials and Methods

The study utilizes a descriptive method to explain the traditional customs of *Maligay Pagtammam* among Tausug families living in rural areas of Sulu. This method includes data collection through two strategies: first, observing the daily lives of Tausug families, particularly their commitment to educating their children, and second, interviewing Tausug parents who have participated in *Maligay Pagtammam*, offering a traditional token to the community after their children finish Qur'an reading at the house of a *Guru*. Using descriptive thematic analysis, these observations and interviews revealed key themes related to the cultural significance, educational practices, and community values associated with *Maligay Pagtammam* among Tausug families. These approaches make conclusions based on the parents' prevailing attitude, behavior, and belief toward the practice.

Adopting Jorgensen's model discusses participant observation in social research as a crucial tool that allows one to immerse oneself within the studied social context. This approach can provide a deep understanding of the participant's culture and interaction, which is crucial for a researcher to know the challenges and ethical considerations involving lived experiences. The methodology of participant observation is appropriate for studies of almost every aspect of human existence. Through participant observation, it is possible to describe what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why— at least from the standpoint of participants— things happen as they do in particular situations (Jorgensen, 1989). To complete the data-gathering procedure, it is also

important to acknowledge that Flick's model emphasizes the significance of interviews for collecting in-depth, detailed, and multifaceted data that can offer insights into complex social phenomena. His approach focuses on creating a comfortable and open environment for dialogue, utilizing active listening skills to encourage participants to share their experiences and perspectives freely. This method captures the richness and depth of participants' insights, allowing researchers to understand the social phenomena under study comprehensively. In most cases, such a "just do it" approach leads to an answer— people are generally happy to say something when asked about their ideas, opinions, or feelings. In interviews, statements, answers, and narratives related to subject perspectives and experiences are collected (Flick, 2021).

The outcomes from observations and interviews were analysed rigorously to establish commonality in practice among residents of Parang, Panglima Estino, and Panamao. The observations focused on aspects such as 'attitude' towards the practice, 'behavior' influencing the decision to practice, and 'belief' leading to individual principles that result in adopting the tradition. Interviews, on the other hand, had facilitated extensive discussions, with answers to questions as a valuable information source. The responses were carefully managed and interpreted to yield insights into the practice among informants with parallel means of subsistence and shared experiences.

Interviews were conducted among eight (8) participants from the municipalities of Parang, Panglima Estino, and Panamao in January 2024. As such, three (3) participants from Parang, three (3) participants from Panglima Estino, and two (2) participants from Panamao. There was a two-day interval between visits to each area, during which observations were also conducted.

Finally, ethical considerations were essential for maintaining the integrity of the research findings. The researchers considered the participants' ability to narrate their experiences in Bahasa Sug and diligently recorded all discussions. Also, as outlined by Silverman (2009), an informed consent form effectively reflected the dignity and safety of the research participants through written and verbal statements. Moreover, the participants were told about numerous things, including but not limited to what the research was about, which included options to withdraw from the interview. Thus, the participants willingly participated in the study and enjoyed the conversation, indicating that the interview provided a safe and non-judgmental environment to share their stories and experiences.

Results and Discussion

Sulu is home to various cultures, renowned for its rich history and stunning landscapes that exemplify the resilience of local communities. It is the homeland of the Tausugs that already existed under the abode of Islam, hence the title *Sulu Darussalam* (Ingilan & Abdurajak, 202, p. 98; Jubilado et al., 2015, p. 148). The province is notably characterized by its peaceful native populace, who are also known for their identity as warriors against foreign intruders (Ingilan, 2018b, p. 71). This reflects the prominence of the Tausug, who have preserved their rich culture and unblemished identity to this day, largely due to Islam, which has taught them about life in this world and the Hereafter. In Sulu, one of the beautiful traditions is the practice of giving a token to a *Murid* (student) after completing Qur'an studies. This tradition, known as *Maligay Pagtammam*, is cherished among Tausug families in the rural areas.

Maligay is a wooden quadrant-shaped food cart prepared for special occasions and can be easily moved by four persons or more, while *Pagtammam* refers to a commencement rite for those who complete Qur'an reading among the Tausug families living in the rural communities in Sulu. Obviously, when these two words are combined, they evoke the concept of a specific type of *Maligay* with its exclusive purpose. Basically, *Maligay* serves to entertain and bring joy, but its purpose can vary depending on the occasion for which it is prepared. Up to now, *Maligay* is prepared for three

main occasions. Firstly, it is included in the groom's dowry for the bride during wedding celebrations. Secondly, it is prepared during *Mauludin Nabi* (the birth of Prophet Muhammad), although it is not mandatory for everyone; however, the Tausug community continues this long-standing tradition to this day. Thirdly, it is given by parents as a gesture of appreciation to any of their children who completes Quranic studies.

Maligay Pagtammat is unique as it signifies a sense of accomplished learning for those who receive it. Simple yet impressive but is seldom available either because parents cannot afford it or since only a few Tausug Murid able to complete Qur'an studies. Across Municipalities in Sulu, there is commonality in the tendency of preparation in three localities of Parang, Panglima Estino, and Panamao. In these areas, many parents gave tokens or *Hiba* (gift) in the form of a Maligay to their children after finishing Qur'an studies. In Islamic law, gifts are known as *Hiba*, to be very precise, gift implies to an extensive overtone and appertain to all kinds (Gururani, 2019) of things or properties. The giving of a *Maligay Pagtammat* is similar to an accolade bestowed upon someone for achieving a particular merit in life. This tradition demonstrates the cultural conventions of the Tausug community, which have been transmitted across multiple generations.

Figure 1

Preparation of Maligay Pagtammat in Patikul, Sulu (Photo by Nashralyn Dammang Aiyubkhan on October 8, 2022)



As regard to the size of *Maligay Pagtammat*, it is normally measured about 5 to 6 ft tall and 3 to 4 feet in width with 4 to 5 ft in length. However, these measurements may vary depending on the volume of foods that the host is preparing. The purpose of *Maligay* is to accommodate varieties of native dishes, such as beef *kurma* (stew curry), beef *piyassak* (liver), chicken *piyanggang* (roasted), fried chicken, sweet and sour fish, coated crabs, deep-fried shrimps, squids, vegetables, eggs, pastries, jams, beverages, and white or yellow rice, all are laid inside the *Maligay*. Sometimes, the host would suspend money above the *Maligay Pagtammat*, which children would try to grab, aiming to collect some bills. According to Ladja (2023), there are two choices: the popular native cuisines which refer to the local method of cooking, characterized by distinct ingredients, and unique taste that relates to culture itself. Into the bargain, colourful decorations and designs made of paper and fabric are also encouraged to enhance the vibrancy and uniqueness of a *Maligay*, delighting the guests' eyes.

In this way, the details for *Maligay Pagtammam* are explained as pretext to the purpose of its preparation. From this point forward, necessarily to first discuss the significance of Islamic education among the Tausug families in isolated areas. Of course, on top of that— how the traditional approach to Quranic learning impacts the lifestyle of the traditional families with a limited idea of modernity. This being said, Islam plays a major role in shaping the educational aspiration of Muslims that paves way to an established community norm that stood on *Ilmu* (knowledge). However, prior to learning the *Ilmu* Tausug used to examine headmost its origin because at that time Sulu has established contact with the neighbouring states like Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. Saleeby (1908) in his book titled, *The History of Sulu*, discussed the unique blend of Islamic and indigenous traditions in Sulu's culture and governance, illustrating how these factors shaped the identity and resilience of the Sulu people. Saleeby further said that Sulu occupies the most nearly central position of any island in eastern Malaysia which may give us the idea that Sulu was once seen as a melting pot where people from diverse racial backgrounds come together. This suggests that there is a possibility of cultural exchange between the Tausug and other external groups through trade relations, which could potentially include aspects related to Quranic literacy.

In many rural areas of Sulu, learning to read the Qur'an can be challenging for children, as they are often accustomed to helping their parents on the farm from a young age. Poverty is a significant obstacle; despite parents' efforts to send their children to a *Guru* (teacher), the difficulties of life often prevent them from doing so, leading to a perception that many families are impoverished. Being poor and uncompetitive is due to constraints brought about by insufficient production inputs (The World Bank, 2021) as evidenced by their limited farm products. As a result, they have no choice but to prioritize their children's involvement in farm activities. Hence, a lot of children are unable to pursue education due to their families' situations, which can lead to a lack of access to learning opportunities and ultimately contribute to illiteracy.

Some children experience idleness due to their pastoral lifestyle. They help their parents by tending to the flock, which involves long days of feeding and sedentary periods in isolated areas away from the crowd. Alkhatib (2016) discussed the impact of a sedentary lifestyle on health and well-being of an individual. Alkhatib also explored the physiological implications of a sedentary lifestyle, such as its effects on overall physical and mental fitness to include may be emotional depression. That is why many children have developed a culture of silence, often only interacting with members of their household. This can lead to indolence, where they become apathetic to the surroundings and may refuse to study, regardless of the reasons.

In some cases, peer influence can serve as an alibi for children who deviate from traditional learning practice. These children do not stay in one area within the community but instead roam around in groups, engaging in activities that may not associate with their parents' expectations. The influence of peers can lead them to prioritize group activities over individual responsibilities, like studying or adhering to traditional learning methods. They become deviant from their parents and show a tendency to appreciate wrongdoing. This behaviour can be influenced by their desire to fit in with their peers and seek acceptance within their social group, even if it means going against the values and expectations of their parents. Matza (2018) introduced the concept of "drift" to explain how individuals engage in delinquent behaviours while still maintaining a conventional self-image. Matza argued that delinquent children are not necessarily different from conventional individuals taking into consideration that various factors may affect their moods. The feeling of guilt can play a significant role in shaping behaviour. For some individuals, the guilt they feel for their actions may lead to changes in their behaviour, prompting them to move away from delinquent activities and towards more conventional behaviours. However, the extent to which this guilt influences their behaviours and how long they linger in a delinquent personality can vary depending on various factors, including individual differences, social influences, and the availability of alternative pathways.

In Islam, education is highly valued, and everyone should have access to it without denial or hindrance. Among Tausug families, education is seen as *Ibadah* or *Ibaadat*, which means devotion with religious significance. One of the objectives of Islamic education is to provide the teachings of Holy Qur'an as the primary source of education (Salleh, 2009). In the remote areas of Sulu, a common practice among families with enough earnings is to prioritize their children's study of the Holy Qur'an. Parents typically take their children to a *Guru*'s house for study sessions. At the outset, there appears to be a formal endorsement of a child to a *Guru*, similar to enrolling in a secular school. Once a child is accepted, he can immediately attend the sessions. The entire family would celebrate this good news because studying the Holy Qur'an is a dream for every Tausug.

Afterward, the children are taught with the proper manners and decorum for studying the Qur'an. It is crucial to remind them of the "Dos" and "Don'ts". For example, before touching the Holy Qur'an, one must perform *wudu'* (ablution) to purify oneself. Another practice is to place the Qur'an on one's head before reading it, symbolizing utmost respect for the words of Allah. According to Masror (2013), to begin with the Qur'an is the word of Allah, The Almighty. Masror continued that the very intellect which enables us to listen and comprehend the Qur'an as a form of speech, but one bounty of Allah bestowed upon us. Whenever any verse of the Qur'an is recited or listened to, conscientious oneself that this is the speech of Allah.

Figure 2

Pagtammat Ceremony in Barangay Lahing-lahing, Omar, Sulu (Photo by Radyo Pilipinas Jolo on March 12, 2023)



As is customary, the Holy Qur'an is placed on top of a *Lihal* (stand), a folding wooden stand designed to hold the Holy Qur'an. It is positioned stationary at the center of the house. Children start reading the text chapter by chapter with full diligence and concentration. Without interruption, they repeatedly read each verse in every chapter. To familiarize themselves with the text, children learn to recite it using the standard pitch or tone of voice taught by the *Guru*. The goal of learning grammar is to steer clear of errors that arise when reading and comprehending text. Grammatical mistakes can lead to significant understanding errors when interpreting Arabic texts, which are typically found in religious books (Hamid, et.al, 2023). This implies that *Murid* (students) are disciplined and attentive to instructions. During session, it sounds like a productive and multi-tasking approach to learning. Students are integrating both "reading" with "memorization" for prayers— can help children develop

their reading skills and deepen or intensify their understanding of the message of the Holy Qur'an.

The session typically lasts 2 to 3 hours daily. Children attend these sessions persistently until they complete all chapters of the Holy Qur'an. With this daily routine, comes a positive aspect: young boys and girls start adopting behaviour in line with Islamic teachings. For instance, those studying the Holy Qur'an are the ones who follow the Guru's house rules and turn responsible. Usually, Murid help in keeping the house clean, arranging messy things, and participating in some household chores. The most common household chores are done after Qur'an reading. Once they finish their tasks, usually the Guru offers meal like lunch to his Murid. Among other things, the consistent household tasks include meal preparation, doing dishes after each meal, and removing shoes when you enter the home (Bungalow, 2022).

As part of the community norms, a term *pagbakti* (devotion) is expressed through a gift offered by a *Murid* to a *Guru* in any way they can, such as bringing fruits, fetching water, and gathering firewood. Even without specific instructions, this duty is incumbent upon the learners. This demonstrates gratitude and respect towards a *Guru* from both parents and learners. Jundam (2006) explored the coexistence and interaction between customary laws (*adat*) and Islamic (Shariah) laws within the Tausug community. These two legal systems introduced guidance to the Tausug families in all affairs of life. In the community, part of their *adat* (customary law) is the practice of *pagbakti*, which involves showing respect and gratitude to individuals who have served others or who are learned in Islam and share their knowledge with the community.

Furthermore, Bruno (1973) rationalized the social structure, cultural practices, and historical context of the Tausug. He additionally explains the idea how the Tausug value kinship systems, and social customs. Whenever there is a community celebration, the host invites relatives and friends to honor the occasion. The Tausug are known for their strong emphasis on family bonds, with an extended family arrangement being conventional in their kinship structure. They prioritize mutual support during events such as, *Pagtiyaun* (Wedding), *Pagtammat* and *Muluddin Nabi* celebrations. This family bond is comparable to the concept of "Bayanihan" in Luzon, fostering a spirit of collective unity that aimed at helping others.

Educational theorist, Khosrow Bagheri (2001) in his book *Islamic Education* highlighted the significance of Islamic education in framing individuals' character, morals, and understanding of Islamic principles. He said, in discussing Islamic education, the main idea must be taken from the Islamic texts. This is necessary particularly because we hold familiarity with contemporary educational thoughts as a precondition. Indeed, true in the town of Jolo, where the majority of parents are professionals with a mindset leaning towards secularism. In contrast, in rural areas where the majority of parents are farmers, their main focus is on the study of the Holy Qur'an. This creates the impression that once their children complete the study of the Holy Qur'an, its value is immeasurable, as if they have achieved success in life which seems beyond material possessions.

After completing the Qur'an reading, parents usually visit the Guru's house and bring valuable items like gold jewellery or money as a voluntary gesture to compensate for the Guru's services. During the visit, refreshments are offered to relatives and friends. They would discuss the arrangements for the *Pagtammat*, including the date, venue, and invitations. Once everything is finalized, the parents would announce the upcoming *Pagtammat* to the community, inviting their loved ones to witness it. This is exactly similar to a recent commencement exercise organized by the National Commission of Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) to honor children who participated in the program, along with their parents. The commencement exercise was scheduled by the Bureau of Muslim Cultural Affairs, led by its director together with the Planning Service (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, 2017).

Despite the strong influence of traditional learning methods, several factors contribute to its challenges. These include the absence of formal learning institutions like Madrasa in rural districts, the geographical remoteness of many households, which makes access difficult, and the lack of financial resources to meet personal needs and other miscellaneous expenses. However, today, the Tausug community is undergoing an educational and cultural shift, as more families are choosing to send their children to town proper to study. What is particularly interesting is that they are not only attending Madrasas but also secular schools.

The modernization process of Islamic education in rural goes through acculturation, through a mixture of the local culture with foreign cultures, without changing the existing culture. There are still some rural families who live in the countryside and have not received the modernization of Islamic education in their family, it is because they still think that it is identical the process of modernization with Westernization that will make their children leave the customs or habits of their ancestor (Nurjanah, 2013). Suffice to say, parents who have the means to fund their children's education are probably deciding quickly to enrol them in formal schooling. On the other hand, those who cannot afford it keep their children in rural areas, where they continue learning through traditional methods. Moreso, children in rural areas are expected to assist their parents in farming activities.

As observed, individuals who have studied the Qur'an may have acquired some degree of language influence. Those in rural areas become acquainted with some Arabic terms which later emerged as the result of a language contact between the Tausug and Arabic. For instance, the names of Islamic months and other Arabic terms for the Five Pillars: *Shahada* (declaration of faith), *Zakat* (almsgiving), *Hajj* (pilgrimage), *Sawm* (fasting), and *Salah* (prayer) are understood by the locals. Additionally, terms like *hijra* (journey), *Mayyat* (deceased), *baba* (father), *wajib* (mandatory), *haram* (forbidden) and many others are used in daily contexts. Language contact occurred in a variety of phenomena, including language convergence, and borrowing. The most common products were code-switching and mixed languages (Kumar, 2023), comparatively the case of the Tausug, through their exposure to Qur'an likely adopted and integrated various Arabic terms into their language, which became widely understood and spread within their communities. It is not surprising that the word "Pagtammat", an Arabic term meaning "finished", has become part of their mother tongue, indicating a significant influence of Arabic language through textual contact.

Pagtammat Ceremony

On the day of pagtammat, parents are occupied with various preparations, including providing foods and refreshments for the guests and constructing and decorating the *Panggung* (stage) where the ceremony will take place. The officiating Imam, accompanied by *Mangluluguh* (chanter), leads the ceremony. The *Mangluluguh* sings an epic narrative in passionate tone, recounting in the lyrics the extraordinary deeds or achievement of mankind. The lyrics are usually based on the narrative *kissa* which speaks of a particular heroism. Because the Tausug culture is rich that extends to biography of unsung heroes who defended their land from infidels. *Kissa* is an oral narrative archived from a cassette tape. However, just like *Luguh* (Tausug Canzonet), the narrator and the year of recording remained unknown, making further attempts to trace the history less successful (Dino et al., 2023).

The procession starts from the host's house to the venue or stage where the program or ceremony is held. The child is dressed in formal attire, surrounded by relatives and friends who have gathered to witness the ceremony. Normally the ceremony would take 1 to 2 hours, depending on the program's length. Sometimes the host includes special dance called *pangalay* to entertain guests. Family members have a designated role to play during the reception.

The *Maligay Pagtammat* will be filled with a variety of dishes and brought to the stage. The parents usually thank the guests for their attendance afterwards the child is asked to read some verses

from the Holy Qur'an. After a beautiful rendition, the Imam may now deliver a *Nasihah* (lecture). Following a lengthy lecture, the Imam will request everyone to pay attention to the supplication. During the prayer, people remain in total silence, only saying *ameen* to affirm the Quranic verses and traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW). After the prayer, the host will announce to the guests that it is time to share the blessings, inviting everyone to eat and enjoy the food from the *Maligay Pagtammam*. Relatives and friends come together and eat the delicious dishes. While children also receive a share of the money on display.

As a gesture of appreciation, some relatives may give money to the child as a gift, while others express their commendation by praising the child and wishing him or her long and successful life as a valued member of the community. Success is not just measured in wealth or material possessions, but also in having a safe and fulfilling life, which is every parent's wish for his or her children. The elders stay for a while, conversing with each other, just as the children cheerfully play around. Before departing, guests greet and embrace each other to bid farewell. This suggests a strong family bond and kinship ties among the Tausug that is practically based upon various factors, and which also depend upon the culture in which someone lives. Within this context, the standard set of norms is deeply rooted and influential, leading to flourishing in all aspect of life.

Data from three municipalities in Sulu, namely, Parang, Panglima Estino, and Panamao, were gathered and interpreted through the process of observation and the use of an interview tool. The informants, mostly farmers, requested confidentiality regarding their names.

***Maligay Pagtammam* in the Municipality of Parang**

Parang is a coastal municipality in the island province of Sulu. It has a land area of 258.00 square kilometers or 99.61 square miles which constitutes 5.67% of Sulu's total area. Its population as determined by the 2020 Census was 71,495. This represented 7.15% of the total population of Sulu province, or 1.62% of the overall population of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) (PhilAtlas, 2024). In this area, numerous parents have presented *Maligay Pagtammam* to their children during the *Pagtammam* ceremony. One of the parents who can confirm the authenticity of this practice is Informant 1, a vendor, and a resident of Parang, whose four children have completed Qur'an reading. One of his children successfully finished reading the Qur'an, prompting the family to present a token in the form of a *Maligay Pagtammam*.

In an interview, Informant 1 said, *Mataud manga kamaasan mabayah makatangbus mangadji in kaanakan nila, sagawa way mahinang bang dih amu na hadja in sah papa-agarun in ka-anakan nila pa uma* (Many parents wanted their children to finish Qur'an reading yet they have no choice but to direct their children to farm activities). In simpler terms, poverty is considered a barrier to children of farmers in pursuing Qur'an reading.

Another informant 2, a farmer, shared his experience when he prepared a *Maligay Pagtammam* for his son. According to him, *In di ha kawman namuh mataud in kya'amuhan sin parkalah pagtammam. In kabunnalan nya, mataud in naghuhulah di labi lubah na tuud in manga masuuk kamu mga kakampungan iban sin mga sila kabagayan in nagpaabut sin panglaggu'i ha pamili ku* (The community really appreciates the event of *Pagtammam*. In fact, many residents specially our close relatives and friends extended their laudatory message to my family). Apparently, the residents remained attached to their traditional way of learning. And the method they employed was a piece of old tackle that resonated within the community— that is reading, writing, and memorizing the text of the Qur'an. For them, it is enough for children to get acquainted with these three basic underpinnings.

The same opinion divulged by Informant 3, a sari-sari store owner, who said, *Landu marayaw bang in manga kaanakan maka tangbus mangadji ha Madrasa iban ha iskul. Byah sin anak ku usug*

pagtammat nya magtuy ku piyahinangan Maligay. Biyahaun yadtu na nag-iskul (It is good if our children could complete their education in both Madrasa and school. Just like my son by the time he finished learning the Qur'an, I hastily arranged for him Maligay. Now he proceeds to schooling).

Maligay Pagtammat in the Municipality of Panglima Estino

The municipality has a land area of 125.10 square kilometers or 48.30 square miles which constitutes 2.75% of Sulu's total area. Its population as determined by the 2020 Census was 34,249. This represented 3.42% of the total population of Sulu province, or 0.78% of the overall population of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Based on these figures, the population density is computed at 274 inhabitants per square kilometers or 709 inhabitants per square mile (PhilAtlas, 2024). The majority of the locals are engaged in self-employment, with farming, fishing, and business being prevalent sources of income. While numerous families opt to send their children to schools in Jolo, a significant portion adhere to traditional Quranic education. This highlights that the preference for Quranic learning among Muslims in the area is rooted in their satisfaction with its traditional approach and their confidence that studying Islam is a fundamental obligation. So, those who remain attached to the traditional learning are the ones offering *Maligay Pagtammat*.

The parents who acted as informants agreed to share their experiences of preparing *Maligay Pagtammat*. Informant 1 stated that, *In anak ku usug nakaubus nangadji Qur'an. Sambat ku kaimu, magtuy aku myadtu pa bay sin Guru, nagdara aku sin panglukat kagaus-gausan tungud yadtu sin sang-sah nya* (His son has completed studying the Qur'an. He revealed that he visited the Guru's house and presented valuable items as *Lukat* (redemption) and appreciation for the Guru's service). The term *Lukat* is a practice of giving valuable items to a Guru after a child finishes Quranic study, although it is not obligatory for those unable to afford it. After making arrangements for the *Pagtammat*, they immediately prepared a *Maligay* with the assistance of relatives. Informant 1 mentioned spending around P20,000 on the *Maligay Pagtammat*, which garnered compliments from the community upon completion. Certainly, with the presentation of native dishes, relatives and friends were delighted and began to enjoy the food from the *Maligay*.

Informant 2 also shared that, *Byah da isab sin anak ku usug nakatangbus nangadji Qur'an, iban sah na saini piyangakuan ku Maligay Pagtammat* (Just like my son who has completed Quranic studies, and as promised, I arranged for a *Maligay Pagtammat*). He visited a Guru's house, where he brought refreshments and discussed the schedule of the *Pagtammat*. Together with his relatives they prepared all the necessary things and ensured that everything was in place. Further he said, *Ha waktu sin pag imun-imun, in manga katautaimanghuran ha kawman kyublaan sin huhulmatan ku kan utuh. Mataud ha kawman nakahagdir sin parkalah amun in laung ta kyansuban iban kya'amuhan sin hahad-diyahan* (During the celebration, the community was surprised by the token I had prepared for my son. Many community members attended the event and were satisfied and impressed by the token). Informant 2 revealed spending more than twenty thousand pesos on food and drinks, in addition to the expenses for constructing the physical materials of the *Maligay*. He went on saying, *Amu na hadja mataud di ha kawman namuh in manga bata lisuan mangadji way hinang daing sin magpakaun sin mga kahayupan i-ipat nila* (Only, in our community, many children are reluctant to study the Qur'an and instead spend their time caring for animals). This observation reflects the reality that many children are satisfied with tending to their animals.

Informant 3, who is the guardian of his niece, provided a *Maligay Pagtammat* for her as her mother could not afford it. He called upon his relatives, and together they discussed the preparation during the *Pagtammat*. He said that the majority of his relatives contributed a certain amount to finance the *Maligay Pagtammat*. The child was unaware that a token was being prepared for her; she only learned about it on the day of the *Pagtammat*. Further he said, *Ha waktu dimatung na in pag imun-imun, in bata kyublaan sin pagkita nya awn huhulmatan tiyatagama kanya. Amu in Maligay*

Pagtammat (When the scheduled event arrived, the child was surprised to find out a token prepared for her. That was a *Maligay Pagtammat*). Overwhelmed with emotion, she broke into tears upon seeing the *Maligay Pagtammat* and rushed to embrace her mother tightly, along with other relatives.

***Maligay Pagtammat* in the Municipality of Panamao**

The municipality has a land area of 266.28 square kilometers or 102.81 square miles which constitutes 5.86% of Sulu's total area. Its population as determined by the 2020 Census was 49,849. This represented 4.98% of the total population of Sulu province, or 1.13% of the overall population of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Based on these figures, the population density is computed at 187 inhabitants per square kilometer or 485 inhabitants per square mile (PhilAtlas, 2024). Traditional families adhere to a conventional mode of learning, where many knowledgeable individuals in the area are open to hosting Quranic sessions for children. Informant 1 said, *Pag ingat ku sin makatangbus na in anak ku nangadji Qur'an, nagbaran aku iban sin asawa ku pa tiyanggi namimi sin kagis-ginisan kalagihan ha Pagtammat. Laung sin Guru sak isab in anak mu landu in hapat mangadji subay na tuud awn huhulmatan. Byah aku kyuyagan sin dyungug ku, magtuy aku kimawah karpenteru nagpahinang aku Maligay in mattan nya malingkat* (Upon his daughter's completion of Quranic reading, I and my wife went to the town of Jolo to purchase all the necessary items for the *Pagtammat* ceremony. The Guru praised my daughter's fluency and recommended a token of appreciation. Delighted by this news, I immediately commissioned a carpenter to craft a beautiful *Maligay*). He proudly stated that his P35,000 token was witnessed by the community. On the day of the celebration, he also prepared extra food and beverages for their guests, who were relatives and friends from their community. While others were from far flung areas.

On the occasion that *Pagtammat* is increasingly becoming popular, Informant 2 is likewise accustomed to the practice. When his daughter finished the Qur'an reading, he announces to his neighbourhood the schedule of *Pagtammat*. Not only that he also requested his two friends to help him prepared the *Maligay Pagtammat*. The man further explains that *Palingkatun natuh in Maligay Pagtammat ini byah sin sila manga tau ha Bila'an landuh in lingkak sin Maligay nila* (We will create a splendid *Maligay*, comparable to the exquisite *Maligay* of the *Bila'an* residents). By the way, *Bila'an* is an adjacent community within the Municipality of Talipao, where many residents are recognized for their prowess in *Maligay* making. However, quite the opposite, the man added, *Mataud manga Kabataan di kamuh in hinang magbuang-saraw na hadja iban sin lundang panun nila, di' mangadji* (Many children in our community prefer to roam around with friends rather than study).

As observed, residents in this area do not openly disclose their level of attachment to this practice. Yet, of all ceremonial gatherings, *Pagtammat* is consistently the most valued practice, possibly due to its connection to religious beliefs. Just as on one occasion of *Pagtammat*, shows a tendency to involve the entire community residents because it becomes the talking point of people as they get themselves ready for the event. Relatives and friends laud the parents of a child who receives the *Maligay Pagtammat*, portraying the family as an exemplary model worthy of emulation by others. Also, there is a warm reception on the day of the *Pagtammat*.

Hence, in the three municipalities of Parang, Panglima Estino, and Panamao, the practice of *Maligay Pagtammat* is prevalent among Tausug households, a pattern similarly noticed in nearby zones. According to most parents, this practice is also evident in adjacent localities, illustrating its acknowledgment across Sulu province. This explanation underscores *Maligay Pagtammat's* distinct significance as a symbol of literacy, extending beyond mere geographical limits.

Conclusion

The study explores into the traditional practice of *Maligay Pagtammat* among Tausug families in

rural areas of Sulu, highlighting its cultural significance and educational implications. The tradition, deeply rooted in the Tausug cultural norms, serves as a symbol of literacy and community appreciation for completing Quranic studies. Widely recognized whilst great progress has been made in literacy with most recent data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024) showing that more than 86% of the world's population know how to read and write. So, traditional homeschooling is a good option for Tausug families in rural areas, enabling their children to learn Arabic literacy.

Moreover, it is evident that reading the Holy Qur'an is deeply ingrained in Tausug culture. Culture does not include only art and literature, but also value systems, traditions, and beliefs' (UNESCO, 2001:3). As observed from the three Municipalities of Parang, Panglima Estino, and Panamao, the 'commonality of practice' prevails more likely in two interpretations. First, the desire to make *Maligay Pagtammam* is based on a single reason that is to serve as token for a child during the Pagtammam ceremony. Second, the attitude towards the practice is unwaveringly certain that everybody appreciates the token. Despite facing challenges such as poverty and a pastoral lifestyle, Tausug families value Islamic education, with Quranic study seen as a form of devotion. In fact, the religious leaders, and elders in these three localities have demonstrated exemplary conduct and moral values, which can be attributed to their traditional education too. They share a common experience about *Maligay Pagtammam* and pass down their experience to the younger generations, to that end perpetuating this traditional practice.

Another factor relevant to religious influence is the notion that children are taught of the Holy Qur'an with the expectation that they will serve their community, either by becoming knowledgeable individuals who can lead prayers during significant events like death anniversaries or weddings, or by carrying out the functions as Imams in mosques. Precisely, among Muslims they believe that the teachings of the Holy Qur'an are complete way of life as *Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala* (God, the most glorified, the most high) encompasses all things. For instance, a proof from the sacred Scripture states that both East and West belong to Allah, so whenever you turn, the Face of Allah is there. Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing (Qur'an, 2:115). Kalwar (2020) opined that Islam established a clear system of worship, laws about living a life, civil rights, political rights, social issues, laws of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and all others which we deal in our daily life. Finally, the practice of *Maligay Pagtammam* reflects a strong attachment to both Islamic and temporal learning methods, emphasizing the importance of either Madrasa or secular school for Muslims. Most of the parents whose children have undergone Pagtammam believe that *Maligay Pagtammam* can encourage a child to proceed to formal schooling. As a token, it is allegorically interpreted in the same way as reward for a conventional degree achievement attained in schools. Through participant observation and interviews, the study provides insights into the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of the Tausug parents towards the practice of *Maligay Pagtammam*, zeroing in on its continued relevance and resilience in the face of modernization. For the most part, *Maligay Pagtammam* serves as a cultural cornerstone among Tausug families, showcasing the rich cultural heritage and learning aspirations of the traditional community, and its numerous facets of enduring contributions passed on from one generation to the next.

Conflict of Interest Statement

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

AI Disclosure

We declare that this manuscript was prepared without the assistance of artificial intelligence. Hence, the content of this paper is original.

References

- Alkhatib, A. (2016). *Sedentary lifestyle predictive factors, health risks and physiological implications*. Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated.
- Bagheri, K. (2001). *Islamic education*. Alhoda Publisher. <https://tinyurl.com/338w6mwx>
- Dino, N. S., Arus, B., Samad, L.A., & Ampang, J. (2021). *Suluk ukkil on the Barung: Expressions, motifs and meanings*. Universiti Malaysia Sabah Press.
- Dino, N. S., Guinto-Sali, M. J., Matolo, A. H. L., Amat, A., & Ingilan, S. (2023). Uncovering the unsung hero of Sulu: Panglima Sayyadi's character archetypes in kissa. *Southeastern Philippines Journal of Research and Development*, 28(1), 49–68. <https://doi.org/10.53899/spjrd.v28i1.248>
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Sheldon, S. B., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., Van Voorhis F. L., Martin, C. S., Thomas, B. G., Greenfeld, M. D., Hutchins, D. J., & Williams, K. J. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action (4th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Flick, U. (2021). *Doing interview research: The essential how to guide*. SAGE Publishing. <https://tinyurl.com/43b94e2k>
- Gururani, N. (2019, June). *Concept of gift under Islamic Law*. 42955. <https://tinyurl.com/mrx35vwk>
- Hamid, M., Halim, Z., & Yahaya, M. (2023). The importance of the science of grammar (Ilmu Nahwu) in understanding Syariah texts. *Malaysian Journal for Islamic Studies*. PENERBIT Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. <https://tinyurl.com/zexz3rv2>
- Ingilan, S. (2017). Unveiling the Muslimah: A feminist stylistic analysis of the image of the female Filipino Muslims in short stories. *Jati Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 22(1), 139-157. <https://doi.org/10.22452/jati.vol22no1.10>
- Ingilan, S. (2018). Tausug's identity in Parang Sabil: A critical discourse analysis. *CMU Journal of Science*, 22(1), 37–43. <https://tinyurl.com/45pnkc7c>
- Ingilan, S., & Abdurajak, N. (2021). Unveiling the Tausug culture in Parang Sabil through translation. *Southeastern Philippines Journal of Research and Development*, 26(2), 97–108. <https://doi.org/10.53899/spjrd.v26i2.156>
- Jorgensen, D. L. (1989). *Participant observation: A methodology for human studies*. SAGE Publication, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412985376>
- Jubilado, R., Ingilan, S., & Dumanig, F. (2015). Expressing profanity in Cebuano and Bahasa Sug. *Jati Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 20, 136–157. <https://doi.org/10.22452/jati.vol20no1.9>
- Jundam, M. (2005). *Tunggal hula'-duwa sarah: Adat and Sharee'ah laws in the life of the Tausug*. Vibal Publishing House Inc.
- Kalwar, S. (2020, August). *Islam is the complete code of life*. The Day Spring. <https://tinyurl.com/3s8pa3r9>

- Kaufeld, J. (2020). *Homeschooling for dummies*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://tinyurl.com/5n8h56ye>
- Kirabaev, N., & Pochta, Y. (2002). *Values in Islamic culture and the experience of history (Russian Philosophical Studies I)*. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. <https://tinyurl.com/yvn3zyk5>
- Kumar, D. (2023, December). An introduction to language contact with sociolinguistics and causes the language changes over time. *Asia Pacific Journal of Religion and Culture*, 7(2). <https://tinyurl.com/548n3nj5>
- Ladja, C. M. L. (2023). *Relevance of Maligay to contemporary Tausug and Malay societies [Zenodo]*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10449916>
- Masror. (2013). *Respect towards Quran and etiquettes of handling the sacred book of Allah*. <https://tinyurl.com/tnxew3v5>
- Matza, D. (2018). *Juvenile delinquency and drift*. Routledge.
- National Commission on Muslim Filipinos. (2017, May 26). *NCMF conducted commencement exercises for young Muslim learners*. <https://tinyurl.com/33cmbn3u>
- Nurjanah, E. (2013). Modernization of Islamic education in the rural family. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 2(1). <https://tinyurl.com/2bt26xbr>
- PhilAtlas. (2024, February). *Old Panamao: Province of Sulu*. <https://tinyurl.com/5yzn3hn8>
- PhilAtlas. (2024, February). *Panglima Estino: Province of Sulu*. <https://tinyurl.com/yn94fd7u>
- PhilAtlas. (2024, February). *Parang: Province of Sulu*. <https://tinyurl.com/yjfv2et8>
- Saleeby, N. M. (1908). The history of Sulu. *Division of Ethnology Publication*. Manila Bureau of Printing.
- Salleh, M. J. (2009). *The integrated Islamic education: Principles and needs for thematic approaches*. Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). <https://tinyurl.com/yj486xk3>
- Schafft, K. A., & Jackson, A. Y. (Eds.). (2010). *Rural education for the twenty-first century: Identity, place, and community in a globalizing world*. Penn State Press. <https://tinyurl.com/5n8f47za>
- Stefano, M. L. (2022). *Practical considerations for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage*. Routledge. <https://tinyurl.com/3neeaw2p>
- UNESCO. (2024, January). *What you need to know about literacy*. <https://tinyurl.com/r3rxamh4>